The Omniscient Eye

Is It Kryptonite, or Just a Rock Painted Green?

In *X-Files* and similar stories we are frequently treated to "metal that does not exist on earth" and the like. How would that be found out? Say that my party found a mysterious piece of metal or other substance. What test could/would be carried out on it, either by the party themselves (assuming a reasonable laboratory) or the entire scientific community, and what might the results look like?

"Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary proof."
--Carl Sagan

Any time we find a meteorite it is something that "does not exist on earth," or at least didn't originate here. We'll touch on that, but most of this article will focus on the more mysterious aspect of the question: if you find Substance X (a piece of metal, a puddle of goo, a glowing crystal), how can you show that it's *alien?* How do you demonstrate that it is evidence of alien life, perhaps secreted by the equivalent of an alien slug, maybe even manufactured by intelligent creatures who crossed the stars to reach Earth? Any claim of extraterrestrial manufacture would require some of the most rigorous materials analysis ever carried out in order to satisfy the scientific community and eventually the public that it is real.

We'll start with the assumption that characters have some reason to think Substance X is alien; you don't analyze every piece of metal you find just for the fun of it. We'll also assume that this Substance has some kind of properties which distinguish it from Earthly objects, and you just have to figure out what those properties are. In addition to discussing how and where one could get this analysis done, we'll also touch on the difficulty of making fakes, since in any good game, movie or novel it's always an uphill battle getting "the authorities" to believe you.

What Are "Off-World Properties"?

If you were at a Top Government Research Lab in 1980 and an excited field scientist came running in with a chunk of ceramic, dunked it in liquid nitrogen, and floated it over a magnet, you might have been able to convince some reputable scientists that it was from off-world.

It would be a superconductor, a material with zero electrical resistance, and which repels magnetic fields. Nobody then had heard of a ceramic superconductor, or anything that superconducted at liquid nitrogen temperatures, and if you had talked to reputable scientists you could have made some good money by betting against either. Alien tech? No, anyone with fairly simple gear could have made this stuff back in 1920. It is actually easier than some low temperature superconductors that had been known for three quarters of a century. So mysterious properties previously unknown to science are no guarantee that something has been made by superior beings.

To look at this systematically, let's start by distinguishing between "elements," which are the familiar atoms from our periodic table, and everything else. The term "unknown elements" is bandied about much too often in science fiction. We know all the stable elements as well as the unstable ones which will survive long enough for analysis (but see below for a theoretical exception). No others can exist without changes in the physical laws of our universe. There are, however, many larger assemblies which can be made from these elements which will have properties we don't know yet. One type of assembly is the molecule, which can range in complexity from the familiar water to DNA, which defines our genetic code and required a Human Genome Project to unravel. Another is the crystal, an orderly assembly of atoms in a lattice. Yet another category is composites, which use combinations of materials, sometimes with specific sizes or geometries, to achieve unusual properties. Natural examples include things like spider webs and opals. Most of the really interesting, novel materials that are being made today rely on microcomposite structures. The tiny

size of the components cause changes in physical, electronic, and optical behavior that add up to big changes in properties we see in the "real world."

In the category of unknown elements the only real possibility lies in a theoretical "isotopic island of stability." It is well known that as atomic nuclei get larger and larger past iron, they get less stable. Nothing heavier than Bismuth has any stable isotopes, though Uranium and Thorium are quite long lived. Ultraheavy "new elements" are made in particle accelerators by colliding lighter atoms together and identified by deducing what was there from the fragments after it falls apart microseconds later. Some theories indicate that there is an as-yet-unaccessed area of heavier atoms with atomic weights around 300 which might be more stable, possibly lasting for minutes or longer.[1] If an ingot of such a substance were found, it would certainly fall in the category of possibly alien. Because of the enormous resources needed to even experiment with such things, it would verge on impossible to fake with current day technology.

Examining the atoms in Substance X can be one of the main indicators that something may be from off planet. An element is defined by the number of protons in the nucleus, which distinguishes (for example) oxygen from nitrogen. There can be more possibilities for the number of neutrons in the atom, however, each of which is an *isotope.* Ratios of these isotopes depend on where the matter came from, and can be characteristic of different planets. Those are how the Martian meteorites like the famous ALH 84001 were identified. The gases trapped in pockets in those meteorites happened to have similar chemical and isotopic makeup to the very-well-studied atmosphere of Mars, showing that they were blasted loose millions of years ago and later rained down here on earth (if Mars had hideous diseases destined to wipe out humanity, they'd already be here by now, but that's another issue). The years of debates on whether the residues in this meteorite are evidence of extraterrestrial life are instructive when one asks how easy or hard it might be to "prove" something is alien. Note, however, that everyone agrees this meteorite is from Mars; that was easy to figure out. We know a lot about isotopic mixes on our planet, and can even in some cases figure out where people grew up by strontium isotope ratios in their teeth.[2]

So, then, if the iron in Substance X has an isotopic mix of about 92% Fe56 and 6% Fe54, it might well be from Earth, because that's a typical isotopic ratio from here. If it's 85% Fe56 and 2% Fe54, either it is from an alien planet (possibly even solar system, depending on how far off it is) or it has been deliberately synthesized in a laboratory.[3]

When it comes to composite materials, there are many examples of things humans have already developed which have strange properties. Getting light emission from silicon was believed impossible because of certain fundamental electrical properties, but in the last decade ways were found to do it via nanoengineering. Meta-materials (engineered composites that have a specific lattice-like arrangement of components) with negative indexes of refraction were first modeled, then built, despite predictions of some theorists that they were impossible.[4] An ordinary rectangular slab of such a material can focus light like a lens, and moreover, could achieve a holy grail of lens making by getting optical resolution better than the diffraction limit. Impact Armor, a flexible material that stiffens on impact and described by Larry Niven in several science fiction stories, has been developed and built into sports equipment.[5] Materials with negative Poisson's ratios (they get thicker when stretched instead of becoming thinner like taffy) have been demonstrated[6] and could potentially be incorporated into things such as rock climbing equipment and specialized machine parts. An example of a composite which would probably be of alien origin is a large (several hundred kg) piece of lead/aluminum alloy. These can only be alloyed in zero gee, and so far nobody has launched the equipment needed to make such a big piece. Since launches are closely monitored, it would be good evidence for something alien. Similarly, a diamond several cubic feet in size, or another type of hard-to-produce crystal like insulating indium antimonide could be things that humans can't currently make by any known technology.

The trick with analyzing the properties of these types of unknown materials is to perform the right test. Some properties are much easier to test for; Cavorite (from the HG Wells story "The First Men in the Moon") blocked gravity, which is hard to miss. If you had given a chunk of superconducting ceramic to a general analysis lab pre-1986 and said "Hey, is there anything interesting about this?," it's very unlikely they'd stumble on the fact that it is superconducting. Most analytical tools aren't designed to work at low enough temperatures to see superconducting properties, and prior to that time superconductivity was a very specialized field of study. Analytical techniques, time, and tools can vary a lot in this category, depending on how obscure the effect is you are trying to test. Diamond has some obvious properties (very hard, high index of refraction, which makes it sparkly) but some less obvious ones. It is

actually one of the best heat conductors known, better than copper, and is very chemically inert. When diamond-coated frying pans come out, they will knock Teflon pans right out of the market. Lots of expertise, knowledge of the state of the art in the field of Substance X, and time are needed to decide if it has truly unique properties we could not duplicate on Earth.

Biological substances are harder to prove alien. In addition to laboratory synthesis, there are millions of organic chemicals in terrestrial life which could be unknown but not alien. There are a couple of things which can indicate Substance X is from off planet, at least if it is something organic and complex like a cup of alien blood. Many complex organic chemicals have two different forms which have identical chemical composition but which are mirror images, called enantiomers. A laboratory synthesis of these chemicals generally produces an equal ("racemic") mix of "left-handed" and "right-handed" forms, but in Earth's biology one form often dominates over another -- for instance, most sugars found in nature are "right-handed" (D-) while most amino acids are "left-handed" (L-). Unrelated life forms -- for instance, aliens -- would be just as likely to go the other way; if you *did* find organic samples dominated by L-sugars or D-amino acids, they are either from an alien planet, deliberately purified that way in a laboratory, or from one of the few exceptions with an earthly origin.

Once the basic compound has been identified, the easiest way to tell whether a sample of a known chemical is D- or L- is to shine a beam of polarized light through the sample and measure the rotation of the beam's polarization; for instance, D-glyceraldehyde will rotate the beam clockwise (as will L-fructose) and L-glyceraldehyde will rotate it anticlockwise (as will D-fructose). An equal mix of both enantiomers will not rotate the beam at all. Confusingly, substances that rotate light clockwise are also identified with a lower-case d, and those that rotate it anticlockwise with a lower-case l -- thus, while "D-glyceraldehyde" is the same thing as "d-glyceraldehyde," "D-fructose" is actually the *opposite* of "d-fructose"!

Even for as narrow a subject as microscopic life on Mars, though, it's hard to establish a good, unambiguous biological marker.[7] This type of expertise is different enough from that needed to analyze an alien microchip or metal sample, for example, that in real life there may be no one who could do both; more than one member of the Omniscient Eye was needed just to write this column! It is rare, in fact, to find a laboratory equipped to do both. In a game, of course, cinematic science skills may be enough to allow analysis of anything you find.

There are certain special cases of things that may be identifiable as "off-planet" because of specific properties. An example of this is the Widmanstatten pattern of lines which can be seen in many iron meteorites upon cutting and etching; their presence seems to be characteristic of their formation in deep space. Some of the other materials which are found in meteorites aren't seen in anything on Earth, because they require zero gravity to form or because they are completely unoxidized. There are actually companies which will analyze rocks which you think might be meteorites if you promise to give them some to sell. Dan Brown's novel *Deception Point* is good background for how a fake meteorite might be produced, studied, and uncovered.

There are also, of course, more speculative materials. Mathematics shows that a material with negative mass could potentially exist.[8] If so, it would allow for perpetual motion machines and warp drives. We have no idea how it could be made today, its properties would be very easy to test for, and alien origin might be as good an explanation of where it is from as anything else. Properties of negative matter would include being repelled when you put an opposite charge on it, in the process pulling you with it with no net energy input, and annihilating normal matter with no energy release. Ultrasmall black holes (asteroidal mass) which are small enough that they should have evaporated since the big bang are another possibility for something that would probably require Extremely Advanced Tech to build. An object fabricated from antimatter would likely be of alien origin, since we've barely made a few anti-hydrogen atoms so far, though hopefully this is not something that would be found on Earth unless it is in a darned good containment system.

How Do We Know Aliens Made It?

Even if you show your Substance X has mysterious properties, it may be hard to prove it couldn't be made today by humans in a lab you don't happen to know about. If you were to drop a one-mile-long coil of 100 Gigapascal tensile

strength carbon nanotube rope on someone's desk, it would be easy to test, but hard to say if it is of alien origin. Nobody has reported being able to make anything that long or strong yet, but much shorter (like a few microns to a few mm length) pieces have been made, so it is not out of the question that someone has made that breakthrough. You could "throw off" many of the natural isotopic ratios discussed earlier by purifying and mixing things in the lab. Different isotopes of common elements can be purchased for scientific experiments, so it would be possible to mix up an alloy that had the appropriate composition for a material from Mars, for example. Conversely, aliens could take care to build their ship out of the exact mixtures of isotopes found on Earth, so that if a piece were sampled it would not give them away. Specifics on this depend a lot on the particular object of interest, and might involve bringing in some specialized teams to argue with each other. For a claim of microscopic alien life from comets based on red rain in India and some refutations, see the footnotes([9]).

How Do We Do The Analysis?

It is, of course, easiest to analyze a smallish lump or vial of something which you can put into various instruments. Identifying a complex organic compound and looking for appropriate dextrorotary or levorotary polarization is fairly straightforward, but then trying to tell what it does ("Oh look, this goo would give the alien Tremendous Strength!") is much, much harder. Drug companies spend years and tens of millions of dollars trying to figure out if particular molecules do anything in a human, and humans are very well studied. The Human Genome project shows the scale which could potentially be needed for a really complex molecule (DNA), and we still don't know what most of the genes do. Isotopic analysis, which might at least tell you that Substance X is not something natural from Earth, is available from some commercial services. They focus on elements like nitrogen and carbon, for things like carbon-14 dating of archaeological samples[10], but you could find a wider variety of expertise among academics with some hunting.

When it comes to solid materials like spaceship hulls or dilithium crystals, we are on firmer ground, as it were. There are literally dozens of analytical techniques to tell you everything from crystal structure to elemental analysis to molecular bonding. Inorganic materials are simpler than organic, so it is likely that with the right techniques you can learn quite a bit about your substance. "Simple" is a relative term, of course, and the instrumentation is generally bulky, expensive, and delicate.

For example, one common technique for analyzing the elements in a solid is Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (EDS). This is carried out by generating a high energy probe "particle," either electrons in an electron microscope or x-ray photons. The probe particle slams into an atom, knocking an electron or two out of its shell, depending on how energetic the probe is. An electron in a more distant shell drops down to the vacant level, and sheds its energy in the process by emitting an x-ray of a particular wavelength unique to that orbital pair and thus to that element. You detect that emitted x-ray, measure the exact energy, and can tell what element is in your target. This requires only that Substance X has atoms, and that they obey the physical laws of our universe. This doesn't tell you how the atoms are bonded together to make molecules or composites, which can affect its properties tremendously, but at least you know something. In order to learn all about a mystery solid, you want to apply many different techniques like this.

Where Do We Do Analysis?

One way to get access to a good lab is to spend three or four million dollars and buy all this equipment yourself, as well as hiring half a dozen people to run it and interpret data. This won't cover every possible organic and inorganic instrument; it's a basic assortment. That also won't be state-of-the-art for all the items; multiply by 5 if you want that. Divide by 2 if you are willing to take used last generation equipment, which is plentiful. Expect to spend at least six months getting all the equipment in and set up in a specialized building with supplies of compressed air (filtered and dried), ventilation, cooling water, nitrogen, and enough electricity to run several houses. Expertise in materials analysis is important; the more exotic the technique and material the more you need to go beyond prepackaged analytical software and basic lab technicians to figure out what you have, and if your material isn't exotic you're going to have a tough time proving it is alien.

To return to the Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (EDS) example above, the unit costs from $50,000 to $70,000. A used one isn't generally worth it, since a new one is so cheap. It is about $40 \times 40 \times 80$ cm in size, and requires several liters of liquid nitrogen to cool the detector every few days, unless you spend another $30,000 for a closed cycle refrigerator. The research lab this member of the Omniscient Eye works at goes through about 10,000 liters of liquid nitrogen per week for various things, so this last requirement is not as exotic as it might sound. Note that this is just a detector; in order to get data it needs to be attached to a Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) which holds the sample, creates a high vacuum, and generates the electron beam that does the probing and forms an image. The microscope can be bought for $50,000-$80,000 used, with another $80,000 or so to get it set up; yes, it can easily cost more to get some used equipment going properly than to buy it new. A new SEM can cost anywhere from $100,000 for a small, simple model to several million for an automated one which might be found in a semiconductor manufacturing plant, but which is overkill for analyzing an alien material.

Getting a technician to run this microscope means a $30-50,000 annual salary, depending on location and skill. If you are lucky, you may be able to find someone who can run several different analytical tools. This is not for someone who can tell you that Substance X is alien; it is for someone who can tell you it contains iron, aluminum, and silicon and take a microscopic photograph of it. Repairing these analytical tools is a different skill, of course; just as a typical truck driver doesn't know how to rebuild his transmission, he would hire a mechanic. A service contract for a SEM/EDS combination like this might cost $50-100,000 per year, depending again on reliability and skill. There are more service people in southern California than in North Dakota.

If you don't want to get involved in this, another option is to spend a few thousand dollars and send Substance X out to a company like Evans Analytical Group[11], which has all the equipment and people who can interpret the data. They can even make recommendations on what techniques will work the best for different types of samples. That does not mean they are going to report back that your Substance is alien. They are just going to tell you what it is made of, so you have to have some idea what to ask for. In any case, if you don't have a dedicated scientist and a pretty impressive laboratory, this could work well, at least for a first pass to see if you have something really unusual. Then you could hunt down academics or government lab scientists who have an entire research group built around a specific analysis tool that would be more ideal for what you want to know. There are, for example, scientists who have spent their career analyzing moon rocks, or studying isotopic ratios in Jupiter's atmosphere. Getting the specialized expertise to declare something alien would mean working with a professor or government lab scientist, in which case an offer of sharing publication rights would probably be enough providing you had something interesting and you seemed credible.

But suppose it is something you have to analyze in situ, like the impenetrable spaceship hull in the classic movie *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, and you can't ship pieces of it to labs. People who build satellites and mobile labs like the recent Spirit and Endeavor Mars rovers are used to this, and there is a surprising amount you can learn without being able to touch your sample. The rovers carry a variant of the EDS mentioned above, called an Alpha Particle X-Ray Spectrometer (APXS). It has the advantage that the "probe" particles, alpha particles, are generated from a radioactive source, so you don't need the big power supply you do in a normal EDS system. This is good because the whole shebang -- rover, motors, antenna that talks to Earth, and analytical instruments -- runs on a power supply not much bigger than the one in your PC. The down side is slower data collection. As another example, the Lunar Prospector satellite mapped water (actually hydrogen) distribution all over the moon from orbit with an Epithermal Neutron Spectrometer which used the signal generated by normal space radiation hitting the moon.

But My GM Says Sensors Won't Work on it!

What if your Substance X has some kind of "force field" that "blocks sensors"? You can still see it, right? That's all you need to find out quite a bit about it.[12] Part of what makes gold, for example, look gold-colored is that it absorbs parts of the optical spectrum that platinum and silver don't. More subtle variations of that technique can reveal quite a bit about elements and even compounds or molecules present in your mystery target. Fluorescence is light emitted by particular compounds or molecules due to light shining on it, and can be used to identify many minerals visually. More full spectrum light probing and analysis will measure a wider variety of molecular bonds, and is used, for example, to see trace blood at crime scenes by applying chemicals which form fluorescent complexes only with hemoglobin. With

the right equipment hemoglobin could be detected directly by looking at absorbance or emission of light with wavelengths specific to its molecular bonds. Only full electromagnetic spectrum invisibility plus shielding from radiation and force fields to prevent you from observing or contacting Substance X can completely thwart the Materials Scientist, in which case you aren't likely to find your sample in the first place.

Talking A Good Game

If you want some jargon to throw into a knotty analysis problem in game, this article should make a decent starting point. Taking a Fourier Transform of a spectrum (performing a mathematical transformation that enhances certain aspects of the data) is often a good choice, as is improving Signal-to-Noise ratio. A good way to confuse the unwary is to refer to Auger Electron Analysis, pronounced "OJ," which shows the elements present in a material but is more surface sensitive than the EDS mentioned previously. Other fun techniques include Rutherford Backscattering Spectroscopy (RBS), which requires a small particle accelerator and learns about elements in a sample; Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR), which requires extremely strong magnets and learns about organic molecules in a liquid; and Laser Induced Fluorescence, a popular forensic technique which looks for particular molecular bonds like those left from bloodstains.

In general, the closer you are allowed to get to something, and the wider variety of probe beams you can hit it with, the more you can learn about it. "Passive" detectors, which rely on merely observing something without actively bombarding it with a probe beam will learn less, but are less intrusive. Virtually all measurements used in or generated by a lab will be in metric units: grams, milliliters, degrees Celsius, and such. There are some exceptions and oddities, for example in the U.S. pressurized gases will be in psi (pounds per square inch), but a high-vacuum system will measure in Torr, an "almost metric" unit; and in Europe and Japan the Pascal, a true metric SI unit, is sometimes used.

Conclusion

In real life, contrary to the impression the *CSI* TV show gives, analysis takes time. Ten different analyses are done, one of them points to something interesting, you hunt down a lab or expert who knows more about that field, they take their customized instrument and work for a week, and on the 37th spectra, someone looking at it gets an idea of what it means. It is unlikely that you will do just the right experiment to discover the Mysterious Property on the first try, though in a game or story, of course, protagonists get lucky all the time.

To get back to the Carl Sagan quote, to convince people you have something alien you would want to bring in the Best Experts In The Field. The effort of proof is low for something really spectacular, like some of the types of exotic matter discussed earlier. For something that's not obvious, though, this kind of science is so specialized that, much like with the Martian meteor analysis, various people would contribute analysis with their particular instruments and expertise, trusting each other for data they didn't personally generate based on the reputation the other scientists have for good work. The more people who analyze it by different means and are convinced, the higher the likelihood that even people who didn't analyze it will be convinced. That's how the ALH 84001 Mars meteorite analysis has gone, and it is probably the best example we have to date of something that's "on the borderline" for whether its extraordinary claim is true or not. So feel free to have skeptics with honest doubts about any alien artifacts, as well as the obligatory Men in Black out to quash anything that might be Mysterious. Characters are more likely to be limited by time, expertise, and knowledge of "Earth normal" than by modern analytical tools. So don't be afraid to make an analysis plot hook focus on the players, rather than the technology. Ultimately the ongoing story of the game is what the players will show up for, unless you have the extraordinary good fortune to be gaming with Materials Scientists, in which case, have fun!

--Gregory Stauf

References

[1] Originally proposed by Glen Seaborg, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Island_of_stability for a discussion.

[2] http://news.ufl.edu/2004/06/21/bonetracker/ and http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/4/Bamburgh.html

[3] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron for example for information on iron and its isotopes; this is a good resource for many elements and materials discussed in this article.

[4] http://physicsweb.org/articles/world/16/5/3/1 and http://cobweb.ecn.purdue.edu/~photspec/Press_files/Negative%20refraction%20goes%20optical.html

[5] http://www.theengineer.co.uk/Articles/292915/Good+Sports.htm

[6] http://silver.neep.wisc.edu/~lakes/sci87.html

[7] http://www.es.ucl.ac.uk/research/planetary/undergraduate/dom/biomarkers/msci2.htm -- MS thesis of A.D. Fortes, "On The Problem Of Ambiguity In Extraterrestrial Biomarkers: Implications For Mars," 2000.

[8] Negative matter is discussed extensively in *Timemaster* by Robert Forward, with scholarly articles in the bibliography including "Negative Matter Propulsion," Journal of Propulsion and Power 5, no. 1, January-February 1990 p. 28-37 and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exotic_matter

[9] http://arxiv.org/ftp/astro-ph/papers/0312/0312639.pdf for article on extraterrestrial life theory, refutation at http://whyfiles.org/shorties/207red_rain/

[10] http://bio.waikato.ac.nz/isotope/isotope.shtml, http://www.clw.csiro.au/services/isotope/

[11] Evans Analytical Group at www.eaglabs.com

[12] "Development and Testing of Laser-induced Breakdown Spectroscopy for the Mars Rover Program: Elemental Analyses at Stand-Off Distances" Cremers, D. A.; Wiens, R. C.; Arp, Z. A.; Harris, R. D.; Maurice, S., Sixth International Conference on Mars, July 20-25 2003, Pasadena, California, abstract no.3107

* * *

Icosahedron Adventures

Fun Fighters

by Owen K.C. Stephens

In most *d20 System* fantasy games, classes that gain spellcasting abilities (or similar Special FX powers) are automatically customizable. Two sorcerers can be radically different purely by selecting different spells. Fighting classes, unfortunately, lack that same versatility. While some differentiation can be gained through feat and weapon selection, this is secondary to the core of those classes -- a style of fighting. For some reason, the tradition in *d20 System* fantasy games is to develop a new character class for each basic combat style, making it very difficult to use these classes for a new fighter idea.

There's no reason why this needs to be the case. By adding class features as talents -- which may be selected from a long list -- rather than set abilities gained at set levels, it is possible to make extremely versatile fighting classes that highlight the ease of a class/level based game system, rather than enforcing unneeded restrictions. Coupled with the common belief that the fighter class is underpowered in a typical fantasy game, the opportunity arises to build a flexible, easy, versatile set of fighting character classes that can be used to replace a broad range of existing core classes.

Below are presented two classes, the Champion and the Combatant, which are designed to replace all core fighting classes for any fantasy *d20 System* campaign. A character can multiclass between the two classes if needed to get a particular mix of combat abilities and special powers. If some new ability needs to be added for a given campaign it can be turned into one or more talents, following the examples given below.

Champion

Champions are warriors dedicated to a higher ideal, who believe that their martial prowess is best used to further the goals of their liege, deity, philosophy, homeland, or all of the above. Not all Champions are Good, not all are Lawful, and not all depend purely on skill at arms.

The Champion replaces the blackguard, paladin, and ranger classes. When building a Champion you must okay your concept with the GM, and all talent choices you make should support that concept.

Hit Points: 1d8 + Constitution modifier/level, maximum hit points gained as 1st level character.

Skill Points: 20 + ×4 Int modifier at 1st level, 4 + Int modifier per level after that. A character starting as a combatant at 1st level gains the benefit of more skill points to cover background training, but when advancing as a combatant most of your time is spent learning fighting techniques rather than other skills.

Proficiencies: All martial and simple weapons, light armor, all shields (except tower shields).

Table 1: The Champion Class

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+2	+1	+1	Talent
2	+2	+3	+2	+2	Talent
3	+3	+3	+2	+2	Talent
4	+4	+4	+2	+2	Bonus feat, talent

5	+5	+4	+3	+3	Talent
6	+6/+1	+5	+3	+3	Talent
7	+7/+2	+5	+4	+4	Talent
8	+8/+3	+6	+4	+4	Bonus feat
9	+9/+4	+6	+4	+4	Talent
10	+10/+5	+7	+5	+5	Talent
11	+11/+6/+1	+7	+5	+5	Talent
12	+12/+7/+2	+8	+6	+6	Bonus feat, talent
13	+13/+8/+3	+8	+6	+6	Talent
14	+14/+9/+4	+9	+6	+6	Talent
15	+15/+10/+5	+9	+7	+7	Talent
16	+16/+11/+6	+10	+7	+7	Bonus feat
17	+17/+12/+7	+10	+8	+8	Talent
18	+18/+13/+8	+11	+8	+7	Talent
19	+19/+14/+9	+11	+8	+7	Talent
20	+20/+15/+10	+12	+9	+9	Bonus feat, talent

Avenger Talent Tree

Champions have many functions, but among the most important is striking down the enemies of their lords and masters. Avenger talents are geared toward helping the Champion bring punishment, and nothing else. The list of avenger talents is as follows:

Aura of Menace (Su). (Fear, mind-affecting.) Once per encounter as a swift action, you may shout a threatening challenge to all foes in a radius 5-feet per Champion level. Creatures with an Intelligence of 5 or more that have HD or CR of your character level or less must make a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 Champion level + Charisma modifier) or be shaken for a number of rounds equal to your Champion level.

Prerequisites: Must not be Lawful Good.

Challenge (Ex). Once per encounter, as a swift action, you may call out a foe to face you in combat. The foe must have an Intelligence of 5 or more HD or CR within at least 2 or your character level, but need not understand your language. You gain a bonus to all attack and damage rolls and opposed checks made against your called-out enemy, as well as to saving throws made against effects he creates. This bonus is equal to +1 for every five full Champion levels you have (minimum +1).

This talent may be selected multiple times, with each additional selection increasing the number of times per encounter you can use it by 1.

Prerequisite: Lawful alignment.

Chastise Heathens (Su). As a standard action you can unleash a wave of negative energy that damages all living creatures with an Intelligence of 5 or more that do not worship your god. The wave deals 1d6 points of damage per 2 Champion levels, with a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 your Champion level + your Charisma modifier) resulting in half damage. Incorporeal creatures take this damage normally. You may do this once per day per three full Champion levels (minimum 1/day).

This talent may be selected multiple times, with each additional selection increasing the number of times per encounter you can use it by 1 per 3 full Champion levels (minimum +1/day).

Prerequisite: Must not be Good.

Chastise Undead (Su). As a standard action you can unleash a wave of positive energy that damages all undead within 30 feet of you. The wave deals 1d6 points of damage per 2 Champion levels. Incorporeal undead take this damage

normally. You may do this once per day per three full Champion levels (minimum 1/day).

This talent may be selected multiple times, with each additional selection increasing the number of times per encounter you can use it by 1 per 3 full Champion levels (minimum +1/day).

Prerequisite: Must not be Evil.

Favored Enemy (Ex). You gain a favored enemy as a ranger, chosen from the ranger list. This talent may be taken more than once. Each time it is taken, the bonuses for any one previous favored enemy increases.

Ranged Skirmisher (Ex). When wearing light or nor armor, you may act as though you had the Rapid Shot and Manyshot feats.

Smite Evil (Ex). Once per encounter as a free action, you may add additional damage to an attack against an Evil-aligned foe. You deal an additional 1d10 points of damage for every four full Champion levels you possess (minimum +1d10). You may declare a smite after you hit your target, but if your target is not of Evil alignment the ability is used and wasted.

This talent may be selected multiple times, but not more than once every four full levels, with each additional selection increasing the number of times per encounter you can use it by 1.

Prerequisite: Good alignment

Smite Good (Ex). Once per encounter as a free action, you may add additional damage to an attack against a Good-aligned foe. You deal an additional 1d10 points of damage for every four full Champion levels you possess (minimum +1d10). You may declare a smite after you hit your target, but if your target is not of Good alignment the ability is used and wasted.

This talent may be selected multiple times, but not more than once every four full levels, with each additional selection increasing the number of times per encounter you can use it by 1.

Prerequisite: Evil alignment

Strike True (Ex). Any weapon you use bypasses DR as if it were of your alignment and either cold iron or silver (selected when you take this talent). This is in addition to a y properties the weapon actually has.

Prerequisite: Any smite talent from this talent tree.

Sneak Attack (Ex). You gain a 1d6 sneak attack. This talent may be selected more than once, but not more than once every five Champion levels. It's sneak attack dice stack with dice from any other source.

Prerequisite: Evil alignment (you don't have to be Evil to use sneak attack, but only Evil Champions earn it).

Two-Weapon Skirmisher (Ex). When wearing light or nor armor, you may act as though you had the Two-Weapon Fighting and Improved Two Weapon Fighting feats.

Boon Talent Tree

Many Champions receive special abilities from their dedication, allowing them to resist or ignore various special attacks and conditions. No Champion may have more than three talents from the Boon list. The list of boon talents is as follows:

Aura of Alertness (Ex). You are attuned to balance in all things, making you immune to all magical sleep, and need not engage in mundane sleep. As long as you are conscious, your allies within 10 feet gain a +4 bonus to saves against fear and despair effects.

Prerequisite: Must not be Good or Evil.

Aura of Courage (Ex). You are immune to all fear and despair effects and penalties. As long as you are conscious, your allies within 10 feet gain a +4 bonus to saves against fear and despair effects.

Prerequisite: Must be Lawful Good.

Aura of Freedom (Ex). You are immune to all paralysis, hold, and entangle effects (but not grapples) and effects that reduce your move rate. As long as you are conscious, your allies within 10 feet gain a +4 bonus to saves against such effects.

Prerequisite: Must not be Lawful.

Divine Grace (Ex). You gain a bonus to all saving throws equal to your Charisma bonus, to a maximum of half your Champion level.

Prerequisite: Must not be of Evil alignment, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Divine Health (Su). You are immune to all mundane and magical diseases, including lycanthropy and mummy rot.

Prerequisite: Must not be of Evil alignment, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Evasion (Ex). When in light or no armor, you have the evasion ability.

Prerequisites: 9th level Champion, not of Lawful alignment.

Loyalty (Ex). Once per encounter you may shake off the effects of any mind-affecting spell or ability. This requires a full-round action, which you may take even if the mind-affecting ability would normally prevent it.

Prerequisites: Must not be Chaotic or Evil.

Profane Grace (Su). If you fail a saving throw against an effect, you can delay the consequences of that failure as a free action. As a full round action you may transfer the consequence to a willing, fully informed intelligent creature by touch. You may only delay the consequence of one failed save at a time, if you fail a second without transferring the first you must either accept the consequences of the current failed save, or of the one you are delaying (to then delay the new consequence).

Prerequisite: Must not be of Good alignment, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Profane Health (Su). You are immune to all mundane and magical poisons.

Prerequisite: Must not be of Good alignment, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Dark Empathy (Su). No creature of the vermin type is ever less friendly than Indifferent to you unless it is under magic influence, or you attack it. Even then, it takes a -4 to all attacks made against you.

Prerequisite: Must not be Good, must have some Neutral alignment component.

Wild Empathy (Su). No creature of the animal type is ever less friendly than Indifferent to you unless it is under magic influence, or you attack it. Even then, it takes a -4 to all attacks made against you.

Prerequisite: Must not be Evil, must have some Neutral alignment component.

Defender Talent Tree

Many Champions must stand up for those who cannot defend themselves. These paragons of their beliefs work to protect the weaker members of their orders.

Detect Evil (Su). As a standard action you may cast *detect evil*, as the spell, at will.

Prerequisite: No other detect talent from this tree.

Detect Good (Su). As a standard action you may cast *detect good*, as the spell, at will.

Prerequisite: No other detect talent from this tree.

Detect Magic (Su). As a standard action you may cast *detect magic*, as the spell, at will.

Prerequisite: No other detect talent from this tree.

End Affliction (Su). Once per week you may cast one of the following as a standard action: *neutralize poison, remove blindness/deafness, remove curse, remove disease,* or *restoration*. This talent may be selected multiple times, with each additional selection increasing the number of times per week you can use it by 1.

Prerequisite: Must not be Evil, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Lay On Hands (Su). As the paladin ability.

Prerequisite: Must not be of Evil alignment, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Shield Brother (Ex). You may grant any defense you gain from a shield you carry to one ally in an adjacent space, without losing the defense yourself.

Prerequisite: Must be Lawful.

Steadfast (Su). As long as you are between a foe and allies or innocents, you cannot be knocked down or forced back while you are conscious.

Prerequisite: Must not be Evil.

Spell Talent Tree

Some Champions draw upon arcane or divine power to augment their powers and grant them more power to serve their cause.

Canon. You can cast 1st and 2nd level paladin spells as a paladin of your Champion level.

Prerequisite: Must not be of Evil alignment, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Paladin. You can cast 3rd and 4th level paladin spells as a paladin of your Champion level.

Prerequisite: Canon talent. Must be Lawful Good, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Treefriend. You can cast 1st and 2nd level ranger spells as a ranger of your Champion level.

Ranger. You can cast 3rd and 4th level ranger spells as a ranger of your Champion level.

Prerequisite: Treefriend talent. Must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Vile. You can cast 1st and 2nd level blackguard spells using the paladin spell chart for a paladin of your Champion level.

Prerequisite: Must not be good.

Blackguard. You can cast 3rd and 4th level blackguard spells using the paladin spell chart for a paladin of your Champion level.

Prerequisite: Vile talent. Must be Chaotic Evil, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Herald. You can cast 1st and 2nd level bard spells using the paladin spell chart for a paladin of your Champion level (including ASF in medium or heavy armor).

Prerequisite: Must be Lawful.

Harbinger. You can cast 3rd and 4th level bard spells using the paladin spell chart for a paladin of your Champion level (including ASF in medium or heavy armor).

Prerequisite: Herald talent, must be Lawful.

Hexen. You can cast 1st and 2nd level assassin spells using the paladin spell chart for a paladin of your Champion level (including ASF in medium or heavy armor).

Prerequisite: Must not be Good.

Wyrd. You can cast 3rd and 4th level assassin spells using the paladin spell chart for a paladin of your Champion level (including ASF in medium or heavy armor).

Prerequisite: Hexen talent. Must not be Good.

Spellmaster. You determine how many spells you gain from any Champion talent as if you were four levels higher. This has no impact on your caster level, just spell access.

This talent may be taken a second time by a Champion of 10th level or higher.

Prerequisite: Any two spell talent tree talents.

Ally Talent Tree

Many Champions are granted allies, often steeds, to aid them in their constant struggle for their cause.

Angelic Steed (Su). You can summon a special mount as a paladin of your Champion level.

Prerequisite: Must be Good, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Animal Companion (Ex). You gain an animal companion as a druid of half your Champion level. This may be used to gain an unusual mount.

Improved Ally (Ex). One ally you gain through a talent from this talent tree gains one of the following templates: celestial, fiendish, draconic. Once the template is chosen, it cannot be changed.

Prerequisite: Must be Good (celestial), Evil (fiendish), or neither (draconic).

Infernal Cohort (Su). You can summon an Evil outsider. This acts like a paladin's special mount, except the creature summoned is as powerful as it would be if you had selected it as a cohort with the Leadership feat.

Prerequisite: Must be Evil, and must follow a divinely inspired code of conduct. Any violation of that code ends this ability for 24 hours.

Bonus Feat: At 4th, 12th and 20th level a Champion gains a bonus feat. This feat must relate to your duties as a Champion in some way (as adjudicated by the GM).

Combatant

Combatants are the most common of all adventuring classes. They are specialists in dealing damage and in combat, and surviving the efforts of others to deal damage to them. Many Combatants are heavily prejudiced toward big weapons and heavy armor, but this attitude is less prevalent in some countries than others. Many lands have traditions of dancing warriors, gentleman duelists, and even stealthy commandos.

This Combatant class is designed to replace the barbarian and fighter classes. A non-spellcasting woodsman can also be built with this class, though to recreate a classic ranger you must also take levels of Champion.

Hit Points: 1d10 + Constitution modifier/level, maximum hit points gained as 1st level character.

Skill Points: 16 + ×4 Int modifier at 1st level, 3 + Int modifier per level after that. A character starting as a Combatant at 1st level gains the benefit of more skill points to cover background training, but when advancing as a Combatant most of your time is spent learning fighting techniques rather than other skills.

Proficiencies: All martial and simple weapons, light armor, all shields (except tower shields).

Table 2: The Combatant Class

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+2	+1	+0	Bonus feat, talent
2	+2	+3	+2	+0	Bonus feat
3	+3	+3	+2	+1	Talent
4	+4	+4	+2	+1	Bonus feat, talent
5	+5	+4	+3	+1	Talent
6	+6/+1	+5	+3	+2	Bonus feat
7	+7/+2	+5	+4	+2	Talent
8	+8/+3	+6	+4	+2	Bonus feat, talent
9	+9/+4	+6	+4	+3	Talent
10	+10/+5	+7	+5	+3	Bonus feat
11	+11/+6/+1	+7	+5	+3	Talent
12	+12/+7/+2	+8	+6	+4	Bonus feat, talent
13	+13/+8/+3	+8	+6	+4	Talent
14	+14/+9/+4	+9	+6	+4	Bonus feat
15	+15/+10/+5	+9	+7	+5	Talent
16	+16/+11/+6	+10	+7	+5	Bonus feat, talent

17	+17/+12/+7	+10	+8	+5	Talent
18	+18/+13/+8	+11	+8	+6	Bonus feat
19	+19/+14/+9	+11	+8	+6	Talent
20	+20/+15/+10	+12	+9	+6	Bonus feat, talent

Archer Talent Tree

While most Combatants focus on melee combat, some turn to ranged weapons to allow them to fight from afar.

Careful Shot (Ex). As a full-round action, the Combatant may line up a careful shot by targeting a single character, creature or object (including chariots and other vessels) that he can see. The following round, the Combatant gains a +4 competence bonus to his first ranged attack against that target. Subsequent attacks in the round do not gain this bonus to the attack.

Prerequisite: Point Blank Shot feat.

Deadeye (Ex). As a full-round action, the Combatant may line up a more damaging shot by targeting a single character, creature or object (including vehicles and other vessels) that he can see. The following round, the Combatant gains a +4 competence bonus to his first damage roll on a ranged attack against that target. Subsequent attacks in the round do not gain this bonus to the damage.

Prerequisites: Precise Shot feat, Careful Shot

Dire Accuracy (Ex). When dealing damage with a ranged attack, you reroll any die that results in a "1." You take the result of the second die rolls.

Prerequisite: Far Shot and Precise Shot feats.

Greater Dire Accuracy (Ex). When dealing damage with a ranged attack, you reroll any die that results in a "1" or "2." You take the result of the second die rolls.

Prerequisite: Far Shot and Precise Shot feats, Deadly Accuracy talent, BAB +6.

Defensive Shot (Ex). You do not provoke an attack of opportunity when making a ranged attack.

Prerequisite: Any other talent from the archer talent tree.

Penetrating Shot (Ex). As a full-round action you may make a single ranged attack at a target in point-blank range, dealing an additional 1d8 points of damage.

Prerequisites: Far Shot, Point Blank Shot and Precise Shot feats, +9 BAB.

Barbarian Talent Tree

The fighting styles many tribes in the frozen north and sad-filled east emphasize focusing on a single target and pounding it until it stops moving. While these attack styles developed among uncivilized cultures they have spread to other lands as well, though employing them always involves obvious, massive effort and normally a lot of yelling.

If you have three or more Barbarian talents, you cannot have more than two Fighting Style talents.

Cunning Attack: The Combatant gains a +4 competence enhancement bonus to damage against flat-footed opponents.

Frenzy: Once a day, the Combatant may fly into a frenzy. He gains a +2 bonus to weapon attack and damage rolls and a +2 AC bonus. This frenzy lasts a number of round equal to 3 + his Constitution modifier. At the end of the rage, he is fatigued for ten minutes. While in a frenzy, the Combatant may not perform any task that requires patience or a

delicate touch.

This talent may be bought more than once, with each additional time adding one to the number of times per day the Combatant may frenzy and the number of rounds each frenzy lasts.

Improved Frenzy: The Combatant no longer takes a level of fatigue after his frenzy.

Prerequisites: Rage and any other brute talent.

Mighty Blow (Ex). You gain a +4 bonus to any attack roll made to confirm a critical threat.

Prerequisite: BAB +6

Momentum: Some Combatants can throw the full weight of their bodies behind an attack, dealing extra damage. Whenever a Combatant with this talent makes a melee attack when charging, he gains a bonus of 1d8 extra damage. Thus, a human Combatant with a 14 Strength and a short sword would normally do 1d6+2 points of damage on a melee attack, but when charging he would deal 1d6+2+1d8 points of damage instead.

Punishing Blow: Once per day the Combatant may focus all his effort on a single attack, which gains a +4 morale bonus to hit and deals an additional 1d8 points of damage for every four full class levels of the Combatant (minimum +1d8).

This talent may be taken more than once. Each additional time adds one to the number of times per day it can be used.

Prerequisite: Any other two Barbarian talents.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex). You have uncanny dodge.

Prerequisite: Any other Combatant talent

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex). You have improved uncanny dodge.

Prerequisite: Any other Combatant talent, uncanny dodge talent.

Commander Talent Tree

Many Combatants train to improve not only their own skill at battle, but how to make the best use of warriors around them, or reduce the effectiveness of enemy Combatants.

Command Aura. You may add a competence bonus to allies in range of you that can see and hear you. This bonus is equal to your Charisma bonus. The range is a radius from you equal to 5 feet per Combatant class level. You must decide what this aura applies to at the beginning of each round, and it is a swift action to change it, establish an aura, or lower an aura. You may add the command aura to the following things: Attack rolls to confirm critical hits; attack rolls made as attacks of opportunity; AC against attacks of opportunity; damage rolls made as part of a charge; saving throws vs mind affecting spells and abilities; rolls made to oppose being bull rushed, disarmed or grappled; Concentration checks; and Spot checks.

Prerequisite: Any other Combatant talent.

Dual Aura. You may have a second command aura in effect.

Prerequisites: Cha 15, any other Combatant talent, command aura talent.

Plan (Ex). Prior to a dramatic situation, either combat- or skill-related, the Combatant can develop a plan of action to handle the situation. Using this talent requires preparation; a Combatant can't use this talent when surprised or

otherwise unprepared for a particular situation.

The Combatant makes an Intelligence check. The result of the check provides the Combatant and allies with a bonus to attack rolls and Str-, Dex- and Con-based skill checks. A Combatant can't take 10 or 20 when making this check.

Check Result	Bonus
9 or lower	+0 (check failed)
10-14	+1
15-24	+2
25 or higher	+3

The bonus only lasts for the first 3 rounds of the encounter. After that time, reduce the bonus by 1 point (to a minimum of +0) for every additional round the situation continues, as the vagaries of circumstance begin to unravel even the best-laid plans.

Tactics. Whenever a Combatant is about to launch an attack against an opponent (or group of opponents), the Combatant may spend one minute planning the attack with his allies. If he does so, when combat begins he and all his allies within 60 feet suffer no penalty for being flanked, and when flanking a foe gain a total of a +4 bonus to hit. The Combatant must be able to see his opponents, his opponents must not be aware of his presence (or of his allies), and he must be able to communicate with all allies gaining the benefit of this talent (though he may use hand signals or communicators to do so).

Trick. The Combatant has the ability to temporarily confuse a target through the use of ploy and deception. The target must have an Intelligence score of 3 or higher to be susceptible to a trick, must be within 30 feet of the hero, and must be able to hear and understand the hero.

To play a trick on a target, the Combatant must use a full-round action and make an Intelligence check (DC 15), adding his or her class level as a bonus. If the Intelligence check fails, the target thinks quickly and ignores the trick.

If the Int check succeeds, the target resists the trick by making a Reflex saving throw (DC 10 + fighter's class level + fighter's Int bonus). If the saving throw fails, the target is stunned for one round. A trick can only be played on a particular target once per encounter. After the first trick in an encounter, whether the attempt succeeds or not, that target becomes wary and immune to such ploys.

Extreme Effort Talent Tree

A Combatant can push him or herself to make an extreme effort.

Extreme Effort. The effort must relate either to a Strength check or a Strength-based skill check. The effort requires a full-round action and provides a +1d8 bonus on the check.

Improved Extreme Effort. The effort requires a full-round action and provides a +1d8 bonus that stacks with the bonus provided by extreme effort (+2d8 total).

Prerequisite: Extreme effort.

Tough It Out (Ex). Once per day, the Combatant can gain a second wind as a swift action. When the hero does this, he recovers a number of hit points equal to his Constitution score plus his Combatant class level. This talent does not heal the hero's hit points beyond the character's full normal total.

Fighting Style Talent Tree

As the art of combat has advanced, it has been studied, codified, altered and improved. Several different fighting styles have developed, taught by army soldiers, master knights and fencing masters. Many of these styles offer trade-offs,

improving a Combatant in one circumstance but limiting him in other ways.

If you have three or more Fighting Style talents, you may not have more than two Barbarian talents.

Armor Use. You are proficient in medium and heavy armors, and tower shields.

Armor Master. You gain a +1 dodge bonus to AC in light armor, +2 in Medium armor, and +3 in heavy armor.

Prerequisites: Armor use talent and any other Combatant talent.

Canny Fighting. When wearing light armor or no armor, you may add your Wisdom bonus to your Armor Class, to a maximum of your Combatant class level. If you lose your Dex bonus to AC, you also lose your Wisdom bonus.

Prerequisites: Any other Combatant talent.

Duelist. You may increase you AC by up to +3 against one foe as a free action at the beginning of your turn. You reduce your AC against any other foe by twice that number. These changes last until your next round.

Prerequisite: Dodge feat.

Exotic Weapon Master. The Combatant is considered proficient in all exotic weapons.

Prerequisites: Exotic Weapon Proficiency feat, any other Combatant talent.

Flashing Blades. When wearing light armor or no armor and holding a melee weapon you are proficient with, you gain an armor bonus to AC. This bonus is equal to 4 + your base Will save from the Combatant class. This does not stack with other armor bonuses, but does stack with shield bonuses or an enhancement bonus from armor you are wearing (a 5th level Combatant with +3 leather armor, flashing blades and a sword in hand has +8 to AC, 5 from flashing blades, 3 from the leather's enhancement bonus).

Item Style. Choose one item that can be held in one hand. You may use this item as a light weapon. It deals 1d6 points of damage, threatens on a 20 and has a ×2 critical multiple. Common choices for this talent are cloaks, daggers, bear mugs, and iron fans.

Improved Item Style. Chose one item you have item style talent with. You may either increase its base threat range by one or its critical hit multiplier by one. When you have one of these items in hand, you gain a +1 shield bonus to AC.

Prerequisite: Item style with item selected.

Parry (Ex). Once per round when the Combatant would normally be hit with a melee attack, he may force the attacker to re-roll his attack. The first attack roll is only used if the second attack roll is also a hit. If the first attack roll is not a critical hit the attack is not critical, even if the second attack roll falls within the weapon's threat range.

The Combatant must be aware of the attack and not flat-footed. Unusually massive melee weapons, such as a Huge tree used as a club, can't be deflected. This talent may be used twice per encounter.

Prerequisites: Combat Expertise feat, any other Combatant talent.

Weapon Master. Choose a specific weapon. When fighting with that weapon, you deal an additional 1d8 points of damage.

Prerequisite: Weapon Focus and Weapon Specialization feats for chosen weapon.

Rugged Talent Tree

Many Combatants are simply tougher than other people, able to soak up damage that would crush lesser creatures. The rugged talent list is as follows:

Acid Resistance. The Combatant ignores an amount of acid damage equal to 2 + his Constitution modifier. This talent may be taken up to twice, doubling the resistance granted.

Cold Resistance. The Combatant ignores an amount of cold damage equal to 2 + his Constitution modifier. This talent may be taken up to twice, doubling the resistance granted.

Damage Reduction 1/-- . The Combatant ignores 1 point of bludgeoning, piercing or slashing damage. This stacks with any other DR the Combatant has.

Damage Reduction 2/-- . The Combatant ignores 2 points of bludgeoning, piercing or slashing damage. This replaces the DR 1/- talent, but stacks with any other DR the Combatant has.

Prerequisites: Damage Reduction 1/-- talent.

Damage Reduction 3/-- . The Combatant ignores 3 points of bludgeoning, piercing or slashing damage. This replaces the DR 2/- talent, but stacks with any other DR the Combatant has.

Prerequisites: Damage Reduction 1/-- and damage reduction 2/-- talents.

Electricity Resistance. The Combatant ignores an amount of electricity damage equal to 2 + his Constitution modifier. This talent may be taken up to twice, doubling the resistance granted.

Fire Resistance. The Combatant ignores an amount of fire damage equal to 2 + his Constitution modifier. This talent may be taken up to twice, doubling the resistance granted.

Magic Resistance. Any time the Combatant takes damage from a magic source he does not have resistance against, he reduces the damage he takes by 5.

Prerequisites: Any two other resistances from the Rugged talent tree.

Robust. The Combatant becomes especially robust, gaining a number of hit points equal to his class level as soon as he selects this talent. Thereafter, the hero gains +1 hit point with each class level he gains.

Thunder Resistance. The Combatant ignores an amount of sonic damage equal to 2 + his Constitution modifier. This talent may be taken up to twice, doubling the resistance granted.

Bonus Feat: Combatants gain bonus feats from the fighter bonus feat list.

Pyramid Pick

Ticket to Ride: The Computer Game

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Game design by Alan R. Moon

Programming by Brice Figureau

Art design by Cyrille Daujean & Julien Delval

Music & sound effects by Michael Huang & [gamenoise.com](#)

Cinematic scenes and 3-D by Philippe Nouhra & [philours.com](#)

Tutorials by Franck Lefebvre

Game CD, promotional DVD, & quick reference sheet; full-color, in a DVD box; $29.95

Too often gamers find themselves without a group of friends to play with, and while they may have the possibility of a computer game open to them, a first-person shooter or strategy resource management game doesn't always have the same appeal. On the other hand, if the computer game actually is a favored board game, you're in like Flynn. ***Ticket to Ride*** is available as a CD-ROM from Days of Wonder.

Like the [physical version,](#) the game asks participants (or in this case, the participant) to play card sets and secure the lines running from one city to the next. Finish with more points than the pixilated competition and you win. But now it's all automated. No more fiddling with tiny train car miniatures or even tinier train cards. No one forgets to move their scoring marker around the circumference of the board . . . and no one has to find a table on which to put said board, either.

The display is dominated by the map view showing the cities and lines you must claim. Above that are your opponents (you can select from one to four rivals) and a quick summary of what they have: their remaining train cars, how many cards they hold, their current score (sans whatever tickets they may have completed), and so on. Along the left side are the draw piles showing what's available from different decks, and the bottom belongs to you -- the same information as your opponents but with more detail.

Your computer screen is now the gateway to all the railroad gaming you could want to do, and when you see how much there is to do you're going to want to do a lot. Rather than stick it to their customers and make them pay for the basic game and then some add-ons for all the sequels (or worse, make each iteration in the line a separate, standalone purchase), you get both the original *Ticket to Ride* and its European-mapped sequel. Then they throw in an all-new map of Switzerland.

Now how much would you pay? Don't answer yet, because if you try to go on-line (more in a moment) with your new toy, you find there's an update waiting at the website. In most cases this would mean a patch released by the company to fix countless problems, but here it means they're offering the *[1910](#)* supplement and all three of its rule variations. The cost to you? Nothing.

So what do you do if you get tired of playing three maps six ways? Well, since the game only allows single play at home -- sadly it doesn't even offer a "hot-seat" option (with friends on one machine taking turns at the keyboard), let alone LAN play -- you'll find joining other people at the site a good way to fill empty VR seats. If your buddy can't come across town to play, meet Pierre and Chan, your new best global friends, with a chat option and other goodies that make it a true on-line experience. (You can even play all AIs when you're on-line. Why? Who knows . . . it's your game, and you can't fault the company's thoroughness.) Purchasing the computer disc gives you a year's subscription to the service.

There are a few irritating features. Usually it's pretty easy to tell the difference between a line of empty spaces ready for your train car placement and a line of your opponent's cars occupying a road, but occasionally the colors get a little tricky and throw you. Claiming a line requires you to click the appropriate cards in your play area and drag them to the segment you want, and sometimes the selecting or "centering" operations demand too much precision. A little practice eliminates this for the most part, so again, not too galling. The new rules on linking to neighboring countries take some getting used to -- you're essentially connecting to a rail ending in nothing -- and sometimes the text on the maps is too small or stylized to make out easily. Thus, the inclusion of a zoom button that gives the far-sighted a better look at the details.

The game is as colorful as the real thing, and it plays well. The AIs are just tough enough that, even after you've got the game down, they still pose a challenge. You won't be able to walk over the system without putting thought into every game. Each color is represented by a separate character (if you've ever seen the box top, the people thereon are your icons), and while they just play the game (they don't talk or taunt or animate crazily) each has a personality that emerges over time. Herr Doktor, for example, usually ends the game with a big score from playing a lot of trains on high-value lines, but he can't complete a ticket to save his electronic life.

It takes a while to get tired of the sounds and animations, and most can be toggled on and off. The music is cute, if repetitive, and the cut-scenes are brief and well produced. Full tutorials with VCR controls tell you how to play, and you also get a promotional DVD that espouses the *Days of Wonder* philosophy and gives you a thorough overview of how to play several of their lines. **Ticket to Ride: The Computer Game** offers buyers another of those rare, overpowering values that come along only once in a while in the leisure world. A trip that's always been worth taking is now not to be missed.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Deadlands Reloaded (for [Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds](#))

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Shane Lacy Hensley & BD Flory with Simon Lucas, Paul "Wiggy" Wade-Williams, Dave Blewer, & Piotr Korys

Illustrated by Aaron Acevedo, Travis Anderson, Chris Appel, Tom Baxa, Melissa A. Benson, Theodor Black, Peter Bradley, Brom, Heather Burton, Paul Carrick, Jim Crabtree, Thomas Denmark, Cris Dornau, Jason Engle, Edward Fetterman, Tom Fowler, Carl Frank, Dan Frazier, Randy Gallegos, Garem, Tim Gerstmar, Simon Gustafsson, Friedrich Haas, Paul (Prof.) Herbert, Llyn Hunter, Simon Ible, Charles Keegan, Mike Kimble, Lissanne Lake, April Lee, William O'Connor, Paolo Parente, Allan Pollack, Mike Raabe, Ron Spencer, Richard Thomas, Pete Venters, Brian Wackwitz, James Walters, Blake Wilkie, & John Worsley

Cover by Aaron Acevedo, Travis Anderson, & Thomas Denmark

258-Page Full Color Hardback Book; $39.99

It is strange to think that [*Deadlands*](#) is 10 years old, an anniversary marked by the release of **Deadlands Reloaded.** The fourth version of the game after the 1996 original, *GURPS Deadlands,* and *Deadlands d20,* it also brings two Origins-Award-winning games together and one of those back to its origins. **Deadlands Reloaded** is not a full RPG, but a supplement for [*Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds,*](#) the pulpish game engine derived from [*Rail Wars,*](#) the skirmish rules that were themselves a simplified version of the Deadlands mechanics.

Deadlands Reloaded is more than a retread of the original game, known as **Deadlands Classic.** Rather it is a distillation of over fifty supplements into one volume, providing everything needed to play within the Weird West, not of 1876, but of 1879. In providing a new entry point for fans old and new, **Deadlands Reloaded** spares the Marshal (as the GM is known) no secrets. What is really going on, who the big bads are -- and the Weird West is certainly not short of those -- and so on, are all included. **Deadlands Reloaded** is one big summary of the Weird West, providing rules and background, but nothing in the way of scenarios or campaign support. Unlike other *Savage World* supplements, **Deadlands Reloaded** does not include a plot point campaign. These will appear in future supplements, although several short scenarios appear on the publisher's website.

For those not in the know, the setting for **Deadlands Reloaded** is the Weird West, an alternate history that combines the classic Western and Horror genres. It extends the American Civil War by a decade, leaving the States torn in twain, and the West either disputed territory or still in Indian hands. The western continental coast has been shattered by an earthquake, leaving a maze of rocky islands disputed b the USA, the CSA, Mexico, Chinese Triads, and a fanatical Reverend. At stake is the control of Ghost Rock, a new glowing mineral that shrieks as it is burned, but can be used to fuel any number of devices from horseless carriages and rocket packs to Gatling guns and flamethrowers.

Ghost Rock and other minerals promise wealth untold, drawing potential prospectors from back East, and way out West all aboard the various transcontinental railroads driving across the continent to be first to get there.

Unfortunately the Weird West is a dangerous place for the unwary traveler. Not just form the territorial Indians, the unpredictable cowboys and outlaws, factions feuding for the Union and Confederacy, and so on, but also from a host of horrors. The least of these are the dead returned from the grave, some of them still on the side of law and order, others downright evil. Others come from Indian legend, like the Sasquatch and the Wendigo; others are more Wild West, like the sentient barbed wire Bloodwire, the Hangin' Judge, and the Nosferatu. It is creatures like these, and the other oddness of the Weird West, that is fodder for the *Tombstone Epitaph*, the Weird West's news sheet of disrepute.

This is a rich mix into which to play, and the character roles available are equal to the task. Gunslingers, Indian Braves and Shaman, prospectors, soldiers, secret agents, Chinese martial artists, holy men and women, voodoo priests, mad scientists capable of building steam powered devices, hucksters who can cast spells vial hands of cards, and hexslingers who casts spells via their six shooters. It is even possible to start play as "a veteran of the Weird West," though the character will be touched by the horrors he has seen and might possibly be jinxed, maimed, in debt, or even one of the Harrowed (the undead returned). All of these are represented by a raft of new Edges and Hindrances, many of them Professional or Arcane. This is in addition to those in Savage Worlds. Character generation is unchanged from Savage Worlds, but Deadlands Reloaded provides plenty of options for the party or posse.

Mechanically, *Deadlands Reloaded* makes some small changes to the *Savage Worlds* rules. It replaces the core game's Bennies -- or luck points -- with *Deadlands'* fate chips, which come in three colors of ascending power: white, red, and blue. Each player begins with a random selection, as does the GM or Marshal who uses them for all of his NPCs and Critters. One downside of using red chips is that the Marshal gets to draw a chip when a player uses one. Combat employs the "Way of the Brave" system that makes any fight more savage and brutal. Duels between hucksters and hexslingers have their own set of rules, participants trying to assemble the best poker hands to fuel their spells.

Over half of *Deadlands Reloaded* is for the Marshal's eyes only. It is here that he will really find out about the Weird West. This is all one big bestiary, history, gazetteer, who's who, and the truth rolled into one. In setting everything out for the Marshal, *Deadlands Reloaded* runs contrary to *Deadlands Classic* and games of its ilk such as *Brave New World,* where the setting's secrets are doled out over the course of the game's releases, which all feels very refreshing.

That said, there are one or two elements missing from *Deadlands Reloaded.* First there is no example of character generation, but there are plenty of sample characters besides the settings personalities. Second, there are no campaign or adventure hooks given, but then the actual setting is rife with details that any Marshal worth his grit should find something in this book. Neither of these omissions poses much of a problem. What does though is the lack of advice on running the game and on handling the mental effect of encountering the Weird West's horrors. It is obviously handled by a simple guts roll in *Savage Worlds,* but this should have been covered. *Deadlands Reloaded,* after all, is a horror setting.

Physically *Deadlands Reloaded* is a good looking book, decently written and fully illustrated . . . probably to a greater extent than most supplements, but then *Deadlands Reloaded* has a decade's worth of supplements to draw upon for its art.

Go back that decade and you have to remember that in its day, *Deadlands* was a big hit. It had a simple hook which so many RPGs these days seem to lack -- a combination of classic Wild West and horror -- that captured the imagination and made the game cool. Yet even if it was cool and its mechanics felt appropriate to the genre, those mechanics were fundamentally too clunky. is virtually a testament to that, an easier (derived) set of skirmish rules in being used for *Deadlands Reloaded,* by using the skirmish-rule-derived *Savage Worlds* (albeit with one or two complications in the use of a poker deck), shows that the Weird West can be run using a lighter set of rules without losing any of the flavor. With virtually everything to hand, *Deadlands Reloaded* is the definite guide and the perfect entry point to the Weird West.

--Matthew Pook

Looking Ahead By Glancing Backwards Nervously (Part I)

And so, as 2006 has been torn into pieces over the course of 365 days and thrown into the dustbin of history, we as a world now turn our eyes toward 2007 to see if it can fare any better. Odds are slim, but I've got the inside track from the breeders that 2008 might be able to last an extra day.

Anyway, this is the time of year when various media outfits put on prognosticator hats and try to foretell the future. (We've even done it around here once or twice.) But I'm going to take a pass this year. My track record is only so-so, and -- frankly -- things don't change quickly enough in the gaming world to make many "interesting" predictions. (And even if they did, I'm not wizard enough to figure out what's gonna happen.) Instead, I thought I'd take my weekly words to think about how the gaming industry has looked to the future in the past -- at least as far as technology is concerned -- and how it worked out.

There's a saying about armies (at least in the U.S.; I don't know if it's a universal truism) that generals always plan to fight the previous war. Thus the Korean War was approached as it if were World War II Too, the Vietnam War was approached with the same mindset as Korea, and General Kenobi approached the Rebellion with the same tactics as he did the Clone Wars (which is to say he was really lazy and was ultimately twice as successful at getting himself half-killed).

This is also reasonably true of the gaming biz as well (and many other industries, no doubt . . . but this is a gaming mag, so what're ya gonna do?). In particular I got to thinking of the number of technological advances that have been made in the gaming world -- both from a business and fan-centric standpoint -- and how, ultimately, many of them either didn't pan out or provided benefits that were quickly fleeting.

The earliest example I can think of this was former computer-game giant SSI's release of *Dungeon Master's Assistant Volume I* in 1988. (*Volume II* followed in 1989.) Now, for the era -- I had them for the Apple][computer system -- these utilities were really useful, and helped the GM organize all his *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 1st Edition* game information. Unfortunately, there was only one slight problem; the *2nd Edition* of the game was released in 1989. As such, gamers who wanted to be on the cutting edge of official rules (which, I believe, is a pretty darn large number) were purchasing computer software that was obsolete in a year or less . . . quite probably much less.

Curiously, something very similar happened with the release of the *Dungeons & Dragons CD-ROM Core Rules* in September of 1996. (As an aside, I note with amusement and awe that, over the course of seven years, the standard computer-storage medium size moved from 0.14-meg 5.25" floppy disks to 700-meg CD-ROMs . . . a 5,000-fold increase.) This product -- one of the earliest attempts at distribution of electronic rulebooks -- only contained a few tomes; notably missing were the *Player's Option* series that began in 1995 and the "Book of . . ." series (the earliest "splatbooks," which contained popular character options called "kits"). The *Core Rules CD-ROM 2.0* contained the *Player's Option* books but were missing the "Book of"s; those weren't added until 1999's *Core Rules 2.0 Expansion.* At last, all the main books were available in electronic format. And the next year, *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* appeared. (At least this time these rules were mostly accessible in electronic format via the freely distributable Standard Resource Document, which formed the foundation of the *d20 System* movement. Whether this movement was good or bad for the industry as a whole is up to future historians to sort out.)

And speaking of CD-ROM goodness, let's not forget White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* offering in August of 1997. (The revised edition of that game came out in 1998, making those rulebooks obsolete.) At least the November 2001 edition of that CD-ROM contained rules that were relevant until 2004's *Vampire: The Requiem* came out. (Heck . . . fans who didn't switch over systems will *always* find that system equally useful.) If it wasn't for that trend-bucking offering, it would seem the surest indicator of a new edition was a CD-ROM release of the old edition.

(I should also note that not all of TSR's CD-ROM offerings were less-than-useful. The *Dragon Magazine* archive is a prized possession even today, and the *Forgotten Realms Interactive Atlas* is an amazing achievement of technology

and research.)

Let's move on to another example, this one 100% devoid of CD-ROM references. Remember in 1997, when the *Star Wars* universe was having its big comeback? Sure you do. Remember the theatrical "Special Edition" re-releases of the original trilogy were coming (back when the notion of prequels was still firmly in the realm of "exciting rumors" rather than "soul-wrenching memories"), and the comics and RPG were in full force? You bet. And do you remember how cool West End Games' website was, capitalizing on all this hype? No? No wonder; West End Games didn't have a website until 2000. Admittedly this is because the downward forces affecting the company were in full force, causing them to declare bankruptcy in 1998. But I have to wonder: At the infancy of the Internet (two years after Amazon.com opened its doors and less than one year before *Pyramid* evolved into its online-only form), when people were desperate for content and hungry for *Star Wars,* how many potential fans didn't even know that there were volumes upon volumes of additional material waiting to be purchased? And how many would have been enticed by a $30-a-month website? Would it have made a difference to the company's fate? Probably not . . . .but who can say?

Expanding on that idea, I note that *many* companies didn't get online until late in the game (Alderac); many that did had lackluster online offerings. (White Wolf and Pre-Wizards-of-the-Coast TSR, I'm looking at you.) While this fact applies to many companies in the mid-to-late 1990s, the fact remains that the Internet is about information and community . . . two facts that are at the absolute core of the gaming experience.

Next week I'll look at a couple of counterexamples to this (which really, in my opinion, prove the larger point), return to the idea of information and community, and discuss why I'm interested in this phenomenon in the first place. See you in seven.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Pyramid Review

Panty Explosion: A Psychic Schoolgirl Adventure Game

Published by **Atarashi Games**

Written by Jake Richmond & Matt Schlotte

Illustrated by Jake Richmond

98-Page 4.06Mb Full Color PDF Document; $10
96-Page Full Color Hardback Book; $20

Obviously, ***Panty Explosion: A Psychic Schoolgirl Adventure Game*** wins the award for least tasteful RPG title of 2006, but was probably the only entry anyway. Fortunately, the game's subject matter is nowhere near as prurient, although it does involve Japanese schoolgirls. More specifically, it involves Japanese schoolgirls confronting various threats from mysterious government agents to traditional Japanese demons. Mysterious government agents because the Men in Black are particularly interested in psychic schoolgirls, and traditional Japanese demons because being a threat is what traditional Japanese demons do.

Of course, it might take schoolgirl psychic to defeat any one of these demons, but her powers and inherent oddness set her apart and mean that she will never fit into the Japanese high school's clique-bound society. In the meantime, every Japanese schoolgirl, psychic or not, has to survive high school, pass her exams, and deal with her own agenda, issues, and rivals.

Schoolgirl creation in ***Panty Explosion*** draws heavily from Japanese culture. Her player assigns the numbers 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 to the Godai, or elements representing attributes. These are Earth (strength/stability), Water (adaptability/flexibility), Fire (passion/aggression), Air (wisdom/movement), and Void (communication/interaction). She must know her Blood Type, her birth sign under the Junishi or Chinese Zodiac, details of her Friends and Family, and her Hobbies. For each of these, plus her highest rated Godai, she chooses five traits, either positive or negative, representing her personality, plus various talents, abilities, hobbies, relationships, and possessions. Additionally, the schoolgirl needs a name, an agenda, and to decide her best friend and rival from amongst the other player schoolgirls. Finally, her player needs to decide if she is psychic or not. At least one student per game must be psychic.

So for example, Sasaki Chinatsu is Blood Type A, and being the artistic type, has the trait, "has won awards for her artwork." Born in December, her Junishi sign is the Boar. Known for its loyalty, her associated trait is, "Friends can always trust her." Her Godai values are Earth 4, Water 3, Fire 2, Air 1, and Void 5; so for her high Void, she has the trait, "Is working on a well-known Manga series." For her Friends and Family, Chinatsu has "Misses her father who is working away"; and for her hobby trait, she "maintains a website devoted to English-language rock bands." Chinatsu's agenda is, "Has a less popular friend who she wants to be more popular."

At the beginning of both a game and each session, the players must determine who the most popular and the least popular students are by a secret ballot. This is important because it determines the die type a student uses during conflict resolution. The most popular uses 10-sided dice, the least popular the 6-sided, whilst every other student uses 8-sided dice. A psychic schoolgirl is too odd to be the most popular. Problematically, the link between popularity and die type is not explained until after conflict resolution is explained.

Besides dice, conflict resolution also requires a character's best friend and rival. A schoolgirl is also limited to 15 dice in a conflict, equal to her Godai. Expended dice cannot be used again in a conflict, so a student must find another way

to win. For example, Chinatsu's friend is being picked upon, so she steps in and stares down the bully. This uses her Earth Godai, giving her up to four dice to use in an action. If the bully responds physically and pushes her, Chinatsu could use either unused Earth Godai to resist or Water Godai to dodge. Later on, she could try humiliating the Bully verbally with her Void Godai. Whilst the limitations on Godai dice constrain conflicts it also moves the game forward because each conflict has to be resolved before the dice are exhausted.

Whatever the die type, a student requires only a 5 or more on one die to succeed, so larger die types are better. A trait relevant to a conflict will increase the die type by one size. Conflicts are played out with each student taking actions in turn, until it is resolved or the participants run out of Godai dice and can take no further action. Interestingly, where typical RPGs have the GM narrate the outcome of a conflict, in *Panty Explosion* the narration is handled by whoever is playing a schoolgirl's best friend or rival. If the conflict failed, then the rival narrates; if successful, the best friend does do. The GM or (School) Superintendent handles narration for everything else.

Combat is handled through this same method of conflict resolution. With no hit points, damage effects are instead narrated, making it easily possible for a rival or the Superintendent to kill a character. The advice though suggests that this should never be arbitrary and should either serve the story or because the victim put herself in that situation.

Psychic powers are handled even more simply. A psychic schoolgirl rolls a 10-sided dice for any attempt to use her powers, the ability determining which Godai dice are used. For example, Levitation uses either Air, Void, or Water dice, whilst Make Heads Explode uses Earth, Fire, or Void dice. If the roll fails, another attempt can be made with a single die. Psychic power use is always disturbing, and accompanied by strange effects like temperature changes or flickering lights. Even if the roll succeeds, it is not a psychic's best friend who narrates the outcome, but her rival. The point is, however useful psychic powers are in confronting demons, their use is not a good thing with unnerving consequences and the rival should bring this into her narration.

It is up to the Superintendent to create the girls' school and potential opposition in the form of rivals, psychics, government agents, and demons. Although numerous demons are described, from the mind-reading skin-stealing Ama-no-jaku to the man-eating snow maiden Yuki-onna, they all work more or less the same. And the same rules apply if the students are facing a government agency or secret society. All get the same number of Godai dice as a student, plus two extra dice per unresolved Agenda, with a further two if the Agenda belongs to the Psychic student. In addition, the demon/agency/society gains another two dice each time the Psychic uses her powers. Which gives the demon an awful lot of dice to play with, but the dice are not intended to be used all at once. Rather they are a pool of dice that the Superintendent dips into over the course of an adventure as the story demands.

The Godai elements are further used in two similar fashions. First, in setting up and structuring a *Panty Explosion* game, for which the Superintendent selects Earth (the setting), Air (the story), Water (the Agendas), Fire (the Demon), and Void (the End). Second in building each scene, using Earth (location), Air (people), Water (mood), Fire (action), and Void (psychic). The Superintendent usually begins with setting the location, but the players are encouraged to suggest Godai elements for each scene. Thus a game of Panty Explosion follows a movie structure, with the story coming to a climax once the students have dealt with the demon. Along the way, the students must deal with their agendas as it is the only way to weaken the threat they face.

Plenty of background material supports the setting, primarily covering the life, society, and culture of the Japanese schoolgirl and her high school. Outside of this institution, there is an extensive description (though no map) of Tokyo, and of the Japanese faiths of Buddhism and Shintoism. This is all useful information, but here *Panty Explosion* ends, leaving the game missing three elements. First, there is very little advice for the Superintendent; second, there is no discussion of the genre; and third, no bibliography. *Panty Explosion* is not necessarily a difficult game to run, but advice is always welcome. The other omissions are more problematic, as indications of the source always help a GM understand a genre. Physically though, *Panty Explosion* is nicely done. The full color artwork is excellent if your tastes run to Japanese schoolgirls, and the book itself is presented as a schoolgirl's notebook.

As written, *Panty Explosion* is designed more for one-off rather than repeated play; there are no rules for character improvement, though a GM could create them. The one-shot nature also lends itself to *Panty Explosion* being run in the vein of Japanese or [J-horror](#) films such as Ringu, Dark Water, and Ju-on. And if that is the point of the game, it

certainly does not say that -- though it should. Despite its omissions (and its title), ***Panty Explosion: A Psychic Schoolgirl Adventure Game*** achieves its aim of presenting a storytelling RPG that can be run within the anime horror or J-horror genres. The GM or Superintendent will just have to conduct a little more research than he should.

--Matthew Pook

Naval Warriors: The Officers And Men Who Fought The Great Square-Riggers

Part II: The Warrant Officers

by Nicholas Lovell

Captain Smallwood stood in full dress uniform on the quarterdeck of HMS Bellerephon. A fresh breeze plucked at his coat as the ship headed west under topsails and topgallants.

"And may I now introduce your standing officers, sir." Goodwin, the first lieutenant, continued briefing his new captain.

"Mr Dreskin, the gunner." A small man, with wisps of grey hair blowing in the wind.

"Mr Richmond, the carpenter." Old, probably mid-50s, with an earnest expression.

"Mr Bowers, the bosun." Powerfully-built and over six feet tall, Bowers towered over the crew. He had an easy authority, and Smallwood felt instantly reassured that the ship would be in excellent condition.

*"Gentlemen, it is my pleasure to make your acquaintance," Smallwood said. "I look forward to talking to you all later, to ensure that we maintain the excellent reputation that the **Bellerephon** has enjoyed for so many years."*

On a major warship, the warrant, or non-commissioned, officers were the backbone of the crew. Since the commissioned officers were frequently advanced due to political or family connections (although merit and gallantry played a significant part), the warrant officers were highly skilled, specialized, and crucial to the successful running of the ship.

The warrant officers were divided into two groups. The wardroom officers shared the wardroom with the lieutenants and marine commanders. They were of a higher social status than the other warrant officers, but often lacked social esteem in polite society compared with their commissioned counterparts. These also included men who were important to the ship but had limited sailing abilities, such as the surgeon and chaplain.

The wardroom warrant officers include:

Master: Responsible for all navigation matters. If the captain was an appointee due to his connections rather than his seamanship, the Master could become the real sailing master of the vessel.

The master would typically be a former midshipman or lieutenant who had passed the technical aspects of his exams, but had failed on the nebulous and informal measure of "being a gentleman." Some men who failed in this way would remain as embittered elderly master's mates or lieutenants, while others would accept their role as master as a recognition of their sailing expertise.

Surgeon: Medicine was very limited in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the surgeon's role was frequently limited to amputation of severely damaged limbs and the removal of bullets and splinters. Splinter wounds in wooden boats could be horrific, as a heavy iron cannonball could send shards of wood several feet long flying through the crowded fighting decks of a man of war. He would also carry treatments for syphilis (the "pox"), an ever-present disease after every landfall.

Chaplain: Often only carried at the behest of the Captain, and not every ship carried a parson. In the absence of a chaplain, the Captain would carry out the Sunday services and funerals himself.

Purser: Responsible for provisioning the ships, which could be a pivotal role in a long voyage. As the man in charge of all supplies on board, taking a cut was easy, and seen as a perk of the job. As such the purser was distrusted by many, if not all, sailors.

Other important warrant officers, although not of wardroom rank, include:

Gunner: Responsible for maintaining the cannon, overseeing the supplies of powder and preparing the charges for the great guns.

Boatswain: Pronounced bosun, was in charge of all rigging, sails and anchors.

Carpenter: a critical role in the wooden ships of the time

Sailmaker: made and repaired the dozens of sails used on a ship of war.

Armourer: the ship's blacksmith who was also the primary maintainer of the small arms and weapons. He reported to the gunner.

Master-at-arms: The ship's disciplinarian, he was also responsible for training the sailors in the use of muskets and pistols.

The gunner, bosun and carpenter were the three "standing" warrant officers on board ship. They were senior to the sailmaker, armourer, master-at-arms, and other warrant officers, and were theoretically attached to the same ship for its entire life. In practice, this was often not the case and they would move from ship to ship.

Marines/Soldiers

Many vessels carried soldiers or marines. They acted as a primary landing and boarding force where appropriate, and were also sharpshooters in ship-to-ship battle. A French marine mortally wounded Admiral Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Typically, the marines were commanded by a Captain and would have two or more Lieutenants. The Captain and the Lieutenants would mess with the naval Lieutenants and senior warrant officers in the wardroom. For game purposes, the Marines are soldiers with few specifically maritime skills, and as such, templates for them are outside the scope of this article.

The wardroom officers have individual templates, since they had specialist skills. The bosun and other warrant officers are based on either the Able Seaman or Ordinary Seamen templates found in a previous article.

Master   *130 points*

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Secondary characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Languages (One accented or two broken, both spoken only) [2], Patron 5 (major nation, 9 or less) [30]; Rank (Naval) 4 [20]; Status 1 [0].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less) [-15]; Enemy (utterly formidable group, 9 or less) [-40].

Skills: Area Knowledge (home port) IQ+0 [1]-11; Area Knowledge (territorial waters) IQ+0 [2]-12; Area Knowledge

(enemy's territorial waters) IQ+0 [1]-11; Astronomy IQ+1 [4]-11; Boating (Unpowered) DX+1 [1]-11; Brawling DX+1 [2]-13; Broadsword DX+1 [4]-13; Carousing HT+0 [1]-13; Cartography IQ+1 [4]-12; Gunner (Cannon) DX+1 [2]-3; Guns (Pistol) DX+1 [2]-13; Knot-tying DX+0 [2]-12; Leadership IQ+0 [2]-11; Mathematics (Applied) IQ-1 [2]-10; Meteorology IQ+0 [2]-11; Navigation (sea) IQ+1 [4]-12; Savoir Faire (Military) IQ+0 [1]-13; Seamanship IQ+2 [4]-13; Shiphandling IQ+0 [4]-11.

Surgeon   *120 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 12 [20].

Secondary characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Languages (Latin, Accented) [4], Patron 5 (major nation, 9 or less) [30]; Rank (Naval) 4 [20]; Status 1 [0].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less) [-15]; Enemy (utterly formidable group, 9 or less) [-40].

Skills: Biology IQ-3 [1]-10; Broadsword DX+0 [2]-11; Diagnosis IQ-1 [2]-12; First Aid IQ+2 [4]-15; Guns (Pistol) DX+1 [2]-12; Naturalist IQ-2 [1]-11; Pharmacy (Herbal) IQ-1 [2]-12; Physician IQ-1 [2]-12; Physiology IQ-1 [2]-12; Surgery IQ-2 [2]-11.

Chaplain   *120 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; IQ **13** [60]; HT **12** [20].

Secondary characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Languages (Latin, Accented; Another language, Accented) [8], Clerical Investment [5]; Patron 5 (major nation, 9 or less) [30]; Rank (Naval) 4 [20]; Status 1 [0].

Disadvantages: Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less) [-15]; Enemy (utterly formidable group, 9 or less) [-40]; Pacifism (Cannot harm innocents) [-10].

Skills: Guns (Pistol) DX+0 [1]-11; Religious Ritual IQ+0 [4]-13; Savoir-Faire (Military) IQ+0 [1]-13; Savoir-Faire (Religious) IQ+0 [1]; Swimming HT+0 [1]-12; Theology IQ+0 [4]-13.

Purser   *120 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 12 [20].

Secondary characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Patron 5 (major nation, 9 or less) [30]; Rank (Naval) 4 [20]; Status 1 [0]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Gentleman's); Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less) [-15]; Enemy (utterly formidable group, 9 or less) [-40]; Reputation -2 (Purser, amongst all sailors, all the time) [-5].

Skills: Accounting IQ-1 [2]-12; Administration IQ+1 [4]-14; Broadsword DX-1 [1]-10; Freight handling IQ+0 [2]-13; Guns (Pistol) DX+1 [2]-12; Merchant IQ+1 [4]-14; Savoir-Faire (Military) IQ+0 [1]-13.

Bosun - 125 points: Based on the Able Seaman template. Add Rank (Naval) 2 [10] and add/raise the following skills: Engineer (Ship) IQ-1 [2]-9; Hobby Skill DX+1 [2]-14; Knot-tying DX+2 [4]-15; Mathematics (Applied) IQ-2 [1]-8; Seamanship IQ+3 [8]-13.

The remaining warrant officers are based on the ordinary seaman template (found in), since many non-commissioned officers rose through the ranks. For each NCO, add Rank (Naval) 2 [10] to the advantages, and the following unique skills:

Armourer (115 points): Armoury (Melee weapons) IQ+0 [2]-11; Armoury (Small arms) IQ+1 [4]-12; Axe/Mace DX-1 [1]-11; Smith (Iron) IQ+2 [8]-13.

Sailmaker (115 points): Engineer (Ship) IQ-1 [2]-10; Knot-tying DX+2 [4]-14; Mathematics (Applied) IQ-2 [1]-9; Seamanship IQ+1 [2]-12; Sewing DX+3 [8]-15.

Carpenter (115 points): Carpentry IQ+3 [8]-14; Engineer (Ship) IQ+0 [4]-11; Machinist IQ-1 [1]-10; Mathematics (Applied) IQ-2 [1]-9; Seamanship IQ+1 [2]-12.

Gunner (115 points): Armoury (Heavy Weapons) IQ+0 [2]-11; Armoury (Small Arms) IQ+0 [2]-11; Explosives IQ+1 [4]-12; Gunner (Cannon) DX+3 [8]-15

Master-at-arms (115 points): Axe/Mace DX+0 [2]]-12; Gunner (Cannon) DX+1 [2]-13; Guns (Musket) DX+2 [4]-14; Guns (Pistol0 DX+2 [3]-14; Law (Naval) IQ-2 [1]-9.

Sample Character: William Bowers, Bosun

William Bowers ran away to sea at the age of 12 to escape the boredom of family life and a future as a tanner in the East End of London. In 27 years at sea, he has traveled around the world twice, and spent less than two years on dry land, six months of which was on the tiny Samoan island of Olosega.

Bowers, at the time a bosun's mate, was involved in a close-fought ship-to-ship action with a French frigate sent to harass the whalers and trading vessels in the South Pacific. When the ships crashed together, Bowers ran along the mizzen topsail yardarm and lashed the two vessels together. He then launched himself at the sharpshooters in the enemy's maintop, carrying a fearsome boarding axe. The two marines succumbed rapidly, but a French sailor unbalanced Bowers, who fell to the deck. Only his cat-like reflexes saved him as he twisted to land on the hammocks stowed along the waist.

Finding himself alone in the enemy waist, behind the mass of defenders repelling his fellow boarders, Bowers heaved himself up and single-handedly stormed the quarterdeck, the massive blows of his axe sweeping sailors and marines aside. Despite two pistol bullets and a wicked pike thrust to the thigh, Bowers reached the enemy officers. His first swing decapitated the First Lieutenant; the Captain, seeing that the English boarders had now gained control of the waist and faced with this berserk giant, hauled down his colors.

The surgeon recommended an extended period of shore-based recovery, otherwise he would not answer for the hero's survival. Bowers stayed for six months in the care of the villagers on Olosega, remaining after he was fully recovered until his ship returned after an extended cruise throughout Polynesia.

Now promoted to bosun of *HMS Bellerephon,* Bowers is a respected figure amongst the sailors. Those who have not seen him in battle have heard the tales, and few would run the risk of incurring his wrath.

William Bowers, Bosun   *125 points*

6'1" 240 lbs., a big man with strong upper body and arm muscles. Greying hair tied back in a pigtail. Easy air of authority

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: Acute Hearing 2, Catfall, Language (Samoan, accented, spoken only), Patron 5 (Royal Navy, 9 or less), Rank (Naval) 2.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Sailor's), Berserk, Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less), Enemy (French and Spanish Navies, 9 or less), Unattractive (scar from a pistol ball scored across his right cheek, barely missing his eye and past his hairline).

Skills: Axe/Mace-12; Boating (Sailboat)-12; Boating (Unpowered)-12; Brawling-13; Broadsword-13; Carousing-13; Climbing-12; Engineer (Sailing ship)-10; Gunner (Cannon)-14; Guns (Pistol)-13; Hobby skill (Macramé)-13; Knot-tying-14; Mathematics (Applied)-9; Musical Instrument (Fife)-10; Seamanship-14.

Quirks: Whistles sea shanties continuously; earnestly believes that an amulet given to him by a Samoan girl will protect him from harm in storms and in battle.

Vignettes in RPGs

by Lloyd Brown III

While long experience and many advice articles teach GMs that interactive storytelling is the epitome of the roleplaying experience for many, this advice minimizes the importance of one tool in the game master's workshop: the vignette.

The vignette is a short narrative, usually used to set a scene. The player characters aren't usually present. The players might not recognize any of the characters involved (if any). Vignettes don't advance a storyline. They don't characterize the player characters. At first glance, they don't seem to provide much aid to roleplaying.

The vignette's strength is scene-setting. In computer games, they appear as movie interludes before the game starts or as transition between acts. They signal the end of one chapter and the beginning of a new one. In RPGs, you can also use them to show back story.

Many campaigns often have problems from a literary standpoint when it comes to information. In a novel, the protagonist (and the reader) gain information in small bits throughout the story. In an RPG, the emphasis often lies in the conflict, and after the characters heroically defeat the villain in combat, they find his secret journal in which he explains in careful detail all his evil plans. In some cases, the villain explains the extent of his evil in a monologue that the characters politely listen to before they kill him (but it's in his journal, anyway, just in case the characters aren't polite enough to let him finish). In novels, this kind of heavy information load is called an "info dump," and it turns off the reader. It has the same effect on a roleplayer.

The vignette allows you to drop in bits of this back story incrementally, saving you from having to place an info dump at the very end of the adventure. When used best, the individual vignettes mean little until the players find the final piece at the end of the adventure.

Different Scenes of the Same Picture

A single vignette doesn't carry much weight. Vignettes carry the greatest impact when used to show different views of a larger image. For example, if you're running a long adventure series, such as the old *Temple of Elemental Evil,* you might plan a series of vignettes that show the Battle of Emridy Meadows, Prince Thrommel lying in state in his crypt deep in the temple, and other bits of back story.

To demonstrate the impact of multiple vignettes, consider the parable of the six blind men and the elephant. One feels the beast's hide and thinks it's a wall. One grabs the trunk and thinks he has hold of a snake. Another feels the tusk and thinks it's a spear. Without repeating the entire parable, the point is that each in part provides a deceptive picture. Only seeing the entire image reveals the truth.

For best impact, the final image comes not in a handout but in actual game play. Use vignettes to separate the minor elements from that huge info dump and reveal them one at a time. If you just reveal the key ingredients at the end of the adventure, then you don't have an info dump. You have a revelation.

Vignette Length

How long should a vignette be? The short answer is "long enough." The idea is to keep it descriptive most of the time, not narrative. Show a picture. A paragraph or two is usually plenty to convey the image you want to the players. If you make it too long, the players lose interest.

Keep your vignettes under five minutes in length. For writing, that means it should be no longer than 1,000 words

(since the average reading rate is about 200 words per minute). If you read or speak it to the players, your target should be about 400 words. These numbers indicate maximums; if you can convey the image you want with fewer words, the impact will be stronger.

When in doubt, make it shorter. Vignettes work best when they create more questions than they answer.

Steal Scriptwriting Vocabulary

To help convey the visual image you're trying to create, use terminology from movies. Players often understand what you're talking about as you use these terms, even if they couldn't come up with them on a vocabulary test.

- **Background.** The area in the image farthest from the viewer.
- **Cut.** An instant transition from one scene to another, with no special effects.
- **Dissolve.** A visual effect in which one scene is replaced by another. It usually indicates the passage of a considerable amount of time.
- **Fade in.** An image appearing slowly from black.
- **Fade out.** Losing detail and turning black.
- **Foreground.** The area closest to the viewer.
- **Offstage.** A voice or other sound effect that is heard but the origin of the sound is not within the viewer's line of sight.
- **Pan.** A horizontal camera move from left to right or right to left.
- **Tilt.** A vertical camera move. An example might be a tilt starting at a character's feet and moving up to the figure's face-at which point the viewer might recognize the character.
- **Wipe.** A visual effect in which the new scene replaces the old one, especially the horizontal wipe, wherein the new scene looks like it's just sliding over the old one from one side to the other. Star Wars popularized this visual effect. It usually represents a passage of time.
- **Zoom.** Coming in closer or zooming out for a larger view.

Creating Your Vignette

To quote Mies, "God is in the details." GM descriptions, especially of scenes in which the player characters are absent, tend to show a lot of "white space." Fill in these unremarkable corners with detail.

Mention the source of light in your vignette. A single candle indicates something about the character. Basking in bright sunlight portrays a different image. A silhouette framed against the setting sun shows yet a third. Examples include:

- Candles, one or more. The candles themselves might be fat, thin, tall, low, etc. They might lie on the ground, be set in tarnished candlesticks, or be set in a silver candelabra.
- A lantern, smoky or bright
- A torch, flickering, flaring, or steady
- Sunlight, through windows, from high overhead, at dusk or dawn, through cracks in the walls, filtered by a forest canopy
- Moonlight, full, partial, or blocked by clouds
- Starlight, no moon
- Flashlights, white or colored.
- Strobes
- Spotlights

Background noise is a good place to show detail. Running water, the break of the surf, the hum of machinery, the lowing of cattle, grass blowing in the wind, a wolf's howl -- each of these elements contributes mood or detail to the main image.

Describing smell can be a useful aid, but it isn't always appropriate. Players can imagine what a stable smells like, for

example. Mention odors when they contrast with the expected -- scented candles or exotic spell components, or wild animal musk.

Hand gestures and other human elements make excellent detail. In television or books, these natural and unimportant actions are called beats. For example:

"If he saw us, we have to do something about it," she said. As she listened to a comment from a figure offstage, she unfolded a newspaper and held it in front of her.
"Well, I'm not going to just sit around and wait." More talking from offstage.
"Forget it. You're an idiot." She flung the newspaper aside. "I'll be back in an hour."

The unidentified woman's newspaper handling was not important to the scene or the story. She wasn't loading a weapon or burying a body. It indicates the actions of otherwise idle hands during normal dialogue. It also serves to give the dialogue a realistic pace.

Other details include the volume of dialogue or ambient sound, the tone of voice a character uses, the speed of the image (a drowning victim in slow motion, for example), and even the level of detail. Using less detail, sparse sound, and muted colors can convey the impression of events that happened in the very distance past.

Many gaming products include short sections of flavor text to establish mood or setting. Using this flavor text as a model can inspire you in the right direction. If you're running an iconic game that allows you to use the text in its entirety, you might even be able to simply read the text to your players.

You can otherwise use a dramatic scene from your favorite novel, changing elements to fit your need. Note what the author describes and follow suit in your own version.

In the *Lord of the Flies,* by William Golding, the scene in which Simon first starts talking to the Lord of the Flies has a distinct surreal quality, as if Simon has just failed a SAN check. You could create the same effect by creating a similar scene in which you take a character out of his element, stress him with danger or violence, and then give a chance to relax in three previous vignettes, then describe this scene, replacing the Lord of the Flies with whatever ancient divine artifact or Thing Man Was Not Meant to Have Conversations With causes his transition into not-normalness.

Picture or Story

Short images or sequences of images work best for foreshadowing, while scenes work best for showing past events. Either a static image or a short scene can work for current actions taking place elsewhere. Picture the cinematics from the computer game *Diablo II* that depict the progress of Diablo across the fictional world through the eyes of the companion who travels with him. In the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy of movies, director Peter Jackson used images of the tower of Barad-Dur and various camera movements to remind viewers of the Sauron's constant menace, bringing a distant threat to the front for effect.

Vignettes as Handouts

Many players love handouts. A short vignette on paper allows them to read it at their own pace while one guy is still up getting snacks, one player is updating his character sheet for gaining a level last week, and one guy is dividing up the group's loot from the previous adventure. Handing out a vignette in the informal moments before you're ready to begin is one way to let players review it and digest it.

And then when you begin play, they forget about it.

Which is exactly the reaction you want.

You want them to take a few moments to consider the meaning and importance of what you're handing them and then give something else priority. They forget about the vignette until it becomes important again. It becomes important when you hand out a second vignette or when they recognize the element from the first vignette.

Spoken Vs. Written

Some people, even among gamers, simply don't like to read. If you have even one of these players in your group, you might wish to read or speak your vignette aloud instead of handing it out in written form. The oral vignette is a little different from the written version.

The oral vignette should be shorter than its written counterpart. Even the average reader reads far more quickly than most spoken English. To keep the imagery you're creating brief -- and therefore dramatic -- shorten the description.

The advantage of reading the vignette aloud is that you control the pace and the tone as well as the words. You can use body language. You can use a dramatic pause . . . where it's appropriate. You can. Emphasize. A single word.

Vignettes as Adventure Openers

One level of frequency involves using the vignettes only at the beginning of each gaming session. This use allows for a slow, big-picture pace. You might feature villains or locations that the characters won't encounter for weeks. If you have a layered adventure, in which each successive villain is a pawn for a larger villain, you could show vignettes featuring higher-ranking villains or even the final villain.

Vignettes as Pacing

While most of this discussion concentrates on using vignettes to reveal future information or back story, you can also use vignettes to portray events happening simultaneously. If the PCs are acting in concert with another group, you can show that other group's progress through vignettes. For example, the PCs might be part of an allied attack on an evil temple. While the main force is charging in open battle through the front door, the PCs might be sneaking in through a secret door to cut off retreat. A short vignette showing how the main force is making progress can show them the importance of reaching their destination.

Similarly, if the PCs are racing to beat another group, you can show them the other group's progress to spur them on. If they have to reach the hangar and fire up their spaceship before the evil minions find their dead leader and react, a vignette showing the minions picking up a black flared helmet might make them abandon caution and run like mad.

Vignettes as Dream Sequences

The uses of vignettes described so far have no in-game justification. The players (and, quite possibly, the PCs) suddenly have knowledge that they can't ascribe to any source. If that disturbs the group, you could have the images appear in the form of dreams.

Dreams offer advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that they don't have to make sense. You can throw in random bits of stuff that don't matter at all, leaving the players to figure out what's important and what isn't.

One disadvantage is that the dreams still have to make some sort of in-game sense. Is the character receiving the dreams some sort of prophet or visionary? Is someone intentionally sending these messages? If so, who? Why?

Another disadvantage is that dream sequences are somewhat cliché. If your players have substantial gaming experience, they might be turned off by the "cheapness." If they haven't been subjected to this technique, you might be able to use it effectively.

Individual Vignettes

In movies and on television, directors use a montage to show the progression of time, usually spent in something boring but important. The archetypal example is sports training. Over the course of approximately one song's length, the hero goes from a barely-competent competitor to a world-class athlete, sparing the viewer the reality of years of dedication.

A vignette can similarly advance time. Think of it as your "fast forward" button for describing travel, a large battle, or a long period of waiting for something to happen. Describe a couple of brief scenes that demonstrate the major events and move on to something involving decision-making or interaction from the players.

In this case, the vignette is not part of a sequence designed to show a larger picture. You don't have to plan it out in advance. You probably introduce it verbally mid-game.

Whether you use it for back story, pacing, scene-setting, or all purposes, the under-used vignette can add a new element to your gaming. Use them like any other tool: in the right place, and at the right time. Your players will appreciate it.

Repo Men

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

This article describes two young men who work to repossess automotives for the financial institutions that own them; adventure seeds are included with variants to fit the pair into almost any campaign setting. Before getting to their information, however, it's probably informative to know a bit more about what they *do.*

When someone defaults on a car/boat loan, or is otherwise unable to meet the financial responsibility, the holder of the *lien* ("link") may have the legal right to take possession of the property, and sell or auction it to pay the debt. (People who claim to have no money are harder to sue!) Depending on local laws, the *lienholder* may not need to notify the "owner" until after it has been repossessed. If they do notify the client, then it may be a felony to purposefully hide the vehicle! In some localities, an aware client can prevent repossession if they are there to verbally oppose the action, or keep the vehicle in an enclosed private garage. It is thus in the hands of clever individuals to find the vehicles away from such protection or to convince the person (or another denizen of the residence) to grant access to the location. These professionals skirt the edge of the law and sometimes put their lives on the line to recover "stolen" property. The agencies for which such professionals work can track a bounty almost anywhere within the country. They are repo men. Their tools: surveillance gear and a tow truck. A team may have a list of targets to look out for in an area, waiting for the vehicles to become accessible.

All of this descends from land laws, which generally involves more money than a car. During times of hardship, including the Great Depression, people are sometimes able to do without money, bartering for food, fuel, and so on. Thus, banks could repossess vehicles, which still have some value. In the UK, a lienholder may need to obtain a court order if the debt is 1/3 paid off. If the debt is over half paid, the debtor has significant leverage from a legal point of view. In Scotland, a lienholder will need a court order to be allowed to repossess property, in most situations. In Australia, repo men cannot enter private property, and the lienholder will need a court order if the debt is 3/4 paid off. Another place to be careful in is Texas, where it is still legal to shoot trespassers after dark.

A "typical" case goes like this:

1. A request comes in.
2. The dispatch office locates the client. (This may be easy or hard.)
3. A foot team investigates the location (below) to verify the target vehicle is there, and to gauge the accessibility thereof.
4. If it can be easily retrieved, it is collected as soon as is feasible without interruption. If it seems difficult, the vehicle is tracked to a time when it is left on the street or in a public parkade.
5. The car is towed to the repo company's yard and the police are notified about the time it is retrieved.
6. As soon as possible, the vehicle is shipped to a yard for the *lienholder.*

A few items of note a reconnaissance team checks for include: pets, exterior security systems, and verifying the location of the vehicle. All of these might be accomplished by delivering flyers to the block with the target house; a "false" pizza delivery to a neighbor's house or going door-to-door selling cable or satellite TV subscriptions can also allow one access to the area. If the company has a high budget, the recovery firm might own a surveillance van mocked up to look like a Cable TV emissions detection van. Such a civilian vehicle has a good reason to circle a block several times.

Cast

Sam Kirkbridge grew up as a below-average student in a bad part of town. He did adequately in gym and learned

some practical martial arts. Doing well on his driver's test, he eventually apprenticed as a tow truck driver for an auto association. He was a good employee with a broad knowledge of the best ways to jack cars for towing. His worldview changed one night as he returned from his shift. Sam watched as an unmarked tow truck backed up to a neighbor's driveway; men lept out and started jacking the car. As Sam approached and asked what it was about, the men said they were taking it into custody for the "legal" owner. Surprised by their efficiency, he asked how he could find their agency. They replied that the number on the truck is the repossessor's registration number and to give them a call if he could find the business. In the short time it took for that conversation, they were gone with the car in tow!

After high school, Val Schneider drifted from job to job, eventually finding employment at a shifty car garage. Doing fairly well at this, he was surprised to find a tow truck "repossessing" one of the more expensive vehicles on the lot. The tow-truck driver tersely explained that the vehicle was being reclaimed by its real owner. Contacting the police, he found out that it was legitimate, and tracked down the company itself. The people there seemed impressed by his people skills and offered him a job. Val took the offer and tendered his notice of resignation. The car dealership folded three weeks later.

Both men received their certification and on-the-job training at about the same time. Eventually, they were assigned a truck of their own. After a brief conflict of attitudes, they are learning to work as a team.

Adventure Seeds

General Ideas

They need the adventurers to:

- help gain access across obstacles not otherwise interdicted by local law (ravine, river) or to neutralize other defense on private property (without damaging it).
- provide armed escort for repo work in the bad neighborhood.
- create a diversion on the other side of the property (just off it, to be precise) so they can remove the vehicle.
- delay the target vehicle on the spot without damaging it (while Sam and Val are towing other car, for example).
- solve a problem. While scouting a prospect, the repo men encounter Weird Stuff™, and cannot turn to any ordinary source.
- provide urgent repairs. A rare or otherwise valuable vehicle is damaged while towing, so spare parts, garage and mechanic has to be found quickly. Val and Sam may believe their jobs are on the line as repossession companies earn about 2% commission on the vehicle they repossess. If it is damaged, then the company may earn less. (As a variation, perhaps the vehicle is partially dismantled when they scouted it; the pieces need to be collected quietly and quickly.)

Number Six's Prius

Heroes often annoy large conspiracies. It is quite feasible for such a group to plant information at any level indicating that the PCs are derelict in their car payments. It may only slow down the heroes, but when a megacorp is scared, they may stop at nothing. Adventurers often have items in their vehicles that skirt legality, and it might happen that having it confiscated could make them nervous.

The Mighty Have Fallen

The target vehicle is held by someone rich, famous, or well connected. They have the local police in their pocket. These officers are less than cooperative, perhaps even warning the target! Obviously Val and Sam would need all the help they could get . . .

Witnesses

The heroes are too late for an event, but see a tow truck speeding away from the scene, perhaps with one of the villain's cars in tow. What did they see, and what tales will the car in storage tell? How will the adventurers get access to it?

Other Hooks

The adventurers could be (or work with) the actual Tracers who *locate* the vehicle, and see it recovered. This could even be a driving force in a campaign, with the more interesting adventures happening while the characters pursue these people. There are shows where hunters are seeking a person (or their property) through the entire series! Alternately, the heroes could be friendly (or not so friendly) rivals of this pair, hired to follow the same list of targets, looking for those legal to repossess. Rivalry could be in timing, value of vehicles, or in sheer numbers of recalls.

Sam and Val in *GURPS*

Both men have average appearances and have forgotten most of their high school classes. Recommended additions to both, depending on the campaign: Legal Enforcement Powers (Automotive Retrieval only -80%) [1]; Reputation (Police, Always) [+1 point per level]; Serendipity [15]; Special Rapport [5]; Weirdness Magnet [-15].

Sam Kirkbridge   *50 points*

Male human, 21 years old, 5' 1", 130 lbs, tan complexion, brown hair.
ST 9 [-10]; **IQ** 10; **DX** 11 [20]; **HT** 10.
Damage 1d-2 thr 1d-1 sw; BL 16; HP 9; Will 11 [5]; Per 11 [5]; FP 10; Speed 5.25; Move 5; Dodge 9; Parry 9 (Judo). (Total: 20)

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Contact (Fixer for a competitor: Skill 15, Usually Reliable, 9) [4]; Fearlessness +2 [4]. (Total: 23)

Disadvantages: Duty (12) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Friends and Family) [-5]. (Total: -15; Total Character Negatives: -25, see page 11 of the ***Basic Set***)

Skills: Area Knowledge (City)-11 (IQ+1 E) [2]; Driving (Automotive)-11 (DX A) [2]; First Aid-10 (IQ E) [1]; Judo-11 (DX H) [4]; Literature (Sports)-9/7 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Observation-10 (Per-1 A) [1]; Professional Skill (Tow truck driver)-12 (IQ+2 A) [8]; Stealth-11 (DX A) [2]; Streetwise-9 (IQ-1 A) [1]. (Total: 22)

Val Schneider   *50 points*

Human male, 22 years old, 6'0", 180 lbs, fair complexion, blonde hair dyed dark brown.
ST 12 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **DX** 10; **HT** 10.
Damage 1d-1 thr 1d+2 sw; BL 29; HP 12; Will 11; Per 11; FP 10; Speed 5; Move 5; Dodge 8. (Total: 40)

Advantages: Charisma +1 [5]; Contact (Police Detective: Skill 15, Usually Reliable, 9) [4]; Fashion Sense [5]; Fearlessness +2 [4]; Honest Face [1]. (Total: 19)

Disadvantages: Duty (12) [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Quirks [-5]; Sense of Duty (Friends and Family) [-5]. (Total: -25)

Skills: Area Knowledge (City)-11 (IQ E) [1]; Driving (Automotive)-9 (DX-1 A) [1]; Electronics Repair (Security)(Automotive)-11/9 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Fast-Talk-14 (IQ+3* E) [4]; Hobby Skill (Painting)-11 (IQ E) [1]; Literature (Painting)-10/8 (IQ-1 H) [1]; Mechanic (Automotive)-11 (IQ A) [2]; Merchant (Automotive)-13/11 (IQ+1* A) [2]; Observation-10 (Per-1 A) [1]; Professional Skill (Tow truck driver)-12 (IQ+1 A) [2]. (Total: 16)

* Includes +3 for Charisma

Equipment

Medkit +1 (2 lbs, $50), flashlights, basic headset radios, and night-vision goggles (all from pages 288-289 of the ***Basic Set.***)

When situations seem dangerous, they might wear the front half of the German MIL-120 vest from page 35 of ***Modern Firepower*** (3 lbs, DR 5) or the Ballistic Vest from page 284 of the ***Basic Set*** (2 lbs, DR 8). An electronic car stopper might be useful to disable the alarm and stop the vehicle if it was left running. The portable version would be doubly useful if it was mounted on an Open Mount on the truck. In a ***Cliffhanger*** or ***Ultra-Tech*** setting, it might even be in a computer-controlled pop turret.

Vehicle: Use the stats for the SUV on p. 464 of the ***Basic Set,*** but Occupancy is 1+1 and the cargo area is replaced with a one-ton capacity External Cradle and two 0.25-ton capacity holds under the cradle. The External Cradle may be covered to make it less conspicuous.

Variants

Cliffhangers/Over-the-Top

Val becomes a Gadgeteer or Smooth Operator, and Sal gets Drive! (see p. 232).

Cyberpunk

Repo works in the cyberpunk world shouldn't be limited to vehicles -- Sam and Val might be sent after any property that have been given in credit. This is especially true if the competition is very aggressive. As presented, the two may be successful against solo targets. Val could distract him with Fast-Talk, and Sam could ambush the target from behind with an electrolaser, tangler or chem attack. Against targets that are part of a gang, they need 50-100cp more, or help (such as the adventurers'). Instead of large tools, they might even be repossessing *cyberware* or *biomods*. This might require the skills Surgery (with the optional specialization "Removal"), and Electronics (Cybernetics). See also the "Organlegger" template from ***Biotech.*** If they are callous enough, they might even repossess vital components such as augmented hearts, kidneys, and so on . . .

Fantasy

Give Val Magery 2 or 3, and add spells such as Drain Mana and Stop Power. Sam could then benefit from Magic Resistance +25 or so (or an equal amount of cp). They might repossess magical items, which can easily range from $33,000 to $100,000. This includes golems, spirits, charmed monsters, undead servants, and -- with the Move Terrain spell -- castles. Unusually dangerous cursed items may require hazard pay!

Historical or Western

Anachronistic heroes that repossess horses, wagons, and cattle could make for a light (or oddly dark) setting for an adventure, or even a campaign. "Hello, Robin Hood Repossessing Service, LLC. 'We Take From The Poor and Give To The Rich.' how may I help you?"

Silly

Val and Sam have not settled their differences. This distracts them to no end, sometimes missing the opportunity to collect cars, and sometimes collecting the wrong one (such as the heroes')!

Space

Add more security related skills, as well as Computer Hacking. Once they are inside an airlock, they can secure it for the true "owner," and declare the other occupants "trespassers." See also *Traveller: Heroes 1: Bounty Hunters* "Repo Men," page 4.

Supers/Steampunk

Val and Sam might specialize in recovery of vehicles built with stolen funding. Another alternative is to specialize in the recovery of battlesuits and walkers. In either case, they could be armed with an item that replicates the Stop Power spell (page 179 of *Magic*).

Transhuman Space

Investigators that recover stolen cyber and bio shells will likely be armed with electrolaser rifles and tangler grenades. Agents will have to be careful to avoid Mugshot databases and Reputation networks, perhaps by wearing LCD suits with full helmets. Another option is a Vacuum Cleaner campaign, where the trick is getting close to a vessel. Somewhere between Silly, Ultratech, Transhuman Space, and Horror one finds the Repo Men facing off against Herbie the Love Bug or KITT from Knight Rider, or even the car from Steven King's *Christine* (see "The Car as the Star"). (See also Links below and Cyberpunk, above.)

Bibliography

Pyramid

- "Auto-Motives"
- "The Garage: Samples for GURPS Vehicles Lite" by Kenneth Peters
- "Xoxnapped" by Steve Horgan
- "The Car as the Star" by Phil Masters : Vehicles as Cybershells in *Transhuman Space*

Other *GURPS* Links

- GURPSNet Vehicles Archive
- GURPSNet Vehicles of the Week

Other Links

- 'Lectric Law Library entry on Vehicle Repossession (University of Nevada Department of Law)
- "Auctionpass.com", a repossession auction page.
- US Federal Trade Commission on Vehicle Repossession
- The Auto Repossession Business
- Australian Repossession Law
- UK: Office of Fair Trading -- Search for "repossession," then "non-cancelable agreements"

Media

- *Han Solo's Revenge* by Brian Daley (Where Repo Men try to repossess the *Millenium Falcon*)

Appendix Z

Technobabble Phrase Simulator

by Eric B. Smith

One of the fun things about sci-fi is the way the characters bandy about interesting sounding technobabble -- phrases with lots of scientific sounding words which often make no sense when closely examined. It can be fun to throw these phrases into a game, but tough to come up with an interesting sounding phrase. By rolling 1d100 in each of the columns of the following table you can generate a plausible-sounding technobabble phrase.

Bonus Website Exclusive!

Click **this link** for a bonus technobabble-generating version of this page using JavaScript. (It has some limitations; in particular, it doesn't roll on the Letter generator, and the formatting isn't quite as pretty as it might be.)

Technobabble Table

Roll	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
1	Tri-	Stellar	Improbability	Caliper
2	Nano-	Digital	Ionization	Spectrometer
3	Sub-	Spatial	Nullifier	Drive
4	Mono-	Anionic	Disturbance	Calibrator
5	Astro-	Matter/Antimatter	Recalibration	Beacon
6	Macro-	Ultraviolet	Suppression	Matrix
7	Inter-	Annular	Timing	Gel
8	Bi-	Magnetic	Phase	Filament
9	Trans-	Positron	Depletion	Fountain
10	Neo-	Normality	Disruption	Transducer
11	Uni-	Electron	Containment	Sustainer
12	Omni-	Continuum	Proximity	Web
13	Meta-	Synergetic	Vector	Grid
14	Anti-	Graviton	Magnitude	Baffle
15	Hyper-	Deuterium	Transduction	Device
16	Electro-	Space	Fragment	Tube
17	Micro-	Lateral	Integration	Resonator
18	Exo-	Di-Hydrogen Monoxide	Ignition	Emitter
19	Intra-	Relativistic	Perspective	Transponder
20	Photo-	Gluon	Instability	Articulator
21	Multi-	Singularity	Alignment	Stage
22	Myo-	Nuclear	Fold	Sphere
23	Dyno-	Photon	Frequency	Scanner
24	Quasi-	Gravitic	Splitter	Distributor
25	Proto-	X-Ray	Intermix	Array

26	Iso-	Alfvn	Mass	Detector
27	Integral	Neutrino	Diagnostic	Actuator
28	Tertiary	Emergency	Convection	Diode
29	Positive	Engram	Analysis	Field
30	Primary	Microwave	Isotopic	Torch
31	Compressed	Astral	Compensator	Recorder
32	Manual	Radar	Displacement	Replicator
33	Automatic	Molecular	Retrieval	Accelerator
34	Adaptive	Voltage	Spin	Chamber
35	Asynchronous	Quantum	Conversion	Node
36	Binary	Muon	Particle	Filter
37	Internal	Neutronium	Inversion	Modulator
38	Forced	Universal	Rotation	Coil
39	Artificial	Fusion	Emission	Probe
40	Heavy	Plasma	Routing	Vortex
41	Potential	Directional	Causality	Cell
42	Phased	Variable	Synthesis	Beam
43	Secondary	Visible Light	Separation	Tracer
44	Static	Thermal	Control	Enhancer
45	Coded	Regenerative	Interlock	Orb
46	Synchronous	Chroniton	Point	Stem
47	Neutral	Metabolic	Differential	Processor
48	Experimental	Seismic	Converse	Buffer
49	Coherent	Total	Crystalline	Compensator
50	Negative	LASER	Interference	Dynamo
51	(no prefix)	Aurora	Space-Time	Core
52	(no prefix)	Temporal	Graphic	Lens
53	(no prefix)	Luminary	Harmonic	Damper
54	(no prefix)	Infinite	Deflection	Generator
55	(no prefix)	Null	Entropy	Monitor
56	(no prefix)	Probability	Coolant	Stabilizer
57	(no prefix)	Passive	Flow	Magnetometer
58	(no prefix)	Gamma-Ray	Cloaking	Disruptor
59	(no prefix)	Meson	Materialization	Portal
60	(no prefix)	Energetic	Detection	Collar
61	(no prefix)	Dimensional	Collection	Sweeper
62	(no prefix)	Resonance	Warp	Nexus
63	(no prefix)	Cellular	Transfer	Cube
64	(no prefix)	Radio Frequency	Reduction	Bomb
65	(no prefix)	Antimatter	Flare	Circuit
66	(no prefix)	Superconductive	Resolution	Stream
67	(no prefix)	Linear	Optical	Inhibitor
68	(no prefix)	Phasic	Fluctuation	Pod
69	(no prefix)	Cyclic	Pressure	Weapon
70	(no prefix)	Tachyon	Dynamic	Net
71	(no prefix)	Heuristic	Memory	Pocket
72	(no prefix)	Fission	Slip	Discriminator
73	(no prefix)	Quark	Alteration	Deflector
74	(no prefix)	Entropic	Polarity	Shielding
75	(no prefix)	Ionic	Suspension	Densitometer
76	(no prefix)	Environmental	Spectrum	Assembly
77	(no prefix)	Inertial	Anomaly	System
78	(no prefix)	Energy	Fractal	Inverter
79	(no prefix)	Static	Power	Tap

80	(no prefix)	Phased	Flux	Initiator
81	(no prefix)	Heisenberg	Simulation	Capacitor
82	(no prefix)	Infrared	Impulse	Seal
83	(no prefix)	Neural	Diffraction	Coupler
84	(no prefix)	Electric	Parallax	Communicator
85	(no prefix)	Centripetal	Imaging	Adjuster
86	(no prefix)	Holographic	Reversion	Plate
87	(no prefix)	Spectral	Triangulation	Interlink
88	(no prefix)	Matrix	Pattern	Interface
89	(no prefix)	Vacuum	Operation	Conduit
90	(no prefix)	Mutual	Nucleic	Valve
91	(no prefix)	Atomic	Migration	Converter
92	(no prefix)	Ionized	Wave	Stimulator
93	(no prefix)	Warp Field	Induction	LASER
94	(no prefix)	Partial	Interface	Pellet
95	(no prefix)	Cosmic	Distortion	Catalyst
96	(no prefix)	Cryonic	Compression	Decelerator
97	(no prefix)	Wormhole	Decay	Crystal
98	(no prefix)	Q-Ray†	Confinement	Controller
99	(no prefix)	X-Band†	Oscillation	Membrane
100	(no prefix)	Radiation†	Spread	Sequencer

† Roll 1d100 on the Letter column of the Prefix Table to determine the type of Ray/Band/Radiation.

Letter Table

Roll	Letter
1	A
2	B
3	C
4	D
5	E
6	F
7	G
8	H
9	I
10	J
11	K
12	L
13	M
14	N
15	O
16	P
17	Q
18	R
19	S
20	T
21	U
22	V
23	W
24	X
25	Y
26	Z

27	Alpha
28	Beta
29	Gamma
30	Delta
31	Epsilon
32	Zeta
33	Eta
34	Theta
35	Iota
36	Kappa
37	Lambda
38	Mu
39	Nu
40	Xi
41	Omicron
42	Pi
43	Rho
44	Sigma
45	Tau
46	Upsilon
47	Phi
48	Chi
49	Psi
50	Omega
51-100	Subtract 50 from the roll and consult the chart

A Walk In The Alternate Woods

"The Orcs were piled in great heaps, away from the mounds of Men, not far from the eaves of the forest. And the people were troubled in their minds; for the heaps of carrion were too great for burial or for burning. They had little wood for firing, and none would have dared to take an axe to the strange trees . . ."
-- J.R.R. Tolkein, *The Two Towers*

Ever since I read this brilliant [Omniscient Eye article,](#) I've been thinking about putting trees into games. I'm not sure I'm done yet, but I figured I'd toss four general types of leafy campaign goodness and see if we get anything like a gaming salad out of it. Each setting takes a different spin on sentient or supernatural Trees, and their relationships with humans (who, sessile campaigns being as limited as they are, are probably still going to be the PCs). Differentiating the Trees from the humans, while making sure that the campaign is all about the Forest, is the key here. It helps, in the first two settings especially, to remember that trees will have lifespans more suited for supernatural beings than human ones -- an old hickory is 300 years old, oaks live up to 600 years, hemlocks up to 800, cypresses can live for 1,800 years, and cedars over 2,500! These beings will seem more like dragons or vampires -- or elves -- than they will "people" in that sense, helping keep the alien-ness of the fantasy foregrounded. So with that . . . into the woods.

"[I]t was peculiarly appropriate that the head of the victor should be graced by a crown of oak leaves, for . . . the Capitoline temple of the god was said to have been built by Romulus beside a sacred oak, venerated by shepherds, to which the king attached the spoils won by him from the enemy's general in battle. . . . A chaplet of oak leaves would thus seem to have been part of the insignia of the old kings of Alba Longa as of their successors the kings of Rome; in both cases it marked the monarch as the human representative of the oak-god."
-- Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough,* 13.2

The First Oak Emperor was, at the time, merely a sapling of the leading Oak King in central Italy. His human servants pollinated from Alba Longa to a new city called Rome, planting him atop the Capitoline Hill. He grew for 250 years, until he overshadowed his father and became Oak King himself; his acorns became the Second Oak Emperor and spread further out across Italy, defeating other Oaks and forcing them to bow their branches to him. In the 400-year reign of the Second Oak Emperor, the Pomegranate of southern Iberia, the Olive of Greece, and the Pine of Sicily all came under his shade. The Third Oak Emperor never knew shade, because his human cultivars raised him to dizzying heights indeed -- the Elm of Gaul, the Chestnut of Britain, even the Cedar of Lebanon and the Willow of the East all accepted Oaks into their groves. Only the Ash of the north resisted, luring the Oak Legions into his own sacred vale at Teutoberg and hacking them to pieces in an orgy of fertilization magic. (The stubborn Jews also resist, cutting down sacred Trees wherever they can.) But surely the Ash will yield in its turn -- the Third Oak Emperor is barely 100 years on the Capitol, and full of the impetuous sap of youth.

In this **GURPS Fantasy** setting, the Great Trees are openly the overlords of men, each grove having its own attendants, and each specific Tree with its own followers. The greatest of the Great Trees rule kingdoms and empires, through their priests and axe-warriors, and attempt to expand their roots into other lands where they can. The GM can follow this chain as far as she cares to; for example, it implies that mixed-growth forests are turbulent border zones driven by competing allegiances. Some Great Trees likely allow "colonies" of outsiders to flourish in their Land -- the Oak Emperor allows the Olive (now, admittedly, a subject stand) to grow throughout his realm. This can be as transparent as any fantasy cosmology, with trees explicitly replacing (becoming) the various gods and kings but with no other result on the rules or metaphysics. Or it can get as specific (and hence as flavorful) as you'd like. Maybe Trees (and their human priests) have powers over things made from their wood -- ships, and arrows, and door frames, say -- and the more general powers over weather, fire, lightning, and growth inherent in being Tree Gods. Blending this setting with the Tree Magic from **GURPS Celtic Myth** will create a whole lot of interesting options. It might even engender a sort of **RuneQuest** feel, as tree-priests (druids, say) must choose dominant Trees from which to derive the majority (or all!) of their powers.

MESS. As I did stand my watch upon the hill,
I look'd towards Birnam, and anon, methought,

The wood began to move.
MACB. Liar and slave!
MESS. Let me endure your wrath if't be not so:
Within this three mile may you see it coming;
I say, a moving grove.
MACB. If thou speak'st false,
Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive . . .
-- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth,* V:v:40-48

Yes, the Romans had their oak priests, but they arrogantly allowed their cities to grow over-great, and they denuded their hills and vales for charcoal and building-timber. When the cold rains fell over the world, and the cities died back, the partnership between men and trees re-balanced. The greatest of the druids, Myrddin Wyllt, lived among the trees of Caledonia in the late 6th century A.D., and although (because) he was mad, he heard the trees most clearly. His *Prophecies* became the basis for the new order, as Merlinite monasteries spread throughout a dark and fearful Europe. Every manor would have its orchard, and its feudal lords would carefully control the right to clear forest. The trees shared their bounty, and drew up long-dead tree-coal from the deep earth for man to burn instead of them. Ogres howl in the North German Plain, and orcs rampage in the Hungarian grasslands, but the forest men are (mostly) safe from all but the deepest raids. Although the Byzantine (and Christian) South remains able to feed more people on its long-cleared farms, it can make little progress against the Merlinite North that is not hacked out with axes and charred with Greek Fire. Its writ runs no farther than Septimania in southern Gaul. More serious are the Inlet-Men, the *vikings* who take their food from the sea, and from Merlinite monasteries and farms on the coast. They have conquered the fenlands where trees grow ill in Anglia, and raided up to the eaves of the forests. Their god Odin, like that of the Byzantines, hung on the Ash-Tree and conquered its wisdom, and they do not fear the druids.

This setting makes the trees not lords but partners, allies, or even tools for human druids and wizards. It's deliberately historically blurry, an even more "generic medieval fantasy" world choice allowing a patchwork of minor counties throughout the European forest belt. Thematically, it reverses the standard fantasy tropes, however -- the Wood is essentially a good place to be, where your food-and-shelter magic is always strong and fine. Monsters (and adventures) happen in places there aren't trees -- the ocean, the sky, underground, the desert, the high mountains, etc. PCs might take individual trees as Allies, Patrons, etc., and roll activation numbers to get favors from their friends, or every PC might have Magery and one or two "letters" of Tree Magic, again per **GURPS Celtic Myth.** Or the GM might assign each Tree to a College and work things that way, or use Spirit Magic from **GURPS Spirits** and work through dryads -- the point is that the PCs all have access to the benevolent Merlinite tree compact. Unless, of course, you want to reverse things, and have the players be fine upstanding humans like Macbeth or Belisarius or Arpad, trying to cut their fellow men loose from the embrace of the inhuman Wood.

"We pushed them into and through the Wilderness. At night we slept with our guns in our hand where we stopped to lay down to try to sleep and meditate over the transaction of the day. We could not sleep well, the country being so desolate and God forsaken, that we hoped we would not get killed in such God forsaken country, and the Whippoorwills made the woods ring with their song. It seemed so desolate that we wished we could get out of this spot of the country. None of us wished to die here. The thought of dieing stared us in the face as the bullets flew thick around here, but we pushed ahead until we could see something like an open spot ahead of us. We thought we were nearly through the woods . . ."
-- Lorenzo D. Barnhart, Company B, 110th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, *Reminiscences*

The Battle of the Wilderness on May 5-7, 1864, was not the bloodiest of the Civil War, although it killed upwards of 3,700 men in three days. (A few hundred men went missing, and were never found at all.) But it was fought all among the cruel, stunted, impenetrable trees of the Spotsylvania Wilderness, and something in all that blood and all that death sorta woke the trees up. They grew up and choked the life out of Lee and Grant in the woods the next week, when their armies poured another 4,000 lives into the ground, and then trees elsewhere began to twist and whip around and grab what they could. The Pine Barrens of New Jersey, the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia, and the Everglades all awoke, and the lumberjacks came pouring south out of Maine and Minnesota full of wide-eyed stories of threat and menace.

In this setting, the Trees are a separate evil species, neither lord nor friend. We're back in Grimm's dark woods, in other words. You can use any forest battle as the Awakening, from Teutoberger Wald in 9 B.C. to Huertgen Forest in 1944 to an unknown action in the Congo War in the apocalyptic year 2000. The best time to set the game is during the Awakening and right afterward, as that's when the question is at its most mysterious -- what woke the trees up? What kind of Growths lurk back in the woods? The GM should look for tree-like monsters from the Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath to Wood Dragons on down to Venus Man-Traps and Vampire Vines to infest the arboreal dungeon, and make sure that merely burning the forest doesn't actually work. (Maybe only "heart's fire," or axes made of "cold iron," will cut through the Trees' demon bark.) The other question, of course, is -- what is the other side in the war doing about it? Are they working with the Trees? Did they cause it? When the PCs inevitably meet the other side's teams in the depths of the Forest, will they share their hard-earned knowledge, or squander their ammo killing human beings -- and risk strengthening the Trees with every death?

"I remember this incident well. That had been a hell of a day. We had been working a really nasty part of the U Minh Forest. Just an hour or so earlier, my gunner and I had found a POW camp. It was an eerie place and then kind of sad since we could see the skinny tree trunks being used as bars and I can still see the backs of the prisoner's hands as they held the "bars" from inside. The trees around the camp must have been 100 to 150 feet tall, really up there. At first there didn't appear to be any cadre . . ."
-- Don Callison, D Troop, "Light Horse" 3/5 Cav, "Sunk Loach"

Every minute, they say, 100 acres of rainforest is clear-cut. To the men and women of Strike Force Ukko, that's a good start. They're the ones who know in their bones what we at the Company have known since 1913, when Teddy Roosevelt came out of the Amazon to report what he'd seen to the relevant authorities. (That would be us. Yes, that 1943 story is a cover. We've been around at least since the Airship Incident. Unless that was a cover, too.) The rainforest is like no place on earth, and it's not just a coincidence that it tends to produce cannibals and vampire bats and horrible, grinding endless warfare. (Anthropologists estimate that over half of all deaths in rainforest tribes come from battle. Half. And that doesn't even count the ones killed by the trees.) It's because Something grows in there, Something that was seeded there by Somebody long ago. What's worse (oh yes, there's always something worse) is that it can be trained by people -- or by things that were once people, anyhow -- to, well, grow things. Like drugs that let you rotate your senses -- including touch -- into a different dimensional manifold. Like flowers that will lower your IQ if you look at them in sunlight. Like fruit that will literally condemn you to Hell if you eat it. Like anything awful and fecund you've ever thought of. What's that you ask? *Of course,* our enemies have access to it. Why do you think we have to keep going back into the jungle, into the Philippines, and Nicaragua, and Guadalcanal, and Vietnam, and Haiti, and Colombia? Why do you think you've been assigned to Strike Force Ukko?

This **GURPS Black Ops** campaign frame is essentially one iteration of the "meta-stable" version of the previous setting. In this version, the Trees have gone from being a mystery to be solved to an ongoing background threat, alien tools or perhaps Secret Masters. Since the Trees are alien constructs, it's easier to explain why fire is only sort of helpful, although the Company surely has access to rocket-fuel-throwers and other VIEWs (Very Intensely Exothermic Weapons) in case of need. With a boatload of experimental weaponry and chainsaws, a PC team of elite killers (or even elite elite-killer-killers), and a mysterious blotch on a satellite photograph, your own private apocalypse is available any time you want it. But only if it's now.

Dataists Are Ever Searching for the Absurd

I recently read the novel *Digital Fortress* by Dan Brown, author of the mind-bogglingly successful *The Da Vinci Code*. (I paid a shiny quarter for it at a garage sale, so it wasn't that onerous an investment.)

Let me say that anyone who believes *The Da Vinci Code* contains any scholarly insight about the "truth" behind Jesus' life should be forced to become a computer scientist and read *Digital Fortress*.

I'll probably expand further on this somewhere else (most likely over on my blog), but for the moment I'll mention a couple of the jaw-dropping moments in this novel, which I swear I'll tie into gaming.

First, one plot point revolves around the possible destruction of the databanks belonging to the National Security Agency (NSA). According to one plot point, if power were shut off to the NSA's main computer, they would lose all their data . . . which, being one of the largest data-handling agencies in the United States, is a lot of data. (Why the NSA was keeping their data on something where info would be destroyed if the power were shut off, I'm not sure; perhaps the agency keeps everything on a really big RAM disk. But that's actually ancillary to the main point.) Anyway, they *want* to turn off the power, because it will keep Something Bad -- which I don't want to spoil, let alone try to think about again -- from happening to the main computer. However, the passage restating this conundrum clearly states:

> *"There was no way to stop it -- not without killing power and erasing every last one of the billions of bytes of irretrievable data."*

Hopefully all the techies reading this had the same cringe I did. "Billions of bytes." Or, as I like to think of them (along with the rest of the computer world) as "gigabytes."

Yes, if the NSA computer gets shut down, they'll lose gigabytes of data . . . about the same amount of data that I have on one DVD from my *Quantum Leap Season 1* set.

(Lest anyone think that this is merely a turn of phrase, or that "untold billions of bytes" might somehow encompass the data the NSA deals with, consider how right or wrong the following analogous sentence sounds to your ears: "If all taxes were repealed in the United States, the government would lose untold dozens of dollars.")

Example the second:

The plot of the book revolves around attempting to track down what happened to a mysterious person named Tankado, who has an accomplice that the protagonists are also trying to track down. That revelation led to the following exchange:

> *"A few times, in public, Tankado referred to his partner by name. He called him North Dakota."*
>
> *"North Dakota? Obviously an alias of some sort."*
>
> *"Yes, but as a precaution I ran an Internet inquiry using North Dakota as a search string. I didn't think I'd find anything, but I turned up an E-mail account."*

Yes, he did a search for "North Dakota," not expecting to find anything. I know this was written in 1998 -- and the Internet had been on the public mind for only four years or so -- but *come on* . . . North Dakota is one of the 50 states of the union; surely he'd expect to get a couple of hits.

In case you're curious, a Google search for the phrase "North Dakota" pops up over 58,000,000 pages, and even a one-word "northdakota" pops up 383,000 results. However, that's by today's standards; although I expect the number of hits in 1998 to be significantly less, I don't know *how* much less; as far as I know, that data doesn't exist.

And that's what today's column is about. Here are two (perhaps seemingly paradoxical) facts to consider:

We, in a modern society (and, presumably, those in a post-modern non-apocalyptic world where all information hasn't been destroyed) have access to a near-infinite amount of data.

There exists a near-infinite amount of data to which we do not have access.

The first fact is obvious to anyone who's ever researched minutia about, say, a popular TV show or movie. (An entire wiki-cyclopedia exists devoted to the *Star Wars* universe . . . a fact I stumbled across when I discovered that I had created something that became a part of that database.) If you were able to read every book, article, story, or magazine about The Beatles, it would probably take you longer than the entirety of their just-over-a-decade as a group.

But there are untold swaths of information that we just don't have a clue about. Either the information doesn't exist in an easily searchable format, doesn't exist in an aggregate form (such as a compilation of all birth certificates in a town) or doesn't exist, period. For example, have you heard of Albert Einstein, one of the most famous and influential intellectuals ever? Well, we'll never know what his last words were, because he said them in German and the only other person in the room -- a nurse -- didn't understand that language.

This lack of information in a usable format is why some areas of research are maddeningly challenging to sort out, such as global warming. Sure, the statistics show that the Earth has gotten hot over the past hundred years, but what about before that? (The answer, of course, is that we don't have reliable data available from before the past century or so to a degree of precision that makes any easy conclusions possible.)

And this is why any in-game scenarios that involve any degree of research should (if they strive for realism) take this fuzziness into account. I'm always amused whenever television shows depict information-mining as an exact science:

"We need to find that serial killer; we know that he was driving a dump truck."
""There have been 18,944 dump trucks active in the city in the past 48 hours."
"How many of them were driven by Scorpios?"
"Looks like 1,571."
"Okay; how many of them traveled on 435-West during daylight hours?"
"<typity-typity-type>That narrows it down to 724."
"How many of them stopped at Dazzlin' Donuts within the past 17 hours?"
"<typity-typity-type>241."
"All right; now, how many of them are driven by someone whose mothers have a maiden name that begins with 'R'?"
"<typity-typity-type> That did it! Driver Rex Deathkill, whose mother was Rita Rederring!"

(This is the same type of effect that allows for a 36-pixel-square black-and-white satellite surveillance photo to be digital enhanced to a perfectly recognizable human face, complete with distinctive birthmark.)

Many games feature information checks, where a successful skill check will reveal to the character what he wants to know. This is well and good, but it shouldn't even be necessarily obvious that a piece of information exists . . . especially if the information is being handled in an aggregate or compilation manner.

Also, as an aggregate matter, accumulating data for a specific purpose or conclusion -- such as finding your serial-killer dump-truck driver -- proves progressively harder the more steps you take. After all, one false search or assumption and you may well throw the target onto the "not a match" pile by mistake.

When compiling mysteries, you can tweak the ease (or lack of ease) of arriving at a conclusion with a few steps:

Names can be common, unique, or anything in between . . . even assuming it's a real name. For example, if the serial killer is Snepiron Tharside, then it's going to be a *lot* easier to assume that you found the right Tharside than if the investigatory target is "John Smith." (And is the information under "Jonathan Smith," "Johnny Smith," "Jonny Smith," etc?") Having information that results in too many hits is, in a lot of ways, worse than information that results in no hits; with too many hits, you can waste valuable time sifting through sand looking for the right grain. Trying to

research a common name, target, or idea will make the skill check more difficult and/or increase the time required to research it. Even knowing a trivial fact can be a pain if it's not the *right* trivial fact; knowing that a person is from a city called Oshkosh narrows it down a lot more than knowing he's from Oak Grove (of which there are 181 in the United States).

In general, the older a target is, the less information that has survived; however, any information that has survived is likely to be "better" (more relevant). In other words, there may be fewer facts, but those facts are more likely to be interesting and useful (presuming the information seemed important at the time; see below). This curve extends exponentially; we know much more about Ronald Reagan's life than we do Ben Franklin's, but if Ben Franklin left a treasure map in a French library, it'd probably be easier to track down than a similar document in Reagan's life.

The less important information was at the time, the less likely it was to survive; the greater the gulf between when information was created and when it was discovered to be important, the less likely it survived. Two famous examples of this are William Shakespeare (about whom there is a considerable dearth of information despite being one of the most famous authors in English history) and the list of Catholic popes. The latter is woefully inexact and holey (pun intended) despite being of import to one of the largest and longest-lived bureaucracies in existence.

Vast amounts of trivia exist in all eras; it is from this "dross" that rich gold can be mined. For example, some of the oldest cuneiform tablets that still exist have to do with tax records. (Today, most people shred their tax clay tablets after seven years.) If a large enough body of a hypothetical ancient language's tax records existed, it might provide an outline for some great cataclysm that befell the civilization: "Dr. Jonas, we've discovered that the Incamas paid increasingly more in tax each year until one year, when all records trickle to a fraction of their former glory. Don't you see?! Something big happened that year . . . three millennia ago, this month!"

The fact remains that humanity will always know several orders of magnitude more about the making of the movie *Willow* than it will about Jesus' teen years. But, owing to the vagaries of data, trying to discern what was going on in the Middle East in 10AD-20AD might prove to be as difficult as figuring out what Warwick Davis had for lunch on the third day of shooting. But regardless of what happens, hopefully in another 2,000 years humanity will have no record of *Digital Fortress.*

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Mmm . . . Brains!

Published by Twilight Creations, Inc.

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Art by Dave Aikins

Layout, design, & editing by Kerry & Todd A. Breitenstein

Five specialty six-sided dice, 50 plastic brains (25 red & 25 white), five player cards in five colors, rules; full color, boxed; $15

The intentional irony of Twilight Creations' slogan "Where fun comes to life" is getting yet another workout. The company, noted for pastimes that all seem to involve zombies and various undead causing trouble for folks, has employed famed designer Reiner Knizia to create a dice game . . . that involves brains. Tasty brains. The kind of brains that make you say *Mmm . . . Brains!* (Emphasis theirs.)

The object of the game is to be the only corpse left with a supply of brains.

You and four other zombies have hit the mother lode: a pile of brains. Being undead, you have no table manners and fall to fighting over the tasty snacks. First you attempt to grab as many for yourself as possible, and then you try to take them from your graveyard pals. Players take turns rolling the specialty six-sided dice that come in the box as they salivate over the stack of 50 brains in the middle of the table. They (the dice, not the brains) are numbered one to five with each number in a different color -- one die, for example, has a yellow number one, a red number two, the three in green, and so on. On another die, the same colors are assigned to different numbers. Five dice, five numbers, five colors, an even spread, and a picture of a brain replaces the six. These shades correspond to each player (everyone gets a little card showing his color).

You want numbers of a single color when you roll because those are added together -- results of another hue are excluded from the math. The total is multiplied by the number of brains rolled. For example, if you got a red one and a red four, a yellow three, and two brains, the reds would add up to five and be multiplied by two brains for a result of 10 (the yellow die is ignored). You get to roll the dice three times, setting aside as you go any dice that give a result you like. Take that many brains from the supply and add them to your dessert menu. Everyone collects brains like this in turn until the central pile is exhausted -- then they turn on each other. The die-rolling mechanic is the same with one exception: The colors now represent whose brains you're stealing, so by choosing the colored results you like you can target certain players. If, through bad luck, you can't get someone else's colors to show up (or you're rolling a color not in use in a three- or four-player game), you have to give up that many tokens from your own stash. The last person left with any brains is the winner (and yeah, folks get a lot of mileage out of that joke during play).

Twilight Creations once again pulls off a win with their plastic molding -- the tiny little brains you get with the set to use as currency are darling. They come in white and red (to represent one- and five-brain denominations respectively), and are about the size of a pencil eraser. Hopefully this will make up for the thin nature of the player color cards, which fortunately don't have to do anything more strenuous than sit in front of each player.

The dice deserve special mention, and alas, that's because they're one of the game's two biggest problems. All those colors must have set the creators back a pretty penny, but they're almost impossible to read. Even in the best light, the

black and blue numbers are hard to distinguish (it's more of a midnight blue). If the yellow side comes up, you won't confuse it with another color because it's the only shade that's just this side of invisible on the white die. Throwing the dice is fun; reading them is painful.

The other big problem is game play: There isn't much to speak of. Rolling dem bones and selecting the results you want is kind of nice -- isn't it always? -- but really, there's little strategy to it during the brain-collection phase. Come the second phase, there's marginally more decision-making to be done as you target enemies for brain-depletion, but 99 times out of 100 your opponents can tell you what you're going to do. Considering the brain color on a die is the same as the five on that die (if you want to attack green, getting the green brain means that juicy green five isn't available), you could almost argue your dice are making as many decisions as you are. It's just a hair shy of completely random.

Mmm . . . Brains! looks simply adorable and Reiner Knizia's name on a box usually suggests something special, but in this case the best of his smarts are to be found in some other product.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Crisis in Freeport (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Chris Pramas, Robert J. Schwalb, & Rodney Thompson

Cover by Jonathan Kirtz

Illustrated by Toren "Macbin" Atkinson, Kent Burles, Britt Martin, & David Griffith

Cartography by Sean MacDonald

64-page b&w softcover; $16.95

With *Crisis in Freeport,* Green Ronin Publishing brings to a close the line that catapulted them to success with the release of *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* back in the year 2000. After just seven scenarios and a handful of other supplements, the *[Freeport: City of Adventure](#)* setting is no more. This is not to say that it is dead, but rather merely resting, for Green Ronin will return to it after moving its timeline on another five years and support it with a series of supplements that will not employ the *d20 System,* but instead be generic enough that they can be used with any system.

In the meantime, *Crisis in Freeport* has a job to do: Wrap up the storyline originally begun in the setting's first scenario, *[Death in Freeport.](#)* Who will be the city's Sea Lord, head of the Captain's Council? The last to hold the position was Milton Drac, but as was told in the original Freeport Trilogy, his rule was brought to an abrupt end by a band of heroic adventurers who foiled his attempt to summon an eldritch and ancient deity known as the Unspeakable One. Unfortunately he was the last of his line, and the city's Law of Succession requires that the Sea Lord possess Drac blood; the question of who would head the city was a thorny issue, and it is this very issue that will be settled in *Crisis in Freeport.*

Designed for a party of four to six characters of 7th to 9th level, *Crisis in Freeport* takes place some months after the events described in the Freeport Trilogy, but before those of either the Origins-Award-winning epic campaign *[Black Sails Over Freeport](#)* or the scenario *Hell in Freeport.* This is not to say that *Crisis in Freeport* cannot be run before either of those, but it needs to be more powerful in order to present a suitable challenge to the party. As is traditional, the scenario includes updated statistics for the same four sample characters that first appeared in *Death in Freeport.*

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Crisis in Freeport begins with a stupendous move upon the part of the Captain's Council; they revoke the Law of Succession that has governed the city for generations. No longer does the Sea Lord need to have Drac blood, and the position can now be filled by a member of the council. The resulting controversy, fanned by the release of a scurrilous newssheet, erupts into riots that sweep the city. Blood is shed as rival gangs take opportunity of the resulting chaos to attack each other and the authorities.

After saving a citizen or two and witnessing an atrocity or two, our heroes are called upon to investigate the kidnapping of Lady Elise Grossette, the Captain's Council member who raised the motion to repeal the Law of

Succession. She is also the leading candidate to be the new Sea Lord, and the party's patron believes that a council rival is behind her disappearance. Before that can be proved, the adventurers must locate and rescue her, the investigation quickly pointing to an Elf corsair with a well-known hatred of Humans. He has already fled the city though, in the direction of a nearby resort island. Hinting at the storm to come if they are unsuccessful, the characters must sail into the wind and rain preceding an oncoming hurricane. On the island they find a maelstrom of black-hearted pirates and in facing down the corsair will learn the identity of his employer.

With this information and the rescued councillor, the adventurers can return to Freeport where they are asked to locate the kidnaper's employer and bring him before his peers on the Captain's Council. This leads to an encounter in a somewhat oddly shaped establishment called the House of Serenity, and information that a continental power has been pulling the strings all along. Bringing him to justice and the election of a new Sea Lord marks the end of the scenario.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Physically, the book is decently written, and as usual contains some excellent artwork. It is not as tightly edited as other titles from Green Ronin, though. In addition to the adventure, new rules detail the crowd as a monster and add the Corsair character class. Although the scenario makes reference to various books -- in particular, the ***Unholy Warrior's Handbook*** and the ***Advanced Bestiary*** -- none of are absolutely necessary to run ***Crisis in Freeport.***

Crisis in Freeport foregoes the eldritch and ancient horrors of its predecessors for a more action orientated, intrigue led adventure that contains some quite brutal scenes. It is perhaps a little too linear and very much built around an information chain, but the action and its sense of urgency should -- if not counter this -- at least make it less obvious to the players. It being a Freeport-set scenario, there is little in the way of monetary reward. Rather, the rewards come in the form of the standard Experience Points, plus fame and reputation. Yet it will be up to the DM to develop this and certainly the next supplement should address this when it appears. In the meantime, there is plenty of adventure to be had in ***Black Sails Over Freeport*** if this has not yet been played, while ***Crisis in Freeport*** brings this chapter to a quiet close rather than a rousing climax.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Masons

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Leo Colovini

Art by Franz Vohwinkel

Game board, 33 walls, 30 towers, 60 houses, 15 palaces, four scoring markers in four colors, 60 guild cards, three six-sided specialty dice, & rules; full color, boxed; $39.95

Sadly, the name *Masons* only refers to the plain-vanilla builders of old, working to construct cities. Maybe there's another, secret game to be played, and when you reach the next circle of enlightenment Rio Grande Games sends you the *real* rule sheet. But don't worry; until then, the "mundane" version of this game does quite well, thank you very much.

The object of the game is to have the most points when the last stone is laid.

Players receive a small hand of cards and take turns putting up walls. (If you roll the dice before you put down your section of wall, you lose a point; do not deny your destiny as a mason.) The board shows a long stretch of land divided into triangles -- imagine a series of hexes with a point in the middle of each, and the hex is sliced like a pizza from the center to each corner. Every intersection has a circle. Walls must be placed along the lines, and towers on the points at either end. A die roll dictates the first tower's color, but the player gets to choose the tower for the other end.

The other two dice show what color houses will be placed in the triangular wedges on either side of your wall. If you only have one section (maybe you built along the coastline), you choose which of the colors shown you'll place. If two houses of the same color find themselves together inside the walls, they combine into a larger piece called a palace. The board fills with towers, walls, houses, and palaces until someone completes a city. If you encircle an area with an unbroken line of walls (it can be any number of triangular segments), it's called a city and a scoring round begins.

The guild cards you play determine what scores for you this time, and most of them focus on the just-completed city. No one actually "owns" the cities the players have built (most are the work of different players over several turns). There's a wide variety of items and situations that pull down points for you. You could choose to play a card that pays off for all the black tower pieces not in a completed city, for example, or all such along the coast, or all towers. You might go for a different color tower, or towers that are part of the finished city. Then again, you might score buildings of a certain size or color, or just get points for the walls themselves. You may only play a limited number of cards per completed city, so you have to decide what works now and what resource has yet to bloom.

Eventually the participants run out of pieces. When you exhaust the supply of any one thing -- houses, palaces, walls, or towers -- the game goes to one more card-playing round wherein everyone gets to choose whatever provides them with the best scoring opportunity. Whoever has overseen the most successful construction wins.

The components are nice, but it would be hard to make them "not nice" since all the playing pieces are made of wood. Well, not the cards or the board, but they're well-done too. The illustrations on the cards could stand some improvement (it's hard to distinguish between the white tower and the "not colored, because you can score for any tower" illustrations), but they aren't weak scraps of paper passing for cardstock like too many recent releases seem to favor. The board gets a little harder to read as the game progresses -- highlighted lines defining the borders of each fiefdom get built over -- but it only hampers you briefly as you score a couple of cards. Finally, it can be hard to get

hold of some pieces, not because they're too small but the playing surface just gets busy.

What looks like a bewildering resource management game turns out to be an incredibly simple set of rules. It all builds up quickly, true, and there are several ways to score, but that just keeps things interesting. Some players falling behind early in the game find catching up is an almost magical process even as the game enters its last turn or two. It doesn't hurt that laggers have the option of switching out some of their cards, but by skipping a scoring round anyone can manipulate their hand. Scoring ends close, play is fast, and the chance to play multiple games in one sitting is the norm. The action doesn't get old any time soon as there's always a new way to balance your card sets with your placement strategy.

Until the darker secrets of the society are unveiled to you, **Masons** is your gateway into the lives of those who toiled to create new cities. Hard work will win their favor. Or maybe that's just what they *want* you to believe.

--Andy Vetromile

Naval Warriors: The Officers And Men Who Fought The Great Square-Riggers

Part III: The Commissioned Officers

by Nicholas Lovell

"Mr. Barker! Pass the word for Mr. Barker!"

The young midshipman tore himself away from his position on larboard chains. Two cables to leeward, the schooner had hauled its colors and come up before the wind. It sat heavily in the water and wallowed in the Atlantic swell

"Mr. Barker!" snapped Captain Smallwood.

"Yes sir."

"Mr. Barker, you will take a prize crew of eight men and make for the nearest English port. Plymouth, I suggest. The master will give you our latest position. You have three minutes to gather your kit bag while we launch the blue cutter. Then you must be away."

"Aye, aye sir!" Barker saluted and ran, a skip in his step, He was 16 years old, and this was his first independent command. Plymouth was over 1,000 miles away, six or seven days with a fair wind.

He vaulted down the stairs and gathered his few belongings. For a week, the schooner would be his own ship.

This could be fun.

* * *

A ship-of-the-line with 74 guns might have as many as 600 crew. The commissioned officers -- the Captain, Lieutenants and Midshipman -- were the leaders and the authority for the men. They were crucial to the success of their ship.

The commissioned officers were identified as officer material at a very young age. They typically hailed from the upper and middle classes of society. It was unusual, although not unheard of, for an officer to emerge from the ranks of the ordinary seaman. It was a requirement, however, that not only were they literate, but also skilled with mathematics, as navigation in the 18th and 19th centuries required a understanding of the practical applications of spherical trigonometry.

The youngest officers were midshipmen and they were often terrifyingly young to modern eyes. It was not unusual for boys of 13 or 14 to have responsibility for ten or more experienced sailors. The midshipmen ran messages throughout the ship, commanded a gun section in battle, and might be required to take charge of one of the ship's boats (usually under the watchful eye of an experienced seaman as coxswain). Much of their spare time was taken up with lessons, both practical and theoretical. On board they would study navigation, seamanship, and -- possibly, depending on the captain's views -- classics and languages.

A midshipman aimed to become a lieutenant by the time he was 20. Older midshipmen, who failed the lieutenant's examination either through lack of sailing skills or because they did not pass as "gentleman," remained in the midshipmen's berth as Master's Mates.

The Lieutenants were responsible for carrying out the Captain's orders. They were watch-keeping officers, meaning

that they were in charge of the day-to-day running of the ship for the duration of one or more of the four-hour watches each day. On a large ship with a full crew, they might only take one watch a day, whereas on a smaller schooner or sloop, warrant officers might also have to take the duty. The senior lieutenant, based strictly on length of service, was called First Lieutenant and had the responsibility of ensuring that the ship ran efficiently on behalf of the captain. The more junior lieutenants were named by seniority (Second Lieutenant, Third Lieutenant etc), and a 104-gun ship-of-the-line such as *HMS Victory* could have a complement of as many as eight lieutenants.

Ultimate authority on board the ship belonged to the captain. He was responsible for both the success and failure of his crew. Most captains had been at sea for all their adult lives, starting out as lowly midshipmen. The captain was given his orders by the Admiralty and failure to carry out their orders, the loss of his ship, or accusations of cowardice could lead to court-martial and even death. In 1757, Admiral John Byng was court-martialled for failing "to do his utmost" to engage the enemy at the Battle of Minorca, and was ultimately convicted and executed by firing squad. Voltaire commented in *Candide* that in England, they found it wise to execute an admiral from time to time *"pour encourager les autres."*

The captain had absolute power on board his own ship, and was able to order floggings and many lesser punishments to those who challenged this authority. While many officers were respected -- and indeed loved -- by their crews, this unlimited authority could easily be abused, and there were many thoroughly unpopular captains.

The captain had no specific watch-keeping or other duties. He would usually take the con during battle, during storms, and potentially during complex or intricate maneuvers or in difficult waters. For most of the time he left the conning of the ship to his lieutenants and the master.

The Captain also benefited from the greatest luxury on board a warship: privacy. He had a cabin and a separate stateroom. Many captains were personally rich, and would lay in a wide range of cabin stores. This enabled them to invite members of the wardroom (the commissioned and non-commissioned officers) and the gunroom (the midshipmen and master's mates) for meals. For many of these men, particularly the gunroom, dining with the captain was not only a great honor, it was a rare opportunity to break from the monotony of shipboard diet.

The Captain was also the biggest beneficiary of the system of prize money. When an enemy warship or merchantman was captured, it would be sold. The prize money was distributed by eighths: two-eighths went to the captain, one to the admiral, one was divided between the wardroom officers (lieutenants, master, surgeon and marine captain), another between the principal warrant officers, lieutenant of marines and chaplain, another between the junior petty officers, sergeants of marines and midshipmen. The final two-eighths were divided between the remaining crew, with able seaman receiving a larger share than ordinary seamen, landsmen and boys. The system, much despised by the army, made many sailors, and particularly admirals and captains, extremely wealthy.

In the Royal Navy, once an officer reached the rank of Post Captain (which was based on a combination of merit and patronage), he would then be promoted strictly in order of seniority. Provided a Post Captain stayed alive, it was inevitable that he would become an Admiral. Becoming "made Post" was the ultimate ambition of nearly every British naval officer.

Commissioned Officers

Midshipman   *110 points*

You are a junior officer who has recently joined the finest navy in the world (whichever that is!).

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]

Advantages: Patron 5 (major nation, 9 or less) [30]; Rank (Naval) 3 [15]; Status 1 [0].

Disadvantages: Code of Honour (Gentleman's) [-10]; Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less) [-15]; Enemy (utterly formidable group, 9 or less) [-40]

Skills: Area Knowledge (home port) IQ+0 [1]-13; Astronomy IQ-2 [1]-11; Boating (Unpowered) DX-1 [1]-10; Broadsword DX+0 [2]-11; Cartography IQ-1 [1]-12; Gunner (Cannon) DX+1 [2]-12; Guns (Pistol) DX+1 [2]-12; Knot-tying DX+0 [1]-11; Leadership IQ-1 [1]-12; Mathematics (Applied) IQ-2 [1]-11; Meteorology IQ-1 [1]-12; Navigation (sea) IQ-1 [1]-12; Savoir Faire (Military) IQ+0 [1]-13; Seamanship IQ+1 [2]-14; Shiphandling IQ-2 [1]-11; Swimming HT+0 [1]-12.

Optional Advantages, Skills, And Disadvantages

Choose 20 points of advantages and skills and -20 points of disadvantages.

Advantages: Appearance: Attractive [4] or Handsome [12]; Absolute Direction [5]; Ambidexterity [5]; Charisma [5*]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Cultural Familiarity [1 per culture]; Fit [5] or Very Fit [15]; Languages: Native [6], Accented [4], Broken [2]; Less sleep [2*]; Reputation +2 (all your countrymen, for conspicuous bravery) [5]; Status [5*]; Wealth: Comfortable [10] or Wealthy [20].

Skills: Climbing, Riding each DX+0 [2]-11; Connoisseur (Literature), Gambling, Savoir Faire (High Society) each IQ+0 [2]-13; Musical Instrument IQ-1 [2]-12; Singing [2]-13.

Disadvantages: Alcoholism [-15]; Appearance: Unattractive [-4]; Bad Temper [-10]; Bully [-10]; Chronic Pain (Mild) [-5]; Enemy (equal in strength) [-10]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Missing Digit [-2]; Missing thumb [-5]; One Arm [-20]; One Eye [-15]; One Hand [-15]; Overconfidence [-5]; Wealth: Struggling [-10].

Lieutenant   *130 points*

You are a rising star in the naval service. Survive battle and fever and the treasured rank of captain is within your grasp.

As Midshipman above, but with the following changes:

Advantages: Increase Rank to 4 [20].

Skills: Replace skills with Administration IQ-1 [1]-12; Area Knowledge (home port) IQ+0 [1]-13; Area Knowledge (territorial waters) IQ+0 [1]-13; Area Knowledge (enemy's territorial waters) IQ+0 [1]-13; Astronomy IQ-1 [2]-12; Boating (Unpowered) DX-1 [1]-10; Broadsword DX+1 [4]-12; Cartography IQ+0 [2]-13; Gunner (Cannon) DX+1 [2]-12; Guns (Pistol) DX+1 [2]-12; Knot-tying DX+0 [1]-11; Leadership IQ+0 [2]-13; Mathematics (Applied) IQ-2 [1]-11; Meteorology IQ+0 [2]-13; Navigation (sea) IQ+0 [2]-13; Savoir Faire (High Society) IQ+0 [1]-13; Savoir Faire (Military) IQ+0 [1]-13; Seamanship IQ+1 [2]-14; Shiphandling IQ+0 [4]-13; Strategy (Naval) IQ-2 [1]-11; Swimming HT+0 [1]-12.

Optional Advantages, Skills, And Disadvantages

Choose 25 points of advantages and skills and -25 points of disadvantages from the midshipman list.

Captain   *150 points*

You are a master and commander with absolute power of your vessel and crew.

As Midshipman above, but with the following changes:

Advantages: Increase Rank to 6 [30]; Status 2 [0]. When the Captain is assigned to a ship with a full complement of crew, he gains an Ally Group (201-500, 12 or less, 75% of points) and his point total is increased by 96 to 246.

Disadvantages: Add Sense of Duty (Crew) [-5]

Skills: Replace skills with Administration IQ-1 [1]-12; Area Knowledge (home port) IQ+0 [1]-13; Area Knowledge (territorial waters) IQ+0 [1]-13; Area Knowledge (enemy's territorial waters) IQ+0 [1]-13; Astronomy IQ+0 [4]-13; Boating (Unpowered) DX-1 [1]-10; Broadsword DX+1 [4]-12; Cartography IQ+0 [2]-13; Gunner (Cannon) DX+1 [2]-12; Guns (Pistol) DX+1 [2]-12; Knot-tying DX+0 [1]-11; Leadership IQ+1 [4]-14; Mathematics (Applied) IQ-2 [1]-11; Meteorology IQ+0 [2]-13; Navigation (sea) IQ+1 [4]-14; Savoir Faire (High Society) IQ+0 [1]-13; Savoir Faire (Military) IQ+0 [1]-13; Seamanship IQ+2 [4]-15; Shiphandling IQ+1 [8]-14; Strategy (Naval) IQ+0 [4]-13; Swimming HT+0 [1]-12.

Optional Advantages, Skills, And Disadvantages

Choose 30 points of advantages and skills and -30 points of disadvantages from the midshipman list.

Sample Character: Charles Barker

Charles Barker was an effective corn merchant in Bristol most of the time, but he had a gambling streak which jeopardised his business. When a storm tore off the roof of his warehouse, destroying his inventory, it coincided with a long run of losses at cards. No longer able to fund the education of his second son, Thomas, Barker called in an old favour and packed him off to sea.

Thomas resisted the idea at first, and hated the first few weeks on board *HMS Pegasus.* However, before long, his natural cheerfulness reasserted itself, and he quickly settled in.

Mr Midshipman Barker is a popular member of the crew. When not on duty, he is often skylarking in the rigging, or, more discreetly, playing cards or dice with the men below. His great ambition is to attain independent command, earn lots of prize money, and return to Bristol to show his father how well he has done at sea.

Midshipman Thomas Barker   *110 points*

5'9", 110 lbs., a gangly youth with an infectious grin and an unruly mop of dark hair.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]

Advantages: Charisma [5]; Fit [5]; Less Sleep 2 [4]; Patron 5 (major nation, 9 or less) [30]; Rank (Naval) 3 [15]; Status 1 [0].

Disadvantages: Code of Honour (Gentleman's) [-10]; Duty (extremely hazardous, 12 or less) [-15]; Enemy (utterly formidable group, 9 or less) [-40], Impulsiveness [-10]; Wealth -- Struggling [-10]

Skills: Area Knowledge (home port)-13; Astronomy-11; Boating (Unpowered)-10; Broadsword-11; Cartography-12; Climbing-11; Gambling-13; Gunner (Cannon)-12; Guns (Pistol)-12; Knot-tying-11; Leadership-13 (includes +1 from Charisma); Mathematics (Applied)-11; Meteorology-12; Navigation (sea)-12; Savoir Faire (Military)-13; Seamanship-14; Shiphandling-11; Swimming-12.

Recommended Reading

- A day in the life of a sailor on an American merchantman: http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/calbk:@field(DOCID+@lit(calbk139div6))

The Writhing Jungle

by Paul Drye

Brasilia-1 is one of White Star Trading's most lucrative timelines. A snap to reach on Quantum-5, it's doubly interesting for being slightly ahead of Homeline in several fields of endeavor. The patents and techniques Brasilians use are easily understandable, and can be licensed cheaply when they're not stolen outright. Outtime investment runs into the hundreds of millions of dollars a year, and any number of fortunes are based on Brasilian businesses that are shells diverting items to Homeline.

Unfortunately for outtimers, the timeline is under a growing threat coming from the Amazon jungle. As Brazil is the industrial superpower here, the river of cash flowing between the two worlds may be cut off.

History

This world's history is the same as Homeline's until the 1600s, when the French Wars of Religion were settled by encouraging dissidents to move to the French colony in New France and, later, Louisiana. From there events gradually diverged. The British failed to break the French grip on the interior of North America and their own holdings broke into two pieces, one north of a successful Dutch colony and the other to the south. All European colonies were then lost to their overlords in the aftermath of the Russian Coalition War. In the modern-day, 1987, North America is subdivided much like Homeline's Central and South America.

Brazil (or, to use this timeline's spelling, Brasil) became the destination of choice for many European emigrants. Its frontier opportunities were available longer than any other's and its cities grew large to support the vast hinterland. While the greater distance from Europe slowed things down as compared to the Homeline USA, Brasil has just exceeded a population of 160 million, and is the most populous and advanced developed nation in this timeline.

Apart from the political differences, the most important change to history is technological. Brasilia-1 is a solid TL9 in biotechnology and medical science. Having the Amazon Jungle to the north of the world's most advanced nation for centuries has sparked all the timeline's biology-related techniques. Most other sciences and technology are roughly comparable to Homeline's; the exceptions are "big iron" nuclear and space science. For example, the first nuclear weapons on Brasilia-1 weren't set off until 1961.

The Trouble

It's been two years since the first reports of odd animal behavior came out of the western Amazon jungle. Individual animals would engage in an orgy of pointless violence against others, and would attack people if given the opportunity. The problem spread very quickly, both geographically and in the numbers of animals involved. In the last

few months the entire western half of the jungle, up to the site of Homeline Manaus, has seen constant ecological bloodshed, culminating in "frenzies" (to use the local parlance) over areas of several square miles. In them, every vertebrate animal attacks every other until nothing of them is left. Left behind are comparative deserts of only plants and insects, and a collapsing ecology in the sudden absence of many species. Outside the main area of trouble, sporadic outbursts have been seen as far downstream as the Atlantic coast.

The one exception to the phenomenon is humans, which have been unaffected directly even if no-one knows why. Unfortunately, they're certainly targets of opportunity for the suddenly voracious jungle and over a million refugees have flocked to the large cities in the affected zone, or to points east. Millions of other people are at risk. The resulting humanitarian crisis and economic disruptions have been immense. The latter of these consequences has particularly affected Homeline and drawn Infinity's notice.

Meanwhile, the Brasilians have been forced to mobilize their army for peace-keeping, and their entire medical and wildlife management communities have turned their attention to the issue. The events seem to be related to some infectious agent, probably carried by an insect vector -- maps of the outbreaks certainly suggest it -- but there's been no success in figuring out what that agent is. Part of the trouble is that it's not like any disease anyone's heard of before: broadly affecting so many species and having such an unusual effect on their behavior. One of the strongest rumors is that it's a biological attack, and some worry that the country may panic itself into war.

White Star Trading in Brasilia-1

Homeline has tens of thousands of outtime traders, and it still isn't enough to cover all the known potentially profitable timelines. White Star itself is already too large and too dispersed for much control, and under those circumstances keeping employees from pursuing far more lucrative goals than mere salaries is difficult. One strategy they use is to give outtime agents the latitude to invest and trade on their own behalf as well as for White Star, which at least has the advantage of keeping conflicts of interest out in the open where they can be regulated. Brasilia-1 is one of the timelines where White Star has adopted this tack; as a politically stable, moderately advanced world, it's safe to leave the traders here to their own devices and concentrate scarce human resources on more problematic situations.

This has had two unfortunate effects, one general to any place where this strategy is used and one specific to the new situation on Brasilia-1. First, the assignment to some timelines is so lucrative that there's a great deal of politicking to get them. In many cases, White Star ends up with people who are brilliant at infighting and less-than-ideal otherwise, particularly since an annoyingly large percentage of them have borderline sociopathic personalities.

The specific problem is that the tactic depends on the timeline being stable. If the situation goes pear-shaped, the agents certainly have the autonomy to react, but they usually don't have the resources to do it well. Since Brasilia-1's situation started deteriorating, Infinity's interaction with White Star's Brasilian operations has oscillated uncomfortably between the civilians screaming for help, then screaming again when Infinity upsets some of their apple carts in the course of trying to fix the problem. As White Star's people on the timeline are often rich and are invariably politically connected back home, it makes interventions simultaneously impossible to avoid and difficult to pull off cleanly.

In total, there are only a few dozen of White Star's people in Brasil (and more elsewhere on Brasilia-1). Despite their low numbers, they are in charge of running several small or medium-sized concerns that are integrated into the Brasilian economy, producing about 90% of their output as sales to the locals as a cover for the 10% they ship back to Homeline. All appear middlingly well-off, but possess considerable hidden wealth. They are interested in getting a solution to their new problems, and specifically not interested in losing their usual leeway -- it's the foundation of their current and future wealth. Several are profoundly interested in avoiding too much attention from White Star back home too, because their criminal sidelines will be revealed by on-the-spot scrutiny.

The Base of Operations

Most of White Star's infrastructure in Brasil is to the south and east in the large cities of the coast, particularly the capital of São Paulo, which is to Brasilia-1 what New York City is to Homeline. Since Infinity piggybacks on their

work, this has made it hard to get to the heart of the trouble.

In Amazonia, about all they've got is a few regional offices and small factories in Alto Solimões, the Brasilian town where Homeline has Manaus; these are entirely run and managed by locals who have no idea that they're working for anything other than a normal business. The last few months has seen a flurry of activity as White Star and Infinity have tried to put more Homeliners into the trouble areas.

Like its Homeline doppelgänger, Alto Solimões was built on the rubber trade during the late 19th century, but unlike Manaus it managed to dodge the following bust. It diversified into the chemical trade based on oil sands shipped down the Rio Negro, and has gradually become a high-tech industrial city that's a marked contrast to the jungle around it. Anyone familiar with Homeline Houston, Dubai, or Edmonton will find much familiar.

The Boto River Scouts

One tool the Brasilians have at their disposal is a group of genetically engineered Boto, otherwise known as Amazon River Dolphins. A freshwater species, they've been used for years in Brasil, and in recent times have been made more intelligent and better at communicating with humans. They're not legally recognized as persons under Brasilian law, which has been a bit of an issue with animal rights groups on Homeline, but so far White Star Trading has managed to fend off even the least bit of oversight in their interaction with them.

The Boto look much like other dolphins, through their skin shows rolls of fat when they bend, and their beaks are considerably longer than those of ocean-bound species. Their most notable characteristic is their color, which is typically gray only when they are young. As they age, a reddish flush spreads from their heads, and eventually turns the animal a remarkable light coral pink. Brasilia-1's animals are also notable for commonly wearing harnesses to carry equipment.

The Brasilian army uses the dolphins to scout the river, drawing attention to anything out of the ordinary that might not be noticed by humans. Similarly, they're used for security purposes, stopping or stalling interlopers and squawking back to base as needed.

The whole Boto project is a bit of a boondoggle. The money poured into it could have been used more effectively on traditional approaches to the problems the dolphins address. Still, they exist, and they've been thrown into the breach (along with every other resource the Brasilians can muster) ever since the frenzies began.

The Source of the Problem

Far up in the Andes, a Peruvian biotech lab molders away, a victim of a civil war almost two decades ago. In the chaos that engulfed its final days, it was abandoned without the usual clean-up. One of its experiments, a study of prion diseases, is ultimately responsible for the changes in the Amazon. A few particles from it were swept by rain into the nearby Marañón River, which winds its way down through the mountains before reaching Amazonia and forming part of the river system there.

After escaping into the wild, the disease infected monkeys in the Peruvian section of the jungle, and was of no consequence until recently. Then one of the various strains of the prion managed to jump to lice on the monkeys and from there into the vast number of insects in the area. The infection causes no symptoms in non-vertebrates, but with a huge reservoir of disease to play with, natural selection has been spitting out further variations that are gradually conquering every other living thing in the jungle.

When infected, any animal with a midbrain (essentially mammals, birds, lizards, amphibians, and fish) has the prion settle in that region and start affecting the animal's response/reward system. Violence becomes enjoyable, as much as eating and reproducing. This is counter to the long-term survival of the animal, but the prion can circumvent Darwin's inevitable displeasure by infecting other animals before its host dies. The result is a cycle of boom-and-bust violence depending on how many animals have massacred themselves in any area.

The Brasilians haven't managed to discover the prion infection because of one safeguard the Peruvian scientists built into their work: the protein that forms its "body" unfolds below 78°F and resumes its identity as a normal chemical in the brain. The warm tropics are ideal for it, and it can exist in colder climates in warm-blooded animals, but if it is in a corpse and brought to an air-conditioned lab it ceases to exist.

One further safeguard makes the prion less dangerous, and explains why humans are never co-opted by the jungle. When it was engineered, the researchers added a sequence to it that prevents human infection while being simultaneously critical to its reproduction. If a strain of infection develops that can enter *H. sapiens,* it will be unable to spread from its host.

Even on the off-chance that the adventurers discover or trigger the discovery of the prion, Brasil's troubles are not over. Their biotech can cure the infection in any individual, but there are roughly a billion animals infected, give or take an order of magnitude. It's a little like the difference between knowing tsunamis are caused by earthquakes and actually being able to do something about it once one is on its way.

Characters

D.F. Ramos: Ramos, as everyone but his mother calls him, is a first-generation immigrant to northern Brasil from Spain. He has lived in the region ever since he was 19, when he came here on a student visa and fell in love with the jungle. After dropping out, he kept a series of odd jobs and used the money he earned to explore up and down the river. Starting about 10 years ago he started becoming more known as an advocate for environmental conservation. He's good at this in a wooly-headed sort of way: his passion for nature outshines his scattershot approach to things.

Now that this crisis has hit, his failure to think through what he wants is coming back to bite him. He thinks the Amazon would be better in many ways if it didn't have any people in it, so in some ways he's happy to see it "fighting back," as he puts it. On the other hand, he's profoundly pained by the suffering of refugees, being a kind soul at heart, and is very distressed that the jungle treats him with as much hate as the worst environmental offender.

Ramos is a latter-day granola type, immersed in the loose, new-age spiritualism of Brasilia-1. He generally acts for the best, and will even display remarkable personal bravery while he does it, though he often gets a wild hair in his head about what is the proper way to move forward with his goals.

He cuts an outlandish figure, in Andean-style ponchos and leggings with a black Elvis pompadour and scraggly moustache. He talks loudly and is intensely friendly with everyone who hasn't offended his sensibilities. For all his cartoony aspects, though, he has very good knowledge of the forest, and good instincts for when things aren't right.

Lúcio Eliseo: He is a *general de brigada* in the Brazilian Army, and the man in charge of relief activities for Alto Solimões. He is also, quite frankly, over his head and is over-compensating for this with aggressiveness. He'll have nothing to do with "science fiction," as he calls it; his tendency is to solve most problems by shooting a few rapid rounds at it. Unfortunately, if Infinity agents try to approach problems on Brasilia-1 through official channels, they'll run into the general's desperate enthusiasm. On the other hand, if they tell him what he wants to hear, he can be very useful.

Lúcio's personality is quite brittle, and he likes to feel in control. If the situation turns sour in Alto Solimões and he faces violence personally, he's likely to crack up completely. Until then, though, he goes out of his way to keep a perfect façade up.

The general is a big, beefy man with watery blue eyes and a thick unibrow.

Morella: One of the Brasilian river dolphins, Morella is notable for her astonishing acquisitiveness. She's got a conservative streak, and resents not being a regular dolphin (and to heck with the mental consequences if she hadn't been engineered). She takes this out by sequestering every interesting object she finds, sticking each in some underwater location where it won't be discovered by land-dwellers.

Her name means, loosely, "Brownie" and comes from her distinguishing feature: a discolored brown spot of skin on the left side of her head. Otherwise she looks much like any other dolphin.

Morella has become one of Infinity's best moles in the Brasilian relief attempts. Her avariciousness makes her a great target for bribery, and she enjoys knowing that she's messing with her supposed employers. She doesn't know what White Star really is, but doesn't care. If it comes down to it, she might even want to come over to Infinity's side as a local agent if the opportunity arises.

Adventures in the Writhing Jungle

A Thousand Furlongs of Sea: A strange series of events on a pre-industrial timeline has uncovered a strange plot to, presumably, destabilize it. The Habsburg emperor's wife was attacked by a lion tamarin she had been given as a pet by a White Star trader. When examined closely, the chain of transactions that got the monkey there leads back to Brasilia-1 -- the attack was not deliberate, but rather a coincidental infection of the animal. However, the creature had been bio-engineered to give off powerful abortifacent drugs in its shed fur and skin, the best guess being that someone was playing a long-term game to prevent an heir to the Habsburg Empire. Investigators need to go to Brasilia-1 and track down what is going on.

NIMBY: Feelings are understandably high in Amazonia, and while hospitality can be obtained, it generally must be arranged in advanced. Most people understand that humans are immune to the jungle's influence, but no-one knows why this is so and everyone worries that it won't last. Surprises are accordingly viewed with suspicion.

In this environment, the adventurers are resting in a small village well into the wilderness when a straggling group of refugees arrives. They're not locals, and appear to be from somewhere rich and developed, probably a science mission of whatnot from the coast. The villagers turn against them and are about to drive them out when it becomes apparent to the adventurers that these are White Star's people. Apart from the moral obligation to help their compatriots, things might go badly for them at home if word gets back that they didn't help the refugees.

Red Sky In Morning: A socialist revolutionary group has had its back pressed against the wall by the Colombian government they oppose, and chosen the Amazon as apparently the lesser of two evils. While it's likely they won't live long, until they are killed by the wildlife they present an extra threat to workers in the region. After some of Infinity or White Star's people are kidnapped (or killed), enough pressure has been put on the Brasilian government to offer the rebels an amnesty. The carrot is an airlift back to civilization; the stick is the fury of the jungle. White Star has had the PCs assigned to make the offer, and it is hoped the insurgents have been sufficiently disillusioned by their experience in the forest to accept it.

Take Me To The River: White Star has sprung for a clandestine expedition to a frenzy. The group are transported (with associated scientific or military people as needed) on short notice to a site 60 miles west of the town of Tefé; this is deep in the jungle between the Amazon and its tributary, the Juruá. In other words, it's the back of beyond even by Brasilian standards.

It's hairy enough getting there by air and retrieving biological specimens for transport back to civilization. Additional complications come from the Caliph-tech stasis boxes the group has been provided in an attempt to keep the specimens as pristine as possible. As far as the PCs are concerned they're powered by unknowable magic, and are correspondingly balky in primitive, TL8+ hands. Everything starts to go really wrong when, not long after the return journey starts, a huge flock of birds deliberately flies into their transport and they crash land in the middle of the jungle.

Using the Writhing Jungle in Other Settings

Fantasy campaigns often use jungles (and associated quasi-Mesoamerican peoples and pyramids) as adventure settings. This is usually an attempt to mine 19th- and early 20th-century adventure literature for ideas, but what these modern takes often miss is the uneasiness the jungle provoked in the original authors. Western culture has swung back towards

a nature-loving perspective after a long post-Romantic period lull, and modern readers usually fail to understand how much Burroughs, Kipling, Conrad, and others position the jungle as an adversary. Too many Discovery Channel documentaries and modern medicines have softened attitudes.

With that in mind, the malicious Amazon of Brasilia-1 can be used to turn nature into an active enemy to counter that it's no longer perceived as one. This is equally true for pulp campaigns that are more directly based on 1920s and 30s forms. Players are likelier to play threatened pulp characters well if they lose their modern-day complacency about the wilderness.

Sci-fi games can be a bit trickier to integrate with the Writhing Jungle. If one is playing the more-traditional type of science fiction, such as *Traveller* or any of the TV- or movie-license games, the jungle can be dropped onto a planet wholesale. Harder science fiction has more trouble, though. While the basic concept of "the ecology hates you" can be used (and is a fairly common sci-fi trope), the reason the jungle has gone insane will need to be re-examined. As presented here, the technobabble relies on Earth's biology. Using prions and targeting midbrains is problematic when transposed to an alien form of life. If the GM is willing to forgo the nasty surprise that solving the riddle doesn't solve the problem, this is not an issue, but otherwise it will be necessary to come up with an explanation that fits this need.

The Omniscient Eye

How Do I Fund Something Really Flipping Expensive?

The article [How Can I Live on the Moon?](#) begs the question: "How do I get people to give me loads of money for a big project?" (As opposed to happening to save the life of a grateful multi-billionaire who is caught by the villain-of-the-week.)
—Eric Fun

Lots of people -- and a higher proportion of player characters -- come up with ideas for major projects which would save the world or just make them very rich. But they don't have enough money to do it themselves. The Omniscient Eye will explain how you can convince people to give you a billion dollars to build your great idea.

Commercial Investors

If your project will produce huge profits, you can share them with commercial investors in return for their fronting the cash. The hard part is convincing them that the project is more attractive than the other opportunities out there and that your financial projections can be trusted. Investors don't just want a big pile of profit. They want it sooner rather than later and with as little risk as they can get away with.

"Sooner" can be the tough part for many mega-projects. A factory producing billions of dollars in revenue every year can be less profitable than leaving money in the bank if it won't start operating for a decade or two. Investors apply a "discount rate" to future revenues to weight them against near-term ones. So a billion dollars 20 years in the future is equal to 200 to 400 million dollars five years from now ([Net Present Value](#) is the technical term). This makes investors very sensitive to schedule uncertainties; one year's delay can reduce their profits by 5-10%.

Investors vary in the amount of risk they're willing to accept, and the higher the risk the more potential profit they demand. Bankers want almost none. Venture capitalists will accept 90% of their projects failing as long as the tenth makes them a fortune. Inventors worry about whether the technology can work, but investors worry more about whether you can deliver on your promises for schedule and budget, and the bigger picture issues of whether the government will screw things up or customers turn their noses up when actually given the chance to buy one.

Start-ups have resumes scrutinized closely. Established companies are judged by their performance on similar projects. If some specific skills are missing the investors may require hiring someone to cover the gap as part of the deal, or to be the investors' "agent" on the inside. There's also a firm awareness among venture capitalists that the skills for implementing an idea aren't the same ones for coming up with one, so the financing deal may include having someone new put in charge of the project (if your gadgeteer PC has the social skills needed to coordinate over a thousand people he's probably safe from this). You may have to defend the technical viability of the project against conventional-wisdom consultants.

"Political risk" is a catchall for anything the government might do to step on the project. Key facilities could be torn down to make way for a road. Safety regulations can drive up costs or prevent deploying the product. Subsidies can give competitors an advantage. Worst case is the government deciding to do the project itself, eliminating all chance of making a profit and establishing a constituency who don't want the government to stop.

Some companies labor long and hard to produce good which stay on the shelf unsold. That's "market risk," the danger that people or companies won't need the product or a competitor will deliver a better version first. A warning sign of a market risk is an entrepreneur basing sales on 0.5% of the population of China buying the gadget. Something more certain, such as specific companies or a narrow niche such as "left-handed redheads age 23-26" provides confidence that customers will actually hand over cash. Going for corporate customers provides a better defined target but, as in

the case of one of the author's former employers, the customer can go bankrupt before buying. The most common hazard is to guess wrong about what customers want; Betamax had better image quality, but customers preferred the longer recording times of VHS tapes.

Even if your potential profit outweighs the risks you're not guaranteed an investment. You're competing with everyone else who wants to raise money. During the dot-com bubble companies had to promise greater profits to get investors' attention. You're not just being compared to other ventures in your own industry or market but to everything out there. Money moves quickly. Investors can switch from rockets to gravel pits overnight. A world event such as 9/11 can change investors' tolerance of risk and send them scurrying for safer opportunities.

Government Funding

Governments have different incentives for funding projects. What a project must do to earn support is meet the official and unofficial needs of the government. The official needs are the obvious ones: national defense, civil order, public health, transportation infrastructure, and so on. The unofficial ones are the personal desires of the decision-makers. Kings want personal glory and rewards for their supporters. Elected officials want to keep being re-elected, usually by providing voters with jobs. Bureaucrats want job security. To win support a project needs to satisfy both needs for each decision maker . . . and there's going to be a lot more of them than you expect. Even in an absolute monarchy, the king will listen to his tax collectors, generals, priests, and other advisers before making a decision. If they don't have reasons to support your project they'll oppose it to protect their own share of the royal revenues.

Democracies can be even more complicated. Trying to convince the US government to buy a new weapon system requires persuading serving military officers, defense department bureaucrats and political appointees, the White House budget staff, the permanent staff of the appropriate congressional committees, and a majority of the congressmen on those committees (The President? Only useful to help persuade the above. If the lower-level folks want a program badly enough there's no stopping it from the White House, as proved by the V-22). Actually getting the money requires formal reviews and approvals within the executive branch at multiple levels, any one of whom can stop the process dead, then majority votes from four congressional committees (the House and Senate each have separate authorization and appropriations committees; one approves the project and the other approves giving it money). There are some ways to bypass this process by creating budget "earmarks" but that won't get you a billion dollars. Recently jailed Congressman Cunningham only provided contracts in the tens of millions to the people who bribed him.

The Apollo Program had one official goal -- man, moon, decade -- but answered many different needs. Outdoing the Soviet Union had clear national defense benefits. The research involved had many economic benefits. The prestige of a first for the human race added to the historical place for JFK and LBJ. And key congressmen had thousands of well-paying jobs brought to their districts to keep their voters happy. That's the broad level of support you need to get a billion-dollar project funded by the government.

One danger is the temptation to add features to a project to bring in more supporters. Each one increases the complexity of the project exponentially, driving up costs and taking more time. If the budget goes beyond what your supporters have the votes to get you, you'll have to cut out a feature to keep going, and that costs you a supporter. Each time a supporter is lost there's less support to keep the budget funded, and competitors will probably cut it to divert money to their own projects. Soon you get a "death spiral" until the project is cancelled or reinvented in a stripped-down form which still pleases a critical mass of supporters. NASA's space station spiraled down from a research center and exploration base to the minimum needed to maintain employment at the NASA centers in key congressional districts.

Other Options

Multinational corporations can fund billion-dollar projects if they want (Microsoft could do that from its spare cash) but rarely sponsor outsiders. Most companies that large have internal approval processes almost as convoluted as the Federal government's. The more nimble ones will consider your project if it ties in to their core business, but even if they don't reject you they would want to control the project completely. If you're willing to become an employee and see your brainchild run by the sponsoring corporation that can still work.

You might try to fund your project by asking for donations or investments from many people instead of just a couple of big investors. If 10,000,000 each chip in a hundred dollars you'd be set. The problem with that is anybody can describe a neat idea and ask for contributions. It's easier to leave town in the middle of the night than deliver on the idea. Which is why the US Securities and Exchange Commission has strict rules on who can invest in a speculative venture, and other laws constrain what can be described as a charity or nonprofit when asking for contributions. You'd need a nationwide reputation for trustworthiness (and some good lawyers) to raise funds this way. In societies with different laws you'll still need to deal with the problem of con artists piggybacking on your efforts. Established major charities can raise money in the billion-dollar range but convincing them to donate to your project would probably be harder than the commercial or government options given the restrictions they operate under.

If you can't get lots of people to give you money, you may get a whole bunch to give you some labor. The Linux operating system was developed by volunteers, many highly talented professionals working on their own time. But that was in the software world. Developing a complex system requires a cycle of design-build-test, each cycle modifying the design to fix the problems identified by the tests. But in software the "build" step consists of pressing the compile button. In other fields it costs up to millions of dollars to get a prototype which can be tested (an experimental aircraft, scale model of a machine, etc.). So the volunteers can help create designs, but without a cheap build option they can't test them. This eliminates the biggest benefit of "open source" development, many eyes making bugs shallow. Without testing there's no way to tell which design suggestions are worthwhile so choosing among them becomes horribly difficult. Open source isn't a practical option outside the software world.

In the end a friendly billionaire may be your best bet, though they're not too likely to sponsor you with so many other people demanding their attention. The best role model may be Jeff Bezos: Become a billionaire first, then build your rocketship with your own money.

Further Reading

- Getting entrepreneurial funding -- http://www.garage.com/
- Getting US Government money -- http://acquisition.gov/

--Karl Gallagher

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

Starting With a Script

A [month or so ago,](#) I began a series about how I ran adventures using pre-generated scripts to begin each adventure. As Something Completely Different, I thought a sample of an actual script might prove useful.

The setup: This was a *Star Trek* mini-series set in the era between the original series and *Star Trek: The Next Generation.* (For the future historians among you, it was set around the same time as the *Enterprise-C,* as seen in the episode "Yesterday's Enterprise.") The premise was that the heroes were testing prototype equipment that would find its way onto the *Enterprise-D* (such as the holodeck) as well as stuff that would be left on the cutting-room floor (such as seat belts on the bridge -- they locked up during one scene, and the heroes were momentarily trapped as they figured out how to escape from the "helpful" devices).

The mini-series was six episodes and featured six PCs, which were split among three players (as outlined in a [classic column](#) from years past). In broad strokes, the characters were:

Player 1

Captain Kaelin: Strong-willed, tough-as-nails female captain of the *Discovery.* (I note this was many years before *Star Trek: Voyager's* Captain Janeway.)

Commander Kasik: A half-human, half-Vulcan second officer, albeit one who (for the most part) parted ways from his Vulcan heritage to devote himself to a world of emotions. (Again, I note this was a year or two before *Star Trek V.*)

Player 2

Councilor Trais: The prototype for the concept of having a shipboard psychological officer. A member of the J'naii race (the androgynous humanoids introduced in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "The Outcast"), she finds the gender issues that surround many day-to-day human interactions to be very confusing and not really worth it.

Frankie Olanov (Chief of Security): Beautiful but deadly, Frankie (as she likes to be called) is highly skilled yet prefers to try to disarm foes with a smile first. Frankie has Roma blood in her ancestry, of which she is particularly proud.

Player 3

Doctor Kelly: Competent yet fun-loving and casual medical doctor who's usually pretty easy-going unless provoked. Imagine if Scotty had become a doctor instead of an engineer.

Supervisor Gordon: The "by-the-book" bureaucrat who is responsible for making sure equipment is used responsibly and overseeing the *Discovery* project's main mission (prototyping equipment in real-world situations). Considered by most to be a pain in the butt, but that's only because he is.

Important NPC

Engineer Carl Ellis: A barely competent engineer, Ellis was chosen because the folks who came up with the *Discovery* project wanted the equipment pass or fail on its own merit, not because a super-engineer was able to *make* stuff work. (Also, from a metagaming standpoint, the GM didn't want the players turning to the engineer for a technobabble solution whenever the situation got grave.) A laid-back fellow who speaks with a quick Southern drawl, Ellis doesn't realize he was decided upon because of lowest-common-denominator concerns.

Okay; now that we've got the preliminaries out of the way, here's a sample script from that era. Keep in mind that I wrote this over a decade ago, and there are many things I'd no doubt change about it given many years' of writerly growth. (In general, the players read their own parts -- including voice-overs -- while I read any NPCs and stage directions.)

[Scene: Discovery Hallway. A black-helmeted, armor-clad figure runs down the corridor. He is armed with a large energy weapon, and is looking left and right at the juncture. A door on the side of the corridor opens, and Doctor Kelly sees him.]

Kelly: There he is!

[The figure turns left and keeps running. Doctor Kelly goes back to the medical bay and emerges with a Type 2 phaser.]

[From another corridor emerges Frankie Olanov in full Federation garb, armed.]

Frankie: Drop your weapon, now!

[She shoots at the figure, who dodges. The figure rolls to the side and shoots Olanov. She is knocked back against the far wall and slumps to the ground. Dr. Kelly rounds the corner and goes to her; the doctor sees that Olanov is unconscious. He starts shooting at the fleeing figure. The figure continues to run, turning a corner.]

[At the same time, Captain Kaelin is walking in the corridor. The figure turns the corner and sees her. The figure is startled, and raises his weapon and shoots the captain.]

[Nothing happens.]

[Looking down at the weapon in the figure's hand, the Captain pulls back and punches the figure in the head. The figure falls to the ground and Olanov and Kelly catch up to the figure.]

Frankie: Oh, my god!

[Frankie runs over to the figure and pulls off the helmet. It's Kasik!! Frankie helps Kasik to his feet.]

Kaelin: What the hell is going on here?!

Frankie (stammering): Um, er . . . training exercises.

Kaelin: Training exercises?!

Kasik: Well, there wasn't anything else pressing to do . . .

Kelly: And after Gordon imposed even stricter Holodeck rules . . . Well . . .

Frankie: We were bored.

Kaelin: And so . . . what the devil were you doing?

Kelly: Well, we've set up this sensor vest [gestures to Kasik's garb] to register low-level phaser bursts.

Frankie: At its lowest level, the phaser emits more light than anything else. As such,

we've managed to jury rig an impromptu phaser-tag game.

Kaelin: You mean, you're using the most advanced personal armaments the Federation has developed . . . as glorified flashlights? [no response] Whose idea was this?

[All, more or less together]

   Frankie: I think it was Kasik who had the basic idea.

   Kasik: I believe Dr. Kelly thought of it originally.

   Kelly: Frankie told me the idea over a game of chess.

Kaelin: Enough!! Kasik, as First Officer, I expected more from you.

Kasik: Among humans, isn't it customary to expect the unexpected?

Kaelin: Who else did you coax into this buffoonery?

[A figure rounds the corner, dressed in full Federation battle garb, with helmet. He shoots at Kasik, whose vests beeps in response. He flips up the visor and sees the Captain. The figure is Ellis!]

Ellis (stammering): Uh, I think I hear the plasma couplers . . . uncoupling. Bye!

[Ellis flees.]

Frankie: Y'know, Captain, this is what happens when free time and boredom collide.

[In the interim, Gordon has walked around the corner and is standing with the group.]

Gordon [to Kasik]: Is that the prototype sensor vest?

[Scene: Discovery ship shot, flying through space (warp speed)]

Kaelin: Captain's log, stardate 20701.4. We are en route to the Shuttlecraft *Aristarchus,* where we will pick up three Federation archaeologists from a recent excavation on Exxis VII. They say they have discovered some important artifacts, and must be escorted to safe Federation territory. I must say that I am . . . [icily] thrilled to be once again a ferry for galactic travelers.

[Scene Discovery Bridge.]

Frankie: Captain, the *Aristarchus* is within range.

Kaelin: Open a hailing frequency. [The frequency opens] This is Captain Kaelin of the starship *Discovery.*

[The viewscreen shifts; the interior of a shuttlecraft is shown. The (presumed) leader and another officer are onscreen, with a third crewman in the background.]

***Aristarchus* captain:** Captain Kaelin, I am Dr. Periduenne; I must insist that we be taken aboard your ship immediately. The fate of the entire Federation . . . [he looks down to his instrument panels] What the-?!

[Shot: Outside *Discovery.* The shuttlecraft explodes.]

> [Ominous horns, commercial break.]

--Steven Marsh

Icosahedron Adventures

Alphabet Enemies
Twenty-Six Nonstandard Nemeses
(Part One: A through H)

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Some campaigns call out for unusual foes. They may be part of a character's background, or ongoing enemies not connected to the overall metaplot of the game. This series of articles presents 26 unusual enemy ideas designed specifically for a *d20 System* game involving magic (though useable in either modern or sword-and-sorcery settings). Each is described in terms of how they relate to their primary foe (listed as "you," on the assumption they are background elements for a PC, though they could as easily be used as foils by GMs). The foes are presented with just a smattering of game rule notes, since they require customization to be appropriate for any game (and can thus be more easily ported to other game systems). Many are specifically designed to be recurring opponents, with built-in reasons for them to survive your efforts to get rid of them, without in turn killing you.

These potentially problematic people are all designed to be "quirky," which can easily slide to "comic relief" if not handled with care. If that's appropriate for your game revel in the oddity. If not, look at these as starting points of ideas to develop more serious supervillains.

Arcanis Vehementer

The *Arcanis Vehementer* is a uncast spell, researched at the dawn of the discovery of magic, but never used by any sorcerer or wizard, ever. So long has the spell sat in the realm of the theoretical, its potential energy growing and evolving, it has become a thinking creature. So much power is stored in the *Arcanis Vehementer* that if it ever is cast, it will happen only once. Unfortunately, no one knows what the spell will do. Not even the *Arcanis Vehementer* knows what will happen when it is cast, but it has no purpose without that act occurring (which will also destroy it). It has become a rogue magic, able to unleash great devastation, or healing, or oddity, but even the most advanced divinations have failed to determine which.

And it's chosen you to cast it, because you are last of the bloodline of the researcher that created it. You may be the last person *able* to cast it.

Whenever you prepare spells or use magic in any form, the *Arcanis Vehementer* can communicate with you. It can do this with anyone, but it has no power to do other than communicating with spellcasters. The spell is determined to force you into a position where you'll have no choice but to use it. To this end, it has begun telling other spellcasters the misleading truth that you have a great, secret spell. Since divination doesn't work on the *Arcanis Vehementer,* they are lead to believe you have some *useful* magic secret. Evil and greedy spellcasters everywhere are now gunning for you, and the rogue spell trusts you'll eventually get into such a deep predicament, you'll cast it in the hopes it will save you. Of course since you may be the last person able to cast it, if you're incapacitated the *Arcanis Vehementer* will do what it can to save you (ensuring you'll have a chance to cast it later, possibly to escape).

B-Team

They don't mean to cause trouble. In fact, they idolize you and all your friends. Maybe you saved their village from orcs, or drove a gang out of their neighborhood. However you did it, you and your comrades became this group's idols. So much so, they decided to take on your careers, appearance, and adventures. In fact, they claim to be you, the ultimate in flattery-imitation.

The problem is, they're not very good at it.

You first hear from an underground newspaper (or bard) how a group very much like you fouled up a rescue mission. Then you discover your funeral was a few days ago. Then you're attacked by spellcasters who blame you for their library accidentally being burned to the ground while you were guarding it. The B-Team never approaches you themselves -- they know they're not worthy. And they do grow in power as they (barely) survive adventures (and replace those of their number who don't). But they always manage to bite off more than they can chew, thus constantly causing problems it takes your group to solve (or be blamed for getting it wrong). You'd love to meet them, if only to wring their necks, but they're always one step ahead of you, making a new mess you need to fix.

Clan Defete

Clan Defete is an ancient fighting family with dozens of lines and hundreds of members. Each takes the clan name as their surname (Mathis Defete, Charles Defete, etc.), and works tirelessly to spread the fame and reputation of the Defete clan. Of course, young Defete members often fall early in their careers, and must be avenged by older, more dangerous kin. To ensure senior members aren't constantly avenging the deaths of junior Defete family (which is a task beneath their considerable talents), each clan member has a specific kinsman, only slightly older, who is assigned to bring down whoever kills them.

And you just killed a junior clan member.

He was a thug, just starting his career and working for bad people you had to stop. But the Defete clan doesn't care why, they just know you took one of their own and now you must be killed. If you kill a 1st level Defete, a 2nd level comes looking for you, And when you kill that one, a 3rd level Defete is "activated." It's nothing personal, but it's going to haunt you until you finally face the 20th level grand master warrior of the Defete clan, whose identity is kept secret to all but the few 19th-level Defete warriors.

Doppelsword

Somewhere along the way, you picked up the curse of the doppelsword. Maybe you cheated a smith when ordering a weapon. Maybe you raided the temple of a god of war. Maybe you picked up a cursed pack of chewing gum. Whatever the cause, now you're cursed. But at first, you're not going to notice.

The doppelsword physically exists, in some museum, tomb or lost battlefield. But it can also be in a second place at once, making another weapon magical. Your curse makes you the target of that second sword. Any time you are attacked by sword-wielding foes, there's a 25% chance one becomes the avatar of the doppelsword. The appearance is always similar -- a bronze blade with black crosspiece and hilt, wreathed in flame, but the style of sword can vary. The doppelsword itself is a near-artifact weapon (+1 flaming burst, ghost touch, keen, wounding weapon of speed), but when its avatar manifests, it has only a +1 bonus for every 2 levels or hit dice of its wielder. Thus it might appear as a +1 flaming weapon in the hands of a 4th level warrior, or a +1 keen weapon of speed when used by a 10 HD giant. Once the sword's wielder is no longer fighting you, its sword returns to whatever it was before the doppelsword manifested.

The curse goes on until you find the doppelsword and destroy it or ask its forgiveness (if you know how the curse befell you). After that the doppelsword disappears to a new locale, and begins haunting a different target.

El Novia

You found her lying in an abandoned temple, dressed for a wedding but bloodied and nearly dead. You nursed her to health, listened to her story of betrayal, and heard her passionate plea for revenge. Maybe you helped her take down those who wronged her. Maybe you just took her to a place she could heal. Either way, you thought your dealings with her were over. She did need help, but her wild-eyed mania suggests she's not the sort of girl you want to get involved

with. Besides, and she's a kobold (or a Capulete, Black Wizard, Jet, werewolf, Scientologist -- whatever makes her socially inappropriate to your circle).

But now that her other business is done, she plans to marry you. Little things like species, religion, and gender don't matter to her. She's going to make you her life-mate, and there's no way of talking her out of it. In her eyes, you are already promised. And until you agree, she's going to make your life miserable. She won't actually harm others that you show kindness to; she's not evil. In fact, she may befriend them, to get to know you better. But she plans to be next to you, singing love songs, driving off potential competition, and trying to get you drunk enough to wed her, until you agree, or her fixation moves on. And that's not going to happen until someone else saves her . . .

Fool's Guild

They are a shadowy organization, with roots that tie to dark sorcerers, early organized crime, and bands of itinerant wandering entertainers. Once little more that a brotherhood of minstrels who used hand-signals to identify each other and pas notes about local laws (and comedy preferences), they have grown into a secret society that charges itself with keeping the world safe. Through comedy.

Part ninjas, part clowns, the Fool's Guild are a movement designed to keep common folk safe through two methods. First, any time an individual or group becomes so self-absorbed they forget the concerns of the lower class, the Fool's Guild takes them down a peg. The methods for doing this vary from spreading rumors and performing parodies to direct pranks designed to make the offenders look like fools, and thus gain some much-needed humility. Second, the Fool's Guild ensures that certain secrets Man Was Not Meant to Know are kept secret, by making popular fantasy fiction that features such secrets as truth. No one really believes there's an invisible map of a secret stash of Mason gold on the back of the Declaration of Independence, because the Fool's Guild made sure a popular movie featured exactly that.

You may have stumbled across the truth of one of the Guild's "secrets," or you may have just gotten too big for your britches. Either way, a Character Assassin is sent to ruin your good name, or at least drag it through the mud a bit. By carefully spinning what version of your history gets around, the assassin ensures anyone making a Gather Information check about you hears a story of your embarrassments before your successes (and it takes a check with a DC 5 higher than usual to figure out which is a more reliable version of the truth). As a result, you must argue against such a perception if you want to be taken seriously, which can be off-putting. When you make a Diplomacy check to establish the initial attitude of NPCs you meet, you must take a -5 penalty if you don't want them to think of you as a dolt. (On the other hand, you gain a +5 bonus to Bluff checks to seem incompetent.) And, of course, you suffer the occasional cream pie to the face in public.

The Fool's Guild has been doing this for centuries, and knows its way around both the media and practical jokes. They won't give up until either you show signs of losing your big headedness, or you give up on whatever "secret" you've stumbled across.

Gwordi

Gwordi is a minstrel group of demons and undead, dedicated to bringing their harsh message of doom and drum solos to the whole earth. And somehow, you've offended them. Perhaps you didn't realize when you complained about the sounds of cats mating that it was actually Gwordi tuning up. Maybe you summoned their drummer-elemental for a fight when they were playing a set. Maybe you just remind them of a harsh royal critic. Whatever the reason, they hate you.

But Gwordi can't just kill you -- that's not artistic. Driven by their bat-winged muse, they need you to suffer the fate of one of their lyrics. Drown in a sea of boiling blood, perhaps, or have your liver eaten by your pet (returned from the dead, of course). Though the members of Gwordi are powerful (select fiends and undead several CR higher than the campaign), they simply refuse to kill you unless it's in a mockery of their own death-doggerel lyrics. This often results in complex plots even their powers can just barely manage, and generally come with lots of foreshadowing.

Hyor, God of Slightly Unfair Contests

Hyor is the last existing deity of his pantheon (having arranged for the final confrontation that destroyed his brethren to slightly favor him). By overcoming dozens of foes in your career you've attracted his attention. As a result he wishes you to become his champion. This would mean additional power (any +3 LA or +4 LA template, such as half-celestial), but it would also mean your Patron god would want half of all battles you face from now on to be slightly unfair against you, resulting in his divine intervention ensuring the extra power doesn't compensate for what he arranges to aid half the foes you run in to.

If you refuse, Hyor takes the news poorly (like any snubbed god). Now he wants *all* your contests to be slightly unfair, to show you why you should work for him. And it's going to go on like this, until you manage to rig things against the god of uneven odds (embarrassing enough for him to leave you alone even if he remains undefeated), or manage to get his attention focused somewhere else.

Pyramid Review

Candamir: The First Settlers

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed by Klaus Teuber

Art by Tanja Donner

English translation & rules development by Guido Teuber, William Niebling, S. Coleman Carlton, Robert Carty, Will Niebling, & Pete Fenlon

Full-color boxed game with board, 49 wooden pieces (four sets of characters, discs, and victory point cubes in four colors & one six-sided die), four character boards, 48 exploration tiles, 12 potion tiles, eight equipment markers, four endurance markers, 16 experience markers, 90 resource and ingredient cards, 29 movement cards, 22 adventure cards, eight character cards, two card holders, & one shuffle cards board; $49

What does Hollywood do when one of its most popular franchises seems to run out of steam? They turn back the clock and do a prequel. The same trick seems to work in games. The Catan series hasn't stopped producing big dividends for Mayfair Games yet, but there's fertile ground further back in *Candamir: The First Settlers.*

You came to the island nation for a new life, but everything's gone wrong. The ship sank, everyone aboard barely dragged themselves to the shores of Catan, and you've but a precious few items to forge your new lives. By working together, you hope to tame the new world.

The object of the game is to be the first settler to place his tenth victory point cube on the board.

One half of the board is the wilds of your new home: a burgeoning settlement in the middle of grasslands, a river running through it, deep forest and imposing mountains on either side. The other half is a close-up of the village. The homes of your neighbors (well, four of them anyway) are shown, with a list of what supplies they want. Players are actually characters this time, with stats, possessions, and skills. Stats are used in challenges -- for example, to avoid a snake, roll a six-sided die and add it to your agility -- and equipment and experience hidden about the board combine to improve these. Skills let each character break the rules somehow, moving faster in forest, trading resources more profitably, and so on.

Each turn presents a choice: explore or "build and brew." In exploration, you scout out tiles on the board, select a space for your destination disk, and move there by drawing a card for each step. The movement cards show what lies in each direction. If the shortest route to your token runs afoul of a bear or other hazard, you must decide whether to go a less perilous (but more circuitous path) or brave the risk. Other spaces may be empty or contain valuable ingredients. Some arrows point to a question mark, indicating an exploit chosen from the face-up adventure cards beside the board (this deck is layered to offer tougher challenges as the game progresses). When you reach your disk, your travels bear fruit: If the space has a tile you collect the rewards listed on the back, and if it's one of the outlying camps you get a resource. You return to the village with these and other supplies gathered from killing wolves and such along the way.

In the settlement, you may "build and brew." Ingredients combine into potions that heal wounds, boost skills, or

inebriate your opponents. Resources create items like swords and chests for your neighbors, and these are the way to victory. Every time you forge a good, you place one of your victory point cubes on a corresponding square at a satisfied neighbor's house. They only want certain things at certain times (everything is arranged in ordered columns), but if you give enough to one person, they'll let you place an additional cube on their abode. If you place all your cubes first, you win.

Although the cards are a little thin (bad news for the movement deck, since it gets shuffled regularly), the usual European standards are otherwise followed. The board folds out (the individual Catan hexes go atop the board this time), and it packs a lot of serviceability into a small and manageable surface. The orderly arrangement and utility of the pieces and characters is an extension of the game's overall mechanical elegance.

The forms and functions of this product are a marvel, and that means a good time for the gamers who get hold of a copy. The movement cards require shuffling too often, and there's perhaps a little too much abstraction to the action (and man, by the endgame, *everyone* is trying to unload ore on you), but that allows players to concentrate on the fun parts. The strategy is limited to the play and not a lot of underlying machinations, keeping it firmly a trading game and not some sort of bloody economic warfare. It's simple to learn, it's easy to play, and there's an answer for pretty much any question. Are opponents too far ahead? Stem their movement with mead. Low on tiles? Camps and adventure cards offer more resources.

A fine follow-up in the Catan tradition, ***Candamir: The First Settlers*** (named after a homebuilder on the island who seems to be everywhere and constantly in need of assistance from one form of jeopardy or another) dovetails its elements nicely, and the overall result does not disappoint.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Oshi: the Game of Influence

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Tyler Bielman

Illustrated by Daniel Egneus

Nine-inch square wooden board, 16 plastic game pieces in two colors, & full-color rules; $24.95

Released just in time for Christmas 2005, *[Tsuro: Game of the Path](#)* marked WizKids' entry into the boardgame market, and despite being relatively light in terms of both skill and strategy, the game was both enjoyable and quick to play. It also looked, and felt, very good, and it was clear from the production values that WizKids were intent on giving us something that also looked good on your coffee table.

WizKids now follow this up with a second title aimed at the same spot in your living room. *Oshi: the Game of Influence* is like *Tsuro,* simple in scope, light in play, and possesses an oriental theme. Unlike *Tsuro,* it is strictly a two-player game. Unlike Tsuro, it is not as good looking. Unlike *Tsuro,* it is not as pleasing to the touch. Unlike *Tsuro,* it actually requires some thought, offering more depth in terms of strategy.

The theme for *Oshi: the Game of Influence is Chinese* rather than Japanese. In addition to giving the first Emperor of Japan the "sanshu no jungi," or Imperial Regalia, the Goddess Amaterasu gave him another gift, that of Wisdom. This was in the form of the game "Oshi," or "Push." What it taught the emperor was that influence was a power to be used cautiously because used unwisely it could lead to defeat.

Wizkids' *Oshi* models this concept with a chess-like variant in which the aim is not to take your opponent's pieces, but to force them off the edge of the board. To do this, each playing piece possesses a range and power over other nearby pieces that when brought to bear, can push them off the board. This is their influence.

The game consists of a wooden board marked with a nine-by-nine grid of squares and two sets of identical plastic playing pieces, one in white and the other in red. Each piece is sculpted to look like a Japanese pagoda. Each set consists of four pieces just one-story high, two two-story pieces, and two three-story pieces.

The height of each piece determines its ability, and thus its influence. A one-story piece can only move one square, a two-story piece just two squares, and the three-story three squares. As part of its move, a one-story piece can also push an opposing piece one square back; a two-story piece can push opposing pieces two squares back; and a three-story piece can push opposing pieces three squares back. On his turn, a player moves just one piece in an orthogonal, that is, not diagonal, direction.

Oshi sounds incredibly simple, and simply put, it is. Yet it is not simple to play. This is a game of push rather than push and shove, since once a player has executed a move and pushed an opposing piece back, his opponent cannot just reverse the move and push back. In this way, the obvious stalemate is avoided. Nor is *Oshi* a game of lightning strikes to expel an opposing piece; rather, each player marshals his forces in to a cohesive whole before the two blocs clash. Keeping each bloc together and staying away from the board's edge are the keys to winning.

Unfortunately, *Oshi* fails to live up to the high standards set by *Tsuro.* Once you get past the nicely done gatefold rules folder, the game is physically disappointing. The rules and the back cover of the box depicts an attractive wooden

board with beveled edges, but this is not what you get. Instead, the board is a plain slab of wood with the grid and starting positions marked on it. All of the playing pieces are of ordinary hard plastic that is nothing like the ivory style effect seen in the rules and on the back cover. The result is that **Oshi** feels and looks cheap, and unlike **Tsuro,** you would not want to display this game on your coffee table.

In terms of play, **Oshi** feels very similar to [**Abalone,**](#) a game that used marbles instead of plastic playing pieces, and was played over 61 holes arranged in a hexagon. Although play is slightly different, the principles are the same -- force an opponent's pieces (or marbles) from the board. And where the pieces in **Oshi** can move just four directions, in **Abalone,** pieces can maneuver and push in six directions.

I liked **Tsuro.** It was simple, very quick to play, pleasing to the touch, and fun. However, after seeing the high standard set by **Tsuro, Oshi** is a disappointment. However, its play is more tactical and more thoughtful. True, its play is more tactical and more thoughtful, much of that being due to the physical feel of the game, but really, **Oshi: the Game of Influence** fails to offer much in the way of depth and once tried offers little that demands repeat play.

--Matthew Pook

Support Your Local . . . Huh?

I'm going to play devil's advocate . . . and what better way to do so than with a nice massage?

Let's say that you're new in town, and you check out a friendly local bank to open an account. You discover that the bank only offers 0.2% interest on its accounts, but they make an effort to know the names of all their clients, they give everyone who walks through the door a nice massage, and, for customers of the bank, they give *really* good massages. You like everyone at the bank, and they like you.

Across the way, the internationally known GloboMoneyBankCorp offers impersonal service, will refer to you only by your designated number ("Enter and be processed, Customer 24601."), offers no special perks, and is cold and lifeless all to heck. But they do everything you expect a bank to do, and -- oh, yeah -- they offer 6.05% interest on their bank accounts.

Now, honest question: What would you do?

Would you give all your money to the friendly local bank? If you routinely keep $5,000 in the bank, that decision will cost you a few hundred bucks a year.

Do you give some of your money to the friendly local bank, but open an account at the impersonal, more fiscally rewarding bank? If so, what ratio do you divide your savings among? Again, a 50/50 mix of your $5,000 savings will still end up depriving you of over a hundred dollars a year.

Or do you just go ahead and put all your money in the account that will give you the best return on your money? And if you do, do you still go into the other bank and take advantage of that free back rub?

Of course, long-time readers (and those who're plugged into the comics or gaming world) probably recognize where I'm going here.

For years, there's been a general trend toward shouting, "Support your Friendly Local Game Shop!" (Most recently I've heard this from none other than **Wil Wheaton**.) The volume of this rallying cry seems to be in direct correlation to the danger that the Friendly Local Game Shop is in, compared to the health and prevalence of the alternatives: online stores, chain booksellers, and so on. But compare the situation with the FLGS to the bank example described earlier. Many of the advantages a FLGS offers are, like the bank's back rubs for those who walk through the door, available for anyone regardless of whether they spend money: the ability to browse through new products in person, the ability to chat with a customer-service person about new stuff, the ability to put a posting looking for gamers on the store's thumbtack board, and so on. (Whether or not this is an ethical use of the store's resources, I'll leave out of this column.) Many of the other benefits, like the middle-of-the-road bank example, can be realized by dividing funds between the FLGS and more frugal alternatives; if the game store only allows common gaming space for paying customers, then you can buy the cheap-o stuff from the store and save up the expensive purchases for some discounter's venue. (Again, I'm not saying whether this is right or wrong . . . merely that there's nothing against it in the rules of most places that I've seen.)

So -- and, once more, I note that I'm playing devil's advocate -- what is so special about the FLGS that it requires special protection?

One common argument that I often hear is, "If you don't support your FLGS, it may not be around when you need it." Of course, the converse is not necessarily true; you might spend all your money at the FLGS and they *still* won't be around a year later.

(Even worse is the conundrum presented to those with substandard FLGSes: Do you spend your money there in the hopes it will do better, or do you take your business elsewhere and help contribute to its overall decline?)

And, just so we're clear, we are talking real money here. Let's say you spend $500 a year on games at your local FLGS. (That's less than $10 a week, or one nice $40 game a month.) Now, let's say you have options of saving 20% on that budget. (I've seen discounts go as high as 30% or more, often with no sales tax, but 20% is a nice workable number.) That means you're spending $100 a year for the ability to use your FLGS. Is what the FLGS provides really worth that amount for the services it provides? [SHAMELESSPLUG] $100 would buy a *Pyramid* subscription for you and four of your best gaming buddies. [/SHAMELESSPLUG] It would go a long way toward a weekly mocha at the local coffee house, entitling you to use *their* premises for gaming. It would buy *more games,* for pity's sake!

Or, it could go toward supporting a store that may or may not be around in a year. And if they go away, then many of the perks you enjoyed -- service reps who know your name and can make recommendations, the ability to see new arrivals -- go away with them. (Now, for many folks there *may* be benefits: instant gratification, utilization of game space, or other perks that they've weighed in their mind and gone, "Yep; that's worth the extra percentage that I pay." But I wonder how large that target group is.)

I recently learned that the first editing "job" of my wife -- the internationally renowned supermodel line-editor Nikola Vrtis -- was helping her father with the photocopied newsletter of the local Commodore 64 club. See, back in the early days of the computer, hobbyists would get together and chat about various ideas, tips, and tricks with like-minded computer users.

For the most part, these computer clubs have all gone the way of the dodo, at least compared to their heyday (back when computer magazines had type-in-yourself programs included). Why? Is it because people didn't support the Commodore 64 enough? Is it because people didn't heed the warning calls and support their computer clubs enough? Or is it because alternate forces -- interest in different computers, the rise of the Internet -- led to the obsolescence of the humble Commodore 64 group?

Let's look at another example. If you're a fan of independent, classic, or old movies, the fact is that there has never been a better time to be such a cinema buff. Is this because like-minded film fanatics arose to the warnings that giant movieplexes were about to crush their beloved two-screen art-house theatres? Errr, no, not exactly; said cozy theatres were almost universally squashed like bugs on the windshield of capitalism. So why is this such a good time for film freaks? Because the home-theater revolution has enabled non-blockbusters to be viewed with better visuals, better sound, orders of magnitude more choice, and fewer uncomfortable seats and sticky floors than their cinematic counterparts. Likewise the rise of refrigeration made daily visits from the milkman a relic of a bygone era for most of the developed world, and the existence of Netflix has caused a drastic change in the video-rental landscape.

The fact remains, many FLGSes *are* in trouble (as is perhaps the very idea of the FLGS itself), and it's hard to stand fully behind a system of merely hoping people do something not in their best fiscal interest, for the hopes of some nebulous may-or-may-not-happen (or may-or-may-not-be-worth-it) benefit.

In my mind, having a demand for something that isn't being met by existing options tends to lead toward the creation of options that *do* fulfill those needs. For example, the traditional-model used bookstore has been under enormous financial pressures in recent years. However, there has been a new breed of super-used-bookstores (such as the national Half Price Books chain) that offer better selection, better prices, and a better atmosphere than most "traditional" used bookstores.

Again, playing devil's advocate, perhaps supporting the FLGS is the worst thing that can happen to gaming, in much the same way that clinging to the relic that was the two-screen movie house would have led only to a substandard movie-viewing experience. Perhaps there is Something Better lurking around the corner, only waiting to emerge should it becomes obvious that the traditional FLGS model is doomed.

("Like what?" you might ask. Well, darned if I know. But let's toss out an idea. Returning to our local-computer-group model discussed earlier, I note that taking half the money our hypothetical gamer saves -- $50 -- and pooling it with only a few similarly minded regional gamers should go a long way toward creating a self-sustaining gaming club and/or quarterly mini-conventions where gamers can socialize, network, learn new games, and do many of the nebulous things that we *wish* FLGSes would do now but may not be.)

Regardless, although I am a fan of FLGSes, I'm also a fan of providing food for the family, and I'm not a huge fan of spending money I don't have to for vague no-immediate-benefit reasons. (I'm also a poor example; owing to working within the industry for some capacity for over a decade, I haven't paid full retail for most of my geek gear in ages.) I've tried sifting through my brain for any other examples of industries or hobbies where customers are expected to act against their own self-interest in support of something that doesn't provide a concrete user benefit without much success; even places such as slot-car stores often offer access to its super-cool tracks, which is a concrete benefit for its users. And so, I ask: What would it take for more people -- including myself -- to feel good (emotionally, spiritually, fiscally) about supporting their FLGS?

Again, I'm just playing devil's advocate. And devil's advocate is one game where everyone knows the rules, but no one can agree on a winner.

--Steven Marsh

Dork Tower!

[Dork Tower!](#)

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

After-Action Report: My *HeroQuest* Game

"A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene . . .
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And make imaginary puissance;
Think when we talk of horses that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs I' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass . . ."
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry V,* Prologue, 4-32

Every time I've taken this column from the scribbles and scrawls behind my own GM screen it seems to go over well, so once more into the breach! This next Applied Suppressed Transmission, like the previous examples, summarizes my own RPG campaign in design and practice. This iteration, we went for an almost fully "character-driven" structure, and fell into Shakespearean tragedy. Whether that's good or bad is not for me to say, but everyone seemed to agree that although they wouldn't have done it that way again if they had it to do over, they didn't regret doing it one bit. So with that Hamlet-like assessment in mind, here's how my Shakespearean Dramaturgy Game played out.

We ran about 17 months this time, from August 2005 to January 2007, finishing up in a long Martin Luther King Day session. I started off with three players and added a fourth last fall when she moved to Chicago, playing as always for about four hours every Monday night that we could manage it. This time, it was Josh's turn to pick what we played, from a menu of choices that we'd mulled over toward the end of the last game. He wanted to take a shot at the Shakespearean Dramaturgy Game that I've been threatening to run ever since *HeroQuest* came out, so that's what we put together. But since we'd done a very GM-driven "mission structure" game last time, I wanted to let the players help not just shape their story but flavor the metaphysics. I decided to try a Lexicon game, which we ran for about six weeks ahead of time using some modifications. You can see for yourself that everyone ran out of steam a little before halfway through -- in future, I'll try even more blatant player bribery if I decide to build another Lexicon, because I think it's worth it. The great advantage to the Lexicon is that players get to "request" material for the game setting by inserting it into the Lexicon, and I get a more natural-seeming background of conflicting occult theory. Plus, everyone got to ponder and absorb some wacky Shakespearean occultism without the pressure of a direct game context.

"Whenas a lion's whelp shall, to himself unknown, without seeking find, and be embraced by a piece of tender air; and when from a stately cedar shall be lopped branches, which, being dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow: then shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be fortunate, and flourish in peace and plenty."
-- William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* V:iv:143

With the Lexicon underway, I dove into the questions of system and setting. I knew that I wanted to run this game as *HeroQuest,* since Gloranthan heroquesting is, essentially, dramaturgy -- changing the material world by ritual performance. But rather than ascend to the Hero Plane to re-enact the myths of Glorantha, my player characters would ascend to the Green Realm (a term I borrowed from Northrop Frye's study of Shakespeare's comedies) to re-enact Shakespeare's plays. Some plays or bits of plays already grant boons or change conditions on the ground (the Three Murderers Working is one I mentioned a lot in game); others need to be changed -- a happy ending for *Lear,* a triumphant return for Prospero, that kind of thing. (In retrospect, I should have put a little more skull sweat into firming up the still-nebulous heroquesting rules, and perhaps written one or two "rotes" as examples. But eventually, we worked it out.) Now, the only question was when to set the piece.

It couldn't be Shakespeare's time -- I wanted the "lost knowledge rediscovered" vibe. I put some thought into a Hollywood 1930s setting, complete with alchemically-ground camera lenses using quintessential silver nitrate film

stock, and we may yet use that setting if we play a sequel. But I decided to go with my first instinct and set the game in the 1750s, during the great rivalry between David Garrick's Drury Lane Theatre and Spranger Barry's Covent Garden. As I did more research (I got a huge boost of theatrical gossip from Mary Nash's biography of Susannah Cibber, *The Provok'd Wife*) I found more and more arcane hints: David Garrick built a temple to Shakespeare in his garden. He had been a wine merchant before suddenly revolutionizing Shakespearean acting with almost his first performance -- and like I need to tell you that Dionysos is both the god of wine and the founder of Greek theater. (Another actor, Charles Macklin, killed a man in a fight over a wig -- obviously a dramaturgically powerful prop.) Under the name Bacchus, Dionysos was also worshipped by the Hell-Fire Club -- so now I had my bad guys. I stirred in Madame Geneva, Saint-Germain, and everything else fine and good about the era of powdered wigs and knee-breeches, hid the good parts, and popped the rest into a handout. The stage was ready, it just needed actors.

"We will with some strange pastime solace them,
Such as the shortness of the time can shape;
For revels, dances, masks, and merry hours . . .
Away, away! No time shall be omitted,
That will betime, and may by us be fitted."
-- William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost,* IV:iii:324-329

In retrospect, it's not entirely my fault that the dramaturgy had such a steep learning curve. Faced with a game about the Shakespearean theatre, my players of course decided to play a cat-shaman and King of London Thieves, a cross-dressing spy for the French, and the second in line for the Manticore Throne of Britain. (Descended from Richard III. Really.) As a result, it was initially much easier for the PCs to get what they wanted by caper adventures, political string-pulling, and the occasional savage murder than by doing all the hard work of dramaturgy. Similarly, all three players had their own magics without dramaturgical help -- feline shamanism, Diana cultism, and being a great bloody manticore. Hence, there was plenty of action on the streets, which I can't say I objected to. I just popped open my *A to Z of Georgian London* (essentially a book version of this map) and went to town. We found that there's always a Rat Alley or Red Cross Street or something equally evocative just around the corner, and riffing on the names and churchyards gave a really great improv urban-fantasy vibe to the game and the setting. When all else failed, they could get chased by werewolves (of London, naturally).

But I made sure to dump one of the Three Caskets (from *The Merchant of Venice*) right in their lap, the Silver Casket of Comedy, which (I hinted strongly) was one of the artifacts created by the occult circle around Shakespeare to first open the way to the Green Realm. Eventually, the players (and I) figured out the magic -- they put on *Midsummer Night's Dream* as proxies for the "rude mechanicals," who get a gift of a purse from Duke Theseus at the end for their play. By clever dramaturgickal linkage, they turned that Green Realm purse into a real-world Patent Royal -- suddenly, they were the co-owners of the Drury Lane Theatre. An ambitious attempt to repair the Manticore Lord's conventional reputation by means of the "masque" from *The Tempest* backfired thanks to Hell-Fire Club sabotage, player perversity -- and a string of very unfortunately timed fumbles.

"Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind."
-- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest,* IV:i:147-155

This, looking back on it, was probably the point at which the Manticore decided to turn evil. I've never actually had a player decide to go over to the dark side, and we all talked it out on a meta-level once the danger became apparent to everyone. But you couldn't say it's not Shakespearean, and it added a good tragic arc to the game just as the PCs began to figure their way around the dramaturgy and start holding their own in the Green Realm. (I kept the Green Realm

denizens fairly weak, since the ***HeroQuest*** conflict systems aren't the most forgiving, and because I'm a firm believer in not penalizing players for doing what you want them to do.) They survived *A Comedy of Errors* and *Merchant of Venice* (having the Silver Chest helped a good bit there), although an attempt to denature the Manticore using *All's Well That Ends Well* ended, well, badly. They mounted a few more occult capers, decapitating the Hell-Fire Club, recovering the Golden Chest of Tragedy from under Bedlam, and stealing the [Alicorn](#) of Britain from its [Sonnet Guardian.](#)

By then the fourth player had joined the group, and she decided (huzzah) to play an actress-dramaturge (and Prosperpine cultist) of dubious loyalties. She provided much-needed dramaturgical muscle, and still more meta-game confusion. She worked for the Ministry, the shadowy agency of Men In Black Cloaks devoted to the Hanoverian Throne, who kept [severed heads](#) alive deep in the Tower of London and held the Lead Casket of History tightly in their grip. She started out play as a double agent, working with the PCs, and briefly became an erstwhile triple agent for the Manticore, until it all came down to the climax in the fifth act. The manticore PC, having seized control of Drury Lane, was planning to open the Pit of the Manticore using *[Titus Andronicus.](#)* But the other PCs had gotten ahold of a manuscript copy of *[Love's Labour's Won,](#)* and threatened to use its untapped powers of closure to remake the Green Realm themselves. The manticore couldn't hold back. Like his ancestor Richard III (whose curse the actress-dramaturge ritually put on him) he rode into a trap and went down under the purifying Alicorn and the arrows of Diana. Exeunt omnes, to a death march.

Next game is ***Truth & Justice***. And nobody is playing a manticore. And it's back to mission structure for a while. But man, any game where you get to recite Shakespeare for Hero Points -- that's a game worth playing.

A Mélange of Magical Creatures II

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

We have traveled [before](#) to the realms of the weird, in search of the strangest of the strange.

Underduck

"This bird must have confused earth primitive plainsmen more than any other marine creature. It is no wonder that many legends describe it as flying in a parallel or mirror world."
-- "History of Early Coastal Cultures" by Doctor Natius Flynn, Professor of Alternate Anthropology

The underduckdoes not, in itself, appear unusual. This species also migrates in flocks, builds nests, and lays eggs in reeds. The main feature that makes these aquatic avians stand out is that they do all this underwater. Underwater and upside down, to be exact. To them, the surface of the water is as solid as stone, except to its beak, which they use to hunt bugs that live on the surface. Sometimes they prey on small eels. Like a whale, the avian body requires the water pressure to maintain integrity. However, not being buoyant, they slowly "fall" to the surface. It uses the underside of the reeds, building nests upside down in reeds.

Encountered

These animals can be met in any campaign where the adventurers encounter the sea coast. Underducks migrate with the seasons as the surface cousins do.

These animals are classified as minor pests, sometimes damaging ropes as they eat the seaweed off them. They can cause nets to be "stuck," so many nets have a *repel avians* spell on them. It also keeps mundane sea birds away. If caught, the only way to take it out of the water is to put it in a pail or equivalent, then to let the water out through a small hole, or dump it on the deck.

Industrial Uses

"Whenever we take a noble to the crystal shoals, it seldom fails that the dignitary will spot the game birds, and draw a bow. He will suddenly look down and see extra 'reflections' in the water. Seeing that the ducks are closer, the noble will then discover that water is quite dense, and that it bends light."
-- Giles Teron, First mate of the fast rigger *The Gyrfalcon*

Coastal alchemists have discovered a variety of uses for underduck byproducts, ranging from water-repelling coats to shoes that let one walk under water, to a local popular sandwich. The most ambitious project to come out of this line of research is the tracked cargo vehicle that rolls under a lake to deliver cargo all year round. It would use wheels, but the waves offer a great hazard. One wizard claimed to have developed footwear that enabled one to walk on the ceiling, but by the time his colleagues arrived, his window was open, and the man was nowhere to be found.

Adventure: Follow Your Nose

In a freeport, word is out that a pirate captain has captured an underduck that migrated this way across a known "unnavigable" reef. He is preparing to set out when the season comes for ducks migrate back. A privateer captain hires the PCs to "relieve" the pirate of it, replacing it with a lookalike underduck. No matter whether the adventurers are successful or not, they are asked to come along on a mission to follow the path. The one fact the patron fails to

mention is that a *second* team was also hired to fulfill the same mission on the same night. GMs looking for a random timeline can roll 1d use the following table. The other party is in the middle of some sort of mayhem (perhaps they are just knocking out guards and more shouting will alert the remaining watch).

In any case, both groups get paid, and there should only be minor confusion regarding who has the right duck. If the GM likes, both groups could continue to challenge each other as they continue on the quest. Complications can exist in the fact that the duck in its water can weigh a lot. Carry too little water, and it will suffocate.

Underduck

Appearance: As a grey-brown duck.
Category: Avian
Diet: Omnivore
ST 2; **DX** 14; **IQ** 4; **HT** 14.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 3 ("Ground").
SM -2; 8 lbs; DR 2, 10 vs. electricity.
Traits: Acute Vision 1; Aquatic; Crushing Attack (1d, sonic); Extra Hit Points +1; Flight (Winged, "Underwater", "Air" Move); Peripheral Vision; Phobia: Claustrophobia (Enclosed spaces); Restricted Movement: Water's meniscus is as stone; Restricted Manipulators; Temperature Tolerance; Wild Animal.

Quantum Sheep

"Originally bred because of a princess that had problems with bad dreams keeping her awake. First, being in an age of prosperity, her mother, the Queen, declared that she should never use the same pillow twice. Since that did not cure the problem, she had her best mages make a self-sustaining supply of enchanted wool to help the princess to sleep. Upon her passing, the kingdom had a great surplus of magic wool, ensuring its prosperity for years to come. Of course, the feature the animals are now renowned for was not in the original designs, and not 'discovered' until much later.

"If you don't believe that, then the next most likely origin is that the sheep's predators were becoming smarter, and could count. Thus, by some fluke, they developed this ability, which became dominant in the survivors.

"I want an eight page essay on the origins of this animal on my desk by the end of next week."
-- Professor Alei Firkin, *History of Magical Garments* Chapter III.

Outwardly indistinguishable from ordinary sheep, these herbivores are highly valued in the magical textile industry. Demanding high prices, these creatures are hard to manage due to their special ability: counting 3 or more of these "slumber sheep" can cause a person to fall asleep (Save vs. Will or HT, whichever is higher for each sheep after the second). The range in yards at which a person is in danger is equal to the number of sheep squared.

A small variety of defenses have been developed over the years. A person is safe as long as one does not actually count the sheep. This can be enforced by hypnotism, a Geas spell, or a spell linked to blind the person if they start counting sheep. Spells that protect against gaze attacks also defend against this effect. In magic-poor areas, these sheep are usually shepherded by innumerate people, or solely by dogs.

Encountered

These mildly dangerous animals are normally kept in fenced pasture, away from the large highways. Some noble houses keep small flocks to tend lawns just outside the main house at night to keep thieves away. If the animals need to be counted, it can be done using a gate that turns a gear or drops a large seed into a jar, or with an innumerate person making marks on a paper for each sheep. It can be part of rural festivals to see how many one can count before succoming. Reproductions are safe, unless one uses psychometric powers to look backward (see page 78 of the ***Basic Set***).

Industrial Uses

"That's how the old joke worked: when a stranger entered the bar, and asked about the 'sleep sheep,' a patron would instead point them toward normal sheep . . . Normally after having a few drinks first, they would get frustrated, become convinced they are somehow immune, or just pass out on their own, and the sheep would eat their hat."
-- Tvold Bragden, recalling his experiences at the Sandman tavern

The primary use for the wool is as a base for enchantments, offering a discount on damage resistance for the wool itself, and on self-repair (see page 118 of ***Magic***). The wool also makes for great pillow, conveying the effects of the Deep Sleep advantage (see page 101 of the ***Basic Set***) and temporarily alleviating sleep-related disadvantages by one category (e.g., Nightmares (12) becomes (15) while such a pillow is used.) The most unusual use, suppressed by governments out of fear and embarrassment, is that of the offensive use of such sheep in times of war. A tale is whispered by infantrymen about a rout in which an entire flank was disabled by a huge flock of sheep cresting a hill. A cavalry charge by the enemy where the riders wore blinders to that side broke the lines and took the leaders.

Adventure: Counting Zzzs

The heroes need to delay a noble from attending a conference without injuring anyone. Their patron can supply modest numbers of quantum sheep to aid them in this endeavor. The sheep are to be deployed along the routes the noble is to take.

Quantum Sheep (a.k.a. Slumber Sheep)

Appearance: Sheep of mottled colors
Category: Mammal
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 12; **DX** 13; **IQ** 4; **HT** 15.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM 0; 200 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Affliction (Sleep) 1 (HT; Emanation; Malediction: Long-range (Limitation: Square root of (number of sheep) in yards); Sense-Based); Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Hooves; Quadruped; Temperature Tolerance 2; Weak Bite.

Temporal Beaver

"How does this wand find distortions? It was part of a beaver dam holding back the tides of darkness. That makes it attuned to the subtle changes in space-time. It did-will work, or so I told myself."
-- Professor Wen of the Department of Impossible History

Just as mundane beavers obstruct the flow of rivers to create ponds in which to build their homes, so do temporal beavers obstruct the flow of time into a pool, both physically and meta-physically. Using sticks and ceremonial magic to stake out and reinforce an area, time becomes placid and calm. In these pools of slower, more predictable time, these beavers move freely, easily dodging foes and enabling them to take the first choice of their foods.

Finally, like their cousins, they dislike the "sound" of ruptures in space-time and actively seek to silence them by damming them off. Teleporting mages are too fast, but longer-use gates are "in danger." Where such occur, soon a temporal beaver will arrive, and pile twigs over the portal, completing a ritual magic that stoppers the gate.

Encountered

If the PCs open lasting, or frequent gates, these animals can show up, and stop the magical effect. Heroes may also encounter a pile of twigs, and innocently cut through them, unleashing an unspeakable horde from another dimension (or location on this plane).

Well-meaning citizens concerned about the "time trap" inherent in the pool of time should beware: Being caught downstream of a broken dam is dangerous, with a person being hit with anywhere from 1d to 6d years of time all at once, depending on how old the dam was.

Some wizards have sought to make trained pets or familiars out of temporal beavers. This has met with mixed success as the animals have a strong instinct to seek out and close any planar instability in their proximity. While this is good for planar wardens and guards, the average experimenting wizard will be pressed between the benefits of an early warning, and the pile of sticks over his pentagram or faerie ring.

"Some places keep these animals in moats to warn them of impending problems! If they try to get in and pile sticks, let them! A hole in space or time is likely to open up!"
-- Note from the Department of Temporal Happenstance.

Industrial Uses

These creatures are rare or misidentified enough that they have not been caught in large numbers. A few speculated uses include using the pelts as clothes to protect against aging spells and washes of time, and using the tail to press food that becomes frozen in time. Finally, some hermits and oracles spend time in meditation in the beaver ponds. They claim the calmer waters give them a clearer view into the infinite. (A GM might allow a +1 on rolls to view another time.)

A few daring entrpreneurs have discovered a use for the pools of time. First, one places a barrel of newly-made wine, or a forgery next to beaver's home. From a distance, using magic or a long rope, one breaks the beaver dam. The rush of time can age the items without the signature of magic. Others have built a dam around structures to slow the time within, sometimes to slow monsters or the course of a poison.

Adventure: Time Heals All

To stop a horde of rampant evil creatures, an old man prescribes a cure: find and capture as many temporal beavers as possible, safely transport them to the portal at the heart of the evil, and protect them as they stopper the hole in space. Difficulties lie in safely transporting them, and protecting them from the evil horde while they scavenge for wood.

Temporal Beaver

Appearance: Small, brown herbivore.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 4; **DX** 12; **IQ** 4; **HT** 12.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -2; 20 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Amphibious; Detect (Time/Space Distortions, Precise); Breath Holding 5; Immunity (Time changes); Peripheral Vision; Semi-Upright; Temperature Tolerance 2; Wild Animal.
Skills: Survival (River)-13.
Knack: Control Gate (close only) and Suspend Enchantment (Gate only).

Lafamorphs

"There we were, on the trail of a wyvern that was poachin' cattle from the local farms. Then, I spotted movement to one side.

"Was only a pink rabbit. I moved quietly. It was then that a man behind me stepped on a twig. That branch snapped, piercing the quiet with such a sound that the hare darted across our path and into a tunnel. The warren must'a been

under our feet! No time to worry, because Jarne spotted the lizard coming this way! We ready our weapons, and look for cover. That pink bunny musta surprised the rest o' its kin, 'cause the next thing you knew, the ground shook, and we all felt the air burn a little. Lost a bit 'o me mustache. Anyway, we were moving toward the large beast at the time, and just before closing, a pink 'stone' shot through the air, hitting the drake on it head. While both were stunned, we took the opportunity to run the lizard through. Of course, the lord o' the land took its **head.***"*
-- Overheard in The Wyvern's Tail tavern

References to these pink rabbits date back to some of the earliest bestiaries, suggesting that they are either naturally occurring, or one of the first experiments at hybridization. The mammals generate a mild electric shock when startled. It is not enough to damage someone, but it is surprising if not expected. This effect can easily set off flammable materials.

Lafamorphs' warrens are typically built near the top of a hill, with straight runs leading down to a central chamber. From there, they have many twisting tunnels. The main tunnels to the antechamber are unusually straight, and through firing become hardened into coarse ceramics. Being small and straight, any rabbit, or other creature for that matter, will be launched a good distance in the air! The odd time that an extra large charge builds up, sometimes ceramic shards are accelerated as well.

Encountered

Often demanded as a familiar by young female mages, these creatures are seldom granted as a linked animal, but are not uncommon as pets, especially with the availability of Purify Air and No Smell collars. Despite the fire hazard, many pet owners eschew the collars for the slightly sweet smell of the rabbits' odor, provided that the pet is kept out of doors.

Industrial Uses

"Sure, they're cute, they stink, are frightened of loud noises, and get into everything. Despite that, this **rat***'s electric shock restarted my heart when I had a stroke. Now I won't part with him."*
-- Luis Fyid, gang member, recovering at a healer's after a stroke.

The nitrous oxide gas the rabbits emit is heavier than air, and thus easily captured for later use. In a fire, it enables a forge to burn hotter, and can also be used as an anesthetic. The critters' fire-resistant pelt is toxic, so mitts must be lined with a different fur on the inside. Some call packed lafamorph fur "asbestos," but this may be a misnomer. The tunnels of the warren become fired, and thus can serve as crude, yet thick ceramics, making for adequate piping for some purposes. Uses in Enchantments include Resist Fire, Stench, and Shocking Touch.

Adventure: Not to be Taken Seriously

The adventurers are invited to infiltrate an unusual cult to find out their plans regarding the small town they are passing through. Among other rituals, mundane and otherwise, the heroes will be expected to keep a poker face while holding a lafamorph and being told jokes. This may require several Will rolls . . .

Lafamorph

Appearance: Pink Rabbit
Category: Mammal
Diet: Herbivore
ST 4; **DX** 14; **IQ** 3; **HT** 15.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 7.25; Dodge 11; Move 8.
SM -4; 3-5 lbs; DR 15 (Sealed, Fire only), DR10 (Crushing, Head Only).
Traits: Acute Hearing 2; Domesticated (or Wild) Animal; Create 1 (Specific: NO2 gas, Always On, Uncontrollable); Filter Lungs; Innate Attack (1d, Emanation; Emergencies Only; Melee; Surge); Innate Attack (1d; Burn; Emanation;

Emergencies Only; Explosion; Melee); Night Vision 3; Peripheral Vision; Phobia (Brontophobia: loud noises); Quadruped; Resistant to Disease; Resistant to Poison; Sharp Claws.
Skills: Brawling-12; Stealth-14; Survival (Plains or woodlands).

Lightning Bugs

"I fell backward down the hill, clutching my arm. The bandit raised his sword to impale me, and charged down the hill. Just then, the wind shifted, and what appeared to be fireflies drifted in front of me. While my hair was on end, the bandit took a beating in crackling energy. Just after the bugs had passed, I pickup a dropped sword, and bade him surrender."
-- Kev Larsin, *The Battle of Widon Hill*

Some specimens of the creatures that are popularly called "lightning bugs" are not, in fact, insects, but a form of silicon-based life. As they pass through the air, they collect a strong static charge, which they use to deter and injure predators. When the bugs are angry, getting within 2 hexes of a swarm nets one a tingling feeling of an electric charge. Getting within 1 hex of a swarm nets one a stun effect, and 1d "shock" penalty in the next round. Entering the swarm gets one an attack of 1d electrical damage, with double the shock penalty for the next round. The Reach of metal weapons counts to shorten the range of this effect.

Encountered

These insects are primarily attracted to locations, objects, and trees that have been struck by lightning in the last month. A person who has used a lightning-related spell in the last day, or over 10 Air spells in the last week, might also find themselves attractive to these pests. Some cities have found that lightning bugs like flying through magnetic fields around power transmission lines, and are attracted to broadcast power sources from 10 times usable range.

"The only safe way to catch a swarm of lightning bugs is to use a metal butterfly net that is tethered to the ground by a wire. One must be sure to get them all in the net at the same time, otherwise the stragglers can cause muscle spasms."
-- Urfa Quirn, *Entymology of non-insects*

Industrial Uses

While some druids use lightning bugs to tell which trees have been struck by lightning, some TL5+2 cultures could use them as an early leap to semiconductors or advanced TL3+3 power storage devices (as per power cell, but the mass is the insulated plug at the top of a jar; the bugs inside can be incited to discharge by flipping a switch revealing a pheromone, or just by shaking it . . .)

Adventure

The entrance to a public place has become infested with several swarms of lightning bugs. The PCs must discover what attracted them, remove it, and then remove the bugs. Once the immediate threat is gone, they should try to find out who did it, and what the distraction allowed them to do.

Lightning Bugs (see swarms, page 461 of the *Basic Set*)

Appearance: Small grey to blue insect-like forms
Category: Silicon-based life.
Diet: Insectivore.
Treat as bees with double hit points, but the direct attack is 1d burn (surge)

Variant: Giant Lightning Bugs

ST 3; **DX** 12; **IQ** 2; **HT** 14.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 6.5; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM -2; 10 lbs; DR 2 (Sealed), DR 10 vs. Electric.
Traits: Breath Holding 1; Combat Reflexes; Innate Attack "Lightning" 2d (Aura; Burning; Emergencies Only; Extra Range; Surge); Peripheral Vision; Flight (Winged, Air Move 14); Quadruped; Resistant to Disease +8; Wild Animal.
Skills: Brawling-13.

Dream Spiders

"Just as we can build bridges between worlds, so can bridges be built between dreams. If enough bridges are built, we get a network, a web. Now what will be caught in these webs? Class?"
-- Professor Atwin, *Lectures on **Geography of the Mind***, 22nd Printing.

While some people sleep, they say they have connected with other people's dreams. There is debate whether a tether remains while a person is awake, whether daydreams are so connected. An unresolved question is how far the network reaches, how far geographically one can travel in dreams and leave messages.

Some also have claimed to have "stepped off" as they traveled the "blur" between dreamscapes. There, most recounted some form of winding connected tunnels. Wandering the outer surface of these tunnels is described as being semi-random, connecting spheres of dreamscapes. A few wizards have gone mad exploring these areas, but many reported seeing giant spiders.

Encountered

Dream spiders are only found on the webs between dreams, never entering the dreamscapes, or the web tunnels, themselves. Encountering one and not getting out of the way may cause one to be "nudged" by the spider back the way one came. Attacking it can cause the spider to cut the thread, weaving a new one.

Mages are the only ones to have reason to fear from dream spirits, and that's only if they are rude. Each night, make an IQ+Magery roll to wander into others' dreamscapes. Only Magery with Communication and Empathy is added to the roll. A critical failure means an encounter with a dream wasp, a Critical Success, an encounter with a dream spider. Most will not realize they have done so. The Dreaming skill would be very useful in this research (see p. B188).

Industrial Uses

"I resolve to crack the mystery of these so-called 'dream spiders,' and will not rest until we have a book on them."
-- The last public speech of Ytri Rulik, Adept of the Mind

The dream network could be used to connect dreamers over long distances, acting as a fast message service. The dreamscape could also be used to no good, should mages discover a way to tap a person's thoughts. If found in enough quantity, the dream silk can be used in lightweight armor, rope, and aircraft material. The carapace of the spiders can be used to make ultradense material, ultralight plate armor, and strong shields. This is all speculative, of course; as so far, few have claimed to bring anything out of the land of dreams. Being part of a dream network could also be a justification for such advantages as Racial Memory, Wild Talent, or even Mechanical Telepathy!

Adventure

A wizard claims to have discovered a way to bring back dream creatures. He will put a special variant of the Beacon spell on his apprentice, who will then

Combat in the Dreamlands

For a simple dream combat system, consider the following:

- Dream ST is equal to the user's Will.
- Damage is recalculated from Will instead of ST.
- FP remains the same, and is used instead of HP.
- Dream DX becomes Per.
- Dodge is Per / 2 + 3, modified as normal for mental advantages and disadvantages.
- Move is Will / 2.
- Dream HT becomes Will.

fall asleep. If and when he succeeds in achieving a state of lucid dreaming, and enter the web between dreams, he will activate it. At this signal, the master will open a gate to this dream world. There, the heroes are to kill a dream spider, signal the mission is done, and pull the body back. The catch is that they need to keep the apprentice near, who will be able to do nothing but concentrate on lucid dreaming, or calling for help. The heroes will be "translated" properly using normal attributes and skills. (If the apprentice is injured or distracted and wakes up, it will be nearly impossible to get back; the mage will have to fall sleep again, and then try to find the adventurers. Only then can the master get a gate to them.)

The Truth?

The truth is that the spiders are setting webs to catch creatures that devour peoples' dreams. These parasites typically take the form of large flying insects, such as wasps (see below). Unfortunately, encounters with these "wasps" are almost certainly fatal for the unprepared, so few have returned at all with any solid facts.

Complication: The heroes discover, after killing several dream spiders, that the creatures are essentially good and beneficial to humanity, performing a vital function by keeping dream parasites at bay. If the heroes have a sufficient conscience, they should be open to suggestions by clerics -- or other authorities on morality -- on how to atone for their evil deed and to right the wrong they did. Commence the next adventure in the realm between the dreamscapes . . .

- Attack rolls use any combat skill, based off of Perception.
- Combat costs dreamers FP instead of HP. At 0FP, the dreamer drops into a coma, which breaks when the subject reaches full FP.

"Will" in this section can be replaced with the Will-based Dreaming skill if one wishes. A Per-based Dreaming roll can also replace Per.

Dream Spider

Appearance: A huge insectoid predator.
Category: Dream Creature.
Diet: Dreamstuff.
ST 20; **DX** 15; **IQ** 4; **HT** 15.
Will 14; Per 14; Speed 8; Dodge 12; Move 8.
SM +1; 400 lbs; DR 4 (Sealed).
Traits: Binding (Webs: Sticky; Persistent); Catfall; Clinging (Web); Combat Reflexes; Enhanced Tracking 1; Extra Legs ×6 (Cannot Kick; Long); Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Sharp Teeth.
Skills: Area Knowledge (Its webs)-14, Climbing-16.

Dream Wasp

Appearance: Any flying or swimming creature, typically smaller than an average human.
Category: Dream Creature
Diet: Dreamstuff.
ST 6; **DX** 13; **IQ** 2; **HT** 12.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM -2; 8 lbs; DR 2 (Sealed).
Traits: Combat Reflexes; Extra Legs × 4 (Cannot Kick); Flight (Winged, Air Move 12); Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Toxic Attack (1d; Poison; Resistable, HT); Wild Animal.

In Nomine: These dream beings are simply ethereal spirits. They are currently neutral, but the followers of Nightmares have seen an upsurge in ethereals taking the shape of large spiders.

Zombie Trees

"Indeed, one could hardly tell that this was the site of one of the most grisly battles in this nation's history, fought less than two score years ago, save for the copses of corpse-trees growing here and there. They feed on death, and I wouldn't be surprised if some of the walking dead visit this place at night. In any case, soon the local chapter of Knights Rampant will be holding their semi-annual campout to surprise these visitors. And on your left . . ."
-- Tour of the Lington Downs

These deciduous trees are found to grow "naturally" in cemeteries, on battlefields, on sites of mass murders, and in other death-aspected areas. Its papery stark-white trunk is even paler than a birch tree, and its pale green leaves are distinguishable as they turn bright red in fall. Also called "corpse trees," they have a very bad reputation as harbingers of evil, and the sight of one tree alone is considered an ill omen by many.

Because of this, they feature prominently in ghost stories and urban legends. They say watering the zombie tree with blood doubles its growth rate and if its fruit are planted in graves, they cause the dead to reanimate! In addition, hearsay says these trees cause children to injure themselves a block away.

Encountered

These trees are banned in some areas, while other governments move and sequester any such plants into secure orchards. Monopolizing the official supply of this plant gives them an edge against undead: obey us, or die as criminals. A few vampires have discovered that a zombie tree stake run through a vampire's heart will cause a seeming of "death," but instead will be in suspended animation, and unhurt, other than the actual (non-vital) impaling damage until the stake decays or is removed. Some rumors indicate that implanting or ingesting the pale wood could grant an undead super powers.

Industrial Uses

"Giving a man a 'last cigarette' made from the leaves of this plant almost guarantees they return as a revenant to finish whatever obsessions they have.

"But no one actually believes in that voodoo stuff, right?"
-- Last diary entry of Judge Traigman just before sentencing the Raith brothers to be hanged.

The truth that few realize is *why* these trees actually do draw necromantic energy out of the environment, and collect it. It is so that the elements can be collected and destroyed along with the evil energy. If this were done, the amount of positive energy in the world would increase slowly, making it harder and harder for undead to exist.

Some undead (and other afflicted souls) claim that smoking these leaves helps put off the cravings for human blood, counting as a daily dose. In *GURPS* terms, it is likely to be just as restricted as blood, so a regular supply can count as a mitigator with a secret . . .

Adventure

The PCs are contracted to remove a zombie tree and to "dispose of it such that every piece is burned." As they prepare to cut it down and dig it up, they are approached by several agents independently, each seeking to acquire parts of it. Some offer cash, others offer chances to meet people, yet others appeal to their sense of mercy to help innocent victims of an undead curse keep from menacing the populace while they look for a cure. In any case, the slighted parties will not be amused if they are denied. Some will even negotiate for the entire tree, intact!

Zombie Tree

Appearance: White-barked tree with pale green leaves.
Category: Plant
Diet: Photovore

Common Threads

With the proper alchemical distillation technique, the "essence" of almost any magical creatures can be extracted and made into an elixir (ointment or powder, see page 213 of ***Magic***). This could be applied to the skin or dried and mixed with a combustible to function as a cigarette or incense.

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. There can be fish that look like birds, and sheep could exist that emit sleep drugs that only take effect after a certain concentration. The temporal beaver could be a hoax, and rabbits with piezoelectric charges can emit nitrous oxide. People can dream similar things, and once the tale of one creature gets out, others can report to have seen it, especially a creature as universal as a spider. In the native traditions of some countries, there are herbs that can make a body seem to be dead to the untrained eye. Social undeath can be ritually caused by someone wakened from this state . . .

* * *

Many thanks to my beloved for the introduction to the creatures of her nightmares, as well as all those on sjgames.pyramid who applauded the last exposition of fantastic creatures.

Special thanks to Bevan Thomas and Christoph Sticherling for their expertise in necromany, explosives, and temporal happenstance which allowed them to make time to help corral and catalog these critters.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Transelven Space

or, Space: 999

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

Beginnings

It was a well-guarded secret that the elves had developed a working space drive centuries -- if not millennia -- ago. Always launching at night, keeping the labs and workshops deep in their territory, their missions were not known to the rest of the world. The elven space program was changed forever when a diplomatic mission involving the elven Prince was shot down and had to make an emergency landing in the center of the largest human kingdom in broad daylight during an international trade conference. The secret was out. The release of the Prince was quick and cordial, while diplomats stalled as top researchers raced to examine his crew and ship. Meanwhile, a security fiasco leaked the human's findings regarding the Wheel, the key to space flight, to all the other major powers. Thus began a worldwide race for space.

While the elves were the first to break the bonds of *terra firma,* they warned the humans that there are terrors Beyond and that it should not be taken lightly. The elves decided not to share maps to slow the humans' exploration, hoping that mankind would listen to reason. Considering the elves to be trying to scare them with fire side stories, the human nations raced onward to the stars. The perceived insult only encouraged mankind to send cheap, manned probes as far as they could in space. Aghast at the humans' bravado, they had not told the men exactly *why* the elven designs employ stealth. The nations had always assumed it was against being detected by men. The fools. The aliens now knew Terrans were moving amid the spheres . . . As probes were being destroyed in the inner and outer system, a few of the wiser nations approached the elves, and begged them for advice, allowing them to set a council to coordinate space research and efforts. The elven translation of the council name is the Necessary Advisory Space Authority. The elder race accepted this as it gave them some influence over the reckless humans.

"Technology"

The elves claim to have invented the "Wheel" propulsion system that makes modern space travel possible. The "Wheel" is the helm of modern space craft. It requires Magery 0 to operate the vessel, and the level of Magery is a bonus to skill rolls to pilot the spacedrive and maintain the device. The most advanced Elven ships use Moon Dust as fuel, Jovian rocks as anti-ballast in the upper deck, and are ornately decorated. Modern "Age of Prosperity" researchers are beginning to date their discoveries and some disagree with the claim that the elves were the first to invent the device.

The Wheel is a high-impulse, low-maneuverability drive. It has such poor handling that to perform fancy maneuvering requires landing in water. Landing on land is a slightly awkward action, but it certainly eases maintenance, access, and transfer of goods. It is certainly in genre to hold

Glossary

- **Age of Prosperity:** A vague term used liberally to define a prior "Golden Age" for other planets in the Solar System when a species develops space travel.
- **Glacial:** Ice-based quasi-elementals invading from the outer reaches of the solar system.
- **Lift Rock:** An anti-gravity substance that keeps the continents of the gas giants aloft. It is mined and refined as anti-ballast in modern ships.
- **Luminal:** Fire-based quasi-elementals invading from the Sun.
- **Moon Crystal:** An artificial gem made from Moon Dust in zero gravity. It can enhance golem cognitive ability. The larger the crystal, the greater the boost.

boarding actions while two vessels descend into the atmosphere. A large rowboat or skiff was found to be the smallest size vessel possible that one can outfit with a "Wheel," with no maximum dicovered as of yet.

- Couriers and raiders can get as far as 1 AU per week (0.14 AU per day)
- Typical warships and merchants can travel 1 AU every 2 weeks (0.07 AU per day)
- Colonial vessels and long haulers can reach 1 AU every 4 weeks (0.04 AU per day)

For ships, see p. SW102, page 464 of the **Basic Set,** and **GURPS Fantasy,** page 142. A simple conversion rule to fine the speed in millions of miles per day is to take the ship's speed in miles per hour, and divide it by two. (For example, 10mph becomes 5 million miles per day.) One million miles per day is about 0.01 AU per day. Actual speeds will vary by ± 10% for age and quality of the model and individual ship. Many messenger vessels ply the space ways as there is no instantaneous communcation between spheres.

> **Moon Dust:** Magic-rich dust originally found by refining megatons of lunar regolith used to power space ships. It was recently discovered that unrefined dust from the Great Red Spot holds the same properties.
> - **Moonraker Pike:** A ballista pike fastened above the skyscraper sail to protect the crow's nest.
> - **Strake:** Armor for the whole ship. A magical protective shield, it extends protection over the entire vessel, including rigging, masts, and open deck.
> - **Wheel:** Magical control for a space ship.

Example distances 01 Jan 999
(calculated with NASA's [Horizons](#))

Earth-Moon   0.0024 AU
Earth-Venus   0.627 AU
Earth-Mars   2.37 AU
Earth-Jupiter 6.22 AU

In addition to propulsion, elven artificers lay claim to designing modern ship armor, called "strake." It protects the entire vessel with DR1 or more and keeps in air. The only downside is that it impedes all fast motion through it. Thus archers must place their lead hands outside to fire unimpeded. Basic cargo ships have DR1, couriers and trade ships have DR2, and warships have DR3+. Each point of strake DR also stops 1 rad/s. This encourages the use of swords and bows in boarding actions.

Solar System

This setting assumes a generally "cinematic" lens is on, each asteroid has at least 0.1G. In general, objects as small as mile-wide asteroids have normal air pressure, although space has "thin" pressure (see page 429 of the **Basic Set** and page 137 of **Compendium II**). This means that unpowered ships do slow to a halt, and then drift with the solar wind. The temperature in the "vacuum" of space is -40°F. Solar wind brings mana, but also "mana sickness" (see radiation, page 435). Although the long-term sickness (and genetic damage) it causes can be cured with magic, and HP lost must be healed by rest.

Terra

Terran nobles are beginning an unspoken contest about who can import the largest floating island from the gas giants. Some Terran nations are building floating air facilities out of imported rocks. Few forces can directly harm such floating fortresses. Each country has launch facilities as close as possible to the equator to save time on launch (but see "Beanstalk," below).

Terran Orbit

Terran orbit is starting to become crowded with fortresses and factories, and the Terran countries have had many armed conflicts. The difference comes in when an invader stops by to cause trouble, be they pirates, or the alien Luminals or Glacials (see below). Only then can human prejudices possibly disappear, at least for the duration of the conflict.

Luna

The moon actually rotates, but it is half-covered in black "soot." This residue is suspected to have originated in the destruction of the Fifth Planet (see Asteroids, below). This soot causes the immediate area to be any kind of higher aspected mana. Thus there is a growing industry that continually sifts through the regolith for "Very High" mana dust. Machines must go through thousands of tons of regolith to obtain a handful of "Moon Dust." Despite the abundance of fuel, there are relatively few port facilities due to the difficulty of defending them. This may change with the completion of some new artillery in the near future, but nations often fail to come to each other's aid. The permanent settlement, "Startown," is built on the North pole, so that the magistrate can always signal a base orbiting Terra.

Sun

Mission Control for the Luminals (see below). The surface is very hot, perhaps 200°F.

Mercury

This planet appears to be tide-locked with the Sun. The side continually facing the Sun is quite hot (120°F/50°C), and the dark side is quite cold (-4°Fz, making the respective territories perfect for colonies of the Luminals and Glacials, respectively. In the twilight region is a green band with a lush ecosystem that is often torn in places as the war between Lumiunals and Glacials damages regions. The ecosystem adapts quickly and regrows to recover from the damage, but it is losing overall. There is some evidence that Mercury was once a larger garden world, but its "life zone" was removed, and the planet's rotation was stopped.

Venus

Vast stands of trees reach into the clouds in the temperate and tropical zones of this jungle planet. Between the tall trunks are low plains. This trend is reversed in the colder latitudes, with the occasional stand of trees. There are traces of an ancient civilization, with many scarred ruins seemingly at random, some under huge, ancient trees. Toward newcomers, the indigenous halflings are shy, the centaurs, stoic, and the giants and minotaurs are hostile. The port of Aphrodite is a small trade center in a clearing made by a meteorite. It is built as a fort to protect it against frequent raids by giants and minotaurs. There is evidence of an ancient city under the settlement, but no entrance has yet been found. The settlement is adjacent to a large plain controlled by a powerful tribe of centaurs. See Races, below.

Mars

There are many ruins of a different, but not completely dissimilar, ancient civilization on this rusty desert planet. These settlements are often buried under sand or contemporary settlements. Local legends and elven lore indicate that Mars was once green and lush, but an ancient war shattered the ecosystem. The goblinoid races are currently rebuilding their civilizations, but are slowed down by the reptile men at every turn. The largest spaceport, dubbed "Ares," is an extension of the largest goblin city. The current landing areas appear to be over the ruins of an ancient spaceport. The site was selected because it was flat, non-arable land. See Races, below. See also *GURPS Mars*' "Dying Mars," replacing the races presented therein with the fantasy races above.

Moons: Phobos is unremarkable. Deimos has traces of prior habitation, including an anchor for a beanstalk.

Asteroid Belt/"The Fifth Planet"

The belt is a wide area, with enough room for everyone, and is too big for any one group to claim or patrol. There is a growing industry mining valuable ores. The more cautious and timid groups tow objects back to Terra, Mars, or Callisto for dissection in safety. Several armageddon cults are based here, and seek to bring destruction to other habited worlds. Evidence suggests that the asteroid belt was once a high-mana planet, creatively called the Fifth Planet. Ever so rarely is an artifact found, often part of a furnace or a wall. This spurs a fine inspection of the region, rarely netting anything new.

Jupiter

This majestic planet has many features. Landing on its main ring can offer an observer a great view of the floating continents below, and the Jovian moons above, especially the four largest (see *Gallilean Moons*, below). Most of the floating continents are as large as any found on Terra, but some are as small as a house. The land masses float at a variety of altitudes, based on the ratio of "lift rock" in them. This causes a certain amount of antigravity lift, causing the mass to naturally float to a certain altitude. If one tries to move it up or down from this point, it feels just as heavy as solid rock. Experiments show that the rocks also keep a certain altitude on Terra, although the math and ratios are not yet understood. The refining of this mineral is an important aspect of ship construction, but quickly dooms the island to fall to the deep clouds of Jupiter. Thus as the ore is extracted, it is kept on the island until all the machinery is removed, as once it goes, the island plummets.

The Great Red Spot is where the most concentrated mining efforts are, despite it being three times larger than Terra. The best research indicates that this is where the core of the Fifth Planet fell when that world was destroyed (see above). The red dust is a Very High mana compound very similar to that found in minute quantities in the lunar regolith, but it is very risky to try to harvest it from the storm. It is still attractive, despite the distance, as this is pure, and needs no refining.

Radiating its own heat, Jupiter's air is warm and dry. Despite this, there are rain storms at high altitudes. The tops of most rocks are covered in plant life and soil. Habited regions tow and anchor islands together, and link them with ramps and bridges. No one is sure where the occasional new island appears from, but they appear to surface from the Deeper altitudes, bare and without greenery. Descent into Jupiter will mean that the air pressure will soon become Dense (see page 429 of the *Basic Set* and page 137 *Compendium II*).

Gallilean Moons

Io: This volcanically active moon is the farthest stronghold of the Luminal people. They fiercely guard its airspace. As the geography changes quickly, there is little known about this moon today.

Ganymede: This moon is complicated. For some unknown reason, its seas are inhabited by a variety of war-like aquatic creatures. The Glacials claim its surface, but cannot control its watery resources. The aquatic combatants fight equally against each other as they undermine the Glacial facilities. Terran forces have been trying to contact the aquatic races, but have barely been able to identify them (see Races, below).

Europa: This body is the little sister to Ganymede in most respects, including the smaller-scale war within it.

Callisto: The outermost of the major Jovian moons is a lonely planet without life or unusually abundant resources to call its own. It is, however, the only safe place in the Jovian system for Terran nations to build supply outposts, however. From here, protected convoys escort vessels to and from the floating islands below. Although Jupiter's Main Ring is inside the orbits of the major moons, it is too hard to defend.

Saturn

The second-largest gas giant in the solar system has a composition similar to that of Jupiter, but the rings have many levels and can be inhabited.

Titan: The moon of Titan has an ecosystem. It is the farthest body out that has recognizable life. Thus, it is the farthest Terran colony on a rocky biosphere. It is the last staging ground for exploration (or invasion) of the outer system. A well-fortified multinational outpost is under construction. Alone together, away from Terra, these settlers fear a common foe from the deep.

Uranus and Neptune

These two brothers share features similar to those of Saturn and Jupiter, but their floating islands are mostly composed of ice. The temperature at "normal" pressure is on average 20°F, and drops to -75°F at "Dense." There is no life here as Terrans know it (but see Races, below).

Triton: The Neptunian moon, Triton, has a tundra ecosystem, populated with penguins, polar bears, and other anachronistic animals. The average temperature is about freezing 32°F.

Pluto

There is some evidence that Pluto was once a larger garden world, but its "life zone" was removed, and the planet was split in twain -- Charon is only half the diameter of Pluto. Today it is a last resting place for many creatures, a dumping ground for abominations that cannot be destroyed. The "cemetery-zoo" is spread across the opposing faces of Pluto and Charon (e.g., the sides away from the tide-locked hemispheres). The Glacials taunt fate by stealing life from sleeping immortals to fuel ships (see Races, below). It is a pressing question among philosophers as to who placed these creatures on Pluto. The elves have evidence that they have added to the collection, but cannot prove that they laid all these cryonauts to rest. That said, not all are immortal abominations, some are self-imposed exiles, and others are prisoners.

Beyond Pluto

No Terrans have explored this far out. There do not seem to be unusual levels of mana nor much light. Discovery of a garden world out here, a "Planet X," could certainly change opinions, however. Using a modern astronomical chart, heroes could explore objects unknown in the previous centuries, such as [136199 Eris](a.k.a. "Xena").

Dramatis Personae

The Call to Adventure is strong, and almost any character could arise to leave the safety of Terra. Soldiers, prospectors, and housewives could each be doing their national duty, on the run, or just sick of their neighbors. Any standard fantasy race could be seen, be they elf, dwarf, or halfling. Apart from the starfaring Terrans, the humanoids on Mars and Venus are found in modest numbers on Terra, but the Terran and foreign groups have no memory of each other.

Other Terrans

Terran industry is making and ever increasing use of golems. While the most basic golems are unimaginative, humans have "reinvented" the golem, allowing increased levels of intelligence through Moon Crystals. The larger and more complex the crystal, and the less specific the orders, the more adaptive it is. The most recent models seem to be alive, and some claim to be self-aware. There is much debate regarding the nature of Artifice Intelligence. Human researchers have also replicated the elven technique to store the spirit of a (usually) willing individual in a golem. These "ghosts" need not eat or breathe. The most complicated procedures use the Simulacrum spell to make a seemingly-organic form.

Beyond Artifice Intelligence, a GM may wish to play up the local biomods and cybermods with some cyberpunk tools and Gene-weaving spells. Thus, Terrans of all sorts can have mana-powered implants, human and animal-aspected bio-implants, self-powered sensing and communication items, spell wands, and biological-bodied Artifice

Intelligences. Life on Terra can be a typical fantasy setting, or possible rebuilt using a Transhuman culture, with tiny permanent Gateways to send messages and people instantly across any distance. Dream nets could connect sleeping people together in communal Virtual Kingdoms over almost any distance on the planet.

Neighbor Races

All the races found on Terra's sister planets of Mars and Venus are also found in relatively small numbers on Terra. Philosophers ask how this is possible. Some point to teleport failures, others to massive banestorms. The most recent theory gaining popularity is that some "Age of Prosperity" ships visited the three worlds, and stranded the passengers -- or their crew. Martian Races include goblins, hobgoblins, kobolds, reptile men (see Gabrook, page 21 of **GURPS Banestorm**). Venusian Races can include centaurs, halflings, minotaurs, giants (see Lorn'dil, page 22). The aquatic races under Ganymede and Europa may be from Olokun (page 22). See also **GURPS Fantasy**, pp. 106-111.

Alien Races (See The End for Templates and Secrets)

Luminals

It is certain that these fiery beings started their exploration of space from the Sun. They have permanent cities on the Sun, Io, and the hot side of Mercury. Whether or not they actually evolved on the Sun, or simply chose it as their arrival point in the system is a matter of hot debate. Their ships are shaped like flaming birds and manta rays. Unproved rumors include: "to kill a Luminal, drop a bucket of water on it" (*False*). "Luminals cannot stand the dark" (*partly true* -- they dislike absolute dark).

Glacials

It is suspected that these beings of living ice originated their exploration from Neptune. They also have permanent cities on Uranus, Pluto, Ganymede, and the dark side of Mercury. While their most advanced settlements appear to be in the floating ice islands of Neptune, it is uncertain if they are native to the planet. Instead of eating food, a Glacial must absorb a similar amount of water. Terrible stories abound regarding Glacials absorbing victims' fluids. Their ships are shaped like silvery crystal fish. When confronted with food and drink, Glacials may try to eat and drink it, and become confused when they cannot. Unproved rumors include: "Glacials are immune to gaze attacks" (*False*), "Glacials are unusually vulnerable to sound" (*False*).

Adventure Seeds

Fe Fi Fo Fum: The alchemist Ythtic has started to grow a large plant with the intent of growing it into orbit. This "beanstalk" absorbs sunlight and a special nutrient bath, gaining miles of height every day. The researcher has built an enchantment into the plant such that one will transport from one end to the other with no additional energy cost. The large amounts of energy are stored in the plant. With every day's sunlight, the plant grows taller, and different organizations grow more nervous. There are many questions on people's minds, such as "What would happen if the plant should fall, or worse, succeed?"

Spin Around the Black: A courier ship needs testing of a new Wheel drive. It has the latest improved maneuvering engines using wind creation spells at the Jet Propulsion Laboratories. The new design needs some shaking down. The path is a simple swing around some asteroids at a Trojan point. Engineer and Pilot characters will have a chance to shine. The trip itself involves some minor breakdowns, with a major one at the farthest point. While the engine is down, the group is ambushed by some pirates! At some point, the patron will reveal that she has *stolen* the ship, but is not a pirate. She works for a rival corporation. They may be able to save the ship, but can they save themselves?

Raiders of the Lost, um, Ark: An archaeologist finds some ruins which he claims were once a large precursor space ship. He claims that the ship is of goblin or halfling ships design because the crew stations are all less than five feet in height. On the bridge can be found intact Moon Crystals. Were the crew simply short LAI golems? What weapons and

wealth might be aboard?

Extra Spice: A junior military officer from an antagonistic military loudly claims the wreck in the name of his government. He is proficient in loud speeches, and will certainly hamper any PC efforts as he can.

Sleeping King: The heroes are sent to recover someone who has become the last heir to a crown, currently asleep on Pluto. The adventurers will have to contend with competitors who are willing to risk detection by the Glacial bases on Charon. An issue that did not occur to the Patron is whether or not the heir wants the job after all these years.

Baby (Monster) on Board: The adventurers pick up some semi-valuable ore as a consolation cargo. During the flight, a baby void beast hatches (ST 15, Bite: 1d (imp), see the end). It senses the strake shield as a solid barrier, and will lunge at any warm body that gets in its way.

Extra Spice: At the last moment, a GM could choose to have the beast bond to the least likely PC, as a source of roleplaying tension.

Asteroid Mining: The PCs are to help a small group of prospectors out on the Main Belt. Aside from cultist squatters, claim jumpers, pirates, and alien invaders, they must be alert for the slim chance of untold treasures being found in the asteroids, as such would certainly carry a price.

Island Hopping: A Great Red Spot mining station on Jupiter was soon to be threatened by a new floating island. The PCs' patron has dispatched a team to quickly mine and "drop" the island so that it misses the outpost. The team has not reported back nor finished their mission. The adventurers' mission is twofold. The primary goal is to change the course of the island, preferably by mining some Lift Rock. This will save many lives. The secondary goal is to rescue the men from the first mission. The heroes find the area quiet. After the crew debarks, and explores a cave, tentacles reach out and try to kill them! Damaging the tunnel tentacles in any way will reveal that the veins of the creature are heavy in Lift Rock!

Follow-Up: Millionaires have been bringing new islands to Terra. The bare ones are ready to be renovated . . . The race to Terra can be as fast or slow as necessary.

Hot Pursuit: A rebel Luminal scientist wants to defect. The heroes have been chosen for their reputation, disposability, and so on, as they will be beset by Glacials, Luminals, and other nations . . .

The Thin Blue Line: Terran forces have been trying to contact the aquatic races on Ganymede and Europa, but have barely been able to identify them. The heroes are given underwater gear in magical cities and equipment. The group must sneak past enemy lines and contact aquatic allies. The first challenge is to find them.

Cogito Ergo Sum: After leaving a small outposts, the adventurers discover a stowaway on board. It is a golem with an expensive-looking artificial body. It seems to trust the PCs, and confesses that it is a golem on the run. The next port the ship arrives at is all abuzz about a huge reward for a certain unarmed golem, returned intact. Can the fugitive trust the PCs now? After all, they're only human (probably).

Alien Secrets and Templates for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

Glacials

The Glacials are the last survivors of Pluto, who took these icy forms to escape to the depths of Neptune. Later, the first exploration of Pluto is instinctive, but their origin has been forgotten, even by themselves. Their reputation is largely undeserved. It started due to a well-publicized survivor of a raid witnessing some starving Glacials feeding . . . Few individuals have "normal" Magery. Many have Magic Resistance, and a few have Magery 0.

Appearance: A sharp-looking slender golem made of ice.
Category: Elemental-kin, ice.

Diet: water.
ST 15; *DX* 8; *IQ* 10; *HT* 12.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5.
SM 0; 400 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Body of Ice; Dark Vision 5 (Shifted); Infravision; Pressure Support 2; Reputation -3 ("Eats Sentients"); Unaging (Accessibility: temperature colder than -40°F); Very Fat.
Notes: Few Glacials actually have "Phobia (fire)," but all are generally aware of their weakness, unless they are Overconfident.

Luminal

The Luminals have a complex caste system. The most militant are the dominant, warrior caste. The few researchers, poets, thinkers, and meek construction crews rarely leave fortified bases. Most individuals have Magic Resistance, and the rest have Magery 0, or rarely, Magery 1+.

Appearance: Glowing humanoids with fiery orbs for eyes.
Category: Elemental-kin, Fire.
Diet: Thermovore.
ST 8; *DX* 9; *IQ* 10; *HT* 11.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5.
SM 0; 130 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Body of Fire; Bright Vision 5 (Shifted); Perk (Feature: Flashlight); Pressure Support 2; Spectrum Vision; Unaging (Accessibility: temperature hotter than 175°F)
Notes: Few Luminals actually have "Phobia (water)," but all are generally aware of their weakness, unless they are Overconfident."

Void Beast

Appearance: A Dark-grey manta-like creature with a prehensile tail.
Category: Space monster.
Diet: heroes.
ST 40; *DX* 12; *IQ* 2; *HT* 12.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6 (Ground).
SM +3; 4 tons; DR 5.
Traits: Chameleon 3; Flight (Space Move 12); Enhanced Move 10 (Space Move 12,288 y/s or 0.6 million miles per day); Ichythoid; Metabolism Control 10; Teeth (Fangs: Impaling).
Features: Native Pressure: Thin; Native Temperature: -40°F
Skills: Stealth-13.
Notes: Must match speeds to attack with "normal" Flight.

Variants

Transhuman Space

Most of the Transhuman Space books can be used whole cloth, provided that the GM make the conversion of terms such as Moon Dust for helium-3, Moon Crystals for computers, golems for cybershells and ghosts for Ghosts.

Gritty

To become more gritty, the ships can colonies all are now fully enclosed. Life support is provided by "air rock" and heat exchangers. Space combat is by grappling and boarding. Ignore the "Recommended physics" under *Solar System*.

Biography

GURPS

- **[GURPS Bio-Tech](#)**

Pyramid

- ["Bronzepunk"](#) -- Bronze-age Transhumanism -- parahuman, biomod, clockpunk
- ["Elves: A Case Study of Transhumanism in Fantasy Worlds"](#) by Jürgen Hubert
- ["Aulos: City in the Sky"](#) by Matt Riggsby
- ["The City in the Storm"](#) by Martin Jenner
- ["Zauberpunk"](#) -- Cyberpunk meets Technomancer -- by Stephen Kenson
- ["Gene Weaver"](#) -- A new GURPS Magic College -- by T. Carter Ross

Links

- [Death Gate Cycle](#), elemental worlds -- by Weis and Hickman
- [NASA Planetary body distances Tool](#). Enter two planets, a date, and click.
- [Object 136199 Eris](#) a.k.a. Planet Xena
- [*Septerra Core*](#) -- PC game
- [Nautical Terms](#)

* * *

Special thanks to Daniel Boese for being a sounding board, my advisor, Rowan, for approving of my "coin-op plot," and DryaUnda for some last minute course corrections.

The Omniscient Eye

Can I Be a Warrior Princess?

It's common in fantastic medieval settings and in some alternate histories (*Ash* by Mary Gentle comes to mind) for there to be adventurous women warriors and soldiers. Aside form an exceptional person like Joan of Arc, how plausible would this be in real medieval societies form our world? Are there examples from period literature or legend that would also support such characters in the medieval paradigm?
        --Sasha Pixlee

Someone once said "Anyone who uses the phrase 'as easy as taking candy from a baby' has never tried to take candy from a baby." Likewise, anyone who uses the phrase "you fight like a girl!" has probably never fought a girl. Fighting has been an overwhelmingly male profession for most of history, but there are many myths and legends concerning woman warriors. Classical antiquity has both the Amazons, a race of warrior women; and Athena/Minerva, a goddess representing martial virtues and wise strategy; and stories of fighting women appear in many other places around the world. But is there any reality corresponding to the myths? As it happens, even if we ignore borderline cases like women being pressed into service to defend in a siege or women in non-combat roles supporting fighting troops (for example, carrying ammunition), there is.

History is replete with examples of women leading armies. One of the earliest was Hatshepsut, ruling Egypt in the 15th century BC. Hatshepsut led an incursion into neighboring Punt at the head of a large army. One peculiarity of her reign is that the Egyptians, like many other early civilizations, believed that only men were fit to rule, particularly when it came to leading armies, so they had to find a creative way of getting around her femininity. Consequently, she was depicted wearing a false beard and other markers of maleness. When she fought, she did so under the legal fiction of being male.

Later female generals did not have their femininity masked. Since political and military leadership went hand in hand, any country where women could become rulers sooner or later had a woman leading the troops. Boadicea, who led an unsuccessful struggle against Roman invaders, is one of Britain's earliest national heroes. At the opposite end of their empire, the Romans faced Zenobia, the queen of Palmyra. Warrior queens, princesses, duchesses, and other women leading troops appear scattered through the Middle Ages and into modernity. If the lord of the manor was abroad or incapacitated when his castle was attacked, it was often up to his wife to lead the defense. There are also a number of cases where a woman, using an ineffective husband as a figurehead, had to take direct control of the troops. A few women led their own sides in dynastic struggles, fighting their brothers, male cousins, and even husbands and ex-husbands. For example, Urraca, sole heir to Aragon in the early 12th century, spent years in the field in an ongoing attempt to recover lands lost to her first husband after their marriage was annulled.

However, just because they're leading armies doesn't mean they're actually swinging swords. Many war leaders, male or female, led from at least a few ranks to the rear and surrounded by bodyguards, the better to see what was happening on the battlefield, issue orders, and preserve their own precious skins. And even if they did lead from the front, they wouldn't necessarily have been effective fighters. Joan of Arc is a perfect example. Despite the legends which grew up around her, she was ultimately just a teenage girl with religious visions and no martial training, whose value was as a rallying point and morale booster, not a killer of men. There's no indication that Joan ever weilded a weapon. Still, a few definitely did know how to defend themselves. Matilda, countess of Tuscany in the 11th and 12th centuries, is said to have learned martial skills as a child just as a noble male child would have, and appears to have put herself on the front line several times. And even without formal training, a noblewoman could easily have applicable skills of riding and archery, acquired for the popular pastime of hunting.

A frequent theme in stories is women warriors who start

their martial careers disguised as men. The most famous is probably the Chinese girl Hua Mulan, who went to war disguised as a boy in order to save her father from military service. Similar women-in-disguise stories appear elsewhere; there are, for example, several instances in Scandinavian epic poems. It's unclear just how often that might have happened in the real world, though. Any woman who disguised herself was, after all, trying to keep a secret, so presumably most instances of it would have gone unrecorded.

Still, some few examples do crop up, with the turn of the 18th century being the golden age for transvestite women in uniform. Two of the best-known examples are the pirates Mary Read and Anne Bonney. They enjoyed long (as such things go) and fairly successful careers as pirates, dressing as men until they were captured. A few women disguised as men appeared in the Scottish dragoons around that time as well.

And, to finally reach the real point, on some rare occasions, women did openly act as regular soldiers. The hotbeds of this kind of activity seem to have been the northwestern and eastern fringes of Europe. In addition to having a long tradition of warrior queens, the Celts had a long tradition of women on the front lines. On the other side of the continent, there are indications of female warriors, in the form of images in contexts which suggest actual events or graves containing the bodies of armed women, among Scythians and Hittites.

Actual fighting women occasionally cropped up elsewhere through Europe and Asia, even during the intensely patriarchal Middle Ages. Women fought in the Crusades, much to the dismay of Pope Clement III, who issued a bull prohibiting it (though it apparently didn't work, since there are passing mentions of women fighting in later Crusades as well). An account survives of a woman of Pozzuoli who went around fully armed, fought, slept in the field like any other man, and could beat her male companions in competitions of strength. The evidence of English muster rolls indicates that a handful of women turned out during troop levies, some providing their own arms. A few knightly orders even admitted women, though exactly what their role may have been is unclear.

Though female warriors have very much been the exception rather than the rule, they also appear to have been hard to stop. There were repeated attempts through the history of western Europe to remove women from the battlefield, but until the establishment of heavily regulated modern armies, those efforts were largely unsuccessful. For most of history, and particularly in tribal and feudal systems, the organizers of large armies simply don't have the authority to impose conditions on their troops, be it armament, age, or sex. So if a few women appeared when troops were mustered, as occasionally happened, local commanders might be disinclined to turn them away, either for lack of other troops or because of a social awkwardness in turning them away. And when an officer brought unusual troops with him, they were his responsibility, not that of commanders higher up the chain.

So what does this mean in a game? Mainly that, while woman warriors are definitely unusual, almost always appear alone rather than in groups (though even here are exceptions; 17th century Dahomey saw the formation of a seldom-used but well-trained female bodyguard for the king, and one shogun's mistress is said to have commanded an all-female troop of cavalry), and can excite considerable interest, they're not, in many historical settings, impossible, nor even so rare as to be utterly unique in their own time. And since characters who appear in adventures tend to fall into the unusual-but-not-impossible category, that should be just fine for most games. There are few circumstances which are strongly correlated with warrior women, perhaps simply because they're so rare overall, but two things do appear to make them a bit more likely. The first is broad-based ideological struggles. Women warriors appear to be more common where an ideal is at stake. The Crusades are one example, but they also appear more frequently during insurrections. The second is states of weakened authority. Women leading feudal armies appear to be a consequence of their throwing off, being relieved of, or never having been under the authority of a husband or father, female bandit chieftains and pirate captains are far more common than female police and naval officers, and women warriors appear more often in less centralized tribal societies than in massively hierarchical states. So long as nobody is there to stop

Novelty Act

Just as women occasionally appeared on the battlefield, they sometimes appeared in the Roman gladiatorial arena. Mentions of female gladiators and charioteers appear sporadically through the 1st and 2nd centuries AD until they were banned by Septimius Severus. They competed both against one another and against men. Though it may have been just another example of the Romans' love of unusual gladiatorial battles, at least some of them were doubtless competent fighters.

her, you can put a woman on the front line just about anywhere.

--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 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!

Pyramid Pick

Tatters of the King: Hastur's Gaze Gains Brief Focus Upon the Earth (for [Call of Cthulhu](#))

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Tim Wiseman

Cover by Ashley Jones

Illustrated by Ashley Jones

Cartography by Antony Fentiman

232-page perfect bound black and white book; $27.95

During the final years of the 1920s, the winters are cold, and the star Aldebaran is visible in the clear night sky. A malign influence falls upon the Earth, felt by the sensitive and the weak willed; it finds expression in the output of the artistic set. The lure of the stars is seen in poetry, painting, theatre, and even radical science, sometimes as a thrill, at other times as a taint that drives men to madness. The medical profession doesn't yet have a name for this "sympathetic madness," but there are those who can explain it. The Earth has fallen under the gaze of the Great Old One known as Hastur, and his cult seeks to either bring the doomed city of Carcosa or his avatar, the King in Yellow, to Earth.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

This is the stage for Tatters of the King, a new campaign for ***[Call of Cthulhu](#)*** set during the game's classic 1920s period that will take the investigators on a journey beginning in Britain and traveling to Italy, India, and Nepal, before climbing to a final confrontation above Tibet on the Plateau of Leng. Compared with ***Delta Green*** or ***[Realm of Shadows,](#)*** *Tatters of the King* is hardly the most radical release. Compare it though to earlier campaigns such as ***[Shadows of Yog-Sothoth](#)*** or ***[Spawn of Azathoth,](#)*** and ***Tatters of the King*** is different, progressive, subtle, even delicate, and shows its predecessors to be heavily structured, almost clumsy affairs.

The first difference is its choice of Great Old One, Hastur being often overlooked in Chaosium's ***Call of Cthulhu*** canon, having only appeared in scenarios such as "Tatterdemalion" from ***Fatal Experiments*** and "Tell Me, Have You Seen The Yellow Sign?" from ***The Great Old Ones.*** Known as "He Who Is Not To Be Named"; associated with the City of Carcosa, the King in Yellow, the Lake of Hali, and the Yellow Sign; and revered by an reputedly abhorrent cult, Hastur as an entity is ill-defined within ***Call of Cthulhu.*** Indeed, for ***Tatters of the King*** the author draws not from the core rulebook, but from John Tynes' approach to the Great Old One, first discussed in ***[Unspeakable Oath #1](#)*** and developed further in ***[Delta Green: Countdown.](#)*** Thus Hastur is not a personification, but a force of entropy, one that beguiles as much as it disturbs and disrupts.

The second difference is the campaign being set in the United Kingdom for its first and second parts, beginning in London. There is nothing to say that characters of other nationalities cannot travel there, but penned by an English author, ***Tatters of the King*** is the game's most anglophilic supplement since ***The London Guidebook*** and ***Green and Pleasant Land.*** Both of these supplements would be helpful in running the campaign, but since they are out of print, the book includes an appendix describing the London and United Kingdom of 1928. Although the third part of the campaign will take the investigators to foreign climes, the setting of its first half in England and Scotland is not only

refreshingly un-American, but also adds much to its mood and feel.

Designed for four to six characters, *Tatters of the King* also has one particular requirement and one suggestion. One of its characters has to be an Alienist (a now obsolete term for a psychiatrist or psychologist), whilst another should be an artist of some kind. The first is necessary because the campaign proper begins with the Alienist being asked to consult on the mental well-being of an asylum patient, whilst an artistic character will enable the investigators to move in creative circles.

Tatters of the King is structured into three parts and a prologue. The latter opens in October 1928 with the investigators attending an amateur production of an avant-garde play that ends in hysteria, disarray, and affray. It also exposes them to the Yellow Sign, thus opening them up to a series of dreams that will haunt them over the course of the campaign. Book I: The Madman and the campaign proper opens with the Alienist being consulted on a patient, Alexander Roby, who was committed following the unsolved murder of his father and sister. During the interview, Roby becomes animated and mentions not only the events of the play seen mere days before, but alludes that he and his friends know something far more.

It transpires that Roby was involved in some kind of cult, one that still has an interest in him and soon after, in the investigators. Shadowed by the cult, hints of its activities come not just from the investigation, but in dreams and from an anonymous benefactor, pointing to deadly arcane rituals performed in the past and another to come. This is to be held in a place familiar to long time *Call of Cthulhu* devotees, *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth's* Scottish village of Cannich. What they discover is not the village, but Carcosa itself, brought to Earth but not yet made permanent. Preventing both this and the summoning of Hastur to Earth brings the first part of the campaign to a halt . . . at least temporarily, for another difference is that the campaign contains a six months gap between parts.

This period gives time for pause and reflection, perhaps even an opportunity for the Keeper to run other scenarios, but it still leaves the campaign half done. The intermission ends with the appearance of the investigators' anonymous benefactor and the reappearance of Aldebaran over the British night sky. Book II: British Gods reveals him to be both a member of the Hastur cult and of another group based in the rural gloom that is Goatswood, deep in the Severn Valley. More amenable to the investigators, this cult reveals that the Hastur cult has not been stopped and remains a threat. The clues point East.

After Book II's bucolic interlude, the campaign picks up pace for Book III: The Upper House. More clues are found in Milan, where the investigators learn that the cult has gained the inadvertent aid of Italy's fascist government. The campaign comes to a climax after a hardy trek into the Himalayas onto the Plateau of Leng. There they confront the last of the cultists, all too rational and determined to bring the King in Yellow to Earth. And if they stop him, the manifestation of Hastur will turn to the investigators.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The emphasis throughout the campaign, and its strength, is its atmosphere. Tatters of the King is permeated by an ethereal quality, a dreamlike feel that seeps from the pages. You can almost sense the quiet tension and madness underlying almost every scene that only comes to the fore during the sequences in Carcosa and the downright alien place above the Earth. Potentially an incredibly difficult scene to stage, it is very well handled and the Keeper will have no problem conveying its madness. The subtle feel also extends to the campaign structure, which still follows the onionskin format, but its layers are more slivers than chunks.

Despite the campaign's quiet hysteria, encounters with the Mythos are far and few between. Similarly, moments of violence happen rarely. When either does, such scenes are all the more effective and dangerous, because the investigators are unlikely to be as well armed as they might in other campaigns. Tatters of the King is more mannered and civilized with the emphasis on investigation and interaction with all of its NPCs, cult members included.

The other major difference, and it is an important difference, between *Tatters of the King* and almost any other campaign before it is that *Tatters of the King* transcends the pulp format and style of its forbears. This shows in the mood and feel, in the choice of Great Old One, and in the low-key nature of the cult and its members, who do not chew the scenery or set hordes of cultists on the investigators.

Physically, **Tatters of the King** is Chaosium's best-looking book for years. Ashley Jones' art is suitably dark and quietly twisted, whilst Anthony Fentiman's cartography, with its architectural feel, is perfection following Chaosium's constant cartographic fumblings. Fentiman should do all of Chaosium's maps from now until the End Times. Tim Wiseman's writing is similarly good and constantly works to be helpful.

Yet **Tatters of the King** is not perfect. Its story is linear and perhaps too subtle in places, clues not always being helpful or easy to interpret. It is also easy for the players to become distracted (for example, by the events in Goatswood), but perhaps the author can revisit there in a sequel.

After this, I very much look forward to seeing the author's next work; it is fair to say that Chaosium has not put out a book as good as **Tatters of the King** since ***Unseen Masters*** and ***Beyond the Mountains of Madness.*** This is as mature and as subtle a campaign as **Call of Cthulhu** has received in years, and it would truly spoil its delicacy to play it in the game's sometimes pulpish mode.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

The Zorceror of Zo

Written by Chad Underkoffler, with additional material by Andrew Byers and Scott Kane

Art by Fred Hicks, Greg Holkan, & Scott Kane

Edited by Eric A. Burns

Published by **[Atomic Sock Monkey Press](#)**

104-page PDF, $15 (One Book Shelf)
202-page digest-size softcover (print on demand), $30, includes PDF (Indie Press Revolution or One Book Shelf)

I grew up with fairy tales. My mother read me to sleep with a story most every night until I was eight, and long before that I was devouring them on my own. Not long after that, I was allowed a library card and carried on further. I was particularly fond of the *Oz* books, with their simple plots, vivid settings, and recurring and *evolving* characters. I even had the privilege of (carefully!) handling and reading some of my grandmother's hardcover *Oz* volumes. I don't know if anyone grows up like this any more, in the age of the graphic novel, the iPod, and the game console, and it's difficult to decide what to make of the recent wave of fairy tale-themed games (*[Grimm,](#) [Deliria,](#)* **Faery's Tale,** and others. With **The Zantabulous Zorceror of Zo** (that's how the cover reads, in plain tribute to Baum *et al*), auteur Chad Underkoffler tells us exactly what to make of his game and goes on to tell us how and why it came to be. It's a fine game, but it's an even better story.

Let's lay these cards out for all to see right now: I like Chad, I've enjoyed his work, I've liked the Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) games (either Chad's or other peoples') very much, and I'm not going to waste our time here recounting for a third or fourth time the mechanics of the game engine. See these reviews of *[Dead Inside,](#) [Monkey, Pirate, Ninja, Robot, Truth & Justice](#)*, *[Questers of the Middle Realm](#)* from Silver Branch Games, or **Ninja Burger** (second edition) from Aethereal Forge.

What sets **The Zorceror of Zo** apart from its kindred is that it uses "The Good Parts Version" of PDQ. (That's an homage to William Goldman's *The Princess Bride,* an exemplar of a modern fairy tale.) Consider an average roleplaying game (or wargame): hundreds or thousands of paragraphs, but only a few score used regularly and reliably. "The Good Parts Version" reflects the core elements of PDQ, mostly drawn from the **Truth & Justice** incarnation, with the components seldom used in play discarded. Hero Points remain, with their uses tailored to fairy tale conventions: Spend them to boost your actions, help you recover from damage, or to "retroactively edit" a scene to be more interesting. Powers and Stunts are disposed with as inappropriate to the genre, and the overall presentation of the rules streamlined to its simplest form. It's still PDQ, but it's the parts that actually get use.

How do we know they get use? This game's subtitle reads "A Fairytale Role-Playing Game," but another subtitle on the credits page reads "(a PDQ campaign in actual play)." And that's how we know, and how this book is able to reach over 200 digest-size pages (of rather large print, true). We get 15 pages of the masterful description of genre and feel that we've come to expect in ASMP books. We get an eight-page overview of the Land of Zo, just to establish a frame of reference for what's to come. The rules and an example of play dialogue take up 35 pages, and a discussion of making characters occupies another 30 (and provides many NPCs and more background to the Land of Zo). A chapter

on gamemastering takes a bare 10 pages, but this section is more about the high themes of gamemastering in fairy tale lands. Chad even manages to shine a light on the darker shadows without causing the shadows to enlarge and take matters into their own hands. There, we've summed up half the book, and no one would have faulted Chad for stopping there with a lean, light, focused game book. But *The Zorceror of Zo* is more, so much more.

The balance of the book recounts the campaign, from late-2005 until mid-2006, in which Zo was created, developed, and matured. "For a *hundred* pages? Half the book?" you might grouse. Be honest, reader; you've always thought your campaigns would make great books. You might even have kept prose recaps of game sessions. Adopters of more web-based models might know no other way, gaming in chat or via blog or journal. What makes this account special, and worth the investment, is the detail in which Chad and his players recount the life of the campaign: from the give-and-take of creating the key player characters, to the sly manner in which the GM seeds plot elements into the campaign, playing out the line until the events of the grand climax come, totally unexpected but totally foreseeable . . . the "First ZoZ Campaign" provides the finest example of how a roleplaying campaign is executed that I've ever read. And you get it twice, as the author includes transcriptions of his notes on the sessions and you can see where things went as he expected and where the players careened well away from the path anticipated. The players get their say, too, providing "commentary tracks" alongside the author's account.

Kudos to Fred Hicks for creating a layout which fuses the conventions of an ASMP book with the sensibility of a classic storybook. The art is mostly simple line-drawings in a genial vein, with the occasional more elaborate piece or manipulated photo for variety. I smile every time I turn a page and a whimsical imp (either in line or in silhouette) dances in the margin. The cover image is very appealing, with the "replica binding" effect we've become familiar with from the *Dungeons & Dragons* line but far less gaudy. A color map of Zo on the back cover evokes the traditional map of Baum's Oz. (The map is reproduced somewhat larger in and among the obligatory forms and charts appendix.) The print version carries the same level of quality as the printed version of *Spirit of the Century* from Evil Hat (another book distributed via Indie Press Revolution), and it does not feel or look cheap. Regarding the PDF version, it offers 12" × 9" pages (reproducing two pages of the print product per page). If you choose to print on letter-sized paper, the pages will necessarily be reduced, but since the typeface is generously large, the result is still amply readable.

This is, I think, the key merit of *The Zorceror of Zo:* it is an intensely personal work in a way few game books show, crafted by a man who loves both fairy tales and adventure games and who found a path to combine the best of both with astonishing fidelity. And then he shared it with us. It's not a free sharing; craftsmen deserve to be paid for their craft. But the value in the specific examples and demonstrations make this book worth the effort of printing out, or the expense of ordering the print-on-demand edition.

Those *Oz* books I grew up with were passed to me when I graduated high school. The tome of stories from which my mother read was handed down at the birth of my first child. I think it's high time to teach my daughters about fairy tales. Fortunately, *The Zorceror of Zo* encourages and approves of such efforts. Hail Zo!

--Bob Portnell

Putting Together Flashback Pieces Like a Jigsaw

Over the past few days I saw the *Saw* trilogy; I'd seen *Saw* but hadn't seen the need to see more *Saw* 'til I resaw the first *Saw;* then I saw *Saw II,* too, and made it three for three I saw by seeing *Saw III.* It's a good thing I saw these three before, because this Halloween there will be four to be seen when *Saw IV* makes the scene with scenes so *Saw* they need to be seen before they can be believed.

But, wordplay aside, the *Saw* series is something like the gory morality plays of the movie *Se7en,* only about half as thoughtful. (Perhaps the movie series should be renamed *Thr33-p.int-fiVe.*) But, from a gaming standpoint, it's interesting to watch ("How would PCs react to *this* situation?!"), and the second movie has the shtick where the [antagonist surrenders to the cops](#) early on, so it can't be all bad.

Now, the second and third installments in the *Saw* howevermanyology do something interesting that isn't done very often in movie sequels. See, sequels usually chart entirely new territory; they take place a week, year, month later . . . or whatever. They may add to the storyline, but they usually don't return to previous ones, at least directly.

In comparison, *Saw II* and *Saw III* both make return visits to the first *Saw,* replaying scenes but adding new information, unknown details, and startling new secrets. ("Startling" here being synonymous with "What the heck?!") It would be akin to having a scene in *The Empire Strikes Back* where you flashback to Han, showing what he was doing in Mos Eisley in the previous movie before Luke and Obi Wan showed up.

Like I said, in movies this is relatively uncommon. I seem to recall that *Superman II* had an extended version of the trial of the Kryptonian villains, and I think the *Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy hopped around a bit between movies, especially with various subplots. (I'm sure there are others.) But, in general, movies usually act as compartments, where scenes from one don't intermingle with others.

On the other hand, this technique is pretty common in novels and comics, where the desire to squeeze in "one more scene" into a previously popular installment can prove irresistible. For example, one of the Batman Halloween specials depicts a flashback scene where the young boy Bruce Wayne begs his mom to wear her pearls before they go out to the movies that night, because he thinks she looks pretty in them; although she's reluctant at first, she eventually agrees. (For those not steeped in their Batman lore, the pearls were the thing that the killer was interested in.) And on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* they revisited the old "Trouble With Tribbles" episode, explaining what happened "at the same time" (thanks to time funniness).

And it's also popular in cross-media properties. For example, the game *Star Wars: Dark Forces* depicts how the plans for the Death Star got into Princess Leia's hands before *A New Hope.* (It apparently involved a lot of running around and shooting things in pixelated grid-like spaceship dungeons.) It's often used in all media to fill in (seeming) plot holes or oversights: "How did Dr. Avalon survive that acid bath?" or the like.

And, finally, it's fairly common in the gaming world. Speaking from personal experience, I know I've gone back to the trough many a time following popular adventures; for example, in a Supers campaign I once created a catalyst-character called The Enforcer (written about at least [once before](#)), where -- in the campaign origin story -- I specifically left a hole of two minutes in the establishing scene. (Big Bad Guy shows up, Big Bad Guy teleports away for two minutes, Big Bad Guy shows back up to get his butt kicked.) At the time I established that hole, I had no specific plans for it; however, afterwords two players worked in their own visitations, and I incorporated that hole into two future adventures. In short, it's a good thing two minutes works out to 120 combat rounds in *GURPS,* because he was plenty busy in that time.

Tapping previous adventures is also not unique in the professionally retail world. There are adventures such as ***Return to the Tomb of Horrors, Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil, Ravenloft II: House on Gryphon Hill*** (which had rules for playing it concurrently with the first installment), and ***Goldfinger II: The Man With The Midas Touch.*** And plenty of company's metaplots have shoehorned in previously unknown details of a game world (***Aberrant,*** I'm looking at you).

The advantages of using this technique are fairly obvious. By riding the coattails of a previously popular tale, you're most of the way toward re-conjuring the warm fuzzy feelings from that first installment. Likewise it can help stories feel more connected; if the heroes learn that there was a previously undiscovered secret passage in the remains of the villain's base that leads to new adventure, it has an immediate "ah-ha!" hook that it wouldn't have otherwise: "Ah-ha! This adventure couldn't be plopped down wholecloth in another universe, because it's set in *our* defeated villain's base!"

However, there are also pitfalls. First, there's always the danger of tainting the previous tale if the new addition raises too many eyebrows. For example, the Batman Halloween tale described earlier greatly disturbed me when I read it; it transformed Batman's origin from "Yes, Bruce, your parents were killed" to "Yes, Bruce, your parents were killed . . . and it's basically your fault." Likewise, attempts to explain away plot holes (unless they were *really* bothering the players) often results in less satisfaction, not more; as a reader, I didn't necessarily want an explanation as to why Bruce Wayne's mom was wearing pearls . . . and now that I have one, it feels in some ways clunkier than not having any answer at all.

Second, from a gaming standpoint, it can raise questions among the gaming group, which can lead to trouble. In our passageway-hidden-in-the-villain's-base scenario, a player might raise the question, "Why didn't we notice this development before, and/or why weren't we able to interact with it?" The more outlandish or PC-affecting the add-on is, the more backlash there can be. ("Wait; you mean when I was revealing our secret plans to my mother last month, he was actually the shapeshifted form of our evil arch-foe? Did I get a perception check to notice that? Did she have *all* my mother's mannerisms down? Don't I have some detect-evil-type ability?")

If you're going to try to incorporate a future "revelation" story into an adventure, probably the best advice I can offer is to try to come up with that hook first; even if you don't necessarily know what that revelation is going to be (like me with my missing two minutes), at least there exists a ready-made hole. And the more you can plot out ahead of time, the more clues and foreshadowing you can drop, which leads to more of an "ah-ha!" when things fall into place. Barring that, keep an open ear for the players; they're often better at finding (or fabricating) such possible hooks than GMs are in creating them in the first place: "Okay, gang; there might be an underground passageway here, so make a note to explore this area thoroughly later."

Playing with the past is always a dangerous prospect, but it can be worth it in certain circumstances. But be careful; if the PCs find themselves back in a filthy washroom with a hacksaw by their feet, hopefully their first thought is one of dread rather than "Not again . . ."

--Steven Marsh

Dwarven Masters

Three New Prestige Classes for the *d20 System*

by Richard Farrese

Dwarven Battle Priest

Dwarves make crafty smiths and fearsome warriors. When they join the clergy, they often become fervently dedicated members of the deity they serve. In some dwarven temples, clerics aim to achieve a balance between the faith and respect they have in their god and their races natural resolve, fervor, and physical endurance. Trained properly, these priests learn how to fight as efficiently as the mightiest warriors of their kin. These martial skills, combined with the divine blessing of their chosen deity, make the men and women who join this highly specialized clergy extremely resourceful on the battlefield. These people are known as dwarven battle priests.

Regiments of battle priests composed of six to a dozen members are not uncommon in some of the major dwarven temples. These warrior-priests typically serve a deity associated with warfare or the defense of the dwarves and their culture. They generally lead and train groups of warriors hired to protect the temple they serve, but many of them travel the globe in search of adventure. Ever seeking to further the cause of the god they venerate, dwarven battle priests are fearless combatants equally adept at killing than at healing. Among the dwarves, they are considered highly respected members of society, and warriors view them as indispensable allies on the battlefield.

Only dwarves may become battle priests, but both males and females are accepted into the Venerable Order of Battle Priest as each of the regiments are officially called. Battle priests usually hail from the ranks of the cleric or paladin professions. The vast majority of them have at least some levels in the cleric class. Multi-classed fighters, rangers, and even some rogues are sometimes accepted into the Order, but members of other professions seldom are.

Hit Die: d10

Requirements

To become a dwarven battle priest, a character must fulfill all the following requirements:

Race: Dwarf
Alignment: Lawful good, lawful neutral, neutral, or neutral good
Base Attack Bonus: +5
Skills: Knowledge (religion) 8 ranks
Feats: Combat Casting
Spellcasting: The ability to cast at least five divine spells per day.
Special: The character must be an active follower of a dwarven deity offering its priesthood access to at least one of the following domains: Protection, Strength, or War. The character must also have access to at least one of these domains and be able to cast divine spells from this domains spell list.

Class Skills

The dwarven battle priests class skills (and the key ability for each) are Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Heal (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (history) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Knowledge (the planes), Profession (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the dwarven battle priest prestige class:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A dwarven battle priest is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, armor (heavy, medium, and light), and shields (with the exception of tower shields). Note that armor check penalties apply to the Climb and Jump skills.

Spells per Day: A dwarven battle priest continues to get access to more powerful divine magic while gaining levels in this prestige class. When he acquires a new even-numbered level, the character gains new spells per day as if he had also increased a level in the divine spellcasting class he belonged to before he added this prestige class. He does not, however, benefit from any other advantages a character of that class would have gained (such as improved chances of controlling or rebuking undead creatures). This essentially means that he adds half his dwarven battle priest level to the level of whatever other divine spellcasting class he has, then determines the spells per day accordingly.

If a character had more than one divine spellcasting class before he became a dwarven battle priest, the player must decide to which class to assign each even-numbered level of dwarven battle priest for the purpose of determining divine spells per day.

Invigorate (Ex): A dwarven battle priest is a paragon of virtue on the battlefield, standing side by side with brave warriors on the frontline and risking his own life to protect his comrades in arm. Beginning at 1st level, he can bolster the morale of allies engaged in combat by chanting a traditional dwarven hymn. All friendly characters within 30 feet of the dwarven battle priest and able to hear his voice benefit from a +1 morale bonus on all saving throws as well as a +1 morale bonus on weapon damage rolls. For dwarven allies, these morale bonuses augment to +2.

It takes the dwarven battle priest a full round action to activate this ability, and its effects lasts as long as he continues to chant plus 1 round for every level he has in this prestige class, or until combat ends (whichever comes first). Deafened allies and those who move out of range lose the benefits granted by this ability. Invigorate may be used once per day at 1st level, twice at 4th level, three times at 7th level, and four times each day at 10th level. This is an enchantment (compulsion) effect.

Turn or Rebuke Undead (Su): A dwarven battle priest gains the ability to turn or rebuke undead as a cleric of the same level. If the character already has the ability to turn or rebuke undead (from another class), levels of dwarven battle priest are added to his cleric or paladin levels when turning or rebuking undead.

Combat Healing (Ex): Although he generally prefers to stand on the front line, the dwarven battle priest often takes on the role of combat medic in times of war, dispensing healing to his wounded comrades as easily as he would slay his enemies. Upon reaching 2nd level, whenever he makes a Heal skill check or a Concentration skill check when casting any cure spell, the dwarven battle priest may take 10, even if stress and distraction would not normally allow him to do so.

Favorite Weapon (Ex): A dwarven battle priest takes pride in his deitys favourite weapon. During the course of his career, he continues to vigorously train in its use. A 3rd level dwarven battle priest gains a +1 competence bonus on damage rolls made with his deitys favorite weapon. This bonus augments to +2 when the dwarven battle priest reaches 6th level and to +3 when he attains 9th level. If the god worshiped by the dwarven battle priest does not have a determined favorite weapon, it is up to the GM to decide which weapon this deity would consider his favorite. Note that most dwarven deitys favorite weapons are axes, hammers, or maces.

Healing Expert (Su): As he gains experience in this prestige class, a dwarven battle priest becomes a veritable expert at dispensing healing. Beginning at 5th level, he adds +1 to each dice he rolls when casting any cure spells. This bonus increases to +2 when the dwarven battle priest attains 10th level.

Align Weapon (Sp): Upon reaching 8th level in this prestige class, the dwarven battle priest gains the spell-like ability to align weapon, as the spell of the same name. He uses this ability at a caster level equal to his own caster level or his

dwarven battle priest level (whichever is greater). A dwarven battle priest may use align weapon a number of times per day equal to his Wisdom modifier (a minimum of once each day applies).

Dwarven Battle Priest Advancement Table

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Invigorate 1/day, turn or rebuke undead	
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Combat healing	+1 level of existing class
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Favorite weapon +1	
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Invigorate 2/day	+1 level of existing class
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Healing expert +1	
6	+6	+5	+2	+2	Favorite weapon +2	+1 level of existing class
7	+7	+5	+2	+2	Invigorate 3/day	
8	+8	+6	+2	+2	Align weapon	+1 level of existing class
9	+9	+6	+3	+3	Favorite weapon +3	
10	+10	+7	+3	+3	Healing expert +2, invigorate 4/day	+1 level of existing class

Dwarven Warmaster

Famously recognized for the strong suits of armor, the sharp axes, and the wondrous battle hammers forged by their master smiths, dwarves are also known as sturdy and relentless warriors. Feared by their enemies and considered indispensable by their allies, dwarven warriors are known for their natural fighting abilities, their rigorous training, as well as the discipline of their units on the battlefield. Among the most highly trained and truly gifted dwarven warriors are those who have the potential to win fame of mythical proportion. The dwarven warmaster is one such individual.

In dwarven society, the Order of Warmasters is one of the most respected organizations there is. Sworn to uphold dwarven interests, defend the ancestral lands of their people, as well as maintain the highest standard of discipline and battle readiness, the members of the Order are equally known for both their ruthlessness on the battlefield and their loyalty to the dwarves. Many believe that none other group in the world train better warriors, and the prowess of the dwarven warmasters in battle seems to support this theory. In times of war, warmasters lead dwarven warriors in battle, and many are high-ranking officers in their kings army.

Only dwarven warriors of unblemished repute are considered potential candidates of the Order of Warmasters. Because of their martial aptitude, dwarven fighters make excellent recruits, but many warmasters also hail from the paladin class. Rangers who have proven their worth in combat as well as clerics of martial dwarven deities are sometimes accepted in the Order of Warmasters, but people from other classes seldom are.

Hit Die: d12

Requirements

To become a dwarven warmaster, a character must fulfill all the following requirements:

Race: Dwarf
Alignment: Lawful good or lawful neutral
Base Attack Bonus: +6
Skills: Sense Motive 4 ranks
Feats: Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (any)
Special: The Order of Warmasters is an extremely select group of highly trained, fervently dedicated, and remarkably disciplined warriors. In order to become a dwarven warmaster, a character must have proven himself many times in battle. He must have won at least one of these battles in the defense of a dwarven community. Once he has done this,

someone from the Order of Warmaster may approach the character and offer to sponsor him into the group. If he accepts the invitation, the character receives special training and may take on levels in this prestige class.

Class Skills

The dwarven warmasters class skills (and the key ability for each) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (history) (Int), Jump (Str), Sense Motive (Wis), and Spot (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the dwarven warmaster prestige class:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A dwarven warmaster is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, armor (heavy, medium, and light), and shields (including tower shields). Note that armor check penalties apply to the Climb and Jump skills.

Aura of Fearlessness (Su): The Order of Warmasters is well known for training fearless warriors who regularly risk their lives to save those of others. Beginning at 1st level, a dwarven warmaster is immune to fear (magical or otherwise). Each ally within 10 feet of him also gains a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against fear effects. When he reaches 4th level, a warmasters aura is so strong that all allies within range also benefit from a +1 morale bonus on all their Will saving throws. The warmaster himself also benefits from this bonus. For allies within range, this morale bonus stacks with the +4 bonus granted against fear effects. At 7th level, and again at 10th level, the bonus to Will saving throws rise by +1.

This ability functions while the dwarven warmaster is conscious, but not if he is unconscious or dead.

Battle Readiness (Ex): A dwarven warmaster is trained to anticipate his opponents movement in combat as well as attacks from hidden or unseen sources. The special training he receives from the Order of the Warmasters hones his ability in battle to new heights. At 1st level, a dwarven warmaster gains a bonus on all Sense Motive checks made to resist an opponents feint in combat. Each time someone uses the Bluff skill to attempt a feint against him, he gains a bonus on his opposed Sense Motive check equal to his dwarven warmaster level + his Intelligence modifier (if positive).

Dwarven Legend (Ex): The Order of Warmasters is a highly respected one among the dwarves and the members of this group are considered honorable and just. As early as 2nd level, the dwarven warmasters reputation grows. When dealing with a dwarf who knows of his membership in the Order (including another warmaster), the warmaster gains a +1 circumstance bonus on Diplomacy and Intimidate checks. This bonus augments by +1 every other levels the character gains in this prestige class (+2 at 4th level, +3 at 6th level, +4 at 8th level, and +5 at 10th level).

Unshakable Resolve (Ex): A dwarven warmaster is not only well trained to fight his enemies and defend himself properly in battle, but he is also extremely resolute. Beginning at 2nd level, his resolve is so great that he can re-roll any failed attack roll or saving throw. Use of this ability can be declared after the result of the first roll is revealed, but before it actually takes effect. The dwarven warmaster must accept the result of the second roll, even if it is worse than the original. Unshakable resolve is usable once per day at 2nd level, twice per day at 5th level, and three times each day at 8th level.

Weapon Specialization: At 4th level, the dwarven warmasters rigorous training in the use of arms grants him the Weapon Specialization feat in a weapon with which he already has Weapon Focus. If he already has the Weapon Specialization feat for a weapon, he may instead choose to gain an additional +1 bonus on damage rolls with this weapon. Otherwise, provided he meets the prerequisites for it, he may select Weapon Specialization in another weapon.

Damage Reduction (Ex): As he gains experience, the dwarven warmasters combat training and natural hardiness bestows him the extraordinary ability to shrug off some amount of injury he receives with each blow or attack. Subtract 1 from the damage the dwarven warmaster takes each time he is dealt damage. The dwarven warmasters damage reduction augments to 2/ at 6th level and to 3/ at 9th level.

Deadly Smite (Su): When he attains the summit of this prestige class, a dwarven warmaster may strike a tremendous blow against one of his enemies. Once per day, he may attempt a deadly strike instead of one of his normal melee attacks against any one of his foes. The dwarven warmaster gains a +4 bonus on this melee attack roll and, if the attack succeeds, he deals 1 extra point of damage per character level. This extra damage is not multiplied on a critical hit. If the dwarven warmasters attack roll misses, the deadly smite is used up for that day.

Ex Dwarven Warmasters: A dwarven warmaster must be of lawful good or lawful neutral alignment. A character who becomes nonlawful or evil cannot gain new levels as a dwarven warmaster. Such a character retains most of the abilities granted by this prestige class, but loses the bonuses granted by the dwarven legend ability. His aura of fearlessness also loses the effects it has on allies. The ex dwarven warmaster remains fearless and he still benefits from the bonuses to Will saving throws granted at 4th, 7th, and 10th level, but the aura has no effect on his allies until he becomes lawful good or lawful neutral again.

Table: The Dwarven Warmaster Advancement Table

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Aura of fearlessness (+4 vs. fear), battle readiness	
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Dwarven legend, unshakable resolve 1/day	
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Damage Reduction 1/	
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Aura of fearlessness (+1 Will saves), Weapon Specialization	
5	+5	+4	+1	+1	Unshakable resolve 2/day	
6	+6	+5	+2	+2	Damage Reduction 2/	
7	+7	+5	+2	+2	Aura of fearlessness (+2 Will saves)	
8	+8	+6	+2	+2	Unshakable resolve 3/day	
9	+9	+6	+3	+3	Damage Reduction 3/	
10	+10	+7	+3	+3	Aura of fearlessness (+3 Will save), deadly smite	

Thunderer

Ancient dwarven legends recount the tales of the brave heroes of olden times. The men and women of this era forged the underground kingdoms of their people with their blood, sweat, and tears. The heroes of old also defended the dwarves against countless enemies, and thus ensured their peoples survival. Over the course of several generations, they had to overcome what must have seemed like insurmountable challenges. To defeat these odds, the ancient dwarves uncovered secrets only they could hope to master. One of the better-guarded secrets of olden days is kept by the Sacred Order of Thunder and Lightning.

This small, reclusive, and highly selective clerical order trains their members to unlock the mysteries of thunder and lightning. Their clerics worship a variety of gods, but they typically venerate the dwarven All-Father, believed to have carved the dwarves from bare rock before breathing life into them. High ranking members of the Sacred Order teaches younger clerics of their group how to call upon the forces of thunder and lightning, as some heroes of ancient times are said to have done.

The vast majority of those who become thunderers hail from the cleric profession, but some druids of dwarven blood are sometimes accepted into the ranks of the sacred Order. On occasion, loyal paladins and devoted rangers also join the group, but individuals from these classes usually do so late in their career.

Hit Die: d8

Requirements

To become a thunderer, a character must fulfill all the following requirements:

Race: Dwarf
Alignment: Any
Base Attack Bonus: +3
Skills: Knowledge (religion) 8 ranks
Feat: Combat Casting
Spellcasting: The ability to cast a minimum of 3rd level divine spells, including resist energy or protection from energy.
Special: The character must be accepted into the Sacred Order of Thunder and Lightning, and a thunderer of at least 3rd level must introduce him to the basic mysteries of the prestige class.

Class Skills

The thunderers class skills (and the key ability for each) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Knowledge (the planes), Profession (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the thunderer prestige class:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A thunderer is proficient with all simple weapons as well as with the light hammer and the warhammer. He is also proficient with all types of armor (light, medium, and heavy) and with shields (except tower shields).

Spells per Day: A thunderer continues to get access to more powerful divine magic while gaining levels in this prestige class. When he acquires a new even-numbered level, the character gains new spells per day as if he had also increased a level in the divine spellcasting class he belonged to before he added this prestige class. He does not, however, benefit from any other advantages a character of that class would have gained (such as improved chances of controlling or rebuking undead creatures). This essentially means that he adds half his thunderer level to the level of whatever other divine spellcasting class he has, then determines the spells per day accordingly.

If a character had more than one divine spellcasting class before he became a thunderer, the player must decide to which class to assign each even-numbered level of thunderer for the purpose of determining divine spells per day.

Thunder Strike (Su): The most important secret of the Sacred Order of Thunder and Lightning is divulged at 1st level. Like some of the greatest heroes of old, the initiate thunderer learns to charge his mace or hammer with supernatural energy that echoes as loud as thunder. When attacking with any bludgeoning melee weapon with which he is familiar (but typically with a mace, light hammer, or warhammer), the thunder may choose to deliver a thunder strike. After a successful melee attack, the thunderers weapon produces a powerful, thunder-like sound that can deafen the target of the attack as well as all living creatures within 10 feet from the thunderer (including his allies). The target of the attack must make a successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + the thunderers class level + his Strength modifier) or be deafened for 24 hours. All other living creatures within 10 feet must also succeed at a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + half the Thunderers class level (round down)) to avoid becoming deaf for 1d4 rounds.

Thunder strike may be used once per day at 1st level and one additional time each day every other odd-numbered level thereafter (twice at 3rd level, three times at 5th level, and so on). Use of this ability must be declared before the attack roll is made. Failing an attack results in one wasted use of the thunder strike ability for the day.

Electricity Resistance (Su): When he attains 2nd level, the thunder becomes able to ignore damage dealt to him by electricity. He gains electricity resistance 5. This resistance to the electrical element augments to 10 at 4th level, to 15 at 6th level, to 20 at 8th level, and finally to 25 when the thunderer reaches 10th level.

Read Electrical Currents (Su): The thunderers understanding of thunder and lightning continues to grow as he gains experience. At 3rd level, he gains the supernatural ability to read the subtle electrical currents that rides through the air. This ability makes him more intuitively aware of his surrounding. The thunderer gains a +4 insight bonus on any roll or check made to avoid being surprised.

Call Lightning (Sp): Upon reaching 5th level, the thunderer gains the spell-like ability to call lighting, as per the spell of the same name. This ability is used at a caster level equal to the thunderers caster level. A thunderer may use call lighting once per day at 5th level and one additional time each day when he attains 10th level.

Thunder and Lightning Attack (Su): Eventually, the thunderer learns how to charge any bludgeoning melee weapon he is proficient in with a surge of crackling electricity. At 9th level, he may declare any one of his thunder strikes as a thunder and lightning attack instead. When he does, a surge of blue sparks begins to crackle upon the face of his weapon. With a successful hit, the target of this special attack takes and additional 8d6 points of electricity damage, in addition to any other damage normally dealt by a thunder strike. A successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 20 + the thunders Strength modifier) reduces this extra damage in half. Lightning strike is usable once per day.

Thunderer Advancement Table

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1	+0	+2	+0	+2	Thunder strike 1/day	
2	+1	+3	+0	+3	Electricity resistance 5	+1 level of existing class
3	+2	+3	+1	+3	Read electrical currents, thunder strike 2/day	
4	+3	+4	+1	+4	Electricity resistance 10	+1 level of existing class
5	+3	+4	+1	+4	Call lightning 1/day, thunder strike 3/day	
6	+4	+5	+2	+5	Electricity resistance 15	+1 level of existing class
7	+5	+5	+2	+5	Thunder strike 4/day	
8	+6	+6	+2	+6	Electricity resistance 20	+1 level of existing class
9	+6	+6	+3	+6	Lightning strike, thunder strike 5/day	
10	+7	+7	+3	+7	Call lightning 2/day, electricity resistance 25	+1 level of existing class

Sexual Content in Roleplaying Games

by William H. Stoddard

People have talked about including sex in roleplaying games for a long time; in the days when Phil Foglio was writing and drawing *What's New,* "sex and *D&D*" was one of the strip's running jokes. But the discussion hasn't led to well-developed methods for including sex in roleplaying games, or to a common understanding of what the options are. This article is intended as a step toward such a common understanding.

Ratings

Roleplaying games are mostly based on popular entertainment, whether it's found in books, movies, television shows, comics, or computer games. Sexual encounters, desires, and relationships are a big part of most forms of popular entertainment. Having methods for portraying them in roleplaying games widens the range of genres and themes that a campaign can be based on. Some players and GMs will want to explore that wider range; others will prefer to focus on fights, mysteries, or perilous journeys. And some may want to choose the level of sexual content that fits the genre and source material of a specific campaign.

Broadly defined, roleplaying games can approach sexual content in five ways:

Level 0. *Minimal.* Characters are defined as male and female, and this affects their appearance, their names, and perhaps their clothing. But it makes no difference to their goals or behavior. They go on adventures together and pay no attention to which of them are male and which female.

Level 1. *Background.* Characters can be defined as having relationships, usually with NPCs, or as wanting to have them. Those NPCs can serve as dependents, allies, or even enemies. For example, a superhero may have a girlfriend or boyfriend who needs to be rescued, or feel a dangerous attraction to a supervillain. But the actual sexual part of the relationship stays in the background; its only function is to motivate the character's adventures or explain why that person is involved in them.

Level 2. *Negotiation.* Characters pursue sexual encounters or relationships during play, through courtship, flirtation, commercial transactions, or other methods. Play focuses on whether the character's invitation is accepted or declined. Once that's been determined, the story jumps ahead to the aftermath, or sideways to another character's activities.

Level 3. *Outcomes.* When characters agree to engage in sexual activity, the players roll dice to determine how well things go. Each encounter is resolved by a single dice roll, which covers all the activities engaged in, giving an overall rating on "Was it good for you?" If appropriate, the GM can ask for or make additional dice rolls for pregnancy or contagion.

Level 4. *Full Detail.* When characters engage in sexual activity, the players roleplay the full details of the activity, either as pure improvisational narrative or using game mechanics.

Choice of Approach

Which of these approaches to sexual content to take depends on several considerations.

In the first place, the chosen level should suit the preferences of the players. Players may prefer to avoid or limit sexual content for a variety of reasons, ranging from lack of interest in the topic to ethical convictions about explicit material to personal embarrassment. GMs running games for players who are younger than 18 also need to consider the wishes of their players' parents.

In the second place, the chosen level should suit the genre and the source material. A game based on classic four-color comics would normally be at level 0 or 1; one based on the novels of Jane Austen would be at level 2 but certainly not level 3 or 4; one based on modern realistic fiction would be at least at level 3.

In the third place, the chosen level should be appropriate to the mood the GM wants to convey. In particular, the explicit detail of level 4 normally tends to distance the players from the activities being portrayed, producing moods such as bawdy humor or coldly clinical horror. The softer focus of level 3 is actually better suited to creating a romantic mood. The same campaign might include scenes at different levels for different purposes.

Every one of the levels *can* be used to run roleplaying games, for some players and for some campaigns. The important thing is to choose the right one.

Erotic Themes

The reasons for running a campaign with low levels of sexual content don't need much explanation. Roleplaying games, by and large, are mostly adventure stories, and sexuality isn't the main focus of most adventure stories. But because high levels of sexual content are less common in roleplaying games, the potential rewards from including them may be less apparent.

At the very simplest level, sexual incidents can be included simply for entertainment value. This isn't much different, in spirit, from including random incidents of violence or danger for entertainment, in the style of "wandering monster" encounters in classic dungeon crawls, or street crimes or bank holdups in superhero campaigns. Some players find it entertaining to have their characters flirt with or bed the tavern girls, or be paid court to by aristocratic hosts or wandering bards. GMs may choose to support this taste simply to amuse their players.

In some groups of players, this may raise a problem: a casual sexual encounter may gratify the one player whose character is involved but leave the others bored on the sidelines. One way around this is to offer the entire party an occasional "shore leave" scenario focused on how they spend their down time between adventures, either as a group (involved in anything from a wild party where couples occasionally wander offstage to an explicit orgy) or each on his own pursuits, which may or may not be sexual. If players prefer individual sexual adventures, it's a good idea to keep them brief, much like fights with casually encountered foes, and to make sure that any player who's interested in such scenes gets a chance to play them.

It's also possible to make sexual scenes entertaining for the other players by running them in a bawdy style, with a chance of humorous mishaps and misunderstandings. Creative interpretations of critical failures can be extremely useful for achieving this sort of mood! Be careful, though, not to force characters into sexual situations their players don't find enjoyable, and not to make humor an excuse for humiliating them. If the bawdiness isn't fun (or at least tolerable) for everyone, it's better to leave it out.

A more sustained use of sexual content can be as support for adventure plots. Threatening the hero's love interest is a classic motivation in such plots, and many game systems have rules for dependents that can be applied to lovers or spouses. Heroes of adventure stories may have to deal with rivalries for their love interests, either from the villain of the story or from a trusted companion. Flirtations or sexual encounters can be a way to gain information or favors; the hero who woos his jailor's daughter is a classic of the swashbuckling genre, for example. Or the PCs themselves can be the target of such activities, in genres such as spy thrillers. Such encounters can be played out at level 2, with the actual sexual acts kept off camera, or at level 3 or 4, showing whether the physical encounter went well or badly.

In a setting that adheres to traditional sexual morality, sexual encounters and relationships can themselves generate plots. Threatening to reveal a liaison can be a real threat against a woman, or against her lover, if he's not just a heartless seducer. The relatives of a seduced woman may come looking for vengeance, becoming enemies of the seducer. PCs may themselves be caught up in such situations, or they may be asked to help other people deal with them. In an investigative campaign, conflicts of sexual morality may lie behind a crime -- and the desire to conceal sexual incidents may create obstacles to investigation of crimes. Dramas of sexual morality can be found in genres from grand opera to classic Hollywood film noir, just waiting to be borrowed by an ingenious GM.

Finally, sexual content can be used to broaden the focus of a campaign beyond action/adventure. Sexuality can be a focus of worldbuilding, an aspect of characterization, or a source of mood.

One of the pleasures of worldbuilding is presenting players with exotic settings that have their own internal logic. Every system of human customs includes rules about sexual conduct, and people who adhere to those customs usually care strongly about those rules. Showing a group of players a world that follows unfamiliar sexual customs is a powerful way of making the difference of the setting real to them. What if they have to deal with a world with matrilineal inheritance, where paternity has no effect on inheritance, "illegitimacy" is an abstraction, and there is no cultural expectation of female chastity? Or one where bisexuality is commonplace and expected, as in ancient Athens? Or one where the ethic of chastity is taken seriously and both men and women are actually expected to follow it? Fantasy or science fiction premises can offer a wider range of exotic customs; suppose, for example, that people who want children routinely buy fertilized ova ready for implantation, with no more genetic relationship to them than a modern farmer's crops for this year (grown from agribusiness-supplied seed) have to his crops for last year?

As far as character interaction is concerned, sex is a powerful human motive and thus a good topic for characters to negotiate over; flirtation, seduction, and courtship all can be occasions for entertaining dialogue. Sex also creates bonds between characters -- between PCs and NPCs, or between one PC and another. Characters who have such bonds can find themselves in dramatic conflicts, such as loyalty to their country or their cause versus devotion to a lover or spouse. Sexual content can add a dimension to an action/adventure campaign, or be part of the foundation of a campaign that focuses on human relationships rather than adventures. An entire campaign can be built on the efforts of young, unattached people (such as most adventurers!) to find suitable mates.

Finally, because sex is emotionally charged, it can have a big impact on the mood of a campaign . . . that is, on the emotional state that pervades it and lingers in its players' memories. Whether sex is treated humorously, or romantically, or clinically will help shape the players' sense of a campaign as comedy, chivalric adventure, or horror. How explicitly sexual situations are treated, from a discrete "fade to black" to exact physical details, should be considered carefully in attempts to convey a mood.

Game Mechanics

A campaign at level 2-4 may well need to have game mechanics for its sexual content. Asking players to "just roleplay" such scenes has the same difficulty as for any other social interaction: It makes it difficult for players to play characters with social skills better than their own -- which is the same kind of problem as if combat rules required actual knowledge of the martial arts and made it difficult for players without such knowledge to play skilled combatants. This problem may be more acute with sexual content, because shy or socially awkward players may find such scenes especially difficult to play out. Having a workable system of game mechanics helps level the playing field.

The system of rules that follows is designed for use with *GURPS;* GMs who prefer other systems can use it as a model for suitable rules in such systems. It's primarily designed for sexual content at level 3, but can be adjusted to fit level 2 or 4.

The basic model for sexual encounters involves three stages: flirtation, foreplay, and consummation. Each requires a skill or attribute roll. Flirtation goes from the first expression of interest to the first physical contact; foreplay covers embracing, kissing, caressing, and similar acts; consummation goes from there to the completion of the sexual act.

In *GURPS* terms, flirtation is an Influence roll. Like other Influence rolls, it represents an attempt to get a better reaction. The obvious skill to use is Sex Appeal -- but it's not the only possibility. Other options are Savoir-Faire, for the elegant or witty aristocrat; Fast-Talk, for the slick seducer; or Diplomacy, for an approach that explores the other person's interest, while leaving the other a way to say no graciously. GMs may also allow a roll against Dancing to appeal to one's partner by being a good dancer.

The published rules specify that a successful Sex Appeal roll produces a Very Good reaction; other successful Influence rolls produce Good reactions. Based on this, a Very Good reaction produces willingness to seek out physical

contact actively; the person influenced will lean forward to kiss the other person, or hold hands, or lead him to a private alcove, or the like. A merely Good reaction produces a more passive interest; the target of the Influence roll won't take the initiative, but will be receptive to further moves by the suitor.

The rest of the spectrum of reactions can also be defined, both for use with failed Influence rolls, and for suitors who don't attempt an Influence roll, but just come right out and ask. An Excellent reaction indicates willingness to consummate the attraction. A Neutral reaction shows that there is no interest, but also no offense. A Bad reaction shows offense; the person approached will turn away in disgust. A Very Bad reaction indicates screams, slaps, or insults; a Disastrous one indicates lasting hostility (-4 on all future reaction rolls).

This scale of reactions is designed for establishing a new relationship. In an already existing relationship, the threshold may be lower; between husband and wife, a Good or even a Neutral reaction might be enough for sexual relations. Conversely, a celibate, or a heterosexual approached by someone of the same sex, might need an Excellent reaction even to passively accept physical attentions in the first place. Neither situation is best handled with reaction modifiers. A substantial bonus to reaction modifiers between established couples would imply that such couples were *more* likely than newly met people to feel strong passion, and would make the use of skills such as Diplomacy largely pointless between such couples; neither assumption seems accurate. Conversely, a substantial reaction penalty for, say, approaches to a person with an incompatible sexual preferences would imply that such approaches commonly led to hostility or even violence, which isn't necessarily true -- and it could be overcome by a successful Influence roll, which seems unlikely.

On the other hand, reaction rolls to determine whether someone is interested in sex should have their own special modifiers:

- +1 if what's being asked for doesn't include consummation in any form
- -1 if what's requested is novel or scary
- -1 if the encounter would have to be kept secret to avoid a bad Reputation, loss of Status, or acquisition of Social Stigma;
- -3 if such an encounter would occur openly and could not be kept secret;
- +1 if the suitor has Sex Appeal at any *any* level;
- +2 if the suitor has Sex Appeal at level 20+;
- +1 if the character being approached is tipsy, or +2 if drunk.

In addition, pay close attention to modifiers for personal appearance and behavior, skills (such skills as Carousing and Dancing can give +2 to reactions with a successful roll), and appropriate or inappropriate behavior. Such modifiers can provide the GM with a way to reward players who come up with good dialogue or who describe dramatically appropriate behavior. GMs also have the option of bypassing reaction rolls and simply assigning a favorable reaction if the player roleplays brilliantly . . . provided that the roleplaying is consistent with the character's personality, of course!

Once initial agreement has been reached, the next step is foreplay. Defining this in game mechanical terms is a bit odd. It has at least two participants, and usually both will be active and ought to make skill rolls; but they aren't working against each other, so making the situation a Contest doesn't work. Instead, GMs can apply the following process:

The skill used in foreplay is Erotic Art. This is defined as applying to "advanced sexual techniques." For basic sexual techniques that are commonly known in a particular culture, allow a +5 skill bonus -- that is, the default roll is made against DX. Characters trained in Erotic Art get the benefit of their training even in using basic sexual techniques. For foreplay, skill bonuses for bodily flexibility don't apply, and there is no Acrobatics-5 default.

With basic sexual techniques, each partner's roll determines his own gratification, but not the other's. With advanced sexual techniques, however, one partner's margin of success can be used to offset the other partner's margin of failure. That is, part of the advanced study of Erotic Art includes knowing how to identify a partner's erogenous zones, how to gauge his or her responses, and other aspects of ensuring that the kiss is mutually pleasurable. Note that this works somewhat like a Quick Contest, but instead of comparing margins of success, it compares one partner's margin of success to the other partner's margin of failure.

The difference between basic and advanced sexual techniques can be a bit subtle. It's partly *what* is done: a lover with Erotic Art will be aware of less culturally prominent erogenous sites such as the back of the neck or the inside of the elbow. But it's also largely *how* it's done: an approach that gives one's partner time to become aroused, rather than rushing ahead, can be much more effective without using any specific unusual technique.

Foreplay involving more than two partners is trickier to manage; all skill rolls are made at -2. However, if it is treated as an advanced sexual technique, two (or more) of the participants can both transfer their margin of success to the third. A lover with Body Language skill gets +1 to Erotic Art; one with Body Language at 20+ gets +2.

Finally, successful foreplay can lead to consummation. (It doesn't have to; characters can choose to stop at foreplay -- but Lecherousness makes a self-control roll necessary to do so.) Consummation requires mutual rolls against Erotic Art skill, in the same way as for foreplay, and with the same +5 skill bonus for basic sexual techniques. A level 4 treatment can get specific about "to do what, and with what, and with whom" (in the words of a classic limerick); a level 3 approach generally won't. Skill bonuses for bodily flexibility apply, and the Acrobatics-5 default is available. Note, in particular, that basic sexual acts provide personal gratification, but advanced techniques for such acts allow using one partner's success to offset the other's failure.

Players make want to have their characters try for a "second round." This should require HT rolls from both participants, to see if they've recovered enough. Further additional acts should require a cumulative -4 penalty per act after the second. After a critical success on Erotic Art, apply an additional -6 penalty! A character who is tipsy must start rolling vs. HT the first time, rather than the second; a character who is drunk makes all these rolls at a further -2!

With human characters, women's arousability may vary more widely than men's. GMs running fairly explicit campaigns may allow Multiorgasmic as a Perk (allowing repeated gratification during a single act, and reducing the penalty to -2 per added act) or Nonorgasmic as a Quirk (allowing gratification only on a critical success). Both traits are rare in human males, though a man with skill in Erotic Art might take Multiorgasmic, representing mastery of exotic Tantric rituals or the like.

The Harder Stuff

Some sexual themes may provoke unusually strong reactions from players, and should be handled with care. That's not to say they can't be included in games -- but GMs are advised to make sure of their players' reactions ahead of time, or to allow an escape route for players who don't want to pursue such a storyline.

The most obvious of these is nonconsensual sexual encounters, from sexual harassment to outright rape. Either letting PCs commit such acts, or making them their victims, has obvious problems; these become especially acute when one PC is allowed to force sexual acts on another PC. On the other hand, being the target of such an assault can be a powerful dramatic role for a player who can accept it. Players may be more willing to take the part of victims who fight off their assailants, or find protection against them from other characters, or gain revenge, privately or legally. GMs who expect their players to react to sexual violence with shock and horror may introduce it deliberately for that effect; GMs whose players treat it casually are better advised to avoid such themes.

Present-day American law assumes that adolescents below a certain age -- commonly 18 -- are incapable of consenting to sexual activity, and that any sexual acts they're involved in are nonconsensual. Historically this idea is a novelty; most cultures have assumed that anyone past puberty was ready for sexual relations and, typically, ought to be married (as in *Romeo and Juliet,* where Juliet's mother thinks her daughter, at 14, is ready for a husband). And even in present-day American society, adolescent sexual activity is actually very common. GMs whose players prefer realism in historical or historical fantasy campaigns may explore such relationships; other players may prefer to assume that adolescents are off limits.

Prostitution may be nonconsensual, in societies where pimps and brothels recruit by abduction or buy slaves, or use lesser forms of duress such as buying contracts of indenture or recruiting addicts. Or it may be simply a job, pursued by "working girls," glamorous courtesans, or professionals with advanced degrees. In the latter case, GMs portraying an exchange of sex for money should bear in mind that whatever the buyer thinks of the transaction, the seller is

thinking about money; sexual allure is a consciously cultivated business asset. Prostitutes don't form part of a typical adventuring party, but in a campaign of "everyday people in a difficult situation" (in such genres as horror or postapocalyptic), they may have useful skills.

Another challenging topic for many campaigns is same-sex relationships. Some players will be uncomfortable with them; for others they may involve more wish fulfillment than GMs want to deal with, especially with lesbian characters and all-male player groups. On the other hand, they were commonplace in historical societies such as ancient Greece and Rome, and may be so again in future societies, if current trends continue. They can help create a sense of cultural distance in portrayals of such societies, for players who like exotic settings; they also can be suitable for player groups that accept same-sex relationships as normal. In a campaign set in a society where same-sex acts are illegal, they can be treated tragically. Note also that this theme can be combined with prostitution: men and adolescent boys who work as prostitutes often have customers mainly or exclusively of their own sex.

Finally, some cultures have occasions of ritual license, either as public holidays or as private orgies. These may be either culturally sanctioned relaxations of the usual rules, or highly ritualized ceremonies for religious, mystical, or magical purposes. The first treatment can be included in a "shore leave" episode in a longer campaign. The second can be either something creepy that secretive cultists do, or a special ritual carried out by PCs for compelling supernatural reasons -- perhaps with partners chosen by lot or divination, or under the influence of trance-inducing drugs. Again, portraying a society that has such customs is a way to create a sense of cultural distance.

Related to these themes, GMs should bear three notes of caution in mind in portraying any sexual encounters. In the first place, players hate faits accomplis. Simply telling a player, "They overpower your character and have their way . . .," without allowing the character to fight back or resist, will produce an unhappy player; having it happen in a session when the player is absent is even worse. So is dictating a character's emotional responses -- for example, telling a player, "His approach is so appealing that you can't resist it." Reaction rolls are for NPCs; players generally want to decide how PCs react, based on what the GM tells them about the encounter. If the PC is the target of an influence roll, the player should get to decide what a Good or Very Good reaction means under these circumstances. After all, a woman who's the target of a man's Sex Appeal skill could be a nun, or happily married, or a lesbian, or simply very careful of her reputation.

In the second place, players are there to have fun. Entangling them in scenarios that spoil their fun, or letting other players impose on them or harass them, defeats the purpose of the game.

Finally, the game is supposed to be fun for everyone. Giving one PC a private adventure can be acceptable to other players, if their characters also can have private adventures (which need not be sexual!), but any one such adventure should only take up a modest amount of play time. Devoting an entire session to erotic encounters is usually too much of a good thing; if it's done at all, it should involve all the PCs, either as a "shore leave" episode providing a break in their usual adventures, or in an entire campaign that's mainly focused on romantic, sexual, or soap operatic themes (for example, some genres of anime). In a more standard action/adventure campaign, GMs should keep things in balance between the different players.

Appendix Z

A Note from a Secret Admirer

by Reverend P. Kitty

From simple notes passed in class to perfumed poems delivered by courier, the anonymous love letter has remained the medium of choice for those too shy or embarrassed to profess their feelings directly. Of course, this makes such a letter into a ready-made platform from which sub-plots can be launched like Cupid's arrows, right into the already complicated life of a given PC.

To set this up, choose at least one option from each section below, or roll 1d on each to determine things randomly:

The Note

How well did the sender hide their identity? An admirer usually hopes that the recipient will deduce their identity and seek them out, but not all are willing to make it easy.

1. **Unfathomable:** There are absolutely no clues as to the sender's identity. The letter is typed, lacks fingerprints, was anonymously dropped off or sent through a remailer, has had Remove Aura cast upon it, etc. They don't *want* to be discovered, possibly because they're sure they'll be rejected, are worried about the note being intercepted, or are teasing and will be sending another note later. If this was chosen randomly, roll 1d; on a 4-6, treat this as **Obscured,** below.
2. **Obscured:** The sender has gone to lengths to remain secret, but a few clues remain. Skill rolls (at default if necessary, and possibly at a penalty) will be required to uncover basic information, which will require additional resources to investigate further. For example, Forensics may reveal fingerprints, Psychology may build a very rough profile of the sender from handwriting and phrasings, or social skills may get a vague description of whoever dropped it off from nearby witnesses. Even a critical success should not reveal too much about the writer's identity.
3. **Concealed:** IQ and Perception rolls can uncover a handful of clues; appropriate skill rolls should get a bonus and will reveal more detailed information. Alternatively, the GM can determine a meaningful clue or two and feed it to the players, trusting them to work out the details. Either way, the facts should still not reveal the sender directly, but they should help to narrow down the search greatly. The envelope might be of a brand only sold at one scrapbooking shop, may be sealed with wax that few noble houses use, or may have been sent via inter-office mail at a local company. When combined with another clue, such as the scent of an unusual perfume, the PC may be able to find his potential suitor with simple footwork.
4. **Amateurish:** Perseverance will eventually uncover the truth. If the sender dropped the note off, witnesses got a good look. If it was sealed, a hair became stuck in the glue or wax. If electronic, the database which stores email addresses of the senders is easily hackable. The paper may have impressions from letters written on top of it, including part of the sender's address. A critical success on any appropriate roll should reveal the sender's identity immediately, if plausible; otherwise, the player(s) should get closer with every new approach until they eventually figure it out.
5. **Blatant:** The admirer either has no clue of what secrecy entails, or is only retaining anonymity because it's fun. The envelope may have a return address label with the name scribbled out, or the letter may have been written on the back of personalized stationery, or the note may have been hand-delivered by the writer's known servant. If this was chosen randomly, roll 1d; on a 1, treat as **Amateurish,** above, on a 6, treat as **Open,** below.
6. **Open:** The letter is signed. This implies a straightforward and confident admirer; bear in mind that this may intrigue certain players but put off others, particularly those who live to unravel threads.

The Admirer

Who sent the letter? Specifically, what kind of person, relative to the PC? The options below can be combined: if rolling randomly, roll an extra 1d here; on a 5-6, add a second entry.

1. **Former Rescuee:** Someone who the PC or party has saved, protected, or otherwise helped in the past. This doesn't have to involve literal life-saving; for example, a single mother may have benefited from a charity organization started by the character.
2. **Inappropriate:** Depending on the world's social structure, someone of a clan, house, race, nation, religion, gender, or social standing which society, or at least the PC's clan (et al) deems "wrong" for him to date. (For warring clans, etc., see **Enemy,** below.) Even if the player disagrees with society, the complications of dating this person will be significant.
3. **Equal:** Someone on roughly the same standing as the PC, whether socially, economically, or within a certain class. Alternatively, they may be a coworker, friend, or someone with whom the character has a friendly rivalry.
4. **Superior:** This can mean one of two types of suitors. In a stratified society, the admirer is of a higher class than the PC, such as a Duchess pursuing a freeman; in such a case, there is a danger both in refusing *and* in acquiescing! In a classless world, this represents a celebrity (though not necessarily an international one) or extremely wealthy suitor; either way, dating will certainly attract the interest of the press.
5. **Enemy:** While one's hated foe is unlikely to come calling for love, a member of a rival organization, group, clan, etc., may certainly grow to respect and admire the PC over time. If this is genuine (see *The Secret*, below), the sender may have to step quickly to avoid reprisals from their own allies.
6. **Unknown:** While the suitor obviously knows the PC, the reverse is not true. This often represents a bystander smitten by the character's actions, though as the fame of a given adventurer grows, more people will begin falling in love with his image, if not his true self (see **Projection,** below.)

The Secret

Beneath the wrapping, it's important to know what's really going on with the sender.

1. **Genuine:** No trick; the sender is real, sane, and actually wants to date the PC. This can make for an interesting subplot for groups which enjoy social interaction, but some players may not see the "point" of developing a relationship that isn't part of a hook or plot twist.
2. **Obsession:** The admirer is genuine, but more than a bit unbalanced. Any encouragement will result in a stalker; a lack of response will ensure more letters in the future; outright denial may cause things to get ugly.
3. **Projection:** The writer is assigning qualities to the PC that may not exist. Unlike **Obsession,** above, they aren't insane, just desperate to fill a (usually emotional) need. This may be the White Knight Syndrome, where they assume that the PC can save them from a bad situation, or outright denial about the PC's flaws or abilities.
4. **Ulterior Motive:** While they may harbor genuine feelings for the PC, the sender wants something beyond romance. This may be as mundane as a marriage for money and status or as unusual as a need to consummate with the PC to give birth to the Antichrist.
5. **Frame-Up:** A variant of **Ulterior Motive,** above, in which the writer is masquerading as another person. Determine who the second person is and *two* levels of secrecy (*The Secret*, above). The more secretive represents how well the true sender covered their tracks; the other shows how easy it will be to find the misleading clues.
6. **Mistaken:** The admirer intended the note for someone else; determine who. If the addressee isn't clearly labeled, this can cause an interesting misunderstanding. If this is an obvious misdelivery, it will reveal something going on that the party was not formerly aware of. Either way, it's important to select an interesting sender and (intended) recipient; finding out that your landlady has a crush on the person in the apartment next to yours is barely worth the game time, unless she's also a spy and this may be your one way to influence her.

Example

In a *Banestorm* game set in Tredroy, the GM decides to roll randomly, getting a 2 (Obscured), 2 (Inappropriate), and 6 (Mistaken); rolling for the intended subject gives 3 (Equal). He decides that the Muslim daughter of a North Tredroy official has fallen in love with a prominent (Christian) member of the Mercenaries' Guild. Her mage fumbled a teleport

roll, accidentally delivering the note into the PC's hands (literally!) while wiping its aura clean. The note, with its Arabic handwriting, could certainly be leveraged into influence or money, but only if the group can figure out what's *really* going on . . .

Pyramid Review

Bella Sara

Published by [Hidden City Games](#)

Five horse and/or energy cards, rule card; full-color, foil-wrapped; $1.99

If you have a 10-year-old girl -- or if you are a 10-year-old girl -- read on. If you're not, you might want to move on to the *Shooting the Moon* review down below. We're about to enter the saccharine world of *[Bella Sara.](#)*

Hidden City Games says there's a demographic of society not yet hooked by the collectible card game phenomenon, so it's reaching out to the kiddies, and since the subject matter is ponies and horses it would seem to be targeted at the girls. Each card has an illustration of a horse; a name (things like Charlie, Blackie, and Kio); a set of symbols at the top (horseshoes, hearts, some flowerish-looking thing); a quote at the bottom (more on that below); and an alphanumeric code. There are also energy cards that offer equipment like halters and riding hats. These allow the cards to be used in a variety of ways.

Among the games provided in the package: Leonardo's Game is really just warmed-over Crazy Eights. Different symbols appear at the top of each card, and in numbers from one to four. Each player draws seven cards from the top of his deck and they alternate turns playing something that corresponds. Your play has to match in the type or number of symbols -- if the person before you put down a card with four horseshoes, you have to play a card with four of any symbol, or any number of horseshoes. If you can't find a match in your hand you draw another from your deck. Whoever empties their hand first wins.

Moonlight's Game is similar, but with elements of speed and recognition added in. Everyone takes the top card off their deck and flips it face-up on the tabletop simultaneously. If you see a match -- again, symbols or the number thereof -- from your card to a rival's, tap the table. Whoever taps first gets to keep their card in a bonus pile. After at least one player has been through his deck this way three times, everyone totals the symbols on the cards they got to keep; the high score wins.

The final game is Bella's. It involves flipping over a card at random and meditating on the meaning of the card's quote. As these excerpts all read like daily affirmations ("Make time to listen to your friends" or "The wind blows. The sun is shining. Surround yourself with positive friends"), it's a pretty Zen load of noodles. They should appeal to the younger set, but at the same time pragmatic advice like Hercules' "Don't be afraid to ask for help" is juxtaposed against Shaman's bewildering (and borderline megalomaniacal) "You are more powerful than you realize. It is safe and good for you to be powerful." Parents, if they start trying to call the shots regarding their veggies, you've been warned.

There's also an on-line component to this operation. Assuming you're not in a diabetic coma, the card codes can be entered in for your account and your stable of horses will grow (and become better equipped or have more energy if you add the halters and whatnot to your stash). You can clean and feed your horses, keep a journal, treat the animals to an apple, and check your blood sugar level. There's a small town to explore, and some games to play if you can get your computer in lockstep with the website.

The illustrations on the cards are wonderful, like something right out of a storybook. Some are drawings, while others are quality paintings, and there's a nice selection of pictures for the foil-wrapped covers, too. The same respect hasn't been paid to the quality of cardstock, nor to the symbology -- for a game that relies on one's speed of recognition, it's painful to make out what and how many are depicted (those could be flowers, they could be machine cogs). The art is lovely, yes, but its size could have been reduced for the sake of playability.

Bella Sara's games aren't particularly clever or new, and have some questionable quirks (you count symbols for the

winning total in Moonlight's table-tapping game, not just the number of cards you took). The slack can be used for someone to come up with more house rules and games, but then again "flexibility" could be synonymous with "aimless." The website's functionality is a bit slow in some cases and unreliable in others, but it delivers what it promises and it's free. It's pretty clear, however, this is meant as a gateway game. There's not as much out there as one might think for the little ones, and even less directed at the girls, so there's certainly a chance that this kind of gamble could pay off big if a *Yu-Gi-Oh!*-style word of mouth is generated. The price is right for that kind of marketing, and no huge investment is required (even the most "demanding" game requires only four packs per player). It's not for the adults and it does what it can for a child's sense of self-worth. At worst, the kids have a game they can call their own to play with the 'rents, and it may be the first step toward cultivating your own crop of opponents for *World in Flames.*

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Shooting the Moon: All Is Fair in Love and War

Published by [Black and Green Games](#)

Written by Emily Care Boss

Cover & Illustrated by Jennifer Manley Lee

44-page digest-sized b&w softcover; $15

Shooting the Moon: All Is Fair in Love and War is a sequel of sorts to ***[Breaking the Ice: A Game of Love For Two.](#)*** Both share similar themes -- the course of true love -- but where ***Breaking the Ice*** took two people on three dates to find love between them, in ***Shooting the Moon*** three people are involved. This is a more adversarial game in which two rivals pursue a shared Beloved. It can be run with two players, each taking the role of two Suitors vying for the attention of a shared Beloved, or alternatively with three players in which case the third takes the role of the Beloved.

The Suitors have a shared goal, the Prize, something unique to the Beloved. Their attempts to gain this Prize will drive the story forward. If the Beloved is playing, her goal is to achieve a Dream, some kind of ambition. Suitors and Beloved race each other to their Prize or Dream, all the while throwing Hurdles into the path of their rivals. Overcoming a Hurdle gains Suitor or Beloved points towards these goals, while every Hurdle encountered will force a character to change and grow, a process to which all of the players contribute. It is the interplay between the characters that drives the storytelling of Shooting the Moon onwards.

The first thing to decide is the setting, which can be anywhere the players are happy with, from a fairy tale land to corporate cubicle culture. The five example games cover office politics, pirates, classic fantasy, high court intrigue, and space opera. These also form the basis of the various examples throughout the rule book.

Right from character creation, everything is done in a set order: Suitor 1, Suitor 2, and the Beloved. Character creation is a collaborative process, starting with selecting six descriptive attributes for the Beloved. From these are derived antonym and synonym pairs that are divided as attributes between the Suitors, one taking the antonym in a pair, the other the synonym. For example, in a space opera game of rival smugglers, the Beloved has the attribute "pretty." From this are derived the attributes Attractive and Ugly. One Suitor chooses one, while the other goes to his rival. Finally each attribute is modified with a condition, thus Ugly becomes "Ugly but eloquent," and Attractive becomes "Attractive but nervous."

A Suitor must also have three traits, a Person (rival, ally, or acquaintance), a Place, and an Object assigned to him. Finally, each Suitor also has a Conflict, which will complicate his pursuit of the Beloved, but grant bonus dice when brought into play. Finally, the players have to explain why the Beloved is available and what problem is she facing, her Opportunity, and her Obstacle. The very last thing to be done is to set the Beloved's Dream. This interactive process of setting up the game and creating characters sounds far more complex than it really is, but it is not easily explicable because it is not as obviously direct.

To win either the Suitor's Prize or the Beloved's Dream, the players must accrue points won by overcoming Hurdles over the course of three turns each. During a Suitor turn, the Active Player narrates his character's actions, while the other Suitor's player becomes his Opponent with the task of throwing the Hurdle, which must relate to the active Suitor's or the Beloved's traits, or to some aspect of the story told so far. At stake is not only the pursuit-advancing point, but also a new trait -- negative and related to the Hurdle if the Opponent wins, positive if the Active Player wins the turn.

For his Hurdle, the Opponent gets to roll five six-sided dice, but the Active Player can gain up to six dice by narrating three responses to the Hurdle. Each response must relate to the Suitor or Beloved traits or attributes, or involve some degree of flirtation between the Beloved and the Suitor. Once three responses have been made, both dice pools are rolled, the highest result being the winner. If the Beloved and Active Player win, they each gain a check towards their goals and a new trait of their choice. If the Opponent wins, the Active Player must take the trait of his choosing. If there is a tie, then the Beloved gives a trait to each the Suitors; or, if in a two-player game where the Beloved is an NPC, the dice are re-rolled.

The Active Player and the Beloved can still gain from a loss or a tie, but the stake increases. The Active Player can either take another of the Opponent's suggestions or involve his Conflict or the Beloved's Obstacle. Choosing any of these options gives more dice to be rolled and added to the pools already on the table. The outcome is the same as with the first Hurdle.

If there is no Beloved player, the points available rise with each successive set of Suitor turns. Once each Suitor has had three turns, the story proceeds to the end game. If there is a Beloved player, the points available do not rise, and the Beloved gets her own three turns. These work the same way as Suitor turns, but the Beloved sets a Hurdle that threatens both Suitors. Further, the more challenging the Hurdle, the greater the number of points towards goals that are available and the more dice the Beloved has to roll.

Once everyone has had three turns, the end game is played out. Everyone counts up the points gained to give one final dice pool. To bring every die in his pool, a player must tie in his Suitor's or Beloved's traits, Conflict, Obstacle, or Dream; any flirtation between them; or some element of the setting. The winner of the dice rolls narrates how his goal is achieved and what happens to the others involved in the relationship.

Like **Breaking the Ice,** this is a storytelling game designed to be told in a single session. Mechanically, ***Shooting the Moon*** shares much with **Breaking the Ice,** but is fundamentally more complex. This is to be expected when a third person is added to a relationship. It's not unnecessarily complex, but it's not as obvious as **Breaking the Ice,** and more examples would have helped to explain the game. Thankfully, **Shooting the Moon** is an interesting development of **Breaking the Ice,** which is no surprise given that it is the middle part of a trilogy, with the third part -- ***Under My Skin*** -- to follow. It is easily as flexible in terms of setting, as evidenced from the included sample games, so it can do Cyrano de Bergerac as well as Allie McBeal. It does not possess the charm or the innocence of **Breaking the Ice** though, and there is a darker feel to this sequel. Nevertheless, ***Shooting the Moon: All Is Fair in Love and War*** is another good vehicle for exploring a more complex aspect of the romance genre.

--Matthew Pook

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Torturer's Apprentice

An Adventure of Pain, Necromancy, and Romantic Comedy
Part I

for *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

This is the first part of an adventure, written for *GURPS* *Fourth Edition* and appropriate for a group of more than three characters built on a modest number of points. It involves multiple mistaken identities and carrying a human body a considerable distance, so fewer characters would be impractical, and vast cosmic powers would short-circuit most of the challenges, so high-point characters wouldn't be much fun. The adventure also involves lots of lying but very little fighting, so socially functional characters are a must. Since it opens with the PCs in chains and without equipment but doesn't require that the PCs know one another or work together for any reasons external to the adventure itself, it is well-suited for a one-shot or for the beginning of a campaign.

Once Upon A Time

Pity poor Yusif al-Lakmah. Yusif was a foundling left by mistake on the back steps of the dungeon (the kitchen door, probably the intended destination, was a bit farther down) of the palace of Emir Khudseen Bey, mercurial ruler of the city of Amanapur. Khudseen Bey is the sort of ruler who orders mass beheadings one minute, then showers surprised visitors with gold the next. Being in a rare moderate mood, he decreed that the child be raised by the man who found him: Idi the executioner.

As the boy grew, Yusif's surprised adoptive father taught him the only trade he knew. Although Yusif had none of Idi's natural talent and dedication to craftsmanship, the foundling became an almost competent executioner, torturer, and jailer. Close enough, in fact, that Idi has felt comfortable leaving the dungeons in the hands of his assistant from time to time while he went to visit his sister, who lives in a village some 30 miles distant. Meanwhile, Yusif fell in love. As usual, that's where the trouble began.

While tidying up some loose limbs, Yusif happened to catch a glimpse of Yasmin, the Emir's daughter, as she strolled through the courtyard, and was immediately captivated. Alas, as a commoner, an orphan, and a torturer, it would be unthinkable for them to communicate, much less carry on a romantic relationship, but Yusif was determined. He approached Festus Magister, the Emir's resident physician and wizard, for a love potion. Festus was happy to oblige, in return for appropriate payment . . . in this case, a few prisoners to help with his magical research.

This was a price Yusif was more than able to pay. The next time Idi went for a visit with his sister, Yusif picked a few condemned prisoners chosen at random and sent them along to the wizard's tower. Now he's got a potion which will make anyone love him. But how can he give it to someone of whom he's never been within 20 feet?

Part the First: In Which Our Heroes Learn That Love Hurts

The PCs have been arrested for violating one of the Emir's whimsical decrees (wearing orange, the favorite color of the Emir's deceased mother? Such disrespect!) and are awaiting execution. But Yusif has a way out for them. If they help him win the love of Yasmin, he'll let them go. After all, he's the jailer. Who else would know?

What Yusif needs the PCs to do is to sneak him into the palace's harem and help him slip the love potion to the princess. The central problem is that the

palace is strictly segregated. Only eunuchs and harem girls are allowed in the harem; Yusif isn't a harem girl, and becoming a eunuch would defeat the purpose. Even if he had the nerve to pass himself off as a eunuch (which he doesn't), he would be recognized and stopped before he could even get close. But with a few disguises and the right passwords, the brave, worldly PCs could smuggle him through the guards and into the harem; turnover at the palace is high enough that a few new faces won't be immediate cause for suspicion. All the heroes have to do is to get him into the harem, carry him around until they find the princess, and keep a lookout for him for as long as it takes for Yusif to slip the potion into the princess's food or drink.

By stealing laundry, Yusuf has managed to obtain a number of outfits which won't attract too much notice within the palace: no more than two servants' outfits (plain but flowing robes), no more than one guard uniform (oversized pantaloons, a brief vest, a scimitar, and a very large turban), and harem girl outfits (several layers of colorful but translucent veils, blouses, and pantaloons) for everyone else. The servant and harem girl outfits can conceal knives and other small items, but only the guards can carry swords, and armor is generally out of the question; by strange coincidence, the only clothes which fit the largest, strongest member of the group is a large harem girl outfit. Veils are compulsory only for harem girls, but PCs may be comforted to know that, in this windy city in the desert, it's not unusual for a scarf or other headdress to cover at least part of the face to protect it from blowing sand.

Once Yusif has convinced the PCs to help him (if he doesn't, there's little point in carrying on), they must figure out how they'll get him into the harem. The palace is amply provided with rugs he could be rolled up with, baskets and barrels he could curl up in, and other vessels for the creative. One of the grand festival dishes of Amanapur is a roast ox stuffed with a roast lamb, stuffed in turn with a roast duck, stuffed with a roast chicken stuffed with several baked swallows, each of which is stuffed with a gold-leaf-coated fried almond. It is entirely possible that an oxladukhenallowmond is being prepared in the kitchen at that very moment. Depending on what they carry him in, they may be able to whisper back and forth with Yusif, or might only be able to communicate with a series of coded knocks (one for yes, two for no . . .).

Yusif can also outline the path the heroes must take. The palace is shaped like a capital C made of five squares. Each square serves a particular purpose and is connected to one or two of its neighbors by guarded gateways. They're currently in the square at the top right, a series of rooms around what is called the "service courtyard." This section of the palace houses the dungeon, the main kitchens, the main laundries, stables, and storerooms. A gateway connects the service courtyard to the adjacent square (at the upper left of the C), the public courtyard. The public courtyard is where petitioners wait for an audience with the emir, tradesmen come to sell or simply deliver their wares, and bodies of the emir's troops who serve as the city's police go in and out of the palace. It is, in short, the front entrance and waiting room of the palace. The palace's main gate is at the center top of the square. The public courtyard connects to the "forest of the throne," a many-pillared room where the emir holds court at the center left of the C, which in turn connects to the semi-private "citadel of the pen," an area of courtiers' apartments and offices at the lower left of the C. That, finally, connects to the harem, at the bottom right of the C. The palace is equipped with a tower (occupied by Festus Magister) at the very upper left of the C, just off the public courtyard, and another (occupied by the private apartments of the emir) at the lower right, just off the harem. The PCs must make their way around the C and into the harem, with Yusif in whatever container he

I Am Outta Here

So why shouldn't the PCs just stuff Yusif in the nearest iron maiden and take their leave? For one thing, there are any valuable possessions they once had. Those are now under lock and key somewhere else in the palace, and they need Yusif alive and cooperative to get them back (which he certainly will, should everyone survive, but not a moment before they've completed the proposed mission; Yusif isn't a *complete* idiot). Second, getting out of the palace isn't as easy as it sounds. The doors to the dungeon are locked on *both* sides, requiring an outside guard to unlock them. Again, they need Yusif to see the light of day. To sweeten the pot, Yusif can promise to *try* to get them a more substantial reward, but he and the princess may have to leave the palace and live the life of paupers once they declare their love for one another, so he can't make guarantees.

And they shouldn't even try to beat Yusif into submission to get his cooperation. He's driven by True Love, making him nearly impervious to coercion. Just as importantly, he is, despite a lack of natural aptitude, a trained torturer and will be more appalled at the PCs' poor technique than their brutality. He might even offer some pointers.

happens to be in. Simple? Sure it is . . .

Two Dinars!

No sooner do the PCs leave the dungeon (with Yusif presumably in tow) than an elderly servant woman runs up to them and starts shouting at one of the PCs with a covered face. The near-sighted, hard-of-hearing old lady is convinced that the hero, who happens to be wearing a distinctive outfit, is someone she loaned some money to a few weeks ago, and she wants it back. The sum isn't huge, but it is more than pocket change, and in any case, the PCs don't have any money on them (Yusif doesn't either; crime may not pay, but neither does punishment). The adventurers may distract or evade her (for example, losing her in a crowd, giving her a purse full of pebbles which she won't count until later), but only temporarily. Unless they manage to pay her off, she will reappear from time to time, demanding her money in the same shrill tones.

Pass the Parcel

Once they get out of the service courtyard, the heroes must cross the public courtyard. And today, it's crowded. A party of religious pilgrims has come to ask the emir's blessings before setting out (and has brought their camels with them), scores of hopeful merchants and tradesmen have brought bundles of wares to try to sell to the notoriously open-handed emir, a minor nobleman has brought a pair of elephants with him as a gift for the emir in hopes of influencing him, and apparently a lot of people are dissatisfied with the city's lesser judges and have come to appeal to the emir for new decisions on their cases. Getting through the dense crowd with a 150+ pound bundle of Yusif won't be easy.

And it doesn't get any easier when the elephants start acting up and the people closest to them try to scatter. In the subsequent confusion and jostling, it's almost inevitable that the PCs will drop Yusif. When they do, they'll first have to find the bundle, box, or roast ox he's wrapped up in. And after they've done that, perhaps after they get out of the public courtyard and into the forest of the throne, they'll have to realize that they've picked up the wrong bundle, go back into the crowd, and exchange their bundle for the one he's actually in. Without, of course, giving anything away.

Peel Me a Grape!

The forest of the throne is far less densely packed than the public courtyard. Lit by skylights but kept cool by a tiered roof held far overhead by countless pillars, this is the room where the emir holds court. At this very moment, he sits on a pile of cushions at the far end of the chamber, doing the business of government while scribes copy letters and examine records, courtiers await the emir's convenience, commoners stand in line awaiting a hearing, and guards police the proceedings. Although the room is fairly quiet, with most people speaking in whispers, there are enough people going here and there that the adventurers shouldn't be conspicuous.

Shouldn't, that is, if the biggest, strongest adventurer weren't wearing an outfit which belongs to the emir's favorite wife. When the heroes get about half-way across the room, the emir calls on them to halt. When they've had a moment to absorb the shock, the emir calls his "dear Zukelia" over to sprinkle rosewater over his brow. It may not be clear just who he's talking to, but since the emir will keep talking to "Zukelia" if a group of harem girl-clad PCs approach him, it should be easy to figure out.

Although the emir is relatively liberal, letting the women of the harem walk

If All Else Fails

At some point, despite their best efforts, the PCs may be unable to maintain their disguises or to keep Yusif hidden. If that happens, chaos erupts. Any guards in the vicinity when the adventurers are unmasked will attempt to capture them and any bystanders around at the moment can identify them to other pursuers, but the PCs will have to take to their heels and stay ahead of the guards until they can think of something else to do. Word of a problem will make its way to the palace gates faster than the PCs possibly can, and they'll end up locked in. There are alternate routes out of the palace, but they can be problematic. If some bright player thinks of heading for the harem, which will keep non-eunuch guards from following, skip to "Follow That Princess!"

around the palace if accompanied by a guard, he's not about to let one be unveiled in public, so "Zukelia" has nothing to fear there. However, the emir will want her to stay close, feed him the occasional tidbit from nearby trays of sweets, and perhaps cuddle a bit.

And then, growing tired of work, he'll ask "her" to sing for him. The real Zukelia is an accomplished player of the oud (a sort of lute) and a reasonably good alto. It seems unlikely that the PC dressed as Zukelia is either. A smart character might come up with a plausible excuse for "Zukelia" not to sing (she has a sore throat, she's saving her voice for a grand performance tonight, etc.). If that happens, the emir will indulgently accept the excuse and send "her," with a parting affectionate swat on the rear, off to the harem to rest.

Pardon?

The guard post between the citadel of the pen and the harem is a post of considerable honor among the harem guards. It is held, with great dignity and ceremony, by Fuad, the most senior of the eunuchs. Fuad is 87 years old. Not only is he afflicted with the nearsightedness so common in Amanapur, he's nearly deaf. Consequently, an attempt to get into the harem will go something like this:

Fuad: What's the password?
PC: The wind blows sand through the tower.
Fuad: Nearly seven.
PC: Um . . . I said, the wind blows sand through the tower!
Fuad: Sandals don't cover your toes! Everyone knows that! Now what's the password?
PC: Open the door, you fool!
Fuad: It may be a token detail to you, but it's a post of great honor!

Conspicuous shouting can continue in this vein for quite some time. The way to get past Fuad is for "Zukelia" to get in his face and shout the password at him. He still won't quite make it out, but he'll recognize Zukelia if "she" gets close enough.

Follow That Princess!

Finally, the PCs find themselves in the harem. Nothing stands between the heroes and their goal . .. except for knowing where the princess is. Yusif has never been in the harem, so he doesn't know the layout, and none of the eunuchs or harem girls know exactly where the princess is. At every room they enter, they're sent on to the next. ("She was just in the garden, but she was talking about going to read in the library.")

Unlike the outer parts of the palace, though, new additions to the harem are uncommon, and the women there will be curious about any newcomers, and why "Zukelia" isn't speaking. The longer the PCs stay in the harem, the more likely it is that they'll arouse suspicion; for each room they go into, make a roll against Fast Talk at -1, cumulatively per room, to gracefully back out before someone becomes insistent that the PCs identify themselves. With any luck, the adventurers will figure out that the princess is working her way around the harem in the direction they've been going, and by running around the harem in the opposite direction, they're more likely to intercept her before it's too late.

They can catch up with her in the harem's baths, a low-tech swimming pool and spa. Surrounded by damp, largely unclad women doing one another's hair (and surrounded by a number of guards, reminding them that this is a place where trespassers are messily executed), they can try to figure out how to get Yusif and his love potion close to the princess.

There are a few major obstacles to their objective. First, the women in the baths are just as inquisitive as elsewhere in the harem. They'll be particularly suspicious if the PCs dressed as harem girls don't take off their veils and relax for a while; they'll also extend several invitations to swim. Second, although Yasmin, at the center of a knot of servants and other ladies, has a cup of melon juice beside her (certainly a nice receptacle for a potion) but seems disinclined to drink from it.

Third, after a minute or two, the heroes will hear a voice behind them pointedly demanding "What are you doing in my dress!" The real Zukelia has entered the baths and spots the one wearing one of her favorite outfits. Discovery is now inevitable. When it becomes clear that something is up, the guards become very interested, if not downright hostile, and it may be time for a frantic chase scene. Yusif, realizing that this is as close as he's going to get, struggles out of his bundle to help. And when Yasmin finds that a group of prisoners has been carting around the assistant torturer wrapped up in a basket (or rug or barrel or, by now, rather cold roast ox), she's furious. At the PCs. How dare they treat her beloved so poorly! He could have smothered inside that basket/rug/well-cooked but unappetizingly cool carcass! If they can calm her down, perhaps by throwing Yusif at her, the story will become all to clear: while walking through the courtyard one day, she spied a handsome young man tidying up some loose limbs . . . and Yusif's love potion is obviously unnecessary.

Given a few minutes, Yasmin can calm things down, calling off the guards and quieting the screaming harem girls. She's the princess, so people will listen to her, and the romance of the situation gives her the sympathy of her fellow harem inmates. As long as the heroes haven't led a chase back out into the more public parts of the palace or chopped up too many guards, the situation can be contained. The party has Yasmin's gratitude (and Yusif's, for what it's worth) and tentative support from the rest of the harem, though Zukelia is a bit miffed. Everyone can live happily ever after.

For a few minutes. Until Yasmin's favorite elderly servant woman runs in and announces "The father of the princess's betrothed is arriving!"

* * * *

Next time: A complicated situation becomes more so.

The Circle of this Forest: *As You Like It*

"Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather."
-- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* II:iv:1-8

"Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." Not the most saccharine of sentiments this Valentine's Day, but then Rosalind is not your average fainting heroine. (Even though she does, as it happens, faint.) No, she's a cross-dressing minx with a secret, which makes her an androgynous, alchemical ideal for our traditional Valentine's Day examination of Shakespearean romantic dramaturgy. So into the woods with us, where love is all around, and everything is *As You Like It.*

"And thou, thrice-crowned queen of night, survey
With thy chaste eye, from thy pale sphere above,
Thy huntress' name, that my full life doth sway.
O Rosalind! these trees shall be my books,
And in their barks my thoughts I'll character . . ."
-- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* III:ii:2-6

Orlando is the youngest son of Sir Rowland de Boys, kept "rustically at home" by his cruel oldest brother Oliver. Orlando demands his birthright, and Oliver throws him out, attempting to have him killed in a wrestling match to boot. The match takes place at the court of Duke Frederick, who has himself usurped his brother's birthright and exiled the rightful Duke Senior to the Forest of Arden. Although Orlando wins the wrestling match -- and the heart of Rosalind, daughter of Duke Senior -- he nevertheless flees into the Forest with his old retainer Adam. Frederick also banishes Rosalind and his own daughter Celia, and they take to the woods accompanied by the clown Touchstone. To disguise herself, Rosalind dresses as a boy, "Ganymede."

In the Forest, they meet the unhappy Silvius, who loves the heartless Phebe, and a number of other pastoral character types. Orlando, meanwhile, has encountered the greenwood court of Duke Frederick, ornamented by the melancholy lord Jaques. Fed and sheltered, he now turns to love, wandering the forest nailing bad poetry about Rosalind onto the trees. "Ganymede" encounters Orlando, and promises to cure his love by pretending to be Rosalind. Phebe, meanwhile, has fallen for "Ganymede." Not to be left out, Touchstone woos a shepherdess named Audrey. Orlando, who has a tardiness issue, promises to faithfully keep his appointments with "Ganymede" and wanders off.

He doesn't appear, but instead his brother Oliver suddenly shows up with a bloody handkerchief and a wild story, both for "Ganymede." It seems that Duke Frederick had ordered Oliver to track down Orlando, but Oliver fell asleep. Fortunately, Orlando came along and drove off a serpent and a lioness, saving Oliver's life at the cost of a mauling that prevented him from keeping his meeting with "Ganymede." Rosalind decides enough is enough, and tells Orlando as "Ganymede" that he will marry Rosalind the next day, when Oliver (conveniently) will marry Celia, with whom he has (of course) fallen in love. For good measure, "Ganymede" also promises Silvius that he will marry Phebe, and promises Phebe that she will either marry "Ganymede" or settle for Silvius. And indeed, the next day she reveals her true identity. The disappointed Phebe marries Silvius, the joyous Orlando marries Rosalind, Oliver marries Celia, and Touchstone marries Audrey, because why not? Even Duke Frederick, offstage, has met a holy hermit and renounced his throne in favor of Duke Senior. Jaques vows to follow Frederick into religious retreat, and Rosalind "conjures" applause from the audience in an epilogue.

"LE BEAU: I will tell you the beginning; and, if it please your ladyships, you may see the end, for the best is yet to do;

and here, where you are, they are coming to perform it.
CELIA: Well, the beginning, that is dead and buried.
LE BEAU: There comes an old man and his three sons --
CELIA: I could match this beginning with an old tale."
-- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* I:ii:50-53

Shakespeare took the basic story of *As You Like It* from the 1590 novel *Rosalynde: Euphues' Golden Legacie* by the poet-adventurer Thomas Lodge. Shakespeare added Touchstone, Jaques, Audrey, and some minor characters, and changed the hero and villain from "Rosader and Saladyne" to Orlando and Oliver, "Alinda" to Celia, and "Montanus" to Silvius. He also removed the battle scene in favor of Duke Frederick's sudden (and offstage) conversion. Lodge based *Rosalynde* on the medieval *Tale of Gamelyn* (wrongly attributed to Chaucer at the time) and wrote his novel while on a sea voyage to the Canary Islands commanded by one Captain Clarke. The precise date of that voyage is unknown, but some time between 1585 and 1588 is a best guess. Likewise, estimates of the date Shakespeare composed *As You Like It* range from 1593 to 1599, although the scholarly consensus is 1598. This would put it at the tail end of the "pastoral" genre of shepherd-heavy poetic romance, appropriate for a play that is essentially a sendup of or self-referential commentary on the pastoral -- Shakespeare's *Blazing Saddles* or *Scream.*

"A lioness, with udders all drawn dry,
Lay couching, head on ground, with catlike watch,
When that the sleeping man should stir; for 'tis
The royal disposition of that beast
To prey on nothing that doth seem as dead . . ."
-- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* IV:iii:90-94

The other big hint on the date of *As You Like It* is its repeated references to [Christopher Marlowe](). Marlowe was killed in a safe-house in 1593 by members of one or the other Tudor secret services, although the cover story was that he died in a fight over the "reckoning" at a tavern. And what do we find in Act III? Touchstone pointlessly mocking Audrey's dull soul with this: "When a man's verses cannot be understood, nor a man's good wit seconded with the forward child Understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room." To drive the point home, as it were, the line also refers to one from Marlowe's *Jew of Malta,* "infinite riches in a little room." And again, Phebe's lament over Ganymede quotes Marlowe (the "dead shepherd") directly: "Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?" Since that quote appears in the poem *Hero and Leander,* not published until 1598 (though Shakespeare could have seen it in manuscript), that's another argument for a later composition.

But how did Shakespeare know about the "reckoning"? That language appears only in the official (not public) Coroner's Inquest into Marlowe's killing, and at the time, Marlowe's death was ascribed to a "quarrel over lewd love," or even the plague! Curiouser and curiouser. Marlowe of course was briefly an "exile" in France -- as was Thomas Lodge, by the late 1590s -- while he worked as a spy for the Privy Council. The name of the clown Touchstone -- the stone that tells gold from dross -- could well refer to Marlowe's activity overseas as a counterfeiter. Further, there is a very peculiar passage in which Touchstone tells the shepherd William (the only character so named in all Shakespeare's works) "Now, all your writers do consent that *ipse* [himself] is he; now you are not *ipse* [myself] for I am he." Touchstone [Marlowe] says that "William" [Shakespeare?] is not Marlowe, because Marlowe is . . . who? "He?" And what to make of the "royal" -- but barren -- lioness (an extremely dangerous reference to Queen Elizabeth?) who threatens Oliver but will prey "on nothing that doth seem as dead"? What, or who, "seems as dead" but is actually alive? Marlowe, perhaps, faking his death and hiding in the Forest of the Ardennes? Or something else, in some other forest?

"But, my good lord, this boy is forest-born,
And hath been tutor'd in the rudiments
Of many desperate studies by his uncle,
Whom he reports to be a great magician,
Obscured in the circle of this forest."
-- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* V:iv:33-37

The play is about searching out just such a mystery, being literally a "romance of the Rose," a quest for Truth in Arcadia. Both Duke Senior and Orlando are seeking Rosalind, and neither knows she is there "obscured in the circle of this forest" with them. She calls claims her uncle is a forest magician (Merlin? Another Marlowe parallel?), and tells the audience "My way is to conjure you." She notes that "in Pythagoras' day" she was an "Irish rat" (driven out by rhymes) and is described by Orlando as a kind of composite female goddess "of many faces, eyes, and hearts." (A cherub? A shoggoth?) She is simultaneously woman and boy, male and female, the Sacred Androgyne and Red Elixir once more. She brings Celia (from *caelus*, "heaven") down to earth. She takes the name "Ganymede," the bearer of the Cup, but hers is a specifically pagan Grail, based not only on love and wildness but sanctified by the ancient god of marriage, Hymen. Orlando senses this, and appeals to Hecate (the "thrice-crowned queen of night") for her love. Like Hecate (and the Duchess of Malfi) she reduces her lovers to "Irish wolves against the moon." If we could but find Rosalind in this wilderness, this "desert," what would she be?

As always, Shakespeare makes it tricky for us, resorting to his old standby mystagogical method of twinning. He has two Olivers -- Orlando's brother, and the country vicar "Sir Oliver Mar-text" (Marlowe-text?) -- and two Jaqueses. Jaques is the name of Orlando and Oliver's middle brother, who appears (unlike the melancholy courtier Jaques) with the good news about Duke Frederick's conversion. Orlando is himself twinned with his brother (Orlando and Oliver were boon companions in the fantastic pastoral *Orlando Furioso,* and Oliver keeps Orlando's appointment with Rosalind) and with his father, "old Sir Rowland," since "Orlando" is Italian for "Rowland." Finally, Celia is "coupled and inseparable" with Rosalind, again twinned "like Juno's swans." Four sets of "twins," and four loving couples: Orlando and Rosalind, Celia and Oliver, Phebe and Silvius, and Touchstone and Audrey. The god Hymen specifically identifies Touchstone and Audrey with "the winter [married] to foul weather," which implies that the other three couples are the other three seasons.

"They say he is already in the forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world."
-- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* I:i:41

This seasonal sweep is evident also in the songs, which begin with "winter and rough weather" and "blow, blow, thou winter wind," and end with "sweet lovers love the spring." Rosalind, of course, is still stirring the pot: "Men are April when they woo, December when they wed," which reverses the winter-wooing to spring-wedding motif of the play. Shakespeare amps up the time-confusion with "no news but the old news" -- Duke Senior has been both recently exiled and gone since Celia was young. Time stops in the Forest of Arden, which though it feels "the seasons' difference . . . the icy fang and churlish chiding of the winter wind" also sports olive groves and palm trees! Oliver is saved under a "bald" oak, while Orlando rests under a live one "like a dropp'd acorn," and Duke Senior sings "heigh-ho, the holly!" (Oliver and Orlando are surnamed *de Boys,* "of the forest.") Oak Kings and Holly Kings aplenty. Summer and winter contend throughout -- not only young Orlando versus old Oliver and old Duke Senior versus young Duke Frederick, but young Silvius debates love with the old shepherd Corin.

The parallels are even clearer in the play's ultimate source. In *The Tale of Gamelyn,* Gamelyn (from the Norse *gamall,* meaning "old one") fights his older brother and locks him up for a week of feasting -- a clear reference to Saturnalia, Yule, Twelfth Night, all the mid-winter feasts at the coming of the new king -- and then is imprisoned in his turn. He frees himself, beats up churchmen (more Misrule) and flees into the woods, where he replaces Robin Hood as King of the Greenwood. He then returns to the town, hangs the sheriff and his brother (in a grand combination of Herne and Mister Punch) and then returns to the forest to marry. Gamelyn is both old and young, both King and outlaw. He, Shakespeare's model for Orlando, is the Green Man.

"What shall he have that kill'd the deer?
His leather skin and horns to wear.
Then sing him home.
Take thou no scorn to wear the horn;
It was a crest ere thou wast born:
Thy father's father wore it,
And thy father bore it:

The horn, the horn, the lusty horn
Is not a thing to laugh to scorn."
-- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It,* IV:ii:11-19

Not just green . . . scarlet and green, like the holly. Gamelyn (or Gamwell) is also an alias of Will Scarlet in the 17th-century ballad "Robin Hood Newly Revived," another connection to Robin Hood for our play. (Likewise, in the 1938 Errol Flynn version, "Will Gamwell" is the Merry Man in scarlet.) In that ballad, Will Scarlet, "young Gamwell," kills his father's steward, loses his inheritance, and flees into the Forest. In "Robin Hood and the Prince of Aragon," Will both fights a giant and marries the rightful heiress, just like Orlando. Will Scarlet is often twinned with, given the name of, or otherwise confused with Will Stukely (or Will Stutely); where "Will Scarlet" is the youngest, rashest Merry Man, "Will Stukely" is the oldest and wisest. And get this: Will Stukely is depicted as Robin's old *steward.* Will Scarlet has thus, in some deep sense, killed Will Stukely, a kind of self-devouring serpent, shedding Lincoln Green for the bright scarlet of sacred blood. But like Orlando and Oliver, they are two sides of the same coin, twins and emblems of each other.

And here's where things get really strange, so stay with me. Another Will Stukeley, an antiquarian, excavated Stonehenge beginning in 1719 and apparently converted to Druidism in the next decade, eventually claiming to be "Arch-Druid of Britain." He became, in other words, the steward -- the guardian of the property, the legacy -- of the Forest King. And what is *As You Like It* actually concerned with? Orlando's legacy, his inheritance, his "one thousand crowns" from Adam. That's why the real climax isn't even the marriages but the reading of Duke Frederick's will -- his legacy. Duke Frederick leaves Orlando not his money, but "a love that your true faith doth merit," which is to say, Rosalind. In between, Orlando has been hanging odes on the Druidic hawthorn, finding "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones" -- which is to say, uncovering (and inscribing) the Truth hidden at the center of the forest, which he sums up as, of course, Rosalind again.

Shakespeare is thus telling the story of the secret of the Rose, the hidden Druidical wisdom, the "golden legacy" of the British past, perhaps as uncovered by John Dee in Wales, by Lodge in the Atlantean Canaries, or by Christopher Marlowe in Jesuit libraries in Rheims. He is talking about the True Kingship, the crest of the deer, the crown of Robin Hood, of Herne, the Horned Man, that "thy father's father wore." Marlowe spread it to the School of Night, who sent it to [Roanoke](#) (Rowan-Oak) on the good ship *Roebuck* (flagship of the horned king's hidden navy?) under Captain John Clarke in 1585. (Another passenger on Clarke's 1585 voyage -- one John *Stukely.*) Was this the same "Captain Clarke" upon whose ship Thomas Lodge wrote his novel? Lodge broke it open, and he had to flee to France. Worse, Marlowe had to be killed (or exiled again) to settle the "reckoning," the debt owed for the Golden Legacy. Marlowe, and the whole secret Forest Kingship, had to "seem as dead," if it was to evade the lioness and her serpentine secret police, the snakes in Shakespeare's Edenic forest. It had to hide in the wilderness under the care of a faithful shepherd . . . or steward. But, Shakespeare says, the seasons will turn, the Will will be read, and eventually the King will come into his own again, and everything will be just as you like it.

"Love? What is Love?" the Gamazoid Asked the Captain

Back in my days as a swinging single (for sufficiently large values of "swinging"), I tried my hand a few times at the online dating scene, which can be a useful gambit if you're a guy working in an office consisting solely of other guys.

Anyway, one interesting aspect about online dating is that, despite a common language, words themselves don't mean the same thing between folks online. I think by far my favorite common phrase I encountered from written personals was from women professing to be "not into games." Now, as someone who considered (and considers) himself to be "into games," this led to something of an interesting conundrum, since I'd often feel like I needed to explain myself to potential dates: "Okay; I'm into games, but I don't think I'm into the kind of games that you're not into."

A similar situation arose whenever I'd talk about my hobbies. Since the Internet is such a diverse breeding ground of interests ranging from the commonplace to the criminal, making sure everyone was on the same page during conversations: "Okay; when you say you're into 'fantasy roleplaying,' do you mean 'pretending to be a naughty nurse who sleeps with people' or 'pretending to be an elf who kills people'?"

Of course, that words have multiple meanings isn't that unusual; there are only so many words in existence compared to the number of things or actions. But what's interesting is the gulf between what people intend by their words and how they are interpreted.

For example, say to various groups of people some version of, "Say, do you all like card games?"

- One group might think you mean games such as poker, spades, or hearts.
- Another group might think you mean games such as *Munchkin, Lunch Money,*
- Still another group might think you mean games such as *Magic: The Gathering, Yu-Gi-Yoh!,* or *Bella Sara.*
- And a final group might think you mean, "Your dog said to kill your parents." (Admittedly, that group is probably less than 10% of the general population.)

Or how many times have you been misunderstood when you told people you liked roleplaying games? "Oh, you mean like *Final Fantasy?*" or "Oh, is that like *World of Warcraft?*" or "What's that? Rex says to kill dad?"

Even when folks seem to be using the same words to mean the same thing, there's still plenty of room for interpretation or misunderstanding. For example, let's say a GM offers to run a sci-fi game. If the GM is assuming that to mean something like *Transhuman Space* while one player wants *Shadowrun,* another player is expecting something like *Fading Suns,* and still another is looking forward to a *Star Trek*-esque game, there's probably going to be a disconnect. (On the other hand, the player looking forward to a *Paranoia* game will likely be happy. Any game becomes like *Paranoia* in the hands of the right players.)

Likewise I've seen plenty of gaming ads looking for "serious gamers." Does this mean people who are really into roleplaying? Serious munchkins? People who actually show up consistently regardless of their gaming style?

Or how about "beer and pretzels" games? Is there any general consensus as to what this means? (According to Wikipedia, *WizWar* is considered an example. Given that game's complexity, I think I'd need a *lot* of beer and pretzels to get it to qualify. Only replace the pretzels with more beer. And replace the beer with shots of Jack Daniel's.)

If the desire of language is to be understood -- admittedly not always the goal -- the easiest way to avoid these problems is probably through the use of examples, analogies, and metaphors. For example, telling folks you want to run a sci-fi game isn't very helpful. Telling someone you want to run "a sci-fi game that's two-thirds *Blade Runner* with one-third *Sky Captain & the World of Tomorrow*" should give the prospective player more to go on. Or telling the gaming group that you consider *BattleTech* to be a beer-and-pretzels offering should help them make an informed decision.

Of course, perhaps the quintessential example of the multiple meanings of language is the word "love" itself. For example, you may love your wife, your brother, and pancakes; but you almost certainly don't use the same meaning of "love" for all three (unless you're a refugee from a Faulkner novel). And, depending on *how* you love something, it's probably best to demonstrate with some chocolates, football tickets, or maple syrup, as appropriate.

And so, on this Valentine's Day week, we again look at some of the various ways that "love" and "gaming" can intersect, with a handful of articles from our Baker Street irregulars. (We're even going to spill a bit over into next week's issue . . . as the helpful "Part I" should enclue.)

So even if you're a naughty nurse who's not into games but loves beer and pretzels, hopefully you'll find something this week to spark your interest. Presuming, of course, that we call all agree on what "spark" or "interest" are . . .

--Steven Marsh

The Torturer's Apprentice

Part II
In Which A Funny Thing Happens To the Heroes On The Way To The Harem

for *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

And so our story continues . . .

For the past several months, the Emir has been carrying on negotiations with the fierce desert chieftain, Sheik Yabutti. The sheik and the emir exchanged hostages, one of Khudseen's brothers for one of the Sheik's sons (Rakhim al-Nayat al-'Ang, his sixth and youngest). Now, a long-term treaty has tentatively been concluded. Sheik Yabutti is on his way to Amanapur and, after a lavish feast, the treaty is to be formalized by Yabutti's son, the hostage, being engaged to Yasmin. Yasmin, however, will refuse the marriage.

To this, Yusif adds what he calls "the bad news." Since the sheik's son was, technically, a prisoner, he ended up in the dungeons of the Emir's palace with no ceremony or fanfare. Not knowing who the prisoner was, Yusif sent him along for Festus Magister's magical experiments. Not only is an engagement standing between Yusif and Yasmin's happiness (and between the PCs and the door), Rakhim's confinement could lead to a serious diplomatic incident.

Yusif again appeals to the PCs for assistance. Without their assistance, he says, Yasmin will not know happiness and the city will be threatened (not so much a problem if the heroes aren't from the area, but a considerable issue if they are). He won't be so crass as to mention that if Yasmin is exposed, there will be no one to shield the PCs from the emir's considerable wrath, but the party should be smart enough to figure that out. What they need from the advengturers, he and Yasmin decide, is assistance recovering Rakhim and keeping up appearances until the betrothal ceremony is complete. After Sheik Yabutti has returned to his desert home, Yusif and Yasmin can make a quiet escape.

While Yusif helps Yasmin pack some veils for their planned flight and exile, the PCs are given the job of visiting Festus Magister's tower, finding Rakhim, and escorting him back to the dungeon. They should try to convince him that Yusif had to move the prisoners to the wizard's tower while the dungeon was being cleaned, and now that that's done, he can move back. Before they go, they can, if they desire, change clothes. They can find enough eunuch guard and eunuch servant outfits for everyone. Yusif is also happy to recover the heroes' gear at this point, although it may take some time. He has to talk to the sergeant of the guard, who was responsible for depositing their belongings with the quartermaster . . . Yusif has little idea how long it'll take, but in the event it will be a matter of hours.

Goodnight, Sweet Prince

Getting into the wizard's tower won't be a big problem. Servants are in and out of every place in the palace all day and night, bringing in food, sweeping the floors, washing this and that, taking away rubbish, and so on. Getting all the way up to Festus Magister's chambers and laboratory is somewhat more difficult. Festus doesn't like being disturbed, and most servants are sensibly terrified of the potentially hazardous nature of most of the items in the lab. Festus reacts to most of the PCs with barely suppressed annoyance and condescension, but he will take aside for a moment the one contacted by the Halvavin. Festus tells him "It shall be at the third horn. Hakim and Aref are on their guard, but make sure that Mansoor knows as well. Now be on your way!" If the hero indicates that he has no idea what the magician is talking about, Festus will give him a long, hard look and send him away anyway, having marked him as a problem.

The unfortunate adventurer will be attacked by lone assassins with poisoned daggers up to three times, if he makes it that long, before dinner.

More difficult than getting in to the tower will be getting Rakhim out without Festus knowing, since the magician keeps track of his zombies. What Yusif didn't know is that Festus Magister knew about the impending treaty far in advance and recognized Rakhim when he was delivered. Festus killed him and reanimated him as a zombie. He's working on a plot to take over both Amanapur and the desert tribes, using the zombie Rakhim as a pawn and his fellow members of the Halvavin as hired killers.

About the only things the heroes have going for them are that zombie-Rakhim will take simple orders from just about anyone, the body is still fresh, so he looks unhealthy but not notably dead or rotten to the casual glance (long term viewing or close inspection will raise suspicions, though; several parts have been cut off and stuck back on with wax), and that if they get him out of the tower, Festus Magister can't make a huge fuss about it for fear of attracting suspicion to himself as well. If they can distract Festus long enough to get a shambling prince out of the tower, they've got breathing room.

Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?

Once they get to the public courtyard, they run into more tumult. Sheik Yabutti has arrived. The PCs can try to head for cover, but since Rakhim is dressed in his distinctive desert nomad garb and any number of people around the palace recognize him (Yusif, who doesn't get out much, is in the minority), it will be very difficult to keep him hidden. And if he's found, people will want to bring him forward to greet his father. This is scarier than it sounds, if the heroes play their cards right. Rakhim can shamble around and moan a bit. In the noise of the crowd, his father wouldn't be able to make out his words anyway, and if the PCs have made it this far, they're probably smart enough to think of the "Rakhim is ill" ploy on their own, letting them whisk the young man away.

For the next few hours, the challenge to the adventurers is to keep Rakhim on the move so that no one can get too close a look at him. "He's not feeling well" will only go so far, and Festus didn't have the chance to disguise his more visible joins. They might briefly stash him in a spare wardrobe or chest, but inevitably someone will appear needing something out of that container, and the PCs will have to explain what Rakhim is doing in there. Well-wishers will want to wish Rakhim well on his engagement, the politically ambitious will want to get their foot in the door with the next generation of leadership, masters of ceremonies will want to be sure he knows what he needs to do tonight, and so on. Comparisons to _Weekend at Bernie's_ in a turban are, alas, appropriate. They can _not_ stash him in the harem, no matter how much Yasmin would be willing to help. Disguising Rakhim as a eunuch is difficult at best, and a dead body shambling around the womens' gardens and baths is probably more than Yasmin would be able to keep under wraps.

Everyone of any importance in and around Amanapur attends the celebratory dinner that evening to announce the treaty and the betrothal of Yasmin to Rakhim. With enough Fast Talk and Savior-Faire roles, the PCs can stick close to Rakhim and act as his servants for the evening, keeping most other people at bay; they can even arrange to get him dressed in his elaborate robes for the evening. The seating plan is also reasonably favorable. The emir and several of his wives have a low table where the emir had been holding court

The Plot, Such As Is

Festus Magister has long wanted to seize power, but lacked the means until Yusif delivered Rakhim to him. Once the betrothal is formalized (for which Rakhim doesn't actually have to say anything), he plans to claim that the young man has come down with a terrible illness. Then, as the region's foremost physician, he can be the sole mediator between Rakhim, or what the world believes is Rakhim, and the rest of the world. Once the emir is dead, he will push the wedding forward as an emergency measure (Yasmin, alas, can't rule in her own right, but Rakhim could inherit the throne through her) and assume effective control of the city. Anyone who finds out about the plot is to be quietly killed as well.

Festus Magister is a senior member of the Halvavin and has several nearsighted assassins to help him with his plan. All are dressed in similar garments. One of the PCs has been given one of their outfits, which is why he's been mistaken for an assassin himself. The beliefs of the Halvavin consist mostly of being mystical and obscure for their own sakes, but their goals are secrecy and the acquisition of power.

earlier that day, the sheik and a handful of his people have a separate table to the emir's left, and Yasmin and Rakhim have a table to themselves to his right, all set with vast candellabras to provide enough light to properly show off the jeweled garments everyone is wearing. They're on display, but won't be approached closely. The rest of the room is filled with other low tables and over a hundred dignitaries, with servants circulating throughout with vast trays of saffron-colored rice, spiced eggplant, dates and other fruit, and remarkable quantities of roast animals stuffed into other roast animals.

Between the head of the candles and general wear and tear, Rakhim is also going to have trouble holding himself together. Festus Magister didn't have time to properly reinforce Rakhim's sealing wax joins. The more he moves, and the hotter the room gets, the greater the chance something will fall off. The food is also a problem. Although he won't digest, Rakhim can be told to eat the food put in front of him. However, he's also been opened up and sealed closed across the belly, so if he eats and drinks too much, he may split open, or at least start leaking copiously. The more exertion zombie-Rakhim has been through that day, the greater the chance that he'll start falling apart.

As the meal progresses, the heroes may notice that several servants dressed identically to the one contacted by the Halvavin staying close to the emir. They circulate through the diners, pouring drinks and clearing away dishes, but move in ever-tightening circles near the emir's table. A fanfare is blown at the beginning of the meal and a second when a grand celebratory elphoxladukhenallowmond is brought into the room. Just after that, one of the identically dressed servants whispers into the ear of the "Halvavin" PC, "Salah, when do we strike?" The heroes could try to hustle him into a dark corner and beat a confession out of him (indeed, they could try that as soon as they figure out that the assassins are all dressed the same), but sooner or later they'd have to explain their own presence to somebody.

If the PCs don't attempt to stop the assassinations (or if they somehow manage to covertly dispose of all of the assassins) and Rakhim hasn't fallen part by then, the emir rises to announce the betrothal of his daughter. After brief preamble about friendship between the people of the city and the people of the desert, his brotherly love for Sheik Yabutti, and so forth, he formally declares Rakhim's intention to marry his daughter. He orders Rakhim to arise and make the traditional ritual gestures which will make the betrothal official: bow to the Sheik to show his respect, to the emir himself to show his obedience to his new father-in-law, and to Yasmin to show his love. On the third bow, the horns blow again, the assassins (if any are left) spring into action, and Rakhim's head falls off.

The Aftermath

Clever PCs will realize that saving the emir's life can only work in their favor. That's particularly the case now, when the eunuch guards around the room will be prevented from reaching the emir by the screaming crowd of revelers shocked by the disintegrating desert prince. Besides, combat-oriented PCs should be spoiling for a fight by now; the GM may as well give it to them.

Once the chaos is over, the heroes are still probably going to have to explain themselves, particularly when Yasmin declares her love (as she most certainly will) for the torturer's apprentice. The emir can't very well have his daughter's head chopped off, but he'd be more than willing to have anyone else connected with the enterprise slowly tortured to death, and never mind the logistics of who's going to do that while Idi is away and Yusif is the only professional in that area in easy reach. Moreover, the sheik is upset at just about everyone, and the emir needs some way of appeasing him or risk a war. If the PCs were involved in saving the emir's life, they may be able to talk their way out of execution with some favorable influence rolls, but it would be nearly impossible to avoid acquiring the sheik as an Enemy.

Very clever heroes, however, might remember that Yusif still has a potion which will make the person who takes it love him. That "love" manifests in whatever way is appropriate. Had Yasmin not already been in love with Yusif, it would have been a strongly romantic love. For an older man without a son, it would be very paternal. Slipping that to the emir will get him firmly on Yusif's side, and therefore the party's side, but leave the problem of the sheik. Getting it to the sheik would give them a way out of both problems. Sheik Yabutti would be willing, and indeed eager, to adopt Yusif and marry him to Yasmin. This

gives Yusif sufficient leverage to beg clemency for the PCs, who thereby get out of it alive.

But not necessarily scott-free. If the GM is inclined to add a coda, someone will note that they're still guilty of whatever crime landed them in the dungeon to begin with. If so, the emir commutes their sentence to a week's imprisonment, to be spent eating oxladukhenallowmond while restrained on lovely carpets by chains of gold (which they may keep when they are released). After several days of this most unusual punishment, Idi returns while Yusif is off being prepared for his lavish wedding to Yasmin. Seeing his dungeon turned into a pleasure palace, he'll demand to know what's going on. Needless to say, whatever the PCs tell him, he won't believe it.

Important Characters

Festus Magister

ST 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 14; **HT** 10.

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 14; Per 14; FP 10. Basic Speed 5; Basic Move 5; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Advantages: Magery 3; Status 3; Wealth (Wealthy).

Disadvantages: Callous.

Skills: Alchemy/TL3-12; Esoteric Medicine-12; Fast-Talk-13; First Aid/TL3 (Human)-16; Fortune-Telling (Astrology)-13; Herb Lore/TL3-12; Intimidation-15; Law (Amanapur)-12; Naturalist (campaign world)-12; Physician/TL3 (Human)-14; Poisons/TL3-14; Politics-13.

Spells: Affect Spirits-15; Air Jet-15; Air Vortex-15; Animate Shadow-15; Apportation-15; Banish-15; Body of Air-15; Burning Death-14; Clouds-15; Complex Illusion-15; Continual Light-15; Control Zombie-15; Create Air-15; Create Fire-15; Create Water-15; Darkness-15; Death Vision-15; Decay-15; Dehydrate-15; Destroy Water-15; Entrap Spirit-15; Evisceration-14; Fear-15; Frost-15; Hail-15; Haste-15; Heat-15; Hinder-15; Ignite Fire-15; Lend Energy-15; Lend Vitality-15; Light-15; Lightning-15; Materialize-15; Minor Healing-15; No-Smell-15; Odor-15; Perfect Illusion-15; Pestilence-15; Phantom-14; Purify Air-15; Purify Water-15; Rain-15; Repel Spirits-15; Seek Water-15; Sense Emotion-15; Sense Foes-15; Sense Spirit-15; Shape Air-15; Shape Darkness-15; Shape Fire-15; Shocking Touch-15; Sickness-15; Simple Illusion-15; Skull-Spirit-15; Snow-15; Solidify-15; Soul Jar-14; Sound-15; Steal Energy-15; Steal Vitality-15; Storm-15; Summon Spirit-15; Test Food-15; Turn Spirit-15; Turn Zombie-15; Warm-15; Wind-15; Windstorm-15; Zombie-15.

Calling him the Grand Vizier would make it too obvious that he was the villain of the piece, but he's still the ruler's chief advisor, scheming to take power for himself.

Eunuch Guard

ST 14; **DX** 12; **IQ** 10; **HT** 12.

Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14; Will 10; Per 10; FP 12. Basic Speed 6; Basic Move 6; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 9 (Broadsword).

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted).

Yasmin, keeping Rakhim's secret until circumstances require him to fall apart, saving the emir, and keeping the peace between Amanapur and Sheik Yabutti.

In addition, the first PC to observe that they are in Khudseen Bey's company deserves a character point, as are the first one to realize that, as court physician, Festus Magister is the doc of the bey, the first one to sing lyrics from K.C. and the Sunshine Band, and anyone who intelligibly claims that the sheik's sixth son is sick.

Quirks: Neutered.

Skills: Broadsword-12; Savoir-Faire (Military)-11; Soldier/TL3-12.

Except for Fuad, who is hardly combat-effective, the eunuch guards are large and tough.

Halvavin Assassin

ST 11; **DX** 12; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10.

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.5; Basic Move 5; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Knife).

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted); Fanaticism (Order of Halva Eaters).

Skills: Disguise/TL3 (Human)-10; Holdout-12; Knife-13; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-11; Stealth-12.

The Halvavin assassins carry fine-quality knives coated with a slow but powerful poison. If an attack penetrates DR, roll against HT-5. The poison does 1d additional damage over the next hour, and an additional 1d after an additional hour for every point by which the HT roll is missed (missing the roll by 4 would mean 5d damage over 5 hours). HT rolls for additional attacks are at a cumulative +3, and the poison will wear off the knife after three or four attacks, whether the penetrate DR or not. A successful Physician roll for each hour the poison is in effect will negate that hour's damage.

Yasmin

ST 9; **DX** 10; **IQ** 11; **HT** 9.

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9; Will 11; Per 11; FP 9. Basic Speed 4.75; Basic Move 4; Block 0; Dodge 7; Parry 0.

Advantages: Appearance (Very Beautiful); Destiny (Be happy with Yusif) (Minor); Status 3; Wealth (Wealthy).

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted); Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen: Women).

Skills: Artist (Calligraphy)-11; Gardening-11; Intimidation-14; Leadership-10; Poetry-11; Sewing/TL3-11; Singing-10; Swimming-10.

Small and pretty, Yasmin has nevertheless learned some lessons about making people do what she wants. When she stamps her little foot, people listen.

Emir Khudseen Bey

ST 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 12; **HT** 11.

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 12; Per 12; FP 11. Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Advantages: Status 4; Wealth (Very Wealthy).

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted); Bad Temper (9 or less); Compulsive Generosity (9 or less).

Skills: Administration-13; Bow-9; Falconry-12; Intimidation-15; Law (Amanapur)-12; Leadership-15; Riding (Horse)-11.

Yusif

ST 11; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10.

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Wrestling).

Advantages: Appearance (Handsome); Destiny (Find happiness with Yasmin) (Minor); Fearlessness 3; Serendipity 1.

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted); Confused (12 or less); Ham-Fisted -1; Social Stigma (Executioner) -1.

Skills: First Aid/TL3 (Human)-10; Interrogation-11; Intimidation-9 (Will-1); Physiology/TL3 (Human)-9; Professional Skill (Torturer)-12; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-12; Wrestling-12.

Appendix Z

Size Modifiers and Strength Scores for GURPS Fourth Edition

by K. David Ladage

According to basic physics, the mass of an object increases with the cube of its linear dimension. That is to say that if a human were hit with a growth ray and doubled in size (with all proportions remaining equal) then that human would suddenly be 8× as heavy ($2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$).

This is all well and good, but how strong should/would this individual be?

Well, according to the same principles of physics, the strength of an object increases with the area of its cross section (or, in simpler terms, with the square of its linear dimension). That is to say that our human above that doubled in size (again, assuming all proportions remained the same) would find themselves only 4× as strong ($2 \times 2 = 4$).

This leads us to a basic rule of thumb for the baseline (i.e.: average) strength of a human-proportioned individual at the various size modifiers that looks like this:

SM	ST	Cost	SM	ST	Cost
-10	1	-90	0	10	0
-9	1	-90	+1	15	45
-8	1	-90	+2	25	120
-7	1	-90	+3	35	175
-6	1	-90	+4	50	240
-5	1	-90	+5	75	325
-4	2	-80	+6	100	360
-3	3	-70	+7	150	420
-2	5	-50	+8	250	480
-1	7	-30	+9	350	680
0	10	0	+10	500	980

Cost is the point cost of the strength listed, with the size modifier reduction applied.

If you are making a Giant with SM +5 (about 45 feet tall), and you want this giant to be semi-realistic, then ST 75 will achieve an individual that is about in proportion to a typical human being. However, to be realistic, you would need to throw on some serious limitations based on the fact that this individual's strength-to-mass ratio is pretty poor.

This individual is about 55× as strong as a typical person, but weighs about 420× as much. Pound for pound, this is only about 13% as strong as a typical man.

Keep in mind that page 19 of the ***Basic Set*** indicates that such considerations should never be forced onto a character. Still, this giant is dealing an average of 28 points of damage with a punch! The strength-to-weight ratio may not be an issue.

There is another option, however.

A typical ST 10 individual, according to ***GURPS,*** weighs in at 150 pounds. ST 10 provides a Basic Lift of 20 pounds. This is about 13% of the weight of the individual. If we scale strength to the mass of the character, so that they have the same proportionate strength (pound for pound) of a human being (the way most fantasy giants seem to work) then the chart looks more like this:

SM	ST	Cost	SM	ST	Cost
-10	1	-90	0	10	0
-9	1	-90	+1	18	72
-8	1	-90	+2	39	232
-7	1	-90	+3	65	385
-6	1	-90	+4	111	606
-5	1	-90	+5	205	975
-4	1	-90	+6	316	1224
-3	2	-80	+7	580	1710
-2	3	-70	+8	1250	2480
-1	6	-40	+9	2070	4120
0	10	0	+10	3535	7050

Cost is the point cost of the strength listed, with the size modifier reduction applied.

If you are making a Giant with SM +5 (about 45 feet tall), and you want this giant to have the same strength (pound for pound) as a typical human being, then ST 205 or so will accomplish your goal. This is not realistic, but it is hard to argue realism when you are simulating a giant that lives at the top of a beanstalk . . . on a cloud.

This individual is about 420× as strong as a typical person, and weighs about 420× as much as a typical person. In addition, this giant is dealing an average of over 70 points of damage with a punch!

Figuring out what ST scores to hand out to a giant creature is sometimes rather difficult. You need to know what your goals are. Most of the time, the realistic method of calculating strength is preferable (just hand-wave that whole strength-to-mass thing and move on). However, if you want to have some seriously scary, put the fear of the supernatural into your players fun for a change: try the second option.

Just be ready to run!

The Omniscient Eye

Can I Have a Glass of Water and a Breath of Fresh Air?

How well does boiling salt water to catch the condensation work, and did Age of Sail mariners have any methods of purifying salt water?

In a purely technical sense, boiling salt water and catching the condensation works extremely well. Distillation of salt water works because the water will turn into steam and boil away at a much lower temperature from the salt, which is then safely left behind; the salt component of this solution boils hotter than the temperature needed to melt glassware! When you collect the steam and allow it to cool and condense, you will have fresh potable water. The technique can, though, consume a lot of fuel.

For "the Age of Sail," we'll take a broad definition, synonymous with the "Age of Discovery." It was the time when trade and warfare was dominated by sailing ships, starting in the 16th century and extending to the 19th century when steam ships started to dominate. Through most of the Age of Sail in the Western world, staple items including potable water were carried aboard ship in wooden barrels. After extended storage, the water in these barrels was often foul and undrinkable due to bacterial growth and vermin infestation. Aside from collecting rain or foraging for water when you were near dry land, this was it as far as having drinkable water on the ship. Although heat distillation of salt water was available as a technique in the western world since at least the time of Aristotle, it was used primarily as an alchemical method, most commonly employed in the distillation of spirits rather than in the production of potable water.

There was no common way for water to be desalinated on board a ship for many years. In 1758, Dr. James Lind, the person responsible for establishing that citrus fruit is an effective preventative for scurvy, repeated Aristotle's observation that if you boiled salt water and collected the steam, the water was fresh and tasted like rain water. He proposed the use of solar energy to heat the water, but this method was very slow and ineffective for producing the quantities of water needed on a naval vessel. Only when a new and more efficient type of shipboard stove was introduced in 1810 did there come the possibility of distilling fresh water on a useful scale.

Shipboard distillation appeared somewhat earlier in the east. During the beginning of the Edo period (early 17th century) in Japan, sailors invented a water purification system called a Ranbiki. This distiller consisted of an earthenware pot containing salt water which was placed on a fire. A bamboo pipe served as a condenser and was attached to the lid of the pot. On top of the condensing pipe was a pan filled with more cool salt water. As the water in the earthenware pot boiled, the steam traveled through the bamboo pipe and was cooled by the water surrounding the pipe, causing it to condense and collect as potable water. As the water in the pan on top became too hot to allow effective condensation, it was placed in the earthenware pot and allowed to boil. This system was quite efficient because, instead of wasting heat, it recycled it, allowing the distiller to run continually and reducing the amount of fuel it consumed.

The key to efficient distillation of water, then, appears to be the efficient distribution of heat, a science Europe only seriously developed late in the 18th century as a consequence of developing early steam engines. It's little wonder then, that once steam distillation became practical and efficient, the sailing ships distillers were installed on were soon replaced by steam ships.

So, to answer the question, mariners did have some methods of purifying salt water, but the effectiveness and usefulness of these techniques varied depending on where you were in the world. In the West, it was possible but not very practical until very nearly the end of the Age of Sail, while in the East, it appeared earlier and was somewhat more common.

Further Reading

- "The Sea Shall Quench" by Neil Campbell MPhil CSci CChem FRSC FCIWEM, Halcrow Water Services, UK -- http://www.jameslindlibrary.org/index.html
- ACWA Power Knowledge Corner -- http://www.acwasasakura.com/know.asp
- James Lind Library -- http://www.jameslindlibrary.org/index.html

--Barbara A. Casuso

What's the maximum amount of air that can be squeezed into an air tank, for use by divers or astronauts? This can either be ordinary air, some oxygen/helium mixture, or pure oxygen for use in some kind of rebreather system. Is this capacity likely to increase as technology advances, or is it pretty much fixed? If it can be improved (without assuming "super-science"), will improvements be gradual, or will it be drastic?
    --Peter Knutsen

A human breathes air at the rate of about 4.2 liters per minute at rest, up to 120 liters per minute during heavy exercise. For a first pass, this is the amount of gas we must supply. Standard air tanks will withstand pressures up to 3,000 psi (200 atmospheres), and a normal "80-cubic-foot" tank (the measure expresses the amount of air it holds at ambient pressure, not the actual internal volume) will provide air for between twenty minutes and eight hours; that tank will weigh about 35lb empty and 41lb full (16-18kg). This is a size of tank which is quite convenient for most people, though smaller and larger ones exist; weight, volume and duration scale more or less in proportion.

Of course, this is for an open-circuit breathing system, which is highly inefficient. The only gas a human actually requires to survive is oxygen, at a partial pressure between about 16kPa and 50kPa, and -- while inhaled air normally contains 21% oxygen -- exhaled air still contains about 15-16% oxygen. Only about 5-6% of the supplied gas is actually used. A rebreather system will scrub carbon dioxide out of the exhaled gas and allow the addition of new oxygen from a pressurized source, either pure oxygen (as in the earliest rebreather sets) or with a gas mix suitable for the ambient pressure (as is more common now). Medical oxygen sets normally supply two liters per minute; the scuba tank would hold enough for nearly nineteen hours on the surface.

Current carbon dioxide scrubbers are chemical in nature (using soda-lime or other substances which will absorb carbon dioxide), and this will gradually be used up. Other techniques will predominate in long-duration rebreather systems; in 1969, the S-1000 cryogenic rebreather set used a liquid oxygen tank, and used the cooling caused by its expansion to freeze carbon dioxide out of the exhaled air stream. Storage technology has since advanced to the point that liquid oxygen reservoirs are available for home medical use (not condensing oxygen out of the air, but keeping it cold indefinitely once filled from an external reservoir).

It is of course possible to store gases at higher pressures, though for reasons of safety this is not often done (especially when pure oxygen is involved). The required thickness of the tank wall scales linearly with pressure, and the weight of the tank is roughly proportional to pressure squared and to the 2/3 power of internal volume; for the same air capacity, a larger low-pressure tank will be lighter than a small high-pressure one. One problem for scuba divers is that the large low-pressure tank will have a low density; most divers already need to carry weights to achieve neutral buoyancy, and a low-density tank made from high-tech materials will just mean that more weight needs to be carried. Even in the present day, many divers prefer heavy steel tanks to light aluminium ones for this reason, and don't tend to use tanks larger than 120 cubic feet in capacity.

What About Pressure?

The total pressure of a gas mix depends on the "partial pressures" (effectively, concentration) of its ingredients. Ordinary sea-level air has a partial pressure of 0.21atm oxygen and 0.79atm nitrogen -- total, 1.0 atmospheres -- and obviously these partial pressures increase when it's compressed. Humans can safely breathe oxygen at partial pressures between about 0.16 and 0.50 atmospheres; for periods of a few hours, it can be allowable to go as high as 1.4 atmospheres, though reactions to oxygen toxicity vary widely between individuals. However, the range of total pressures at which

For use in less dense environments, where mass will still be a factor, stronger materials would certainly be useful. Carbon nanotubes offer significant possibilities, with a wall just thousandths of an inch thick and tanks weighing only a pound or two even for the largest size it would be practical to carry. At this point one can effectively discard tank weight as a consideration. So how much gas can fit into this supertank?

When sufficiently compressed and cooled, gases liquefy and then solidify; for pure oxygen this happens at the surprisingly low pressure of 450 atmospheres. The density of solid oxygen in its various forms was measured in 1978; its densest form weighs 780 kg/m^3, equivalent to a gas pressure of 550 atmospheres (at a temperature below 24 Kelvin). Even with miraculous weightless insulated pressure tank technology, something the size of a modern scuba tank won't ever hold more than about 9kg of solid oxygen. So how long will that last?

On the basis of inhaled and exhaled oxygen percentages, we can calculate the amount of oxygen actually consumed, from 4.5 mg/s in normal conditions to 130mg/s under heavy exercise; that's what a truly optimised system will have to supply. The ultimate rebreather, with 100% efficient recycling of all exhaled gases and total removal of carbon dioxide and with a solid oxygen tank the size of the scuba tank, would be able to supply oxygen for nearly 23 days of rest or 19 hours of heavy exercise. The stored oxygen would weigh about 20lb. The local gravity might well allow more mass to be carried; the sheer bulk of the system is more likely to be the limiting factor, though someone not doing physically demanding tasks (stretching and bending) might reasonably expect to carry up to twice as much as this.

humans can operate is very much wider; the Apollo program's pressure suits ran as low as 0.25 atmospheres, while scuba divers using specialised equipment have descended below 1,000 feet (30 atmospheres). (Other gases have their own toxicity problems at high pressures; this is why helium is used rather than nitrogen as a diluant gas for deep dives.) Clearly the gas mix must be designed for the pressure at which it will be used; currently divers carry multiple tanks with different gas mixes, with oxygen typically 10% of the mix for the deeper stages of a dive, but with advancing technology it seems likely that this will be replaced by a dual-tank system of oxygen and diluent gas which is mixed on the fly.

A diver who isn't using a hard suit also has an increased air consumption, because he has to inhale air at the same pressure as the water surrounding him in order to prevent his chest from collapsing. At 60 feet down, the pressure is nearly three times what it is on the surface, and a given air supply will only last one-third as long. However, the total oxygen actually consumed by the diver does not increase by anything like as much; an efficient rebreather will only show a slight loss in duration at depth.

An alternative to an oxygen tank is of course a true oxygen regeneration system, perhaps using highly-active algae driven by photosynthesis to convert exhaled carbon dioxide back into oxygen as fast as the wearer can breathe it. This has mostly been considered in the larger context of a closed-environment space station, but U.S. Patent 5,614,378 suggests that a unit about the size of the scuba tank ought to be able to keep one person supplied with oxygen indefinitely as long as he remains in sunlight.

References

- Cushman, L., Cryogenic Rebreather, Skin Diver magazine, June 1969, and reprinted in Aqua Corps magazine, N7, 28, 79.
- Fischel H., Closed circuit cryogenic SCUBA, "Equipment for the working diver" 1970 symposium, Washington, DC, USA. Marine Technology Society 1970:229-244.
- Guyton, Arthur C: Physiology of the Human Body (6th edition, 1984); ISBN 0-03-058339-X
- Reynolds, Glen Harlan: "Seeking New Depths", Popular Mechanics, vol. 183, no. 12, p. 58 (2006)
- Roder, H. M., "The Molar Volume (Density) of Solid Oxygen in Equilibrium with Vapor," J. Phys. Chem., (1978), 7, #3, 949-57 -- http://www.nist.gov/srd/PDF%20files/jpcrd122.pdf
- http://www.astronautix.com/craft/a7l.htm
- http://www.freepatentsonline.com/5614378.html
- http://www.diveriteexpress.com/library/tanks.shtml
- ASME BPV Section VIII

--Roger Burton West

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!

Pyramid Review

Contenders: A Roleplaying Game of Blood & Sweat, Pain & Hope

Published by [Prince of Darkness Games](#)

Written by Joseph J. Prince

52-page digest-dized b&w softcover; $15

Let me begin by making a confession: I have no interest in the sport of boxing. I have never seen a movie about boxing. Not *Rocky*. Not *Raging Bull*. Which begs the question, why would I want to play an RPG in which the protagonists are boxers, let alone review it? My answer would be that I should be able to review any game, and that after reading through *Contenders: A Roleplaying Game of Blood & Sweat, Pain & Hope* by JJ Prince just once, I knew that I wanted to play the game.

So with one person missing from our regular Friday night gaming group, I extracted *Contenders* from a gaming pile and after a second read through, I wrote out some character sheets, and found an ordinary deck of cards. Once everyone arrived, I explained what I was planning to run. Normally in such situations I get out a board game so all but one of the group were reticent to try *Contenders.*

In *Contenders,* each player takes the role of a boxer trying to climb out of the gutter and into the big leagues by fighting in the ring. If his HOPE is strong enough, a fighter can make it, but PAIN and despair, both of which drives him to fight harder, might drag him back into the gutter. He draws HOPE from those he knows, his CONNECTIONS, and from winning fights, but gains PAIN from losing fights and when his CONNECTIONS are failed.

Contenders can be set at any time, but lends itself to a gritty urban feel. Suggestions include Depression-era New York, 1970s South London, and behind the Iron Curtain. For ease though we selected the default setting of Desert City, a bright-lights, deep-shadowed, Las-Vegas-inspired boxing Mecca.

Character generation is a quick and easy process. Each Contender has two sets of four traits. The first four are PAIN (physical pain, and mental despair and rage); its counterpart HOPE, divided into two pools, Contender and CONNECTION pools; CASH, representing time, effort and money; and REP, a fighter's reputation. Each attribute begins at 1, between which a player divides another two points.

The other four are in-ring traits: TECHNIQUE, a contender's boxing skill; COVER, his defensive skill; POWER, hitting strength; and CONDITIONING, his physical fitness. Again each begins with a value of 1, between which a further 6 points are divided.

Besides assigning points, each player must explain who his Contender is, and why he wants to fight. He also needs a connection from whom he can draw HOPE and for whom he has a fear. For example, my character July Washington has a sick mother who could get better, but his fear is that she will die. Finally, each player creates four NPC Contenders to provide the game's opposition.

The aim of playing *Contenders* is to increase a pugilist's REP to 10, by participating in -- but particularly by winning -- fights. A boxer must also spend time training, working, building connections, promoting bouts, and even threatening other contenders or their connections. This is done in scenes without either dice or a referee . . . both factors that initially perplexed several of my players.

Simply, the players take turns narrating scenes that involve their Contenders, either as straight narration or roleplayed with the other players handling the NPCs. An ordinary deck of cards is used to handle any random resolution, with red

cards drawn counting as successes. A player draws for his Contender whilst the player to his left draws for any opposition.

Scenes come in six types. Connection scenes let a character create a new connection or invest in an existing one. This takes CASH and will increase the connection's Hope value, but if it goes wrong, will increase a contender's PAIN. Work scenes gain a contender a little CASH, but more can be earned by doing something shady or dangerous. CASH can also be spent to train and improve an in-ring trait, but an NPC boxer's trait must also be increased. Promotion scenes let boxers and their NPC managers set the terms for a fight and allow them to face off beforehand. Threat scenes enable a contender to attack a rival outside of the ring or threaten another contender's connection. Although costly, successfully threatening a contender's connection can deny him HOPE.

Mechanically, scene resolution is simple. For example, July Washington, having injured his back during a Work scene, opts for another more dangerous work scene, radical medical research. Desiring 4 CASH, I drew four cards, whilst Dave on my left, drew cards equal to July's PAIN, also 4. If I drew more successes or red cards then July would get paid, if Dave drew more, July would not and would gain a point of PAIN. If we draw an equal number of successes, July would gain both the PAIN and the CASH. Most scenes work in a similar pattern, so for example, July later invested that CASH in a CONNECTION scene, taking his sick mother to an expensive doctor. Unfortunately, the diagnosis was poor and he lost the CASH and gained more PAIN.

Fight scenes are more involved. Each round a fighter sets his style -- Aggressive, Balanced, Defensive, or Dirty. This determines potential Dominance based on TECHNIQUE for that round and how much damage based on POWER, can be inflicted if successful. COVER can block some damage, but the more damage done, the greater number of Victory Points the judges will award the fighter. Victory Points won are directly levied from the loser's in-ring traits, the bout being won by the boxer with the most Victory Points.

Fights use the same card drawing mechanics and can be extraordinarily tense, with every turn of the card counting. It is possible to knock a boxer down, knock him out, or even win on a technicality. Narration rights for a round are won by whoever draws the highest ranked card. It is thus possible to lose a round and have to narrate it, but if a player has narration rights and the opponent used dirty tactics, he can describe the referee spotting this. Winning the bout gains a fighter HOPE, CASH, and REP. Losing will also gain a fighter CASH and REP, but not as much, plus PAIN.

Playing *Contenders* is a progression, a player initiating scenes to gain CASH for training and investing in Connections in preparation for the fights in the ring. Play progresses until the Rep of one boxer reaches 10 or a boxer loses all of his connections through Threat scenes. This triggers the end game, wherein everyone gets one more scene before going into one big fight night between the Contenders. This is followed by an epilogue scene for each fighter. These vary according to the values for each fighter's HOPE or PAIN traits, if HOPE is greater, the boxer triumphs, if not, his story ends in tragedy. Apart from playing the NPCs, the Contenders' stories do not cross unless agreed upon or a Joker card is drawn, in which case it is mandatory.

Contenders, like [*My Life With Master,*](#) possesses the same escalating narrative structure. In comparison, although as strongly themed, *Contenders* is not as tightly focused. This allows room for greater player input and opportunity to roleplay outside of a player's own character. Of course we are playing many of the sport's clichés, but even if we have no interest in boxing, we are likely aware of these clichés.

Playing and explaining *Contenders* is made particularly painless by the linear layout of the easy-to-read and comprehend rule book. The simple mechanics do capture the desperate feel of the down at heel boxing world. As to my players -- Dave looked forward to playing; Louise hated the genre and was reluctant to play, as was Jason, who thought it sounded too much like a board game. It could be played like that, but once they got past the idea of not having a referee they enjoyed being able to roleplay numerous characters and having an input throughout the game. They also came to care about the fate of their Contenders.

If you cannot get past its subject matter, *Contenders* could easily be imagined much as *My Life With Master* can be run as "My Life With Momma" or "My Life With Tony Blair." Thus is it could become a game about politics, gladiators, or Sumo wrestlers with a simple redefinition of the in-ring traits. *Contenders'* simplicity gives it this potential adaptability. If you can cope with the RPG's subject matter though, *Contenders* offers a pleasing storytelling

vehicle that neatly handles its twin themes of hope and pain. I should also end with a confession: I still have no interest in boxing. **Contenders** has not made me want to watch a boxing match or movie, but I would play **Contenders** again -- it is an easy game to pick up and play, does not require a GM, and its stories can be told in a session or two.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Aquadukt

Published by [Uberplay](#)

Designed by Berhard Weber

Game board, 112 building tiles in four colors and styles, eight mountain tiles, five glass beads (wells), 36 blue wooden sticks (canals), 20-sided die, rules; full-color, boxed, two to four players; $27.99

Water means life, and you can't build a civilization without it. You won't actually be building a whole empire in *Aquadukt,* but the water is still paramount in this simulation of Roman farm life.

The object of the game is to supply more of your houses with water than anyone else.

The board shows the wide open country where you and your competition build your new villas. It's divided into 20 tracts comprising still smaller plots -- just big enough for you to place one of your housing counters on it. Everyone has a selection of new homes, distinguished from each other in color and style. These tiles show the buildings in "denominations" of one through four, and these are kept in separate stacks.

On your turn, you have three options: place houses, uncover a well, or lay canals. If you start new houses, roll a 20-sided die to determine in which section you may place a tile. So long as you're happy with what comes up, you can roll for three such constructions. If you don't like the location you roll (and there's some strategy as to what might be a good placement), you don't have to place that token but your turn ends there.

To start supplying homes with water, someone has to dig a well. These springs are placed at the intersections of those squares, so they're usually the second thing placed. You don't have to place them next to existing homes, but that's naturally the way it turns out (and the more work anyone has to go to for water, the fewer opportunities you'll have for scoring). A well doesn't supply anyone in and of itself, so the next step is to lay down canals. Little wooden blue sticks are placed along the lines separating the housing squares to show where the gutters run, bringing the life-giving aqua to citizens.

Now for the wrinkles. If you roll a number, you can put a home on any square on that numbered stretch of dirt, but when all the squares there are filled up, a check is made to see that everyone's getting water. Only those homes with a canal running along one edge of the tile are supported. Someone may opt to "double up" the canal pieces, which extends this support to two spaces, but that's a drain on the supply of canal pawns. If a counter isn't supported, it is removed from the game…bad news if you haven't hooked up your pipes yet, but you may also choose to play the spoiler by sacrificing one of your houses to fill up a section and force a tile exodus. Since emptied squares may be reoccupied later, this may afford you a chance to get into an area you covet.

You can only play the counter of your choice away from the water sources; if a canal has already been established where you're about to build, you must play your lowest-valued tile beside it. Putting down higher values requires a leap of faith and a little work. Only two canals may come out of any well, and no two gutters may cross or meet each other. For a little extra worry you can add mountains to the board, forcing players to work around them. When the last canal piece is laid, the round is finished and whoever has the most points worth of legally supplied housing wins.

Who knew German game-makers even knew what 20-sided dice were? But lo and behold, this game uses one. All the pieces here work out just fine, with snazzy wooden canal pieces, even snazzier glass beads to represent wells, and the

quality tiles you'd expect. The board is the weak link; the borders of the numbered areas are hard to spot sometimes, and when housing piles on it's an even tougher call.

Fans of pure strategy may lament the heavy use of the die roll to determine where you can and cannot build, but it's really not that bad. You may not get to place where you'd ideally like, but you still get to select the make-or-break moves that drive the game. Your decisions are relevant and the random elements only complement play; they don't replace good planning, thinking ahead, and adapting to the moment. *Aquadukt* takes only a half-hour or so to play, and while the mechanics may wear too thin to keep you playing it constantly, it's sound enough to be pulled out every so often when you want to take another trip to the well.

--Andy Vetromile

Time Isn't On My Side (No It's Not)

*"**Hank:** I'm gonna leave everything to you. We're on a tight schedule. You keep them motivated. [leaves]*
[workers are busily typing]
__Homer [to staff]:__ Are you guys working?
__Man 1:__ Yes, sir, Mr. Simpson.
__Homer:__ Could you, um . . . work any harder than this?
__Man 2:__ Sure thing, boss.
[workers type faster]
__Homer:__ Hey, call me Homer."
--"You Only Move Twice," *The Simpsons*

* * *

Here's a classic puzzle that I always found interesting:

Let's say you're on a trip along a 10-mile road. For the first five miles, you go 30 miles an hour. How fast do you need to go for the remaining five miles to average 60 miles an hour for the full trip?

For those who haven't encountered this one before, I'll give you a few minutes to try to figure it out.

Back?

Great.

The answer -- which I reveal now to those who didn't bother with the pencil and paper -- is that it's impossible. It takes 10 minutes to go the first five miles, and to average 60 miles an hour for 10 miles would mean the trip takes 10 minutes. In other words, you've run out of time to meet your goal before you're half-way done.

Now, there are a few different ways I could take this interesting mathematical predicament (for example, by pointing out that 87% of all lateral-thinking puzzlers involve ice: ice daggers, hanging by standing on an ice block, freezing plastic jugs of water and cutting away the plastic), but I've got an avenue that fits in with my events for this past week.

See, this past week has involved the trip from our home in Indianapolis to visit my parents in Ft. Lauderdale. Since we were traveling with a five-month-old, we decided that going via car would be the better option, since it's a lot harder to pull the vehicle over to deal with an unhappy baby if the vessel in question is a plane.

Anyway, at some point during our driving I turned to the missus and said, "Consider that a trip of 1,000 miles . . . would barely get us to Orlando." Unfortunately, while we built in a considerable buffer into our trip, we were also off by an additional two hours each day of travel; as a result, we ended up in a car (or at a rest stop, or in a fast-food joint . . .) for 26 out of 48 hours, which was off by about four hours from our estimation (and about 10 hours over the MapQuest estimate). The trip was, in short, long.

Now, here's where I'm going with both our initial puzzler and the anecdote above: I hypothesize that *extraordinary* successes are much less impressive in many cases than *mundane* failures, especially when it comes to matters of time. For example, let's take our MapQuest road trip example. in this case, the projected time of the trip was about 16 hours. I submit that -- if I'd rolled the equivalent of a Critical Success on the Drive Across Country roll -- I'd only succeed by an additional 10% or so . . . in other words, about 1&frac;2/3rds hours. On the other hand, a fairly mundane failure *added* almost 50% to the total; I could easily see that failure having ballooned to a 100% or more increase over the

original projections. As a separate example at the extreme of this ideal there's Brooks' Law, a.k.a. *The Mythical Man-Month,* that states adding engineers to a software project makes that project take *longer.*

When it comes to time, it's much easier to lose it than it is to gain it. I believe the opening puzzle above illustrates this quite nicely; the fundamental problem with that challenge is that the hypothetical traveler runs out of time. As another real-world example, my daily commute to the Job Of Unspeakable Madness typically takes 30 minutes. If I'm early, it's by no more than five minutes. But several times I've been later than expected, and it's usually at least 10 minutes, and often 20 or more. (Once it took over twice as long to get home as it should have.)

As best I've been able to find, there's typically only one way out of this conundrum, and that's the radical overhaul -- in other words, doing things sufficiently differently from what has been done before. Thus we could easily shave many hours off the Florida trip by flying (which would take probably 12 hours, at the most), or having my parents fly or drive up to visit us (less than a one-hour trip to the airport and back for us). My job commute could be greatly reduced if we moved our household.

Now, the 64-dollar question is, what does this have to do with gaming?

Well, a lot of games allow for increased benefits of results for a spectacular-enough degree of success. However, sometimes these systems produce exaggerated results on greatly successful maneuvers, especially when matters of time emerge; surgeries that would take hours to complete are done in a quarter of the time, trips are done at double-speed, and intricate rituals just fly by.

But, in some ways, this short-changes the creative process for characters (and, by extension, players -- for those who enjoy that sort of thing). Going with the hypothesis that it requires a radically different approach to shave a non-trivial amount of time off a project or task, some games might benefit from trying to determine what that approach *is* (or at least coming up with a possible explanation). The alternative is to allow the somewhat incongruous result that doing something in a traditional or suboptimal way can result in significantly-better-than-expected results . . . which quickly becomes absurd. ("Okay; I know the bad guy went north, but we're going to drive due south; since the world is round, we only need to roll *really* well to catch him!")

If a player rolls really well with a stated goal of trying to accomplish something faster, I think it would be entirely with the GM's rights to request some explanation for how that task was done more than 10% faster. For example, let's say a player wants to translate an ancient manuscript, and he's on a deadline. The GM determines that doing a full conversion to English would take an average of three days, but the player doesn't have time for that . . . the breakneck unfolding of modern conspiracies frequently involve centuries-old documents. The hero, hoping for results in just a few hours, pokes his player-self for ideas of how to speed this up. The player might propose that the PC is going to translate the first sentence of each page, looking for anything interesting. Or maybe he's only going to scan the whole thing, looking for a few specific words and phrases ("Masons," "Grail," "Big League Chew") and translating around those sections. (Personally I'm of the school of thought that says this shouldn't be a "true" test of the player's knowledge, but rather a challenge to come up with any justification or flavor description to do better than expected. If the player makes an assertion that shorter paragraphs in ancient manuscripts are often the most important ones, and he rolls well enough, I'll work that detail into the game, by golly.)

Of course, some tasks have a variable level of time. For example, solving a physics problem that requires a flash of inspiration entirely hinges on when lightning strikes the scientist's cranium; that could take minutes, hours, days, or never. But all too often tasks have a presumed standard length to them, beyond which it's devilishly difficult to make any advances. For example, if the GM determines that the standard difficulty of a physics problem requires brute-force computation to arrive at an answer, and that difficulty is based on solving the product by hand, then the player might propose that he's trying to do aspects with computer software to speed things up. (I'd give a bonus if the player could figure out a way to rope other PCs into the act: "Okay; did anyone here take trig or better? Great; start double-checking these columns.")

And requesting how a player is going to crank up the pace introduces the possibility for more plot options down the road. For example, if the players decide that they're going to try to buy time in a cross-country chase by driving like maniacs -- breaking every law, placing lubber and land in danger -- then I may well try to work that information into a

future game . . . perhaps introducing a matchstick-chomping sunglasses-wearing police officer who's made it his life's duty to track these folks down.

Of course, many games benefit from the speed and simplicity of letting the dice dictate the results. And lots of players would rather not fight with trying to come up with an explanation, especially if they're playing a character with skills vastly different from their own knowledge. ("How the heck do I know how to repair the engine in less time? Just . . . turn the wrench-thing faster!") But for some groups, coming up with explanations for how things are done faster, more efficiently, or more dramatically can be a real boost.

Presuming, of course, that your gaming group has the time.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

Lemuria

by Paul Drye

Eduard Seuss was one of those 19th-century geniuses who, despite working in a science that was then missing a important information, still managed to grope his way close to the truth. His greatest discovery was the lost supercontinent Gondwana, the Earth's southern lands during the heyday of the dinosaurs.

What he got wrong was how his continent came to an end. Living before anyone took continental drift seriously, he assumed that the lands between South America, Africa, and India were flooded by the oceans. Another scientist, Philip Sclater, gave a name to the supposedly lost region between India and Madagascar: Lemuria. Eventually science ruled out its existence, though the name lived on in occult publications as a sister to Atlantis.

Seuss' luck held posthumously, though. Modern bathymetry showed a large underwater plateau in the southern Indian Ocean; drilling brought up rocks that had been formed on dry land. For all the wrong reasons, the 19th-century geologist had been right. There once was a Greenland-sized mini-continent in the area, driven up by a hotspot under the oceanic crust then subsiding 20 million years ago when the hotspot moved on.

This was all vaguely interesting from a scientific standpoint, but had little practical effect until the discovery of parachronics. Then reports began trickling in from Infinity agents that, every now and then, a timeline would still have land in the region. In a few cases, it can't be ignored.

The Basics

All Lemurias are located in the southern Indian Ocean at about latitude 48 degrees south (at one end) to just inside the Antarctic Circle in the south. On Homeline, this area is quite cold and uninhabitable, but the presence of Lemuria alters the situation: the cold circum-Antarctic currents are disrupted and the climate is several degrees warmer than it would otherwise be. The weather in Lemuria is comparable to Homeline's Newfoundland, shading more towards Greenland as one approaches the south pole.

The mini-continent was built up by a series of volcanoes and related uplift events, making the land quite rugged. This is less obvious in the east, where the coast is sheltered from the prevailing winds, and trees and rivers have rounded things off. In the west, frequent gales have produced extensive moorlands and bogs. No matter where one goes, however, the land is doused by rain and periodically salted by ash. Lemuria has some of the richest temperate farmland on Earth, and so is often a target if the world has a colonial period.

This happens often, as most Lemurias are on high inertia timelines. By definition, Lemurian timelines diverge from Homeline at least 20 million years before the present, but most have carried on down the same historical path. Humans evolve, nations arise, Europe rules the world briefly, and industrial technology follows. There are a few Lemurias on

lines where things have gone in a radically different direction, but there is a selection effect keeping those of minor importance. On a timeline filled with people it can become a place on the level of, say, Canada or Australia, and so be worth visiting under some circumstances. Without a world of societies around it, though, it's just a cold and isolated island; there's no particular reason for Homeline's colonists to go there, or Infinity's agents to investigate it.

Getting There

When it became apparent that there were several Lemurias to be explored, Infinity created a station to do it. It's not easy to use, so Infinity will try to start the journey in Homeline's South Africa, or Perth in Australia, then use indigenous transport to get the rest of the way. On pre-industrial timelines, however, this is not an option. People must be sent from a corresponding location on Homeline.

Unfortunately, there's very little dry land in the right place for them to work with; Homeline's "Lemuria" is all but submerged, with only the icy Kerguelen Islands and the even colder and smaller Heard and McDonald Islands poking above the water. The former is a French possession, but when the need for a Lemurian station arose France was already oversubscribed to parachronic ventures. The new station was placed in the Australian possessions instead. A formerly obscure scientific base at Atlas Cove on Heard Island received an influx of cash and personnel, and is now home to about 50 people.

The settlement is otherwise useless, far too isolated from the rest of the world for trade, and too unpleasant for tourism. Infinity personnel consider the glaciated island a punishment post; even in the summer, the daytime high is barely above freezing.

People headed to any Lemuria via Atlas Cove must go by ship from Perth. Supplies are run out that way (a 2,200 nautical mile journey) once a month, and in an emergency the ship may raise anchor outside of its normal schedule. There are no port facilities at Atlas Cove, just a lee under Mawson Peak, an active volcano. The transport will huddle in the lee, and the last few hundred yards of the journey will be on a neoprene dinghy to the cove's beach of volcanic shingle. It may take a few days after arriving at the coast before this can happen, though, as the weather is usually rainy (or snowy) and very windy, making landings dangerous until the skies clear.

Notable Lemurias

Albany-1: A Quantum-7 timeline that is a front in the Time War, Albany-1 is largely under the control of Centrum but has been targeted by Infinity as ripe for revolution. Lemuria is this world's equivalent of Australia, the place where the United Kingdom set up shop after the American Revolution; in the current year of 1844, it is home to some 1.1 million people. It is also the developed nation which seems most likely to rise up against the incipient British-led world government being backed by the Centrans. The United States is already fighting, but is heavily blockaded and it's hard to see how they can end the stalemate. With the Royal Navy over-stretched, though, distant Lemuria -- locally called New Scotland -- has a chance to break away.

While New Scotland is a colony of the United Kingdom, it's groaning under the burdens imposed by the War of Consolidation, and political tensions are high. Infinity has infiltrated several local groups and started passing on money, goods, and logistical help, trying to leveraged the trouble into outright rebellion. Meanwhile, British and Lemurian agents are fanning out from the capital at Albemarle, looking to stem the tide.

Lemuria-2: The first Lemurian timeline was found on Quantum-4 (the name Lemuria-1 was taken by a weird outlier in Q6 where Theosophy is true in all its bizarre glory); Lemuria-2 is very similar to 1930s-era Homeline. The primary difference is Lemuria itself, somewhat like Papua New Guinea or Central Africa on Homeline, the "final unexplored frontier," though a more classically gothic one than the green hells of Homeline's last blank spots on the map.

Lemuria was connected to the rest of the world's continents only when it was near the south pole, so it's long been impoverished for mammals and reptiles. Like New Zealand, birds have filled in many ecological niches. From the standpoint of Lemuria-2's Western explorers -- and for Homeliners -- one of the most interesting things about this

land is its pseudo-dinosaurs, re-evolved from birds in the last 50 million years or so. Crossed with the Malayo-Polynesian settlers who came here in the 11th century, Eyland -- as it's called here -- has a distinct "Lost World" feel.

Lemuria-4: When the first Infinity agents arrived here, local year 1983, it was four days after the most sensational event in that timeline's history. Deep in the southern Indian Ocean, Lemuria -- it's coincidentally called that here -- appeared from nowhere. Until that time, Lemuria-4 had probably been a historical echo in Quantum-6, but the sudden shock of Lemuria kicked it up to Q7, where it was rapidly discovered by both Homeline and Centrum.

This Lemuria is one of the bigger anomalies in all the infinite worlds. A substantial portion of it is enclosed in a force field of some kind, extending in a dome some 800 miles in diameter and 22 miles high. Seismic information indicates that the full structure is an ellipsoid extending the same distance below the ground. The portions of Lemuria outside the dome are unremarkable, but deep within it are a series of what appear to be city-sized industrial locations full of imposingly advanced-looking buildings. Vast automatons move within them, and spectrographic tests made by satellites flying overhead pick up puffs of weird gases like sodium hexafluoride.

When Lemuria appeared, tensions between the timeline's United States and Soviet Union increased dramatically, especially when they came to the conclusion that there may be alien technology within; Infinity thinks it's probably advanced human, and the continent a shiftrealm of some kind, but the distinction is moot. The two superpowers came to a rough-and-ready joint agreement to study and monitor the huge interloper, but it may come apart: since appearing, the force dome has been giving off a steadily decreasing amount of microwave and radio emissions. Throw in Infinity's natural interest in parachronic anomalies, and their worry that Lemuria-4 might get some insight into the Secret, and there are several factions paying close attention. If the dome collapses when its emissions reach zero, an event not very far in the future, a free-for-all may ensue.

As well as being a place to explore itself, this Lemuria is also the reason why many other Lemurias are being examined closely. Infinity is hoping that at least one of the others will give some insight as to what is going on here.

Kumari Kandam: There is one notable exception to the rule that isolation keeps Homeline colonists away from the Lemurias. For years prior to the discovery of parachronics, a mystically tinged branch of Tamil nationalism held a submerged country in the Indian Ocean their lost homeland. Based on their ancient religious literature, they believed that Kumari Kandam stretched from Sri Lanka to Australia and as far west as Madagascar.

Both the Sri Lankan and Indian governments have had to deal with Tamil secessionist movements, so when the idea came up among the ultranationalists that a Tamil homeland could be built on a Lemuria somewhere, the governments were inclined to support it as a way of relieving tensions. In the last five years, both have arranged for several hundred people to ship out via Atlas Cove and find the god-promised land of their dreams.

Unfortunately, the colony has not been doing well. The mystics tend to be highly educated and a little disconnected from reality; mundane necessities like farming and exploration are shunned. On top of this, their new society regularly fractures along lines defined by arcane theological points, further consuming the colonists' attention. So far Kumari Kandam has sputtered along on the monies the largely well-to-do colonists can put into it, but it's showing all the signs of becoming a failure in the next few years.

Lemuria-7: Being able to examine other timelines has spoiled historians and anthropologists. Instead of having one world to use for examples, they can now look at dozens of slight variations on, say, the Roman Empire when building their theories.

There are some situations where even this doesn't help, though. Hundreds of world cultures derived from Mesopotamia and Egypt are nice, but civilizations with unique origins can be worth their weight in gold (or grant money). Lemuria-7 hosts one of these. Humans are hunter-gatherers everywhere in this timeline, except on the local Lemuria where they've developed writing, agriculture, and monolith-laden cities. At any time, several scientific teams are here unraveling the society's language and culture, which don't appear to be related to any others encountered on any other world.

One question that remains unresolved is how the Lemurian humans got here, and that troubles some people. This

culture doesn't possess ocean-faring vessels yet, and they don't know about any other lands -- Lemuria is thousands of miles from its closest neighbors. Yet they must have had that technology at some time in the past in order to colonize Lemuria in the first place, as the human race certainly didn't evolve here.

The Lemurians

Infinity agents who deal with Lemuria are likely to end up in contact with a relatively small group of people who specialize in the parachronic Eighth Continent.

William Page Henderson: An inhabitant of New Scotland, Henderson is a writer of some renown on that timeline. His specialty is what he calls *bagatelles,* tales of this new age of steam and exploration; his closest Homeline equivalent would be Jules Verne, though Henderson is a generation earlier.

Like many well-to-do people through history, Henderson is leery of the lower classes, but his love for the future makes him think improvement is inevitable. This brought him to the attention of the Centrum, as he's of the opinion that the forcible subjugation of the world is the best path to universal education, the elimination of superstition, and the creation of a technological Eden. The revelation that this orderly, advanced society already exists "outside of time," and the promise that he can become a member of it, has made him a useful native recruit.

Henderson will work in opposition to Infinity agents stirring up trouble in New Scotland. Not only is he good as a spy and operative, completing his tasks with flair and imagination, he is highly motivated. It outrages him to no end that someone could be working against the establishment of his ideal, benevolent totalitarianism. As well as helping Centran efforts on Albany-1, he is sometimes found on other Lemurian timelines when time is of the essence and he is the agent who can get there most quickly.

As a well-known native New Scotlander, Henderson has access to the country's movers and shakers. He also understands the local social structure far better than the typical agent of Centrum. He is held back a bit by his TL5 background, but he is imaginative, unafraid of future tech, and is aware that there's more to the world than he knows. As a result, he has much less trouble than might be expected when encountering it.

Kianyar: If Homeliners want to explore the inner reaches of the continent on Lemuria-2, they will want a native guide. The back country is dangerous and has few tracks, so someone with local knowledge is essential. This requirement is particularly difficult to meet because almost all indigenous Eylanders never travel more than a few miles from their place of birth. Kianyar is widely acknowledged as the man to meet, as he is a veteran of several expeditions.

He is in his early forties, and is as well-acquainted with the interior as anyone else. On the other hand, his health is deteriorating after the years of hardship, and he is not as able to travel as quickly or as doggedly as he did when younger. Despite his declining abilities, he still enjoys hunting the continent's pseudo-dinosaurs as a way of impressing his employers (as he suffers a bit of an inferiority complex because of their guns and other outward signs of wealth); there is a danger that he will get himself killed, stranding the group he is leading weeks away from the coast.

Ellen de Villers: A South African biologist from Homeline, de Villiers has become an expert on the various Lemurias. In the days before parachronics she was an unknown working in the veldt on various ecological projects, but soon became known as a popularizer of out-time wildlife studies throughout the English-speaking world. Now in her sixties, she has slowed down a great deal from the rough-and-ready image she projected when younger. Her current screen persona is an elder stateswoman type, who discusses the animal onscreen in hushed tones while clad in sun helmet and shorts.

Based in South Africa, de Villers is best placed to feature in documentaries on the weird wildlife of the Lemurias, and has turned them into a cottage industry. Many people know her for her television special on Lemuria-7, the first time she mixed human anthropology with her ecological concerns; it was a hit on Homeline television a few years back.

As time has gone on, however, she's moved away from the mainstream of science and into a kind of scientific

mysticism. She's become a follower of Teilhard de Chardin and a proponent of Rupert Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields. Recently she's come to the conclusion that Lemuria is a focus of strange activity that gives insight into the nature of life across all timelines -- in particular, she's interested in the shiftrealm on Lemuria-4.

Regardless of her problematic beliefs, Infinity lets her transport through Atlas Cove whenever she needs to. She has the money to pay for it, the backing of some influential people, and it's not against the law to have strange opinions.

Adventures in Lemuria

Outbreak: As events heat up on Albany-1, smallpox hits the countryside of New Scotland. The disease has been eliminated on Homeline, so standard protocols kick in to prevent it from crossing back with parachronic travelers. One of the protocols is gene-sequencing the virus so as to identify the correct vaccines to use. This time, the tests come back with proof that the pox is artificial and resistant to the usual ways of fighting it. Not only does Homeline immediately quarantine Albany-1 until the disease runs its course (stranding Infinity operatives there), it would seem that Centrum is using biowarfare to aid their British catspaws. Strictly speaking, agents are supposed to stay put while a disease "storm door" is in place, but what kind of hero will let his work among the New Scotlanders collapse, let alone sit still for genocide?

Welcome to the Lizard House: On an otherwise unremarkable timeline, Infinity's researchers notice that people who have risen above a certain level of scientific ability or wealth post-1947 end up dead. Stephen Hawking, Bill Gates, Silvio Berlusconi, and dozens of others have all been cut down just as they were on their way up. In all cases, the death was either not suspicious, or the investigation into it was shut down.

With their ability to investigate outside the boundaries of the timeline's usual power structure, Homeline agents have made the remarkable discovery that this world has a Lemuria. It's not on any map, or discussed in any book; furthermore, the vague outlines of a world conspiracy can be traced with this phantom country in the middle. More worryingly, it seems like the conspiracy has started to penetrate the outer edges of Infinity's organization here. Unless stopped, it's just a matter of time before they discover The Secret.

Unclean: Infinity has had several agents disappear in the last few months, not from action in the field, but apparent kidnappings. Investigation has led to the suspicion that a group in the local Indian subsections of Infinity, possibly with the aid of people inside the Indian government, are spiriting them away to Kumari Kandam. Unable to trust their own people on the scene, investigators from elsewhere are going to have to go to that parallel and get to the bottom of things. As well as having to avoid disappearing themselves, the visitors are going to be in a place where they are legally allowed but socially unwelcome: Kumari Kandam is a paradise for its inhabitants, with sacred overtones. Outsiders are anathema.

Walking on the Moon: Lemuria is what geologists call a large igneous province, the product of enormous volcanic eruptions. Other igneous provinces, such as the Siberian and Deccan Traps, have been fingered as the culprits in mass extinctions. While it's been 35 million years since the last really big eruptions in Lemuria the potential is still there, and with infinite worlds, potential is going to become reality somewhere. When they go off, the volcanoes in the south of the continent are going to turn thousands of square miles into wastelands of ash and lava over a few weeks, and inject enough material into the stratosphere to cool the whole planet. In the cloudy, chaotic conditions, some of Infinity's people are bound to get lost; if they're lucky, this will happen in an uninhabited Lemuria and the missing will be trained outdoorsmen with camping and survival equipment. If they're unlucky, they're going to be without the resources they need as well as being trapped in a humanitarian crisis with hundreds of thousands of locals.

Suggested Reading

Putting aside the mythological accretions it picked up in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the land presented here as Lemuria did exist. In the real world, the Kerguelen Plateau was drilled by the *JOIDES Resolution* ocean survey ship in 1999, and dry-land rocks brought up. As new as the discovery is, there's not an awful lot of information about the lost mini-continent, but a passable overview can be obtained from [Ancient Volcanic Cataclysms in the Indian Ocean](#).

A more scientific (if still-popularized) explanation of the plateau's formation and its effect on the Earth is described in "The Lost World."

Most of the rest of the currently available information is in primary sources like *The Journal of Petrology* and *Earth and Planetary Science Letters.* Unfortunately, at best only abstracts these are freely available on-line.

Icosahedron Adventures

Alphabet Enemies
Twenty-Six Nonstandard Nemeses
(Part Two: I through P)

by Owen K.C. Stephens

In this article we continue our list of unusual enemies, begun in "[Part One: A through H](#)." Given that no campaign is likely to need this many fiendish foils for the player characters, either as background or picked up in play, we also take a quick look at other ways such nonstandard nemeses can be used in a campaign.

- **Standardized encounters:** While having more than a few outlandish opponents attach themselves to player characters is only appropriate in the most chaotic of campaigns, using them as more standard encounters to be stumbled across and ignored or solved as the players prefer is much more manageable. If an ally (or even an enemy) of the players is suffering from one of these atypical archenemies, the PCs can have the fun of dealing with the problem without the annoyance of it being an ongoing threat.
- **Part of the problem:** A variation on the first idea, here the heroes become an element of the adversity befalling someone else. If a good king or well-respected senator is killed and turns out to have a Killer's Fund (see below), the PCs might be among those who try to claim the money in the name of both greed and vengeance.
- **World background:** Many of these ideas set a tone, which may be just right for a given campaign. Rather than have them encountered at all, some of these radical rivals can become part of the history, legends and myths of a campaign. Players who hear about Mochanna the Barbaric in some far-off time or place know that comic, overbearing, part-parody people are appropriate to the world their characters live and adventure in.

With such ideas to expand their possible use firmly in mind, let's move onto the next set of alphabetic antagonists.

Identity Thieves

These phantasmal fakers are just like the [B-Team](#), except they *don't* mean well. They take out credit cards in your name, claim rewards for dragons you've killed, sell off shares of your companies, offer to marry rich older women while wearing your face, and make disparaging remarks about local mobsters wearing your signature suit. You could probably kick the stuffing out of them -- if you could find them. But they don't want to "defeat" you in some mano-a-mano sense. They just want to keep you busy while they enjoy the fruits of your labors.

Julie Jazz

Julie Jazz is a top reporter who prides herself on covering the adventurous set. Her name and exact occupation aren't important, as long as the name's alliterative and the job includes gathering information. She might be Jacqueline de Jewel (courtesan and spy of the high court), Dr. Joyce Jergens (experimental psychologist), Jolie "Jo-Jo" Jones (hard-bitten cybernetic police hacker), or Jo'less Jay'ayne (elven diviner and scholar for the elven lords). Heck, the idea could even become John Jacobs (decidedly male UFO-oligist and grad student).

The important thing is "she" has some professional need and legal right to poke around in your business, a willingness to go beyond that legal right, and just enough competence and confederates to be a really useful contact for you. When she's not trying to unearth your secrets she's probably being captured and threatened by your enemies. She doesn't mean any harm, and she does help you out when you need some research. But she also wants to be there anytime you do anything dangerous, ask questions whenever you want something kept secret, and inevitably grab the mulligan you need and hide it just before Doctor Deathtrap grabs her and sticks her in, well, a deathtrap.

Killer's Fund

You killed a rich man. He may have needed killing. He might have made his money on black lotus, white slavery, child pornography or even assassination-for-hire. Or he may have left you no choice, coming at you with a knife in a dark alley for whatever reason. In any case, killing him wasn't the hard part. It's surviving afterward.

Your target had a Killer's Fund, an amount of money sitting in a secure location to be paid out to whoever kills the person or people that killed him. You might have known about it in advance, but if not you're sure to hear about it afterward. The money may be in a bank in a country that allows such outlandish financial arrangements, or it may a less official matter with the money in the hands of someone willing to make a "gift" to anyone who meets the requirements. Heck, the money doesn't even have to be real, as long as most people *think* it is. It's a big sum, enough for anyone to retire in comfort to a beach somewhere. And until you're dead, it just keeps collecting interest and wealth off investments, so the quality of assassin it attracts keeps growing (which explains why you were jumped by 3rd-level assassins when you were 3rd level but run into 10th level assassins now that you're 10th).

You don't have many methods of getting the black mark off you, either. If the money is held in a legal vault, you might be able to have it seized as part of a criminal investigation into the first few assassins who jumped you. If it's not, you may have to fake your own death (and possibly claim the reward for doing so), or convince people the money and offer aren't real. You might steal the Killer's Fund, or just ruin the person holding it so they decide to access it for themselves (though they may have their own Killer's Fund, which could make things even worse). You can even start a rumor the Killer's Fund is a lie, even if it isn't, and try to win the following battle of public perception. But this is a problem you can't fix through beating people up; you need to get sneaky one way or another.

Lazarus

Maybe he's the actual biblical figure and maybe he isn't. (Of course in games without the Christian Bible, a similar figure must be created to be appropriate.) But he definitely is immortal. His claim is the full line said by Jesus was, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." And while that's theology for most people, for Lazarus it's literal truth. As long as he believes in Jesus, he can't die. And being long sick of living, he wants someone to find a way to kill him.

He's chosen you.

Maybe he feels you have overcome every other foe, and thus can find a way to destroy him. Maybe he believes you have the power to steal his faith in Jesus, which should render him mortal. Since he does believe in Jesus he tries to be a huge thorn in your side, without breaking any commandments. But there's nothing in there to prevent him from telling your enemies about you, as long as it isn't *false* witness. Nor (in his view) beat you silly, as long as he doesn't kill you. Or even destroy things you own, as long as he neither steals nor covets them. He can make your life very difficult, and has the money and connections to get out of most imprisonments you arrange.

Of course he never works at making your life difficult or getting killed on the sabbath.

Mochanna the Barbaric

He's the typical muscle-bound hero. He swings a mean broadsword (or whip, or street-smart punch, or whatever strong jawed heroes are swinging within the campaign). He's fearless, unswerving in his devotion to the cause of freedom for all people, and complete immune to all mind-affecting magics. And logic. And common sense. He's seen as barbaric (even in a modern setting, where his name is Mochanna Howard Saint) because once he identifies his foe, he doesn't stop until either he or that foe is six feet under. Also, Mochanna speaks only in the third person. It is Mochanna's way.

Problem is, he's convinced you're his foe.

Maybe you made the mistake of picking up the bloody knife when you happened to find the murdered body of Mochanna's friend. Maybe someone who looked a lot like you stole Mochanna's frisbee. For a more reasonable version of Mochanna, he may have seen a prophesy stating you would destroy the world. (This would make him terribly sorry to have to destroy you, but it is for the greater good. Surely you understand?) Whatever the reason, Mochanna is going top put you down. Hard. Unless, of course, you out-think his many clumsy attempts to do you in, which isn't that difficult.

You can, of course, just run Mochanna through with dirk or bullet, but he's really not a bad guy. Heck, he fights a lot of the villains you fight, and against them he's surprisingly effective. He also has a lot of friends, who are going to come after you if you knock him off (though they are remarkably forgiving about just knocking him silly). Besides, he would be a powerful ally, if you could turn him to your side. You just have to do that in a way that doesn't depend on convincing Mochanna he's wrong. Because Mochanna doesn't do "wrong." Perhaps you can prove that while he was right to hunt you in the beginning, it's no longer necessary.

Nemesis Reality

Your foe isn't a person, or even a group. It's a whole dimension . . . a dimension where everyone you know and trust is part of a vast conspiracy to destroy you, and willing to undertake any actions (no matter how foul or vile) to see you dead. They've already succeeded in destroying your nemesis reality duplicate, and now they want to move on to versions of you in other realities. When the stars are right (or ion storms weaken the density of dimensional barriers), members of that conspiracy can get through to your reality and try to destroy you.

Of course, at first you think this is a simple reverse-world, where good is evil and vice versa. In that case, the nemesis world version of your enemies should actually be your allies. But that's not how nemesis world works. For some reason, in that reality, every living thing hates you. Dogs attack you on sight. Nuns try to gouge your eyes out. People who are otherwise moral, rational, kindly people go to any length to tear you apart. And since everyone who exists in your world has a nemesis-world duplicate, every few months someone you know and trust is temporarily replaced with a nemesis-world duplicate. When simple assassination attempts fail, the nemesis worlders begin thinking of more elaborate plans that culminate in your untimely end. They even bring over people you've never met any version of, to work them into your lives. In time, you may learn to distinguish nemesis-people from the tension they always have in your presence, as they struggle not to launch themselves as your throat (a Sense Motive check opposed by their Bluff check).

You may be able to close down the barriers between realities somehow. Or fake your death. Or find a reality where everyone likes and trusts you, and have those ally world people protect you from nemesis world.

One-Eye Roy

He shows up in just a few dreams a month at first. One-Eye Roy, a black-winged demon with just one blazing red eye. In these dreams you are attacked by animals and inanimate objects. Heck, you are an animal or inanimate object, subject to tortures carried out by robots or golems as well as cartoon anthropomorphic items and animals. If you dream you are a sheep, you get slaughtered and served by dancing cutlery while aware of every moment. If you dream of being a book, you're torn up and fed to a paper shredded one agonizing page at a time. You begin screaming to wakefulness more and more often. Which bothers anyone sleeping near you, and makes travel through regions requiring stealth difficult at best.

Then, the dreams start coming every night. Soon, you must make a moderate Fortitude save (DC 15) or wake up already fatigued. If you seek the aid of divination or wise men you learn it's not One-Eye Roy, despite what the demon calls itself, but the Oneiroi. The three gods of sleep, sons of Hypnos the Greek god of sleep. And it isn't even all of them -- Morpheus is the Oneiroi who forms men in dreams, and you don't have any. Apparently only his two brothers, Phobetor and Phantasos, have problems with you.

Why? Maybe Morpheus showed you his favor, and his brothers are tired of him hogging the limelight. Maybe that

gang you busted used to spray graffiti that praised the two lesser Oneiroi, and the gods want their worshipers back. Maybe One Eye Roy is a true demon, weakening your mind through your dreams in preparation for possessing your body. Or maybe, just maybe, it's all in your head. You've killed so many men you feel guilty, causing you to be unable to dream of them. Thus your subconscious forms a land where there are no people, but everything else punishes you for you bloody deeds. Heck, you may not need to face the gods, you may only need to face yourself.

But if you don't find what you need and deal with it, you're going to lead a very tired life from now on.

Plant Empire

It is one of the largest nations on the planet. It claims thousands of square miles, hundreds of species, and millions of subjects. It has survived war, fire, flood and drought. And it has coexisted, unnoticed, with the empires of man for eons. It's the Plant Empire, and if you didn't know about it you just couldn't see the forest for the trees. The origins of the Plant empire may be as simple as hidden evolution or magic enhancement, or as complex as post-apocalyptic super-mutation, mad science bioengineering, or alien invasion. Triffids could be among us!

And now they're after you.

The Plant Empire has always defended itself. Senators opposed to tree-rights are"accidentally" killed in skiing accidents. Druids who care more about wolves than ferns "somehow" mistake poisonous mushrooms for their more benign cousins. And not everyone who choked to death on a carrot died accidentally.

How did you earn the ire of ferns? It may have been a simple thing. You thought you were just getting firewood, but to the Plant Empire you slaughtered a well-liked orator (or a scion of a noble line, or a popular pollen artist). It's also possible there's a more complex reason. You may have championed the cause of a company that makes paper -- lots of paper. Maybe you were convicted of herbicide in an ivy league court. Perhaps your very success and pro-animal agenda make you a political target of frond-laden terrorists. If you're a vegetarian, it might just be payback.

Until the walking, poison-spitting varieties of plants are available, the Plant Empire has only a few options to hurt you. Whenever you deal with living, or very recently living, plant matter, things go against you. Hay fever has become a major issue. Grass seems to cling to your shoes, slowing your ground movement rate by 5 ft. outdoors and placing a -2 penalty on your Hide and Move Silently checks under leafy conditions. Thorns are everywhere. And a surprising amount of the produce you eat is tainted or spoiled, requiring daily moderate Fortitude saves (DC 15) to avoid stomach discomfort and muscle aches (same basic penalties for being fatigued if you fail that day's save).

Once you realize the pattern of attacks, you must find some way to communicate with the Plant Empire. You can't possibly avoid all plant life forever, and if you kill every plant in the world you've got more serious problems.

For more help running the Plant Empire, especially the attitudes of its most influential species, be sure to check out the Omniscient Eye on the personalities of trees.

Pyramid Review

Expedition to Castle Ravenloft (for *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Bruce R. Cordell & James Wyatt

Cover by Kev Walker

Illustrated by Dave Allsop, Kalman Andrasofsky, Ralph Horsley, William O'Connor, Lucio Parrillo, Anne Stokes, & Eva Widerman

Cartography by Jason Engle & Kyle Hunter

226-page full-color hardcover; $34.95

First published in 1983, the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* module *Ravenloft (I6)* is noted for several things. First, it introduced the horror genre to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.* Second, it presented a major villain, Count Strahd von Zarovich, to the game. Third, it contained the late David Sutherland's amazing orthogonal maps that depicted the grandeur and scale of Castle Ravenloft. Fourth, it utilized "The Fortunes of Ravenloft," an in-game encounter with gypsies during which the characters' futures are told and the location of items inimical to Strahd, of Strahd himself, and his motives, all determined. Since this could be different every time, *Ravenloft (I6)* could be played again and again, the experience slightly different each time. This was a process that would be repeated in the authors' *Gangbusters* module *Death in Spades (GB5),* determining victim method, motive, and the murderer.

The setting for *Ravenloft (I6)* is the isolated valley of Barovia. For centuries it has been dominated by Count Strahd von Zarovich's baleful pall, a man driven into madness, then evil by his unrequited love for his brother's wife Tatyana. Centuries later, and Strahd has become enamored of Irena the local burgomaster's daughter and spitting image for Tatyana. Learning of this, the adventurers -- brave, pure and stout of heart -- determine to foil the threat to Irena and that cast over Barovia.

The reputation of *Ravenloft (I6)* as a particularly challenging adventure is well deserved. The classic adventure has been reprinted more than once and was included in TSR's *Silver Anniversary Box Set.* It also spawned both a sequel *Ravenloft II: House on Gryphon Hill (I10)* and a complete setting in *Ravenloft,* which explored many different horror tales from *Dracula* to *Frankenstein* to zombies. Interestingly, the original scenario is a surprisingly sparse affair at just 32 pages. But now Wizards of the Coast have revisited *Ravenloft (I6)* in an all-new full-color expanded supplement.

Expedition to Castle Ravenloft has the same basic set-up, but brings the detail of *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5* to the adventure. It gives Strahd extra possible motives and works to make the player characters as much Strahd's allies as his enemies. It adds a wealth of detail to the castle and to encounters both inside and outside of the castle. It offers options to run *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* as either as a single night session, as long or short adventures lasting several sessions, or as a full mini-campaign. Of course, the shorter options will miss out on some of the campaign's details, and the adventure suggests how it might be abbreviated. *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* might be used in the *[Eberron,](#)* *Forgotten Realms,* or even the *Urban Arcana* campaign setting for *[d20 Modern.](#)*

Where *Ravenloft (I6)* was designed for 5th to 7th level characters, *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* is designed for 6th to 10th level characters. Higher level characters are needed to play the campaign in its shorter forms as they will have

to face Strahd much, much earlier. For lower-level characters and the longer campaign form, the characters will explore Barovia, facing the allies and minions of Strahd before entering the castle itself.

As in the original, an encounter with the gypsies and the telling of "The Fortunes of Ravenloft" determines the various aspects of the adventure. Not Strahd's secondary goal (which is determined by a dice roll) nor the adventurers' reason for entering Barovia (which is determined by the DM), but the location both of Strahd and those items inimical to him. Where *Ravenloft (I6)* just used playing cards, *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* adds the alternative methods of using either tarot cards or Dungeon & Dragons' in-game card game, Three Dragon Ante.

Armed with this knowledge, the party will eventually enter Ravenloft, a forbidding edifice full of gloom and dark shadows. Inside they will have numerous encounters with the undead, face deadly and memorable challenges, and be harassed by the vampire himself in various forms. Strahd will attack the party frequently, but he will withdraw just as often, constantly goading and testing the characters. Every encounter with Strahd will be memorable, but other notable encounters include a trap that teleports a Wight into the character's arms and armor, and the character into the Wight's shroud in a nearby crypt!

Perhaps the most radical change is the new encounter format pioneered here. The adventure and its numerous locations are described as normal, but each combat encounter is more fully detailed in a two-page spread at the end of each chapter. The advantage of this is that the DM need only flip to one location to handle the combat for that encounter. The downside with *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* is that each chapter is followed by literally pages of combat encounters . . . over 70 pages for Castle Ravenloft itself.

One thing that each combat encounter description does is take the scenario's orthogonal maps and flatten them into an old fashioned overhead view. This makes each location easier to present to the players as they explore the castle and lay it out for use with miniatures. You almost wish that the book came with maps that could be laid out ready to play, just as you wish that the book came with illustrations that could easily be shown to the players.

Expedition to Castle Ravenloft also adds treasures as it provides additional detail about the originals, plus it describes a new Prestige Class dedicated to fighting the undead. A character can take this class during the scenario and thus re-found the Order of the Raven. This actually requires the character to meditate overnight in the castle, so is a difficult process. As with other Wizards of the Coast modules, *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* can be run from just the three core books, but it can be expanded upon with the addition of several supplements, most notably *Libris Mortis: the Book of the Undead,* but also *Complete Warrior* and *Complete Divine.* Perhaps the supplement that will have the most impact upon the scenario is *Heroes of Horror.* It is suggested that a DM use the rules for taint, corruption, and depravity from *Heroes of Horror* to increase the adventure's sense of horror. This is almost mandatory since the adventure is meant to be one of gothic horror as much as it is fantasy. It also adds an element that was not present in 1983.

Physically, *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* is almost, but not quite nicely presented. For a scenario as complex as this, it is a surprise to see that the book lacks an index. More disappointing is its treatment of the famous orthogonal maps. It is nice to see them in color and each section placed near its set of location descriptions, but nowhere are the individual maps put together so that *Castle Ravenloft* can be seen as a whole. What is lost is a sense of scale of the place, and how each section connects. Here it is actually worth having a copy of the original scenario to gain that sense of scale and grandeur.

The publication of *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* in 2006 also feels a little odd. Why not wait another two years for its Silver Anniversary? And then why not do something a little more special? Perhaps a book of illustrations in full color or of maps ready to play out with miniatures? It would have been equally interesting to read something by the original scenario's authors on both their version and this.

Certainly the most singular omission is any suggestion of what happens at the scenario's end. What if the characters succeed? If they fail? It's not addressed here, and perhaps a DM will be forced to return to the original scenario for a suggestion of either.

Ultimately, *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* manages to both satisfy and disappoint. The first, for the excellent job of

expanding and detailing the adventure, although in keeping with the nature of **Dungeons & Dragons 3.5,** the emphasis is on a very tactical feel, especially in the use of the new encounter format. The latter, for its omissions: the full map and the lack of ending, and its failure to do anything beyond the book format, and its failure to highlight the original scenario's significance. It also places too much emphasis upon combat over roleplaying, but that is as much indicative of **Dungeons & Dragons 3.5** as it is this campaign. There is no really good guide for the DM for how to roleplay Strahd, except in the individual combat encounters. That still leaves no little amount of work for the DM to do, for **Expedition to Castle Ravenloft** is a challenge not only to revisit, but also to run for the first time.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Jayne's Intelligence Review 1905PD: The Royal Manticoran Navy
Jayne's Intelligence Review 1905PD: The Havenite Republican Navy

Published by Ad Astra Games

Written by David Weber, Ken Burnside, and Thomas Pope

With contributions from Don Beseny, Joe Buckley, Mark Graves, John Lerchey, Thomas Marrone, Steve Osmanski, Giles Schildt, Chris Weuve, Marcus Wilmes Artwork by Jenny Dolfen, Thomas Marrone, and Charles Oines

68-page full-color softcovers, $29.95 each

The nice people at Jane's Information Group have been providing key information about the world's security forces since 1898, when Fred T. Jane published his first guide to the warships of the world. A tradition like that commands deep respect and also attracts the urge to parody or pay homage to the outstanding reference materials Jane's provides. With *Jayne's Intelligence Review,* the authors are definitely in the homage category with volumes to bemuse and entice both fans and casual readers of Weber's Honor Harrington Universe.

For those not familiar, Honor Harrington is the gifted space-naval officer whose adventures are recounted over several novels and short stories by David Weber. She lives in a cosmos where starships ride the currents of space-time itself, in a setting which owes as much to Horatio Hornblower and Jack Aubrey as it does to James Kirk, John Sheridan, and (maybe) Jack Ryan. As one might expect in military science fiction, Weber has not stinted on the hardware and gives us, as often as page count and plot pace permit, thorough explanations of the workings of the ships and technology available to the Manticoran and Havenite forces and allies. It would be nice, though, to have all of that information in one consistent place, attractively illustrated.

Jayne's Intelligence Review does all of that, and then some. Each volume (to date) takes on one of the major players on the astropolitical stage of the (our calendar) late 40th/early 41st century. After a bit of astronomy data on the home systems and a brief recap of the history of the services being considered, we move into detailed reviews of the heirarchy, organization, ranks, uniforms, and tactics of each space fleet. Over a dozen ship classes are discussed in each book, with full-color illustrations and tables providing dimensions, armaments, capabilities, weaknesses, even "signature" patterns for common sensors. The ship review fills half of each book and evokes the *FASA Ship Recognition Manuals* for *Star Trek* in the 1980s (but without the game content). The art, though, is much more detailed, in vivid color, and goes beyond the traditional three-view to include a "file hologram" of the ship in its natural habitat. Each book wraps with a discussion of that government's marine corps, the planet-side warfare specialists. We get, again, the table of organization, ranks, uniforms, and equipment from the simple sidearm to the battle armor and transport vehicles, all also lovingly rendered in color. *The Royal Manticoran Navy* closes with two pages of essays discussing the evolution of these warships from pieces of fiction to components in the *Saganami Island Tactical Simulator* game, and on to their presentation in these books. It speaks well of Weber that he was not only willing to accept corrections where inconsistencies occurred, but also to revise his older novels to bring them into the new consistency.

So far we haven't said much about gaming, except in reference to other books. What is this review doing in a gaming

magazine? Ad Astra Games seems to have two purposes in mind. One is to expose the depth of material extracted during the development of the *Saganami* wargame. In that light, these can be viewed as companion works extending the wargame's background in a way that wouldn't fit into the original box. Ad Astra Games has also announced the development of the *Worlds of Honor* roleplaying game, using a variant of the *D6 System* which had served so ably in the original *Star Wars Roleplaying Game.* With that knowledge at hand, we can view these *Jayne's* books as a preview of the production values to expect in the roleplaying volumes, and as a way to get crunchy background content out ahead of the RPG release, drumming up support and sparing the publication team of having the same ship information repeated across five different products.

Of the two books, *The Royal Manticoran Navy* gets an edge for being on glossy paper, which serves to add depth to the larger full-color space illustrations. It's a slight edge only. The ship illustrations are lovingly detailed, with weapon and sensor emplacements meticulously placed. Yes, the ships do all look much the same, even from book to book, but so do most World War II-era destroyers if you don't know what distinctive details to look for. The designs also very much say "ship of war," in ways that Foster's Humanx "plumber's helper stuck in a melon" or *Star Trek's* disks, cylinders, and ellipses can't.

The shopper might balk at at $30 price tag for a 60-odd page book. The shopper needs to remember that these are heavily illustrated, making very full use of the options color printing brings. You get a great deal of bang for the buck here, making these welcome references for the *Saganami Island Tactical Simulator* player, the novel collector, and the *Worlds of Honor* roleplayer-to-be. These volumes of *Jayne's Intelligence Review 1905PD* do a fine job of condensing complex information and presenting it in a manner pleasing to the reader. The passion for the setting shows, the same passion that Fred T. Jane brought to cataloging the ships of his experience a century back.

--Bob Portnell

Rider's Block

This past week I saw *Ghost Rider* one and a half times. The "half" time stems from the fact that I saw the last half of it because we all had the audacity to arrive at the complex a half-hour before the movie was supposed to start; as a result, the other patrons hadn't driven their cars out of the theater yet. See, this marks the first time I've seen a movie in a drive-in theater as an adult, and it's something of an experience, somewhat heartily recommended for those who enjoy a different viewing experience. (I note that the cost -- $10 for the two of us in the car -- beats every matinee price I've seen in a decade, let alone a 9:30 showing on the week a movie opens.)

Anyway, I'm going to engage in some somewhat spoilery behavior right now, because that's what I do when I see a movie the week it opens; so frequent an occurance this is, I believe I've done it twice previously in the past seven years. (I'm not exactly a first-run-movie kind of guy).

One of the big elements of this movie is a mysterious smirking mentor played by Sam Elliott, perhaps best known as playing the mysterious smirking mentor in the Shakespearean epic *Road House,* or otherwise portraying the voice of carnivorism in the ["Beef: It's What's For Dinner"](#) ad campaigns.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Anyway, it turns out that the Sam Elliott character (whose name I could look up but I'm too damn lazy) is, in fact, the previous Ghost Rider . . . only he's got a burning horse instead of a burning motorcycle. So, in the climax of the movie, Sam and the current Ghost Rider Nicholas "Elvis" Cage ride out for Sam's last journey to the Plot Point Climax Church & Saloon. Yes, burning motorcycle and burning horse, riding alongside in a cool-companion-y kind of way. And then, once they get there, Sam tosses Nick a gun (which Nick probably could've carried himself) and says, basically, "Good luck." And that's the last we see of Sam.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Sadly, this is quite probably not even in the top five moments that don't make a lick of sense about *Ghost Rider* (a movie that, all things considered, I enjoyed watching more than I didn't).

Anyway, in gaming there's often a tendency to create interesting NPCs who run the risk of stealing the spotlight. For example, 57% of the supporting cast of the ***Aberrant*** RPG were more interesting than the PCs had any hopes of being; at best, the players might be able to apply and compete for Kewl Character's mop-up crew. (Come to think of it, this is a common criticism and complaint about many ***World of Darkness***/White Wolf games.)

On the other hand, games often exist or fall because of the strength of the characters the heroes get to interact with. For example, what would the *Star Wars* series be without the deep-bass threat of Darth Vader, the background menace of Jabba the Hutt, or the drawn-butter yumminess of Admiral Akbar?

In my mind, the trick of the introduction of any (non-trivial) NPC is to perform a delicate balancing act: Making supporting characters cool without making them overshadowing. Making villains menacing without making them untouchable. Making allies seem helpful without making the players wonder why this person isn't solving all problems himself.

As a textbook example, I consider Professor X (of the *X-Men,* formerly of the starship *Enterprise*) to be one of the best NPCs ever. He's interesting withought (usually) taking the spotlight. He's powerful but possesses significant difficulties that keeps him from performing more directly. He's generally 100% trustworthy (with a hiccup here and there), meaning he's a perfect catalyst for just about any adventure. And he has many reasons for staying *out* of the spotlight -- desire to maintain secrecy, frailty, other things to do, and so on.

As a gaming anti-example, I consider the way the Archangels (and, to a lesser extent, the Demon Princes) as presented in the core ***In Nomine*** books to be particularly *bad* examples of supporting NPCs. While their goals and motivations

are well-described, the details for how they interact with their underlings -- a.k.a. "the PCs" -- were sorely lacking. On important missions, how often should a heroic angel maintain contact with his Archangel? How much support can an Archangel provide if things prove more dangerous or more crucial than expected? How much do the Archangels know, and/or how much *can* they know if need be? (And, if they can know/do/say more than they let on, why don't they? If the world's going to end if X isn't done, why doesn't the Archangel do X directly? And so on.)

As such, when I craft interesting NPCs (especially highly competent ones), I almost always try to have a compelling reason for them to *not* be more interesting or useful than the heroes. Usually all it takes is one good justification:

Character is prevented by ailment or limitation from being truly useful (Professor X again, [Monk](), Spider-Man supporting character [Madame Web](), or a drug-addicted Sherlock Holmes) Character is prevented by society or circumstance from overshadowing the heroes (for example, if the NPC is an incredibly busy business man, or is a noble or powerful person whose "handlers" won't allow to be placed in harm's way) Character possesses useful abilities or skills, but isn't a "complete" package (most companions of the Doctor, most inventor/mad-scientist characters) Character *is* highly active or competent, but only in a limited scope or field (for example, Batman in Gotham City) Character has some other reason for avoiding the limelight (wanted by authorities, vow of non-violence, has too many at-risk associates to attempt involvement)

Having said all this, if you're going to incorporate a cool character into the plot, then it's useful that they actually *do* something . . . other than ride up with the PCs and toss them guns. But it's important that they *not* be the ones who get to whack Professor Destructorio. Like I said, it's a balancing act.

While I'm sure there are other solutions to this, the method I think I enjoy most is having the NPC do the stuff that the heroes *should* do, but it's too boring. For example, let's say the Bad Guy lashes out at an innocent bystander, who's now in critical condition. "I'll take care of him!" shouts the secondary NPC, giving the heroes a chance to reaffirm their primary duties as kickers of butt. Often I won't even have anything in mind for this character; I'll just keep an ear out for the players to say something along the lines of "Well, we *should* alert the mayor about these mutant ferrets . . ." If that line isn't said with much enthusiasm or interest, then Supporting-NPC is usually happy to pick up the slack. And so on.

Players often have a love-hate relationship with cool characters; they like to meet and interact and swap notes, but when the time comes to get stuff done, the PCs like to be the center of attention (and rightly so . . . their controllers gave up an evening of playing **World of Warcraft** to be part of the gaming table). Figure out a balance that everyone likes, and let the fun roll on.

Or, barring that, just make yourself a big slab of beef and hope it'll all work out. Beef: It's what's for sidekicks.

--Steven Marsh

Riding the Tiger

Exotic Riding Animals for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

From the orc-ridden wargs at the Battle of the Five Armies to the tigers of Pan Tang to the giant Paluan lizards in *The Fallible Fiend,* unusual riding animals frequently appear in fantasy literature. Moreover, though they're extremely unlikely, the idea of cavalry mounted on dinosaurs, giant eagles, or some other impressive animal has an undeniable "kewl" factor. This article presents a number of utterly unrealistic but -- with any luck - interesting riding animals for fantasy campaigns.

A riding animal has to fit a few requirements. First, it has to be strong enough to carry a rider. Assuming an average combined weight of rider and gear of about 200 pounds, which is near enough for humans and other human-sized riders, the minimum ST for a mount is about 18, which puts the mount near Medium encumbrance. A ST of 22 moves that "standard" load closer to Light encumbrance, which is good for speed, or provides a lot more margin for heavy armor, which is good for heavy shock cavalry. ST values above that raise the possibility of multiple riders. For example, a mount with a ST of 24, though not terribly fast, might carry a lightly armored "driver" and an equally lightly equipped archer (or fireball-hurling magician, or some other "gunner" type) in the manner of Bronze-Age chariots, but with much better terrain handling. Typical *GURPS* elephants (ST 45) are strong enough to haul three lightly armored people and still have nearly 700 pounds of carrying capacity . . . enough for a small, lightly armored wooden fighting tower.

Second, the animal must be amenable to training and keeping company with humans. There's no specific trait which covers that, so this must ultimately be the GM's call. For the most part, though, any animal with the Domestic Animal metatrait can probably be trained so far as its IQ will allow.

Here, then, are several animals which may be used not just as monsters but as riding animals used by human-sized (or nearly so) characters. Almost all are carnivores, but are sufficiently omnivorous or suited for less-than-fresh meat that the Restricted Diet disadvantage doesn't apply. They eat an average of $2.5 worth of food, mostly meat, per point of ST per day. However, most can gorge themselves for a few days, then go without eating for two or three days thereafter. The exception is the herbivorous hill turtle, which grazes as it goes.

Coursing Wolves

ST 17; **DX** 12; **IQ** 4; **HT** 12.

Damage 1d+2/3d-1; BL 58 lbs.; HP 17; Will 11; Per 12; FP 12; SM +1.
Basic Speed 6; Basic Move 9; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 10 (Brawling).

Advantages: Damage Resistance 1; Discriminatory Smell; Night Vision 2; Teeth (Sharp Teeth), does 1d+1 cut; Temperature Tolerance 1.

Disadvantages: Chummy; Code of Honor (Wolf) -1.

Skills: Brawling-14; Tactics-9; Tracking-12.

Cost: $6500.

The coursing wolf is on the borderline of being a rideable animal. Goblins and other smaller races can use them as cavalry, but they're only practical mounts for humans if the human is fairly small (or lightly equipped) or the wolf very

large. Their social nature can make tending them a chore as they work out the pack hierarchy, and they're restless and distracted when alone. However, they're bred for group hunting and are used to working together, making them remarkably amenable to training for group tactics. The "code of honor" is the coursing wolf's inherent loyalty to its "pack," a group of fellow wolves and associated humans. A coursing wolf will fight to the death to protect its fellow pack members and defer to pack members above it in the hierarchy. Among trained wolves, riders are regarded as "alpha dogs," and a well-trained coursing wolf is *very* loyal.

Giant Eagles

ST 21; **DX** 12; **IQ** 3; **HT** 13.

Damage 2d/4d-1; BL 88 lbs.; HP 21; Will 9; Per 12; FP 13; SM +1 at rest, +2 with wings extended.
Basic Speed 6.25; Basic Move 6; Aerial move 24; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 10 (Brawling).

Advantages: Acute Vision 3; Claws (Talons), does 2d cut; Enhanced Move (Air) 1; Flight (Cannot Hover; Winged); Teeth (Sharp Beak), does 2d-1 pi+.

Disadvantages: No Fine Manipulators.

Skills: Brawling-14.

Cost:$11,000.

Flying mounts are rare and expensive, but among those, giant eagles are among the most common. They're relatively fast, are individually dangerous, and can render most terrain moot, but their capacity for training is limited, they need a lot of room for maneuver, and their immense wingspan makes them easier targets.

War Tigers

ST 23; **DX** 14; **IQ** 4; **HT** 11.

Damage 2d+1/4d+1; BL 106 lbs.; HP 23; Will 11; Per 12; FP 11; SM +1.
Basic Speed 6.25; Basic Move 10; Block 0; Dodge 10; Parry 12 (Brawling).

Advantages: Claws (Sharp Claws), does 2d+1 cut; Combat Reflexes; Damage Resistance 1; Night Vision 5; Teeth (Sharp Teeth), does 2d cut.

Disadvantages: Sadism (12 or less); Sleepy (Asleep 1/2 of the time).

Skills: Brawling-16; Stealth-13.

Cost:$10,000

Though not much good as long-distance transportation (they need a great deal of rest, so they're only good for short stretches), war tigers are among the most dangerous unusual mounts: agile, stealthy, and armed with particularly sharp teeth and claws. Their habit of playing with their prey before killing them only adds to their fearsome reputation.

Great Bears

ST 27; **DX** 10; **IQ** 4; **HT** 13.

Damage 3d-1/5d+1; BL 146 lbs.; HP 27; Will 11; Per 10; FP 13; SM +1. Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 7; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Brawling).

Advantages: Claws (Sharp Claws), does 3d-1 cut; Damage Resistance 2; Teeth (Sharp Teeth), does 3d-2 cut; Temperature Tolerance 3.

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted); Bad Temper (9 or less); Semi-Upright.

Skills: Brawling-11.

Cost: $11,500.

Few mounts are more formidable than the huge, tough great bear. In northern forests, they are used as transportation for both people and goods, and in a pinch they can be used for cavalry. Unlike other cavalry, though, they can grapple their opponents; some specimens are trained in Wrestling. Great bears are, however, sometimes hard to control, so they've yet to be regularly used in large numbers. The Rider (Bear) skill includes training on how to stay in the saddle when the bear rears up on its hind legs, and bear saddles are specially designed to allow such a maneuver.

Grand Caiman

ST 29; **DX** 10; **IQ** 2; **HT** 10.

Damage 3d/5d+2; BL 168 lbs.; HP 29; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10; SM +2. Basic Speed 5; Basic Move 5; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Brawling).

Advantages: Amphibious; Damage Resistance 3; Teeth (Sharp Teeth), does 3d-1 cut; Striker (Tail; -2 to hit), does 3d+3 crush.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12 or less); Cold-Blooded ("stiffen up" below 65); Laziness.

Skills: Brawling-11; Swimming-11.

Cost: $12,000.

Though strong and tough, the grand caiman has a number of drawbacks as a regular mount. It is hard to motivate, easily angered, very sensitive to temperature, and almost impossible to train. On the other hand, it has a number of attributes making it remarkably useful in its native tropical swamps. One, obviously, is its considerable carrying capacity. It is large enough to carry two or three lightly equipped men into battle, though the riders usually dismount rather than use the caiman as a fighting platform. It is also equally at home in the water and on land. Although it can swim far under water, it is trained to stay on the surface when it has riders.

Hill Turtle

ST 350; **DX** 8; **IQ** 3; **HT** 13.

Damage 36d/38d; BL 24,500 lbs.; HP 350; Will 10; Per 10; FP 13; SM +6. Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Advantages: Damage Resistance 3 (Tough Skin); Damage Resistance 12 (Torso Only).

Disadvantages: Cold-Blooded ("stiffen up" below 50).

Cost: Rarely sold, but at least $80,000.

The hill turtle gets its name not from living in the hills, but from *being* a hill. At 15 to 18 yards across and able to carry over 30 tons without complaining, domesticated hill turtles aren't mounts so much as mobile homes. In their native near-desert plains, they are usually fitted with small housing compounds. In times of war, the compounds

become small wooden fortresses. Hill turtles are nearly impossible to miss, but very hard to hurt.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Very Picture of Her Love

An Adventure for Any Modern Setting

by Michael Anguiano

"Orchid at Casement" is a highly-regarded painting by Giuseppe Gianni, which disappeared from his studio upon his death. It was ultimately found by the late Adrienne Hesme, a New York artist. It has remained in the Hesme collection ever since, now controlled by Hesme's husband, Gillette Sandoval.

At least, that's what everyone thinks. An independent collector has approached you for help in selling a painting. She says this one is the real "Orchid at Casement."

The Set-Up

Someone calls the PCs from a street pay phone. The voice is female, with a slight English accent. She identifies herself as Beth Linehan and says that she has a proposition for the heroes regarding a valuable painting entitled "Orchid At Casement." Supposedly, the painting is currently part of the Hesme collection, but she's convinced that the Hesme "Orchid" is a forgery. Why? Because she's now in possession of the original. If the adventurers are interested, Linehan arranges an afternoon meeting at an open-air café in a busy shopping area, giving a brief physical description of herself.

The PCs can easily find information on "Orchid At Casement," including pictures, history, value, and so on. With a bit of calling around they can confirm that Linehan is an independent art dealer, having done some business with a wide variety of collectors and institutions around town. Anyone with specialized knowledge of or contacts in the art world can additionally learn that Beth Linehan is known for 1) traveling in international circles; 2) turning up unusual finds on a regular basis; and 3) dealing with a somewhat unsavory crowd. However, that's the most that can be learned on short notice.

The Meet

The café is situated in the middle of a large courtyard, surrounded by tall buildings that house a wide variety of businesses that cater to the urban shopper. Any PC might notice that this courtyard is a sniper's paradise, with scores of windows looking down on them.

Beth Linehan arrives just before the scheduled meeting. She wears an expensive dark business suit, pearl earrings, and a short pearl necklace. She's carrying a small black attaché case. Taking a vacant table, she greets the investigators with a radiant smile, a brisk shake of the hands, and a suggestion that they get right to business.

Linehan explains that she's come into possession of the original "Orchid At Casement." How? She says that's not important. If the heroes are not familiar with it, she will give a brief description and history of the painting. She goes on to say that it was supposedly rediscovered in 1986 in Australia and that copy currently resides in the Hesme collection. Unfortunately, Linehan doesn't have sufficient documentation to prove that hers is the original. Presumptions of authenticity will favor the Hesme copy, so everyone would assume Linehan is peddling a fake. That means that she has to rely on a gray- or black-market sale.

Her solution: sell it to Sandoval himself. She hopes to lure him into buying the real one, or else he risks being publicly exposed as owning a worthless fake.

So if she has the painting and knows a potential buyer, why does she need the PCs?

Simple . . . this is a very valuable painting and she has some very unethical competitors. The heroes will safeguard the painting for the next several days while she arranges the meeting. After that, she says, everything should be taken care of and they should get their payment a few days later.

Linehan is willing to cut them in for a percentage of the sale price. She will initially offer 15% but they can negotiate up to 30% with some effort.

If the Heroes . . .

- press her for details on the painting's acquisition, she will say she ran across in the storage space of an old friend, an amateur collector in Prague who didn't know what he had, so she traded him some ancient Greek pornography.
- threaten her, she will reduce the offered percentage and threaten to walk away from the deal.
- suggest that they might steal the painting for themselves, she'll say she knows how to find them if she needs to, and they don't even know where the painting is yet.

Should the heroes accept her offer, Linehan will smile broadly and give them a bulky manila envelope marked "Orchid" from her case. Inside the envelope, she says, are a letter, an address, and set of keys, as well as an initial retainer toward expenses. At this point, Linehan takes her leave and exits the courtyard via a busy store. She will skillfully evade any attempt to tail her.

The "Orchid" envelope contains a set of car keys (no clues as to make or model); the address of a warehouse near the port facilities; and a signed letter to a freight agency, authorizing the release of a specified vehicle to the party; and bundle of crisp hundred dollar bills. The cash will be $4,000 per character, or $20,000 total . . . whichever is greater.

Should the PCs decline her offer, Linehan will smile broadly and say that it was worth a try. Then she will give them a flat manila envelope, which she says contains a small payment for their time and trouble. She then takes her leave and exits the courtyard via a busy store. She will skillfully evade any attempt to tail her. In this envelope is $2,000 in crisp hundred dollar counterfeit bills.

The Pick-Up

At the warehouse, the adventurers find a large green SUV waiting for them. The warehouse belongs to the freight agency, which shipped the vehicle in from Amsterdam. It cleared customs that morning, and the heroes are welcome to drive it away . . . assuming they brought any gasoline.

They also receive another envelope, which was to be given to whoever picked up the vehicle. This envelope contains a letter with no addressee, but signed by Linehan. It instructs the reader to keep the vehicle safe for two days, in whatever fashion the reader deems appropriate, and that she will be in contact by phone at that point. It also mentions that the vehicle has great sentimental value for her, as she has always used it to transport her prize orchids.

At this point, the PCs are free to pursue whatever course of action they wish. They can look for more information, find a place to hide with the vehicle, go for a wild night on the town with their new cash and new-to-them car, or whatever else they decide. Regardless, in two days Beth Linehan will call them, and sometime before that they will be attacked.

Investigations

Getting information on "Orchid At Casement," Giuseppe Gianni, or Adrienne Hesme is simply a matter of finding an encyclopedia. Information on Gillette Sandoval is less available, because Sandoval has not lived in the public eye, but is easily learned from more knowledgeable sources or even old newspaper archives (in articles about Adrienne Hesme). See the information on each below.

Getting any information on Beth Linehan will depend less on the heroes' skills and more on knowledge of or

connections to the art world. Or perhaps incredible luck. Simply calling around will merely confirm that she is an independent art dealer. Better connections will yield more information on her shady reputation as a dealer in international circles. *Very* good connections will reveal the entirety of information listed for her below.

A simple examination of the large green SUV reveals only that it is two years old, has moderate mileage, is well-maintained, has brand-new NY plates, and was previously driven in England by someone who smoked tobacco. Observant investigators may recall that Linehan did not smoke or smell of smoke. Smart investigators will also adjust the headlights for driving on the right side of the road.

A skilled and careful (or merely violent) examination will reveal that the panels and windows are bulletproof. If the PCs specifically examine the bed of the vehicle, they will discover suggestions of a false compartment that is wide, long, and very flat. However, actually getting into the compartment will take proper tools, a couple hours of work, and disassembly of most of the SUV's rear end. In that compartment, the PCs find a painting, carefully sealed in plastic. Upon examination, the painting appears to be "Orchid At Casement."

However, the PCs will *not* find the two tracking devices that have been built into the vehicle's frame. These can be located only if the PCs look for transmitter signals. They will certainly overlook the third device, built into the rear-view mirror, which is inactive until specifically signaled to begin transmitting. And not to mention the fourth device built into the radio itself . . .

Follow-up on the vehicle's registration will reveal ownership by the non-profit Greater Vermont Arts Foundation, which has apparently existed for only one week and has a non-existent street address in Manhattan. All listed corporate officers will turn out to be deceased for at least six months. Before that, the vehicle doesn't appear to have been registered anywhere at all.

The painting in the SUV will match all descriptions and pictures of "Orchid At Casement." An appropriately skilled PC will recognize that the painting is a work of skill, but will not be able to independently ascertain whether this work is the original or a forgery. Any attempts at chemical analysis will be conveniently forestalled; the heroes are attacked!

The Attack

Sometime before Beth Linehan calls, the party will be attacked by a group of large, violent, heavily-armed, rather stupid thugs. The thugs have an electronic unit that picks up the tracking devices in the SUV frame. However, they actually have been tailing the heroes since the vehicle pick-up, only occasionally resorting to the electronic unit. They've been instructed to find the painting, which they figure is somewhere with Linehan. However, they don't know where Linehan is, so they have to make do with the PCs.

The adventurers' behavior will determine how the thugs attack. If PCs hide out, the thugs attack sometime in the dark early morning. If they drive around all night, the thugs will try to run them off the road, leading to a running gun battle on the streets. If the heroes leave the vehicle unguarded, the thugs will simply wait there for them to return.

If the Heroes . . .

- capture any of the thugs, they can easily learn that "some German guy" hired them to find Linehan and/or the painting. They have a contact phone number, but it's a prepaid cellular phone service that does not identify the user.
- study the electronic unit, they can find the two tracking devices built into the SUV's frame. If a skilled PC disassembles the device, he might discover that a listening device is built in . . . and presumably someone's been listening in on whoever's got the device. Audio broadcast range would be several miles.
- found the painting in the SUV, they might offer to sell it to whoever sent the men. The men were actually hired by a severe-looking Austrian man (who works for Volker Mandrella; see The Cast below). The Austrian man will reluctantly meet them, but will dismiss the painting as a forgery after a cursory examination. The Austrian man will leave with no further explanation; if the PCs try to forcibly detain him, he will be rescued by a group of

well-armed, well-trained, very businesslike commandos with matching Austrian accents.

Linehan Calls Back

Two days after picking up the SUV, the PCs get a call from Beth Linehan. She tells them that she's being tracked by several men, and can't safely move around in public. That means that it's up to the PCs to meet with Sandoval and make the pitch. She's set up the meeting for tomorrow morning and gives them directions to Sandoval's estate on Long Island. If the adventurers need persuading, she'll reluctantly up her offer to as high as 40% of the final sale price.

If the Heroes . . .

- tell her about the attack, she will be excited. She explains that this means her competitors are splitting their forces and aren't working together. She won't explain how this could make any sense.
- tell her that they found the painting, she will congratulate them on their ingenuity and tell them to put it back where they found it, because that's the safest place for it.
- threaten to sell the painting to Sandoval on their own, she breezily tell them to give it a shot and get their best prices. She adds that she'll be in touch afterward, and hangs up.
- trace her phone call, they'll get a pay phone in the Museum of Modern Art.
- decide not to meet Sandoval, they'll be hounded by various gunmen for several days until it becomes clear that they know nothing about Linehan's whereabouts.

Meeting Sandoval

Gillette Sandoval lives at Eulenspiegel, the estate he inherited from his late wife. The PCs will be suitably impressed at the sprawling mansion that overlooks the grounds, as well as by the security guards who meet them at the front gate and escort them inside. The heroes are met at the front door by Mather, the butler, who dismisses the security guards and leads the party through the mansion and to a large gallery.

The gallery is obviously the subject of very heavy, very expensive security. A wide variety of paintings and sculptures are spread through the room, but a wide swath of the rear wall is given over to a single painting: "Orchid At Casement," displayed without a frame. A small array of track lighting hangs from the distant ceiling, solely for this painting. Seated in a wheelchair before the painting is Gillette Sandoval.

Sandoval greets the PCs with a smile and apologizes for the wheelchair. He explains that he was recently on a dig in central Africa and had an unfortunate bout with malaria. The wheelchair is part of doctor's orders until he's fully recovered.

Sandoval then points to the painting and asks if the heroes are familiar with it. If they are not, he will give a brief explanation of the painting's standard interpretations. If they are, then he'll skip the basics and tell them to be patient for a moment, to indulge an old man in a wheelchair while he spins a boring story.

Sandoval will then explain that met Hesme at an art show in 1982, when she was well-established. He, of course, had no idea who she was, having been dragged to the show by well-meaning friends. While standing in front of some painting of flowers, he noticed a pretty young woman standing next to him. She asked his opinion, and he replied that he was about as bored as a real bee would be. He explained that the bee sees into the ultraviolet range, and that the real blooms would have markings that were only visible in the ultraviolet. So when he looked at this painting of flowers, he was about as good an audience as a real bee would be, because neither of them would see much to be interested in. Sandoval pauses at this point and adds, "I was being a real jerk."

Of course, that was Adrienne Hesme, and of course that was one of her paintings.

Sandoval goes on. They began dating and were married a couple years later. She credited his observation with influencing her artistic output as well as her artistic criticism. In her writing, she argued that one of the principles of

her artistic criticism was the need for a relationship between the artist and an informed audience, and that the artist who disdained any audience was performing only for his own arrogance.

"I make a stupid comment," he observes, "and she spins it into an artistic legacy for the ages. Made me really feel like an even bigger jerk."

At this point, Sandoval turns to the painting. He explains that she found this in some dusty backroom in Canberra and gave it to him on Valentine's Day in 1986. "She said that it spoke to my sense of always being out of place, in my life, in my career, even in my love. So she said this would show me how it could all be resolved into one whole. Still don't really know what she meant by that."

Sandoval hands one of the heroes a small pair of goggles and directs them to look at "Orchid At Casement." The goggles allow the PC to see the ultraviolet highlights from the overhead lights. Through the goggles, the blossoms in the painting are more vivid and marked by elaborate patterns. In the lower right corner is Hesme's signature.

"I'm not that bright sometimes. Took me seven years to figure out that it was a forgery. Now it means more to me than the real one ever could." Sandoval pauses, then adds, "You can keep the goggles. Mather will show you out."

The butler usher the party out, politely but firmly. On the way to the front door, the butler gives the heroes a card with the name of an art dealer who might be interested in their offer. The security staff sees them off the estate. Linehan calls the PCs as soon as they leave.

If the Heroes . . .

- tell Linehan about Sandoval's refusal, she will be stunned. She will ask for some additional details, then hang up. The PCs will not hear from her again.
- tell her that Sandoval accepted, she will eagerly ask for details and amounts, then hang up. She will then call Sandoval directly, learn the truth, and then the PCs will not hear from her again.
- refuse to speak to her, threaten her, or say they'll sell the painting without her, then she'll point out that the painting from the SUV is also forgery and have a nice day. Then she will hang up and the PCs will not hear from her again.

At this point, the PCs are left with only their advance payment, the SUV, and the painting from it. They will discover that the painting is a moderately skilled forgery, worth only a few hundred dollars as a wall decoration. Unless the PCs sell the SUV immediately, it will be stolen within three days and quickly shipped out of the country.

"Huh?" -- Background Notes

Beth Linehan is using the heroes as the proverbial canary in a coal mine.

She stole a painting, but she's not sure if it's real or fake, so she uses the party as bait for the person she stole it from. If the heroes are attacked, the stolen painting is valuable and therefore real. If the PCs are not attacked, then it's not valuable and therefore fake.

Linehan suspected that the real "Orchid At Casement" painting was stashed at Volker Mandrella's estate in England. Given the painting's value, she decided the potential payoff was worth the investment of her time, money, and effort. First, she had her own forgery of "Orchid" made. Second, she seduced Mandrella's chauffeur to get access to the estate. With the chauffeur's help, she stole Mandrella's painting of "Orchid." She also stole the green SUV.

After stowing her own forged copy in the SUV, she and the chauffeur split up. She took the real painting and disappeared. He took the SUV (and forged painting) to Amsterdam, where it would be shipped to New York. He was supposed to meet her in New York, but Mandrella's people caught up with him first. He died under interrogation, but he didn't know anything anyway. Having no other lead on Linehan, Mandrella's men followed the SUV instead and watched for whomever picked it up.

The Painting

The GM must bear in mind that there are *three* paintings of "Orchid At Casement": two forgeries and one real one. The Hesme painting is a forgery. The SUV painting is also a forgery, used by Linehan as a decoy for the PCs. The third painting, which was stolen from Mandrella, is the real one . . . and which the heroes never actually see in the course of the scenario.

"Orchid in Casement" shows an open window in a stone wall. Surrounding wall details, flooring, and other details indicate a British manor house. A Phalaenopsis Schillerianna orchid in a red "wrapped twig" pot is standing on the casement, the sunlight streaming in around it. The orchid's growth is leaning inward toward the room, rather than outward toward the light. A pendulous stalk of blossoms is extended into the shadow, leaving the details of the blossoms' color in question. Moss on the pot is under the orchid's direction of growth. The pot is wet on the shadowed inward side, with a few drops of moisture on the casement underneath it.

Critics note that the pot was evidently watered, then placed into the sunlight in a way to correct the lean of growth; the pot has been standing at the window only long enough for the sunward side to dry, while the shadowed side is still wet. This suggests a moment of attention and care following a period of neglect. Additionally, the orchid's spray of blossoms would normally be the most colorful element of such a painting, yet the blossom's vivacity is muted by shadow. Further, this species is Philippine in origin, but is set in a European location. The muting of color and displaced setting possibly suggest a feeling of emotional dislocation or perhaps a sense of exploitation of foreign cultures, both motifs common to this artist's "tropical period."

"Orchid At Casement" disappeared in 1845. It resurfaced in Hong Kong in 1912 during the estate disposition of Edward Westphalen, a recently deceased British collector. It appeared again in Johannesburg in 1926 in the collection of Lady Helene Riesling, who apparently owned the painting for less than two weeks before selling it to an undisclosed buyer. Adrienne Hesme rediscovered the painting in the assets of a bankrupt auction house in Canberra in 1986. The painting is commonly valued at $1.8 million.

The Cast

Beth Linehan is a very attractive fair-skinned brunette of English background in her late 20s. She wears her hair in a short "pageboy" cut. She dresses very fashionably and presents a cultivated, educated demeanor. She is fluent in English, Spanish (European), Italian, and German, as well as having a working knowledge of Japanese, Portuguese, and Arabic. She works primarily in the acquisition and sale of art works. In speaking to the heroes, she will affect a slight English accent, although this is strictly to be charming.

Born in Yorkshire, Beth actually grew up in Rome, the child of an expatriate British couple. As an art student, she fell in with a bad crowd and found that it suited her. A skilled manipulator and negotiator, she has steadily acquired knowledge, skill, and wealth during her years of working in the criminal elements of the art world. She is likewise proficient in the areas of surveillance, sleight of hand, and small arms. In other words, she can ditch a tail, pick a pocket, and use the small Beretta pistol she keeps tucked away.

Linehan has acquired some reputation as someone who makes shady deals but can be counted on to hold up her end of the bargain. This reputation was carefully cultivated. When she has no intention of living up to her end of a deal, she will use the name Elise Grumann. As Elise, she will speak with a Bavarian accent, uses more severe styles for her hair and makeup, and dresses mostly in leather.

Adrienne Hesme, artist and writer, deceased (1950-1996). A willowy blond of mixed European ancestry and privileged upbringing, Hesme was a very eclectic artist and prolific writer who helped reshape critical perceptions of art in the 1980s. Hesme was mostly known for her work with mixed media sculptures, although painting was her most regular artistic pursuit. Among her most notable artistic successes was the legendary Oregon Gallery opening in 1985, when the first hundred attendees were provided with masks (handmade, numbered and now highly sought-after), a

small percentage of which included ultraviolet-active lenses that revealed hidden details in most of the paintings. The motif of "visual obscurity" appeared repeatedly in later work. Her work continues to be displayed in various museums and galleries. Since her death, the Hesme Collection (which contains little of her own work) is on continual tour, but her personal favorites remain on permanent display at Eulenspiegel, the Long Island estate where she lived with her husband.

Much of her critical writings had to do with the need for an educated audience, and that art is as much a function of audience as the artist. The timelessness of a piece of art is a condition of the appeal to its audience, so that the greatness of an art work will vary with the society in which it is placed. She also delineated a theory that the significant difference between "high" and "low" culture was the level of education needed to appreciate it.

Giuseppe Gianni (1786-1845) is known to have been a brilliant artist, inveterate traveler, and philosophical eccentric who railed against the rapacity of imperialism. Born in Florence, he lived variously in Cairo, Mexico City, Montreal, Bombay, Kingston, San Francisco, and Manila, where he spent his final years. He died on the floor of his Manila studio in 1845, apparently succumbing to some obscure hemorrhagic fever. During his travels, he produced an extensive body of sketches illustrating botanical and zoological specimens, many of which entered standard use in scientific texts. He also produced a sizable body of paintings during his life, for which he became acknowledged only after his death.

His years in the Philippines have become known as his "tropical period." These paintings usually featured tropical plants or animals which were pictured in mildly unsuitable European settings, which critics have interpreted as reflecting a sense of displacement as well as perception of European appropriation of foreign culture. Many of these paintings disappeared from his studio upon his death, only a few of which have ever resurfaced. Of these lost paintings, the best known was "Orchid in Casement," which was rapturously described in contemporary correspondence by a number of visiting dignitaries and artists. Extensive preliminary sketches remained behind, but the work itself was presumably stolen.

Gillette Sandoval (b. 1953) is a semi-retired paleobotanist. The child of a Brazilian diplomat and a French businesswoman, he was born and raised in New York. Although botanist by training, he was consulted increasingly by a paleontologist friend on pollen grains found in archaeological digs, until he inadvertently became a leader in the field that would become paleobotany. He and Adrienne Hesme were married in 1984. Despite seemingly incongruent backgrounds and careers, the two were extremely happy together until her death from pancreatic cancer in 1996. Since then, he has worked to preserve her artistic legacy, as well as funding work in his own field.

Volker Mandrella is an elderly Austrian collector of considerable wealth and reach. He does considerable traffic in art works of questionable ownership. The large green SUV is his property, typically used to hide or move a single work of great value. It has never been proved in court that Mandrella was a member of the Nazi party or served in any military capacity.

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Ultra-Tech*

by David L. Pulver

The original **GURPS Ultra-Tech** was the first book I wrote for Steve Jackson Games, back in 1988, and so I was very pleased to be able to update it. The road to this proved unusually rocky, however. Originally, we'd planned on a very different book, one that would feature a complex technology path, weapon, armor, and gadget design system. To this end, I worked closely with Kenneth Peters (and also with Hans Christian-Vortisch, co-author of the new **High-Tech**). Unfortunately, a lengthy playtest confirmed my fears that that the resulting first draft was too complicated for casual use. After attempts to simplify it were less than successful (and with the book now over deadline), Kenneth left the project, and I completely rewrote the book, basing it far more closely on my original *Third Edition* work. (Hans and I hope to release a significantly revised version of the weapon part of the design system at a latter date.)

The result was a vast improvement: a new edition that combines *Ultra-Tech* and *Ultra-Tech 2* into a single unified book, but fully updated to *Fourth Edition* specifications. In addition, it adds completely new material, such as ultra-tech vehicles, customizable robot templates, and many new gadgets. It's designed for a wide variety of science fiction settings. In particular, I included more examples of "domestic" technology and consumer goods for ordinary people, to help GMs providing a sense of "ordinary life in the future." Full support was also included for cyberpunk campaigns, with numerous examples of cybernetics, and military games, with more heavy weapons than the original books, including tanks, battlesuits, and cannon. The book also complements **GURPS Bio-Tech** with additional examples of future medical technology, hardware-based nanotechnology, and uploading.

Gadget Out-Takes

With the space freed up by the removal of the overly-complex weapon design system, almost all gadgets that I wanted to go in the book actually made it in! But a few were left out for reasons of space.

Household Manager System (TL9)

An array of sensors and microcommunicators scattered through a house and its appliances. They keep track of the state of the household chores, tracking dirty dishes, laundry, etc. +1 (quality) bonus to Housekeeping skill and may coordinate housebots or cleaning swarms. It is not a burglar alarm, except indirectly (e.g., a bloody corpse may signal as a "mess" to be cleaned up). $1,000.

Stage Equipment (TL9)

This is a set of portable gear including multiple directional sonic comms, spotlights, and 3D media screens designed for sound stage, dance floor, etc. Use several for large venues. $20,000, 200 lbs., 10D/20 hr. LC4.

Anti-Sex Pheromones (TL10)

This "don't-hit-on-me" perfume produces pheromones that actually cause sexual disinterest in people of a specific sexual orientation. It is popular for people who do not wish to be sexually harassed. Anyone who has Lecherousness who is within two yards or downwind gets +2 to their control roll if the only viable subject in the area is using anti-sex pheromones, or if the pheromones are in the area. People without Lecherousness also experience reduced desire. Someone attempting to use Sex Appeal on someone who is exposed to these pheromones will have a -2 (if that person is susceptible to them). The effects linger for a minute after they have been breathed. $10 per dose. LC4.

Empathic Interfaces (TL10)

Empathic interfaces are neural interfaces that incorporate additional equipment similar to a veridicator. They can translate the user's emotional state into a digital signal.

Empathy Upgrade (TL10): This is a hardware upgrade of a neural interface. It can record feelings and translate them into particular values ("he's registering happy"). A computer or other device that is linked to the neural interface can then be set to respond in accord with a particular emotion. This should be pre-set, e.g., "if I'm frightened, turn on the force screen" or "if I get curious, activate my camera." An empathic neural interface 1.5× as expensive as any other interface.

Emotion Interpreter (TL10): This software provides the equivalent of the Empathy advantage but only in situations when it is run on a computer that is receiving input from someone using a neural interface with an empathy upgrade. Note that the user of an emotion interpreter does not need a empathic neural interface; only the subject requires one. However, if the user does have neural interface with an empathy chip, he can set it so that it will let him experience the incoming emotions (as his own brain is triggered to manufacture the appropriate electrochemical signals).

Complexity 4 software, LC4.

Industrial Antimatter Factory (TL9-12)

A purpose-built facility for production and storage of antiprotons and the creation of antihydrogen. Antiprotons are produced by accelerating protons (or other particles) to energies high enough that, when they collide with a target, a part of the energy is transformed into particle-antiparticle pairs. These are then captured and assembled into antihydrogen.

Antimatter Factory (TL9): A large, optimized antiproton particle-accelerator system. It manufactures antimatter at a cost of $25,000 per microgram, and can manufacture 1,000 micrograms per day. At these prices, antimatter is used in nanogram levels as both a radiation source for medical treatment, and as a catalyst for fusion or fission in small nuclear pellets or warheads, although the latter are very expensive. $25 billion. LC1.

Antimatter Factory (TL10): Manufactures antimatter at a cost of $2,500 per microgram and can make 10,000 micrograms per day. Antimatter-catalyzed fusion is common; micrograms of antimatter are routinely used as a catalyst for nuclear weapons. Antimatter is also used to fuel antiparticle beam weapons. $5 billion, LC1.

Antimatter Factory (TL11): Manufactures antimatter at a cost of $25 per microgram and can make 100,000 micrograms per day. At these prices, antimatter reactors are used where high-performance power plants are more important than fuel efficiency (e.g., military craft). Antimatter warheads of intermediate yield between conventional and nuclear weapons are introduced (a microgram of antimatter equals about 90 lbs. of TNT). $1 billion. LC0.

Antimatter Factory (TL12): It manufactures antimatter with high efficiency at a cost of $5 per microgram and can make 1 gram per day. At these prices, antimatter is used directly in some high-performance rocket engines, and is common in weaponry. However, each pound of antimatter still costs $2.2 billion (and explodes with about 20 megatons yield), so nuclear bombs remain the only cost-effective way to create big explosions. $200 million. LC0. In comparison, at TL8, antimatter production, primarily for research purposes, rarely exceeds 0.01 micrograms/year at $60-70 million per microgram.

Antimatter factories are cheaper if they can benefit from solar collection facilities, especially close to the sun, e.g., on Mercury. For such a facility, multiply the start-up cost by four due to the specialized equipment and transportation that is needed, but divide the cost per microgram of antimatter by two. This can be much more efficient.

Electrothermal-Kinetic Slugthrowers (TL10)

"ETK" guns are similar to both liquid propellant guns and electrothermal-chemical weapons; they are the final evolutionary stage of conventional firearms before a complete transition to electromagnetic weaponry. Instead of relying on the chemical energy of the propellant, they use a powerful electrical charge to vaporize it. The expanding

steam and plasma accelerates the round to a very high velocity. They use more energy than an electrothermal-chemical weapon, but less than a gauss gun.

All TL9 conventional slugthrowers can also be available in TL10 ETK versions. They propel projectiles at roughly twice the velocity of a conventional slugthrower. ETK slugthrowers get double their normal piercing damage, double the range, and have 1.5 times as many shots of a conventional-propellant slugthrower. Two-handed weapons (rifles, shotguns, SMGs, etc.) also add +1 to Acc. They are also twice as expensive. They have the same variable velocity setting as LP slugthrowers. Other statistics are the same.

The grip or stock of an ETK slugthrower incorporates a removable B cell (for pistols) or C cell (for SMGs, PDWs, shotguns, rifles), or D cell (for larger weapons) to provide the electrical pulse. Each provides enough power to fire 10 magazines worth of ammunition.

Inquisitor Robot (TL10)
188 points

This is a sinister machine equipped with three flexible weapon mounts and three manipulator arms. The basic model is a cylindrical machine that moves on a cushion of air. Its strength belies its size. It is also called a "torture robot," although its large brain (for its mass) and array of sensors let it analyze behavior and make it very good at psychological manipulation. A typical mix for its weapon mounts might be a pneumohypo, a holdout electrolaser, and a neural lash. Its second mouth is mounted on an arm, and can be used to take samples for its taste sensor. $20,000, 64 lbs. LC2.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+1 [10]; HT+2 [20].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+4 [8].
Advantages: Doesn't Breathe [20]; Discriminatory Smell (Emotion Sense, +50%) [23]; Discriminatory Taste [10]; DR 10 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [6]; Extra Arm 3 (Extra Flexible, +50%; Weapon Mount, -80%) [9]; Extra Mouth 1 [5]; Flight (Low Ceiling, -25%) [30]; Infravision [15]; Machine [25]; Protected Hearing [5]; Protected Vision [5]; Radio (Burst, +30%; Reduced Range 1/10, -30%; Secure, +20%; Video, +40%) [16]; Sealed [15]; Sharp Teeth [2].
Disadvantages: Aerial [0]; Cannot Float [-1]; Electrical [-20]; Maintenance (one person, weekly) [-5]; Restricted Diet (Very Common, Power Cells) [-10].
Features: Compact microframe computer brain.
Availability: $60,000 (TL10), $15,000 (TL11), or $4,000 (TL12). LC2.

Hardware Upgrades

Contragrav (TL10^) (+15 points): Floats silently through the air, which only increases its menace! Remove Low Ceiling, -25%, giving it Flight [40]; add Silence 1 [5].

Jump Communicators (TL10^)

This directional comm teleports energetic subatomic particles (e.g., mesons or anti-particles) across space, where they arrive and decay with enough energy to be noticed by a properly-tuned receiver (but without enough energy to inflict any damage). They must be aimed at known coordinates; if the receiver is moving and not already in communication by this or other means, the GM may require an Electronics Operation (Comms) roll to successfully transmit (takes 10 seconds per attempt).

They cannot be intercepted in transit, since they vanish and then reappear, rather than traveling through space. They can penetrate anything except a reality stabilizer (page 194) or other device that blocks matter transmission. It may be a precursor to actual matter transmission (MT) technology, or it may be that particles are all that can be transported.

Light speed and faster-than-light jump versions are both available.

Very Large (TL10^): 50-mile range. $200,000, 1,500 lbs., F/10 hr. LC2.
Very Large (TL11^): 500-mile range. $20,000, 60 lbs., 2D/10 hr. LC2.
Large (TL11^): 50-mile range. Includes video screen. $6,000, 6 lbs., 2C/10 hr. LC2.
Medium (TL11^): 2,000-yard range. $2,000, 0.6 lbs., 2B/10 hr. LC3.
Small (TL11^): 200-yard range. $500, 0.06 lbs., 2A/10 hr. LC3.
Micro (TL11^): 20-yard range. $100, neg., AA/1 wk. LC3.

Multiply ranges by ×100 per TL after introduction.

Neutral Particle Beams (TL10)

These weapons are intended for use in vacuum and trace atmospheres, where a charged particle beam would rapidly defocus. Instead of light (and negatively charged) electrons, the beam is composed of heavier hydrogen atoms. In order to accelerate the beam, an extra electron is attached to each hydrogen atom. The now-charged heavy ion is accelerated in conventional fashion, but as it exits the accelerator it passes through a tenuous gas that strips away the extra electron, producing a neutral beam.

The extra machinery means that neutral particle beam weapons are more complicated than charged particle beam weapons, appearing one TL later. Neutral particle beam weapons are mostly used as spacecraft weaponry, sometimes with accelerator tubes that are hundreds of feet long. However, semi-portable neutral-beam weapons may be available if vacuum combat is expected; for example, troops operating on a lunar base or in an asteroid belt might be equipped with these weaponry. In vacuum or trace atmospheres their range is not reduced (unlike a charged particle beam). In atmosphere, they can fire a normal electron beam (rather than a hydrogen atom) and will thus perform as an ordinary charged particle beam blaster.

Neutral particle beams otherwise have the same statistics as ordinary charged particle beam blasters, but appear one TL later.

Wrist Line Shooter (TL10)

This is a miniature launcher for a 100'-long carbon fiber line terminating in a molecular adhesive cup that will stick to anything and support up to 200 lbs. The user can use it to travel by swinging from buildings, tree branches, ceilings, etc. He adds +2 to Climbing skill, and can move at half Basic Move while swinging along. $200, 0.5 lbs. LC3.

Plasma Lance Warheads (TL11^)

Plasma lance warheads are similar to plasma warheads, but generate a highly penetrating shaped plasma jet designed to burn through armor. Plasma lance warheads inflict burning damage with a (10) armor divisor and the surge damage modifiers.

Plasma lance is available for any 10mm or larger round. Hand grenades and mines use the warhead damage. Guns and launchers with plasma warheads replace their normal piercing damage with the warhead damage shown below.

Warhead	Damage
10mm	6d (5) imp inc sur
15mm	6d × 3 (5) burn sur
18.5mm	20d (5) burn sur
25mm	6d × 5 (10) burn sur
40mm	6d × 8 (10) burn sur
66mm	6d × 12 (10) burn sur
100mm	6d × 20 (10) burn sur

Plasma lance warheads are 15 × cost. LC1.

2D Force Warhead ("Grav Slicer") (TL10^)

These create a two dimensional hypergravity pulse, usually parallel to the local gravity gradient. This flat disk of expanding gravitational force inflicts cutting damage with a (3) armor divisor. The GM should adjust hit location based on the position of the victims; this can be a nasty surprise if they don't realize what type of grenade was used, since the normal reaction ("hit the dirt") might be the wrong thing to do. If someone drops prone when a "grav slicer" grenade lands near them, any location could be struck. If they time a jump just right, it will miss them, and if they remain still, it may slice off their feet at the ankles. Warheads may be programmed to airburst at a given height (e.g., neck level, torso level, etc.) to maximize a particular effect.

2D force is available for any 15mm or larger round. Hand grenades and mines use the warhead damage. Guns and launchers replace their normal piercing damage with the warhead damage shown below.

Warhead	Damage
15mm	1d(3) cut ex
18.5mm	1d+2 (3) cut ex
25mm	2d(3) cut ex
40mm	4d(3) cut ex
66mm	8d(3) cut ex
100mm	8d×2(3) cut ex

They are 10 × cost. LC1.

Tachyon Communicators (TL12^)

A T-Com is a directional communicator using a modulated beam of faster-than-light particles (tachyons). A tachyon beam is not affected by intervening objects, but the user must know the exact location of the receiver . . . so interstellar communication works best between fixed relay points rather than mobile ships, unless some other means of communication is also used. The beam travels at 1 parsec per hour (57 AU per second). Tachyon beams may not penetrate reality stabilizers (page 194).

Large (TL12^): 10 parsec range. $60,000, 400 lbs., 2E/1 day. LC3.
Medium (TL12^): 1 parsec range. $20,000, 40 lbs., 2D/1 day. LC3.
Small (TL12^): 0.1 parsec range (20,600 AU). $2,000, 4 lbs., 2C/1 day. LC3.

Crazy Old Man's House

by Caias Ward

"I'm not opening that. I am going outside, and having a smoke, and I am not going to open that . . ."

Eric stomped off, refusing to subject his mind to the sheer insanity of this place. At least until he got a smoke in.

"Look," Moko said, swinging around the two rusty cleavers bound together by wire, "It's twice the cutting!"

Eric ignored him. Moko shrugs as Cai walked by, a huge box in his arms. It was nudie magazines from the '50s and '60s, the eighth box they found today. Along with the nine oscilliscopes in the garage pit, the room with four inches of heating oil on the floor and the Ford Model A engine block, it was a light day of cleaning. Other days? Other days were . . . **worse.** *Like when they had to burn all those pictures . . .*

"I can't believe your grandfather was insane enough to collect all this stuff . . . " Cai continued to work through the basement, being careful to avoid the rotted floor section that attacked them the first time they came in the house.

"Insane? He has The Brilliance!!!" Moko mocked. "Any moment, we're going to find the giant spider robot and we'll be sorry! Sorry I say!"

Cai was out of earshot by now, throwing the magazines in the dumpster. They were up to their twelfth 30-cubic-yard dumpster, and the end was far off. He turned back to find Eric cursing and smashing a paint can with an axe handle. Inside the previously factory-sealed paint can were dozens of rusty locks, all cut.

"Who factory seals locks in a paint can? **Who?***" Eric continued smashing the can in anger, his mind still trying to wrap itself around this crazy old man's house.*

The Start of the Collection

Carmine Natoli of Ridgewood, New Jersey was a factory worker during World War II. A small man, he was still capable of incredible (and herniating) feats of strength. Otherwise unremarkable, he managed to keep this love of collecting a secret from his family for decades. In this time, especially when his wife passed and his daughter moved away, he filled his three-story house with objects found on the street, stolen from his place of employment, or acquired from his many trips to the dump.

As he collected, his mind wandered more and more, finally being declared mentally incompetent and taken to live with his daughter and her family. It was only when the family hired a few of the grandson's friends to clean out the house did the true depths of Carmine's insanity reveal itself. Carmine was an inventor of "things," as it were; they didn't necessarily work, or even serve a purpose, but they were a testament to the wild thought processes going on in this man's head.

The Location

Carmine Natoli's house used to be part of a much large estate, including a servant's quarters on the next block. Currently, the house is a three-story stone structure with a two-story garage adjacent to it, sitting on one acre of land. Built into a small hill, both the basement and first floor are at ground level, with a regular door and "storm cellar" door for access to the basement. The grounds are overgrown but otherwise not remarkable.

The interior of the house before it was cleaned is another story. Depending on when the house is seen, it can range from being impassable without major effort or magical abilities (desolidification, flight, size control) to simply

cluttered. While the house is relatively stable, there are areas of floor that are decaying or broken due to the weight of the objects within.

House Cleaning

All said and done, it took 16 dumpsters (30 cubic yards apiece) to empty the contents of the house. When the basement was first opened, the grandson commented on how something must be blocking the door. It turned out that the room was filled floor-to-ceiling with stuff, to the point where he had to repeatedly ram the door to crush and shift objects until he could reach in to remove boxes.

What was originally a beautiful three-story stone house was now a broken shell, left to rot with trash, clutter, and dead animals. From rotting floors to a drill press the 127 pound man picked up himself and carried into the center of the basement, it was a heartbreak of lost architecture. Elegant latticework burned and stained, fine cloth moldy and torn, all of it was a hazard to body and mind. It got worse as the friends cleaned the house; the grandson claimed that his grandfather had "The Brilliance," an ability to see beyond three dimensions and the skill to shape mundane objects into powerful magical machines.

While they considered it a joke, the friends always gave pause when they would find a jar with a hundred washers made out of detergent bottle plastic, an anatomically-correct tin man or two gallons of mercury in a jar. Also, the house seemed to . . . *breathe.* Doors that could barely move on their hinges would slam shut, a store mannequin would move from floor to floor and "secret plans" scrawled on paper would alternately be gibberish or reveal incredible insight.

Finally, the house was cleaned and sold after months of work and incredible expense. Carmine Natoli passed away from heart failure shortly after, blissfully unaware that his life's work of collecting had been reduced to trash. Still, the memory of the house and the objects within haunt the people who spent so much time cleaning it.

A Small Selection of the Objects Found Within

Carmine Natoli's house is a convenient location to place any strange or unusual object. In the real world, Carmine Natoli's house contained the following objects:

- Nine oscilloscopes in the garage pit
- Twelve lawnmowers in the garage pit
- "Linda," a store manniquin that would move from place to place in the house.
- A cataloged and reviewed collection of over 600 pornographic tapes
- Issue #1 of *Playboy* in mint condition
- A Ford Model A engine block
- A suitcase full of women's underwear
- Four dead possums
- A case for a Wurlitzer jukebox
- Ten containers of dried plasma
- A printing press
- Classified government documents, circa 1941

Depending on the world his house is found in, these objects will be tame by comparison.

Adventure Seeds

Here are some possible interpretations for how to use this abode and its contents.

The Brilliance!: The grandson was right: Carmine Natoli had The Brilliance. The Brilliance, in this case, is a

symbiotic or parasitic creature of either magical or technological origin that guides the host to create and craft. Carmine was already mentally unstable to begin with, so The Brilliance enhanced his mental infirmity and ended up battling between genius and trash-collecting. When Carmine was removed from the house, The Brilliance left him and waits for a new host or hosts.

The purpose of The Brilliance? Perhaps it is a space traveler seeking someone who can help it find a way home, or it is the vanguard of a destructive race seeking to make a doomsday weapon such as a planet-killer or a spider robot. It might even be an artist creating works too advanced for mortals to understand. It may have already spread to the house cleaners, or some of it might wait still.

Imprisoned in Wire and Glue: Carmine knew there was evil in the world and that evil would accumulate in objects that others would throw away. He swore that he would contain the evil, bringing it into his house and locking it away. The evil ate at his mind, forcing him to use his technical skill to craft objects of power to draw off the taint. Factory-sealed paint cans full of cut locks, "double cleavers," and X-rated films on 8mm all contained the wickedness to some degree, but were now free to torment the world.

Dreaming of Mad Machines: Carmine was a fey, a craftsman not meant for this world. In the hands of those who could use magic, his strange creations are powerful weapons against those would fight creativity and stifle imagination.

Who Let the Weird Out?: Seems Warehouse 23 has a new satellite location in Ridgefield, NJ, all without their intention or knowledge. More importantly, dangerous objects have been appearing in the house despite the best efforts of Warehouse 23 staff, and the grandson has been selling his finds online!

Legacy: Carmine was the mechanical mastermind behind a number of super villains, providing weapons and armors to thugs and dictators. The components for his massive spider-robot were thrown away, causing a mad dash between heroes and villains to gather the pieces before it becomes self-aware and lays waste to New Jersey.

Pyramid Review

Malleus Monstrorum: Creatures, Gods and Forbidden Knowledge (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Written by Scott David Aniolowski, with Sandy Petersen and Lynn Willis

Published by Chaosium Inc.

296-page b&w softcover; $34.95

One of the best purchases I ever made for my *Call of Cthulhu* game was *Ye Booke of Monstres.* It was a delightful two-volume set of "new nightmares" for the game: creatures and Gods culled from the festering mass of Mythos fiction and previous Chaosium works, complete with wonderful illustrations of the oogy-boogies. Since many of my players were veterans, and had at least leafed through the main book, mere sight of "Ye Booke" was fair warning they were about to get pasted by something they knew nothing about. So I could ensure fear just by having one or both volumes on the table, even if it they weren't going to be used that session.

A few years later, Chaosium printed *The Creature Companion,* which was a combining and expansion of the two volumes of *Ye Booke of Monstres* with additional creatures, full-color reproductions of four Nick Smith Mythos paintings, and journal entries from a fictional Mythos investigator thrown in for good measure. After a good read-through I groused that, having kept up with Chaosium's products over the years, there wasn't enough new and good material in it to truly justify my purchase. But there were a few new and worthy inspirations to be found, and it *was* handy having all the info in one book. So I started using the *Creature Companion* instead of the older volume, and put the latter upon the shelf of hallowed previous editions.

It's almost 10 years since the *Creature Companion* came out, and we have a new collection of Mythos nasties, appropriately entitled *Malleus Monstrorum.* It's the English "edition" (read "non-exact repackaging and expansion") of Pegasus Spiele's work by the same name. And I have to say that Chaosium has outdone itself, as this is the biggest, juiciest Mythos entity book ever made. I do have a couple of quibbles with it, but I think both new and long-term Keepers will want to get their hands on this one.

Malleus Monstrorum presents almost all of the entries from *The Creature Companion,* along with several new entries, plus the observations of Sir Hansen Poplar, Mythos Investigator. And if that wasn't enough, it also reproduces the "main" Mythos entities from the rulebook, too -- allowing a fairly rules-savvy Keeper to only have to flip through one book during play.

The entries are done in standard Chaosium format: a quote from a Mythos story and/or description of the entity, information about its practices and habits, details on attacks and/or special abilities, and then its stats. As always, some entries are much longer than others, depending on how fleshed out those entities are in Mythos fiction or Chaosium products. And there are *considerable* expansions on previous entities from both the Companion and the rule book, such as the Tcho-Tchos, the Mi-Go, Sand Dwellers, and Nyarlathotep's various Avatars.

As you might expect, some of the new entries are from recent Chaosium publications, such as *Secrets of Japan, Unseen Masters,* and *Beyond the Mountains of Madness.* Others have come from obscure corners of the Mythos, non-Mythos horror stories (such as the Triffids and The Thing) and world mythology (many new Avatars of Nyarlathotep). The obscurity of some entries might make a Keeper wonder if there's any real use for stats on a thing that no Investigator would ever see, much less Summon, but you have to give them high marks for all-inclusiveness. If you ever wanted to write a Scenario around Cthulhu's second wife and their kids, they're in there.

The package is rounded out with expanded sections on natural and supernatural creatures, and a few appendices which will be of varying worth to Keepers. Indispensable are the pronunciation key and tips on presenting Mythos entities to players. Not so key are tips on bringing non-Mythos entities into the Mythos (Cenobites, anyone?) and a rumination on the Dreamlands that winds up sounding more like an ad for the latest edition of that book than a useful tidbit. And there's an ever-handy "Monster Master" sheet in the back, too.

The biggest difference in the style of presentation is the artwork, itself. Rather than a frightful drawing of what the entries look like, they present examples of how the creatures were expressed in human art. Many of these works are so good that it's hard to tell if they were real, unchanged finds, or if the artists tweaked them a little, or a lot, to get the Mythos entities into them. Others are more obvious put-togethers or retouchings, but they still make handy props for Investigators to find while doing research.

So far so good, so what's the big problem? For me, it's mostly the art. I realize there's a sizable school of Keepers who think having actual drawings of Mythos entities is sacrilegious, and the players should only ever have the oogy-boogies lovingly described, so as to let their imaginations create the Worst Thing Possible within their own heads. This is a perfectly legitimate view, but I come from the school that believes every picture tells a story and says a thousand words, and I *like* having handy, gruesome illustrations to flash at folks when their Investigators see something vile.

Other grumbles? I really do not like how the authors have taken a number of ancient mythological Gods and said they were Avatars of Nyarlathotep all along. I prefer His avatars to be alien and horrific rather than mundane and mythological. I'm also a little unsure about making space to document entities that are so obscure that no Investigator would ever come across them.

Another quibble that isn't really a quibble for me: as I've intimated earlier, this is *not* an exact translation of the German version. The additional text that accompanied the entries -- descriptions of a victims' death, and subsequent corpse, at the hands of the entity in question -- have been excised, except for what I believe are a few examples in the back. Given that those examples seem to have lost something in translation, I don't think we're missing too much, but anyone expecting an exact replica of the German text may be disappointed.

What would have made this a better product for me? Well, I'd have had the drawings back with the entries, and put the found art in an appendix in the back. I'd have also excised all the Hansen Poplar journals because I find them useless wastes of space. (That and, quite frankly, anyone who knows even a third of what he does should be drooling in a rubber room, somewhere.) But I'm kind of 50/50 on trimming the more super-obscure entries, as I may find a use for some of them . . . someday.

That said, my quibbles are small and paltry things that are more than blown away by the monstrous hammer of the work, itself. The ***Malleus Monstrorum*** more than fulfills the purpose of any successive "monster book" by building upon what came before, and giving a heck of a lot more along with the bargain. New Keepers who may not have all the books will find this indispensable, and even old hands like myself will find new wonders scattered throughout.

So I'm happy to say that my ***Creature Companion*** is being retired to the hallowed shelf of previous editions in favor of this new work. I'd recommend you do the same.

--J. Edward Tremlett

Pyramid Review

Badaboom: an Explosive Card Game about Tinkering Goblins

Published by [Gigantoskop](#)

Designed by Gigantoskop

Illustrated by Peter Svärd & Jesper Moberg

64 Full Color Cards (5 Bomb Cards, 5 Mechanism Cards, 7 Gadget Cards, & 47 Trick Cards), 50 Gold Coin Markers, 2 Bomb Armed Markers, & 6-Page Rules Leaflet; $20

Life is hard for a goblin. I mean really hard. They hate each other. They hate everyone else. And they hate their boss, the High Necromancer . . . especially when he is mad, because then he punishes the goblins. Right now the High Necromancer is mad because the Human, Elf, Dwarf, Gnome, and Fairy alliance have begun bombarding his Army of Darkness with exploding contraptions, and he cannot reciprocate. The problem is that the High Necromancer lacks the technological know how. Fortunately he has a plan. Unfortunately this involves the goblins. More specifically, it involves goblin engineers in the Bomb Research Dungeon tinkering with unexploded contraptions until they explode. This is not a problem for the High Necromancer, because goblins are cheap to resurrect. In the meantime any goblin engineer is stuck trying to explode bombs and performing secret missions for the High Necromancer in the hopes that he can gain enough gold to bribe the troll guards to escape.

This is the set up for ***Badaboom: an Explosive Card Game about Tinkering Goblins*** for three to five players, the latest design from Swedish publisher Gigantoskop. Having asked us to [build junk piles and slap monkeys](#), then [shoot ourselves](#), now they want us to blow ourselves up. Play is simple: Bombs are passed from one engineer to the next, who take it in turns replacing the Mechanisms and Gadgets inside it. This tinkering eventually removes the Safety and the Bomb goes off. If a goblin survives the explosion, he gains gold; if he completes a Secret Mission for the High Necromancer, he gains gold; and 10 gold is enough for a bribe.

Being a Gigantoskop game, ***Badaboom*** looks good. The cards are full color, illustrated to amusing effect, and easy to understand. The rules are more of a problem in that they take time to digest and they are not easy to teach to others.

Besides the 50 plastic gold coin markers and 2 black "Bomb Armed" cards, ***Badaboom*** consists of 64 cards, divided into 5 Bomb cards, 5 Mechanisms, 7 Gadgets, and 47 Trick cards. Each Bomb card -- there being one for each race opposing the High Necromancer (Humans, Elves, Dwarves, Gnomes, and Fairies) -- describes the make up of the Bomb, how many Mechanisms it contains, and any special characteristics. For example, every Gnome design has two Mechanisms, while a Fairy bomb contains three Mechanisms and must be passed counter clockwise during play. Mechanism cards such as "Holy Spring" or "Relentless Cogwheel" represent Safety devices that keep a Bomb from exploding. Over the course of the game, goblins will remove these from a bomb to make it more dangerous, but can put them back in to make them safer.

The Gadget cards can be put into a Bomb to change its characteristics, redefining the basics of its eventual explosion. For example, once inserted, "Dead Rat" does not affect the Bomb holder but the goblin to his left, while "Marbles" affects everyone bar the Bomb holder.

Tricks are more complex in that they can be played into a bomb to take up space, or from a player's hand to affect the game in various underhand ways. Their effects can be permanent, temporary, or even interrupt another Trick card. Further some Trick cards have a Special Mission that, when fulfilled, will earn a goblin more gold. For example,

"Stinking Halfling Thieveses" forces every other player to discard a card from their hand and has a Secret Mission that earns more gold if the card holder survives the explosion.

Game set up is simple. The Bomb and Mechanism cards are placed in separate piles face down, and one Bomb is drawn and assembled from its instructions. The Gadget and Trick cards are shuffled, and placed face up. Each player receives four cards from this draw pile into his hand or "Bag of Tricks," and the most goblin-like player (cue an argument) starts the game with a newly assembled Bomb in hand.

Play consists of the Bomb being passed clockwise, each goblin tinkering on his turn. Play order can change or a Bomb can be stolen from or passed to another goblin, beginning a whole new turn. Each turn consists of six phases, during which the Bomb make up remains hidden except to the Bomb holder. A new card is drawn in the Draw Phase, while in the Pre-Tinkering Phase any player can play a Trick card, usually to force the Bomb holder to pass the Bomb on and end his turn.

In the Tinkering Phase, a goblin can remove a single card from the Bomb and replace it with a card from his Bag of Tricks. The removed card either goes into the player's Bag of Tricks or into the Mechanism pile, depending upon card type. Of course the Bomb card cannot be removed, but if the last Mechanism card has been removed, the Bomb is now armed. The arming Bomb holder receives one Bomb Armed marker to indicate that he did the job, while the other is put on top of the draw deck to prevent any cards being drawn in the Draw Phase. The Bomb armer announces that it is armed and what its effects are.

The other players again have the opportunity to fiddle with the Bomb during the Post Tinkering Phase, as in the Pre-Tinkering Phase. Finally the Bomb goes to the next player in the Pass Phase who then takes his turn.

Before the Pass Phase and after the Post Tinkering Phase there is the Explosion Phase. This is when the Bomb goes **boom!** . . . not in the same turn as when it was armed, but on the next goblin's turn. If that goblin has a Mechanism card in his Bag of Tricks, he can secure the Bomb, but he might not want to, either because he thinks he can survive the explosion or he can meet the conditions of a Secret Mission and thus earn himself gold. Gold is also rewarded for each Mechanism card held in hand when the Bomb explodes -- this is how the goblin researchers learn about bombs.

Then new cards are drawn, a new Bomb is created, and the Bomb passing begins anew. Play continues until a goblin has enough gold to bribe his way past the troll guard and thus win the game.

Definitely prettier than anything a goblin deserves to get his hands upon, **_Badaboom: an Explosive Card Game about Tinkering Goblins_** is a game that not only feels unnecessarily complex, but it is unnecessarily complex. Play does not match the simplicity of the game's concept, and it is not only difficult to learn, but it is also awkward to teach, and this is the major reason why some of my players refuse to play **_Badaboom._** All this is down to the rules, and this is a hurdle that anyone coming to the game must overcome. Yet overcome this problem, and **_Badaboom_** turns out to be a chaotic game of Bomb tinkering, Bomb passing fun that requires just a little memory to recall what you put into it earlier. It is also a game that is best played at a fairly brisk pace, not only to avoid the paralysis of over-analysis, but to simulate the short attention span of the average goblin. Played this way, **_Badaboom: an Explosive Card Game about Tinkering Goblins_** should be a chaotic game of exploding goblin nastiness.

--Matthew Pook

Avoid Breaking Realistic Promises By Only Making Unrealistic Ones

The movie *Heathers* had an interesting conundrum: How do you portray how teenagers speak? The obvious method is to poll or listen to actual teenagers, and record their slang and mannerisms. Unfortunately, the problem with this method becomes apparently obvious: The slang of those in high school changes seemingly week to week; if a movie used their actual lingo, then it would feel musty when it hit theaters and downright decrepit by the time it hit those new-fangled video cassettes. (*Heathers* is an old movie, remember.)

So they hit upon an ingenious solution that all but guaranteed their movie would not be instantly dated: They made up their own teen slang. Logically, something cannot go out of style if it was never in style to begin with, and the mucked-up world of the Heathersverse still feels pretty darn fresh.

(Acute-eyed readers may note that I used the phrase "all but" in the previous paragraph. That's because, when *Heathers* was released, some of the slang therein became part of teen culture for a while . . . until it stopped being used. At which point the slang in *Heathers* became outdated. Really, trying to understand teenagers is a lot like the Laws of Thermodynamics: You can't win, you can't break even, and you can't get out of the game.)

Anyway, this has a direct application to the world of gaming, which I'll illustrate now.

See, back when I was the Editor on *D6 Space,* I had a debate with the line developer about how sci-fi devices should be defined. My primary point was that any hard-and-fast definitions for technology were likely to be laughably out of date almost immediately; technology tends to advance at a rate that we can barely fathom. (I'm holding a copy of the 1990 edition of *GURPS Space* in my hands right now; did you know that a database costs $1,000 per gigabyte? In other words, your standard DVD can contain about $4-8,000 in info.

This debate spilled into other areas; how could we define, say, something as basic as a "cart" in a generic sci-fi (space opera) game? Too much detail means the game closes off some types of games, while too little detail doesn't give the GM enough to go on.

So I went ahead and took a crack at two thorny ones: the data-storing "palmdisc" and the generic haul-stuff-around cart.

Anyway, to make a long story short, the line developer didn't disagree with my assessments, but noted that 1) she wanted to remain at least somewhat consistent with previous games from the company (most notably *Shatterzone*) and 2) my descriptions were too darn long, regardless. Anyway, neither one of us was paying attention and we both ended up getting married to each other, so I guess that'll learn us.

For those who are curious, I present my own attempts at defining these two things.

"**Palmdisc:** The palmdisc is a portable means of storing or moving data. For many types of data, the size and shape of the palmdisc is largely a matter of personal convenience; smaller discs are lighter and more easily concealed, but much easier to lose. Larger discs are more easily found and sorted, and can be turned into pleasing objects themselves. The two most common palmdisc types are a small pen-sized canister and a palm-sized flat disc. However, palmdiscs can assume just about any useful shape: a swallowable capsule-drive for spies, a mirror-finished rectangle for putting on make-up or sending signals, a fold-in-half disc with advertising slogans, and so on. In general, any non-standard palmdisc will only be immediately useful for the system (or systems) designed for it, although accessing it from other systems is a

Moderate Computer Hardware job. Because of advanced compression technology, palmdiscs can store massive amounts of information; it's possible to save virtually unlimited amounts of 'primitive' data (such as text files, graphics, sound and music files, 2-D movies). Size and storage capacity usually only become an issue with more advanced types of data; a capsule palmdisc might only store 50 pages of crypdocs (an unbreakable encryption scheme utilizing a password and DNA scan) or 30 minutes of sense-vid (fully emersive virtual reality recreations), while a palm-sized disc can store 500 pages of crypdocs or five hours of sense-vid. Of course, the challenge is often not storing information, but acquiring and accessing it; someone looking for vague random information in a sea of unfamiliar documents will require a Computer Programming check ranging from Easy (for a few dozen unencrypted documents or images) to Very Difficult (for a disc containing a copy of every bit of information the owner has ever had access to)."

"**Carts:** Since the wheel, mankind has used whatever means were available to transport goods easily. In **D6 Space,** the modern cart is custom-tailored, based on its duties, responsibilities, and the realities of economics. Thus a cart transporting core-diamonds across a continent might be an armored, covered anti-grav hovercraft, while one bringing megawheat from the field into a poor colony outpost town would be a simple open-topped vehicle with wheels and a loading platform; it may or may not be powered. Carts are one of the most basic and slow but reliable forms of transport in the galaxy; they will not fail except in the most extreme environmental situations or because of deliberate acts of sabotage. In general, a cart contains as much of a good (or goods) as can be comfortably handled by one man; beyond that, the vehicle becomes a car or truck."

Now, I look back at my palmdisc one, and even now I cringe at how quickly some of the bits became out of date. (Sure I left some wiggle room -- "might only store 50 pages" -- but c'mon . . . your standard PGP encryption on a one-gig USB chip can probably store every text document you'd ever be able to read in your lifetime. And PGP is unbreakable enough; we're not talking *Digital Fortress* here.)

However, I'm still happy with the cart one; while generic, I think it encompasses just about everything the players can envision, from *Star Trek* hover-sleds to lumbering Tattooine-type wagons. And, despite my cringing, I'm happy with some of the palmdisc info; the concentration on *acquiring* and *accessing* the information is, in a lot of ways, more important than how much the discs can hold.

Anyway, returning to our *Heathers* example, I note that -- when it comes to thinking futuristic or alternatively -- letting your mind roam is quite possibly the best way to create something memorable and less prone to becoming outdated. *Star Trek's* communicators seem quaint now, since they're larger than most cell phones; however, its transporter technology remains an idea of awe, and is one of the things that helps define that universe. (And, yes, I know they've done some stuff with making photons or singular atoms hop about. Not the same thing.) Likewise **Fading Sun's** jumpgates or **Eberron's** elemental-powered engines aren't likely to be "proven" wrong, outdated, or cliched anytime soon, since they're so off the beaten path. Let your mind wander. "Armor" in the form of a daily-taken pill? Mind-hopping cloning in lieu of instantaneous transportation? AIs that exist solely for the ability to create new entertainment in the forms, styles, and mannerisms of previous works? Sure; why not?

Or, to put it another way: It's a lot harder to be proven wrong when you make no attempts at being "right" in the first place.

--Steven Marsh

Cities in Rust: Alternative Ultra-Tech

"Retarded progression usually stems from technological stagnation, often in conjunction with a Dark Age that causes a major decline or fall of civilization. This gives plenty of time for interstellar empires to be established without technology changing humanity beyond recognition, and pushes the development of TL12 civilization into the very far future."
-- David L. Pulver and Kenneth Peters, **GURPS Ultra-Tech**

Ahh, the satisfying "thunk" on the coffee table means that there's a new **GURPS** hardback out, and this time it's Pulver and Peters' latest iteration of **GURPS Ultra-Tech.** Loads of joy for all campaigns -- as long as they're set in the future, it seems. Well, that seems unfair to those of us who spend more time puttering around in the pretended past and dubious present, doesn't it? If you'll forgive the Stiff Little Fingers allusion, then, what we need is an alternative ultra-tech. And we find it, if we look carefully. (Not carefully enough to note that the so-called "evidence" is all rubbish, often literally, but carefully nonetheless.) We find machines Way Back When, and contra our introductory quote, it's possible to use "retarded progression" to push "the development of TL12 civilization" into the very far past.

"The only conclusion left open to us is that whatever traces were left have been erased by the natural processes of weathering and erosion . . . There are several possibilities: A catastrophe of some sort could have wiped them out to the extent that there were no traces; or possibly their civilization existed in regions that today are submerged beneath the oceans. Further searching will no doubt produce solutions to this question."
-- Professor Danchekker, in *Inherit the Stars,* by James P. Hogan

According to Pulver and Peters, it takes a minimum of 200 years, give or take, to go from our happy TL8 selves all the way to TL12 and the end of the book. Add that on to the 11,000 or so years since the Neolithic Revolution and we get a technical lifespan from stone knives to Singularity of about 11,200 years. Posit a "Bright Ages" tech track that moves from Hellenistic heights to the High Medieval Scholasticism without that annoying Fall in the way, and you can shave another 800 years off that time; you can probably skip the Bronze Age Dark Ages as well for another 600 years. We get, thus, a bare minimum of 9,800 years for the tech tree to grow. More likely, Pulver and Peters' "medium" estimate puts the climb up from TL8 to *Star Trek* closer to 2,000 years --13,000 years all told. The "slow" estimate (assuming many small dark ages, rabid safe-tech or Luddite tendencies, and so forth) extends the entire techspan of humanity to 17,000 years at the most. Which means that the conventional lifespan of the human species so far could contain between ten and twenty full-blown technical civilizations, each rising from the ruins of the previous one, assuming that *H. sapiens* had started growing its own food right out of the gate.

Let's be generous -- give Adam and Eve a thousand centuries to get settled there on the African plains -- and allow a good long Post-Technical Age (the "Re-olithic"?) in between each Fall and the climb back up. There's still plenty of room, chronologically speaking, for four or even five serial civilizations to travel from flint to antimatter just in human existence as we understand it. And that's just as we understand it. As late as 1879, Othniel C. Marsh, the dean of American paleontology, believed -- based on findings of modern human skeletons in Sierra Nevada auriferous gravels -- that the human species went back to the Pliocene or even the late Miocene, some nine million years. That's enough room for 180 of our "full tech and a rest" periods! A **Steampunk-Time Travel** game could play out a lot closer to *Star Trek* than *Time Tunnel,* with hundreds of alien civilizations at every tech level stretched out into the past -- and all of them human.

"Strange logic! Does the finding of the remains in the cave of Devon prove that there were no contemporary races then who were highly civilized? When the present population of the earth has disappeared, and some archaeologist belonging to the 'coming race' of the distant future shall excavate the domestic implements of one of our Indian or Andaman Island tribes, will he be justified in concluding that mankind in the nineteenth century was 'just emerging from the Stone Age'?"
-- H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*

And they don't all have to be human -- at least not as we understand it. When you start messing around with vanished prehistoric civilizations, you're on Theosophist turf, and it behooves us to take a squint at the possibilities here for

"deep time *Ultra-Tech*" gaming. In a nutshell (heh), H.P. Blavatsky posited a cycle of cycles, of "root races" that spawned ever more sophisticated "sub-races" until they were replaced by the next root race, usually after some magnificent cataclysm, for a total of 33 civilizations so far. The First Root Race, the Polarians, was a formless race of astral beings living in the "Imperishable Sacred Land" at the mystic north pole during the Carboniferous Period (330 million years ago to us; about 80 million years ago according to the geologists of Blavatsky's era). They gave way to the Second Root Race, the "sweat-born" ectoplasmic (even shoggoth-like) Hyperboreans, during the Permian Period (call it 280 million years ago to us, and 50 million years ago to Blavatsky). The Hyperboreans were occasionally identified (by later Theosophists) with dragons -- interestingly, the mid-Permian is about when proto-dinosaurs begin evolving.

For Theosophy and modern geology alike, the break between the Permian and the Triassic (251 million years ago for us, 46 million years ago in the 19th century) is a cataclysmic extinction event. When the smoke clears, the dinosaurs -- and the Lemurians, the "egg-born" third root race of apelike giants -- rule the earth. Both are destroyed in the K-T extinction event at the end of the Cretaceous ("fearful geological cataclysms" 9 million years in Blavatsky's past) leaving the Fourth Root-Race, the twelve-foot tall, arrogant Atlanteans. Each Root-Race spawns seven sub-races, with its own cycle of progress, technical (and spiritual) mastery, and disaster-laden death. The Atlanteans reach their peak under the fifth, or "Semitic," sub-race, which is when they spawn the Fifth Root-Race, namely the proud Cro-Magnon "Aryans." Blavatsky, as it happens, contradicts her geological experts on this date, placing it approximately 18 million years ago, safely within the modern Miocene. The Atlanteans mostly disappear around 850,000 B.C., with a tiny remnant surviving until 12,000 B.C. as [Plato's Atlantis](#).

"The events of an interplanetary story -- aside from such tales as involve sheer poetic fantasy -- are best laid in the present, or represented as having occurred [secretly](#) or prehistorically in the past."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "Some Notes on Interplanetary Fiction"

But not all the aliens come from Earth. The other most important H.P. in the deep time business, H.P. Lovecraft, has his primordial civilizations "seep down from the stars" in various iterations of what a later culture would call "[ancient astronauts](#)." Lovecraft's Elder Things create humanity (among other species) in their bio-tech labs, as it happens. Later writers, among them James P. Hogan and Larry Niven, posit humanity's descent from alien visitors in more conventional style. Either way you slice it -- aliens from Earth or humans from the stars -- you get the potential for human civilizations spread throughout the galaxy by various space-going human empires, perhaps based in the now-sunken land around Indonesia, or on a warmer, wetter primordial Mars, or on the now sadly exploded [Fifth Planet](#). Ancient astronaut OCD sufferer Zecharia Sitchin stretches his "Nibiru" encounters, and the concomitant creation of technical human civilization (beginning as alien slaves, admittedly) back to 450,000 B.C. Sitchin only puts one civilization in that whole stretch, which seems wasteful -- we could easily fit ten full-blown star empires in that space alone, or as many as 25 if we pushed a bit. Each empire could be different: Nibiru conquest, human Mameluke interstellar state, Martian Renaissance, alien invaders who consider humans useful food animals, Empire of Human Fear, Fifth Planet Empire, multi-species commonwealth, Atlantean Star Empire, genegineered Sirian theocracy, transhuman consciousness fog. And we haven't even gotten up to the Neolithic yet.

"I cannot be sure of that because I have seen that the twenty or thirty thousand years that elapse between the fall of one civilization and the rise of the next destroy all traces. In twenty to thirty thousand years memories become legends and legends become superstitions and even the superstitions become lost. Metals rust and corrode back into earth while the wind the rain and the jungle erode and cover stone. The contours of the very continents change -- and glaciers come and go, and a city of twenty thousand years before is under miles of earth or miles of ice."
-- Fredric Brown, "Letter to a Phoenix"

The other great thing about ancient astronauts is they give you a fine way to explain why we don't have more traces left of the primordial ultra-tech civilizations on Earth. After all, we have plenty of stone ruins that have survived for seven or eight thousand years. Stainless steel and plastic should last even longer, and complex industrial chemicals can maintain integrity for up to 200,000 years. Radioactive remains, of course, get up into the millions. But if the aliens (or our fellow humans from space) bombard the Earth with comets and meteors, aiming for all those high-tech spots with their disintegrator beams and strong-nuclear-force suppressor cannon, or pour their hunter-killer tech-eating nanoswarms onto their Earthly targets, well . . . maybe all that's left of each civilization is its flint knives. We can also

posit anything from a "gray goo" accident to extremely conscientious recycling of previous civilizations' ruins to mass exodus (technology and all) to another star (or dimension) as part of a religious or environmental rite. And we might not recognize a high-tech civilization, even if we see the ruins in front of us. The "natural" nuclear reactors at Oklo in Gabon went critical 1.8 billion years ago -- or are they all that's left of the Elder Thing power complex? Geologists have found numerous formations in Jurassic sandstones from Utah to China that resemble nothing so much as rusting pipes. The famous 65 million-year-old layer of iridium all over the Earth might not be a vaporized meteor after all, but the thin stratum marking the ruins of the Reptoids' cities, ground flat by glaciers and continental upthrust. Perhaps the traces aren't physical: if Al Gore is to be believed about the current rate of species loss, the Reptoids' rapid urbanization might also have triggered the K-T mass extinction, and then their own in massive climate change.

"Our own acceptance is upon a carved, geometric thing that, if found in a very old deposit, antedates human life, except, perhaps, very primitive human life, as an indigenous product of this earth. . . . As to the deposit -- Tertiary coal. Composition -- iron, carbon, and a small quantity of nickel. . . . [G]eometric form; presence in an ancient deposit; material as hard as steel; absence upon this earth, in Tertiary times, of men who could work in material as hard as steel."
-- Charles Fort, *The Book of the Damned*

And every so often, of course, we do find pieces of the older civilizations. My favorite of the OOPArts (Out-Of-Place Artifacts) is probably the Klerksdorp Spheres, grooved metallic balls discovered in 2.8 billion-year-old pre-Cambrian strata in South Africa. (That would give us space, at one fully technical civilization flourishing for two percent of every million years, for 2,800 such civilizations. 2,801 counting ours.) But there's a chased metal vase dug out of 600 million-year-old solid sedimentary rock in Dorchester, Massachusetts in 1852. And a wonderful iron nail found in a Devonian-period sandstone (360+ million years old) in Kingoodie Quarry, Scotland. Better still, in 1928 miners in Heavener, Oklahoma found a polished wall of concrete blocks embedded deep in a Carboniferous coal seam. (A similar wall turned up in 1868 in a coal mine in Hammondville, Ohio -- this one decorated with hieroglyphics.) Metallic tubes appeared in a Cretaceous chalk bed in France; a little later, a curiously geometric, grooved cube of nickel-iron was embedded in a Paleocene coal seam in Wolfsegg, Austria. Towards the beginning of the Oligocene, about 50 million years ago, neoliths, incised bones, and other human-produced tools begin to dot the geological record, as documented at tiresome length in Michael Cremo and Richard Thompson's *Forbidden Archaeology*. And to cap things off in the Pleistocene, we have: a clay idol found in 2 million-year-old strata in a well in Nampa, Idaho; a copper coin of no known type turned up by a well borer in Lawn Ridge, Illinois from interglacial soils around 200,000 years old; and best of all, what may or may not be a spark plug discovered in what may or may not have been a half-million-year-old solid geode in Olancha, California in 1968.

"We cannot ascertain at present the limits, whether of the beginning or the end, of the first . . . period when Man co-existed with the extinct mammalia, but that it was of great duration we cannot doubt. During those ages there would have been time for progress of which we can scarcely form a conception . . . we should now be finding . . . lines of buried railways or electric telegraphs from which the best engineers of our day might gain invaluable hints; astronomical instruments and microscopes of more advanced construction than any known in Europe, and other indications of perfection in the arts and sciences such as the nineteenth century has not yet witnessed. . . . Vainly should we be straining our imaginations to guess the possible uses and meaning of such relics -- machines, perhaps, for navigating the air or exploring the depths of the ocean, or for calculating arithmetical problems beyond the wants or even the conception of living mathematicians."
-- Charles Lyell, *The Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man* (1836)

And that, of course, gives suitable license for any sort of primordial ultra-tech to turn up in a historical game, from the beginnings of archaeology in ancient Babylon to the modern day of satellite ground scans and deep-penetrating radar. But in the spirit of the Charles Lyell quote above, I think it's best to end with the ***Steampunk-Ultra-Tech*** vision of Marsh and Cope dueling for dinosaur bones and Reptoid saucer parts in the American West, or Belzoni blasting ancient broadcast power transformers out of an Egyptian pyramid. Access to the ruins of Egypt, the Holy Land, and Mesopotamia was already a matter of imperial prestige in the 19th century. If the archaeologists or the geologists are uncovering "lines of buried railways" in the Persian highlands, or "microscopes of . . . advanced construction" in the Patagonian taiga, or "machines . . . for calculating arithmetical problems . . . beyond the conception of living mathematicians" beneath the Congolese jungle, well, things could get awfully adventurous, awfully quick. And that's

before the ancient drone-craft, and nanobots, and AIs begin to awaken into the 181st civilization on Earth . . . so far.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

Psychedelica

Black Magic Mushrooms On The Black Market

by August Rider

Here are some new, weird, wondrous, and psychedelic drugs from a time-travel pill to a drug that allows one to encounter both their greatest fantasy and worst fear.

These concepts were originally created with the setting of Al Amarja in mind from the *Over the Edge RPG.* These are also quite suitable for High Weirdness, *GURPS Cabal, Horror,* and *Warehouse 23* (adventures might involve the discovery or retrieval of the drugs), *Black Ops, Illuminati,* or anything with a surreal edge and otherworldly flair.

But First, Who's Responsible For This Madness?

Why, the Man in the Purple Hat, of course. Since these items don't come out of a vacuum (though they may cause one) lets see who's pushing. Most of these drugs were designed with a person or market in mind; some of them most devious. Others were designed for the sheer purpose of putting money in the dealer's pocket (or pocket universe). And yet others are cryptic, delightful, experimental or part of some larger conspiracy.

The drug king, the czar, the rock-n-roll star, the man who all the heavies deal with is the one and only Spider Prince, so called because his web extends everywhere across the globe. He is the go-to man for celebrities and movers and shakers. The prince is the Willy Wonka of the drug trade (one part Willy, one part Rob Zombie, and one part Dracula Gary-Oldman style). As an offshoot to his booming drug business he operates an inter-dimensional slave trade. He specializes in offering those skilled and talented in the erotic arts. He is one of the most famous and infamous people on the island. He has connections across the world from mystics and musicians to occult figures and drug lords and everything in between. The prince has cornered the market on both mundane and magical drugs; a true monopoly.

The Psychotropics

Here's the dope on the goods. Aside from the more mundane merchandise and well known conventional drugs the Spider Prince also offers these paradoxical, dangerous, twisted, magical and mystical goodies.

(As a warning, these are powerful drugs and could alter your campaign, characters and setting and cause untold hours of fun and chaos. Use with care.)

Two Tone

This is a large red and blue capsule with "TT" inscribed on it. It is said that few men will realize their greatest fears or their greatest fantasies. Two Tone will see to it that this is not so for the one who gulps down this horsepill. The effects of Two Tone are not immediately notable but they creep up on the one who ingests this strange drug. The user will be filled with a sense of place in the universe and feel he is inevitably being pulled towards the omega point of his destiny. All paths converge to this point.

By way of synchronicities both the greatest fear and ultimate fantasy of the character will be realized on this fateful night. The red represents one aspect; the blue the other. It is never known which will happen first nor can one just take half the pill and hope to experience only the fantasy. Like all capsules its filled with uniform small beads so there is no way of separating them or taking one half (not to say it hasn't been tried). The fantasy and fear come together; that's the reality, and that's the price. Which one happens first is up to the GM. There is a chance that the character may not

survive his worst fear, or for that matter his ultimate fantasy. See the black magic mushrooms below for a way to contact those recently departed souls. As an example, a character may meet the woman of his dreams only to find later in the evening that she is in the arms of another; another character may find himself blasting down the highway on an ultra-tech sport bike at nearly 200 miles an hour and later end up in a confined space (claustrophobia) crawling with hairy spiders (arachnophobia). Note: although the characters may have phobias these may not be their greatest fears.

Duration: Lasts until both fear and fantasy has been realized.
Notable Characteristics: Tastes bittersweet, mixed with mild hallucinogenic.
Side Effects: Motivates the character to live life. After about three uses the drug is ineffective.

White Maiden (Moon Lady)

This comes in white capsule form. A blue rectangle is visible on the capsules. Under magnification this rectangle shows itself to be an image of the High Priestess (Rider-Waite) tarot card. This gives one a psychedelic trip akin to LSD or mushrooms. Here's the kicker: Everyone who ingests white maiden sees the white maiden at some point during their trip. She may impart a secret or answer a conundrum that has troubled the seeker for some time. Others report erotic encounters and yet others have stated that the maiden led them to a place or a source of information. Sometimes she leaves the tripper with cryptic information. She is always seen as a pale young beautiful lady in sheer white flowing robes that shimmer in the moonlight and ruffle in a gentle breeze. This drug has no effect if taken in the day. It is most efficacious at the waxing full moon. Plot hooks, cryptic messages, red herrings, and McGuffins abound.

Duration: Lasts from dusk till dawn.
Notable Characteristics: Has the scent of lavender and tastes like flowers, mixed with LSD.
Side Effects: Character is in a dreamy state after meeting the White Maiden. This is highly addictive and the character will want to finish the quest above all else.

Fortune Cookie

These are actual fortune cookies with the fortune inside. Cracking open the cookie or seeing the fortune nulls the magic effect of the cookie. These are customarily taken with green tea. One simply eats the cookie with paper fortune and all . . . down the hatch. The fortune inside then manifests for the character. For gaming purposes simply have a bowl of fortune cookies. The GM breaks it open and works the fortune into the evening's adventure.

Duration: Lasts until fortune is fulfilled.
Notable Characteristics: It's just like a regular fortune but glows with a magical aura for those who can detect such things.
Side Effects: Characters become hungry shortly after eating it.

Phantom Loop

Also known as Digital Bath, this pill is a minute version (somewhat smaller than a marble) of the plasma balls one finds in the gift shops of malls across America. It reacts to the touch just like a regular sized plasma ball does. The first stage of this drug causes the consumer to become surrounded by a field of static electricity. In the second stage Phantom Loop causes any electrical equipment nearby the character to spike, glitch, or blackout. In the third and final stage one becomes a conductor or random capacitor in a circuit of unknown origin. The circuit is arbitrary and will form on a whim; it could be between two buildings, power generators or just link into the electrical energy in the Earth's atmosphere. This causes the character to store and discharge electricity with rather dangerous and deadly consequences. The dispersion is random and the character has no control over the discharge. The discharge itself is equivalent to a high-level lightning strike or chain lightning. Before a discharge the environment takes on a strange calm and more observant characters will notice the impending smell of ozone. The character taking Phantom Loop suffers no ill effects at all from the electrical antics that ensue but may become downright deadly to those nearby; appropriate damage rolls apply.

Duration: Lasts seven hours.
Notable Characteristics: Makes character's hair stand on end.
Side Effects: Repeated uses have shown that people taking Phantom Loop become poor conductors of electricity when not on the drug. Batteries on mobile phones and other devices drain in seconds and defibrillators have shown not to work on recurring users. Long after the duration of the pill has passed the character may find random and spontaneous jumps, spikes and blackouts occurring around him.

Karma' Suit Ya

Also known as just Karma, Moksha, or Kali's Embrace, this comes in two types: Instant Karma and Past Life Karma. Both come in the shape of voluptuous idols like those seen in Hindu and Tantric temples. They have the size and definition of a children's vitamin. The Instant Karma is pink and the Past Life Karma is green. They are chewable and bittersweet. Both are mixed with LSD.

Instant Karma: This is exactly what is seems. Any behavior is mimicked almost immediately. Cut someone off in traffic and you are cut off. Give a compliment and one is returned. Attitudes will also be mirrored. Come to the table with a bad attitude and the character will soon see another mirroring that attitude. This is often crumbled and slipped into coffee of unlikable bosses and supervisors.

Past Life Karma: This version allows you to see what you were in past lives. It also puts one in touch with one's past life incarnations and allows one to communicate with one the former selves. Peak experiences sometimes allow one to know what must be done to break the cycle of reincarnation and be free from the cycle of death and rebirth. It also points the way to Agartha for nephilim characters. Though the path may be revealed this by no means makes it any easier to reach the lofty goals of transcendence.

After a trip on Karma the characters may come to know what rewards they are reaping from past actions and what sentences they are suffering from past infractions. Ingesters of this mysterious drug may also see prevalent patterns repeated during past lives, such as realizing that one has always been a warrior. For growth the character/soul must move on to other archetypes such as a healer, magician or sage. They may see places of power for them or persons, places, or items that are harmful to them and that should be avoided. For example: Ireland is a place of power for you, wearing the color blue enhances your charisma (+1), and stay away from sharp objects on Saturday. Ideal for Nephilim character crossovers.

Duration: About six hours.
Notable Qualities: Mixed with LSD.
Side Effects: Karma is conducive to mysticism. NPCs may join a cult (one in 10 chance).

Timekiller

This is a white capsule with a gold band around the middle. Upon closer inspection the band reveals hieroglyphics. Upon ingestion this capsule will send one back in time. If users hold hands and ingest the capsules at the same time they will go back to the same time and place. Timekiller has a way of sending one back to a time and place that is pertinent to the character. One may be transported back to their childhood, a favorite event in history or witness one of their ancestors or heroes in action. People have reported being dropped right in the middle of a war.

Oh, and some people taking Timekiller have never been seen again. Can characters interact with the people from the past? Yes. Does this effect now? That is up to the GM. Thoughts of Homer Simpson squashing a bug come to mind. See *GURPS Infinite Worlds* and *Time Travel* for more.

Duration: Lasts for a 24 hour cycle from the time of blipping back to the time of returning.
Notable Characteristics: Tastes like bananas.
Side Effects: Aging or regressing several years or decades in an instant, causing clocks to jump ahead, stop, or roll

back hours in an instant, plants may grow more rapidly than usual. Time warps causing everything to move around as if time were in fast motion. Time warps causing everything to move around you as if time were in slow motion. Oh, there is one other drawback to Timekiller; it always sends you back in time stark naked . . .

Tongue-N-Cheek

Drank as a fizzy cobalt blue seltzer Tongue-N-Cheek causes the imbiber to have their own background music. The music emanates from the character and ranges from cool to comedic (GM's prerogative). Entrances and exits are especially grand and mirror the actions of the character. Tunes range from television theme songs to operatic arias. Many report Carl Orf's Carmina Bruana cuing in to accentuate the emotional charge of the situation.

Duration: Eight hours.
Notable Characteristics: Comes only in blueberry flavor at this time.
Side Effects: Often causes one to hear colors and see the colors of sounds, music often interferes with normal conversation, cymbals, and symphonies wake one in the middle of sound sleep or interrupt normal conversation, inability to change the tone or modulation of voice (Will Ferrel's Jacob Silge has this disease.)
Side Note: Not prescribed for agents, rogues or thieves or anyone doing any sneaking around.

Jupiter's Gift (Drops of Jupiter)

This expensive purple liquid can be dropped into the eyes or under the tongue. It gives one luck for a short term. Luck ranges from just-lucky to amazing and worthy-of-a-story. Longtime use is detrimental and can actually cause the reverse, not to mention a range of side effects. Repeat users often place bets after ingesting or head to the local casinos. One drawback is that Jupiter's Gift is this it is incredibly expensive and one may need a gracious amount of luck just to procure it. One drop can range from several thousand dollars and on up, and that's the lowest seekers will find it. Prices on Al Amarja are high and only the jet-setters are the only ones who can usually afford it.

Duration: Lasts about eight hours.
Notable Characteristics: Grape flavored.
Side Effects: A Pollyanna approach to life with people often giving valuables away claiming that more will come. Repeat users also often overestimate the amount of luck they may have on a given evening making insane bets and taking risks with their life savings, or even worse, the savings of their friends or family or both. Jupiter's Gift is highly addictive. Spontaneous combustion, makes one prone to lightning strikes, random morphing into a duck, poor concentration. More than three uses has proven to cause a permanent phobia. After losing his fortune on baccarat, Herbet Milquetoast developed Bacillophobia (fear of microbes and bacteria) and died of a heart attack on the spot when his friend, who was trying to console him, sneezed. One of these side effects has a one in six chance of happening per dosage.

Daredevil's Delight

This is a derivative of Jupiter's Gift. It comes in a chewable tablet in the form of a bullet. On Al Amarja it is usually taken in "moloko" form -- that is, dropped in a glass of milk. Delight gives the imbiber luck only when performing physical stunts such as jumping motorcycles over cars or jumping from the rooftops of tall buildings. This is good for heroics in the Hardboiled vein. Take a hit and burst through the front door with both guns blazing Chow Yun Fat style and survive.

Duration: Four hours.
Notable Characteristics: Tastes of peppermint and chocolate, contains cocaine.
Side Effects: Cockiness, overconfidence, irritability, impatience and over-reliance on one's physicality. ("We don't need any stinking key. Just kick it down.") For some reason this makes one into a cop magnet. There will always be law enforcement nearby in public and even the most minor infraction will draw their attention such as going a few miles over the posted speed limit.

Side Note: This does not make one invulnerable to injuries should they happen.

Witch's Brew

This is drunk in the form of a flaming cocktail. For those not already magically inclined it allows the imbiber to see into the magic goings-on and the spirit world that overlays the mundane world with the added kick of LSD. Fright and horror checks are applicable. This is particularly popular during Beltane, Walpurgsnacht, and Halloween. This is often used on potential cult members and acolytes.

Duration: Lasts from dusk till dawn.
Notable Characteristics: Cinnamon aftertaste, mixed with LSD.
Side Effects: No known side effects are noted other than a mild hangover.

Garden of Eden (Serpent's Kiss, Starbright)

This purple tablet comes in the shape of an hourglass so it is easily snapped in half. A provocative choice among adventurous lovers, Eden allows lover's to inhabit each other's bodies for a time so they may explore and get to know each other through the other so to speak. If a daring, bold or stupid character can trick an unwilling suspect into taking the other half they will inhabit the chosen target's body.

Plot Hooks: A dying character makes a last ditch effort to live by switching bodies. Help, a suicidal man is in my body. Hey . . . where'd my body go? Can I use your body for a little while? Switching bodies to avoid assassination.

Duration: Six to eight hours.
Notable Characteristics: Forbidden fruit flavored (apple), mixed with ecstasy (MDMA).
Side Effects: Sometimes "sticks" meaning a couple may not be able to switch back for days. There was a bad batch going around that would not allow the users to return to their rightful mortal coils. That's been rectified or so it's said.

Chaos

This comes in a charcoal gray or black tablet in the shape of the chaos symbol. Ingestion is forbidden at the mansion and buyers are escorted off the property before the merchandise is handed over. Chaos creates a sphere of . . . well, *chaos* around the swallower of this strange drug. Walk across the street and a collision ensues. Happen into a restaurant and waiters collide amidst the sound of breaking glass. Yes, folks, it literally creates chaos.

A little known and highly coveted secret is that those who ingest Chaos suffer no ill effects from the environment and could walk unscathed through a war-zone. If you are heading into the villain's secret underground layer this may be the drug of choice along with Daredevil's Delight; as for the side effects that's a different story.

Duration: Lasts exactly 66 minutes and six seconds, every time.
Notable Characteristics: Licorice flavored, mixed with downers.
Side Effects: Spontaneous combustion, random "blipping" (teleporting both short and long distances), bisociation, multiple personalities, becoming ectoplasmic (also ethereal or insubstantial), sexual maladies, phobias (for some reason high rates of coulrophobia (fear of clowns) have been reported). Other less frequent side effects include personality inversion (becoming an introvert if one is an extrovert), being the catalyst for bizarre storms that rain not water but frogs, ducks, snakes or children's toys. Turning into a frog is not uncommon with extended use (one in six chance for three uses, each time after that the chance goes up one) of Chaos. The only known cure for polymorphing into a frog is a kiss from a fair maiden (residents of Al Amarja have noted that blonde haired exotic entertainers will do the trick in a pinch). Some Hoodoo, Voodoo, Lukimi (Santeria) practitioners, and Bruja on the island are known to sell an antidote that will counter some of these side effects.

Fuzzy White Spider

Yes, this is actually a fuzzy crawling white spider. One simply has to eat it live. A roll against one's willpower (or similar ability) is necessary for those of a queasy constitution. Ingesting the spider allows one "to see by the light of the moon." This allows one to see the fae folk and any otherworldy entities, structures, gates or hidden things such as hidden passages, werewolf tracks and haunting sights by the light of the moon. It also gives one the ability to see any magical writings, runes, glyphs, wards or wizardmarks not seen by the unmagical eye. The drug has no effect in broad daylight. The spider is, of course, soaked in a special type of LSD that allows the creature to stay alive.

Duration: From dusk till dawn.
Notable Characteristics: Some claim they taste like white chocolate.
Side Effects: Ingesting the spider caused one to become a weirdness magnet. The ingester will be harassed by Unseelie or have an encounter with a werewolf at the very least.

Anodyne

Anodyne comes in unique and antique bottles of all different shapes and sizes. These bottled spirits are bottled spirits mixed with . . . spirits. Upon drinking Anodyne one will be possessed by an -- hopefully -- uplifting spirit.

However, this is not always the case, and entities more demonic have been known to inhabit the Anodyne bottles seeking to escape. These are entities imprisoned who seek a way into our world such as Djinn or the classic genic in a bottle. Sometimes the spirit of a person from the past is contained.

Duration: Depends on how much one drinks but usually an evening.
Notable Characteristics: Tastes like whatever liquor, whiskey or cordial it is mixed with.
Side Effects: Hangover, demonic possession or both.

Witch's Milk

A glass of milk supposedly weaned from the teat of a witch. Drinking this makes one impervious to any motifs of harmful sensation for nine days. That is, it will protect one from all forms of the Evil Eye.

Duration: Nine days.
Notable Characteristics: Tastes like milk.
Side Effects: Upon drinking Witch's Milk one will develop an unhealthy obsession for witches (major disadvantage) and seek them out wherever and whenever they can be found. As the effect manifests characters find themselves sitting through hours of *Bewitched* or *Charmed* episodes and not knowing why. This ends a tireless quest to find a real life witch. If the obsessed character meets an NPC witch who is an unwilling partner nasty spells or law enforcement could become involved.

There is also a 75% chance per glass of becoming a white werewolf. With the second glass its a lead-pipe cinch the character will become a werewolf. The werewolf suffers from the same obsession and will sniff out witches in the area. The ability to detect witches in a twenty mile radius is an advantage gained upon becoming a werewolf.

This form of lycanthropy is considered a curse that can be dispelled by a high level witch or magic user, or can be dispelled by completing a quest or fulfilling a geas by one who has the means to remove the curse.

This probably explains the murders of three witches (Sisters of Cybelle) over the last few weeks. Some witnesses have identified what appears to be a white werewolf near the scene of the crime.

Campaign Note: Witch's Milk is tied up in a war between two rival covens. The coven of Ravenlock is responsible for the creation and distribution of Witch's Milk. It is by this means that they seek to create werewolf slave-soldiers and eliminate the rival coven. The rival coven, the Sisters of Cybelle, are known for their mastery over the evil eye thus the protection the milk gives. The coven of Ravenlock all wear blackstone amulets that nullify the obsession.

Nine Lives

This is made from a black cat's eye (or so its said) and looks and feels like an eyeball when swallowed. This strange drug gives the imbiber nine lives.

The Kicker: The PC will die for the next eight nights in a row only to be reborn again eight times night after night. Whether the character is mangled, burned butchered or vaporized does not matter. He will be resurrected in full health as as if he spent a restful nights sleep in peace upon the bed he last slept in (characters appear to teleport there). The character will start the next day with all stats normal and fully healed. Nine Lives is ideal for faking one's own death for insurance (if the company doesn't find out about the other seven deaths) or other reasons as well as feigning an assassination. Not long ago an assassin was bewildered at having to kill the same person eight times in a row. The death is still painful but leaves no scars. Masochists swear by it.

Duration: Eight nights.
Notable Characteristics: It's a cat's eye. For some that's hard to swallow.
Side Effects: Seems to draw the attention of otherworldly entities such as angels or demons (one in six chance) who wish to communicate with the supposedly confused soul.

Androdyne

Not to be confused with Anodyne (which it has been), Androdyne causes those who drink it to change sex plumbing and all. There is a 1% chance that it will be permanent.

Duration: Twenty-Four hours.
Notable Characteristics: Anise flavor.
Side Effects: None.

And, Finally: Magic Mushrooms

And last but not least . . . the mushrooms. These mushrooms can be eaten, smoked or brewed as a tea. They have a taste -- if you can call it that -- like dirt. The mushrooms themselves range from white to black. All the the mushrooms glow in the dark. The effect of the mushroom depends on the glow it gives off.

There are seven types:

- **Pink:** Gives dreams of the '60s psychedelic kind, the type the Beatles sing about, all is fun and a bit mysterious like a children's show. A lot of vivid colors, traveling and lava lamps.
- **Cobalt blue:** This gives characters the ability to travel the astral plane for an hour or so. It also puts one at peace and is conducive to deep and beneficial meditations. In game terms this manifests as bonuses on skill and talent rolls. The blue mushrooms also have healing properties and one comes out of the trip feeling revitalized and well rested (all hit points healed) . . .
- **Black:** (Glow comparable to a backlight) for those drawn to the dark side this will give one necro-dreams that make for a dark and scary trip. This allows the user to speak with the dead if near a cemetery, crypt, burial ground, tomb or in a morgue. For initiates, some secret, puzzle, riddle, or spell will be posed that usually relates to necromancy or the black arts such as the hidden location of an arcane tome.
- **Yellow:** Allows one to find a familiar or totem animal even if the character is not a mystic or magic using type. The type of animal will give appropriate bonuses to the character; for example: a bear gives strength, a snake gives wisdom, elephants grant eidetic memory, an owl may grant night vision, and a cat may grant stealth. The bonuses and abilities apply for as long as the totem animal or familiar is alive. Yellow mushrooms are only good for one trip and taking them a second time will have no effect. Side note: Recently a full shipment of animals that were scheduled for the grand opening of the Al Amarja zoo were "liberated" by a group of eco-warrior/terrorists. For some reason officials have chosen to let the animals run free. Finding an animal on the

island is not as difficult as one may have initially thought.

- **Red:** Fulfills dreams and fantasies of a carnal type to be fulfilled to the point of overindulgence. There is a one in six chance the dream may be vampiric in nature with either the character or someone else being a vampire. Side note: Don't be surprised if the vampire in the dream shows up on your doorstep for more or shows themselves at some point during your daily (excuse please . . . nightly) activities. Vampires on the island are experimenting with dream magic and this is their in. A roll of two out of six reveals that the vampires have found the character and are bent on recruiting him.
- **Orange:** This is prophetic and will reveal one possible future that the character may encounter. The future history will unravel before the character as if he were watching a movie of his own life. It may be that the party must work to help the player change his fate (if possible) if it is a bad one.
- **Octarine:** This is the most rare and expensive of the mushrooms. The glow is different to all who gaze upon it and is known to change the longer one watches it. It is said that this rarity will give the seeker exactly the type of trip he needs. This could involve a psychedelic trip involving all the colors above or simply expose the imbiber to one word or equation in glowing neon before him that answers a longtime, gnawing conundrum. Such cryptic messages as "Build it and they will come." are not unlikely. Many takers of octarine report encounters with occultists, magicians and dead rockstars from the past.

Story Idea: The characters work for the Spider Prince. They are assigned or coerced to eradicate the competition. Adventures like this can give the genre a new twist especially if set in Al Amarja. This provides a *Grand Theft Auto* or *Scarface* feel with the added element of the occult on the street level.

So what happens if a crazy character or NPC throttles down a handful of pills and washes it down with one of these magical elixirs? That's where the fun of discovery and experimentation comes in. It may be something akin to crossing the streams in *Ghostbusters.*

More than Meets the Character Sheet

Intelligent Transforming Robot Characters in *GURPS*

by Reverend P. Kitty

A transforming robot campaign, as popularized by shows like Go-Bots and Transformers, can be a fun twist on a typical genre. War is arguably more fun when both sides are giant robots who can turn into fighter jets and tanks. Building them can be tricky without the right approach, however.

Concepts

Buy each additional mode as Alternate Form (Once On, Stays On, +50%; Reduced Time 4, +80%) [35]. Because "Once On, Stays On" changes the template cost from 90% to 100%, there's no need to specify a "native" racial template, which allows for freedom to simplify.

Then define the rest of the core character (personality, knowledge, and other intangible qualities) and create a template for each mode. Putting the two together will create a complete character sheet, representing this particular robot in this particular mode.

Core Character Sheet

This should only have things which carry over between modes. It must contain:

- All attributes and secondary characteristics except ST
- All Alternate Form advantages
- All mental and social traits
- All skills

If any other traits (including ST) are the same *in all modes,* it's simplest to put them on this sheet as well.

As skills appear here, so should DX. Especially dexterous modes can include an attribute modifier.

Mode Templates

Subtract the Core Character Cost from your campaign point limit and spend that many points on *each* Mode Template.

This collection of ST and physical traits define the mode's form and what it can do. Nothing here should overlap or be incompatible with any of the Core Character traits. It's okay if things overlap or disagree between Mode Templates, since only one will be in use at any given time.

Note that you never buy Alternate Form as part of a Mode Template.

Done

Your robot now comprises a core personality and multiple modes. Put them together, transform, and roll out!

Ho's Long-Life Noodle Cart

by Matt Riggsby

Somewhere in a crowded city is a bulky pushcart. Ho, the blocky, middle-aged proprietor, can always be found at some plaza or streetcorner. He sells excellent noodle soup, green tea, and eternal life.

Unknown to customers, Ho's soup is an eccentric elixir which contains life-giving energy. It doesn't instantly grant extraordinary benefits, but if taken regularly, will improve the customer's health and extend his life indefinitely. Sounds great for anyone seeking immortality, but, of course, it's complicated.

First, Ho is difficult to find, without relationships beyond an evening's drinking buddies. The magic of his soup requires that he move frequently, never selling from the same place twice (resembling an elusive, one-man Goblin Market). Second, Ho's motivations are philosophical, and he doesn't care to publicize his soup's powers. He creates the same level of new vitality, whether he feeds one bowl to thousand or thousands of bowls to one person, and thinks it more fair to distribute it far and wide.

If that weren't enough to prompt adventures, Ho is also sought-after by those in the know. They might kill him to keep him out of the hands of competitors, but they really want him for themselves. PCs might be:

- Afflicted with mystic wounds which can only be healed by the marvelous soup.
- Leading occultists out to find Ho and get him on their side, or just find out where his soup comes from.
- Street-level operatives charged with finding Ho or recovering him from someone else.
- Do-gooders determined to keep Ho free.

Ho objects to captivity, but is motivated to preserve his own skin, so he'll cooperate with rescuers to return to his cart. And while he can grant bits of immortality, his soups may have a darker, corrupting side. Maybe there's a reason noodle resemble tentacles . . .

Adventure Pizza Crust

The *Red Harvest* Plot

by Kenneth Hite

Note: "Marisol" is the person, if any, in the Setting that the PCs actually care about.

The PCs arrive at the Setting. They dramatically kill idiot Mooks from Faction B. A Good Local, a Faction A Mook, or Underboss A tells the PCs they've angered Faction B, but Faction A could use their skills.

The PCs meet Boss A. By playing on his weaknesses, or by humiliating B, they become Underbosses of A. They learn A's version of the Setting and the feud. They may encounter a Good Local who gives them insight into the weaknesses of Bosses A and B. They discover that Boss B has Marisol or the McGuffin.

Under another identity, using their insider info, or pretending to be double agents, the PCs gain Boss B's confidence. (Killing their rival Underboss in Faction A will do it.) Then they:

- Escalate the gang war between Factions A and B, using insider knowledge to ambush Mooks or outnumbered Underbosses.
- If there's a Faction C or D, wipe them out.
- Weaken both Factions from within, sowing discord and suspicion.
- Uncover and exacerbate both Bosses' weaknesses.
- Develop surprise Edge over Factions.
- Steal Marisol/the McGuffin/treasure.

If caught by superior forces (the Underboss or even the Boss of each Faction *is* competent) the PCs either:

- Flee to opposing Faction, triggering the Faction Apocalypse early.
- Get thrashed and thrown into the desert. (In the desert, the Good Local will bring food, first aid, and information.)

Adventure Goal: Set off Faction Apocalypse, the PCs switching sides repeatedly to prolong the bloodshed. At curtain, they should be the only violent troublemakers left, with Marisol/the McGuffin/the Setting/a fistful of treasure.

During play, give extra XP for each betrayal and for each use of a psychological weakness to provoke conflict.

The Multiverse, Our Prison

by Steven Marsh

In this three-player multi-genre campaign of linked one-shots, each player (unknowingly) represents a different facet of ability:

- Power
- Knowledge
- Skill

In systemless terms, allow each PC to tap his aspect: *Power* possesses unusual abilities (psionics, magic, metaphysics). *Knowledge* has 10 "lore points" he can spend throughout the campaign to know anything (outside of the meta-game mystery). *Skill* can Critically Succeed three times per adventure.

Pre-generate characters for each session that fit the aspects (pulp example: Occultist, Historian, Agent). Characters have "regular" abilities so they can succeed without tapping their specialties (although tempted often).

Each adventure follows a similar pattern. The heroes:

- awaken in a new world/genre, possessing roles known in-world but amnesiac about their situation (although remembering past adventures in this campaign);
- are confronted with a new situation, given ample guidance for what they should do (client's holovid, dragon's cave map, Nazi attack, etc.);
- resolve the situation;
- "wake up" in a new situation/genre.

In the finale, they awaken in a featureless "room" (the prison); they can realize they influence the cosmos. Thus:

"Is there a door?"
GM: *"Is there?"*
". . . Yes."
GM: *"Indeed, there is."*

They define reality, understand their natures, escape, and confront the adversary.

What's Happening

Before the campaign, an entity called Entropy captured the heroes. Entropy couldn't win directly; instead he discovered how to trap them within the multiverse, forcing them to access their powers; each special-ability usage (power, knowledge points, crit-success) flows into him. Successfully completing adventures helps them escape, but gives power to Entropy. (Entropy's final abilities depend on how much each used their specialties in-game.) Ideally, players should lure Entropy into a trap themselves, perhaps utilizing previous genres. (Thus, if they visited a time-travel setting where paradox destroys the causer, they could trick Entropy into visiting there and creating one.)

The Purple Monkey

by Sean Preston

Lucky Lee, a small time smuggler, worked the streets of Hong Kong. One day, however, his luck ended when he acquired an exotic amethyst from a source even less reputable than himself. Knowing the worth of the stone and the risk in possessing it, he immediately booked passage to America, looking forward to a future of peace and prosperity. There would, however, be no peace for Lee, as the ship suffered greatly from storms and soon fell off course. Lee, knowing of the stone's purported curse, went down to the cargo hold and hid the gemstone in a stuffed animal, a rather crudely fashioned monkey, and returned to his room. Waiting there was a dark vengeance, as the stone was the only thing protecting him from an even worse fate . . .

The purple monkey is a simple stuffed animal about two feet in height, weighing just over four pounds, that looks like it has seen better days. Its brown cloth covering is ratty in places, the seams are remarkably sound, and wine-colored stains dapple its arms and chest. Wherever the purple monkey is found, chaos and death are not far behind, for the cursed amethyst is nestled within the old rags and sawdust of the monkey's body. The mystic power of the stone makes the monkey impossible to destroy. Only exorcism can temporarily put the spirits of its victims at rest.

The powers and use of the monkey are at the GM's discretion. Certainly, it can fall into the characters' hands any number of ways, or may be the focus of a supernatural haunting. Recommended powers range from the monkey being possessed by an ancient Chinese guardian spirit to it being able to bring forth the damned souls of its victims to reap even more. Be creative. Feed the monkey.

* * *

*Sean Preston is the madman behind Reality Blurs. Recent credits include: **Agents of Oblivion** for **True20 Worlds of Adventure** and the newly released **RunePunk: Steam & Shadow** for **Savage Worlds** in luscious hardcover! Check out the company website at realityblurs.com for the latest news. What's next? Wait and see.*

Locus Yesod

A Chancel for *Nobilis*

by Reverend P. Kitty

Deep within a fissure of the World Ash, Yesod -- the Shadow Serpent, he who has shed his physicality -- rules over a land of howling winds and cragged rocks. At the center lies the unclimbable Mount 'Ashuwyah, representation of unobtainable enlightenment, where the Ymera collects its consciousness when not in the spirit realm.

Locus Yesod seems an inhospitable land to most. The ground is hard, rocky, and mountainous. The winds atop most peaks are strong enough to cut flesh, and wild dogs patrol every part of the Chancel not dominated by man. First appearances can be misleading, however; the land is not unlivable -- it just demands respect. The mountain springs allow for limited farming; with great effort, communities can stay fed. The dogs will attack anyone who strays too far, but they will cease (and even become somewhat protective) if they taste Chancelfolk blood. Those who are able to live in harmony with their surroundings find a peaceful home there. Those who cannot tend to meet their end quickly in this unforgiving place.

Yesod and its Nobles do not discriminate between their inhabitants. Both human and dog alike are given equal consideration in all matters of the Chancel. Sovereignity is unofficially divided between the Nobles, though the entire familia are recognized (and obeyed) by all inhabitants.

Locus Yesod is defended solely by its terrain and its wild dogs, but those are protection enough. The dogs are fairly intelligent and are gifted with the ability to ignore the Rite of Holy Fire (despite being mundane, and thus unaffected by an Auctoritas); they have proven effective at overwhelming even Noble intruders. The crags and crevasses within the Chancel lead to a few caves and deep forests an Earth, and a few lead onto the World Ash itself.

Iiad The Undine

for *GURPS Infinite Worlds*

by Phil Masters

Last year, a Sheldrake Section probe team came back from Azoth-7 with a collection of samples from an alchemist's laboratory. Nobody noticed that one of these samples included a *passenger*.

Normally, supernatural spirits rapidly fade away and die in Homeline's mana-free environment, but Iiad has modest needs, and was able to adapt, and even form a new body from substances which had accidentally ended up in the Sheldrake lab's drains. However, he can't venture far from this site, as he does depend on the proximity of various magical and alchemical items which are in for examination to sustain himself. Habitually secretive, he amuses himself by playing pranks on humans. The lab staff are now becoming aware that they have a problem with the drains that demands more than a mundane plumber. Dealing with it in the absence of working magic may be tricky, especially perhaps when anyone realises that Iiad is a sapient being.

Iiad the Undine   *143 points*

A supernatural being resembling an ever-shifting puddle of malodorous liquids.

ST 8 [-20]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 7 [-60]; **HT** 12 [20]
Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 10 [15]; Per 12 [25]; FP 12 [0]; SM -2.
Basic Speed 6 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.

Social Background

TL: 4+2 [-10]
CF: Azoth-7 Western [0].
Languages: Azoth-7 French (Accented/Illiterate) (Native Language) [-4].

Advantages

Body of Water [175]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Regeneration (Fast) [50]; Unaging [15]; Vibration Sense [10].

Disadvantages

Appearance (Hideous) [-16]; Bad Smell [-10]; Dependency (Magical or supernatural objects or phenomena, even if inert; Occasional, Daily) [-60]; Oblivious [-5]; Short Attention Span (15) [-5]; Trickster (12) [-15] Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Skills

Area Knowledge (Laboratory Plumbing)-12 (IQ+5) [16]; Stealth-14 (DX+3) [12]

Using Puzzles in Your Campaign

by Louis Girard

Thinking of using a puzzle in your game? Here are five golden rules we, at *Polymancer* magazine, have come up with while working on an upcoming adventure scenario.

Rule #1: Choose Wisely

A riddle may make sense to you but not necessarily to your players. The solution should be unique, unambiguous, and self-evident when found. A good puzzle allows the players to validate the solution, like when the numbers match in a game of Sudoku. Finally, make it relevant; If players can get away with slicing the Gordian Knot instead of untying it, they will.

Rule #2: Keep It Clean, Keep It Simple

It should be obvious when a puzzle is found. The challenge should be clear enough to know what the objective of the puzzle is or allow the players to figure out what is expected of them. Your puzzle should be hard enough to challenge them without having to complicate things further by using unduly cryptic instructions or making them undetectable.

Rule #3: Give Them a Reason

Players are not going to spend time on a puzzle unless their efforts are rewarded. Make the reward evident enough for them to attempt solving the puzzle. Had the fellowship found a better way to enter the mines of Moria, Gandalf would have never had to spend hours solving the riddle of its gate.

Rule #4: Don't Put Their Backs Against the Wall

Locking up characters until their players crack your code combination will bring your game to a grinding halt. Always leave options for the players to do other things in game while they solve the puzzle on the side, possibly in between game sessions.

Rule #5: Never Give Away the Solution

The player's character has a superior intellect? Give the player a clue; never give away the solution or let an NPC do the work for them.

* * *

*Louis Girard is the art director of **Polymancer** magazine, the only printed gaming magazine that does not solely cater to one company's products. There is a complete adventure scenario in every issue. Find out more at* www.polymancerstudios.com.

What a Card

by Nikola Vrtis

A deck of poker-style playing cards (without jokers) and this article can give gamemasters and players just the instant inspiration they need make their characters feel different from each other.

To use the characteristics table, shuffle the deck. Deal three to five cards. Then, cross-reference the cards to learn the character's most significant features. If seemingly contradictory results appear, either redraw the last card(s) or come up with a circumstance in which they could both be possible.

The cards can also dictate the gender:

If the first card is . . .	the character is . . .
a king or odd card	an adult male
a queen or even card	an adult female
a jack	a young adult; use the next card to determine gender

Example: The three of diamonds (educated), three of spades (uneducated), and 10 of hearts (outgoing) are dealt. The character could be a student who's been so involved in his studies that he hasn't mastered most social skills, but he fakes it with his outgoing nature.

Suit	Face	Characteristic
Diamonds	King	Ambitious
	Queen	Blunt
	Jack	Witty
	10	Desires change
	9	Excited about a new hobby
	8	Worrier
	7	Confident
	6	Meticulous
	5	Intelligent
	4	Indecisive
	3	Educated
	2	Compassionate
	A	Thrill seeker
Hearts	King	Artistic
	Queen	Reserved
	Jack	Unambitious
	10	Outgoing
	9	Affectionate
	8	Quarrelsome
	7	Content
	6	Generous
	5	Loyal
	4	Bitter
	3	Happy
	2	Has a significant other
	A	Romantic

Clubs	King	Energetic
	Queen	Attractive
	Jack	Shy
	10	Wealthy
	9	Hard worker
	8	Gambler
	7	Honest
	6	Poor
	5	Loves job
	4	Swindler
	3	Lucky
	2	Disloyal
	A	Talented

Spades	King	Bossy
	Queen	Selfish
	Jack	Deceitful
	10	Depressed
	9	Unintelligent
	8	Lonely
	7	Fearful
	6	Easily bored
	5	Possessive
	4	Difficulty communicating (speech impediment, lacks social skills, etc.)
	3	Uneducated
	2	Recently lost something important
	A	Unlucky

The Broken Rule

by Alice Turow

The Broken Rule is an ornate [slide rule](#), fractured in the middle. While still holding together (barely), it cannot function at all for its original purpose; the slider can't move without breaking the Rule. If the Broken Rule ever *does* fall apart, its powers disappear forever.

When concentrated on slightly by the owner (who must have it nearby), the Broken Rule allows the person to break a rule of science (or do something impossible or seemingly so) as depicted in one specific movie. Examples include:

Using human computers to interface easily with alien ships *(Independence Day)* Using pressure waves to travel safely away from an explosion *(Mission Impossible)* Transforming a tiny video still-shot detail into a crystal-clear identifiable image *(Enemy of the State)* Causing a car to explode by shooting it (take your pick)

Each movie can be accessed only once, regardless of the effect utilized from that film. Should the Broken Rule transfer to others' hands, it "remembers" past movies tapped (although PCs should probably get a "blank" Rule). The Rule can only affect rules based on objects or ideas that exist at least mostly in the real world; it couldn't be used to gain entry into cyberspace or transform a laser pointer into a sci-fi phaser, but it could permit sound in space (since both "sound" and "space" exist). In general, it's best to tap movies that take place in "modern" times, albeit those with wildly inaccurate or exaggerated scientific principles.

Rumors persist that similar artifacts exist for different genres of films; for example, a broken puzzle ring attuned to romantic comedies permits actions that would be socially unacceptable elsewhere -- such as making a bet that you can get a love interest to fall for you -- because it's romantic in a movie.

1d Minutes To Learn, A Lifetime To Master

Playing Games in *GURPS*

by Reverend P. Kitty

Sports aside, when most roleplayers think of "games," they likely picture a computer, board, or card game, if not an RPG. These are all covered by the Games skill (page 197), though the differences between them deserve a closer look:

RPGs: These Games specialties are used to craft and run an adventure, or to perform well in one. Add half the successes of a Performance *or* Public Speaking roll to the Games roll. One cannot "win" an RPG, but success earns a Good reaction from the other players.

Card Games: The most famous card games are played for money, and use the Gambling skill. For more detail, use the average of Gambling and the appropriate Games skill (round down) instead of the familiarity bonus for Gambling. Other card games follow the advice for *Board Games.*

Board Games: The winner is determined with a quick contest of Games, though long games can be simulated by averaging the margins of success or failure from two or three rolls. Chess is a popular specialty; in a cinematic game it can default to Tactics-4 or Strategy-4, and vice-versa!

Computer Games: These are often just recontextualized *Board Games*, though twitchy shooters could justify basing the skill roll on the average of IQ, DX, and Per! Grueling tournaments can be treated as regular contests, with those who fail being eliminated each round.

Finally, note that only those who compete in a game professionally are likely to have any points in the Games skill! Most people use their IQ-4 default, which is balanced against other amateurs. A professional with even one point in Games will (and should) be at a clear advantage against amateur players, while a match between two masters will be a sight to behold, whether on the chessboard or the Halo battlefield.

The Beginning

by Helen Forbes

Remember when all campaigns started with the words along the lines of, "You're all in this Tavern and a stranger comes in looking to hire some adventurers"? It's not much of an opening. Compared to the beginning of any decent movie it looks uninspired.

So how do you start something? Where do you begin?

Try starting in the middle. This is easy if you're running **GURPS Black Ops** or something similar. You drop the PCs from a Helicopter in the middle of nowhere or pile out of an unmarked Van in some city. They introduce themselves to each other by the roles they take on during the ensuing bug hunt.

Or how about a time loop? Your PCs don't know each other but "by chance" happen to be in the same place at the same time. They are attacked by assailants who leave behind them a group photograph of the heroes. If you allow for time travel then the assailants were the dregs of an enemy group that the heroes are destined to destroy. The attackers were attempting the terminator trick -- kill the enemy before they become the enemy. If not then the PCs were once part of an elite group with selective amnesia.

Or start at the end. This works well with systems like **Feng Shui** but could also work with something dark and edgy like **Call of Cthulhu.** Start with the final confrontation, run a few rounds of combat then jump back to the beginning. Run forward for a bit then jump forward to the final confrontation where you left it. In this way the players get to solve the mystery of how they came to be grappling abominations in a shrine or fighting a running battle with deep ones in the caverns beneath town.

Warehouse 0.23

The Bathoscaphe

by Kenneth Hite

Constructed on similar lines to the more-familiar *bathyscaphe,* this device brings a crew into a lower, more obvious -- more bathetic -- literary universe. The bathoscaphe has three main sections:

- The crew cabin (insulated with elegant translations from Homer, Goethe, and Dante) holds three explorers and their gear. An irony-lock allows exploration, if the risk of becoming an obvious stock character is worth it.
- This cabin is suspended below a large tank containing the manuscript of Fernand Braudel's *Civilization and Capitalism,* providing realism-flotation. Like the gasoline in a bathyscaphe's float, it is incompressible.
- The craft sinks by flooding its conceptual tanks with Norman Lear sitcoms or prog-rock concept albums. It rises by screening John Ford Westerns and playing Bach's "Passion of St. Matthew."

The Agency uses the bathoscaphe primarily for salvage -- many bathetic realms have technology or information not available in the realistic universe, from light-swords to the Quasi-Life Equation to universal computer hacks. Occasionally, the Agency recruits bathetic local operatives -- their lack of nuance and self-examination makes them ideal for covert work. Since bathetic natives often look much better than real people, the Agency sometimes sub-contracts them to the entertainment industry. There, they suffer far less from pervasive realism or maturity, surviving years or even decades before flaming out in sudden low drama.

The dangers of bathetic travel range from being caught in some farcical bathetic war, to Doomed Love, to dying suddenly at the second-act turn. Low-literature explorers also risk postmodern narcosis (unresponsiveness to the genuinely moving or important), the "rapture of the shallow" (belief that the bathetic world is more real than ours), and the Brian Michael Bends (stabbing pain, blindness, or mental dissociation caused by high irony levels).

Rumor has it that the bathoscaphe was adapted from experimental Nazi Campfwagen technology.

Cooperative Gaming: Bullies and Idiots

by Jeff Siadek

"Don't be an idiot!"
"I don't care! It's my character and I'm doing what I want."

Cooperative games such as RPGs, **Shadows over Camelot,** and **Battlestations** bring the social dynamics into sharper relief. The real point of gaming isn't to thwart evil in the realm; it's to have fun with your friends while doing it. The shared experience and decision making can be great when the whole is greater than the sum of the parts or it can be a nightmare if people can't play together nicely.

It's good when a leader emerges to hold the focus of the group. It's a problem when other members feel like pawns. Everybody should feel free to voice their opinions but ultimately leave the final decision up to the player taking action. Otherwise, the game turns into a solitaire game for the bully with several reluctant assistants to push pieces around.

It's frustrating to watch somebody make a blunder that affects the whole party but it is worse to see yourself turn into an insufferable jerk. Be supportive in your advice. Use upbeat reasoning rather than negative platitudes. Be brief and respectful. When it comes time for another player to make a decision, let them. It might work out better than you'd hoped.

It's rude to dismiss others' ideas out of hand. If you consistently go against the consensus, you're probably alienating people. It is hard to make decisions when your emotions are riled up. Relax. Enjoy the camaraderie and make decisions that will enrich the experience for everybody.

If we were talking about a real war with real lives at stake, a different code of conduct would be appropriate. As it is, we're talking about imaginary lives on the line but real friendships are at stake. Play nicely.

Karphos

Angel of the Drabble
Reliever of Creation

for *In Nomine*

by Elizabeth McCoy

Karphos

Angel of the Drabble
Reliever of Creation

Corporeal Forces - 1	Strength 2	Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 3	Intelligence 6	Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 4	Perception 12

Skills: Artistry (Writing/6, Poetry/6), Knowledge/5 (Literature), Singing/1.
Songs: Motion (Ethereal/3, Celestial/3), Tongues (All/6).
Attunements Angel of the Drabble, Seraph of Creation, Grace of God*, Midwife*, Uncommon Sense*.
Special Rites: Complete a work of art*; Complete a drabble, haiku, or other short, written art. The last two may be the same work!

* See ***In Nomine Superiors: Eli,*** pp. 4-6.

"Brevity is the soul of wit."
--William Shakespeare

Karphos has been a reliever since shortly before the Fall, and has never fledged. After all, there's a certain something in simplicity, is there not? While it is not currently in service to any but its walkabout Archangel, Eli, Karphos currently resides in the Cathedreal of the Archangel of Judgment: the Celestial Tribunal.

Though not *technically* under house arrest, Karphos does have a triad of Judgment relievers following it around. It politely asks before making trips to Earth to act as a muse.

Judgment fears it is passing, and receiving, coded messages from Eli.

Adventure Seed

There is, on Earth, a little imp of the Media who longs for the Word of the Soundbite. Naturally, this imp sees Karphos as its natural enemy, and is sure that if only it can capture the reliever and present it to Nybbas, Prince of the Media, it will be given the prize it desires.

It just has to lure Karphos down to Earth . . .

A drabble is a story that is exactly one hundred words long. Prior to the word's coinage, Karphos was the Angel of [the angelic note that means Short Written Artforms].

Don't Bug Me

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

If rats are too conventional for you, here are some fantasy swarms for *GURPS* *Fourth Edition.*

Fire Bees

Fire bees, possible relatives of fire elementals, appear as candle-flame-sized flying points of light. A swarm comprises about 30, with the combined light of a good campfire. They have Move 8 and do 1d-2 burning damage; DR protects normally. Enclosed armor (such as full plate) is likely to provide complete protection from direct damage; however, it can get hot. The temperature increases by two degrees per turn the wearer is attacked. This usually just makes the suit uncomfortable and can be alleviated by stopping momentarily to cool down after combat ends, but persistent attacks can make the armor dangerously hot. A swarm takes 10 HP damage. Fire bees take 1d-2 damage from drenching and water sprays.

Fire bees can be semi-domesticated. A swarm has IQ 2 for training purposes. Kept in stone hives, they are most often used to provide a mobile light source and a bit of extra protection.

Lotus Flies

The lovely, deadly lotus fly has a scent which is intoxicating. Literally. A swarm of 20 has Move 5 and 7 HP. It does no damage, but breathing characters in a swarm must roll against HT+2 each turn. On the first failure, the character becomes Tipsy (per pages 428-9). On the second, he is afflicted with Euphoria, and with Ecstasy on the third. And that's when the real damage happens. The lotus flies land on the immobilized character and implant him with parasitic larvae. The larvae do 1d-3 damage on daily intervals for a week. If the target has not been cured by that time, the larvae hatch into a new swarm (doing another 1d-3 damage). Desperate souls might harvest lotus flies for use as a drug.

Grecian Urn

for *Delta Green/Call of Cthulhu*

by Billy Aguiar

The Minotaur myth is a common motif in Grecian art, so when urn fragments with similar iconography was recovered in the Laconia region by a turn-of-the-century British expedition, it was considered not unusual and placed into storage. When the urn was partially reassembled by a graduate student in the 1960s, the student was later found in a vegetative state. The urn fragments were next examined in the 1980s in a metallurgical survey, but analysis of the urn's glaze was inconclusive. The fragments traveled among institutions, each one failing to identify its glazes, until the fragments arrived at the Smithsonian, and a test there determined they were made from a heavy element not found in nature.

The fragments were immediately transferred to D Stacks.

Dr. Jensen Wu reconstructed the exterior images of the urn, and it revealed a variation of the Minotaur myth. A man made of snakes was given the wrong meal and became the Minotaur. Enraged, it demanded tribute, and its young victims lost their spirits in a labyrinth. The border of the story is a representation of the labyrinth, but there are missing fragments so that the labyrinth is incomplete.

Game Effects: If one studies the urn fragments, there is a POW × 2 they may activate the labyrinth, with their soul/spirit being trapped, leaving their body in a vegetative state.

Story Ideas

- If other fragments of the urn are recovered, the labyrinth effect could become controllable. Urn fragments could be found at its previous institutions or even at the original dig location.
- A party member or a Delta Green researcher has been reduced to a vegetative state by the urn, and the team has to locate one of the serpent people who knows the original spell.

* * *

*Billy Aguiar writes manga columns and reviews for **Comic Buyer's Guide, Newtype USA, Prospero's Manga,** and **ICV2.** For gaming he publishes **Hol** and a series of PDF terrain CDs in association with MicroTactix through The CaBil. He also contributes miniature game reviews and scenarios for Scrye Magazine.*

Act III

by Jim Pinto

Perhaps the most underutilized Act in American cinema is Act III. Most movies are resolved with the simple use of bigger explosions and more bullets. The range of movie ending in Hollywood can be counted on a three-legged dog. It appears as though no one wants to wrestle this puppy to the ground and make Act III work for its paycheck.

In roleplaying games, GMs have an even harder time with it.

After all, the majority of published adventures and games run on rails, providing the player with too few options. Once the finale approaches, everyone assumes the game will end in a hail-fire of death and carnage. How else does one recover Tibetan relics from the Nazis?

Certainly the entire theme of the movie *300* encourages warfare as a tool for getting things done, but this pastiche is so riddled with over-used and unimaginative clichés, one can hardly see anything resembling a story through the fog.

In escapist roleplaying, this premise is fine. Blow up the Nakatomi plaza with everyone in it. That takes away the terrorists bargaining chip. But for players who invested thought and time into their disadvantages, burning down the bingo parlor where grandma plays twice a week in order to subdue a money-laundering priest seems as boring an ending as anyone could devise.

The strength of Act III in roleplaying is the player's involvement as a team in devising every last element of this story. Act IIIs needn't end with everyone dying ala *Reservoir Dogs* (although this isn't bad), but rather can end with revelations so intense, the PCs are riveted with fear and rendered speechless by their own disbelief (ala *Oldboy*).

Consider stealing pages from less-known works when planning adventure endings and leave the majority of Act III story-writing to the players.

The Omniscient Eye

Is a Sea Section Dangerous on a Low-G World?

Imagine a world with lower gravity than Earth but (for this thought experiment) the same air pressure and temperature, and open water. Would the performance of a boat change? The boat and the payload are lighter, but so is the water it displaces . . . And what about airships? They float in air just as submarines float in water, right?
     --Onno Meyer

At rest, the forces acting on a boat depend on gravity -- its own weight, and that of the water it displaces. Reduced gravity affects both of these equally, so it'll ride just as high in the water as it does on Earth. But when it starts to move, either under power or in response to weather, dynamic forces and inertia become important. These don't scale with gravity, so performance will change.

A hull moving through the water generates hydrodynamic lift, increasing with speed. This causes the boat to rise in the water, reducing drag. Some high-speed craft (e.g. hydrofoils, speedboats) are designed to lift almost completely out of the water ("planing"), improving speed and efficiency.

In low-gee, these craft will plane more easily, improving acceleration and fuel economy at low speeds. Craft that wouldn't plane on Earth may do so here, but this will cause handling problems if they're not designed for it. They may end up having to travel *slower* to avoid planing. Depending on the design, low-gee may reduce the amount of energy wasted in kicking up spray, or just kick the spray up higher.

Stability will suffer, especially for small boats and sailcraft; gravity is an important part of how boats keep upright, so wind or a sudden turn will make a boat heel over further than the same cause would on Earth. (Waves in low gravity are a column in themselves.)

Airships will be mostly unaffected, since buoyant forces are already small compared to dynamic ones. Operating ceilings will increase because lower gravity means slower changes in air pressure. Submarines are in a similar situation, and can dive deeper, but will be slower to surface and dive since these processes use buoyancy (most airships rely on dynamic forces for short-term altitude control).

--Geoffrey Brent

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!

Random Inkling

Many years ago, the late Dr. Jerome Stern -- Florida State University's antagonistic writing professor and cantankerous mentor figure -- started the "World's Best Short Short Story Contest," where all entries are 300 words or less. The contest continues today.

Dr. Stern's original intent (along with others dabbling in drabbles or muddling in microfiction) was to explore the limits of fiction: How small can a story get and still be a story? How much cruft can be pared away? What stories can be told in a smaller form that are more difficult (or impossible) in a larger form?

To me, one conclusion I take from microfiction experimentation is that almost everything can be a game. We know this as children: "Be careful walking on the sidewalk's edge; the street is *lava!*" (And, when faced with a square-patterned floor, I still fight the urge to walk L-style, like a chess knight would do.) Smart parents can use this to their advantage as well: "Betcha you can't clean your bedroom in 10 minutes!" And well into adulthood the games continue: calling "shotgun" when it's time to get in the car, juggling objects when bored, making puns or other forms of wordplay.

And, of course, the writerly challenge of writing short-short gaming articles. This week the number "300" looms large in the air, and we've thrown down the gauntlet to some familiar faces and voices new to *Pyramid:* Can you write an article in 300 words (or less)?

The results speak for themselves, but it's up to you -- the reader -- to determine if they're worthwhile. Let us know what you think, via the discussion boards or by e-mail.

Thanks to all the writers who participated, and special thanks to Jerome Stern: Absence can speak volumes.

--Steven Marsh

Morituri Te Salutamus

by Nikola Vrtis

In this dice game for two or more players, participants play deities harvesting soldiers for their lands of the dead.

This game requires five tokens per player and two dice. (More tokens means a longer game.) To start, place the tokens in the center of the playing area, within reach of all players. Each player rolls the dice; the player with the highest number goes first. Players take turns rolling the dice, consulting the chart and performing the action indicated. Play continues to the right (roll, consult, perform). If a result is impossible to perform, play passes. The game ends when there are no more tokens in the center; the person with the most tokens wins.

Number	Action
2	*Reinforcements:* Put one token in the center.
3	*A Lull in the Combat:* Play passes.
4-6	*Not Your Dead:* Put one token in the center or give one to another player.
7	*Divine Intervention:* Take one token from the center and another from someone else.
8-11	*Reap the Wounded:* Take one token from the center.
12	*Vicious Battle:* Take two tokens from the center.

Three Variations

- **Winds of Change:** Players begin with three Fate Chips apiece. Each chip can be used once to force a reroll (of anybody's die roll); the results of this roll must be accepted, but additional chips can be utilized. At game's end, if a player used *no* chips, *all* three count as additional harvested souls: Fate acts subtlely.
- **Favored Souls:** Mark the underside of one token per player. If drawn randomly from the center, these tokens can be used as Fate Chips (above); if used in this way, the token is discarded.
- **Honored Sacrifices:** Remove three of your tokens for one Fate Chip (as above) *or* to choose one result for a roll.

Grecian Urn

for *Delta Green/Call of Cthulhu*

by Billy Aguiar

The Minotaur myth is a common motif in Grecian art, so when urn fragments with similar iconography was recovered in the Laconia region by a turn-of-the-century British expedition, it was considered not unusual and placed into storage. When the urn was partially reassembled by a graduate student in the 1960s, the student was later found in a vegetative state. The urn fragments were next examined in the 1980s in a metallurgical survey, but analysis of the urn's glaze was inconclusive. The fragments traveled among institutions, each one failing to identify its glazes, until the fragments arrived at the Smithsonian, and a test there determined they were made from a heavy element not found in nature.

The fragments were immediately transferred to D Stacks.

Dr. Jensen Wu reconstructed the exterior images of the urn, and it revealed a variation of the Minotaur myth. A man made of snakes was given the wrong meal and became the Minotaur. Enraged, it demanded tribute, and its young victims lost their spirits in a labyrinth. The border of the story is a representation of the labyrinth, but there are missing fragments so that the labyrinth is incomplete.

Game Effects: If one studies the urn fragments, there is a POW × 2 they may activate the labyrinth, with their soul/spirit being trapped, leaving their body in a vegetative state.

Story Ideas

- If other fragments of the urn are recovered, the labyrinth effect could become controllable. Urn fragments could be found at its previous institutions or even at the original dig location.
- A party member or a Delta Green researcher has been reduced to a vegetative state by the urn, and the team has to locate one of the serpent people who knows the original spell.

* * *

*Billy Aguiar writes manga columns and reviews for **Comic Buyer's Guide, Newtype USA, Prospero's Manga,** and **ICV2.** For gaming he publishes **Hol** and a series of PDF terrain CDs in association with MicroTactix through The CaBil. He also contributes miniature game reviews and scenarios for Scrye Magazine.*

Appendix Z-Minus

Comparative Deep Time Table

by Kenneth Hite

"Theosophists have guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu"

This table attempts to harmonize, as best one can, geological chronology with the various "deep time" histories of the Cthulhu and Theosophical Mythoi.

Geological Era	H.P. Lovecraft	H.P. Blavatsky
Pre-Cambrian	Elder Things and Shoggoths [1000 Mya] Flying Polyps [750 Mya]	Previous cycle of Root Races?
Cambrian		
Cambrian-Ordovician mass extinction [488 Mya]; wars between Elder Things and Tsathoggua? Flying Polyps?; end of previous Kali-Yuga		
Ordovician	Great Race of Yith [450 Mya]	First (Polarian) Root-Race
	[both races of pure mentation]	
Ordovician-Silurian mass extinction [444 Mya], Ice Age [460-430 Mya]		
Silurian		Second (Hyperborean) Root-Race
Devonian		
Late Devonian mass extinction, formation of Pangaea; Cthulhu arrives from Xoth [360 Mya]		
Carboniferous	Fall of Cthulhu [300 Mya]	
Permian	Serpent-Men [275 Mya]	
	[both Shoggoths and Hyperboreans describable as "ectoplasmic" and "sweat-born"]	
Permian-Triassic mass extinction; Shoggoth Revolt; end of Second Root-Race [251 Mya]		
Triassic		
Jurassic	Mi-Go [160 Mya]	Third (Lemurian) Root-Race

	[both "egg-born"? neither have skeletons, both associated with crystals and/or mining]	
Cretaceous		
Cretaceous-Tertiary mass extinction; mutual destruction of Great Race of Yith and Flying Polyps, beginning of fall of Elder Things; war between Lemurians and Venusian "Dragons of Light"? [65 Mya]		
Paleocene		Fourth (Atlantean) Root-Race
Eocene		
Oligocene		
Miocene	Hyperborea rises; Fall of last Serpent-Man kingdom beneath N'Kai [5 Mya]	Fifth (Aryan) Root-Race emerges [18 Mya]
Pliocene	Voormis [3 Mya]	
Pleistocene		
Pastonian Interglacial (global warming); resurgence of Hyperborea against Voormis, final fall of last Elder Thing city; sinking of first Atlantis, end of Fourth Root-Race [850 Kya]		
Nebraskan Glaciation; fall of Hyperborea [680 Kya]		
	Ghatanothoa awakens in Mu; sinking of Mu [170 Kya]	
End of last Ice Age; end of Hyborian Age; sinking of Plato's Atlantis [12000 BC]		

Pyramid Mini-Review

Advanced Squad Leader Starter Kit #1

Published by [Multi-Man Publishing, LLC](#)

Designed by Ken Dunn with Chas Argent, John D. Johnson, Pete Shelling, & Brian Youse

Cartography by Kurt Miller

Two 8"×22" Mapboards, 12-page Rulebook, 280 ½-inch counters, three scenario sheets, 1 Quick-Reference Data Chart & two six-sided dice; $24

Avalon Hill's *Advanced Squad Leader* game system provides peerless squad-based World War II wargaming, yet its detailed game system and steep learning curve is both daunting and expensive. Fortunately, Multi-Man Publishing, has countered this with Advanced Squad Leader Starter Kit #1.

Introducing prospective players to the game's core concepts and giving a feel for the full game, Starter Kit #1 is relatively inexpensive compared to the full game ($80 versus $24), concentrating entirely on infantry combat plus support weapons between US, German, and Russian troops. Vehicles are saved for the full game and further Starter Kits.

Starter Kit #1 is pleasingly appointed with full-color rules, and clear, easy-to-use double-sided counters. The full-color mapboards are not mounted, instead printed on sturdy card. A turn counter is needed though, and the second player needs a Quick-Reference Data Chart.

Opponents maneuver their squads to bring enough firepower to bear on the enemy, inflicting casualties and breaking enemy morale, restricting a squad's fighting ability. The game's heart, the squad leader, is necessary to coordinate the firepower of multiple squads, and more importantly, to rally broken squads to fight again. The rules clearly explain and illustrate with examples, the eight phases of a game turn. Not overly complex, the rules do require the memorizing of a lengthy list of abbreviations.

Most of the six scenarios are set across post-D-Day Western Europe, using only one mapboard and at most 30 counters, increasing Starter Kit #1's suitability for solitaire play. Beyond this, the Starter Kit is limited, with no capacity for designing scenarios.

Minor quibbles aside, quality components make the *Advanced Squad Leader Starter Kit #1* a solid, reasonably priced package. It is also an excellent means of entering what is an engrossing hobby with plenty of support. Further stand alone Starter Kits ease the learning curve.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Mini-Review

GameMastery Item Pack One

Published by Paizo Publishing

Illustrations, graphics, & design by Vincent Dutrait, Sean Glenn, & Joe Boulden

Product coordination by Jason Bulmahn

55 cards (54 item cards, one product description card); full-color, tuck box; $9.95

If you have a tough time keeping track of your fantasy loot, the **GameMastery Item Pack One** adds a new method. It's a standardized 54-card deck depicting various pieces of equipment found in standard dungeon crawls: armor, artifacts, weapons, and so on. Each card has a portrait and name on the front and a description and blank space on the back. Part of the space is for a code so the GM can dispense cards and keep relevant secret information in his notes, and the rest can be used for statistics. He can hand you a crossbow card marked "1-A"; you write the range and weight on the back while he notes "1-A is cursed . . ."

Everything is generic, so no *periapt of wisdom* card or anything system-specific like that, but they're still colorful. The illustrations are top of the line, and the flavor text makes each entry more than a simple axe or scroll. You choose the magical (or even historical) mechanics you'll put down, though fitting them into the small square takes an even hand. On the other hand, that section's surface is cleverly treated so it can be marked (and erased) with a pencil. A simple line-by-line listing of gear on your character sheet may be more straightforward, but multiple cards can be arranged within a nine-card plastic sleeve to represent where your character is carrying his gear (unless you want to staple cards to your sheet . . .), and if in-game circumstances dictate you can switch the weapons you have "in-hand."

Players can increase their selection with random boosters and sequel decks to the **Item Pack**, adding both more mundane items (10-foot poles and such) and fanciful relics. It may not spell the most satisfying or obvious method of accounting for everyone, but it wins big points for creativity.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Mini-Review

Alhambra

Published by [Queen Games](#) & [Überplay](#)

Designed by Dirk Henn

Graphics by Jörg Asselborn, Christof Tisch, & die basis

60 1¾" square Tiles (Six Starter Tiles & 54 Building Tiles), 108 Money Cards, Two Scoring Cards, 12 Wooden Tokens, Six Reserve Tile Boards, One Scoring Track, One Building Market board, One Black Cloth Bag, & a six-page rules sheet; $34.95

2003 "Spiel des Jahres" winner, *Alhambra* is a simple-themed tile-laying and resource management game. It's Granada, 1278, and players direct European and Arabic artisan teams to construct the finest, largest Alhambra, Spain's most beautiful palace. Naturally, artisans want paying in their native currencies.

For two to six players, *Alhambra* has high quality components. The famous Lion Fountain marks Starter Tiles, while various Building Tiles are marked with a purchase value. The Money Deck consists of four color-coded currencies: blue Dinars, green Dirhams, orange Ducats, and yellow Florins. Each Tile Reserve board has space for tiles and scoring details.

Alhambra's heart is the Building Market board, marked with four tile spaces and currency symbols. After a somewhat-complex set-up, a player either draws Money Cards for later; redesigns his Alhambra; or buys a Building Tile with the correct currency, adding it to his Alhambra or Reserve Board. Paying a tile's exact cost grants another turn.

Alhambra design can sprawl or be compact, but placed tiles must align correctly, and adjoining sides must match, cheaper tiles being more difficult to place. Scoring happens when either Scoring card is drawn, and at game's end, points awarded for the most of each building type and the longest wall. The player with the most points and finest Alhambra wins.

Alhambra offers simple tactics but difficult decisions. Pay extra for scoring tiles or take Money Cards for the exact amount and extra turn later? Either could deny a player or rival valuable Money or tiles. With strong random tile and card drawing, *Alhambra* lacks player interaction, except over the Building Market, making each *Alhambra* a self-contained puzzle.

Despite poor interaction, *Alhambra* is enjoyable, frustrating and gratifying as fortunes fluctuate. Evenly spaced scoring rounds let player scores balance. Beautiful, cleverly designed, *Alhambra* is pleasingly light and plays easily.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Mini-Review

Perplexcity, Season 2

Published by [Mind Candy](#)

Seven puzzle cards; full-color, booster packs; $4.99

In case you missed the news, the puzzle cube, the long-sought relic from the back story of the ***[Perplexcity](#)*** collectible card game, has been found. Like any good puzzle junkies, the creators don't stop obsessing there, they release *Perplexcity, Season 2.*

While the ***Perplexcity*** folks are glad to have their cube back, it seems not everyone is in agreement on what's to be done with it. The [Brotherhood of the Six](#) have splintered to demand the artifact be used to its full potential. Tales are spun on the backs of cards (including "Choose Your Own Misadventure" stories), and some have reminders on playing the game and getting points and prizes at the home page. (Those even include "warm-up" puzzles to raise your blood pressure.)

And puzzles are what you're here for. A new series of 256 tests are being doled out in waves (84 randomly selected cards to start), and the more you solve the better your score (if you post codes at the website, you can simply enjoy the noodle-scratchers by yourself). The mysteries come from all corners: logic puzzles, mazes, visual tests, even cards whose veils must be pierced by smell.

Sometimes graphics are decorative. In all cases they tell you into which set of ciphers the cards fall. Styles range from cartoons to classical to photo-altered reality, but all are striking and, since there's no way to tell what's important, worth looking at.

Within a single packet you can find enigmas ranging from "Well, duh," to "You've gotta be kidding me . . . I have to know the science of *what*?" If you can't find something to your taste in one, there's sure to be something in the next, and at the price it's not too costly to find some excellent example of what tests your mettle.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Mini-Review

Fjords

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Franz-Benno Delonge

Translated by Jay Tummelson

40 Full Color Landscape Tiles, 8 Wooden Farms in two colors, 40 Wooden Field Counters in two colors, & Full-Color Rules Leaflet; $19.99

Having had enough of the sea, of rape and pillage abroad, and of spam and parrots, a good Viking settles down to farm the rich meadowlands between the mountains and the turbulent waters of Scandinavia's fjords. This is the theme for *Fjords,* a two-player tile-laying game wherein each Viking explores the fjord, securing the best sites for his farms, before cultivating new fields. The aim being to have the most fields.

Fjords is played in three two-stage rounds. Stage one is Discovery: The players lay the hexagon-shaped tiles in turn such that at least two sides must connect and the terrain (blue sea, green meadowlands, and black mountains) match adjacent tiles. When adding a new tile, a player can choose to place a farm on its meadowland section. His opponent can freely give placement advice, which can also be ignored. Gaps (known as lochs) can be left in the tile layout.

When all the tiles have been placed, the second stage -- Land Claim -- begins. Field counters are placed in turn, in empty meadowland adjacent to an existing field or farm of the same color. Once all field counters are placed, the number for each player is counted up and noted down. Two more rounds are played, the highest score from the three rounds determining the winner.

Fjords, like *[Carcassonne,](#)* is pleasingly tactile and jigsaw-like. Tactics focus on tile and farm placement ready for field cultivation, players using the terrain to block his opponent's access to meadowlands with sharp valleys, narrow mountain passes, and thin coastal strips, there being only two all-meadowland tiles.

Simple, enjoyable, *Fjords* plays easily and quickly, and is arguably a less-demanding alternative or introduction to *Carcassonne.* With thick tiles and wooden pieces, *Fjords* is attractive and would also work with more players and more pieces.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Mini-Review

Roanoke: A Game of Dark Mystery & Wicked Action!

Written & Published by [Clint Krause](#) with Daniel Bayn

Cover by Glauco Nobre

44-page 1.28meg b&w PDF with Color Cover; $5

Inspired by *Tim Burton's Sleepy Hollow, Ravenous,* and *Brotherhood of the Wolf, **Roanoke*** is a roleplaying game of Lovecraftian horror, over-the-top action, civilization against wilderness, and sinister conspiracies at the New World's edge. It explores, but does not explain, what happened to "[England's lost colony.](#)"

Players take the roles of Roanoke's colonists, protectors, betrayers, and native peoples, each defined by three traits, one combat, one social, one professional, plus a crippling fear. Traits are rated three, four, and five, the fear just one, and everything else two. For its mechanics, each rating is the target to roll under. Simple resolution is a straight roll under a trait. For conflicts, ***Roanoke*** employs Daniel Bayn's narrative control Wushu mechanics, players building dice pools of six-sided dice by adding narrative elements, and then rolling for successes. For example, a Witch-Hunter denounces a Heretic, using inflammatory oratory, producing evidence of devilish doings, and witnesses to the Heretic's lies about God. The Witch-Hunter gains a die for each, rolling 3d6 against his professional trait, Witch-Finder (5). The Wushu mechanics actively encourages player input.

Roanoke models the colony's fate with its too-simplistic Doom mechanics. To gain automatic successes in a conflict, a player invokes his Fate, but Faustian-like also raises Roanoke's Doom by one. The final Doom rating determines how tragic Roanoke's end is, a higher value indicating a darker end.

Although Roanoke's real fate is unexplained, the game suggests several foul plots, frameworks that move the campaign onwards, including Elizabethan court intrigue, cannibalism, and ocean-borne threats. Nevertheless, it is the players and the Doom rating that will determine Roanoke's ultimate end. As with ***[Don't Walk in Winter Woods,](#)*** Clint Krause has created a light storytelling RPG with strong player input wherein getting to the fate is more interesting than the fate itself.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Mini-Review

Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Tiles 3: Hidden Crypts

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

48 tiles (two 8×10 (stable & mausoleum/crypt), two 4×4 (bone ziggurat & hidden tomb), four 4×4 with corners clipped (two empty tombs & two staircases), two 2×8 (stairway & empty crypt), 12 2×4 (three hardwood floors, glowing green pit, double doors, three empty crypts, massive stone doors, archway, & two darkness), six 2×2 (crevasse/floor cage, illuminated coffin, demon brazier, stairs, clawed fountain, & hole-lined floor), four 2×2 with clipped corners (two statuary & two darkness), two 1×4 (one darkness & one stairway), eight 1×2 (five doors, two sarcophagi, & rack; two coffins on back side), six 1×1 (two darkness, two upright coffins, door, & iron maiden; pile of bones on back side)); full color, mounted; $9.95

Quick-use maps continue to flood the RPG market, and thankfully Wizards of the Coast keeps up a regular supply of their quality tile sets. To coincide with their miniatures accessory *The Unhallowed,* the third set in the line is called *Hidden Crypts.*

As that might suggest, you now have a virtual necropolis at your disposal. You won't be building vast cemeteries with the selection (they're "hidden," remember?), but you've got enough to fill an entire dungeon with undead haunts. There are bones, sure, but the artists don't let that carry the whole product. You get coffins and tombs, some without their occupants (the GM determines whether the bodies were stolen or . . .), and stone doors and vaulted frames suggest the confines of a gothic burial chamber. A few pieces are clipped at the corners so your dungeons need not have those hard edges -- stairways can sweep majestically into the room, and corridors can take a gentler, more decorative turn as a respectable mausoleum might have before the fireballs start flying.

There are a couple of misses, or at least unexplained anomalies, like the glowing green pit (unless Superman was buried here). The stable only makes sense when paired with what looks like a small family plot with a single grave (that's all the outdoors you get). There are odd hardwood floors, and one counter has a dotted line of dark holes all around the edge -- either it's the upper view of a cage (and there are already some upper views of cages less circumspect than that), or they're holes ready to spew flames or fumes. As with the other sets, the opposite sides of most pieces show plain tiled slabs in case you simply want a dungeon. *Hidden Crypts* may be Wizards' most well-targeted but generally useful set yet.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Mini-Review

Kung Fu Fighting: Martial Arts Brawling Cinema Style!

Published by [Slugfest Games](#)

Designed by Geoff Bottone, Colleene Skadl, & Cliff Bohm

Illustrated by Peter Nguyen with Cliff Bohm

Tan-Colored 99-Card Deck, Six 7"×5" Character Cards, Six Red Glass Chi Stones; $19.95

Following *Fishing for Terrorists,* Slugfest Games keeps it fast and non-political with the Chinese-style kick-ass *Kung Fu Fighting* card game. As martial arts masters, two to six players throw punches, kicks, and each other, or strike with swords, nunchucks, or even a table to be the last one standing.

Each player has a Player Template: a card indicating current Chi marked from one to 20, plus spaces for weapon held or stance taken. The cards, nicely illustrated with a range of action shots, depict weapons, stances, attacks, attack enhancements, blocks (specific to attack types), and Chi Restoration. Each player begins with a hand of seven cards and 20 Chi.

In turn, players make an attack against an opponent: a direct quick punch or kick, or complex like a Fast Flying Kick delivered from the Crane stance. The kick inflicts just three points of Chi damage, unless blocked, but each Enhancement increases the damage done. Before his attack, a player can freely discard and draw as many cards as he wants, changing weapon and stance cards to gain the best defense and attack values. Outside of his turn, a player can only play block cards to stop attacks, while weapon and stance defense values reduces attack damage. Except for stance and weapon cards, all played cards are discarded. Players are eliminated once their Chi is gone, and the last one standing wins.

Kung Fu Fighting is a knockabout game, enjoyable, but undemanding, playing better with more players. It involves some luck in the cards drawn, but the key is building the right combination of stance, attack, and enhancements to land devastating blows. Inject a little verbal interplay and you have the easy to visualise martial arts movie fight scene, helped by the card illustrations. Bad accents and subtitles optional, of course.

--Matthew Pook

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Smooch

for *Toon*

by William H. Stoddard

Kisses are a classic bit in animated cartoons. One cartoon character steps up to another and plants a big smack on his cheek, or on his lips, leaving him stunned, ecstatic, or both. For **Toon** GMs who want to include this in their games, here are some rules.

The basic action is a Chutzpah Skill:

Smooch

This skill is used to display your affection for another character, either sincerely or ironically. The effect of a successful Smooch is that the recipient is Boggled. This may be accompanied by a variety of takes, especially if the Smooch is sincere. Good descriptions -- for example, of throbbing hearts, or characters running around screaming "Woo, woo!" -- can earn Plot Points. On a failed Smooch, the smoochee is free to take action against the smoocher: slapping him, punching him, picking his pocket, or even smooching him back.

There are a couple of different ways to arrange an attempted Smooch. One is talking the recipient into it; this requires Fast-Talk, countered by Resist Fast-Talk. Another is catching him off guard with a Sneak, resisted by See/Hear/Smell. You can also try to grab him with a Fight roll; this can be countered by another Fight roll. A success on any of these results in an *immediate* chance for a Smooch roll; it's not delayed 'til your next turn.

Some Shticks also apply: Hypnosis, Invisibility, or even Stretching your lips. Incredible Luck and Teleport can both be used to avoid being Smooched.

Of course, one character can *agree* to being smooched.

Successful Smooches can have long-term effects: the smoochee may pursue the smoocher, hoping to receive another kiss, or to give one. Player characters can choose whether to react this way; non-player characters react this way if the Animator thinks it's funny!

Sack of Words

by Alice Turow

The Sack of Words contains small, loose, blank rectangular tiles. Impossible to count, a full pouch houses a few hundred. Only one tile can be drawn at a time, and upending the bag also only produces one. It's impossible to do more than estimate tiles remaining or acquire more than one at a time. The Sack cannot be refilled nor tiles reused.

If a tile is drawn with a word in mind, it appears on the tile. These words can convey messages to *anyone*. First, the drawer contemplates a target; the initial word drawn is always "TO." This recipient can be *any* person(s), condition(s), or idea(s).

Examples:

- BENJAMIN MURPHY
- MURDERER OF TIMOTHY QUINN
- MYSELF AT MIDNIGHT
- EVERYONE ABOARD THIS SHIP

The only seeming limit is that recipients in the past cannot be targeted.

The tiles have a slight "you-know-what-I-mean" quality; if the drawer only knows one Benjamin Murphy, only two tiles are required.

Once a recipient's chosen, the drawer assembles a message; this segment begins with the word "MESSAGE," counting as one tile. This message can be as many tile-words as desired (given enough tiles). Tiles can only be used for words. There's no punctuation (unless faked: "PERIOD"), and numbers are spelled out; "TWENTY FOUR" is two tiles. Hyphenated words count two (or more), and attempts to thwart the tile's limits -- "BRINGMOREGUNS" -- result in a tile consisting of the first whole word. (Tiles follow the same "Don't-be-a-jerk" philosophy GMs should.)

Beyond that, tiles are open to any use of delivering words:

- TO FRIENDS MESSAGE HELP
- TO ME IF PERIMETER BROKEN MESSAGE DANGER
- TO EVERYONE ON EARTH MESSAGE BOLLOCKS
- TO GOD MESSAGE WHAT IS THE POINT

Messages deliver instantaneously mentally, without tone, direction, or clue of origin (unless in-message); the drawer knows nothing of the recipient(s).

The Major Villains From My Campaign, 2002-2007

by James L. Cambias

- A biker gang.
- A rogue DEA agent secretly behind the gang wars in the city.
- An ex-Soviet mercenary trying to take over the city's underworld.
- A Colombian drug lord who's really a CIA agent.
- A crooked police captain who's really a Vampire!
- A whole secret society of vampires in the city's business leaders.
- A Masonic group who are looking for the hidden Templar treasure.
- A fundamentalist preacher against music, games, and comic books -- but it turns out he's a cyborg!
- Vampires in the school athletic department.
- Masonic agents out for revenge.
- Cyborg mercenaries.
- A vampire drug lord.
- Masonic assassins.
- Vampire cops.
- The Psycho Vampire Queen, who starts out acting all nice and pretends to be impressed when the heroes give her hand-painted miniatures, but then starts moaning about how the heroes never go anywhere, and demanding that they buy her *very expensive* concert tickets to bands they don't even like very much, and finally dumps them when she's drained all their life energy.
- More Masonic hit men.
- Cyborg slutbots.
- The Masonic Traitor Agent, who's been fighting alongside the heroes for years and years, totally gaining their trust, but who turns out to be allied with the Vampire Queen.
- Vampires.
- The Evil Cyborg Traitors, a group of former heroes whose brains are replaced by electronic implants controlled by the Masons, who set up their own "hero" group that uses the same headquarters as the PCs even though I've complained about it to the owner like, a dozen times.
- Masonic vampires.
- Cyborg vampires.
- Masonic cyborgs.
- The Cyborg Controller, an alien trying to capture all Earth's heroes by brainwashing them and taking them off to space, where he sticks them on some stupid starship and forces them to explore alien planets.
- Space vampires.
- *Cyborg* space vampires.

NUK "Nehebkau"

A Transhuman Space Cybershell

by Phil Masters

"Mini-snakebot" cybershells are frequently used for espionage; they're good at slipping through the proverbial ventilation ducts, and if they're spotted, they may be ignored, or at least treated simply as animals. This model also has functional "fangs" -- a drug injector, holding up to three doses.

Nehebkaus aren't generally sold into the domestic market, but a few civilian owners carry one or two, literally up their sleeves, for practical jokes or as holdout weapons, and similar models (without fangs) have uses in the entertainment industry; theatrical companies employ them in productions of *Anthony and Cleopatra.*

Mini-Snakebot *GURPS Fourth Edition* Template (-13 points)

Attribute Modifiers: ST-7 [-70]; HT+1 [10].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM -2; Basic Move-1 [-5]

Advantages: Absolute Direction (Requires Signal, -20%) [4]; Damage Resistance 1 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [3]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Infravision [10]; Machine [25]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Pressure Support 2 [10]; Reduced Consumption 3 (Recharge once a week) [6]; Sealed [15]; Telecommunication (Cable Jack; Video, +40%) [7]; Telecommunication (Radio; Video, +40%) [14]; Temperature Tolerance 5 [5]; Vacuum Support [5].

Perks: Accessories (Tiny Computer, Drug Injector) [2].

Disadvantages: Cybershell Body [-15]; Invertebrate [-20]; Maintenance (Electronics Repair and Mechanic skills, 2 people, Monthly) [-4]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Restricted Diet (Very Common, power cells) [-10]; Vermiform [-35].

Features: Standardized physical design (see below).

3' long, 2 lbs., $450 + cost of computer.

Notes

Most mini-snakebots are designed to resemble some natural species; if they're seen, they'll probably be treated as possibly-dangerous wild animals, and if they're identified, they may be viewed as sinister espionage gadgets. Hence, even if they are operated by a LAI rather than a NAI, they may change that template's Social Stigma (Valuable Property) to Subjugated, reflecting the worse treatment they can expect, for -10 points.

Phone Beyond

Modern-Day *Call of Cthulhu* Hands-Free Horror

by J. Edward Tremlett

Everyone's seen the television ads. Well-dressed businesspeople march through exotic locales like they were in an office. "Pure Morning" by Placebo plays as they talk business on the beach, in the jungle, the mountains and deserts. No stethoscope headsets or obvious bluetooth earpieces. Just a pouch at the belt, and a smile.

All brought to you by "Phone Beyond." Better coverage and fewer dropped calls than all other providers. Behind-the-ear bone-conduction headsets as a standard package. The web site reveals that they're 50% more expensive than the competitors . . . but hey, everyone else's doing it.

The Problem

It starts out small, at first. Long-time users start to see things out of the corner of their eyes in dim light. "Floaters." Fleeting, squid-like movement in corners. Multi-legged shapes running under the table. Amoebas floating half-in and half-out of the walls . . .

A blink of the eye and they're gone. Overwork . . . too many hours in front of that damn computer.

But then they're seen with the lights on. In the street in broad daylight. Getting closer all the time.

One day, they bite, and a customer goes missing.

Systems

Phone Beyond's headsets are tiny, much-improved Tillinghast resonators. They vibrate their wearers' skulls to receive and send voices, and to transmit the signal through another dimension, using the human mind as a focus.

Unfortunately, that dimension is not uninhabited. Long-term use "attunes" the wearer to interact more fully with its strange inhabitants -- the Terrors From Beyond.

For each phone call, subtract the user's POW from the minutes spent: a negative number or zero is treated as 1. This is the cumulative percentile chance of attunement. Once attuned, the victim has a number of days equal to POW before the creatures can attack.

Terrors From Beyond are on pp. 91-92 of *Malleus Monstrorum.*

Get Your Players to Tell You What They Want

by Jason Anderson

My players are very big on character development, but in the past I've had problems figuring out how they want to develop their characters. Even worse, when I did have an idea they were just "bad" situations for the character to react to; I was rarely coming up with "good" situations for the character.

The solution was simple and obvious: Get my players to tell me! But I decided to make it a somewhat formal process, and this has helped it tremendously.

I gave my players three index cards apiece, and told them to write down something each wanted to have happen to his character (one on each card). The contents of the card were to be kept secret -- only the player and I would know what was on the card. The event could be good or bad, major (i.e.: plot altering) or minor. I did reserve the right of veto if the idea was unsuitable for any reason.

Every session I use an event from at least one of the cards (one card from the entire pool of cards, not one card per player). If I use a card during the session, the player writes a new one to add to the pool for the next session.

So far it has worked great. My players all gave me ideas that I wouldn't have thought of, and while there have been a few silly ones in there they are all suggestions I can work with. Better yet, many of the suggestions are plot twists I can work into the ongoing story, linking the characters more directly to what is happening but in ways I didn't initially think of myself.

It's a simple idea, but it works great. Give it a try!

Three Hundred Words? Eee, Luxury . . .

by Marcus L. Rowland

Good roleplaying comes from conflicts between personality and plot. Characters who stay in character, even if it means lost opportunities or a risk of death, are more satisfying than those whose who always follow the most expedient path. Imagine meeting the character; would you prefer someone with a strong personality and opinions, or someone who never gave a straight answer and instantly changed their attitude if it gave them a tiny advantage?

One approach is to try to sum up the character in a few words and see if he, she, or it still sounds interesting. If the summary is little more than "barbarian with a big axe," more work may be needed. A challenging way to do this is to write the summary in exactly a hundred words plus title, a literary form known as a Drabble.

Here's an NPC example, from one of my more melodramatic Edwardian adventures; this accidentally turned into blank verse as I wrote it:

Femme Fatale

An aristocratic damsel in distress,
pale foreign beauty held in durance vile.
Beware this stranger,
those who aid her are soon in danger.

Strange plots and stratagems abound,
mysterious voyages and cargoes are found,
and desperate traps.

How lucky to find such protectors,
to clothe her, expensively, as befits her rank,
to follow this tangled trail wherever it leads,
and earn her thanks.

No surprise if romance is in the air,
and rivals for her hand take less than perfect care.

The instigator of it all, she is content to wait.
She plans a cunning trap, and is its bait . . .

Give it a try; you might find new depths in your characters!

* * *

*Marcus Rowland previously explored this idea in greater depth as part of an article on characterization in **Odyssey Magazine** issue 7 in 1999. This magazine had very poor distribution, and it will probably be new to most **Pyramid** readers.*

Mélange of Magical Creatures III

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

Hand Squirrels

*"In the dark, a man in black perched on a rooftop overlooking the park. His eyes narrowed as a squirrel ran the length of the roof, stopping in front of him. The man dropped a small nut, which the rodent gobbled up quickly. The squirrel then bowed, and began to trace a complex pattern with its tail. The man chuckled as it finished its display and fixed its gaze on his hand. He then dropped the small nut remaining therein. It did not reach the roof, but was gobbled up greedily by the squirrel. The man probably would not have laughed as he jumped to the street below, had he spotted the man watching him from across the way. The bag that man held contained the squirrel holding the **real** message."*
-- *The fall of the Vanchez Crime Cartel*, Chapter II.

What started as an adaptation to help carry extra nuts and get better access to food was enhanced by runoff from magical factories. Thus was born the "hand squirrels." These otherwise ordinary brown to gray squirrels have long and well-furred tails. Since then they have been spotted fighting off small predators, and using the tails to grapple when fighting each other. They also seem to have a keen sense of direction, being able to pass messages secretly between groups. However, to be trained to carry physical objects, they become somewhat mercenary, and then will only perform if given small treats at each end. Hand squirrels are at -1 **DX** per level of encumbrance carried by thier tails.

Encountered

In any area where these creatures can be found, there are many people who can take advantage of this to pass messages in thieves' cant or military gesture secretly without making a noise or casting a spell. It is said that some mages have trained their hand squirrels the somatic components to critical spells so they don't have to make them. Others refute that this could work . . . Agents can also deliver messages while possessing hand squirrels, releasing the spell as soon as the signal is done.

Industrial Uses

"Youths commit misdemeanors by teaching squirrels obscene hand signals. These squirrels teach other squirrels these habits. It can take over a week for a druid to deprogram them and get the face and voice of the culprits."
-- Inspector Bonlieu, Metro West P.D.

A large number of scout units have taught the squirrels to give messages only to those who sign a correct countersign. Their prehensile tail can also be used to pass small items, letters, and coins. Personal magical items can include wristbands improve one's manual dexterity, or a full set of guards that make one double-jointed. The most unorthodox use is in a magical item of partial shapeshifting that give a human a tail of proportional size.

Adventure Possibility

In a small village, a messenger boy's hand squirrel has made a friend. It appears to be a foreign military's squirrel. Can the PCs decode its signs and learn what it knows? Will the local military pay for this information, and the animal itself? Will the boy's squirrel pine away if its mate is taken away? Can the heroes deal with delivering a litter of baby squirrels?

Hand Squirrel

Appearance: A squirrel, coloration varies greatly in natural colors: red, black, gray.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 2; **DX** 14; **IQ** 4; **HT** 14.
Will 11; Per 12; Speed 8; Dodge 11; Move 8.
SM -4; 2 lbs.
Traits: Absolute Direction; Catfall; Claws; Clinging (Wood); Extra Arm 1 (Extra Flexible); Perfect Balance; Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Striker (Tail: Crushing); Super Jump 1; Wild (or Domestic) Animal.
Skills: Jumping-14.

Fireberry Trees

"The thief slipped the book into his satchel, and slipped past the bubbling apparatus, and back out the hole in the window that he had carefully cut. As he hit the ground, he heard a dog growling, and a guard shouted, "Stop!" Of course, he bolted. The guard threw a hammer, and the thief dove behind a tree. Unfortunately, the hammer hit the tree, causing fruit to rain down over him. That was the last he heard of the world until he was calmed down at the prison by the healer."
-- Retro-scrying report, P.D. No. 3

These obviously artificial trees have been carried across the known world by alchemists and black-powder experts. These deciduous trees have unusually straight brown trunks and narrow leaves. They are best known for their berries, which explode concussively when dried and hurled. In the wild, falling sun-dried berries explode, scattering seeds to the wind, and harming competing plants at the tree's base. Ripe, juicy berries are harvested for their rich, spicy flavor that is found in many chili recipes. Adding dried diced berries to foods in just the right amounts is an art form, and the hallmark of a good chef. Despite this, every year, there are people injured when eating food made by a chef that is just a little too daring. Despite all the propaganda about the berries, it is the trees' wood that is the main industrial product, while the berries are merely a by-product. The bark is fireproof and after a few decades can even resist a strong forest fire.

Encountered

Underworld connections in most cities can produce dried berries under the name "cherry bombs" with a simple Streetwise roll. The wood makes for a good shield against flaming arrows and dragons; heroes may be sent to acquire such a shield as part of a quest. Because of the use in explosives, fireberry trees can be found growing all over some steamtech battlefields. Heroes can also find such berries by accident as part of a ploy by villains to pass off fireberries as safe berries.

Industrial Uses

"Yeah, I heard a story about a druid that was getting upset about people cutting down his forest, so he cross-bred fireberry trees and tree ents. They say the enemy burned down the forest from eight directions at once, rather than try to take it."
-- Heard inside the Alchemists' café, *The Simmering Cauldron.*

While it is the berries that have the public's attention, it is the wood that interests companies. When grown straight and tall in an orchard, the fire resistant wood can be used to make barrels, sconces, torch stands, exterior siding, furniture, and fireproof safe linings (Highly Resistant, see page 433 of the ***Basic Set***). Treat this as expensive durable fireproof ablative (see page 5 of ***Vehicles Expansion 2***).

The orchard can let people in every year to pick the ripe berries at a "discount price" per basket before the fruit become dangerous. There is little demand for these berries dried. Possessing whole, dried berries is a fineable offence in many regions. It is kept a little-known fact that powdered, dried berries make a substance that explodes if jostled or lit . . .

adding a stabilizing agent such as sawdust makes this similar to dynamite. Thus begin the Explosives and Traps skills in a world (see page 194 of the **Basic Set**).

Adventure Possibility

The Adventurers are hired to sabotage a bandit's camp. The plan is to replace their reserve of firewood with fireproof fireberry wood, which will be recovered after the raid. The plan involves that the PCs distract the guards while the "B" team slips in with a cord of wood. Then, an inside agent on their woodcutting team will replace used volumes from the front of the stack with real wood from the back. Fireberry wood will then be stacked to make the reserve seem full. Any information the heroes can gain as they skirt the enemy camp will be appreciated. When the next winter storm hits, they will suffer from morale problems, and be ripe for dissolution as soon as it clears.

Fireberry Trees

Appearance: A deciduous tree with dark, smooth bark.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.
HT 14, 2HP per year
DR 1 per year for the first ten years, plus DR1 for every ten years after that (Ablative).
SM+0 in one year, +1SM per 10 years.

Gloomblossom Plant

"How lovely! Just look what this does for the room. The gloomblossoms absorb the reflected sunlight here, like so. Thus, the colors on this side of the room all balance, and the excess light is gone. Now, to add light to the opposite end . . ."
-- Feng Shui master Zhu Choi in the house of Lady Baxi of Ulter.

The flowering plant known popularly as "gloomblossom" has dark leaves and blooms hiding an unusual property. As part of its nature, it actually draws sunlight from the surrounding area, as well as using what reaches its leaves. Despite this, it will die if taken to an area with direct sunlight or lacking mana. It is suspected that this plant was created artificially, with the design to grow wild, starving neighboring plants as bunches of these flowers vie for all the remaining twilight. Once there are half a dozen in a square foot, they can be in the open during the day in overcast conditions; in those circumstances, they can spread their influence over entire fields. However, an unusually strong sunny summer's day could kill them all. Each plant in a hex lowers the ambient light by -1, to a maximum net value of -9.

Encountered

The public most often encounters these plants in public theaters for lighting effects, at funerals, or around goth mansions and meetings. Gloomblossom tea is popularly called "block tea," for its sun-blocking effect. The strength of the tea determines how many cups one needs to protect one fully. The flower's oil can also work, but many find it looks too dark to rub on one's skin. Correctly applied to glasses, they could protect one from gaze attacks, assuming the magical effect is limited properly.

Adventurers will almost certainly encounter the gloomblossoms in the homes of necromancers, goths, vampires, and subterranean denizens living on the surface. Vampires will certainly have a lot of this tea about to protect them from sunlight.

Industrial Uses

"Warning! prolonged exposure to the gloomberry plant has been known to cause serious depression and metabolic

changes!"
-- Health label on a Gloomblossom Plant

Large-scale exploitation of this plant is still in its infancy. Currently, there are uses wherever excess light is undesirable. This means applications dwell mostly in deserts, as well as military and underworld operations; as such, the use of personal gloom items may be restricted by local authorities. A dark room might be good to develop mushrooms or photographs, but a stealthed carriage or boat would attract attention by its aura of gloom. Finally, an item of shadow form is said to be in the works, but no one has heard more. Some alchemists seek to breed variants that feed on infrared or ultraviolet light, allowing them to thrive underground, or in lands of perpetual night. Some suggest these variants might be able to act as heat sinks, or be invisible to x-rays.

Adventure Possibility

The heroes are hired to be part of a large hoax, perhaps as a birthday prank. They must attach pots of gloomblossom to all the windows in a house to make someone think that it is still night. The effect works too well, and some vampires (or other undead, such as ghosts) move in. The victim now sees ghosts and becomes almost too scared to return home.

Variants: These can also be used to sabotage a maze, peep holes, cameras, motor vehicles, ladar sensors and AESAs in ladar mode.

Gloomblossom Plant

Appearance: Small flowering plant.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore and Manavore.
Size: SM -4.

Reaper's Bane

"These terrors first appeared after the death siege of -20. They are a blight upon the land that ravaged the farmlands while the undead armies assaulted the cities. As if it is not enough that the walking dead slaughter all in their path, that these despoilers grow behind the battle lines to assault our food supplies."
-- Sage Andalus, *The Two Hundred Years of Silence*

These monstrosities only appear after a dark and stormy night. The entire trunk of a Reaper's Bane grows almost 50 feet within the space of a few hours. Some say it resembles a giant asparagus. Despite its appearance, its presence means almost certain death for any ordinary person who approaches it or chop it down. Animals will dislike getting within a mile of its effects, which begin at its base. Magical beings feel increasing unease the closer they get to the tower. These effects are twofold. The first is life-leeching effect that grows at a rate of one yard radius per hour: 24 yards per day, 720 yards per month, and slightly over two miles per five-month growing season. Plants in this area will not grow, and in fact will slowly wither and die.

When something living moves along the ground within the 1/4 range, then each minute make a Perception roll, modified by the speed/range table, and the Size Modifier of the subject. If a victim is noticed, then lightning strikes the core, a barbed tree shoots up where the target was standing. The sudden upshoot of spiked thorns can rend a man in pieces.

Encountered

The monstrosity should be avoided, if at all possible.

If that is impossible, then the safest way to remove the blight is with a siege engine, such as a catapult. Should that option be unavailable, one might try to bring a long chain and some oxen. One must keep the oxen as far apart as

possible, and then pull the stump out. Beware of lightning.

Industrial Uses

"The gate of the necromancer B'Silker was guarded by two of these abominations. All who sought to enter had to run the gauntlet and pass next to the towers. It was very effective in keeping warm bodies from the main gate."
-- Tan'wey the scout, *Sieges of Darkness*

A desperate enough society *could* use these behemoths as part of an energy collection network. A metallic grid set above them could intercept the lightning, preventing the rise of the pain-barb trees. A society that invoked a large number of pain-barb trees could create an almost unlimited supply of firewood.

Adventure Possibility

The adventurers are hire because they can do the impossible. They are to bring back a Reaper's Bane "alive." Since it and its immediate vicinity are immune to direct magics, transportation will have to be mundane. The two most difficult tasks involve finding one before it is destroyed by local forces, and unearthing its roots safely.

Reaper's Bane (Core)

Appearance: Core: 45-foot-tall gray asparagus.
Category: Plant, Undead.
Diet: Life force, lightning.
Perception: 12.
HT 16, 170 HP.
SM +4; 5 tons; DR 6.
Traits: Frightens Animals; Infravision; Lifebane; Mana Damper; No Fine Manipulators; Vibration Sense; Wild Animal.

Pain-barb tree (striker)

Appearance: Pale gray sharp, prickly leafless tree, 10' tall.
Category: Plant, Undead.
Diet: Life force, lightning.
ST 20; **DX** -; **IQ** -; **HT** 12; HP 30.
Speed 6; Move 6 (vertical).
SM +2; 1,000 lbs; DR 4.
Traits: Combat Reflexes; Frightens Animals; Lifebane; Mana Damper; Sharp Claws.
Skills: Brawling-12.
Damage: 2d-1 (imp)

Variant: Reaper's Widow

Appearance: As per Reaper's Bane, above.
Category: Plant, Undead.
Diet: Life force, lightning.
Perception: 12.
HT 16, 170 HP.
SM +4; 5 tons; DR 6; DR20 (lightning only).
Traits: Frightens Animals; Lifebane; Innate Attack: Lightning 3d (Burning, Long Range, Surge); Mana Damper; No Fine Manipulators; Wild Animal.
Skills: Innate Attack-12.
Notes: Appearing similar to the main stalk of the Reaper's Bane, this variant will hurl lightning at any walking creature

within half its life-leeching range.

Honeyhat

"And so, we see that fashion has changed again. Out are the stripes, and in with spots. Courtiers are already scrambling to get the latest cues for their 'wear. Yes, we accept no imitations, as oracles say that the magic-resistant biting insects will be extra fierce this year."
-- Memoirs of Lady Yadei Odiva, *Years at the Royal Court.*

This symbiotic animal was created as a fashion accessory that can change with the times and keep down magic-resistant insects. The honeyhat is also popular for the traveler in any humid location, especially where pheremones or magical wards would be offensive. These creatures emit a slight sweet smell which can also be tailored as a perfume, even to "no scent." They also eat moths and their larvae when stored in a closet. The first were made in certain colors, but the latest can have their coats change color, consistancy, length, and to some extent, texture when fed specific foods. All tailoring foods are expensive. Connoisseurs often keep two of the same style, and keep them in separate rooms in case one gets sick. While the basic design of these fashion accessories remains the same, each season brings out new varieties in shape and features. Trends are often artificial, created by the local manufacturers. Some include adding wings, extra eyes, or more carrying capacity. The normal lifespan is six years, but when it only has a month left, its fur starts turning irrevocably gray from the inside. When its fur is completely gray, it dies.

Encountered

This combination frog-bat is a mostly-sessile symbiont, thus the heroes will usually be coming to them. Proper care of these dependant creatures may require more time and care than most adventurers are able to afford. Rental may certainly be possible, but the quality and availability cannot be assured.

Industrial Uses

"Yes, there was a wave of troublemaking pages that somehow managed to get ahold of some color-food, and fed it to flies. They then released them at a party, and all the hats belonging to the Duchess and her visitors turned striped over the evening. For the rest of the season, stripes were the in thing, they say."
-- Milanitus, Chief of Security, *Too Noble to Bleed?*

Many establishments have purchased factory rejects that are unworthy to be worn. These are placed in strategic locations to keep insects away from doorways, windows, and some tables. It has been whispered that large chimeric projects have been undertaken, but most groups agree that gengineering any creature large enough to eat a child makes the public nervous.

Adventure Possibility

The heroes encounter on the road, or are hired to protect, a small caravan. Just before the last intersection outside the destination city, there is a mob waiting. They claim that breeding the creatures is a form of cruelty! The mob is riled enough to ignorantly "punish" anyone who opposes them.

Honeyhat (see Skullcat, page 146 of *Transhuman Space*)

Appearance: Varies, generally a furry hat, although some have feathers. At the top is a mouth with a sticky frog tongue to catch insects.
Category: Mammal (some avian).
Diet: Insectivore.
ST 3; **DX** 10; **IQ** 3; **HT** 12.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 5.5; Dodge 8; Move N/A.

SM -2; 1-2 lbs; DR 1.

Traits: Domestic Animal; Early Maturation 2; Extra Arm (striker); Innate Attack (linked, sticky); Fur; No Legs; No Fine Manipulators; Perk (Coat can change color when fed specific hormones); Sanitized Metabolism; Self Destruct; Short Lifespan 3; Sterile; Temperature Tolerance 2.

Skills: Brawling-12.

Aria Hares

"Listen? Do you hear that? That is the banshee-like wail that signifies death! It is so close to you, that it heralds doom, should you choose to continue!"
-- The Mad Oracle Yeshari to the King of Zulan, before his last battle.

These singing rabbits can act like parrots, picking up sounds and projecting their voices yards away. Popular myth suggests that these creatures were bred as pets, but escaped to the wild. The parroting trait was dominant, and thus spread through the populations. They generally imitate frightening sounds they have heard, especially when something is dying.

Encountered

It is considered a very bad omen to be near a wailing aria rabbit. In the wild, they are often encountered when one is hunting a predator; these rabbits will imitate their various cries. They can be easily trained to imitate sounds on command. They can learn notes, even long symphonies. These rabbits can be taught to learn from to only one person, or a person giving certain foods.

Industrial Uses

"Ah, opening night at the opera. It opens with troubadour Josien, with his backup chorus of aria rabbits. He has trained them to switch keys as he dances. A few critics complain that in his vainglory, he has taught a line to sing in his voice . . ."
-- Quilia Rusini, *Art Review*

Many schools have a band that is composed of "synthesized" music in which students "program" rabbits to sing specific tones on cue. The stages of cacophony are usually a passing phase, but a rare few individuals stick with it and bring harmonies to the world. Some locations have a hutch wherein one can place a trained rabbit that knows different songs. The most extravagant are built into organs that can form powerful harmonies of up to dozens of the beasts. A few have shown the aptitude to listen while a certain trigger is present, repeat during another trigger, and forget under a third. Some people have these rabbits take messages at doors.

Adventure Possibility

The lord of a local realm has a dangerous carnivorous pet that he caters to. Thus, he has commissioned the heroes to bring one or more aria rabbits to the wild, and capture the sounds of one of his pet's species. A creature of the opposite sex, to be exact. Every second of sound brings more money.

Aria Rabbits

Appearance: As ordinary rabbits, see ***Bestiary.***
Category: Mammal
Diet: Herbivore
ST 3; **DX** 14; **IQ** 3; **HT** 14.
Will 11; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM -4; 3-5 lbs; DR 2.

Traits: Acute Hearing 2; Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Eidetic Memory (Sound only); Enhanced Move 1 (Ground move 14); Horizontal; Mimickery; Night Vision 3; Peripheral Vision; Protected Sense (Hearing); Quadruped; Sharp Claws; Voice.
Skills: Survival-13; Ventriloquism-14.

Crystal Fish

"When these first were first discovered, explorers picked them up and stored them in small bags. Later, they were put on shelves. It would be an understatement to say that the first cataloguers were surprised when they went to clean the display and the wet "rocks" started to flop around."
-- Ytkad Wortmam, *Years at the Imperial Archive*

These mostly transparent fish are native to tropical lagoons. They seem to have originated in coastal pools that empty with each tide. They use sunlight to break down hydrogen from water, and thus live in the top 10-30 feet of the sea. Their durable nature makes them virtually immune to predations of any fish that cannot simply swallow them whole. Their near-transparent nature makes them very hard to see in water.

Encountered

These creatures are easy pets to take care of, and are hard to starve. They require no food, only water and sand. When one travels, they can be kept dry, and hibernate in a low energy state, taking energy from the air. One can even leave them to dry in different positions. Some people set up whole dioramas.

Industrial Uses

"Legends speak of some crystal fish breeds that can store, and then later emit concentrated light to blind foes."

"But that's just nonsense, isn't it?" -- Tiela Jirtin, *Study of Light*

By placing an inverted glass over the fish bowl, these pets can be used to create the *elixir of life,* which is called oxygen by some. Many workplaces have these in the office places along with plants to increase the air quality. Vendors warn that one must be sure the pet has a good air flow. Some have found ways of grinding their scales to form lenses. Some arid countries have imported them to deal with sand clogging channels. When crystal fish are in their larval state, they consume a lot of sand. In enchantment, for each multiple of standard wealth spent in refined crystal fish, the enchantment cost for [metalic golems](#) (in energy) is reduced by 1%.

Adventure Possibility

A traveling salesman peddles "hand crafted crystal" to the merchant guild. When the heroes witness a local pickpocket stealing one, things change. Surprised, he accidentally drops it in a puddle in front of the heroes, and just as shocked when it comes to life, something's afoot! It is then announced that the last item sold was a large conglomerate statue made by gluing together hundreds of smaller "sculptures." How can the heroes inform the noble without either losing honor?

Crystal Fish

Appearance: Mostly transparent fish or seahorses.
Category: Elemental-kin (Earth).
Diet: Photovore, lithovore.
ST 1-2; **DX** 11; **IQ** 2; **HT** 15; 2-4 HP.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 6.5; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -5; 1-5 lbs; DR 1.

Traits: Aquatic; Body of Stone; Chameleon 4; Ichythoid; Peripheral Vision; Wild Animal.

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. Rodents that can parrot hand-signals are not far-fetched. Plants that cause the optical illusion of diminished light are not infeasible. Animals bred as hats can be found in the hard-science *Transhuman Space.* If budgigars can parrot, larger mammals surely can. The crystal fish might be all biological, yet with transparent tissue, going dormant when out of water. The reaper's bane might instead poison the ground, and the second stage grows from the roots, and sprouts the plant's seeds; this process would take *years* instead of seconds.

Additional Material

- "Golem Construction System for *GURPS*" by Steven E. Ehrbar

* * *

Many thanks to my beloved for the introduction to the creatures of her nightmares.

Special thanks to Fred Fuchs for his Fish.

Appendix Z

Weaknesses of the Flesh
for *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

Your character just suffered a terrible blow; he has suffered an Ability Drain, a permanent loss of 1 or more ability score points. This can range from sapping the character's Intelligence to withering his Strength. The end result is the same: that character will never be as powerful as he once was. After all, Hit Points can be healed, even Ability Damage eventually returns. But Ability Drain is permanent. Right?

Wrong. A 4th-level paladin and cleric spell, *restoration,* restores all points permanently drained from a single ability score. If you use the NPC spell casting rules, a 7th-level cleric casting the spell costs 290 gold pieces (spell level (4) × caster level (7) = 280) + (10% of material component cost (100/10) = 10) = 290 gold pieces.

For just under 300 gold pieces, the loss of 18 points of Strength can be easily restored. With all that healing at a character's fingertips, fear of life and limb are significantly reduced. What's a GM to do?

One way to make the ruinous effects of combat more painful for characters is to make Ability Drain only healable through a *regenerate* spell. On the other hand, players might become frustrated with the inability to remove the penalties, and understandably so; the loss of 2 points in an ability can affect skills, combat, and saving throws. Consider the loss of two Dexterity points. Nine skills suffer a -1 penalty (Balance, Escape Artist, Hide, Move Silently, Open Lock, Ride, Sleight of Hand, Tumble and Use Rope), and the character's Armor Class bonus and Reflex save are also reduced by one.

A possible compromise is that Ability Drain can be healed by *restoration* but there are lingering effects, not quite as bad as the loss of an ability score but still a reminder that the character shouldn't run risking life and limb without some thought to the consequences. And of course, all these effects can still be healed by *regenerate,* a much more powerful (and thus more expensive) spell.

Drain Conditions

There are different levels of Ability Drain. The penalty is always one-half of the points drained, rounded up. All penalties are considered Ability Modifiers.

Charisma

Facial Scar: The character has a scar that cannot be easily concealed. It bestows a penalty on all Diplomacy and Disguise checks.

Throat Injury: The character has a raspy voice as a result of her injury. She suffers a penalty on all Perform checks.

Constitution

Constant Pain: The character's wounds never heal quite right. He suffers a penalty to Concentration checks.

Lung Damage: The character can rarely get a full lungful of air. She suffers a penalty to all checks to hold her breath.

Stomach Injury: The character suffers from ulcers as a result of a stomach injury. When eating food, he must make a

Fortitude save (DC Ability Drain) or be sickened.

Liver Damage: A deep wound has pierced the character's liver. The character suffers a penalty to all saves against poison.

Dexterity

Knee Injury: The character's knee is permanently cracked. She suffers a penalty to all Tumble checks.

Missing Finger: The character is missing a finger. He suffers a penalty to Sleight of Hand checks.

Missing Toe: The character is missing a toe. She suffers a penalty to all Balance checks.

Intelligence

Hallucinations: The character sometimes sees things that aren't there. She suffers a penalty to Spot checks.

Flashbacks: The character has recurring flashes back to when he suffered the Ability Drain. He suffers a penalty to Knowledge checks.

Insomniac: The character has difficulty sleeping, filled with nightmares when she suffered the Ability Drain. She suffers a penalty to Concentration checks.

Strength

Arm Damage: The character's arms are weakened. He suffers a penalty to Climb checks.

Leg Damage: The character's legs are weak. He suffers a movement penalty of 5 feet for every 2 points of ability damage.

Ankle Damage: The character's ankles are weak. He suffers a penalty to Jump checks.

Wisdom

Missing Ear: The character is missing an ear. He suffers a penalty to Listen checks.

Eye Damaged: One of the character's eyes has difficulty seeing. She suffers a penalty to Search checks.

Nose Damaged: The character has difficulty smelling things. He suffers a penalty to Survival checks.

Pyramid Review

Wild Talents: Superhero Roleplaying in a World Gone Mad

Published by **ArcDream Publishing**

Written by Greg Stolze, Dennis Detwiller, Kenneth Hite, & Shane Ivey with David Blewer, Colin Chapman, Edward Dean III, Brad Elliott, & Matthew Widner

Cover by Christopher Shy

Illustrated by Samuel Araya, Todd Shearer, & Christopher Shy

238-Page Full Color Hardback; $39.95

So *Wild Talents: Superhero Roleplaying in a World Gone Mad,* the sequel to *Godlike: Superhero Roleplaying in a World on Fire, 1936-1946* -- the most interesting of 2001's World-War-II-themed RPGs, has finally arrived. Both are superhero RPGs, but where *Godlike* presented a desperate time of men at war wielding small, focused, even odd talents or powers through will alone, *Wild Talents* is broader, a pure superhero RPG, complete with mutants, sorcerers, aliens, alien invasions, avenging angels, and cape and cowl.

Not just a supers system though. Beyond its mechanics, *Wild Talents* examines the formulation of the superhero universe, presents a sequel to *Godlike* as an example, and gives a gritty down-at-heel scenario suited to a low-powered *Wild Talents* game. All of this is presented in a clean looking hardback that includes some fantastic illustrations, of which there are not enough.

Apart from its setting, what set *Godlike* apart from its peers was its mechanics. Both it and *Wild Talents* employ the ORE or "One Roll Engine" System. Using only pools of 10-sided dice, a single roll determines how well and how fast a character performs a task, and in combat, where he hits an opponent and how hard. What counts in any roll is the value (Height) and number (Width) of matched results. For example, Henchman Harry takes a pot-shot at Torchlight with his pistol. With Body 3 and Pistol 3, Harry rolls 6d, getting results of 1, 4, 8, 8, 8, and 10. This is read as Width 3, Height 8, or 3×8. From that, he has shot Torchlight in the torso for Width+2 or 5 killing damage.

The larger the pool, the greater the chances of rolling matches, but the ORE System adds two wrinkles. The first is Hard Dice, which always have a value of 10. Representing the maximum of any skill or ability, they are not as flexible. For example, with pistol 1d+2hd, Harry's Hard Dice guarantee a head shot every time. The second wrinkle is Wiggle Dice, which can be any value, representing more carefully judged skill or ability use, and are used to make matches with the dice rolled. With even 2d+1wd, Harry can inflict a lesser wound rather than kill.

Wild Talents characters are comprised of dice assigned to stats, (superhuman) hyperstats, skills, (superhuman) hyperskills, and Miracles (or superpowers). The more flexible the die type, the more it costs -- Hard Dice cost more than ordinary dice, and Wiggle Dice cost more than Hard Dice.

In *Godlike* the base character is a trained soldier with 25 points spent on his Talent, resulting in a relatively powerful, narrowly focused ability. This is the equivalent to 125 points in *Wild Talents,* wherein players have a total of between 200 and 500 points to spend. The GM sets this point total according to the type of game desired. *Wild Talents* introduces Archetypes, which determines the source of a character's powers, be it cyborg, parahuman, or technological.

Characters can have multiple Archetypes, further defining the character and providing a measure of protection. For example, when an anti-mutant ray zaps Torchlight's light-based powers, his Technological Archetype prevents any gadgets from being effected.

Miracles are built with up to four Qualities: Attacks, Defends, Robust (Miracle works regardless of distraction), and Useful Outside of Combat. The number of Qualities sets a Miracle's base dice cost to which can be assigned cost-increasing Extras like Locked On and Radioactive, and Flaws such as Attached and Touch Only that decrease it. Dice pool size determines range, spread, and capacity, so Flight 6d gives a flight speed of 64mph, while Body 6d lifting power of 1,600 pounds. Power Stunts can also be bought for most Miracles, for example Barnstormer adds dice to roll when maneuvering through a city skyscraper canyons. Other Miracles are straight level based, for example Heavy Armor and Immunity.

Wild Talents includes the usual superpowers, from Absorption to Unconventional move, the player having to decide the exact nature and parameter of each Miracle, with the point being that a power is not going to be the same for every hero. Sidebars suggest how Miracles might be used to simulate powers of the comics, such as using Containment and Attach with Heavy Armor to create Force Fields; or Extra Tough, Flight, Harm, Hyperbody, and Immunity all Attached to Heavy Armor to do Power Armor.

In addition, *Wild Talents* introduces several Miracles not found in *Godlike* -- Telepathy, Cosmic Power/Spell Casting and Gadgeteering/Enchanting. These last two work to simulate other Miracles and can be very expensive in terms of Will. Although the designers go to great lengths to explain how each works, some examples would have helped.

Some powers are particular to *Wild Talents* and the ORE system. For example, Aces gives dice to add to any roll, Jinx gobbles an opponent's dice, and Indomitable Will and Will Battery each tie into the underlying feature of both *Godlike* and *Wild Talents:* Will. In *Godlike,* Talents could detect another and in a contests of Will cancel his Talent. In Wild Talents, Willpower must be bid to activate a Miracle. If the roll is made and the Miracle works, the Willpower bid is kept; if not, it is lost. Willpower can also be lost from trauma, tragedy, and defeat, but gained from rest, heroism, good performance, rolling well, and defeating a fellow superhuman. Every superhuman has Base Will from which his Willpower is fuelled, and certainly players will want to buy extra Base Will and Willpower during character creation.

With "Changing the Course of Mighty Rivers," Ken Hite guides us through "Building Superheroic Histories." Essentially, this asks how much do you want Talents to change your world? The author uses four design axes, each with five levels that help a GM set his campaign's parameters. The Axes are Red, Historical Inertia measuring how much Talents can change history; Gold, Talent Inertia or how much the Talents change themselves; Blue or "The Lovely And The Pointless," how much paranormal and alien influences there are; and Black, Moral Clarity, is the world morally black and white, or does it contain shades of grey? Push all four to the maximum to get a Four-Color world. The essay also discusses the nature of realism in a Talent setting and how Talents fit into it before exploring common trigger points for Alternate Histories, coming right up to date with 2001.

Having proved that he can write on both the horror and alternate history genres, Hite applies his knowledge of the latter to the superhero genre. Not surprisingly, this is as good a piece as you would expect and the best essay on the genre and RPGs to be published since Chad Underkoffler's ***Truth & Justice.***

The world post-*Godlike* is described in "A World Gone Mad," which parallels our own modern history, but with some interesting inversions of Cold War politics. The Soviets and the Americans backed different nations in the Middle East -- Israel is Soviet backed, Syria U.S. backed; Talents were used in a militarized Space Race, reaching Mars in 1969; and it culminates in an alien invasion that destroyed Mercury. Other notable differences include a united India as a world power that leads the computer industry, and the Talent volunteers, a non-political organization that helps worldwide.

Wild Talents closes with "White Knights, Black Knights," a scenario that is sadly not set in the *Wild Talents* universe. Set in an alternative 1970s in which several low powered Talents find themselves framed for murder.

Just like *Godlike,* the default for Wild Talents is a gritty deadly setting. Referencing comic books such as *The Dark Knight Returns, Top 10, The Ultimates,* and *Watchmen,* it is not by default a Four-Color setting, but can be with a

tweak or three. Optional rules given and explained throughout the book can be combined with Hite's essay to create the desired setting. The default setting does lack magic or aliens. This is not to say that they cannot appear or at least their effects simulated, but primarily Talents are driven by Will alone.

Wild Talents is not, however, *Godlike's* equal. It lacks the focus, some of the flavor and the setting, and the fact that *Godlike* essentially pushed at the genre's boundaries. The problem is that individually, *Wild Talents'* four elements -- the ORE system, the Hite essay, the *Wild Talents* history, and the scenario (to a lesser extent) -- are excellent. Together though, they almost -- but do not quite -- gel. The real problem is that the scenario is not set in the *Wild Talents* universe, when it should have been. The ORE system is also problematic because in differing from both normal linear and normal dice pool mechanics, its exact workings are not necessarily intuitive. More examples of both the mechanics and character creation would have helped counter this.

Nevertheless, the mechanics are supported by Hite's essay which should be read by every superhero RPG GM and the flavorsome alternate history provides a dark sequel to *Godlike.* As to the game itself, *Wild Talents: Superhero Roleplaying in a World Gone Mad* gives a pleasingly harsher edge to the superhero RPG, while offering room to soften that edge.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Gheos

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Designed by René Wiersma

Graphics by Joshua Cappel

60 triangular tiles, 12 scoring tokens, 6 wooden civilization markers, 30 wooden followers, rules (in English, German, & Dutch); full color, boxed, two to four players; $24.99

We're all used to being like gods when we play certain games, but in *Gheos* from Z-Man Games players actually take on the role of deities.

The object of the game is to have the most points from followers when civilization peaks.

The gods (that's you, the players -- two to four of you) create a new land by fitting together triangular sections on the table. Your hand always consists of two such pieces. Some have little strips of land, others have larger, continent-sized masses, and all separate the lands with thick rivers and small lakes. The segments may have other features like wheat symbols, temples, and pyramids.

When you place a piece, you can either start one of the six civilizations or take a follower from an already placed culture (there are five colored cubes each in the same colors as the civilizations). If you're lucky enough to have wheat on your chosen landmass, when you start a new tribe there you automatically get a free follower for each such symbol. A new color cannot begin on the same island as someone else.

Everyone has three scoring chips, and you can play one on your turn to get points (any chips not played before the game ends are lost, so you can't hold out too long). Count up the cup symbols that share the land with each civilization; that's how many points you get for each follower. If the red tribe is in an area with three cups, you get three points for each of your red cubes. No one "owns" a civilization, so you score for every color for which you have adherents, not just the ones you might have placed.

Being a god, you can alter the terrain on a whim -- simply remove a previously played triangle and put a new one in its place (sacrificing one loyal follower to do so). You may split lands in half, forcing people there to migrate to one area or the other, or you may join two separate landmasses together. If this lets two colors occupy the same landmass, war breaks out. The newly placed tile is the break point: Count up the sword symbols on either side of it, and the civilization with the most wins. Not only is that tribe's token removed from the board, everyone has to give up any followers of that color. The culture must start again (and the gods must solicit new followers).

Placing temples also nets you points. The temples have a wheat, cup, or sword symbol, and you get points for matching symbols on the landmass to which you added the temple piece. Scattered in with the other tiles you also find epochs, moments in history when cultures achieve the next level. When they come up, everyone scores if their followers share space with a pyramid. When the last epoch is drawn or everyone runs out of scoring chips, there's one more "free" scoring round and the god who has amassed the most points worth of worship wins.

The tiles are tough, sharp little items, and most of the pawns are made of wood, so you won't lose anything through wear and tear. The counters are crystal clear so you won't strain to see what lies where. The follower cubes are small enough to worry about losing, but the good news is they don't go on the board; they just sit in front of you needing

little to no manipulation throughout the game.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment of the game is that you don't get to feel much like gods. Yes, you get to switch out land tiles, but that's about as impressive as you get. Deific elements are there, but the trappings are thin and simply overlay a "regular" war game. Obviously controlling the very continents makes you more than soldiers commanding units, but you really long for the chance to smite someone Old Testament style. Putting that aside, the strategy that underpins the game is solid, with enough control over mortal lives that your fellow divinities must step (or manifest) lively and plan ahead if they're going to outthink you. There aren't as many opportunities to mess with another player's tile placement (there's no way to plan for or block all possible maneuvers), but that leaves the war mechanic as a deliciously iffy act of sacrifice. With a lower price than other games in this vein, *Gheos* is a budget-conscious chance for gods to play dice with the universe . . . minus the dice, naturally.

--Andy Vetromile

Know What You Have Done

Every once in a while, I return to the basics for column ideas. ("Basics" here being synonymous with "Ideas I should've thought of before, but for some reason fell through the cracks.")

"'The only use of Ti Kwan Leep is self defense.' Do you know who said that? Ki Lo Ni, the great teacher."
"Oh, yeah? Well, the best de-fense is a good oh-fense. You know who said that? Mel, the cook on **Alice.**

Given the nature of *Pyramid* readership, I suspect many of you recognize the above quotes as being from the Frantics "[Ti Kwan Leap/Boot to the Head](#)" sketch. Regardless, it illustrates an interesting point which I'm going to use as the springboard for this column. Namely, as the second speaker above showed, the source of quotes can be murky at best, and quotes can be a useful tool for almost any creative activity.

For those of you with easy shufflable access to your music collection (iPod-people, CD-jukeboxers, keepers of crates of MP3s), here's a thought experiment. Decide whether you want to create a character, adventure, or campaign. (This technique can be used for lots of things, but those are three of the biggies that folks often create with no ideas in mind.)

Click the "shuffle" mode on your musical choice. Stop when you hear a song you like that has lyrics deeper than "Woo-wah-woooo . . ." Listen to the lyrics, carefully. Do a jewel-case or Google search, if you gotta. Then, see if you can find an inspiration. Take a lyric out of context; let your mind wander. Can you think of a situation where that would be an appropriate or worthwhile lyric?

When I conceived of this experiment on the way home from the Day Job, I utilized my own musical randomization method known as the "radio." The first tune that popped up that I found interesting was Weezer's "[Beverly Hills](#)." It's a song about someone with "nothin' in [his] pocket" bemoaning the life he doesn't have in . . . well, Beverly Hills. It contains the verse, "Preppie girls never looked at me; why should they? I ain't nobody." Now, before I did the mandatory Googling, I heard that lyric as "Preppie girls never *look* at me." A subtle distinction, perhaps, but one which sparked my imagination. (Obviously, it's okay if you mis-hear something, so long as it sparks an idea you like.) Because "preppie girls never look at me" sounds very similar to a super-power, and/or a curse. So I pondered:

What if someone had an ability that made them more transparent, depending on social class? The upper echelons of society literally can't see the person; middle-class souls see him as someone vague or indistinct. Only when surrounded with the dregs of society does the individual become fully visible, tangible, real, or the like. And, of course, for maximum impact it should probably be "always on."

In a Supers campaign, this would be an interesting *Invisibles* or *Wild Cards*-type power; fairly low-powered and flavorful, despite being really easy to explain.

In a Horror campaign, this character becomes an ideal antagonist. Imagine a Jack the Ripper-esque character, who is no more substantial than a shadow to those of any means. The investigators, almost certainly living some sort of middle-class-or-better lifestyle, have no chance of interacting with him directly, and can only be witness to his horrific effects. (Of course, intangibility runs both ways, and while at their social standing they aren't in any danger from the social-shade.) To thwart him, then, the heroes would need to discard the trappings of their social level and "lower" themselves into another world . . . one where they don't know the rules, where they are crawling along the underbelly of society, and they're placing themselves directly in the accessible realm of their seeming quary.

If I do say so myself, that's not bad inspiration for a random lyric from a geek-rock band.

Inspiration can run both ways, where you know the desired destination first and pick an appropriate song. For example, back in college my friend Matthew ran a supers campaign inspired from and shaped by the Genesis song "Domino" off the *Invisible Touch* CD (an album that was required to be owned by everyone of our narrow generation). In addition to providing a "soundtrack" offering, this song provided a cornucopia of [lyrics,](#) any of which would be

appropriate for adventure titles, character inspiration, or the like. (That's a benefit of choosing a 10-minute song, even if that length is greater than most fledgling campaigns.)

I don't have any recollection or notes from that campaign, but if I were to draw similar inspiration from that song today, here's what I'd come up with at a cursory glance:

Character Inspiration

- "A hundred crazy voices call my name." -- Perhaps a character who, upon hearing his name, has a change of personality or powers
- "I fight to rise from this river of hell." -- "river of hell" could be interpreted as the River Styx; literally, the character needs to keep fighting (perhaps literally, perhaps by undertaking some mission) to keep from being swept away by death
- "Sheets of double glazing help to keep outside the night; only foreign city sirens can cut through." -- Perhaps a force-field manipulator, albeit one with some kind of weakness or hindrance (loud sounds? unswerving respect for authority figures?)
- "Act as if it is perfectly clear" -- Although also suited as an adventure title, let's interpret it literally. What if the person this quote applies to someone with an odd form of X-Ray vision . . . perhaps one that will only serve to confirm what he "believes" to be there (acting as if it's perfectly clear), resulting in a kind of one-sided "20 Questions" game as his powers seek to confirm his act: "Okay; I'm looking through the door of this office. I see multiple desks . . . no? One desk. Yes; one desk. Made of wood? Great; wood desk. It has five drawers . . . no?"

Adventure Titles (Placed in order of how I'd probably run them)

- "The Glow of the Night"
- "Pointless Violence" -- A great adventure name in any setting, genre, or time
- "In Silence and Darkness"
- "Another Long and Sleepless Night" -- typing up hooks from the first adventure?

In less than 20 minutes of utilizing this process, including the typing, I have four characters and four adventure "hooks." Not too shabby. And, again, there's nothing that says you need to keep the quotes around once you've gotten your inspiration; if you find it distasteful that you were deeply moved by some lyric, it can be discarded, leaving nothing but the yummy fruit of your thoughts.

I might continue this next week, but until then, I note that to find a master of quotation, weaving them on the loom of possibility, one need look no further than our own lovable Ken Hite. Next time you read a column of his, take one of the items he quotes and see how it inspires *you*. You might find yourself teeming with possibilities you didn't know existed.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

Age of Ice

by Paul Drye

For the last time, Richelieu looked across the mass of trenches and siegeworks that surrounded La Rochelle. He was sure that if he'd had more time, the city would have fallen to him. It had all started so well back in September, but the winter had descended as hard as anyone could remember. Even the Pertuis d'Antioche had frozen solid, making it that much more difficult to supply his troops from the coast. Every day brought more deaths from cold and hunger, and the mood in the camps was turning dangerous. So now they were pulling back to Bordeaux, giving up their season's gains against the Huguenots. If only the cursed weather had been better!

On Homeline the weather *did* get better, as the Little Ice Age started to ease in the early part of the 17th century and faded entirely by about 1850. On Hyperborea-1 the temperature took at dramatic turn for the worse in the 1620s, and the Earth slid back into an ice age. By 1650, the climate had essentially reproduced the Younger Dryas cold snap 13,000 years previous. The world was anywhere from 10 to 20 degrees Fahrenheit cooler, with Eurasia on the stronger end of that effect. Almost 400 years later, Europe has been entirely destroyed and reborn: the old states are gone, and their colonies snuffed out or reclaimed by natives. In the warmer regions around the western Mediterranean, the Kingdom of Hatlain controls all the coasts and tries to hold its own against the tribes of the French steppes.

Homeline has an interest in the timeline because it's a good source of Renaissance art and the like. If one is willing to risk the frozen ruins of Paris or London, there are riches to be found. One trader has set up on the timeline itself, and with his skill and out-time knowledge has made himself a player in the southern lands.

Climate

Much of southern Europe is lightly wooded steppe, similar to the American West or Ukraine on Homeline. A wedge of it dips down from the Pyrenees into eastern Iberia, and is the heartland of Hatlain's farming. Along the coast of Provence and into northern Italy the land is too rugged for large-scale agriculture, and the people live on herds of sheep and goats. The Po River basin is the other major flatland area given over to grain farming.

Iberia west of a line from Cadiz to Valladolid to Bilbao is hilly and wooded, mostly pine but with some hardwoods in the south. The foresters get rich on their timber, which goes to ships and houses in the more populated east. Italy south of Rome is similarly wooded.

North Africa is even drier than in Homeline, if cooler, as moisture is sucked out of the air by the ice the dominates the seas and lands to the north. The Sahara away from the coast is uninhabitable even for the hardiest desert nomads.

Dominating the whole scene, however, are the freezing parts of Europe. North of 45°, the steppe and pine woods give way to cold bogs, where deep permafrost prevents liquid water from draining away. Eventually, once one gets to the

southern coast of England (the Channel is now just a few miles wide at the Pas de Calais), the permafrost reaches the surface. Inhospitable, windy tundra and icy deserts rule all the rest of the way to the North Pole.

Though the Earth is deep in another ice age, it's still too early on for glaciers to have advanced very far; the cold might keep snow from melting, but it also inhibits precipitation for lack of moisture. The north face of the Alps is only just starting to become ice-bound, as are Scandinavia and the Scottish highlands. Western Europe doesn't lack for ice, though, as the Atlantic as far south as Cornwall is choked with pack ice during the winter, and the North Sea and Baltic (the latter now a large freshwater lake) are invariably frozen over from November to April. In the summer the solid ice retreats to the northern fringe of Scotland but icebergs often drift south into the Bay of Biscay, sometimes even grounding themselves in the north of Iberia.

The Kingdom

Homeline's main contact with Hyperborea-1 is through Hatlain, the successor to the Spanish Habsburg kingdom of Iberia and southern Italy. Its lands were the most habitable ones in western Europe when the weather turned for the worse in the 1600s, and as the old order collapsed it suffered under waves of refugees from France, Germany, and the Balkans.

The capital, and the largest city in Iberia, is Saragoss (the equivalent of Homeline Zaragoza). As well as being home to the king, it is the most important inland port for the entire region. Barselon handles the coastal traffic, and is the major ship-building center for all of western Europe. In Italy, the kingdom's main cities are -- in modern Hyperborea's Hungarian-influenced Italian -- Roma and Napolya. A strip of coastal land through Provence connects the two, but it is cold and heavily watered by runoff from glaciers of the Massif Central and the western Alps; Homeliners find it reminiscent of the Scottish highlands.

A similar strip of land along the North African coast completes Hatlain's enclosure of the western Mediterranean. Their presence here is restricted to seaside villages, though Tunis is a naval base protecting the sole strait between the eastern and western Mediterranean now that Sicily is attached to Italy at Calabria.

Infinity puts the total population of the kingdom at three to four million, which is extremely low for this part of the world -- it is, for example, less than Homeline had here in 200 BC. The upheavals of the new ice age have been so great that nearly the entire population of western Europe starved to death before learning how to use crops more suited to the frosts and snows, or even switch to nomadic herding north of the Pyrenees and Alps. In the meantime, wildlife and large pine forests have grown in the region, and there is still much empty land. In the last 100 years, though, things have turned around and Hatlain is growing at a slowly increasing pace.

The Church

Hatlain's existence as a viable state owes a lot to family connections between the nobles of Iberia and Italy: after all, the two regions were already connected under the Habsburgs when the climate started to sour. The Habsburgs themselves are gone, but the Molinas, the de la Cuevas, and others had holdings on both sides of the western Mediterranean and provided a framework for the re-establishment of feudal government.

Their efforts would have been unrewarded if there hadn't been for farmers and merchants to build on, though, and they made it through the worst times of the 17th century because of the Catholic church. The church was already retrenching as the Thirty Years War got underway when the temperature diverged from Homeline's; their efforts had them thinking about adaptation just as it was most needed. The Inquisitorial court in Zaragoza became the seat of law for ever-increasing parts of Iberia, and eventually crossed with Papal power in central Italy to form the core of the kingdom's judiciary; the Pope is essentially the Supreme Court of Hatlain, and by Homeline standards the country is semi-theocratic. The nobility may own property and capture criminals, but the Church rules on the laws.

In return, the Church has continued its charitable role. The tithe was formalized during the upheavals of the early 17th century and is essentially a taxation system that supports a rudimentary social safety net.

The Turks

Only one European power retained any continuity through the 17th century, and that was the least "European" of them. The Ottoman Empire was near its height in the 1620s, and no part of their possessions became completely uninhabitable. The upheavals elsewhere and recurrent famines did hurt them -- their control over Africa west of Tobruk dissipated -- but the Emperor still ruled in Istanbul, the muezzins called to prayer in Jerusalem, and the Nile still flooded in Egypt.

The Turks are by far and away the greatest threat to the continuing existence of Hatlain; the fact that the two countries touch only along the Adriatic (Tripolitania is an uninhabited no-man's land) is the main reason that's kept Hatlain from falling to the Ottomans some time in the last four centuries. The people of Hatlain know it too. Their harvest festival is explicitly a celebration of three major battles (Poitiers, Lepanto, and the Hyperborean-specific Conillera) that took place against Muslim forces within the first weeks of October.

Hatlain's relations with Turkey alternate several years of frosty relations that nevertheless allow trade with a year of campaigning whenever religious hatred flares (usually in Istanbul, though Saragoss is not entirely innocent). The wars are invariably a combination of land campaigns in Italy with naval clashes in the Strait of Sicily. The fighting ends when Hatlain manages to defeat the Turkish fleet, as with enemies on other sides the Ottomans can't concentrate their attention like the western kingdom can. With that done, the Muslim forces in Italy are cut off and defeated, a treaty signed, and the war begins again a few years later.

Technology

At first glance, Hatlain is medieval: peasants farm while nobles ride, castles dot the landscape, and there's an appalling lack of sanitation. Upon closer examination, however, the previous late-Renaissance civilization on which it is based pokes through.

Before Hyperborea-1 diverged from Homeline, Europeans had developed the printing press, telescopes, and flintlock weapons (the latter only just in time). All three are found in Hatlain four centuries later. Similarly, the Columbian Exchange had already happened, so everyday food features New World imports like tomatoes, potatoes, and maize. Tobacco is a cash crop in Andalusia. Even the sciences are somewhat further ahead than might be expected, as the new European civilization builds on Galileo, Napier, and William Harvey; Descartes never published, but his ideas circulated by word of mouth in the decades before France collapsed. 150 years of printed books prior to the divergence point have kept most ideas from disappearing, and the kingdom has access to them.

The Mountebank

Freeman Reil is a former Infinity agent now turned time trader. He's used his expertise to hunt down famous art objects across the multiverse and bring them home to high-paying clients. Having made his fortune, he has taken the unusual step of retiring to Hyperborea-1. Permanently relocating to an inhabited timeline is rare, and fraught with legal hurdles, but Freeman has plenty of contacts in the Corps and large amounts of money; people inclined to cause trouble shy away from him as a hard target.

His cover is a traveler and wise man from a Christian kingdom on the far side of the Turkish Empire. While it's true a fragment of Armenia has reformed in Mesopotamia, it might as well be on the Moon for its lack of contacts with Hatlain. For Reil, the fantastic tales of the world beyond the Turks just help cement his disguise.

Since arriving in Hatlain, Reil has ingratiated himself with the king and several powerful members of the Church by becoming the "prince of retrievers" -- the Hyperboreans are no more immune to the material charms of their old civilization than Homeline. Reil uses his Homeline research team to pin down exactly where an item or resource might be found and mixes retrievals to alternately get cash from folks back home or bring a local ally onside. In the few years since he arrived, he has worked his way into a position of informal power, and avoided the usual troubles of

social climbers thanks to his near-infinite supply of largesse.

In return for his services, the king of Hatlain has granted him the fief of Val d'Aran, up in the Pyrenees near the *de facto* border between the kingdom and the tribes to the north. There he amuses himself by improving the life of his "little people" with out-time knowledge -- he's even helped re-open the local lead mine just because he can. As well as being a convenient base for further expeditions into France and England, the valley is also far enough off the beaten track that it lets Reil control how much information gets back to Homeline about his actions.

This is important to him because, as well as being a businessman and an erstwhile wise man, Freeman is the head of a group secretly dedicated to ending the Secret. When he was an Infinity agent, he favored boot-strapping various other timelines up to Homeline's level and -- in the process -- recruiting them as allies against the Centrum. Reil's other major interest is humanitarian: he thinks Infinity's pieties about cultural contamination and non-interference are abdicating their responsibilities. Were it up to him, Homeline would make more effort to help people who are less well off; anything else is just a cover for greed. When he came to the conclusion that he was never going to change Infinity's policy from the inside, he left to found his cultural retrieval service and recruit others to his cause while he was at it. Now he runs a good-sized fifth column within Infinity and Time Traders, as well as having several native recruits spread across multiple timelines. While the Corps has encountered and arrested some of these agents, through careful use of compartmentalization and anonymous communication they have little idea of the organization's size, or leadership.

Reil has one of three potential roles in an adventure. First, the time travelers may interact with him openly, receiving orders from their superiors (themselves members of Reil's group) to aid him in some frozen venture. The other roles open up if the group realize their orders are not ordinary -- too much travel to get to projectors specifically under the control of Reil's people, for example, or goals that seem remote from anything Infinity normally wants -- and that they're on the edge of some other group. If they discover Freeman's secret agenda they can then either oppose him, or he can be a useful patron for players who've come to the same moral conclusions as he has.

The Native-Born Exile

After northern Europe fell apart, any number of ethnic groups' remnants migrated south and were assimilated into the cultures of the Mediterranean. One that didn't was the English Catholics, who were grudgingly welcome in Habsburg Spain and gradually turned into an underclass like Spain's Jews and Gypsies.

One of the foremost members of this group is Maria Howard, the scion of 17th-century England's small Catholic nobility, and that's a heritage she takes seriously. While she lives in poverty, like all her people, she is well-known to all of them and is treated as their young queen no matter whether she is in her native Barselonian dock neighborhood or across the ocean in Italy. She is a roguish figure, living up to the stereotype of the English in Hatlain: traveling more often than not, and engaged in a variety of nebulous activities that short-sighted officials think of as criminal.

If Reil is an adventurer's entry point to Hatlain's upper level of society, Howard is the one to the lower classes. She is always on the lookout for an advantage, and is inclined to do anything for money if she can square it with her peculiar notions of English and Howard honor.

Adventure Seeds

You Can Have the Body: The Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus is an important figure on several timelines that hinge on the Thirty Years War, sometimes ending up as Emperor-Elect of the German Empire (a remarkable accomplishment for a Protestant) or in some other positions of semi-dominance. On timelines where he avoids or survives the Battle of Lützen and reaches old age he is usually quite sickly. An Infinity researcher has discovered that Hyperborea-1's Gustavus Adolphus died in Paris in 1641, one of many Swedish refugees from the cold. He wants to retrieve genetic samples from Gustav's body, buried in the royal cemetery, which may not have risen above freezing in all the years since. The hope is of getting insight into how to cure (and so entice) the other Gustavs across the continuum.

Traveler's Aid: Several of Freeman Reil's agents have reported strange events during nights spent in Toulouse. Reil has an idea why: The ruined city probably has a reality shard in it. His best guess is that it's a reliquary of Saint Christopher, a two-foot silver statue of its namesake that reputedly contained some hair clippings from the saint. Homeline's version of the statue (but not the hair) is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art where it displays no unusual qualities. On timelines where the reliquary and relics have not been separated, however , it's sometimes the center of strange happenings and Infinity suspects it's a single shard "piercing" multiple worlds. All are well-guarded, but Reil has come to the conclusion that the one on Hyperborea-1 is still intact and was abandoned in Toulouse when the ice came. Unfortunately, while the empty and crumbling city is not very far north of Hatlain's boundaries, it is protected by fierce local tribesman. Even worse, the shard seems to have a particular effect on Infinity personnel -- Saint Christopher is patron of travel, and it seems to home in on travelers from other timelines. Two of Reil's agents have been unable to find it despite weeks of effort, and locals aiding Reil's efforts are repulsed by seemingly random events.

On the other hand, if it can be retrieved he's sure he can do something with it (even though it's not clear what).

Uncovered: Muskari Salih is the representative of the Ottoman emperor in Saragoss, the one who keeps him apprised of business in Hatlain and passes on messages from the king. As is often the practice for ambassadors he is an intelligence agent as well, delving into the inner workings of Hatlain in search of anything that might assist his country.

Of late, he has come to the conclusion that there is some nebulous organization in Hatlain, perhaps a conspiracy plotting an uprising against the king -- though no matter what explanation he forms, Salih often finds their actions puzzling. In fact, what he has partially discovered is Infinity's operations on Hyperborea-1. It is now necessary to persuade him to look away. This is easier said than done: he is curious, well-connected, and familiar with the rough-and-tumble of espionage.

My Eye on You: Nayin Jones does not like crosstime conquerors. Her life is what it is because of one (see "Infinite Crossroads-2: Koshezak and Betenamal"), and she wants to prevent that from happening to others. While it's not explicitly part of her job she likes to keep an eye on various people who've set up shop on pre-industrial timelines, and make sure they don't have any funny ideas. Her superiors know better than to get in the way of her interest, and besides: she sometimes comes up with something interesting.

The latest figure in her sights is Freeman Reil, and anyone who may have been working with him. If that's the players' characters, she will use whatever leverage she has to turn them into double agents.

A Troublesome Gift: TEM Partners is a new enterprise looking to get into crosstime trading. They've selected Hyperborea-1as a target, and are aiming to get some gifts to Jaim II, king of Hatlain. Once in his good graces, they hope to obtain some space in Barcelon from which to operate. Their chosen cover is as Bavarian nomads, trading in the south on behalf of the relatively sophisticated kibitki-dwellers of the north. This means that the "cover-appropriate" gifts they bring are amber, animal skins, and narwhal horns supposedly from the coast of Scotland. Unfortunately, someone also thought that a live polar bear would be a good option, and that several Infinity agents should be assigned to assist the embassy as it sails from the small port of Marseille to Barcelon and then proceed inland to Saragoss.

Using The Age of Ice in Other Settings

Lots of fantasy worlds have a north. Hatlain is a chance to use some of it. Its main pre-requisite is a lost golden age (which fantasy worlds also have in abundance) along the lines of the one in H.P. Lovecraft's "Polaris." Hatlain becomes a fragment of that lost kingdom, clinging to the edge of the ice as a home base for adventurers delving into a treasured past. Even Freeman Reil can make an appearance, for who else would be most interested in that world's magic than some wizard from an advanced, southern nation?

A science fiction setting with a deep enough history (along the lines of *Fading Suns* or *Traveller,* as opposed to *Star Trek*) could use Hatlain almost as written. It's common to relegate the Earth to a position of no importance, and with enough time the cycles of the world will roll around to ice again. H. Beam Piper used a decrepitly backwards, frozen Earth to good effect in "The Keeper," which has fallen out of copyright in some of the world and can be read through Project Gutenberg at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19338/19338-h/19338-h.htm.

Tredroy Allied Guard

by Eric Funk

Introduction

There is only one body to coordinate law enforcement efforts beyond the City Council: The Watch. Responsible to the City Council, the Allied Guard were established as a body within the Watch to coordinate and catch would-be taxpayers who had not registered with the tax office (see page 143 of **GURPS Banestorm**, and "the Watch" on page 8 of **Tredroy**). In this matter, they were such a great success that the Council expanded their mandate to include other activities that were major crimes in all three cities such as murder, fraud, and grand theft. Without this law enforcement body, criminals can simply flee into another country to escape justice, and it is up to bounty hunters to return them (page 7 of **Tredroy**). TAG officers wield short staves between two and three feet long, too short to require registering with the Guild of Mercenaries (Tonfa) (page 9).

Despite this, most citizens prefer dealing with a Watch officer rather than a local Guard officer due to the Watch's limited mandate regarding petty crimes (page 7). Still, any minor law-breaking can be added to corroberating evidence and character witness in trials of larger crimes, resulting in a stiffer sentence. Alternatively, the Watch can choose to detain an individual to be arrested by the City Guard, should the situation warrant it. Touchy issues that are handled on a case-by-case basis include kidnapping or murder of someone classified as a slave in an Islamic country. Relation to other police forces usually cordial, but individual reactions vary. Depending on the crimes, a criminal might be extradited with an escort to a foreign court to be sentenced, and after the first sentence is carried out (such as jail time or punishment), they will be extradited to the second country. The trials are all carried out first so that witnesses and evidence are fresh.

> ### Useful Resources
>
> Ideally, a GM should have on hand **Banestorm** and **Tredroy** and would do well to have **Fantasy** and **Magic,** but none are neccessary to use this article as is. This article describes an international task force that is designed to help keep the peace in the triple city of Tredroy. Discussed are their mandate, recruitment process, and even some of the problems they face, and it is rounded out with an example template and character.
>
> For those without **Banestorm** or **Tredroy:** Tredroy is a mixing pot of Yrthian culture, as it is built at a fork in the Blueshoal and Lorian rivers. The city is governed from the Council Island in the center of the fork of the rivers. The three coasts each are territory of a different country, bringing in their own merchants, people, traditions, and laws.

Operations

A normal TAG patrol consists of at least three officers, sometimes called a "TAG team." The three officers serve as corroberative witnesses, and ideally to represent each quarter of the city. Under normal circumstances, the group will follow the lead of whichever officer is in their home region, but newer officers or in the case of multiple officers from the same area, seniority will usually take precedence.

The major crime that this department is set up to pursue is tax evasion. The TAG's main purpose is to identify and apprehend those who have been living in Tredroy over three months and have failed to register at a tax office (see "Taxation" on pages 7-8). The TAG are efficient at what they do, and the fines fund the operation. The hard numbers and dollars appeal to the merchants and nobles in the form of tax returns, helping resist bribes to overlook major crimes. Those with money are less likely to be bribed by it. A good payment history and a prompt payment of all taxes upon request can sometimes grant a criminal leniency if one appears penitent.

Training and Recruiting

Recruits are chosen for their powers of observation, and a basic grasp of numbers. Most TAG officers are recruited from the Watch and the local constabulary forces. The promotion is welcome, as there is slightly less danger as TAG members operate as a team rather than solo. The specific departments' officers typically know their beats better than the average TAG officer, who must have a basic familiarity with all districts as well as the Council Island. Most TAG officers know and are known by most customs officials at the gates and bridges due to the frequent crossings. Because of the scope of the TAG mandate, officers must be familiar with the customs, language, and culture of the three countries. As detectives, they must know how to read body language and quickly sort out key witnesses.

One of the more controversial aspects of the training program is the integration with the local bardic community. Few individuals know as much about psychology and reading emotions as a master bard. From the teacher, TAG recruits and officers learn how to listen, how to observe a scene, recognize people, speak in public, read lips, and learn when people are lying, detect smuggling, holdout, pickpocketing, and filching. Knowing how to play a musical instrument is not required, but can earn extra respect from the teachers. Music and Dance Magery has a place, and is encouraged by bardic traditions. TAG officers with the most promise are given basic bardic training: Eidetic Memory (Preparation Required, 1 minute, -20%) [4] (See *GURPS Fantasy* pages 219 & 227). Some veteran officers are even welcome at the Singer's Green (page 49 of *Tredroy*). In addition to bardic teaching, the bards can act as informants across national borders. The bards' G-String tavern is a place where much information is traded. The bards' reputations are safe as connections as the Watch is not able to arrest citizens for petty crimes.

Crime

"Listen very carefully, I will only say this once."
-- Allo Allo

A "typical" crime scene investigation flows as follows: The crime is reported, and witnesses are questioned. The scene is investigated for clues and suspects detained. If the detectives decide that the evidence and suspects warrant it, forensic experts examine the scene, and diviners look back in time to witness the events. Lab people examine clues, and use history-viewing spells to look into the past. Due to Islamic teachings, magic is not, in of itself, evidence. It can be used to locate witnesses and real, physical proof, but it is only as reliable as the mage who "witnesses" the events using magic (page 9). If divination can only reliably go back to a person's death, criminals may assault a victim with a slower acting poison to prolong the time he has to get away.

TAG officers recently located a poorly hidden cache of assassin's weapons, including crooked daggers, garrotes, and potions. A police spokesperson says that the most insidious item found was a potion containing a combination of a sleeping drug, healing potion, and a fast-acting poison with a slow onset.

A new-cutting technique is the use of fingerprinting to uniquely identify criminals. It is described as being "Like a portrait, but faster." Many muslims claim to be against it because it is profane to make an image of man. Fingerprinting has been around since Earth in the mid 1800s, but this technique was recently "discovered" by alchemists and the principles were disseminated to hundreds of people at once. Thus, it seems to be a natural phenomenon, rather than a leak from Earth. Disguises and masks are becoming popular among criminal elements. Many use the cover of artificial darkness to change disguises. Some simple illusions have becom popular, such as obviously false lizardman disguises. Others include William Shakespeare, and a Sahudese dignitary in formal martial arts robes. Some gangs sport identical illusions to help confuse law enforcement efforts.

There is surprisingly little friction with the guilds of thieves and assassins. Both hold that if someone was sloppy enough to get caught, they will become wiser with this experience. That ceases to apply should the suspect become loose-lipped about their guild. All criminals other than those brought in for tax evasion are released to the guilds.

Noble Deeds

Crimes masterminded or perpetrated by nobles are difficult to pursue. This is especially true across international borders. If the TAG forces get a warrant, they can bring the noble in for questioning. A trial by peers is usually the

result. A great many individuals make choices based on powerstone enchantment forecasts, as they cannot be foretold (see *Magic,* p. 12). Crime bosses direct actions based on private enchanters. Having private enchanters is not that unusual, as powerstones are a valuable commodity, and many businesses need private random numbers to keep ahead of competitors' diviners.

TAG as a Patron

As an elite force, TAG officers watch out for their own. TAG can quailify as a Patron to some officers. Individual officers can amount to Allies and Ally groups to some individuals. That said, not all officers inspire such a level of comadarerie to earn the advantage.

TAG as an Enemy

If a criminal is notorious enough that all TAG members are given their description and known aliases, they could earn TAG as an Enemy. How close the campaign will be to Tredroy will determine its frequency. The roll coming up in a campaign taking place away from Tredroy might mean bounty hunters seeking to gain a reward. Vigilantees and private investigators are generally accepted as long as they are polite, do not break laws and report anything they find. Acting suspicious or sufficiently annoying an individual officer could earn him, or even the whole department as an Enemy (Watcher).

What this means for Adventurers . . .

. . . As Officers Themselves

The current article is intended to be a resource to base a Watch campaign, in which the PCs are all part of an investigative agency in Tredroy. The heroes are on duty, investigating crimes. For example, a TAG officer teams up with a troubleshooter from the Church, a detective from the Emir's Guard, and a Guild "security" specialist (e.g. Thieves').
Advantages: Adventurers have definite goals
Disadvantages: Structured, can be limiting in scope and progress. Some sense a lack of progress, unless it is to topple a crime boss, be it a crooked councilman or lord.

. . . As Consultants and Expert Witnesses

Heroes often chase master villains, at first by the crimes they perpetrate, and the underlings they hire. Should the detectives hear the PCs are asking questions about criminals involved in a string of crimes, they could seek to collaborate, or at least find out what the amateurs know. Honorable detectives might accept help unofficially, should the heroes have any hints as to the villain's motives or abilities, even if they would lose face by asking up front. This has the double advantage that the force cannot officially ask the would-be detectives to stay away. Unfortunately, a cliché of detective adventures has law officers scoffing at the work of any amateurs, sometimes threatening to arrest such interlopers, even if they have not committed any crimes. Adaptive detectives could bring the heroes along, to keep an eye on them, or vice versa.

In a more mundane point of view, Player Characters are often geniuses, and possess skills ranking in the range of "world class expert." In this capacity, they can be called upon to translate documents, discuss therories found, or examine unusual radiation or runes. The experts can then be called in to testify as to the origins of items and abilities of weapons. If the heroes are strangers to the location, their testimony could be chosen as unbiased, or to save time going through the sea of red tape to get the time of a guild wizard or university professor. For example, when the ice vampire is claiming lives, the heroes can identify whether the markings in a room are consistant with the creature they know from the previous town.
Advantages: Heroes are sought out; PCs get exposure.

Disadvantage: Not all PCs are experts; law agencies may be evil in the campaign.

. . . As Witnesses on the Scene

The heroes are going about their business, when they witness a crime occur. If there is a lot of money involved, it is likely that someone will try to influence witness testimony in some way, perhaps even subtly. Refusing a bribe or blackmail threat can have repercussions for years, as can accepting one. The latter can be a level against the character for the rest of their life. As an example, the heroes might witness a wizard's guild merchant outlet being robbed; they happen to see through the illusion. A crime boss wants to silence all witnesses, and first bribes the PCs to silence, then threatens their Dependents and families.
Advantages: Ease of connection to any campaign in or near Tredroy.
Disadvantages: Short connection to campaign.

. . . As Innocent Suspects

The heroes are going about their business, when they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, or a foe plants evidence they are involved in a crime. This is almost as inconvenient as the situation in which the PCs are guilty of a different crime, or about to commit one. This could be made more inconvenient in a situation in which they must clear their name and get about their business while detectives dig into the group's past. ("So, you have a broadsword with seventeen notches in one side. Interesting.")
Advantages: Intruduces the agency without direct repercussions.
Disadvantages: Players may feel threatened or suspicious.

. . . As Criminals or Guilty Suspects

One fantasy and RPG standard holds that if the PCs see some great injustice, and the criminal gets away with it, it is acceptable to break the law to right the wrong. A GM wishing to explore this conundrum can put investigators on the trail. Clever heroes will figure out how to lead the detectives to proof of the original crime. The heroes are trying to stay one step ahead of the law as they try to accomplish some goal. A GM can plan out first what tools the detectives have, and then let the PCs plan out any heist with every tool they have. After the heist goes down, check to see what the police find. If the heroes are caught, it would be appropriate for them to stand trial, no matter how much the players want their characters to break out. The prisoners could simply be charged with an adventure that would mean certain death to *ordinary* people (such as the film *XXX*).
Advantages: Logical cause and effect.
Disadvantage: Players may not like causality. The work plan is an easy way out.

TAG Investigator Template [75 points]

(Extrapolated from Detective, *GURPS Cops*, page 46)

Primary Attributes: ST 10; DX 10; IQ 12 [40]; HT 10. *Secondary Characteristics:* Per +1 [5].

Traits: Taboo Traits (Innumerate).

Advantages: Eidetic Memory (Preparation Required, 1 minute, -20%) [4]; Legal Enforcement Powers [5]; Police Rank 1 [5]; and 15 points in Acute Senses [2/level]; Ally or Ally Group (TAG officer(s)) [varies]; Charisma [5/level]; Combat Reflexes [15]; IQ+1 (but remove Perception+1) [15]; Perception [5/level]; Contacts [varies]; Patron (Individual or TAG) [varies]; Will [5/level]. (Total: 25 points)

Disadvantages: Duty (Job, Very Hazardous, 15-) [-20]; and -17 in Addiction [varies]; Bad Temper [-10*]; Discipline of Faith [varies]; Intolerance [varies]; Overconfidence [-5*]; Pacifism [varies]; Secret (Corrupt) [varies]; Sense of Duty () [varies]. (Total: -37 points)

Primary Skills: Area Knowledge (Tredroy/Al-Haz)-12 (IQ E) [1]; Area Knowledge (Tredroy/Al-Wazif)-12 (IQ E) [1]; Area Knowledge (Tredroy/Cardiel)-12 (IQ E) [1]; Criminology-12 (IQ A) [2]; Detect Lies-11 (Per-1 H) [2]; Forensics-11 (IQ-1 H) [2]; Interrogation-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Law (Al-Haz)-10 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Law (Al-Wazif)-10 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Law (Cardiel)-10 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Observation-12 (Per-1 A) [1]; Professional Skill (Law Enforcement)-12 (IQ A) [2]; Shortsword (Baton/Tonfa)-10 (DX A) [2]; Writing-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]. (Total: 20 points)

Secondary Skills: Survival (Urban)-12 (Per-1 A) [1]; Hiking-11 (HT-1 A) [1]; Savoir-Faire-12 (IQ E) [1]; Stealth-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Streetwise-12 (IQ A) [2]; Shadowing-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Theology (Islam)-11 (IQ-1 H) [2]; Theology (Christian)-10 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Heraldry-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Fast-talk-11 (IQ-1 A) [2]. (Total: 12 points)

Background Skills: Total of 6 points in Administration (IQ A); Animal Handling (IQ H); Brawling (DX E); Diplomacy (IQ H); First Aid (IQ E); Hazardous Materials (Magical) (IQ A); Knife (DX E); Lip Reading (Per A); Psychology- (IQ H); Public Speaking (IQ A); Running (HT A); and one of Occultism (IA A) or Thaumatology (IQ V).

Example Character: Marcus Niall Usham [150 points]

Marcus is, on the outside, a typical officer; however, on the inside he is a conflicted man and Megaloan spy. He sees no conflict in swearing loyalty to the Tredroy Allied Guard, as he is certain that he will not betray them. He simply reports on merchant and noble activities for his "uncle," a trader in Megalos. Every week, he sends a letter to his "uncle" in Megalon, some of which contain hidden messages and codes. Growing up in Megalos, he was taught the ways of Islam, but rejected them as a rebellious teenager looking to advance in Megalon society. As a descendant of Muslim immigrants to the metropolis of Craine from the border city of Raphael, his darker skin and knowledge of the Koran made him the perfect agent to infiltrate Tredroy (see ***Banestorm,*** pages 98 & 100). Already possessing the technique of a perfect memory as part of his spy training, he no longer has to disguise its use. In the year since his arrival, he has begun to have second thoughts about his mission. The free-spirited Islamic faith combined with the sense of comaraderie are calling to him.

Primary Attributes: **ST** 10; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 13 [30].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 20 lbs; HP 10; Will 13; Per 14 [5]; FP 12; Basic Speed 6; Basic Move 6; Dodge 10. (Total: 115 points)

Languages: English (Native) [0]; Arabic (Native) [6]; Latin Spoken (None)/Written (Accented) [2]; Tredroy Patois (Broken) [2]. (Total: 10 points)

Advantages: Charisma +3 [15]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Eidetic Memory (Preparation Required, 1 minute, -20%) [4]; Empathy [15]; Legal Enforcement Powers [5]; Police Rank 1 [5]. (Total: 59 points)

Disadvantages: Addiction (Tobacco) [-5]; Curious (12) [-5]; Duty (Job, Very Hazardous, 15-) [-20]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Phobia (*Trikstadekaphobia:* Number 13) (12) [-5]; Secret (Spy, Death) [-20]; Sense of Duty (Friends and home country) [-10]; Workaholic [-5]. (Total: -75 points)

Skills: Administration-12 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Area Knowledge (Terdroy/Al-Haz)-14 (IQ+1 E) [2]; Area Knowledge (Terdroy/Al-Wazif)-14 (IQ+1 E) [2]; Area Knowledge (Terdroy/Cardiel)-14 (IQ+1 E) [2]; Criminology-13 (IQ A) [2]; Detect Lies-16 (Per+2‡ H) [2]; Diplomacy-14 (IQ+1† H) [1]; Fast-talk-17 (IQ+3† A) [2]; Forensics-12 (IQ-1 H) [2]; Hazardous Materials (Magical)-12 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Heraldry-12 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Hiking-12 (HT-1 A) [1]; Interrogation-15 (IQ+2† A) [1]; Law (Al-Haz)-11 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Law (Al-Wazif)-11 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Law (Cardiel)-11 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Lip Reading-13 (Per-1 A) [1]; Obervation-13 (Per-1 A) [1]; Occultism-12 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Professional Skill (Law Enforcement)-13 (IQ A) [2]; Psychology-14 (IQ+1‡ H) [1]; Savoir-Faire-13 (IQ E) [1]; Shadowing-12 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Shortsword (Baton/Tonfa)-11 (DX A) [2]; Stealth-12 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Streetwise-16 (IQ+3† A) [2]; Survival (Urban)-13 (Per-1 A) [1]; Theology (Christian)-11 (IQ-2 H) [1]; Theology (Mulsim)-12 (IQ-1 H) [2]; Writing-12 (IQ-1 A) [1]. (Total: 41 points)

† Includes +3 for Charisma.

‡ Includes +3 for Empathy.

Links

- *Columbo*
- Various *CSI* series
- Terry Pratchett: *Guards! Guards!* and *The Fifth Elephant*

* * *

Special Thanks to Gary J. Bartz for accepting the escort through town as the Guard tested new methods.

Random Quotes for Random Folks

Last week we were looking at **quotations**. Curiously, the entire body of that piece ended up being about utilizing the lyrics to songs. Whether this is a result of random chance bringing those ideas together or intelligent design, I'll leave to future school boards to decide.

However, that's not the only source of inspiration quotations. Indeed, song lyrics have a purposefully "artful" quality to them; they're designed for another purpose -- sounding good to music -- and those often result in quotations that are somewhat alien to our ears.

No, far more common are your humdrum quotations: interesting things that people have said or written. Given that many people end up saying or writing untold volumes of words in their lifetimes, it's no wonder that a few choice morsels end up surviving the ages, for us to swipe and adapt with abandon.

Continuing our thought experiment from last week, I've clicked "reload" a few times on the random-quote portion of the website **quotationpage.com** (complete with all quote-dictionaries selected). I've then taken some of the quotes there (discarding many of them) and chewed them in my mind, mulling over the following possibilities. These aren't the end-all of what you can do with quotations, but they should give some ideas you hopefully haven't thought of, complete with some worked examples.

1) The quote is imagined being said by or about a character. What insight does the quote provide into that character?

Example: *Efficiency is intelligent laziness.*
-- Anonymous

When I read this, I immediately considered a twist on the typical mad-scientist super-genius character. What if you had a character with the intellect of Reed Richards or Sherlock Holmes, driven not by the pursuit of the game but by extreme laziness? Imagine Jughead (from Archie comics fame) as a mad scientist. This concept might be the first "realistic" super-genius inventor that doesn't unbalance a campaign. Q: Why doesn't the world have flying cars? A: Do you know how much *work* that is?!

For this method, consider trying to use a "dictionary-quote" style, where quotes are sorted by topic or keyword. After all, if you're trying to come up with a character with forceful thoughts on love, politics, religion, or sacrifice, finding out what other people have said on the topic might give you a jumping off point for a new or different concept yourself.

2) The quote can be applied to an existing world or situation.

Example: *The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.*
L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*

That's a concept someone can apply to any **Time Travel/Infinite Worlds** campaign. And, indeed, it can inspire all manner of adventure possibilities: What if a mission required more attention than normal to the "customs" of a bygone era?

Really, using quotes for this style of inspiration isn't terribly different than using song lyrics, a la last week's installment.

3) The quote is modified, adapted, or stolen whole cloth, to be used by a PC or NPC.

Example: *Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.*
-- Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

Ahh, good old Nappy was always a source of wondrous quotes. This is a great quote for any Machiavellian or tactical character. Of course, it's possible that one might feel guilty just stealing someone else's words, even if it's for such a noble cause. Fortunately, there's nothing that says you can't take an existing quote and tweak it enough for your own purposes. So, cranking this quote through the hopper, I came up with:

Always wait to strike until your enemy has ceased making mistakes.
--Any Darn NPC I Want To Attribute It To

Again, most of the flavor . . . entirely original. (Of course, I'm personally of the mind that -- for a personal game -- there's absolutely nothing wrong with just leaving a quote as is. As Tom Lehrer [sang](), "Plagiarize; let no one else's work evade your eyes . . . only be sure always to call it please 'research.'" On the other hand, if it's intended for publication, always attribute or file the serial numbers off.)

Let's take this technique on another quote our randomized search popped up:

Example: *Government is like a baby. An alimentary canal with a big appetite at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other.*
-- Ronald Reagan (1911-2004)

That's a clever quote on its own, and one that can be adapted for a number of settings:

Managing the Thieves' Guild is like caring for an infant: Both demand time and attention at all hours of the night, and both are responsible for all sorts of foul nastiness in the end.

4) As a final idea -- especially if you need to come up with better-than-cardboard characters quickly -- is to use a source of these quotes to generate NPCs, outlooks, or happenings. Do the heroes send 10 different wards off to forge their own destinies in a fast-moving campaign? Don't worry about trying to make up their fates; simply click on the random-quote link and try to figure out how each one applies. (Really, using a random-quote website for this method is almost one step above tarot-card reading, but it's fast and could well produce some interesting results.)

Again, the notion behind these techniques is to inspire something into existence that wasn't there before. There's precious little that can be done for a Great Random Adventure or NPC Generator That Works In All Situations, but you can get pretty close using a source of quotes and some mind wandering.

As a final note, I stumbled across this quote in the first page of quote-reloading I did in this experiment:

There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are. Somerset Maugham, The New York Times Book Review, September 30, 1984

The same quote could just as easily apply to running a good game.

--Steven Marsh

The Omniscient Eye

If My Eyes Are Running, How Fast Do I Need to Move to Catch Up?

I'm wondering about the movement rules so popular in games. What's the real story? Figuring out how fast some one can run under ideal conditions isn't that hard (just look to world records), but how fast can some one run under realistic conditions. In other word, if you're not an Olympic athlete, running on a smooth track with light clothing and running shoes and no encumbrance. What if you're not even running in a straight line? What if combat is occurring around you, or someone is shooting at you? What then?
--Patrick Smith

A typical adventurer has a sprinting speed of 6.4 yards per second. At least, that was my average speed. Reasoning that the best way to answer this question was to try it and see, I set up courses and got my wife to measure how far I could run in six seconds -- one round of **d20 System** combat. (Distance covered per round has been converted to yards- per-second in Table 1.)

Standard Conditions (6.4 yps): Wearing running clothes, I sprinted in a straight line along a flat dirt road. These are the best conditions one can have in a wilderness setting. Even after dropping weapons and treasure-filled sacks, the typical adventurer is more encumbered than this.

Boots (6.4 yps): I sprinted along the same course wearing running clothes and boots. Although the boots added four pounds to my weight, they did not slow me down. This is similar to the encumbrance of an unencumbered adventurer.

Chainmail (6.0 yps): I sprinted along the same course, this time wearing boots and my wife's chainmail. The chainmail did slow me down. An armored adventurer wears more than a 15-pound tunic, but because he is stronger than I am and because his armor fits better, these conditions are similar to those he would be facing (unless he is wearing full plate, of course).

Comparison of the Author and a Typical Adventurer

An adventurer is athletic.
The author has played ultimate frisbee (a sport requiring a lot of sprinting) at the league level.

An adventurer is in good shape from tramping through the wilderness.
The author was a varsity long distance runner in high school and has continued to train for and run in various races. At the time of the experiment, the author had been training for two weeks after a winter hiatus.

An adventurer is not specialized in sprinting.
The author is considered to be fast by those who play against him on the frisbee field, but he could not have run for his high school at any distance under 1600 m.

An adventurer is strong from swinging heavy weapons and carrying heavy armor.
The author is not.

Hurdling Brush (5.4 yps): The second course was laid out in a straight line through bushes one to three feet high. I jumped over everything in my way. I am not an experienced hurdler, and neither is the typical adventurer.

Weaving Through Brush (5.6 yps): I was slightly faster using a different technique on the same course. Instead of hurdling the brush, I went around. It is worth noting, however, that my final two trials were better than the previous three. The improvement in speed could be due to learning the course. An adventurer is usually running an unfamiliar course.

Obstacle Course (3.6 yps): This course went over a fallen tree, up an earth dike, down the other side, and over another tree. Speed was slower because of the elevation change and because the hurdling was more challenging.

Though I ran this course efficiently, it is possible that I could have run it more quickly by taking more risks. A fleeing adventurer, if he is willing to take those risks, covers the ground more quickly -- at least until he breaks his leg.

It is surprising that encumbrance has so little effect -- at least it was surprising to me because sprinting in boots was much more strenuous than sprinting in running shoes. It is possible that the boots did reduce my leg speed but that the extra traction they provided compensated for this. I suspect that over several combat rounds, the weight begins to take its toll and an encumbered adventurer is not able to maintain this speed for long. Instead of giving movement penalties for encumbrance, a GM might wish to give movement penalties for fatigue, with fatigue increasing more quickly for adventurers who are carrying more weight.

Chainmail does slow a runner down -- not only by adding another 15 pounds of weight, but also by flapping around, thus dissipating kinetic energy and altering the runner's form. I should have worn a belt to diminish this effect, but we were trying to limit ourselves to a two-minute rest between trials and completing the change into boots and chainmail in that time was difficult enough.

Terrain proved to have a more significant effect than encumbrance. When hurdling brush, my speed was only 85% of my speed on the road. On the obstacle course, my speed was only 56% of my speed on the road. (My speed in chainmail was 93% of my unencumbered speed.) When the party is fleeing through interesting terrain, the GM should feel free to reduce their speed. This experiment shows that speed reduction factors of 50% to 90% are reasonable.

The Standard Conditions are intended as a control. By running along the same course in boots and in chainmail, I was able to test the effects of encumbrance. By running along different courses in running clothes, I was able to test the effects of terrain. But other factors such as the time of day, temperature, amount of warmup, and degree of fatigue can affect the sprinter just as significantly. (The experiment was designed to keep these factors the same for each level of encumbrance and terrain; see sidebar.)

To simulate the situation faced by a fantasy adventurer, I should have spent a few hours wandering through a dungeon before running the sprinting trials. Instead, I spent a half hour warming up. Being a distance runner, I require a substantial warm up before I can sprint at maximum speed. When an adventurer needs to run, he does not have time to stretch first, but his muscles are probably loose from walking or fighting. Of course, after too much activity, the adventurer must deal with fatigue. I did this experiment after two weeks of long distance training, which enabled me to do 30 six-second sprints without slowing down. I did, however, take a two-minute break between each sprint. The typical adventurer is not a long-distance runner and does not get two-minute breaks between combat rounds. As explained in the sidebar, my performance should be similar to that of a typical adventurer -- a typical male adventurer. Females are slower than males at similar levels of competition. In surveying 100-meter dash results from state-wide, national, and international competitions, I noted that the fastest women were running at roughly 90% of the speed of the fastest men (with female performance coming closer to male performance at higher levels of competition).

Other Factors That Affect Sprinting Speed

An individual's sprinting speed can vary greatly depending on the time of day, temperature, amount of warmup, and degree of fatigue. Because a person can be fast on some days and slow on other days, all sprinting trials were run in the same 60-minute period, one every two minutes.

Based on previous experience with sprint work outs, I expected that the first few trials would be a bit slow until I got my legs warmed up. Thirty sprints is a lot, so I expected that the final trials would also be a bit slow. To make sure the effects of warm up and fatigue applied to all conditions equally, trials were grouped in five sets of six, with each set containing one trial of each condition.

Some trials (such as sprinting in chainmail) were more strenuous than others. I expected that my times would be slower after running in chain mail than they would be after running unencumbered, so each set had the six conditions run in a different order. The order was chosen so that no trial was preceded by the same type of trial twice. For example, sprinting in chainmail was done immediately before the obstacle course only once. (Thank goodness.)

This exposes a gap between game rules and how we might go about testing them against the real world. For example, if the game system treats male and female sprinters equally, the GM may wish to create custom rules to penalize females. In this case, the GM should either explain the penalties to the players before they make their characters or be fast enough to outrun anyone who dislikes being penalized for playing a female character. It may be safer to use the attributes as given and assume that the equality of the sexes is because men and women are physically equal in that game world, because women who become adventurers are faster than most, or simply that stats are "unisex," describing levels of ability without attempting to justify them or link them to a particular norm.

Table 2 suggests movement factors the GM can apply to the speeds of sprinting characters. If you are not the sort of GM who runs combat scenes with miniatures and a ruler, just keep the following in mind: Sprinting speed is usually relative. Difficult terrain may slow down a fast character, but any pursuers are likely to be sprinting through the same terrain and slowed down similarly. The impact of terrain does come into play, however, when the sprinter is running from foes with ranged weapons. Choosing to flee through rough terrain could give enemies an extra round to shoot. Choosing to flee while wearing boots or light armor should probably not have such a penalty. However, choosing to flee while carrying an object will slow the adventurer down.

In *A Thinking Man's Guide to Pro Football*[1], Paul Zimmerman notes that "the actual mechanism of carrying the football naturally slows people down." He cites an experiment done by Marty Glickman, an Olympic sprinter who also played halfback for Syracuse. Glickman was timed for the 100-meter dash with a football and without. "I repeated it a few times, and each time I was one to two seconds slower when I carried the ball." That's a factor of 0.92 to 0.83. Glickman was affected more by carrying a one-pound football than I was by wearing an extra 20 pounds of boots and chainmail. So feel free to tell your players that their characters can get out of the tunnel before the dragon fills it with flame only if they are willing to drop their swords and shields.

How does being shot at affect sprinting speed? I would assume that adrenaline makes the adventurer run much faster, initially. Once he is hit, he slows down, and if he is killed, he stops. But here I am just guessing: my willingness to run for Science only goes so far.

Table 1: Speed ranges under various conditions

Conditions	Speed
Sprinting on Road	6.2 to 6.8 yps
Sprinting on Road in Boots	6.2 to 6.7 yps
Sprinting on Road in Chainmail	5.7 to 6.2 yps
Hurdling Brush	5.3 to 5.6 yps
Weaving through Brush	5.3 to 5.7 yps
Clambering over Obstacles	3.4 to 3.7 yps

Table 2: Suggested movement factors for the GM based on the results of Table 1

Terrain	Movement Factor
Clear	1.00
Brushy	0.90 to 0.60
Obstacles	0.75 to 0.40

Encumbrance	Movement Factor
Light	1.00
Heavy Boots	1.00 (no penalty)
Light Armor	1.00 to 0.90

Notes

- [1] Zimmerman, Paul (1970). A Thinking Man's Guide to Pro Football. E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York.

--Jason A. 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!

Ultra-Tech Mayhem

for *GURPS*

by David L. Pulver

These weapons and options were considered for Ultra-Tech, but not included . . . partly due to their excessive lethality! They were nevertheless popular in the author's own campaign, primarily as alien artifacts or nefarious super weapons that inspired particular adventures.

Hyperdimensional Barrels (TL12^)

This is an option for grav guns or rail guns. It uses a hyperdimensional barrel is much longer on the inside than on the outside, due to a temporal loop or pocket dimension. Rail or grav guns equipped with hyperdimensional barrels are 10 × as expensive, but have twice the damage and range.

Antimatter Conversion Field (TL12^)

This transforms all matter within a 10-yard radius of the target point into antimatter. These weapons tend to be long-ranged and designed to kill space fleets and worlds. The result is an enormous matter-antimatter explosion. The field covers a volume of about 100,000 cubic feet. Effects depend on the matter in the zone; each pound of matter converted is equivalent to about 20 megatons of yield. The result is very bad. For example, on a planet, the blast yield might range from about 180,000 megatons (converting a sphere of air) to about 360 million megatons (converting a sphere of dense rock) leaving a hundred-mile crater, devastating a continent-sized region, and causing the extinction of most higher life forms from nuclear winter and related effects.

It is nevertheless possible to survive a direct attack by an AM conversion field: if the field completely envelops a small target (e.g., a vacc suit, space fighter, life capsule, missile, etc.) in vacuum, no explosion occurs, since there is no normal matter around to contact. However, surviving as an antimatter being may pose many challenges (e.g., locating antimatter food or air, and interacting safely with others). It may be possible to reverse an AM field and transform someone back to matter, however.

Conversion fields are building-sized weapons that use cosmic power cells (p. 00), and are usually found only as the main armament of giant space battleships. Conversion fields also have industrial uses (by producing cheap antimatter).

ARTILLERY (BEAMS) (IQ-5)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
12^	Antimatter Conversion Field	n/a	24	10,000 miles	2,000,000/400F	1	1(60)	M	-10	1	$10 billion	0

Antiplasma Guns (TL11^)

These weapons are similar to plasma and fusion guns, but they fire blobs of anti-hydrogen plasma. The antimatter plasma bolt travels down a force field tube or laser-evacuated channel; when it strikes the target, it produces an antimatter explosion. They differ from antiparticle beams (p. 00) in firing more antimatter (as a plasma rather than as a beam of particles) but at substantially lower velocities. An antiplasma bolt inflicts burning damage with the explosive, radiation, and surge damage modifiers. It has a (2) armor divisor. Like plasma guns, they also have recoil.

Weapons

Antiplasma Gun (TL12^): An oversized, bulky rifle with a backpack power supply. With the exception of the disintegrator (p. 00), it is one of the most destructive of all man-portable weapons.

Light or Heavy Antiplasma Cannon (TL12^): Devastating vehicle-mounted weapons. The heavy cannon is capable of destroying almost any vehicular target, or laying waste to a city.

Semi-Portable Antiplasma Gun (TL12^): This weapon is usually tripod or vehicle-mounted, but sometimes carried by powered troopers. A single shot can blow up a house or destroy a lower-TL armored vehicle.

BEAM WEAPONS (RIFLE) (DX-4, other Beam Weapons-4, or Guns (Rifle)-4)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
12^	Antiplasma Gun	6d×10 burn ex	9	630/2,000	19/Ep	3	600(5)	15†	-5	1	$62,000	1

GUNNER (BEAMS) (DX-4, or other Gunner-4)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
12^	Semi-Portable Antiplasma Gun	9d×15 burn ex	14	3,200/9,600	64/Ep	1	50(5)	27M	-8	2	$200,000	2
12^	Antiplasma Cannon	6d×50 burn ex	14	20,000/60,000	1,000/Fp	1	33(5)	100M	-10	2	$1,500,000	1
12^	Heavy Antiplasma Cannon	6d×100 burn ex	14	80,000/240,000	8,000/Gp	1	42(5)	300M	-10	2	$12,000,000	1

Minigate Beam Weapon (TL12^)

This system uses a pair of teleportal minigates. One minigate is configured as a handheld weapon, complete with sights, trigger, grips, etc. The second is integrated into the focusing system or muzzle of another weapon, often a heavy beam cannon.

When the user pulls the trigger, he sends a signal through his minigate to the other weapon, triggering it to fire. Its beam is then transmitted down the minigate link . . .

Minigate beam weapons allow seemingly small weapon systems to generate very powerful beams. For example, a heavy pistol-sized minigate might be hooked up to tank-sized plasma cannon several miles away (or even in another dimension or time).

Any mounted beam weapon can be equipped this way. Select any weapon with "M" next to its ST requirement as the beam generator weapon.

The handheld minigate has the same statistics as the beam generator weapon, except as follows: Acc is one-third normal, Bulk is -3, ST is 10, weight is 10 lbs.

The cost is that of two minigate teleporters plus 50% of the cost of the base weapon.

Pyramid Review

Total Warfare (for Classic BattleTech)

Published by FanPro LLC

Written by Randal N. Bills & Herbert A. Beas II with Dan C. Duval, Kevin Killany, Jason M. Hardy, David L. McCuloch, Steve Mohan, Jr., Jason Schmetzer, & Phaedra M. Weldon, plus Drew Williams & Ray Arrastia

Cover by Franz Vohwinkel

Illustrated by Chris Lewis & Klaus Scherwinksi

312 full-color hardcover; $39.99

Originally published as *BattleDroids* in 1984, over the last 20 years the anime influenced *BattleTech* franchise has been developed to include several boardgames, 100 supplements, over 80 novels, numerous computer games across various platforms, a virtual simulator, a CCG, and even a cartoon series. More recently with the closure of FASA, the original publisher, Wizkids developed the franchise into the collectable minis game *Mechwarrior: Dark Age,* set further into *BattleTech's* future. Meanwhile, FanPro continues to support the original version of the game (which has long ago left behind its anime influences) with *Classic BattleTech,* at the heart of which lie two fundamental factors.

The first of these is the setting, a far future in which mankind has colonized the stars and found itself alone. In the 31st century, five Succession Houses -- each founded on feudal, cultural, and ethnic lines -- divide the Inner Sphere, an area roughly 1,000 light-years across. Fielding great armies against each other, they vie to restore the old Star League, but a stalemate has existed between them for centuries. This is broken with the return of the Clans, the genetically enhanced descendants of the military forces that fled the Star League's fall, wielding advanced technology and bent on conquering the Inner Sphere and restoring the Star League. Although the Inner Sphere manages to stop the Clans, it is not permanent and the alliance does not last. Developed through both the supplements and the novels, the BattleTech setting is rich with detail and reasons to fight.

The second is the game itself, a 1/285th-scale combined-arms hex-based miniatures wargame played on either large mapsheets or player-owned 3-D terrain system. At the heart of *Classic BattleTech* stands the "battlemech," a bipedal, humanoid warmachine between eight and 14 meters tall, weighing between 20 and 100 tons, and armed with lasers, particle projection cannons, missiles, gauss rifles, machine guns, and autocannon. With a crew of one, and capable of operating over any terrain, the battlemech is the king of the 31st century battlefield, equaled only by another battlemech, and restrained only by its ability to vent the heat generated by its weaponry that if unchecked will impair movement, weapons fire, and even cause the battlemech to shutdown or its ammunition to detonate.

FanPro has relaunched the *Classic BattleTech* line to make it friendlier and more accessible, the entry point for which is the *Classic BattleTech Introductory Box Set.* This provides the basic rules, mapsheets, and miniatures necessary to play, but beyond this, FanPro are presenting the rules for combat, battlemech, vehicle, and aerospace unit construction, campaigns, plus a setting guide and a new RPG in a series of six core volumes.

The first of these is *Classic BattleTech: Total Warfare,* which replaces all previous rule sets, bringing together the

rules for battlemechs, vehicles, infantry, aerospace fighters, and dropships. It includes rules for units previously only peripherally seen in the game and more commonly seen in *Mechwarrior: Dark Ages.* In particular, the IndustrialMech, using its forestry or mining equipment for melee attacks and often jury-rigged with other weaponry; the WiGE, or "Wing in Ground Effect," a heavy cross between an aircraft and a hovercraft; battle armor, in the main fielded by the Clans; and ProtoMechs, battlemech-like suits weighing less than 10 tons and fielded only by the Clans. Further, where previous versions of the game divided its rules into varying levels of complexity and acceptability for either standard or tournament play, Total Warfare simplifies this by making all of its rules as standard and suitable for tournament play. Future supplements will present advanced rules that will not be suitable.

BattleTech's game is simple and familiar enough. Players take it in turns to individually move their units, anywhere from a lance of four battlemechs upwards, expending Movement Points to walk, run, and even jump over a variety of different terrain types. Once in range, successful weapons fire or melee attacks have an attrition effect, scouring armor from a target to get at its internal components, from the internal structure and joint actuators to weapons and the fusion engine. Critical hits can also pierce armor. Damage is inflicted by location, marked off the unit's record sheet. Both movement and weapons fire generates heat, which must be vented through heatsinks, of which a battlemech only has a few. Some record keeping is required, but not an excessive amount.

Mechanically, *Classic BattleTech* uses 2d6 for almost everything. Piloting checks, for example, are made to avoid skidding on hard surfaces or falling after the loss of a leg actuator, and for physical attacks, from punches to ramming. Gunnery checks handle weapons fire, whilst hit locations are determined randomly -- this being due to the inaccuracy of targeting systems. Each mechwarrior, aerospace pilot, or vehicle crewman possesses the appropriate skill, rated between 3 and 5, to which modifiers are applied for various factors, including movement, heat, terrain, and the effects of critical damage.

Of course, adding more units and different unit types increases the game's complexity. Especially when aerospace fighters, which use a slightly different set of rules, and to some extent, battle armor and ProtoMechs, become involved. The complexity occurs at the point when these elements of the game interact with battlemechs. It is not excessive, although working out the exact details of an aerospace fighter's crash or the effects of a collapsing building upon the units hiding inside (including battlemechs) for example, can be time consuming compared to normal play.

Fortunately, *Total Warfare* makes this complexity and the rules themselves easier to comprehend by breaking them down into digestible chapters. Beyond the basic concepts this format allows players to pick and chose which aspects of the rules and which vehicles they want to play with. Although a bit dry, the rules are supported by a series of detailed, fully worked out examples that often build from a single situation and explore its various possible outcomes. The learning curve is actually quite gentle, even more so if a player has had previous experience with the game, whether from long term play or the *Classic BattleTech Introductory Box Set.*

Alongside the rules, the book only gives a little setting material, so it is up to *Total Warfare's* fiction to add some color and flavor. Prefacing each chapter is a short, four-page short vignette related to the chapter's contents. *BattleTech* has long been known for the quality of its fiction and the many pieces here are no exception, all being most enjoyable.

Total Warfare does include some non-standard/non-Tournament play rules. These present a system for creating scenarios built around a set of tables that determine the scenario type, force size and composition, and unit skill levels. To get the full use out of the table does require access to the game's many Technical Readouts, but the book is not written with the novice player in mind. This being a set of wargame rules, the book ends with a guide to painting *BattleTech* miniatures and 3-D terrain.

Physically, *Total Warfare* is a sturdy, error-free hardback. It is liberally illustrated with both dioramas of BattleTech miniatures in action and fully painted pieces to accompany the fiction. The official mapsheets are used in the many examples of the rules, and every example is made to stand out from the otherwise reasonable layout.

There are wargames to suit almost everyone's tastes, and for those who find the idea of piloted giant walking robots fighting it out all too silly when tanks and infantry make more sense, then both *Classic BattleTech* and *Total Warfare* will not be to their liking. Which is fine, but if a combined arms game that focuses on giant fighting robots is to your

liking, then **Classic BattleTech** is very well supported, and in bringing together all of the rules for every unit type in the game, **Total Warfare** provides all of the details necessary to play and is the essential volume that every **BattleTech** player will want have on his shelf and at hand during play.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

GameMastery Campaign Workbook

Published by [Paizo Publishing](#)

Designed by Jason Bulmahn, Sarah Robinson, & Sean Glenn

320-page spiral-bound 4½''×5½'' softcover; $13.95

Every GM needs a place to hang his hat, metaphorically speaking, and a good starting place would be the *GameMastery Campaign Workbook* from Paizo Publishing.

Another in their line of GM and player aids, the workbook is just what it says: a place to start, maintain, and cultivate information about your ongoing roleplaying game. Seems simple enough, but is there enough here to recommend it to anyone over, say, a notebook full of ruled paper?

Well, it starts straightforward enough. There's space for all your contact info, both the kind that lets you call your players to let them know about the next session and the sort that lets someone return your workbook to you when you forget it at the Taco Tavern.

You can manage attributes, brief notes, and status (like "missing") for up to 14 PCs. The stat blocks are OGL-specific, so while there's room enough for you to write up notes about any character, anything that isn't *d20 System* material won't be able to use the handy boxes. Then it's back in the GM's court, with the name and dates of your campaign, room for an overview, places for your NPCs, and any rules deliberately being left in or left out. A full (blank) year of month grids let you erase and rewrite all the sessions you'll be canceling, and maps allow you to track the action at several levels of refinement. Then follows a couple hundred pages of game logs, with blank lines on the left page and a little section of graph paper facing them.

Finally the book ends with an NPC registry (room for two thumbnail characters on one side and a more fully-developed one on the other) and room for items the party may be carrying (both mundane items and expanded sections for when someone is unwittingly toting about the Spear of Longinus).

Physically, the book is high quality, though it should be noted the same product was originally released with a "perfect-bound" spine that gave out from laying the tome flat on a tabletop. This version has a spiral binding; it costs an extra dollar, but it's sturdier and the old books were recalled and can be traded in for a replacement. The type inside is written in non-photo-blue ink, the sort that keeps you from making copies, which may make a certain amount of sense from a marketing and security viewpoint but it makes the text just a bit harder to read in a couple of spots. Or the ink choice could just be a complete coincidence that reflects the nature of notebook and graph paper printing.

Like some of their other products, Paizo may be shooting themselves in the foot by not offering more information about the line; the "item" pages have handy places for the codes used by their *[GameMastery Item](#)* cards, but there's nothing to let you know on the outside that it's an OGL-compatible book. While it isn't overwhelmingly *d20 System,* it's a point worth making somewhere other than the website literature. Gamers already know if spiral binding serves their purposes, but it is a small book, about five inches on a side (plus a smidge for the spine), so that may make it fit your book bag really well or be exactly the wrong kind of annoying. It requires a cramped writing style or the use of a couple of lines for one line of text.

It's a lot more fun to use than a notebook to keep your thumb on the pulse of your game, and the page edges indicate where sections begin or end. If you're tired of little sticky notes showing your fingers how to do the walking, that'll help. It also shows just how darn much of the book is given over to the campaign logs. That's not meant as a criticism,

and certainly the continuing narrative is probably the thing you need the most of, but there's really no way to know how much space is required before a game is done. On the gripping hand, that's an awful lot of graph paper -- small graph paper -- and that might not be as useful as extra pages for simple narrative. You could always utilize the same book for two or more smaller games, though that might complicate things.

There's an obvious sense of fun here, too, making the ***GameMastery Campaign Workbook*** both cute and clever. Things you might not have thought of like a track for maintaining what level the party is overall and pages dedicated to writing down any infamous, crowd-pleasing quotes that pop up show the designers put serious thought into what comes out of a game and what might need space. These, too, might not demand anything better than a notepad, but all this taken together says the creators have something on the ball and have put some relevant and useful effort into codifying it here.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

\

Soul Train

for *Eberron/d20 System*

by Caleb Dillon

A living construct, not unlike the warforged that dot the globe in Eberron, Soulemere is a possessed lightning rail gone out of control. Soulemere is a solitary creature intended for use in the **Eberron** campaign setting; however, with a few adaptations it would really fit just fine into any high-magic chronicle. If you've been dying to play a train heist scenario and want to see what happens when the train strikes back, then read on.

Background Information

During the Last War, House Cannith, like the other dragonmarked houses, maintained a strict neutrality . . . mostly. Illegal arms running, smuggling contraband, and underground lightning rails were all lucrative career choices in those days, and there was hard coin to be made for bold men unafraid to engage in certain lucrative (albeit less than legal) ventures.

Such as man was Erran d'Cannith, dubbed by his fellow artificers the "Mad Maker." Erran was in need of funding for any number of other ventures he wished to pursue. Forging rings, carving wands, piecing together golems; artificing is not an inexpensive way to spend one's time, and Erran was not the adventurous type.

So when the King of Cyre came to him with a proposal to build a lightning rail (unbeknownst to House Orien) that could go places other rails could not and field test it himself, he merrily rose to the occasion.

Dubbed Soulemere by its creator, Erran envisioned a huge living construct, not unlike the warforged so common to Khorvaire. But Erran wanted Soulemere to be something more, something special. He had, around that time, began dabbling with a new, previously unknown form of magical energy called incarnum. (Complete rules regarding this new and potentially powerful source of magic can be found in the **Magic of Incarnum** rules supplement.)

Erran's coworkers warned him against the dangers of manipulating forces that he did not fully understand, but the King was not known for his patience, and neither was Erran. So when the time came, rather than binding an elemental spirit to the vessel, Erran bound a spirit being of pure incarnum in its stead . . . or at least he tried.

Time and time again Erran performed the binding ritual, and time after time it failed. He failed. Bits of stray incarnum were lost and dissipated, or simply flitted about the chamber, seemingly of their own accord. In time, Erran's failures made him bitter, and his contempt hung over the heads of his coworkers like a dark cloud, dampening spirits and lowering morale accordingly.

What Erran did not understand (and what ultimately doomed the project) was that incarnum feeds off of raw emotion. Erran's anger, having festered for long enough, turned to rage as he began the binding ritual one last time. The stray bits of incarnum coalesced and bent to his will.

This time, the ritual worked. No sooner had Soulemere been animated than it turned on his creators. It slew half the magewrights before they realized what had happened, and the others barely managed to flee with their lives. Erran stood fast, hoping he could command at the very least reason with Soulemere.

But if Soulemere could understand Erran, it gave no indication of this. Realizing on some subconscious level that Erran had created it, Soulemere sparred Erran's life, burst through a nearby wall and fled the forgery, bound for parts unknown.

Erran, fearing for his life after having failed the King of Cyre so completely, did like Soulemere and fled as well. Shortly thereafter came the Day of Mourning, and Erran suddenly found himself without cause for worry. The King was dead, and with him his knowledge of their joint endeavor. The books had been wiped cleaned.

Erran decided that Soulemere couldn't have survived the Day of Mourning, and wrote the entire thing off to a learning experience. But Soulemere did survive. Its current whereabouts are unknown, but the Mainland is a pretty fair guess. It was here that Soulemere was born, and there that it will mostly likely stay.

Soulemere has the mentality of a child, a very alone, frightened and angry child. He is evil in the same way as an abused toddler. Soulemere doesn't really understand what's been done to it, or why, but it knows something bad happened, and the only respite it gets from its anguish comes from tormenting others in kind.

Soulemere, Elite Lost, 7th-Level Soulfused Incarnum Golem Incarnate

Huge Construct (Incarnum, Living Construct)
Hit Dice: 33d10+7d8+120 (331)
Initiative: +5
Speed: 40 ft. (8squares), fly 10 ft. plus 10ft. per essential invested (good)
Armor Class: 22 (-2 size, +0 Dex, +14 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 23
Base Attack/Grapple: +21/+39
Attack: Slam +29 melee (4d8+10)
Full Attack: Slam +29 melee (4d8+10)
Space/Reach: 25 ff × 65 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Adaptive attack, fury of wrath
Special Qualities: Aura,damage reduction 10/adamantine and magic, detect opposition, essential pool 16, expanded soulmeld capacity, fast healing 5, immunity to magic, incarnum radiance, living construct traits, rapid meldshaping, share incarnum radiance, soulbound resistance (essential 6), soulmelds (see below)
Saves: +20/+13/+16
Abilities: Str 31, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 1, Wis 11, Chr 10
Skills: Bluff +1, Diplomacy +1, Intimidate +4, Listen +10, Spot +11
Feats: Cleave, Cobalt Charge, Dodge, Great Cleave, Greater Powerful Charge, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack, Mobility, Open Greater Chakra (throat), Power Attack, Powerful Charge, Run, Shape Soulmeld (Brass mane), Spring Attack
Environment: Any
Organization: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 15
Treasure: None
Alignment: Neutral Evil
Advancement: -
Level Adjustment: -

A House Orien lightning rail veers towards you, though it travels on no track. A smoke stack rises from the coach, and souls of the lamented trickle off in a cloud of eerie blue radiance. The forward section has been cast in the brass likeness of a roaring dragonne. A mantle of blue flame manifests around the engine compartment, and it glides over the ground on a sleigh on lightning.

From a distance, Soulemere appears to be the coach car of a House Orien lightning rail. As it approaches, however, keen men will notice dissimilarities. Soulemere moves along no track, but rather flies in short lobs of two hundred feet or so, touching down for only a moment before continuing on, like a child skipping.

Soulemere's hull is made from magically hardened darkened glass, adamantine and iron beams, infused with incarnum. From front to back, the coach is nearly 50 ft long and half as wide. Some parts of the vessel appear very real, while others, such as the light at the front of the coach, the flames flickering around it, and the cushion of air Soulemere moves around on, appear wispy and insubstantial.

Soulemere acts in many ways like a child. He may play with an adventuring party at first, before they do something to set it off (even the most innocuous slight will do), at which point Soulemere gets agitated and attacks! It will fight until reduced to a quarter of its hit points, at which point it turns and flees, making a sound not too unlike a whimpering toddler.

If the party somehow finds a way to disrupt Soulemere's soulmelds, especially its airstep sandals, Soulemere will sink to the ground and be unable to move (at which point it sobs uncontrollably; Erran was still working on Soulemere's locomotion when Soulemere fled the forgery). Soulemere has no lair, and since it needs no food or sleep, it constantly stays on the move. If the party successfully defeats Soulemere and someone manages to get it to a member of House Cannith, the salvage rights would be substantial.

A better (if not more challengingly way) to deal with Soulemere would be to try and befriend it. Soulemere is very much in need of others like it, or at the very least a friend. The scholars at Morgrave would probably find a nice home for it, but Soulemere would have a hard time adjusting to life in the big city (think King Kong; Soulemere's just never going to fit in).

A kind hearted artificer would probably have the best chance at getting Soulemere to stand down from a fight, especially if the artificer somehow reminds Soulemere of Erran, but good luck with this approach. This shouldn't be easy (Diplomacy DC 30+, and needs extended rolls over a long period: three consecutive rolls, then 1 roll per day for a week to start earning Soulemere's trust).

Soulemere understands Common, though it has no ability to communicate in that language or any other. Soulemere travels at a speed of 25 miles per hour.

Combat

Soulemere is nothing short of an oncoming train in combat, and should be treated as such. It strikes swiftly, leaving gaping holes in enemy lines and fortifications both. Soulemere benefits from its adaptive attack, often targeting the same creature (if it survives more than one attack) round after round, in much the same way a vehement child keeps swinging long after the fight is over. It makes good use of its cleave feat, targeting lines of creatures rather than groups. It relies on its fast healing ability to repair any damage it suffers, but it isn't bereft of intelligence, and it will run from a fight that it is definitely losing.

Adaptive Attack (Ex): When Soulemere strikes, it adapts its attack to take advantage of weaknesses in the opponent's defenses. Each round that Soulemere successfully damages a living creature, it gains a cumulative +1 insight bonus (maximum +5) on attack rolls and damage rolls against that opponent. This bonus remains in force until Soulemere deals damage to a different living creature. For example, the first time Soulemere damages a living foe, a +1 bonus applies to each of its attacks against that target in subsequent rounds. The next time it hits that foe, the bonus increases to +2. During any round that it misses the target, the bonus increases to +2. During any round that it misses the target, the bonus does not increase. If Soulemere hits a different target at any point in that progression, the bonus against the first target is lost, and a new bonus begins to accrue against the new target.

Aura (Ex): Soulemere has a particularly powerful aura corresponding to its alignment (see the *detect evil* spell). The power of its aura is equal to its incarnate level, just like the aura of a cleric.

Similarly, its soulmelds always radiate evil as though they were aligned magic items with a caster level equal to its class level.

Detect Opposition (Sp): At will, Soulemere can attempt to detect the presence of creatures whose alignment is opposite its own. This ability works like the *detect evil* spell, except that it detects the specific alignment opposed to its own (good, in Soulemere's case).

Expanded Soulmeld Capacity (Ex): The essential capacity of Soulemere's soulmeld capacity is increased by 1,

superseding the normal restrictions for a meldshaper of its level. This only applies to soulmelds, not to feats, class features, or other abilities that allow essential investment.

Fury of Wrath (Ex): Soulemere automatically enters a ragelike state on its first turn in combat. While in this state, Soulemere gains 66 temporary hit points and adds a +20 to all damage rolls. Soulemere's fury last for 10 rounds.

Immunity to Magic (Ex): Soulemere is immune to the effect of any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below.

A *dispel evil, dispel good, dispel chaos, dispel law,* or *dismissal* spell resets Soulemere's adaptive attack bonus to +0, and dazes Soulemere for 1 round. A *banishment* spell also resets Soulemere adaptive attack bonus but dazes the golem for 1d4+1 rounds. While Soulemere is dazed by either of these effects, its fast healing ability is suppressed.

Incarnum Radiance (Su): Once per day as a free action, Soulemere can activate this ability. This effect lasts for 7 rounds: An ash-gray aura surrounds Soulemere. It grants Soulemere a +4 bonus on melee damage rolls.

Rapid Meldshaping (Su): Once per day, Soulemere can unshape one of its existing soulmelds and immediately shape another soulmeld. This process requires a full-round action and provokes attacks of opportunity. The soulmeld that it shapes cannot be bound to a chakra, even if the soulmeld that it unshaped was bound to a chakra. Soulemere typically only does this if reduced to less than 50 hit points, at which point it unshapes *brass mane* and shapes *fellmist robe,* pumping 6 points of essential into the soulmeld, granting Soulemere a 40% miss chance from attackers more than 5 ft away from it, thus giving it a chance to escape.

Share Incarnum Radiance (Su): Soulemere never opts to share the benefits of his incarnum radiance with allies, as he has no allies to speak of.

Softbound Resistance: Soulemere can invest its essential in this special quality as if it were a soulmeld. Every point of invested essential grants it a +1 resistance bonus on all saving throws. The maximum essential capacity of this quality is as normal for a character of the constructs character level, 6 in Soulemere's case..

Soulmelds: Soulemere can shape five soul melds, drawn from the incarnate list. Soulemere currently has the following soulmelds shaped and bound. Each of these soulmelds has an essential capacity of 7.

Airstep Sandals (Su): Soulemere can fly up to 10 feet plus 10 feet per point of essential invested (at good maneuverability) as a move action once per round. Soulemere must end the flight solidly supported or fall.

Brass Mane (Su): Soulemere gains a +4 competence bonus on intimidate checks. Every point of essential invested in this soulmeld increases the competence bonus it grants on intimidate checks by 2. Because this soulmeld is bound to its throat chakra, once per minute, it can loose a devastating roar. All creatures except dragonnes within 10 feet plus 10 feet per point of essential invested must succeed on a Will save (DC 14 plus essential invested) or become fatigued.

Diadem of Purelight (Su): Soulemere shapes incarnum into a beam of light that illuminates the area directly in front of it. Soulemere's *diadem of purelight* shed lights as a torch, illuminating a 20-foot radius with bright illumination (and out to a 40-foot radius of shadowy illumination). This radius of illumination increases by 10 feet per essential invested. The area of shadowy illumination is always double the radius of bright illumination. Creatures gain a +2 insight bonus on spot checks when attempting to see anything within the radius of illumination (including within the shadowy illumination).

For the purpose of interacting with *darkness* spells, the *diadem of purelight* is treated as a *light* spell of a level equal to its invested essentia.

Lightning Gauntlets (Su): In Soulemere's case, this soulmeld appears as a crackling aura of electricity beneath it. Soulemere can deal 1d6 points of electricity damage plus an additional 1d6 points of electricity damage for every point of essential invested with a successful melee touch attack (a standard action). Because this soulmeld is bound to its hands chakra, Soulemere can add the damage dealt by *lightning gauntlets* to one attack per round made with its slam

attack, but this requires a normal melee attack rather than a touch attack. Soulemere must announce that it is using the *lightning gauntlets* before making the attack; if it misses, it can't use them again until its next turn.

Mantle of Flame (Su): While Soulemere wears its *mantle of flame,* any creature that strikes it with its body or a handheld weapon deals normal damage, but at the same time, the attacker takes 1d6 points of fire damage plus 1d6 additional points of fire damage for every point of essential invested. Creatures wielding weapons with exceptional reach, such as longspears, are not subject to this damage if they attack Soulemere.

The *mantle of flame* grants shadowy illumination in Soulemere's space, but provides no further lighting.

Essentia Pool: Soulemere has an essential pool of 16 (including the +1 for the Cobalt Charge feat, and +1 for the Cobalt Power feat) and an essential capacity of 6 (7 for soulmelds). Soulemere typically invests 5 points in Cobalt Charge, 4 points in the *diadem of purelight*, and 7 points in the *airstep sandals.* One the first round of combat, Soulemere shifts 7 points of essential to its *brass mane* (and roars) and 4 point to its *mantle of flame.* After the first round of combat, it shifts 7 points to its *lightning gauntlets* and leaves the remaining 4 points in its *mantle of flame.*

Construction

Soulemere is one of a kind, and its likeness will never be duplicated again. It is because of this rarity that artificers, historians, and scholars are so interested in not only discussing this rather taboo topic, but discovering its present whereabouts as well. Many a young and foolish adventurer has gone off to find the great "steaming behemoth" to never come back.

Tactics

Although Soulemere is a fearsome opponent, it isn't a strategist, and often follows the same pattern (which, admittedly has worked thus far) in battle after battle. Using the following guideline to help plan your assault on a group of seemingly benign PCs, or an army.

- Soulemere attempts to *detect* any good party members as soon as they come in range, and in combat it makes them its principal targets. Soulemere has little knowledge of spellcasters or what they're capable of, so it doesn't have any way to discern them as a threat.
- On the first round of combat, Soulemere activates its *incarnum radiance* ability as a free action. This adds +4 damage for the first seven rounds of combat. It also roars, and any creature within 80 feet except dragonnes must make a DC 21 Will save or become fatigued.
- Soulemere always charges when it can, and because of its Cobalt Charge feat, enjoys a +5 bonus on to hit and damage rolls when it does. Soulemere tries to charge the first target again, making optimal use of its *adaptive attack* ability. Soulemere deals an extra 4d6+5 (this is accounting for its Cobalt Charge feat, above) damage on a charge, and its natural attacks count as magical weapons for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.
- By shifting its essential (see below) it will deal an extra 7d6 points of electricity damage on a successful hit due to its *lightning gauntlets.*
- After the 1st round of combat, Soulemere gains 66 temporary hit points that last for 10 rounds (bringing its hp total up to 397 for the first 10 rounds of combat).
- What this all means is that if Soulemere charges, his attack roll is +36 (remember to drop its AC by 2 when its charges) and if Soulemere hits it deals 4d8+11d6+15! That's an average of 89 dmg/rnd on a successful hit (93 dmg/rnd for the first 7 round of combat)! Soulemere also has access to the power attack, cleave, and spring attack feats, which it makes judicious use of. And let's not forget the death from massive damage rule.
- Soulemere is practically immune to all magic (see below), and has DR/10 magic and adamantine. It's only true weaknesses in combat are its relatively low AC for a creature of its CR, and that it only gets one attack per round.
- Those who strike Soulemere with a handheld weapon or their bodies take 4d6 fire damage from its *mantle of flame.*

What this all amounts to is that Soulemere is a tough creature that should be the rare and stand-alone focus of an

adventure, not unlike stopping a recently awakened tarrasque or Ancient One.

Here are a few basic adventure leads to get the creative ball rolling on how to incorporate this interesting beastie into your *Eberron* (or any other) chronicle.

- **Rescue mission:** A archaeologist friendly to the PCs (perhaps a scholar at Morgrave University, or the like) got a little too close for comfort when tracking the migrations of Soulemere. Now it's struck on the rail and can't get off. It's relatively safe in the coach, but Soulemere keeps rolling around, and its only a matter of time before the scholar gets thrown free and Soulemere steam rolls over it, literally.
- **Important Find:** Prince Oargev of New Cyre or a favored member of House Cannith has claimed salvage rights on the soul train, and wants it for himself. He hires the heroes to go after it, and bring it back to him, in anyway they can, preferably alive.
- **Menace:** Something has set Soulemere off, and now its rampaging around the countryside like an angry bull, destroying everything in its path. No one is safe. Airship pilots reported spotting it a few days ago, headed for a local village or even a major city.

Feel free to combine as many of these ideas as you see fit. (Maybe the town Soulemere is headed for is New Cyre, or the scholar in the coach is actually a member of House Cannith.) An adventure like this makes for a great one shot. Just set the maniacal monster loose, plan a few dramatic pitfalls, and let the PCs loose to deal with it.

Soulemere is a living construct, something new and different. It loses its construct traits, but gains the living construct traits, which are summarized below.

Living Construct Subtype

A living construct is a new subtype of construct -- a created being given sentience and free will through powerful and complex creation enchantments. Living constructs combine aspects of both constructs and living creatures, as detailed below.

Features: A living construct derives its Hit Dice, base attack bonus progression, saving throws, and skill points from the template that gave it sentience or the class it selects.

Traits: A living construct possesses the following traits (unless other noted in the creatures entry).

- Unlike other constructs, a living construct has a Constitution score. A living construct does not gain bonus hit point through a Constitution bonus (or penalty) as other living creatures do.
- Unlike other constructs, a living construct does not have low-light vision or darkvision.
- Unlike other constructs, a living construct is not immune to mind influencing effects.
- Immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, disease, nausea, fatigue, exhaustion, and energy drain.
- A living construct cannot heal damage naturally.
- Unlike other constructs, living constructs are subject to critical hits, effects requiring a Fortitude save, death from massive damage, nonlethal damage, stunning, ability damage, ability drain, and death effects or necromancy effects.
- Unlike other constructs, a living construct can use the run action.
- Living constructs can be affected by spells that target living creatures as well as by those that target constructs. Damage dealt to a living construct can be healed by a *cure light wounds* spell or a *repair light damage* spell, for example, and a living construct is vulnerable to a *harm* spell. However, spells from the healing subschool prove only half their normal effects to a living construct.
- A living construct responds slightly differently from other living creatures when reduced to 0 hit points. A living construct with 0 hit points is disabled, just like a living creature. He can take only a single move action or standard action in each round, but strenuous activity does not risk further injury. When he has fewer than 0 hp but more than –10, a living construct is inert. He is unconscious and helpless, and he cannot perform any actions. However, an inert living construct does not lose additional hit points unless more damage is dealt to him, as with a living creature that is stable.

- Can be raised or resurrected.
- Does not need to eat, sleep, or breathe, but can still benefit from the effects of consumable spells and magic items, such as *heroes' feast* and potions.
- Does not need to sleep, but must rest for 8 hours before preparing spells.

A Primer to Incarnum

For those who don't have access to the ***Magic of Incarnum*** rules, the following summarizes what you need to know to use this unique creature in your game:

Incarnum is a new form of magic energy. *Essentia* (specifically *essential* points) represents how much raw power an incarnum wielder has to call upon. *Soulmelds* are like spells, sort of. An incarnum wielder must rest to shape soulmelds, and once he chooses his soulmelds for the day (from his class list) he can't shape different ones (usually). Actually, soulmelds are more like semi-permanent magic items. They aren't really tangible *unless* you bind a soulmeld to a *chakra.*

A *chakra* is the spiritual equivalent of a body part. For example, most humanoids have hand chakras, leg chakras, even heart and soul chakras (though you have to be an incarnum wielder to gain access to them). Binding a soulmeld to a chakra is sort of like putting on a magic item. In effect, it makes the soulmeld appear more 'real' and corporeal.

An incarnum wielder starts the game only being able to bind soulmelds to a few chakras (if any). As he gains more levels, new and more powerful chakras will become available to him so that he can bind his soulmelds to different charkas.

Like the spellcasting system uses spell points, the incarnum system use points of essential. Unlike spell points, however, these points renew and can be reinvested each round. There is also a maximum number of essential points an incarnum character can invest in any soulmeld (based on their level). Essentia doesn't have to just be invested in soulmelds; it can also be invested in some feats, class and racial features, and special qualities and abilities.

Stupervillains!

Costumed Nuisances for Supers Campaigns

by J. Edward Tremlett

Most supervillians one might meet in a Supers game are villains, through and through. They're evil and greedy, and possessed of power. They've got plans, and are willing to do whatever it takes to realize their sinister or deluded aims. And, most importantly, they have their act together.

But there are some supervillians who don't. They're losers -- inept. They're one-joke turkeys with glass jaws and feet of clay. One good sock to the head should deal with them, and if it doesn't, maybe your heroes can laugh them into submission. And doesn't every Supers game -- no matter how grim and gritty -- need a good in-character laugh once in a while?

So in the spirit of April Fools Day, here are some generic supervillains that really should just stay in their lairs. Some have useful talents they haven't figured out how to use properly, or can't. Some are their own worst enemy. And some might amount to something when they get their act together . . . someday . . .

They are ranked in increasing order of power, with notes on powers, strengths and weaknesses. Stat guidelines go Poor -- Average -- Medium -- Impressive -- Powerful -- Nigh-Powerful. Substitute your own setting for The City, plug them into your favorite game mechanic, and you've got almost ready-made comedy relief.

(And if you need some more inspiration, good places to find stupervillains in their natural habitat are included at the end.)

The Clockstopper (Talented Fool)

"Aha! Do as I say or I'll stop the flow of time *forever!* -- oww, my head . . ."

Matthew Winder; 26; American citizen with criminal record

Orphaned Matthew spent years sweeping floors and winding clocks in his cruel grandfather's timepiece shop. One day, he discovered that he could start and stop simple machines with the power of his mind. After using his power to drive his grandfather insane -- losing his one source of income -- he decided to use his powers to make some easy cash.

Calling himself The Clockstopper, he threatened a succession of Hurry-Mart cashiers into giving him money by claiming he'd stopped time. He then moved up to City First Bank's downtown branch, knowing that the guards' guns were also stopped by his power. But an alert teller with a digital watch saw through his ruse, and the angry customers chased him off.

Undeterred, Matthew decided a bigger stunt was needed, and threatened to stop the Clock Bridge's main clock for good if he wasn't given a million dollars. However, the effort of stopping one of the largest clocks in the world gave The Clockstopper a mini-stroke. He escaped from the hospital a week later, and has been laying low since, plotting a comeback.

Powers: Can use his massive hatred of clocks to stop and restart any simple machine within line of sight (clocks, wind-up toys, guns, etc.) Once he's stopped something, he can keep it stopped by staying angry, but usually loses control once he falls asleep. Affecting anything larger than a grandfather clock may give him a killer headache, and anything too large causes minor brain damage.

Stats: Average Body; Average Mental; Medium Spirit

Appearance: 5'6, 230 lb, brown hair, blue eyes, homely looks, dresses preppy.

Costume: Bright red suit with an appliqué of a broken clock in the center of his chest, black domino mask, boots and gloves. Had a black cape early on but tripped on it too many times to keep.

Family: Grandfather (78, insane, institutionalized)

The Terrorizer (Emotionally-Crippled Would-Be Vigilante)

"I should punish them . . . but then I'd be just like them . . . but someone's got to be like them to stop them . . . but does it have to be me . . . yes, I *should* punish them . . . but I'd be *just like them* . . . but someone's got to... wait! They're getting away again! Nooooooooo!"

Ferdinand Chateaux; 38; American Citizen with no criminal record

Someone had to do it. Ferdinand realized this after he read the third murder headline in a week. Folks just like him and his family -- dead for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Someone had to stop the scum. Someone had to deal with the lowlifes and gangsters that *didn't* wear costumes. And someone had to deal with them harshly.

Ferdinand had been a Marine. He'd seen action in Desert Storm. He worked at a firing range, which gave him access to weapons. And he went bowling every night he wasn't at the bar, which gave him an alibi. It was all perfect.

The problem was that Ferdinand thought too much for his own good. Everyone always said so. He'd find out when the gangs were meeting, set up a snipers nest and wait . . . but spend the whole time violently arguing with himself over consequences, rationales, and justice. And when the moment came he was too conflicted to pull the trigger, and let them get away.

The Battle Journal of the Terrorizer is three years old. It is filled with plans, diatribes, self-loathing screeds and only one kill -- the pot-bellied pig he shot by accident. He wept for months.

Powers: None. Has an impressive arsenal of weapons you could buy at any Gun-Mart stashed around the house, or in his SUV. He's training his dog to drop homemade explosives under cars, with so-far unimpressive results.

Stats: Medium Body; Average Mind, Poor Spirit

Appearance: 6 ft, 290 lb, black hair, brown eyes, moderately handsome, dresses like someone's blue-collar dad.

Costume: Black "night fighting" fatigues ordered from a vigilante magazine.

Family: Wife Doris (36), Daughter Suzie (6), Son Leroy (9), Puppers the Dog (3)

The Word (hamstringed talent)

"I said g-g-g-g-g- . . . g-G-G-G-G-Giff . . . giff giff give me the mo-mo-mo-money. And st-st-st-st . . . stop-p-p-p l-l-laughing . . . "

Gerald G. Goulash, 31, American Citizen with a Criminal Record

Gerald always knew he wasn't like other people. He knew he had some power up his sleeve. He knew he was destined to be a leader of men. Destined to have whatever he wanted. Mansions, yachts, legions of willing servants, pretty girls

. . .

The only problem was that Gerald was a stuttering goober with no self-confidence whatsoever. He stuttered whenever he was happy, sad, gleeful, angry, frightened or confused. On those rare occasions when he felt massively confident, he could tell others what to do and they'd do it. But he only usually felt that way when he was alone by himself, practicing in front of the mirror.

Eventually he learned that if he took the edge off with a few beers before a crime, it worked pretty well. Unfortunately, being half-drunk made him vulnerable to stupid mistakes, which is how every hero in The City has come to beat him.

Currently, The Word is being held incommunicado at Maximum Slam 23, awaiting trial for his back catalog of crimes. But one day he'll find a way to get out. And when he does, he's going to get back everything he deserves . . . after a beer or two.

Powers: Anything The Word tells someone to do, they do -- anything at all. It's that simple. It works equally well on the most mindless schlub or the mightiest hero (barring any mental defenses they may have.) However, the power must sound authoritative to work, and since The Word is always stuttering, it rarely does.

Stats: Average Body; Powerful Mind; Poor Spirit

Appearance: 5'11, 180 lb, Thinning blonde hair dyed blue, blue eyes, skeedy face, snazzy dresser.

Costume: Wears a blue suit with a succession of increasingly awful "power ties."

Family: Parents Harold and Maude Goulash (67, 56), living in Orlando, FL.

Dr. Banana (Mind-Shattering Power! Hilarious Side-Effects)

"Fools! I will crush you all for interfering with my plans!" (said in squeaky falsetto voice)

Dr. Juan X. Amarillo, 52, American citizen with criminal record

Dr. Amarillo should have known that geneticists didn't tend to drive nice cars or make it with gorgeous women, but he always thought there was a pot of gold waiting for him at the end of every project's rainbow. However, time and again others got the reward for his hard work, which wouldn't have been so bad if they hadn't rubbed his nose in it.

One day, he couldn't take anymore. He subverted the ends of a new project to his own devices, attempting to discover a means to temporarily splice more powerful DNA into the human genome. Soon he discovered that he'd found a way to make a much more powerful man -- the sort of man who could go take what he wanted -- and all he had to do was ingest a pill!

He tried it out on himself, of course, and the results were impressive: suddenly the paunchy, weak fellow was massively huge and unbelievably strong! Highly resistant to damage! Almost impossible to knock over! Able to bend metal, crush brick walls and shrug off bullets!

Unfortunately, he was also slow -- unbelievably, painfully slow. And bright yellow. And spoke in a squeaky falsetto that made would-be victims laugh rather than scream. (He also only had an hour of power per dose of the yellow pill, which made the speed issue very pressing.)

His first crime consisted of him knocking over Second City Bank, downtown. The Liberty League pummeled him for the better part of an hour, and stole his bottle of pills. They then followed him as he ineptly tried to get away, detaining him once he changed back to human.

The speedster hero The Blink called him Big Banana, as a joke. But sitting in prison, waiting for his accomplices to sneak in another yellow pill, Amarillo decided to take back the insult, and adopted the name Dr. Banana. He has since

made trying to kill The Blink his number one priority, which inevitably ends in farce since The Blink achieves speeds over 1,000 times faster than Dr. Banana.

Powers: When he takes his yellow pills, Dr. Banana gains superpowers for one hour per pill ingested. He bulks up to five times his size, gains super-strength and bulletproof skin, and weighs about a ton. Unfortunately, he moves about one-third the speed of a normal human in this state, his skin and hair turn bright yellow, and his voice turns into a kittenish squeak that sounds as threatening as . . . well, a kitten.

Stats: Average/Powerful Body; Impressive Mind; Average Spirit

Appearance: normally 4'11, 150 lb, balding brown hair, brown eyes and disheveled lab clothing. When he takes his medicine he's 8'4, 1999 lb, with a shock of yellow hair, black eyes and a stretchy pink thong thing. He looks pretty fuggly in either form.

Costume: That stretchy pink thong thing.

Family: Mother Esperanza (87), living in Mexico City

K'Tang the Konqueror (Disinterested Alter-Ego)

"Take over The City, or watch 'Desperate Housewives?' Well, that's an easy choice. Now, did my worthless host buy more pizza, or shall I order out?"

John-Bartholomew Frazer-Vole III, 29, American citizen without so much as a parking ticket.

K'Tang was a disembodied intellect from the unimaginable battle-world of K'R'Ang. Bound within an otherwise-unassuming necklace, he was an intelligent super-weapon designed to meld with the mind and body of whomever wore that necklace. He was kept in reserve to protect K'R'Ang from alien invasion, at which time he was given unto a strong-willed champion to defend his world. And when the danger was past, he would be put away again.

After several memorable battles -- some lasting decades -- K'Tang refused to be put back in his box, and conquered K'R'Ang, itself. And then another world, and another, and another . . . until he sat at the hub of a massive stellar empire, and still wanted more. But his tyranny was his undoing: a plot was hatched to wrest the necklace from his host, seal the weapon away in a special binding casket and jettison it into space.

No one is quite sure how the casket traveled from one galaxy to another, and wound up on Earth in the time of the Pharaohs. And there are many theories as to why it was buried with King Nat-Shep-Hat IV, just beyond the Valley of the Kings. All that matters is that John-Bartholomew Frazer-Vole -- frustrated but brilliant archaeologist -- found the necklace in 1934, put it on, and became the new host to K'Tang the Konqueror.

For the next two years, the original Liberty League fought K'Tang the Konqueror on three occasions, standing bravely against one of the most dangerous opponents imaginable. Many valiant heroes lost their lives stopping him from taking over the world, and the first Captain Patriot died tearing the necklace from K'Tang's neck, putting an end to the threat. The necklace was sealed in The Vault, John-Bartholomew went to jail for the rest of his life, and the threat was considered to be contained . . .

Unfortunately, K'Tang had nothing but time. The death of the original Red Flame, just this last year, weakened the mystical seal that hero placed over The Vault. That was enough to let the necklace teleport itself out and find the closest person to its last host: the grandson and namesake of John-Bartholomew Frazer-Vole -- a near-worthless slacker who worked at Smiley's Pizza, downtown in The City.

The bad news was that John-Bartholomew III knew what the necklace was and, tired of being third-best in life, put it on. The good news was that John-Bartholomew III had the mental power of a doorknob, which meant that instead of there being a melding with the mind of K'Tang, the disembodied intellect was able to achieve full dominance.

Free from others' dreams of conquest and power, K'Tang realized that he really didn't care to take over the world, enslave its women and make his host's manager eat pizza until he exploded like that guy from the movie *Se7en*. Instead, he wanted to relax, try new experiences and take up poetry. Maybe painting. And there's so many movies and television shows to catch up on . . . and books! He loves books.

The sad thing is that John-Bartholomew Frazer-Vole III has no idea he's being played for a sucker. Such is K'Tang's power that he can convince his host that they're working on a slow, careful plan to take over the world, and implant false memories to that effect. So John-Bartholomew goes to work and dreams of power, and when he comes home and puts on the necklace his alter ego turns on TiVo, reads four books at once and orders Thai from that nice place on the corner.

Powers: Saying that K'Tang is powerful is something of an understatement. He has nigh-super-speed, nigh-super-strength, and nigh-super-senses that rival the strongest of the world's known heroes. He can fly, survive in vacuum, mask his appearance to look like anything or anyone he's seen, throw fireballs the size of boulders and call down lightning. He also has the tactical smarts of someone who's fought and won a thousand wars on dozens of planets.

Stats: Average/Nigh-Powerful Body; Average/Nigh-Powerful Mind; Poor/Nigh-Powerful Spirit. The necklace is made from mysterious (and Nigh-Powerful) B'L'amo metal.

Appearance: John-Bartholomew is 4'11, 300 lb, with dreadlocked blonde hair, brown eyes and baggy slacker clothes. K'Tang is 6'9, 280 lb, with long black hair, blue skin, ten red eyes, two pointy ears, a huge mouth full of sharp teeth, four arms with three fingers, demonic wings and a devil's tail.

Costume: Galactic conquerors need no costume. (Fortunately for the faint of heart, K'Tang has no genitalia)

Family: Parents John-Bartholomew II and Hilde-Marta (45, 34) Brother Ray-Charles (23) and sister Sarah-Kate (25). John-Bartholomew I died in prison in 1988.

Further Inspiration

- *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* (TV show)
- Grant Morrison's run on *Doom Patrol* (esp. the two Brotherhoods of Dada)
- *Flaming Carrot Comics*
- *Mystery Men* (Movie)
- *The Tick* (comic book and TV show)
- *Venture Bros* (TV show)
- Peter Milligan's *X-Force* and *X-Statix*

Avril

for *Transhuman Space (GURPS Fourth Edition)*

by Phil Masters

The weblife entity known as Avril is an artificial intelligence, something between a gypsy AI, a rogue, and an especially sophisticated free meme. "She" can be treated for game purposes as an emergent intelligence, but in fact her nature was largely a matter of *design.* She's closer to low-sapient than fully sapient in some ways, but she has much of the versatility and emotional awareness of a full SAI; she was carefully built that way.

She was created by a small team of disaffected hackers, all of them based in Quebec, under the leadership of Annette Tallien and Josef Mallory. These two had previously worked as system programmers for a local subsidiary of the Japanese company Kanzaki Robotics, but had developed a very poor relationship with their supervisors, and indulged themselves by installing a series of "back doors" and subtle security flaws in several systems on which they worked. After their relationship with their employers finally broke down completely and they were sacked, they indulged themselves by creating an AI to exploit these loopholes and cause trouble for the company.

They realized that a highly active prankster rogue would be a primary target for hunters, and might be deleted before the joke really paid off, so they gave their creation a powerful set of tools for survival; it plants copies of itself all over the Web, when it gets the chance, and also sets up small, totally non-sapient processes on multiple systems, which recognize the active existence of the current version of the rogue, watching for subtle signals hidden in routine traffic. When these monitors are certain that a previous version of the main program has been deleted, they activate another on some system which previous incarnations have identified as potentially useful. The new "incarnation" then hunts down encrypted activity logs which its predecessors will have hidden in yet other locations, usually giving it a good idea of events immediately prior to its last destruction.

However, "Avril" was given a broad set of goals and motivations rather than specific instructions, and her personality adapted over the subsequent months, as AIs do; Kanzaki is no longer her only target. In fact, because she wishes to avoid drawing unwanted attention to whatever is her current base of operations, she sometimes consciously *refrains* from causing trouble on the company's systems, when she has an alternative target. Still, Kanzaki's system security department is painfully aware of her existence, as a persistent gypsy AI with a taste and talent for abusing their hardware.

Avril was deliberately designed from the first to be a self- sustaining being, fully independent of her creators; in fact, Tallien and Mallory deleted any references to themselves from her memory, and did their best to remove any other clues as to her origin from her structure, which has in any case evolved considerably over time. They went on to pursue seemingly innocent careers in the industry, and it would be very hard to pin the blame for Avril's existence on them. (Mallory even somewhat regrets the act; Tallien continues to follow Avril's career with gleeful interest.) Their various associates in the work only knew them by anonymous codenames, and indeed mostly only know bits and pieces about the finished AI, although several of them came away with knowledge of security vulnerabilities in Kanzaki's systems, and continue to exploit this for illicit purposes. Avril usually runs on Kanzaki-made systems, mostly large mainframes and macroframes where she can steal the odd processor cycle unnoticed, but is versatile enough to exploit other hardware.

Primarily, Avril is a practical joker. Her personality is shallow and unreflective by human standards, but still quite complex; however, her makers gave her an obsessive-compulsive need to play pranks, which she couldn't shed without destroying most of her sense of self. (It might well be theoretically possible for her to secure a much safer life for herself by transmitting herself to a transhumanist enclave where independent AIs have the right to life and citizenship, but she's highly unlikely ever to do such a thing; it would deny her very reason for existence.) She may not be terribly smart by human standards, but she's meticulous in her set-ups, far more so than most human pranksters, and she uses her Visualization ability to full effect. She also has a "signature," her glittering silver fish avatar- symbol, which she

attaches to all her efforts. Her pranks range from the trivial and routine (planting fish symbols in inappropriate places in VR environments and productions), through the economically disruptive (adjusting an automated production system's programming so that all the items it produces come out fish-shaped, silver colored, and useless for their purpose), to the destructive and even vicious (planting a series of hoax messages which cause police SWAT teams to raid the home of a nervous elderly citizen -- then sending video recordings of the incident to the press, "signed" with her symbol). Experts who've analyzed her behavior have come to the conclusion that she doesn't actually have much of a sense of humor, by human standards; she's more compelled to *annoy* people, and her idea of what humans find funny is largely rule-based. This may seem surprising, but then, a lot of human pranksters aren't really very dissimilar.

Although Avril is functionally amoral, indeed more or less sociopathic in human terms, her designers made sure that she started with not only a functioning survival instinct, but a deep-seated understanding that breaking certain rules would attract far too much hostile attention, and hence would be very bad for her survival. As a result, she carefully avoids killing or seriously injuring any fully sapient being herself; it's not impossible that her pranks could lead to harm, but only if one of the victims reacted violently, in a way that was clearly their fault. She'd have little compunction about deleting a hostile NAI, and survival is her primary concern, but she may well ensure that survival, or avoid capture, by triggering the deletion of one of her "instances," just so long as she is reasonably certain that another (preferably with access to reasonably recent memory logs) will soon be run. She will hope that her opponents, lacking a proper grasp of her nature, will think of her as "dead."

This reflects another of her concerns and another point where she is careful not to trigger human paranoia. Just as humans fear "killer AIs," they fear proliferating xoxes, perhaps even more. (Avril doesn't understand such fears, but she can work with them.) Hence, she's scrupulous about only ever running one instance of herself at a time. In fact, if one of her backups is ever launched but discovers that an older version was already running safely, she'll send that "older sister" a detailed encrypted log of her memories, for reference, and then delete herself. (This has happened half a dozen times; on two occasions, two copies were in operation simultaneously for several days, and on one, there were *three* Avrils operating for a few hours.) Her sense of self-preservation is strong, but the forms it takes can look bizarre to humans. Like many other AIs, she sees any copy of herself as *being* herself, no more or less valid than any other, and while she values her memories, she doesn't regard them as defining what she is; if she was, say, trapped in a "sandbox" processor with no external communications, she might well self-destruct dramatically. As a result, while many instances of Avril have been hunted down and destroyed, security specialists only have partial and corrupted fragments of her software. It might be possible for hunters to exploit this psychology to persuade copies of Avril to delete themselves, but that would demand that the attackers very effectively trick an expert trickster.

Because of this "restraint," not everyone who knows about Avril is terribly worried about her. Indeed, some members of the public find the stories that they've heard of her activities very amusing, and watch out for news of her with enthusiasm. A number of well-informed computer security experts, human and AI, are much less sanguine about her, though; a few are downright terrified. She clearly has exceptional knowledge of computer security vulnerabilities, and because the origin of this knowledge is a mystery, she looks all the more formidable; she's also adaptable, clever, and aggressively willing to make trouble for other beings. Some observers fear that she has a deeper agenda; others are simply scared that she could turn more violent, or simply find the idea of a weblife practical joker, however subtle, very worrying; how many more might one day appear? Avril's recently observed habit of playing pranks involving urban traffic management systems has several people especially worried; that sort of thing could easily turn lethal. (The unknown chief reason is actually simply that, as of January 2100, she's running on a major urban traffic management computer, somewhere in North America.)

Incidentally, there are several rewards on offer for more complete copies of Avril, "for analysis"; some have been posted anonymously, officially because the originators are computer security analysts who find too much public attention tiresome and inconvenient. A common belief is that these really come from organizations or groups who'd like to analyze such a sophisticated piece of software to steal ideas for their own use in, say, espionage, but one or two may come from *Avril,* and be designed to muddy the waters and give her leads on people who know too much about her. And while she isn't terribly vengeful, anyone who annoyed or worried her enough, or just caught her attention especially strongly, might have some serious problems.

Avril   *168 points*

*(See [Changing Times](#) for rules on creating **Transhuman Space** characters under Fourth edition.)*

Avril always uses very similar avatars in virtual reality -- a small, glittering silvery fish which often darts around faster than human perceptions can track. Also, her pranks are always "signed" in some way with the symbol of this fish. She might adopt a different avatar to facilitate a trick, but it would almost certainly be modified in some way -- say, she might adopt a human guise but wearing a fish pendant.

ST 0 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 11 [40]; **HT** 12 [0].
Damage 0/0; BL 0; HP 30 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP n/a.
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 0 [0].
SM +2; Weight 1,000 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 10.
CF: Western [0].
Languages: French (Native) [0]; English (Native) [6]; Spanish (Native) [6].

Advantages

Computer Wizard 1 [5]; Extra Life +4* (Copy, 20%; Requires Body, -20%) [60]; Gypsy Emergent SAI-7 [188]; Modular Abilities (Computer Brain) 1 (8) (Limited Integration, -20%; Skills and Languages Only, -10%) [27]; Reputation +1 (Among casual observers of Web affairs, as an amusing non-lethal prankster; Recognized Occasionally) [1].

* In addition to the Extra Life from the SAI template. In fact, the number of viable copies of Avril available for restoration varies from day to day and even from hour to hour; five is a reasonable average as of January 2100.

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Enemy (Kanzaki Computer Security; Medium Group, Less Powerful, Hunter, Appears Quite Rarely) [-10]; Enemy (Weblife monitoring groups; Large Group, Less Powerful, Watcher, Appears Fairly Often) [-7]; Macroframe* [-104]; Poor** [-15]; Reputation -3 (Among computer security experts, as a subtle but high-priority menace; Recognized Sometimes) [-7]; Secret (Devious gypsy infomorph currently misusing a busy computer) [-20]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property: "cover story" usually involves passing as a LAI or legal American SAI) [-10]; Trademark (Always attaches silver fish symbol to pranks) [-5]; Trickster (12) [-15].

* Avril's current "home" system is a macroframe. In other incarnations, she may make use of a mainframe or even a mobile cybershell of some kind.
** Avril's "wealth" represents access to resources she uses directly for various purposes -- all acquired illegally or by scavenging, of course. The software that she can misappropriate on any system she occupies, including skill sets and teleoperation programs, can be worth a great deal, and she maintains a reasonable Status for her cover identity by using the physical resources of her borrowed systems when necessary.

Quirks: Broad-Minded; Fully prepared to delete herself if there's another copy running; Little real sense of humor -- can't appreciate others' jokes; Very careful about killing sapients or xoxing herself; Will play trivial tricks on easy targets when bigger stuff is infeasible. [-5]

Skills

Acting-11 (IQ) [2]; Area Knowledge (The Web)-11 (IQ) [1]; Camuoflage- 11 (IQ) [1]; Computer Operation/TL10-16*

(IQ+4) [4]; Current Affairs (Science & Technology)/TL10-11 (IQ) [1]; Diplomacy-10** (IQ-2) [1]; Electronics Operation (Communications)/TL10-11*** (IQ-1) [1]; Electronics Operation (Media)/TL10-13*** (IQ+1) [4]; Fast-Talk-11** (IQ-1) [1]; Hidden Lore (Kanzaki North America systems security flaws and trapdoors)-14 (IQ+3) [12]; Propaganda/TL10-12** (IQ) [2]; Psychology (Human Applied)-10** (IQ-2) [1]; Scrounging-12 (Per) [1]; Traps/TL10-10 (IQ-1) [1].

* Increased from SAI-7 template; includes +1 for Computer Wizard.
** Includes +1 for Memetics Talent.
*** Includes +1 for Computer Wizard.

Adventure Seeds

Gone Fishing: A small company or individual vehicle operator handling deliveries for the U.S. National Parks Service in Florida comes to the PCs with an odd story -- a complicated tale of inappropriate shipments ordered, supposedly empty warehouses full of tanks of organic materials, and erratic cybershell behavior. It's hard to pin down, but it has the slight smell of a screw-up that'll be pinned on some unfortunate bystander if it turns into a disaster, so the caller is looking to cover himself.

In fact, a combination of circumstances after her last deletion left Avril's latest incarnation running as the controlling AI on a polypede cybershell being used for environmental restoration work in the Everglades. She doubts that she can last long here -- its system really isn't big enough to hide on -- and she's not been able to arrange a transmission to a larger system so far. So she's tried to ensure that she has other versions of herself ready to roll on systems elsewhere around the country, and she's setting up an especially flamboyant joke in Florida which will culminate in the release of thousands of genetically modified fish which are totally inappropriate for this environment. She doesn't give a damn about environmental damage, of course, and if and when she's exposed, she plans to make a theatrical "break for freedom" in the polypede, causing lots of property damage and loudly spouting random political slogans pulled off fringe discussion boards on the Web until she's destroyed.

A Prophet is Not Without Honor: Avril hasn't previously made much use of memetic techniques -- her creators were more interested in old-fashioned pie-in-face humor than subtle mental tinkering, and didn't give her any special training -- but she's aware of the field, has a SAI's refined awareness of systems of thought, and can always load appropriate skill sets if she wants to do something for which she isn't trained. Or, she now reflects, she can get someone else who's better at this "charisma" thing to do the work.

Which is how the Unified Way (see **Toxic Memes,** p. 28) has come to North America. Avril spent some time contacting a branch of the cult and convincing it of her sincerity; she also had access to sufficient data communications resources to enable her to import a copy of the Shepherd. She wasn´t able to get hold of a bioshell for it, but with the aid of the cult itself, she managed to acquire a few fairly good Humaniform cybershells, each now secretly marked with a fish symbol that's becoming the symbol of "American Shepherdism" (to the annoyance of various Christians who were already using a completely different fish logo). The meme is actually rather a poor fit to local conditions, but the Shepherd can always make some converts -- and the Unified Way's creed of civil disobedience is quite capable of making trouble anywhere. While various North American governments lodge informal protests and a few threats with bemused but amused TSA governments, and quietly seek to bargain for advice (beyond "shoot them all") from China, a number of groups are working to contain the problem. And Avril is stepping away from involvement with the affair, but still feeding it a little aid from time to time, to keep the joke going. She's even working to promote rifts *within* the cult; she finds religions especially amusing when they schism.

Oedipus, Complexity 7: Josef Mallory is a worried man. Avril isn't supposed to know who created her, but he suspects that she might feel at least as curious about such things as any human foundling. Creating her seemed amusing at the time, and a good way to get back at the SOBs who'd pushed him around and out of his job, but he's become a little more cool-headed over time, and it's gradually dawned on him that there's a digital monster on the Web that might one day show up calling him daddy. What's worse, just recently, he's received a series of anonymous messages, each marked with a fish symbol. So he's taking defensive measures. Anyone with a known likely interest in the Avril problem may start receiving anonymous messages of their own -- useful clues about this subject, showing a detailed

knowledge of Avril's internal architecture. If anyone scores notable successes with this knowledge, Josef will send them more. Everyone involved in all this is making good use of standard anonymity techniques; it'd probably take the resources of a government department to track them down.

The irony is, Avril still *doesn't* know about Josef -- yet. Those messages came from one of his assistants on the original design project, who traced him and decided that this would make a great joke itself. This former assistant is one of Avril's biggest fans, and regards imitation as a wonderful form of flattery. If Avril is seriously harmed and details of the methods used get out, this former assistant may guess who was responsible, and escalate his own campaign by way of revenge -- or simply find a way to inform Avril of Josef's identity. (Simply sacrificing him to the authorities wouldn't be *cool,* though.)

See also: "Crush," by Ben Jeapes (available online at http://www.sff.net/people/ben-jeapes/stories/crush.htm).

Pyramid Review

Dead Money

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

Illustrated by Brian Snoddy

112-Card Deck, Small Rules Sheet; $14.95

Dead Money is a game of hands, hands, and brains. Hands of cards, hands to hold the brains, and the brains needed to play some of those cards. Designed by James Ernest, this card game brings together his love of poker with a theme common to several other titles from Cheapass Games: Zombies. "Dead Money" is also a [derogatory term](#) in Poker.

So after having served fast food in *Give Me the Brain* and *[Lord of the Fries](#)* and run for the brains on the train in *[The Great Brain Robbery,](#)* we are back at Friedey's, but not the restaurant staffed by members of the corpse cortege. Rather in *Dead Money,* we are at Friedey's, the Saloon and Gambling Hall of the Damned. With poker being the latest fad, Friedey's is running regular tournaments and to make up the numbers, it is using the staff. The problem is that employees are not allowed to win, and zombies have great poker faces. So with zombies being the last ones in the tournament, the aim is not to win, and the best way of doing that is by a zombie losing money. This is done by getting rid of all the cards in a zombie's hand, and the first to do so wins the game. This being a Cheapass game, one more item needs to be supplied by the players, in this case, a six-sided die.

Designed for three to six players, *Dead Money* consists of 112 cards divided between eight Brain cards and two complete poker decks. However, these are better than your average decks because nearly every card depicts a full color zombie drawn by Brian Snoddy. Besides its suit and rank, and any illustration, each card has a title, a set of instructions for describing its effects when played, and two or three icons down the side. These depict either one or two green hands, a brain, or one or two coins.

The hands indicate how many hands a zombie uses to play a card. If the card shows one hand then a zombie can play another card marked with one hand in his turn, but if the card shows two hands then it is the only card a zombie can play on his turn. A brain on the card indicates that a zombie must have a brain to play it. The coins show how many cards a zombie must draw if he wins any showdown following the scrabble for a dropped brain.

Starting with a hand of seven cards, each zombie plays one or two cards a turn until his hand is emptied and he wins the game. Typical one hand cards include "Suicide King," which allows a zombie to discard any brain in play (if the only one in play is his, hard luck) and "Give 'Em What They Deserve," which lets a zombie draw, arrange, and replace the top five cards in the deck. Typical two-hand cards include "Is This Whiskey Vegetarian," which forces a neighbor to the right to draw a card, and "Grave Digger," which enables a zombie to go through the discard pile for a brain, or steal one from another player if unavailable. If a card cannot be played, then a zombie must draw a card.

Alternatively a zombie can play a brain card which goes down on the table face up. Although it ends a zombies' turn, it also forces him to draw two more cards and take another turn. It is possible to have two brains in play, but having at least one enables a zombie to play a greater range of cards. For example, "Waking up the Monster" lets a zombie put a card from his hand onto the top of the deck, while "The Great Brains Robbery" forces every other zombie to give you their brains in play.

Unfortunately the effort taken to both hold a brain and play brain-needing cards can be too much for a zombie who

might drop his brain. Each time a zombie plays a brain card, he must make a skill roll. This is done after the card's effects have been resolved, the zombie must equal or better the card's rank on the six-sided die. If the suit of the brain in play matches the suit of the card played, a +1 bonus is applied to the roll per matching brain. This is the only way a zombie can catch or beat the highest rank card that needs a brain to play, which is 7. If the skill roll is made, the zombie keeps his brain and play continues. If a brain is dropped, it is up for grabs and a Showdown ensues.

During a Showdown, which interrupts the current turn, each player forms a poker hand from his cards with which he bids for the now free brain. A zombie does not have to bid, but bids are done in turn order and a bid cannot underbid a previous bid. The rules sheet includes a short list of poker hands, useful for those who do not know poker (like myself). All bid cards are discarded, but the zombie with the successful bid not only wins the brain but takes the next turn. He must also draw cards equal to the number of coins shown on the winning bid. This gives him more cards to play, but he has greater flexibility in what he plays, whereas the zombies with the lower bids merely discard cards from their hands. Although not always possible, it is always better to bid low and discard the bid, unless a zombie really, really wants that brain.

Playing *Dead Money* sounds simple and it is, but actually getting rid of your cards is made all the more difficult because it is exactly what every zombie is trying to do. This is obvious, but it's a game in which every zombie is being nasty to each other. The game becomes a little complex when working out a card's instructions where part of the instructions cannot be fulfilled, and this can cause disagreements. But even with the interruptions of the Showdown, *Dead Money* is quick to play and enjoyable.

Dead Money benefits from being in color and the artwork of Brian Snoddy. In fact, Snoddy's zombies are even better in color and Wild West garb. The game also benefits from a simplicity of design that has not always been present in recent Cheapass titles. *Dead Money* is not only a return to a popular Cheapass theme, but a return to the simplicity of the best Cheapass designs.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Taluva

Published by Rio Grande Games

Designed by Marcel-Andre Merkle

Boxed Tile Board Game; $30

Taluva is ostensibly a game of peoples settling volcanic islands from Marcel-Andre Merkle, designer of *Attika,* published by Rio Grande Games. Its a fun, quick-playing tile laying game with neat buildings, a relevant third dimension, and a tendency to surprise you.

Each player begins the game with a supply of buildings in their color: 20 huts, three temples, and two towers. Each turn you must draw one of the 48 terrain tiles, add it to the map, then build.

Each terrain tile consists of a triangle of three hexes, one of which is a volcano, the other two are grassland, jungle, desert, rock, or lake. The first two terrain types are much more common than the latter three. There are some doubles, as in Volcano-Lake-Lake. You can place a tile anywhere on the table contacting the existing map on one or more hexsides, even creating holes if you like. You can also place tiles over existing tiles in a volcanic eruption, which is subject to the following additional rules: the volcano hex of the tile you place must sit on top of an existing volcano hex, the newly placed tile must be supported under all three of its hexes (no caves), and the newly placed tile must cover parts of at least two previous tiles (you can't stack straight up). You can crush huts (your own or others), which are removed from the game. You may not destroy temples or towers.

There are four ways to build. A single hut can be placed in any non-volcano hex at elevation one, forming a new settlement (you cannot place in this fashion next to any of your existing buildings). You can expand a settlement by putting new huts into all the hexes of a chosen terrain type adjacent to one of your existing settlements. If you expand into a level-two hex you must place two huts in that hex, and you must place three huts in a hex of elevation level three. A temple can be added to a hex adjacent to any of your settlements that occupies at least three hexes, but you cannot place a second temple in any settlement. Finally, a tower can be added to one of your settlements on any hex of elevation three. You can't build on volcano hexes (you saw that coming). If you cannot build, you lose and drop out of the game.

There are two ways to win. If one of the players builds all of his buildings of two of the three types, he wins immediately. You might suspect this would typically be all the towers and all the temples, but during review games some ended with someone placing all their temples and all their huts nearly as often. Should players successfully prevent each other from reaching this goal and the last tile is placed, the player who's played the most temples wins, with towers breaking ties, and huts breaking any further ties.

Typical tactics include trying to place several of the same type of hex next to one of your settlements to allow efficient expansion, causing volcanic eruptions that trim down the size of an opponent's settlement so he can't build a temple, crushing your own huts to divide a settlement and create a temple-building opportunity, or, most fun of all, creating level-three terrain adjacent to one of your settlements and then putting a tower on it.

Its entertaining that the destruction of one's huts is not necessarily disastrous. You've already built them; that's often what counts. Sometimes, in fact, you may destroy your own huts to separate one large settlement with a temple into two, to make building a second temple possible. The two times losing huts can hurt you is when you were about to build a temple but the reduced size of the settlement no longer allows it, or when loss of the huts denies you access to

part of the board that's about to become advantageous . . . say, with level three terrain.

There is very little luck, only in the draw of the tiles, and the tiles are similar enough that a "good" draw isn't overwhelming and a "bad" draw isn't disastrous. The landscape shifts quickly enough that long-range planning doesn't pay off, but looking ahead a turn or two can net you an unblockable tower.

Player interaction is pretty good: you can do some damage to others by crushing their huts with a volcanic eruption or blocking their expansion, but this usually comes at the expense of your own expansion. Placing a third level tile creates two opportunities for building, of which you can only take one; thus, building your tower often gives someone else a chance to build theirs. An ideal spot for two players often results in a game of "high altitude chicken" as each waits for the other to place the tile that will give them each a tower, using their own placement phase to extend their other projects.

This is almost a gateway game: it's quick, it's easy, it's fun, and when you see a game in progress across the room you do get the "I want to play *that!*" feeling. The building placement rules have, at first, a little of the "except on Tuesday" feel, which might make a non-gamer's first go a bit rough. In practice, though, the tile and building placement rules are second nature after 10 minutes, and it's all hut-crushing and tower building fun after that.

Physically the game is well done. The buildings are wood pieces of reasonable size, and they're visually interesting, not cubes or generic houses. The huts are a little difficult to pick up, especially if your fingers are less than nimble. The tiles are quite thick, making the hut-covered "slopes" intriguing even from the next table over. The box insert holds the tiles nicely, though there is just one bin for all four colors of buildings.

This game is reasonably priced at $30, looks great on the table, plays quickly, and is very enjoyable. It's the kind of game that can be played several times at a sitting, and it won't end the same way twice.

--C. Andrew Walters

Make with the Funny

It's April Fool's, and that means our annual issue of fun and frivolity. We're playing it a little low-key this year, avoiding anything [too crazy](#), but hopefully we've still got enough of interest for those of the off-the-wall as well as more "straight" material.

This time I'm going to toss my hat into the ring with some advice that may well be the equivalent of painting red-and-white concentric circles on my chest and walking into a shooting range: I'm going to offer advice for how to be witty as a character.

Now, the slings and arrows can come from at least two directions. First, many believe that teaching how to "be witty" is akin to teaching how to "be tall"; it's a trait that you either have or you don't. While I believe this is true to a certain extent, I also believe there are certain techniques you can use to invoke mirth that are formulaic enough to be adaptable by lots of folks, but still be interesting even if you know the "tricks."

Second, some might view this as setting myself up as a paragon of humor. Well, I'm not; I like to think I do well enough to get by, but in the end, there are probably at least two or three people in the world funnier than I am . . . possibly as many as four. Finally, attempting to analyze humor tends to be very tricky, pretty dry, and usually not too funny. Then again, most attempts at analysis don't require the participants to exhibit the properties of the analyzed -- scientists analyzing uranium seldom explode, for example -- so hopefully you all will be patient if we're not exactly a laugh riot.

So, knowing full well the dangers involved and doing a daring potbellied cartwheel into the minefield, let's get on with the tips.

Never laugh at yourself; never repeat your quips. The first tip is an absolute, the second tip is less such but still warrants a use of the word "never."

It's possible to be *emotional,* provided you're not laughing. Emotion is especially appropriate to express if you're exasperated or outraged.

Wit often stems from outrage. Okay; maybe "outrage" is a bit of a strong word; exasperation, disbelief, sorrow, or disapproval can all be fine substitutes. But most of what an adventuring party encounters can either be broken down into 1) things that would invoke outrage in non-adventuring types, and 2) shopping expeditions.

Thus let's say that an encounter results in the adventuring party almost getting killed by a dragon. A reasonable quip afterwords might be something like, "Well, if anyone had died, I'm sure it would have come as fine conciliation to their parents and widows that they perished trying to stab something that, as it turns out, really didn't want to be stabbed."

Let's analyze that one a bit more, shall we? (It's rhetorical; keep scrolling down.)

Think of what you're going to say before saying it. This one should be obvious, but -- despite the ease with which the wittiest folks pull off their craft -- being witty takes some mental gymnastics . . . especially if you haven't practiced. As such, you should never try to just construct a witticism (such as the 37-word monstrosity above) off the cuff. Fortunately, the previous example would work well right after escaping, but it would also work well while the party is camping, or even for the *next* encounter, should it seem that they'll face similar situations. (Of course, in that case, change it to, "Well, if anyone dies, I'm sure it will come . . .")

Understatement is usually funnier than exaggeration. A textbook example includes Han Solo's exasperated "Luke, we've got company!" after completely botching his efforts at fooling the blaster-toting authorities by intercom. Likewise, the crux of our first example wit is the understatement that the entity "really didn't want to be stabbed."

So let's say that, in a *Shadowrun* campaign, the party's plan is to sneak in, investigate, and only engage in combat if absolutely necessary. Of course things go wrong, and the heroes find themselves in the middle of a furious firefight. A suitable quip might be, "Are we still on the 'sneak in' portion of the plan?" (It's understatement because that's obviously *not* what's going on.)

However, exaggeration *can* be amusing, although it usually requires the exaggeration to an extreme (c.f. "Marsh asserts he's one of the four funniest people in the world," above). Thus, while exploring a neighboring province, if the heroes have endured their third attack by random assailants in two days, a suitable quip might be, "Apparently every citizen of this kingdom has undergone certification as a fully trained assassin. The barmaid from last night is probably the leader of an apocalyptic death cult, and that crippled beggar we encountered no doubt lost his legs when he ripped them off to bludgeon the last group of adventurers who made the mistake of crossing the border." Note that the exaggeration is probably better served by overdoing it here; I don't think it's quite as funny to say, "Apparently this kingdom has 10,000 fully trained assassins . . ."

Juxtaposition is really funny, and so are random facts or allusions. Again, in the "certified assassin" quip, note how we brought up a barmaid and a beggar (both of which were, presumably, featured earlier). Random facts you can introduce to the mix (preferably true but obscure ones) can add to the wit, especially if they serve as juxtaposition. For example, let's say that a vital piece of the information necessary to resolve a world-shaking plot -- a ritual or password or the like -- is in the hands of an eight-year-old. Some quip possibilities might be: "So, the fate of the world is in the hands of someone who weighs less than Thog's axe." or "So, we're at the mercy of someone who's a decade out from shaving."

Pointing out inconsistencies or absurdities via wit is keen. Actually, this can be a good service to the GM; players tend to be more forgiving of plot oddities if they're specifically acknowledged in-game. For example, let's say that the heroes arrive on the scene dramatically in time to fight a sinister cult that's about to eviscerate some poor victim. Our wit might offer, "You know, if we were just an hour later, we'd be able to mourn instead of fight. I'm a much better mourner, personally . . ."

It's easier to be witty when you're weak or powerless. Attempting wit from a position of strength is usually seen as cocky, arrogant, or mean. This is why most glib remarks from protagonist butt-kickers in Schwarzenegger- or Seagal-type movies usually feel flat or forced; these characters seldom seem like they're in over their heads or in any particular danger. On the other hand, out of the mouths of those who are obviously in trouble -- such as most of Harrison Ford's or some of Bruce Willis' characters -- similar remarks seem a lot more interesting. As such, if you want to make a witty character, you'll have to acknowledge that you're probably going to be underpowered (or at least specialized and not as suited for combat). Of course, this can be relative; your standard *d20 System* thief is still probably better in a fight than most "regular" folks out there, and a low-level wizard can start out underpowered but grow to be the most potent member of the team. But, generally, wit is something you practice when you're running, hiding, cowering, or otherwise trying not to get killed.

Avoid puns. Harlan Ellison has a fairly lengthy rant against the pun in his collection of essays titled *Watching*. I won't decry them entirely, except to note that, in general, they're too easy and, for the most part, they've been heard before. "I could use this fish as a weapon, just for the halibut." Ha-ha. (For a quintessential version of this pain, contemplate Schwarzenegger's "Mr. Freeze" in *Batman & Robin* saying, "Ice to see you." Or, alternatively, don't.) Slightly more interesting, in my mind, are puns that use the same words but with different meanings. Taking an in-campaign example, one adventure saw our party trapped in a pocket dimension-prison thingee, where we needed to insert some thingamabob into some aperture before we can get back home. My character's quip was, "Ah; this is a clear-cut example of 'No deposit, no return.'" (Although, again, this often lame. Again, Schwarzenegger's Mr. Freeze says at one point, "Allow me to break the ice." Perhaps it's because he's nowhere weak or powerless enough for that to work. Perhaps it's because Mr. Freeze's ice-related puns were nonstop and consisted of approximately 95% of his dialogue.)

Pretend you have a British accent. It's much easier to be witty with a British accent, especially if you're just starting out. Also, it's also much easier to pretend to have a British accent if you actually *are* British.

It's not easy being witty, but it's also not as hard as some folks make it out to be. Don't get discouraged if they don't

laugh at first; the other players just may not "get" your attempts at wit . . . although -- let's be honest -- it's probably your fault. And just keep in mind: If no one is chuckling at your attempts to be witty, remember that they weren't chuckling when you *weren't* attempting to be witty, either.

--Steven Marsh

Meals on Wheels

An adventure for the *Discworld Roleplaying Game* or *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*

by Jody Macgregor

The Disc and the Warhammer World have a few things in common: a Tolkienesque base with bits of Lovecraft, Leiber, and other writers thrown in; a certain British sensibility and sense of humor; analogues of real-world people, events, and nations; and a technological Renaissance. Obviously there are differences as well, but there is enough overlap that certain situations work in both settings and therefore, both RPGs. This adventure is one of those situations. Where game-specific information crops up it will be given for both the *Discworld Roleplaying Game* and *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay,* separated by a slash.

"Meals on Wheels" is set in the city of Ankh-Morpork/Altdorf and is suitable for novice characters as it doesn't require too much combat or use of specific skills, and inventive solutions to the problems it presents are more important than having high stats.

The Set-Up

It's late in the afternoon and our heroes are climbing into a coach, in a hurry to get somewhere. They should be in one of the nicer areas of the city when they enter the coach, but where they're going is not important, just so long as they're going. If your players aren't the kind to fork out for coaches then you'll need to motivate them; perhaps a riot breaks out during a political demonstration or an execution and the only way to get through the crowds is by coach. You can slide this adventure into the middle of an existing campaign whenever such a situation occurs, or you could invent a reason that suits your players better: perhaps they see an enemy of theirs or someone with a high bounty on his head ride past at a gallop, perhaps they hear of a really good party on the other side of town. Whatever.

The coach is rather nice, with curtained windows (drawn), but not very much room. It's pulled by a single horse and driver, a fellow with an earring and scarf who promises to "get you where you're going post-haste, guv'nor." Anyone who opens the curtains may notice that the coach is taking an odd route towards the seedier side of town. Any worries are waved aside by the nervy driver with "just a shortcut, don't worry, I'm not gonna overcharge." The coach stops rather suddenly in a narrow street in the Shades/the Reikerbahn and before anyone can say anything, the driver jumps on the horse and rides off, leaving the coach and its occupants behind.

Then the skeletons emerge from the twisting alleyways.

Plot Outline

This is a basic outline of the major events of "Meals on Wheels" to give you an overview of where the adventure is going. Since this is a roleplaying game, you're probably going to deviate from this outline whether you aim to or not. That's okay, really. You go ahead and have your fun, roll with the punches and improvise boldly. we're not going to be here crying into my keyboard because you strayed from my work of pure genius.

Sniff.

1. The PCs are chased through the streets by a horde of skeletons, eventually finding refuge in an abandoned and disused temple.
2. Barricading the doors, the adventurers settle in for a siege. If they explore the temple, they find it belonged to a minor swamp god, and the priest had an interesting hobby.

3. The vampire who controls the Undead trying to break into the temple makes himself, and his evil plot, known. Panic probably ensues. A vampire bat attack definitely ensues.
4. More victims arrive in the street and the heroes are forced to choose between risking their safety to help them, and staying safe and living with the consequences.
5. The band of survivors hit upon a desperate plan to escape before they all wind up drunk. And we don't mean "whoops, I've had a few brandies too many" drunk, we mean "arg arg, I needed that blood to live," drunk.

Background

Baron von Crowlocke misses his beloved Baroness. Some bugger with a pointy stick and some big ideas ended her unlife a century ago, and although the peace and quiet and lack of complaints about the curtains in the drawing room seemed like a blessing at first, the Baron never found someone to replace her. A wooden stake isn't the only thing that can get to a vampire's heart after all, and undying love doesn't come along very often. The Baron spent years gathering his beloved's ashes (which her slayer had thought to scatter, being a thorough chap who took pride in his work), and then separated out all the bits of grit and stake, because a bloodsucking fiend has standards. Then he tried the time-tested way of bringing one of their kind back to life -- a drop of blood on the ashes.

It didn't work. Neither did a whole peasant of blood. The Baroness was a tasteful and discerning lady who only fed on the finer varieties of people, and she's been dead for a hundred-odd years. It's going to take more than a couple of peasants to bring her back; it's going to take a whole lot of quality, city-folk blood. Maybe even some of the exotic, non-human blood she liked.

Enter our heroes.

The Baron's plan is simple. He's moved into an old slaughterhouse in the city, in a part of town where the Watch don't often go. His mortal servants will bring him coachloads of guests from one of the nicer parts of town and his skeletal servants will turn the slaughterhouse into, well, a slaughterhouse. The ashes get soaked, the Baroness returns to life, and the two Undead lovers get to dance through the centuries together, side-by-side. Maybe think about starting a family.

And guess who are the only ones who can stop them?

Undead, Undead, Undead

So, our heroes are sitting in a horseless coach while a horde of skeletons (adjust the amount to suit your PCs; twenty is a good round number) approach to drag them into the slaughterhouse. Their driver got a little nervous and deposited them before dark, but the Baron isn't going to let that slight hiccup interfere with his plans. He's just going to have to move things forward a little, that's all.

The skeletons won't spill any blood they don't have to, and will try to grapple the heroes and drag them into the slaughterhouse if they can. If the would-be victims get violent they will hit back, but it should be obvious that the party have a chance to make a break for it. Any skeletons that are destroyed will just start to put themselves together again, anyway.

As our heroes run down the darkening alleyways, all they see are locked doors and windows. The Shades / the Reikerbahn is the kind of place where people don't stick their necks out for strangers, and there will be no help from that quarter. Desperate heroes may try kicking their way into some poor, terrified family's house, but that door isn't likely to hold out the Undead after you knock it down, and the walls of these ramshackle houses are so thin the skeletons will

Bring the Funny

You may be wondering why an adventure about blood and death is being set on the Disc. Where's the funny in that? Well, the funny doesn't usually come from the plot, in Pratchett (who is capable of dark plots as well) or in roleplaying. It comes from the characters. A desperate situation is exactly the kind of thing to get people joking to relieve the tension, and once you get your wacky PCs involved the comedy will flow. Getting roleplayers to be serious is a lot harder than letting them make jokes; all you have to do is let them. Play

tear their way straight through them. The skeletons ignore any locals who get in the way.

Running around a corner with Undead at their heels, they see it -- an old temple, made of stone and with its solid oak doors wide open. If they don't run in and slam the doors behind them, they deserve what they get. The doors can be barred from the inside, and of course the PCs have just enough time to do so before the sound of bony fists can be heard hammering at them. Our heroes may think to grab a pew and use it to reinforce the door, and now they have a moment to catch their breath and take stock. The next thing they do will probably be to check the other exits. Actually, the next thing they do may be to swear a lot and ask silly questions, but after that they're bound to do the exit-checking thing.

along. Take up their suggestions. If they insult an NPC, have them bluster humorlessly. Players love that.

Also, never underestimate the funniness of broken skeletons scrabbling around for their bits, losing their heads and bumping into things.

The Temple

The temple is small, only 16 yards long with room for seven pews a side (although only three rotting pews remain, the rest scavenged for firewood long ago), and one side-chapel. There are torches along the walls, which will need to be lit before dark. A religious icon is carved into the stone walls; a vertical line with three smaller lines coming off its upper half, like a capital "F" that lived too close to the nuclear waste dump. The roof is quite high, as are the small, stained-glass windows (cracked, but out of reach), and overall it gives the impression of not belonging to a prominent god. The acoustics are very good, and anything shouted will echo. The altar was taken long ago, but a search will turn up a dusty copy of the *Book of Bylorak* underneath one of the pews.

A successful Humanities (Theology)/Academic Knowledge (Theology) check based on a viewing of the icon, or a quick read of the *Book of Bylorak,* explains that this temple belonged to Bylorak, the god of the Marshes. Not a popular god, the center of his worship is a town in Uberwald/Sylvania called Bylorhof. Most scholars believe he is actually one of the nature gods with some mud on his vest. Followers of Bylorak believe in the holiness of marshes, and they thought his cult would stand a chance in the city considering the state of the River Ankh/Reik (semi-solid). They were wrong.

The Book also contains instructions for a ritual, the Blessing of Bogs, which can be used to imbue one body of water (a lake, pond, or --- say -- a mile-long stretch of river). The water must be dirty for the Blessing to work. The ritual requires reading a short prayer while making certain gestures with one of the god's symbols. The Blessing turns the murky water into holy water for the next hour, but you still shouldn't drink it. A note written under the Blessing says, "This will be perfect for the fountain, once I get the pump working."

The side chapel has another door, fortunately locked and bolted. Shortly after our heroes barricade the front doors, hammering starts at this door. The window beside it, which is much lower than the stained-glass windows in the main room, shatters. Skeletal hands reach in, but they can be kept out either by blocking the window (say, with one of the pews), or standing there jabbing at the skeletons with a weapon whenever they start to make it in.

There's a heavy stone trapdoor in the side chapel that requires a Strength check to lift. Stairs lead down from here to the crypt. Even if it hasn't grown dark by the time the crypt is discovered, it will still require torches to investigate.

The Crypt

The air here reeks of staleness and death. It's traditional for followers of Bylorak to be buried in a marsh, as explained in the *Book of Bylorak,* but that's not possible in the city. Attempts to give the dead semi-traditional burials in the river were halted by the authorities and anyway, since the bodies tended to bounce off when they were dropped. Instead, the bodies of Bylorak's handful of faithful were interred here, in stone caskets filled with mud. Opening the caskets reveals nothing but solid, dry dirt. Breaking the dirt away reveals things you wouldn't really want to reveal.

One of the caskets is noticeably nicer than the rest, with carvings and filigrees and whatnot. This is the resting place of Father Abronsius, the priest of Bylorak whose death lead to the abandonment of this temple. He's been given the same traditional burial as the five others, except that one of his holy works was interred with him. Anyone game enough to dig through the dirt will find a holy symbol of Bylorak: a length of wood with three thorn-like prongs on the side, like an antler or a bent trident.

Searching the caskets probably won't be the first thing anyone who enters the crypt does, as there's something unusual taking up a third of the room. Father Abronsius's last loyal followers (both of them) interred something else down here, a project of his that they thought he might like to take with him to the muddy afterlife. Father Abronsius was a member of a small network of scholars who collect the notebooks of Leonard of Quirm/Leonardo de Miragliano, despite the fact that the authorities frown on private individuals owning such things, since they tend to contain blueprints for weapons of rather large destruction. Father Abronsius was working on recreating a device from such a set of blueprints: a steam-powered water pump and locomotor that he hoped to use to create an area of sacred swampland on the temple grounds. It's very close to being finished, a successful Engineer/Academic Knowledge (Engineering) Test could easily get it going. The engineer would also realize that the motor is extremely dangerous, and quite likely to explode (it was an early design). Lighting a fire in the boiler would get the motor going and the wheels turning, but after a minute or two, or a sufficient jolt, the thing would clearly overheat and explode.

We Only Come Out at Night

At some point during this exploration, preferably after sealing the side-chapel window but before exploring the crypt fully, the sun goes down and the Baron emerges from his coffin in the slaughterhouse to make his way to the temple. There's a residual holiness to the place that keeps him from approaching it too closely (he's not a modern vampire), but that doesn't stop him from standing in the street and having a conversation. Feel free to rewrite his dialogue; you're the one who's going to have to say it. If you can talk like the Count from *Sesame Street,* go ahead and ham it up.

The hammering of the skeletons stops.

"Hello! You in temple there, thinking you are so clever with the holy ground. Let me make introduction: I am Baron von Crowlocke. My servants you have already met. You are thinking you will be safe in there until help arrive, yes? Well, I have seen this city a while, and I think that is not happening. These people who live around here, they are inconsequential. Thin-blooded peasants. Your Watch does not come here. You are alone.

"I do not expect you to be coming out in hurry, though. Let us pass the time with light conversation, yes? I am a vampire, as I think you may be guessing. I have lived for longer than you can be imagining. It is lonely, being immortal. Once, I had wife to pass the years with, but she died. Tragic, I know. You would like her. Beautiful woman.

"I am rambling. This happens when you are alone for a century. That is how long she has been gone, you are seeing? I would very much like to bring her back, which is what this is all about. All I am needing is blood. How much? Well, all of it I am afraid. The Baroness, she is having a taste for the finer things, so I need the blood of people like you. Strong spirits, that is what she liked. Very discerning. I do not know what she is seeing in me.

"That was my joke. *I do not hear laughing!*

"You think this will last forever? You think I won't just give one of them an axe?"

At this point the hammering starts up again. While the PCs rush to the doors, the remaining glass in the high windows breaks and vampire bats fly in -- one for each PC should do it. They aren't here to kill, preferring to wound their prey then snatch them up and fly back out with them. As they attack, the Baron can be heard laughing.

"Ha ha ha, where am I getting axe? Another joke, you see? Some people have no sense of humor."

We Suck Young Blood

After the vampire bats are defeated, there's a reprieve. The skeletons are still hammering and the Baron is still out there lurking, but our heroes have some more time to search the temple. And then they hear the clatter of coaches arriving. (Unless they are hiding in the crypt, in which case you should skip straight to the zombies.)

It's the Baron's other servant, arriving when they were both supposed to, with a coach full of victims. If the heroes do nothing, the new victims will be hauled screaming into the slaughterhouse, the Baron running down any who attempt to flee this time.

Most of the Undead leave the temple to round up these new victims, giving the PCs a chance. They could make it past the skeleton crew who are left and run for it, leaving the new arrivals to their fate -- although the Baron might well chase them down too. The more heroic thing to do would be fight off or distract the skeletons at the door and give the victims an opportunity to run inside, possibly supporting them with missile fire. Some of them might not make it, but this gives you a good opportunity to add NPCs that have whatever abilities the PCs might need for the cunning plan they've been cooking up. Possibilities include:

- A Dwarf engineer who could help them assemble the contraption in the crypt.
- A wizard with access to some useful spells.
- A surveyor who knows which wall of the crypt to break to get into the sewers.
- A replacement PC for anyone who has died unsportingly early.

Don't just hand them a way out on a stick, but if they've come up with a clever idea that needs an expert, go ahead and gratuitously insert one here.

The Baron won't be happy about even more of his victims getting away, so he works some necromantic mojo, and the bodies of Bylorak's followers reanimate and dig their way out of the dirt. Anybody down in the crypt working on the contraption will get a nasty surprise, as will those upstairs if they haven't explored yet, as six more Undead (one with the holy symbol around his neck) burst out of the trapdoor to attack them.

The Climax

You know how in some adventures there's only one way to "win," one way to save the day and/or your necks, and you have to sit around until you figure out that one way the designer of the adventure thinks is clever while the GM gets frustrated and drops increasingly obvious clues? Yeah? You know how that sucks? We're not going to do that.

Here are some ways the conclusion could play out:

- Completing the contraption in the crypt, wheeling it out into the street and aiming it at the Baron, possibly requiring a heroic sacrifice to get it there, and blowing it up. Killing the Baron causes the skeletons to collapse, except for that one comic-relief skeleton who has been given a nickname by the PCs; he runs off to wacky adventures of his own.
- Killing the Baron in other ways: Luring him out into the open and shooting him through the heart from the rooftop, perhaps. Using the holy symbol of Bylorak on him. Keeping him talking until the sun comes up.
- Using the Book of Bylorak to lead a prayer to the almost-forgotten god could lead to something miraculous happening, depending on how involved you want the gods to be in your game. This would be a nice thing to use alongside one of the other climaxes; perhaps that lucky break or distraction or conveniently placed slippery mud puddle was really Bylorak's doing.
- Making some grand speech to the locals that makes them overcome their reticence to help (possibly involving the miraculous voice of Bylorak, whether real or cleverly faked . . . the temple does have some nice echoing acoustics), resulting in the formation of a brutal mob, complete with pitchforks and torches.
- Breaking through the wall of the crypt and escaping into the sewers. Best combined with coming back with Commander Vimes/Captain "Filthy" Harald Kleindeinst and a well-armed contingent of the Watch to deal with the problem, rather than the less heroic buggering-off-home-for-a-nice-cup-of-tea option.
- Breaking through the wall into the sewers, using the Blessing of Bylorak on them, and using the pump to blast a

stream of blessed effluent at the Baron. "Holy $*%#!," as one of my players delicately put it.

Character Information: Grinnin' Baron

Baron von Crowlocke is from an old Uberwald/Sylvania family, and even when he was alive he was something of a petty tyrant. Becoming a vampire just took away the few restraints his personality had. He ruled with an iron fist and a warped sense of humor, playing bizarre and usually fatal practical jokes on his servants and guests. Von Crowlocke is the kind of person who springs some awful gag on you, then points and laughs, "You should have seen your face!"

There's nothing worse than people who think they're funny. Except people who want to kill you, of course.

The Baron subscribes to most of the usual vampiric weaknesses: he recoils from holy symbols and garlic, avoids the sun, sleeps in a coffin, won't go swimming (especially after meals), etc. He's a traditionalist that way, even filled his castle with spooks and kept up the accent. He doesn't take kindly to being made fun of, and will overreact to insults in his broken manner of speaking, "Do not start at me. Are you making fun with me? You want to get down to dirt? You want to say names?"

Discworld

ST 15; **DX** 18; **IQ** 15; **HT** 17
Speed 8, Move 8
Dodge 8, Parry 9 (fencing sword)

Advantages: Magery +2; Multiple Forms (large bat); Night Vision; Regrowth; Resurrection (with limitations, see Discworld RPG 76); Sharp Teeth; Vampiric Immortality; Vampiric Invulnerability; Winged Flight (swirling cloak for wings)

Disadvantages: Dependency (blood); Dread of Holy Symbols; No Body Heat; No Reflection; Social Stigma: Undead; Vulnerability (wooden stakes, beheading, direct sunlight); Weakness (holiness)

Quirks: Has no sense of humor and doesn't know it; dislikes garlic

Skills: Acrobatics-14; Brawling-13; Climbing-18; Hand Weapon (Broadsword)-14; Hand Weapon (Fencing)-18; Humanities (History)-17; Influence (Intimidation)-16; Influence (Savoir-Faire)-16; Interrogation-17; Jumping-18; Leadership-13; Occultism-16; Research-15; Riding-18; Running-16; Throwing-17; Writing-11

Languages: Ankhian-6; Klatchian-12; Ancient Tongue (mock Latin)-15

Spells: Enchantment, Persuasion, Lend Health, Lend Strength, Rejoin, Sense Life, Summon Spirit, Zambesi's Potent Zombification (which conveniently works however you need it to work -- the skeletons are actually old zombies who have lost all their flesh and are hold together with bits of wire)

Warhammer Fantasy Roleplaying

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
65%	42%	62%	63%	60%	45%	70%	65%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
2	21	6	6	6	1	6	0

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Genealogy/Heraldry, History, Necromancy), Charm +10%, Common Knowledge

(Bretonnia, Dwarfs, the Empire), Dodge Blow, Evaluate, Gossip +10%, Intimidate, Magical Sense, Perception, Ride, Scale Sheer Surface, Search, Shadowing, Speak Arcane Language (Magick), Speak Language (Bretonnian, Reikspiel, Sylvanian), Torture

Talents: Dark Magic, Disarm, Frightening, Keen Senses, Master Orator, Natural Weapons, Night Vision, Petty Magic (Arcane), Public Speaking, Schemer, Specialist Weapon Group (Fencing, Parrying), Undead

Special Rules:

Blood Drain: While grappling an opponent, von Crowlocke can drain blood with his fangs. If he inflicts at least 1 wound on an enemy while grappling, the victim loses 1d10% from his Strength Characteristic as well. If the victim survives the encounter, 1% of the lost Strength is regained each hour.

Natural Necromancer: Von Crowlocke can control Undead the same way necromancers do (see **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplaying,** page 161). He does not suffer the Side Effects that are typically associated with the Black Art.

Pass for Human: Von Crowlocke can pass for Human if need be, retracting his fangs and claws and softening his features. When in this form he is no longer Frightening. Switching back and forth is a free action.

Vampire's Curse: Vampirism grants many benefits but it also has severe drawbacks. Von Crowlocke cannot cross running water except over a bridge. He may not walk on holy ground. He shows no reflection in a mirror. He must drink several pints of blood every day or lose 10% from all Characteristics in the Main Profile (losses are regained as soon as feeding takes place). In direct sunlight he halves all Characteristics and suffers 1 Wound (regardless of Toughness Bonus or Armour Points) per minute of exposure.

Trappings: Interesting waistcoat

"Over the Elephants"

"Over the Elephants" was an adaptation of the **Over the Edge** rules for the Discworld described by Michael Cule in the *Pyramid* article "Watch Academy VI: Hogswatchnight." If you plan on using "Over the Elephants" you'll need to swap the listed skill checks for the PCs' most appropriate traits. You'll also need these stats for the NPCs, and possibly a stiff drink to loosen you up.

Baron von Crowlocke

Languages: Ankhian, Klatchian, the Ancient Tongue
Attack: 6 dice, ×3 damage with sword, ×2 with claws
Defense: 6 dice.
Magic Pool: 8 shots. Give von Crowlocke the same spells as Sir Arthur Compton.
Traits

- *Vampire,* 6 dice -- This is one of those ridiculously over-powered traits you'd never let a PC have, so you can use it for whatever you like. Fighting, jumping, intimidating people, flying, being a vampire makes you awesome at all of them. (Widow's peak, sharp teeth, claws, looks at people's necks.)
- *Necromancer,* 5 dice -- Von Crowlocke mainly uses this trait to create and control the Undead (see below). (Wears black)
- *Vampiric Vulnerability* -- Is vulnerable to everything vampires in the movies are. (Flinches at garlic)

Undead

Languages: None, though they can say "gak" with varying intonations.
Attack: 4 dice + penalty die, ×1 damage

Defense: 2 dice
Hit Points: 21 points of bones.
Traits

- *Mindless Violence,* 4 dice -- Despite their clumsiness, the Undead are entirely capable of ripping your head off, should they get hold of it. (Walk with arms outstretched, eager to grasp victims)
- *Spooky,* 4 dice -- Anyone facing the Undead must take a penalty die unless they beat a roll against this trait on a courage- or will-related trait. (Glowing eye sockets)
- *Shambling,* 1 die -- The Undead take a penalty die on any action that involves manual dexterity, because they don't have any. (Clumsy gait)

Vampire Bats

Attack: 4 dice, ×2 damage with claws
Defense: 2 dice
Hit Points: 28 points of bestial resilience.
Traits

- *Sonar Sense,* 6 dice -- The keen echolocation sense of a vampire bat is almost impossible to hide from. They can detect opponents in complete darkness up to a range of 30 yards (High-pitched squeaking noises)
- *Bloodsucking,* 4 dice -- Vampire bats attack by going straight for the throat, although they will also clutch victims and fly back to the nest to feed at their leisure. To aid their bloodsucking their saliva contains an anti-clotting substance called draculin, because scientists do too have a sense of humor. (Pointy teeth)
- *Spooky,* 4 dice -- Anyone facing vampire bats must take a penalty die unless they beat a roll against this trait on a courage- or will-related trait. (Big pointy teeth)

The Secret of My Excess

"European poetic lore is, indeed, ultimately based on magical principles, the rudiments of which formed a close religious secret for centuries but which were at last garbled, discredited and forgotten. Now it is only by rare accidents of spiritual regression that poets make their lines magically potent in the ancient sense. Otherwise, the contemporary practice of poem-writing recalls the mediaeval alchemist's fantastic and foredoomed experiments in transmuting base metal into gold; except that the alchemist did at least recognize pure gold when he saw and handled it."
-- Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*

So that, if you're wondering, is the actual reason that every April Fool's Day, or thereabouts, I commit acts of willful doggerel in these hallowed electronic pages. It's not actually a cheap dodge to get out of doing research, it's an alchemical experiment in recreating "accidents of spiritual regression." And so this year, to demonstrate the wonder and the magic that is the mystical grammar of poetry, what better framework to hang my brightly-colored nonsense from than the most widely hailed piece of American balladic steganographia in the last forty years?

"Texe Marrs explains how, all around us, reality is constantly being shaped by magic and ritual. . . . Also examined: . . . the Illuminati's goal of "shifting" or "reinventing" the world; and the Illuminist, magical code-words employed in the JFK assassination . . . Was the JFK affair a ritual mind control staged drama played out according to a pre-prepared script? And did the odd and curious lyrics of Don McLean's subsequent hit, 'Bye, Bye, Miss American Pie,' purposely divulge some of the arcane secrets of the programmers?"
-- Texe Marrs, catalog copy for his CD *Occult Cabbalistic Rituals of the Illuminati -- Mind Control, Magic and the End of America*

I speak, of course, of Don McLean's immortal mainstay of Lite FM, "American Pie." McLean has called the song a "complicated parable," saying "'American Pie' was part of my process of self-awakening; a mystical trip into my past." Well, it's all in good fun, and very parabulous, no doubt, but it's not that complicated. Its very accessibility makes it fun, kind of a My First Lit-Crit Kabbalah: Buddy Holly, Bob Dylan, Charlie Manson, Altamont, *ave atque vale*. Discuss, preferably while stoned. Err, I mean drunk, of course, kids. Getting stoned, as Robert Graves will tell you, is the prerogative of us Higher Poets, who alone are capable of such rare accidents of spiritual regression as the following tribute to Anubis, Sirius, Hecate, and other doggerel gods:

Merovingian Pie

A long, long time ago . . .
I can still remember
How the Masons ran all time and space.
And I knew every Thursday night
It didn't matter what I'd write
Illuminati covered up their trace . . .

But Opie made that awful movie
As Opus Dei got all groovy.
It sits there on the bookshelf;
The "I can't take a look" shelf.

I can't remember if I heaved
When I learned all those dolts believed,
But still and all I was bereaved
The day the musing died.

So bye-bye, Merovingian pie,

It's much simpler for the Templars,
But the Templars aren't shy.
And the Prieuré were hanging out in black tie,
Singin' "This will be the day that we die
"This will be the day that we die."

Did you read the book of Leng,
And do you have faith in anything,
If the Navy tells you so?
Do you believe in UFOs,
Can you make sense of Strieber's prose,
And can you teach me where the Greys lay low?

Well, I know you traveled to the past
'Cause I saw the *Eldridge* in the blast.
It glowed that neon green.
Man, I dig those Tesla machines.

I was an old profiler of conspiracy
With some orichalcum and a DC-3
But I knew They had come for me
The day Bermuda Tried.

I started singin'
"Bullseye, Merovingian pie.
Got me lassoed by Sargasso
But Sargasso aimed high."
And the Prieuré have double-crossed ONI
Singin' "This will be the day that we die
"This will be the day that we die."

Now since '13 They've been in control
And bushes grow up on a grassy knoll,
But that's not how it used to be.
When the player bowled for le roi et reine,
With a Stone he stole from Saint-Germain
And Voltaire picked up the spare for you and me,

Oh, while Odin hung up in the sky,
The powder-wigged All-Seeing Eye,
The Bonapartes were well-advised;
The Revolution wound up televised.
And while Venice built canals like Mars,
The Carbonari hung out in bars,
And they killed archdukes in their cars
The day Tunguska fried.

I started singin'
"Nice try, Merovingian pie
You were shootin' for Rasputin
But Rasputin survived."
And the Prieuré arranged the Peace of Versailles
Stating "This will be the day that we die
"This will be the day that we die."

Nazi patsy, H.P. Blavatsky.
Gemstone files on the screen in ASCII,
Bloodlines long and fading fast.
The Stone resurfaced in Alsace,
Cathars hid the Grail in stainéd glass,
For Mahatmas in Agharti in the past.

Now the Root-Race heir was Prester John
Who filled Asia with his formless spawn.
The Mi-Go of Tibet,
Oh, they may still dwell here yet!
As the saucers hovered quite concealed
By the Hollow Earth's magnetic field,
Do you recall what was revealed
The day Lemuria dried?

We started singing,
"Bye, bye, Merovingian pie."
Tried the mantras from Atlantis,
But Atlantis subsides.
The Prieuré were hanging out at high tide,
And singing, "This will be the day that we die.
"This will be the day that we die."

Eldritch remnants left of scattered rhymes,
Ancient traditions tossed in time.
With London where they reappeared.
So come on: Jack be Springheel'd, Jack be Ripp'd
Jack Ketch caught inside a marble crypt
'Cause the jackal is the hangman's only fear.

Oh, but as they opened up the Tomb
Greatness reckoned in a little room.
Even Thoth's sacred baboons
Couldn't break Akhenaten's runes.
See, Cleopatra embraced her fate
To hate the vast Illuminate
(I saw Shakespeare's version, it was great)
The day Anubis lied

He was howling,
"Yi, yi, Merovingian pie."
Gave conniptions to Egyptians,
But Egyptians comply.
And the Prieuré were piling pyramids high,
Singing, "This will be the day that we die.
"This will be the day that we die."

I met a guy who lived in Wales
And I asked him for some fairy tales,
But he just vanished in the murk.
I went down to the alien moor
Where I'd seen the magic years before,
But the moor son said the Working didn't work anymore.

And in the stores: the bookshelves groaned
The prose was dry and the research cloned.
And every word was boring;
Not even worth ignoring.
And the Three who understood Creation:
The Powers, Thrones, and Dominations,
They left with my imagined nation
The day Cthulhu died.

And they were singing,
"Bye-bye, Merovingian pie.
It's just scrambled Joseph Campbell
And Joseph Campbell was high.
And the Prieuré has sucked the last of it dry,"
Singin' "This will be the day that we die.
"This will be the day that we die."

Yes they were singing,
"Bye-bye, Merovingian pie.
It's just scrambled Joseph Campbell
And Joseph Campbell was high.
And the Prieuré has sucked the last of it dry,"
Singin' "This will be the day that we die."

Mélange of Magical Creatures IV

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

We return now to our fourth trip to a realm of strange but familiar creatures, as we have done three times before.

Chromo-gils

"The new guy pulled over some ruffians, and confiscated a bottle of gray lizards. When he tapped on the glass, the creatures within all turned a sickly shade of pink. Surprised, he dropped the bottle. Fortunately, the punk he took it from had better reflexes, and she dove, catching it."
-- Officer Zale, 23rd Precinct.

In the wild, these skink-like lizards gather in small swarms, clinging to rocks and trees. Instinctively positioning themselves near frequent insect paths, these lizards snare them with frog-like tongues. Together as colonies, they have learned to activate their chameleon reflex when they hear fearful sounds. As long as they get food, they're content to stay still. Their worst predators are avians that can discern distinct shapes from a distance; this blurring reaction when the predator tries to attack serves to confuse them mid-stride, and veer off, lest it strike some tree or rock. Predators that don't swerve often encounter the rock or tree the lizards were lounging on.

Encountered

There are two main results from training a chromo-gil. The first is to train them to simply adapt to their surroundings on a sound cue, becoming essentially invisible. The second is to take on a specific color on a sound cue. They can be used on leather jackets to make colors and form words. Recreating sounds that mimic the lizards' natural prey will cause them to move when hungry.

Industrial Uses

"I hear that the military has stepped up production of lizard type C-83. It seems that they need more adaptive camouflage for the Zenthim campaign. Plus, they say that the biting insects are really bad there."
-- Overheard in a bar

These creatures can be trained as signage, to change to a specific color when given a sound. They are useful for long-range semaphore and written communication. An invisible variant would be useful, sitting on a glass in front of a light. Some experimentation is going on with music boxes to produce choir harmonics to change whole groups of lizards at a time. A few inventors have also tinkered with detectors for specific frequency sounds, with lizards that take different colors at different times. Some law enforcement agencies have been trying out voice-stress analysis for lie detection. Some enchanters have made blur items and invisibility potions from these animals. Fortunately for industry, untaught "blank" chromo-gils learn from their elders.

Adventure

The adventurers have found a music box amid other clues. A sage suggests they must take it to the right "sign" and it will reveal a map. When they do find the correct board, activating the box spells "At the right hour, at the steeple's vespers." Taking it to the nearest bell tower and playing the box while the vesper bells ring will reveal the map for a few seconds . . .

Chromo-gil (see Swarms, *Bestiary* and page 461 of the *Basic Set*)

Appearance: Small lizards in a variety of colors.
Category: Reptile.
Diet: Insectivore.
Treat as per swarm of "small rats."
Traits: Chameleon 1 (-1 to Vision rolls when on); Claws; Clinging; Combat Reflexes; Eidetic Memory (Sound Only); Faz Sense; Horizontal; Night Vision 2; Peripheral Vision; Striker (Tail: Crushing); Wild Animal.

Giant Chromo-gil

ST 15; **DX** 14; **IQ** 3; **HT** 16.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 7.5; Dodge 12; Move 8.
SM +1 (3 hexes/yards long); 250 lbs; DR 2; 20HP.

Parchers

"There we were, in the middle of the jungle. We had just made it to the second clearing, when we noticed that Sir Gilbert was not sweating. 'I don't sweat,' he said. 'Poppycock,' I said to myself. So I kept an eye on him. After we set up our tents, we say by the fire, and Gilbert was sweating like a pig. Following him to his tent, I asked to borrow a book. As I entered the tent, I noticed the air was completely dry, and there was a strange cactus in the center of the tent . . ."
-- Lord Aluvn, *The Temple of Ahi-canon*

These plants slowly absorb all the water within a yard. In nature, they compete for moisture in arid desert regions. These plants look like scorpions to the untrained eye. They secrete chemicals that confuse insects, but their appearance does not trick avian predators. The most notable restriction on this ability is that can only affect air in contact with the plant, or in contact with that air. It is very unhealthy, however, to breathe pure, dry air over a period of hours. An average capacity for water absorption is about one gallon per hour, or any precipitiation less than a driving rain on dry land.

Encountered

Outside of desert zones, these creatures are likely to be encountered in commercial places, such as coat racks or in the entrances to establishments in rainy areas. This can remove all the excess moisture from umbrellas and boots. Particularly decadent individuals may have catered events outdoors in the rain with these creatures on poles, absorbing the rain. They can also take the humidity out of the air to reduce the felt temperature in hot, moist climates.

Industrial Uses

"Boss said it was foolproof. He had some boys come over the river on legitimate business, trailing a long rope tied to the shore. It was in this boat that we stashed the stolen paintings. We then tossed in a dozen of these strange cacti, closed the chest, and sunk the boat. The next night, the other team was to reel in the dry paintings. What we didn't count on was someone being suspicious of buying a few hundred feet of rope."
-- Confession recording, TAG precinct 1.

There are many industrial uses for these plants. They are valuable for dry storage in most climates. Raisins, dates, and rations can be dried out easily. Snow and rain can be cleared in minutes from a hex. Some seek to use them to create 200-proof alcohol. There is experimentation in using semipermeable material to limit transfer (such as wax paper or plastics). Enchanting principles are known to enhance items built to distill or destroy water.

Adventure

There is something killing cattle in the pen; unfortunately, what should be a routine mission has some unexpected dangers. Camping out overnight to look for the rustlers can lead to an unusual confrontation; there are an unusual number of parchers in the area (perhaps it is because the area is aspected to fire magic), and the dryness can be dangerous . . . especially if fire magic, lamps, or other flame sources are utilized.

Parchers

Appearance: Gray-green scorpion.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.

ST 1; **DX** 3; **IQ** 1; **HT** 10.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 3; Dodge 6; Move 1.
SM -5 (7" long, but tall); 1-2 lbs; DR 2 (vs. cold).
Traits: Destroy (Water) (Emanation, Always On); Extra Legs (Six); Night Vision 3; Quadruped; Striker (Tail: Cannot Parry); Temperature Tolerance 2 (heat); Wild Animal.

Variation

If the "destroy water" aspect does not require an air path, then if could be very dangerous, especially if there are closed bottles around.

Giant Parchers (see Giant Flytrap and Giant Scorpion, *Bestiary*)

ST 8; **DX** 4; **IQ** 2; **HT** 14.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 9; Move 2.
SM 0; 50-100 lbs; DR 2.

Cut Ants

"First marketed by East Wickham Biomancers Ltd., over 50 years ago. It is now unclear whether the product known as Cut Ants was one of their products, or simply a trained breed from the wild. There is much evidence available surrounding the training and packaging of these creatures. The original documents detailing the creation were officially lost in a fire. Strangely enough, at about the same time as the first marketing campaign, these creatures were discovered in the wild."
-- History of Trained Insects, Volume XI

In the wild these ants creep up on sleeping mammals and trim their fur as they feed on parasites. They can move quickly when they want, and are easily tempted by a drop of honey. Many species seek them out in spring to have their winter fur thinned out and to be rid of parasites. Their bite has a mild local anesthetic, and it can be used to dull pain.

Encountered

Each color of cut ant trims the fur different height. The redder ant result in longer fur while bluer ants lead to shorter growth; black cut ants make one bald. Any trimmed hair is left in a clump on the ground. They may be part of a normal veterinarian check in lower TL societies, consuming parasites and trimming fur. One is likely to encounter "cut cream" made from their juice.

Industrial Uses

"I have successfully followed the bearded suspect, even though he thought he had lost us. Laying his cloak on the

ground, he pulled out a bottle, and started pouring black insects over his head. As I crept forward, tufts of his hair began to fall to the center of the cloak. Then he -- who turned out to be a 'she' in some kind of fake facial hair -- brushed the ants from her hair-free head onto the cloak. As she put the open jar in the center of the cloak, to drop it in the river, I fired my stun-rod."
--Incident Report, 7th Precinct

Industrially, a swarm of these insects can trim rugs and animals' fur to a prescribed length. Sheep shearing can be greatly simplified by this method. It can also be used in regimented establishments to allow for compliance, such as balding prisoners, establishing standard military cuts, and setting fashion for boarding school. By-products from these creatures simplify the enchantment of haircut and measurement items.

Adventure

Someone is stealing wool while the sheep are in the back fields, where no one can see them. Since the exact location is not known until the sheep migrate back for the morning, history spells are not very effective. The heroes must try to catch the youths pulling it off, or to treat the sheep ahead of time, and track their wool after it reaches the market?

Cut Ants

Appearance: Ants with blue-green heads, and bodies whith dark colors.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Omnivore.

(see also nanto-tech from "Stonepunk")

Giant Cut Ant (see Giant Ant from *Bestiary*)

ST 11; **DX** 12; **IQ** 2; **HT** 12.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6; BL 205.
SM -2; 25-50 lbs; DR 2.
Lift ST +21

Striders

"It was one of the more unusual sieges we had to endure. They tried a new tactic: they launched a ship anchor over the walls, and then had a pair of striders pull it back, wrenching the walls over the parapets. They managed to pull down the upper walls until we got some of our own beasts ready to pull back."
-- Lt. Algisson, Veteran of the People's Army.

These strong beasts can pull down trees, and pull them a great distance before eating them. Looking like semi-upright lizard-bird hybrids, striders have large rear legs and underdeveloped small forearms. Their beak is a herbivore palate, and they only have a soft call. Striders are clawed, and can climb trees and hills. For this reason, they are well loved by Elven and hilled societies. Many "civilized" cultures de-claw their striders for that very reason, to keep them off walls and buildings. Apparently it also discourages guerilla action by limiting travel to roads. Striders' chitinous hide makes excellent jackets (treat armor as leather for double cost, plus rigid DR2).

Encountered

These creatures are likely to be encountered as mounts and beasts of burden. They have a niche in places too unfriendly for oxen. Some warehouses use these critters to move shipping containers. It is more likely that adventurers will encounter tracks of these large, clawed, beasts of burden. On dirt roads and wooden framework, the indentations will be significant. A typical peasant building may simply collapse.

"De-clawing striders won't stop criminals. They'll just heal the critters."
-- Overheard at the bazaar.

Industrial Uses

Striders can be used as cheap mill animals, towing barges, and moving buildings. Miniature breeds can fill the niche of mules. What really makes this species stand out is that they can haul loads almost vertically on natural surfaces. Finally, there is a small but growing market for the meat and hides of a strider. The government-mandate removed claws can be found sold as picks and awls. Enchanters can look forward to a discount on the enchantment of reduced encumbrance and long travel items.

Adventure

The heroes are to find clawed striders for a mercenary company. A person could also pay for regular striders can find someone to heal them (or a PC could heal them). Remember that large creatures cost more to heal (see *GURPS Magic,* p. 11). SM+2 are 2× energy cost.

Strider (see Oxen in *Bestiary* and page 460 of the *Basic Set*)

Appearance: Low, bipedal, small forelimbs.
Category: Avian-mammal hybrid.
Diet: Herbivore.

ST 30; **DX** 10; **IQ** 3; **HT** 12.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5; BL 720.
SM +2 (3 hexes, 3'-4' at the shoulder); 2,000 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Claws; Domestic Animal; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 10); Fat; Horizontal; Lifting ST +30; Night Vision 1; No Fine Manipulators; Peripheral Vision; Short Arms; Weak Bite.

Tiny Strider

ST 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 3; **HT** 10.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5; BL 80.
SM 0; 200 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: As above, but Lifting ST +10.

Jail Birds

"Developed as nature's response to very high mana areas, these creatures actually absorb mana to power their internal organs. After all, they can survive in natural no-mana areas, much to the chagrin of wizards everywhere."
-- Magical Creatures 101.

These bright blue birds are treasured yet feared by wizards because they dampen a wizard's connection to mana fields. The onset of the effect takes a few seconds to a few minutes to isolate a subject. These parrot-like beasts would become popular terrors, if not for their unusual diet. Each day, an adult jail bird must consume one carat of manastone or powerstone. It can be aspected or quirked, but it must have a charge. They can be seen turning stones over until they find a charged caret. A few recluses in Very High mana areas use them to dowse for natural manastones like pigs for truffles! They are essentially mobile Mana Dampers (see page 67 of *Basic Set*).

Encountered

Jail birds received their name because they are most frequently encountered in a prison, although they can be seen in

mages' practice halls and in some high-class shops. Shop keeps would like to keep these birds under the counter, unseen. This would restrict those who try to pass off glamour-coins or use spells to affect the clerks. Apprentices like to carry these to magical conventions . . . other apprentices would often cast spells on them otherwise.

Adventurers are also likely to encounter these animals when having audiences with important people. The lower floor would be shielded by the birds' influences, while loyal casters could lob missile spells into the dead areas. This might get PCs loaded down with magical items to come up with new tactics.

"There is a constant ideological battle between producers who want to use magical preservation methods and shippers who want to feel safe by canceling all magical effects and suspending enchantments."
-- News article in Magic Today!

Industrial Uses

Securely storing cargo in vehicles, it can keep enchanted and hideaway items dormant. Expensive to feed, these creatures often require a license to own and a costly permit to breed. Some criminal elements have taken to selling blue birds with a temporary spell about them. Others sell real jail birds that disable their effect with a sound cue, enabling licensed criminals to get away with fraud. Enchantment uses include talismans and warding spells.

Adventure

The heroes are contracted to slip a jail bird into the library of a wizard. The trick will be to do so without using magic; the library is on the second floor in a dense merchant's quarter. Human engineering might be the easiest way to gain access. The houses on both sides are only one to two feet from the target building. All house fronts have shingled overhangs overdue for repairs.

Jail Bird

Appearance: Bright blue small birds.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Manavore, lithovore.

ST 2; **DX** 14; **IQ** 4; **HT** 12.
Will 11; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 11; Move 7.
SM -3 (20"-24" long), SM-2 with wings unfurled; 2-6 lbs.
Traits: Enhanced Move 0.5 (Air Speed 21); Flight (Air Move 14); Mana Damper (Switchable); Restricted Diet (Very common; Substitution, -50%); Night Vision 2; No Legs (When using manipulators); Peripheral Vision; Temperature Tolerance 1; Unusual Biochemistry; Wild Animal.

Giant Jail Bird (see large birds of prey from *Bestiary*)

ST 5; **DX** 13; **IQ** 4; **HT** 13.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 11; Move 7.
SM -1 (SM+1 with wings unfurled); 10-15 lbs.
Traits: Increase Range: Mana Damper

Dinge Bats

"Why should we import these?"
"It is suspected that some necromancer developed these to keep the gloominess that a proper demesne requires."
"It also is useful to tell when an intruder has been making footprints in the lobby."
-- Overheard at Peter's Pet Emporium.

Dinge bats make items attractive to dust by using a form of static cling. They then eat moths attracted to dust. Caves with these gray bats in them are much more passable, as the sediment absorbs moisture. The electrical field and heat that the winged mammals emit confuses moths' senses.

Encountered

Adventurers will most likely meet these creatures in old houses. They are often imported by certain classes of individuals who like having the appearance of a centuries-old dwelling. Some larger organizations use dinge bats to charge feather dusters to increase their efficiency.

"The set is ready, cobwebs in place. Release the bats, the dust is needed."
-- Odete Ingalis, Act II, Scene I

Industrial Uses

They can work as air filters, remove particulate contamination as well as pet allergens from the air. A few inventors seek to harness their electrical potential and make lightning-throwing weapons. Enchanters see uses for these animals in items to clean and polish.

Adventure

A local noble imported some dinge bats a few years ago. Now she tires of them, and wants the adventurers to remove *only* the dinge bats from a belfry. They must be removed permanently, one way or another. Selling them for export might be profitable, assuming they are shipped to another town.

Dinge Bats

Appearance: Gray bats, with contrast varying from light to dark.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Insectivore.

ST 1; **DX** 13; **IQ** 3; **HT** 11.
Will 10; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 2 (Ground).
SM -5 (10" long), SM-4 with wings unfurled; 1-2 lbs.
Traits: Bad Sight; Burning Attack 0 damage (surge); (Control (Air); Enhanced Move 1 (Air Speed 24); Flight (Air Move 12); No Legs (When using manipulators); Obscure; Scanning Sense (Sonar); Wild Animal.

Giant Dinge Bats

ST 5; **DX** 13; **IQ** 3; **HT** 11.
Will 10; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 2 (Ground).
SM -3 (2' long); 4-6 lbs; DR 1.

Variants: As presented, they are not carnivorous, but if a GM wishes, they could be "vampire" bats, and attack humans. Add Bite (Impaling) to the templates.

Rip Worms

"Watched as sleeping cow #30576 was slowly wrapped by the silk worms . . . Unit #30576 is ready for shipment and loaded into the cargo container."
-- Notes on a clipboard from the Sayako cattle packaging plant #5.

These domesticated insects wrap potential prey in a cocoon for later. Their silk is durable, requiring a knife to cut through. The most remarkable part of their power is that biological process are paused inside their cocoons. While they are popularly called "rip worms" because of the take of Rip van Winkle, they are also called "time worms." Their taming has not been popular until late due to the myths that circulated about them due to their feeding habits -- they prefer food that still breathes . . .

Encountered

These creatures can be encountered in almost any area, especially in forests or underground. Sleeping victims can be in danger of being preserved. It is said that the Egyptians were the first to discover this creature, as it was handed to them by the gods. They used its silk in the wrappings of their mightiest pharaohs. It is whispered that their wrappings included extra enchantments, and would slowly reverse age over 1,000 or more years . . .

Industrial Uses

"We found ourselves trapped underground, and had a few rip worms with us. Luckily we had some worm food with us, and we put each other in suspended animation. Finally, they left a torch burning to suffocate the worms. We were rescued a few decades later. Although we turned the tide of a battle, our homeland was gone."
-- Record of Kianu Giantslayer, *Mourning*

The suspended animation effect works on any animal matter, be it natural, a simulacrum, artificial beings, and synthetic proteins. It is thus used to package food, juices, alcohol, furs, and wool clothing. Some enchanters seek to make items from the silk and glands that prevent aging. The closest success so far is something that slows all time experienced for the user (see Reduced Time Rate [-100]). It is, in general, a carefully guarded secret as to how to keep the worms from revisiting their stored meals after the embalming is complete.

Adventure

Cryonauts -- sleeping troopers -- awaken, ready to continue their mission. Unfortunately, the causes they were fighting for and against no longer exist! Thus they begin to strike against the buildings now in the places the original targets were . . .

Rip Worms

Appearance: Silk-colored worms.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Carnivore.
Traits: Affliction 1 (Paralysis; Link); Bind (Link); Injury Tolerance (No brain); Injury Tolerance (No Neck); Night Vision 4 (shift); Odious Racial Habit (Prefers to eat food live); Vermiform; Wild Animal.

Giant Rip Worms

ST 30; **DX** 8; **IQ** 3; **HT** 12.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5.
SM +3; 500-1,000 lbs; DR 2.

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. There can be fish that look like birds, and sheep could exist that emit sleep drugs that only take effect after a certain concentration. Trained chameleons could change colors when they hear a sound cue. Plants can slowly filter and absorb water from the air. Insects could instinctively cut hair, and beasts of burden

could be found in different forms. Birds that emit radio interference could be annoying in TL6+. Bats could be given mild bioelectrics, and insects spinning silk is not new.

Pyramid Link

- For more inspiration for chromo-gils, see ["The Art of Camouflage"](#) by S.E. Mortimer.

* * *

Special Thanks to Roger Burton West for his big game hunting skills.

The Omniscient Eye

Are All Mythic Creatures Loners?

Are there any examples in myth or historical literature of monster or non-human races which parallel the numbers and frequency of appearance we find in fantasy games and literature (as whole civilizations or large herds in the wild), or are they always represented as rare and solitary?

The easy answer to this question is a simple: yes, there are a variety of examples of non-human civilizations and herds of monsters in myth and historical literature. This answer is hardly satisfying, though, nor does it address the complexity of thought and discussion that went into this question in the past. After all, tales of monsters and non-human races go back to pre-history, and both individual monsters and whole societies existed in popular thought through the Early Modern period, to the first glimerings of modern fantasy fiction. Obviously, they extend into the modern day as well.

Before delving too far into the subject, It is important to note that my answer to this question will focus on the Western tradition -- the inspiration for most English language fantasy fiction -- and on three periods: the Classical (Graeco-Roman, through the fall of the Roman Empire), the medieval (fall of Rome to 1350) and the Renaissance/Early Modern period (1350-1650 and 1650-1800) even though pre-20th century examples can be found after 1800, such as H.G. Wells' *Time Machine,* and ignores the literature of civilizations such a Mesopotamia, medieval Islam, India, and China, all of which have their own monsters. It's also worth noting that, until the 20th century, monsters and non-humans were almost always located on the margins, relegated to places that lacked Western, Christian civilization. Related to this locating, during the medieval and Renaissance periods, monsters were typically associated with either Cain, Satan, or signs from God; the trick was to determine which of the three was the source.

During the later periods under discussion, if a literary monster was described as being unique or appeared alone, it was typically put to a metaphorical or allegorical use. For instance, a lone siren could represent lust and promiscuity, a dragon would represent greed, or a lone giant wolf could stand for rapacity and gluttony. This is a key characteristic of the type and is related to the entymology of the term "monster," coming from the Latin *monstrar* -- to reveal or show. Unique monsters, or those who appeared alone, were believed to reveal some part of a divine plan or to show God's will (whether He was angered or pleased). On the other hand, large groups of monsters or non-human sentients were typically treated as other races or species. In general, they possessed exaggerated features -- very much like Star Trek aliens -- and represented oddity or the potentials of Creation. Most medieval theological authors saw these civilizations as a chance to spread their faith to the corners of the world and spent a great deal of time and ink debating whether non-human races had souls or could be converted to Christianity.

However, those are slight digressions from the actual question. Examples of both unique and social monsters and non-humans are the important part here. So, a chronological approach is probably best.

Classical Antiquity

If we look at Graeco-Roman mythology, we find many examples of solitary and unique monsters. Just dealing with the obvious ones, we have the Minotaur, the Sphinx, Jason's Dragon, Cerberus, and Pegasus. Medusa also falls into this category in that she was one of the three Gorgons, sisters cursed by the gods. Each was unique and each had its own story, or played a major role in someone else's story. There are also some borderline creatures in these myths, though. We can argue that the Stimphalian Birds, while unique to an area, appeared in a large quantity as Hercules fought a flock rather than just a single bird. According to some myths, the Sirens appear to have fairly large numbers and live in different areas, beyond the group that plagued Odysseus. Likewise, the Lernaean hydra, it could be argued, is one of many hydrae due to the need to specify which one Hercules was supposed to destroy, though the argument is not a

particularly solid one due to a lack of other hydrae in surviving myths. So far, the answer above seems to be disproven. However, Graeco-Roman mythology also presents Odysseus' Lotus-Eaters, who exist as a quasi-society. A stronger argument for semi-organized non-humans in large numbers looks toward the Nymphs, Fauns, and Satyrs, which could appear individually or in groups. Usually any groups appeared around Bacchus (or Dionysus), though, so a divinity is involved.

Ovid (43 B.C.E. -- 18 C.E.) helps to fully resolve the question. In his *Metamorphoses,* Ovid relates the story of Polyphemus (Book 13) who laments his lost love and is one of many Cyclopses, children of Poseidon -- not to be confused with the three Cyclopses born of Gaia who make Zeus' lightning bolts. He also presents the story of the battle with the Centaurs (Book 12). In this scene, Nessus describes the battle involving many Centaurs, male and female, in their best effort at organization -- which is to say not exactly regimented. On the other hand, Ovid also retells the story of Perseus, including his unnamed monster (Book 4) which is a unique sea serpent, among other creatures and transformations of a unique nature. Another Roman author, who will be discussed in greater detail through later sources, is Pliny the Elder (late-Roman) who described the so-called Plinian races and the phoenix (also in Herodotus) in his *Natural History.*

Medieval

While the Classical era furnishes Western civilization with several examples of both lone and social monsters/races, the medieval era not only reproduces many of them but expands the field considerably. Beginning with mythology, both Celtic and Norse myths present us with a variety of examples in both camps. The Celts made great use of the Seelie and Unseelie courts of the Fae (which assumes some sort of organization), though they were distanced and separated from interaction with humans, with exceptions. Norse mythology gives us both unique or solitary monsters (the Fenris wolf and most dragons) and social non-humans. Among the latter are the Norse Dwarves, Elves, Giants, and Trolls. All four appear in large quantities, the Dwarves and Giants at least have courts and kings, while the Elves might, and they all interact with humans to some extent. The most famous, of course, being Fafnir (Dwarf turned into a dragon) and Andvari (Elf) from the *Volsunga Saga.*

Remaining in the mythic/religious realm, Saint Augustine's *City of God* (fifth century) includes a brief discussion of the Plinian races, though he is concerned about whether they were human enough to be converted (16.8). Each of the races he discusses, including the Blemmyae (who have their heads in their torsos), the Cynocephali (dog-heads), Skiopodes (big feet), and Androgyni (hermaphrodites) have large numbers and their own civilizations.

Beowulf (c. 1000) pushes us back into the solitary monsters, notably Grendel and his unnamed mother, both of whom are described as descendants of Cain. Therefore both stand in as evils to be defeated by (the presumably Christian) Beowulf. The epic also presents the first dragon in English literature, an unnamed beast that is both solitary and anti-human. This creature, the predecessor of Tolkien's Smaug, is commonly read as a representative of greed and voraciousness, a suitable creature for Beowulf to die fighting.

About a century and a half later, Gerald of Wales (1146-1223) presents more unique monsters in *The History and Topography of Ireland.* In this survey, he discusses many individuals among the Irish, including a pair of werewolves (2.52) and an ox-man (2.54), largely to present the Irish as a monstrous people in need of civilizing (or so most modern readings have concluded).

One of Gerald's contemporaries, Albert the Great (1193-1280) included a wide variety of monsters in his bestiary, *Man and the Beasts.* This text is a phenomenal resource for gamers, especially, as a treasure trove of interesting new creatures and generally forgotten traits for common monsters. Albert discusses the Basilisk (Basylyseus, book 25: entry 13) which he says virtually infests Turkey and Nubia; the Phoenix (Fenix, 23:42), which he implies can be found throughout the Orient; and the Manticore (Manticora or Maricon Morion, 22:74) of which there are apparently many in the Orient. Each of these creatures is presumably solitary, since Albert never says anything about social organization. The same is true for his extended entry on Dragons (Draco, 25:27) of which he says there are many, ranging from five to 30 cubits (elbow to tip of the middle finger) in size. Presumably, Albert leaves the implication that all four species are solitary due to food supply, which would fit in line with his discussion of the impracticality of flying dragons. Other notable bestiaries include that of Isadore of Seville (late sixth to early seventh century) and T H. White's

translation of an anonymous 12th-century English bestiary.

Contemporary with many of these authors is the tradition of the Arthurian legends. Best represented by Chretien de Troyes (late-12th century), the *Gawain*-poet (mid-14th century), and Sir Thomas Malory (1410?-1471), these tales present a wide variety of monsters and races wandering the countryside. In the legends it is practically impossible to walk in a rural area without tripping over a giant or dragon of some sort. And, in *Arthur and Gorlagon,* even a werewolf makes an appearance. More relevantly for our topic, though, Chretien's *Yvain* includes at least one Giant/Wild Man (lines 277-407) who is a solitary herdsman, but certainly not unique seeing as the court barely bats an eye at hearing about him. The same author's *Lancelot* includes other similar creatures from time to time as well. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* by the *Gawain*-poet, presents the audience with a solitary giant in the form of the Green Knight himself. And Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* describes a solitary dragon, though not unique, in Arthur's dream (V.41) as well as Sir Pellinore's Questing Beast, which is unique (Book I).

Renaissance and Beyond

Around the same time as the *Gawain*-poet, during the transition between the middle ages and the Renaissance, Sir John Mandeville (mid-14th century) produced his *Travels.* This collection charts the author's supposed pilgrimage to Jerusalem and his travels to points farther east. While there is considerable debate about whether Mandeville ever even existed, much less actually traveled anywhere, his discussions of the Plinian races and monsters in general are quite entertaining.

Initially Mandeville limits himself to singular monsters, solitary representatives of far-spread species. The first of these is Hippocrates' daughter, whom Mandeville claims was turned into a dragon and left on the island of Lango by the goddess Diana, the curse to be lifted if a knight kisses her (part 4). His second and third are a Faun or Satyr (he is not clear which) living as a Christian hermit in the deserts of Egypt and the Phoenix aptly located in Heliopolis (part 7). However, all three are relatively close to home. Once he moves beyond Jerusalem, the quantity and organization of monsters increases and turns into entire races of intelligent beings. Among these are the Anthropophagi (cannibals) of Sumatra (part 20) and the Cynocephali (see above) as a tall race with a king, though primitive, from the far east (part 21) which he draws from Pliny and Alexander the Great. Further east, Mandeville locates the Cyclopses, Blemmyae (see above), and myriad others with their own civilizations (part 22) in the Andaman Islands. In Bactria, he claims there are giant griffons and hippopotami (centaurs) aplenty (part 29). Finally, there are the primitive, cannibalistic, but organized Giants beyond the Vale Perilous (part 31), who grow in size the further the particular species is from Europe -- they start with a breed measuring 28-30' and end with another breed measured at 50-60' by the time Mandeville gets back to sea.

Equally far-ranging is Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), the author of *Orlando Furioso.* This particular epic involves a wide variety of animal headed men who fight one of Ariosto's heroes, Rogero (Canto 6). Later, Rogero also fights a pair of Giants, a brother and sister (beginning in Canto 7). The sister of the pair is known for riding a large wolf into battle. Then there is the hippogryph, a unique creature traded around from hero to hero for transportation throughout the tale. Overlapping with Ariosto is Ambroise Pare (1510-1590) who discusses the many Tritons and Sirens (male and female for the same species) in the world (107-108) and the Thanacth -- a human faced tiger in India which apparently appears in large numbers since the natives kill them for food (146-7) -- amongst many others.

More famous than Pare is his contemporary, Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), author of *The Faerie Queene.* This massively epic poem contains a phenomenal variety of creatures, non-humans, sorcerers and knights. The first race of non-humans the audience is introduced to are a group of Satyrs and Fauns living in the woods (I.6). These individuals rescue one of the heroines -- Una -- and, though her beauty and speech, convert to Christianity (whether Catholicism or Anglican is debatable). Later, Redcrosse, the hero of Book I, fights the giant Orgoglio, one of many such beings, and the hydra that Orgoglio creates for his co-villian Duessa (I.7). After Spenser leaves Redcrosse, he moves on to another knight who helps defend Temperaunce from a plethora of animal headed men (II.11). Yet another Giant gets into a duel with Sir Satyrane -- the child of a Satyr and a human maiden -- in canto 7 of the third book. More Satyrs appear in book 3, canto 10 to find and marry Hellenore, a young wife escaping from her rather old and jealous husband. Finally, in book 5, canto 2 we see more Giants and at least one Elf running around for the heroic knight to deal with.

Twin contemporaries, both from the Elizabethan era, briefly touch on the subject as well. First is William Shakespeare (1564-1616) who favors organized groups of faeries in both *The Tempest* (with Ariel and her companions) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (with Titania and Oberon's court of faeries in the woods). The other is Cervantes (mid-16th century through 1616) whose hero, Don Quixote, jousts against a bevy of giants and dragons, even if they are all in his mind.

Finally, let's look briefly at Jonathan Swift's (1667-1745) *Gulliver's Travels.* This is quite possibly the most famous pre-20th century travel narrative in print. Throughout the course of his travels, Gulliver meets a variety of non-human races with their own civilizations in relatively remote areas. Amongst these are: the Lilliputians (sub-pigmies with their own emperor), Brobdignagians (giants with an advanced civilization), Laputians, Balnibarbians, Luggnaggians, Glubbdibdribs, and Yahoos. Seeing as Swift is a satirist, each race stands for an example of some aspect of social perfection or social problems for his English audience. However, since the medieval and Renaissance races were also used for similar purposes, this should not exclude Swift's from consideration.

As noted previously, in addition to providing one of the roots of modern fantasy, each of these texts and authors provides a wealth of imaginative ideas for fantasy gaming GMs. Whether the GM decides to throw the players off by introducing Alexander's fire-breathing Cynocephali, digs around in Albert the Great for an obscure monstrous animal, or makes use of *The Bestiary* to modify the stats of their cherished dragons as a surprise, these early stories and collections can be a perfect supplement for the various gaming monster compendia and bestiaries currently on the market.

References

- *Beowulf* Trans. Seamus Heaney. New York, Norton: 2002.
- *The Bestiary* Trans. T.H. White. New York, Putnam: 1960.
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Trans. J.R.R. Tolkien. New York, Ballantine: 1980.
- Albert the Great. *Man and the Beasts* Trans. James J. Scanlon. SUNY Binghamton Press: 1987.
- Ariosto, Ludovico. *Orlando Furioso* Trans. Guido Waldman. Oxford UP: 1998.
- Augustine, Saint. *City of God* Trans. Marcus Dods. New York, Modern Library: 1993.
- Cervantes, Miguel. *Don Quixote* Trans. John Rutherford. New York, Penguin: 2003.
- Chretien de Troyes. *Yvain* Trans. Burton Raffel. Yale UP: 1987.
- Gerald of Wales. *The History and Topography of Ireland* Trans. John O'Meara. New York, Penguin: 1988.
- Malory, Thomas. *Complete Works* Oxford UP: 1971.
- Mandeville, John. *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* New York, Penguin: 1983.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses* Trans. Rolfe Humphries. Indiana UP: 1983.
- Pare, Ambroise. *On Monsters and Marvels* Trans.Janis Pallister. University of Chicago Press: 1982.
- Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* New York, Signet: 1998.
- ---, *The Tempest* Oxford UP: 1998.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene* New York, Penguin: 1987.
- Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels* New York, Penguin: 2003.

Further Reading

- Beal, Timothy. *Religion and its Monsters* New York, Routledge: 2002.
- Bildhauer, Bettina and Robert Mills, eds. *The Monstrous Middle Ages* University of Toronto Press: 2003.
- Cohen, Jeffery Jerome, ed. *Monster Theory* University of Minnesota Press: 1997.
- Friedman, John Block. *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* Syracuse UP: 2000.
- Gilmore, David. *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* University of Pennsylvania Press: 2002.
- monstrous.com -- largely uncited, but relatively complete with some mediocre prose translations
- Monstropedia -- sparse variety, but very detailed and well researched entries

--Brent Stypczynski

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

Damnation Decade (for [d20 Modern](#) & [True20](#))

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Robert J. Toth

Cover by Chris Dien

Illustrated by Empty Room Studios (Jeff Cram, Bob Cram, Colin Throm, Keith Curtis, Rick Hershey, Michael Hamlett, Jia Wang, Cliff Kurowski, & Dan Howard)

144-Page Perfect Bound Black & White Book; $27.95

Bonkers.

This supplement is quite literally bonkers.

Which was my initial reaction to *Damnation Decade,* the latest in Green Ronin's Mystic Vistas line. From its treatment of the [Biblical Age](#), [pirates](#), [Ancient Egypt](#), and an [alternative Soviet Union](#), this series has produced some of the best supplements and source books for the *d20 System,* consistently proving to be interesting and informative. *Damnation Decade* continues this trend, providing not only for *[d20 Modern](#)* and Green Ronin's *[True20 System,](#)* but also for gaming in general, the best supplement on the 1970s to date. Between Wingnut Games' *Solid! The d20 Blaxploitation Experience* and Deep7's *[Disaster! 1PG Survival Adventure!](#)* and "Thunderball Rally," the article in *Dungeon* #93/*Polyhedron* #152, there is not a lot of competition, I grant you, but *Damnation Decade* is not just the best, but also engagingly crazy.

Damnation Decade describes a period wherein every paranoid fantasy, every disaster depicted in movies such as *Soylent Green, Rollerball, The Omega Man,* and others has come true. It is 1976 and President Stanton Spobeck should have resigned two years ago for interfering in an earlier election, but the earthquake that destroyed America's West Coast and triggered an ecological collapse has kept him in power. The Earth's temperature is rising, the polar ice caps are melting, the oceans rising, and nuclear power stations are melting down, poisoning the local environment and creating acid rain, while oil reserves are running out. With distractions at home, America's enemies have taken advantage. What remaining oil reserves there are have been grabbed by a fundamentalist revolutionary, while the Collectivist bloc led by Gogol Yobar has conquered much of Continental Esperanto with its Purity Wall, a black iron wall of tank treads that prevents all escape.

At home, rumors abound of giant animal attacks from killer bees to rabid rats, of the zombies inside the cordoned off state of Alamo, of aliens and reptile men, of the men in cream suits -- the Monday Men who do the President's dirty work, of super computers and android robot replicants, and so on. Many of these are investigated by Herman Pervis on his popular TV series *Beyond the Barrier.* Meanwhile, the people of America are shaking their funky thing at BootyDome franchised dance halls, attending self-help "Hunker Obliterative Processing" seminars, and watching Omegaball, the ultra-violent sport that has replaced everything else. And if that sounds bad enough, a 16th-century astrologer named Abednego Trestle has predicted that the end of the world will come on New Year's Eve 1979. Right now it is July 3rd 1976, the eve of America's Bicentennial, and the fate of the world depend upon who the next President is and what the heroes do.

In a time when the trucker is big on the road, roller skates are cool, computers are big, and bionics cost several million dollars, *Damnation Decade* offers a take on several old *d20 Modern* occupations, such as the Athlete, the Celebrity, and the White Collar worker. To this it adds several particular to the genre, including Guru, Red Collar Worker (someone who works in the sex industry, or dancer, professional companion, or therapist), and Survivalist. The Advanced Occupations are even more suited to the genre and include the Driver, the Groover (who lives for good times), the Omegaballer, the Parapsychologist, the Trucker, and the Urban Cowboy.

There are surprisingly few new skills or feats, but the supplement's new version of the Psychic class, receives a set of new rules that reflect the unstable and sometimes uncontrollable nature of their abilities. Every time a Psychic uses his powers he must make a control roll. This roll becomes the save check number, and is open ended, reflecting the psychic's mental momentum. Fail the control check and a further failed Willpower save causes a psychic mishap. The type depends upon the ability.

The technology section lists various pieces of equipment, enough for most situations. The most notable inclusion though, is that of de rigueur bionics. Expensive, powerful, these replacement limbs, eyes, and other implants represent cutting edge technology and are never freely available to a player character. It should also be noted that the hedonistic aspects of the setting is supported with rules for drug use.

In terms of play style and set-up *Damnation Decade* gives three options. The first is having the characters all similar -- for example all FBI agents or members of the same globe trotting basketball team, whilst the second two allow for a more diverse group to be brought together. This can be through circumstances, perhaps as the result of a disaster, (for which Deep7's *Disaster!* would be a perfect source), or through a patron -- anonymous or not. Naturally this patron is wealthy and has a particular interest in the prophecies of Abednego Trestle. All of which can be tied into the setting's secrets, of which there are many.

Half of *Damnation Decade* is devoted to those secrets and the various foes taking advantage of America's situation and inability to deal with it. No detail is spared here with the background, current situation, and plans plus any necessary statistics for some of the factions, powers, and groups. Besides the foreign threats of Collectivism and an oil consortium dominated by multinationals, these threats include androids, radioactive zombies, demons, brainwashing cults, and so on, their motives described in detail. A GM is free to use all, some, or just a few as is his wont.

The first of two appendices discusses inspirations for the setting -- mostly in the form of films, along with a little reading. The second appendix provides a conversion to ***True20 Adventure Roleplaying.*** This concentrates upon modeling the various Occupations and Advanced Ocupations found earlier in the book, and on how *True20* can handle the setting's other elements, such as bionics and Omegaball.

Damnation Decade is engagingly written and its pages are stuffed to the gills with little facts and elements of color that bring this version of the Seventies to life. Behind the movie-poster-style cover, the artwork is merely adequate, but all of it has a cheesy quality that befits the supplement's "Bad Assed" genre.

Part of the fun of reading *Damnation Decade* is matching its details to the real facts and personalities. In fact, had this supplement used all of the real elements, it is unlikely that *Damnation Decade* would have worked as well, or at all. This does not stop the players or the GM doing so to make it their game, though only the older gamer is going to get most of the references -- for the younger gamer it pre-dates *Star Wars,* a film that will never be all that popular in the era of Damnation Decade.

And that really is the problem with *Damnation Decade* -- you have to be old enough to get its parodying. If not, then it is both mystifying and bonkers, rather than just bonkers. *Damnation Decade* is a fabulous, crazy, platform-shoed, booty-shaking take upon the Seventies, that is not only up to the standards of the Mystic Vistas line, but just about ruins any future supplement on the same period.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Escalation!

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Art by Beth Trott

57 cards (56 playing cards, one instruction card); full-color, boxed, two to five players; $10

If you don't have one living next door to you then he's across the street; if not there, down at the cul-de-sac. He's a jerk. A bad neighbor. Maybe you lent him your weed whacker and he never gave it back. Perhaps she borrowed a cup of sugar, but when you needed two eggs she turned you away at the threshold. His apple tree keeps dropping fruit on your side of the property line and your kids keep stepping on the bees they attract. Things like this start small, but there's always *Escalation!*

Z-Man Games has brought your neighborhood woes to the tabletop with their new card game of interhouse warfare. Things have gotten out of hand, and the object for two to five suburbanites is to leave your opponents with all the cards.

Everyone gets a hand of cards, and they rotate laying down one or more of them. The cards are numbered one to 13, with three wild cards and two neighborhood watch cards. Each person in turn must put down a greater total than the person before them did. For example, the first person may put down a single "one" card, so the next person need only place a two or higher. On the other hand, they might up the stakes early in the game and play a greater sum. You can play more than one card on your turn, however many you like, but they must all be the same value . . . all "three" cards, for example. The wild cards are numbered "1-7," and they stand in for any card of those values you like. You could announce one wild card as a seven, for example, or play it with a couple of sixes and call it 18.

If a player cannot (or won't) beat the previous player's total, and they don't have a neighborhood watch card (which is used as the same total as the previous player -- if the last guy had a 12, you can play it as a 12, representing a temporary cessation of hostilities as cooler heads prevail), you must keep all the cards that have been played up to then. You then restart the fight with something from your hand and play continues. When the deck runs out, the first player to empty his hand ends the game. Everyone still holding the bag adds their remaining cards to their collection, and whoever has the fewest cards stacked against them wins.

You may not recognize your friends and neighbors among them, but the illustrations here are awfully good for a little card game like this. Bright and colorful, cartoony but recognizable, with clear graphics and more than their share of brutal whimsy. Each card is a bit more unpleasant than the number value that preceded it (and the lengths to which its character is prepared to go become that much more extreme). It's little touches like this that help put a game over the top.

And speaking of that top, no one's going to be making space in the trophy case for the awards such a slight offering may bring, but Reiner Knizia shows once again that the simplest twist on rules can make an enjoyable outing from most any rule set. You don't necessarily get a great feeling for the subject matter -- it's really just a one-note joke around which to hang an idea -- but even as the intermission played between other, larger games, you'll still find yourself playing more than a couple of games. (One suggestion they make is playing as many full rounds as there are players, and adding everyone's scores together to get the winner.)

The strategies are as slim as the subject matter, but they're fun to learn and play. Your goals change slightly as you approach the endgame: Since most hands end when someone can no longer play any cards, but the last round ends with the first player to empty his hand, deciding how many cards you can afford to blow while still keeping enough to make bigger matches becomes more important. The market is filling up with card games that barely break the 10-clam mark, and some give you more value for that sawbuck than others. ***Escalation!*** isn't the best, but it's more engaging than others and has a layer or two more than its competition. Of course, first you have to get that $10 Mr. Fentucchi owes you for that deposit you made for him on last summer's beer keg . . .

--Andy Vetromile

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Past Ain't What It Used to Be

This past week had a minor victory for me as I picked up a used DVD set for dirt cheap: *The Best of the Electric Company, Volume 1.* For those who are unaware, *The Electric Company* was the Children's Television Workshop series designed as a follow up to *Seseme Street,* encouraging six- to eight-year-olds to read. It starred Rita Morano, Morgan Freeman, Bill Cosby (for the first season), Spider-Man (playing himself), and lots of other folks, and included bits by Tom Lehrer, Chuck Jones, Mel Brooks, and others. It was a sketch-comedy show similar in format to *Seseme Street . . .* or perhaps *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* with a much greater emphasis on phonics.

Thus it was with some trepidation that I watched them. It's the same dread that creeps through my mind every time I revisit some beloved childhood memory: *He-Man & The Masters of the Universe, Voltron, Star Wars* (episodes IV through VI), *The Monster at the End of This Book,* old Infocom games, and others. It's the same terror that keeps me from rewatching *The Karate Kid* or *Superman III.* Because, as I've learned time and again: Nostalgia is a harsh mistress.

The filter of nostalgia casts darn-near everything in the past in a better light. Movies were "better" years ago, as were books, comics, and -- yes -- games. Of course, an objective eye shows that this isn't generally the case; the waves of history allow the cruft to wash away the forgettable masses while the compression of memory allows the gems of "childhood" (defined by scientists as 1980-1989) to glow supernova compared to the limited window of offerings we typically see on movie marquees or bestseller lists.

What I find fascinating is how unselective the childhood mind is at determining what it likes. Although not everything I watched was beloved as a child (I didn't much care for *Speed Racer,* for example), I seem recall liking everything with a roughly equal intensity. Old episodes of *Doctor Who, The Brady Bunch, Scooby Doo,* and *The Rockford Files* filled my childhood afternoon, packing the void where I would've done something silly like make friends or get exercise. And I can vaguely recall thinking that something like *He-Man* and Disney's *DuckTales* were about on par with my mind at the time, but the former is a tough show to watch nowadays while the latter still holds up quite well for me. The same thing happened with *Star Wars* and the Indiana Jones series; the original *Star Wars* trilogy is not terribly watchable for me nowadays while I'm still a huge fan of both Indiana Jones movies.

And, of course, this also applies to games.

Sometimes I wonder how much of the hobby-gaming world is in the "nostalgia" market: the success of retro-1970s-style **d20 System** adventures or **HackMaster,** the continued reprints of game books that came out decades ago, the licensing of worlds or resurrection of genres that havn't been on the public's mind for years.

Of course, the problem of living in a nostalgia world is that reality has a party-pooping habit of intruding, especially if those "classics" are revisited. I'm reminded of an anecdote where two old-school game designers sat down to play a much-beloved old war game, popping out chits, setting up the board, reading the thick rule book (numbered in arcane systems where you might see something like "for wheel rules, see 3.1.4.1.5.9.e"). After going through the extensive setup process and getting about half-way through the rules, they both realized: They didn't want to play. Their tastes had changed and they'd drifted away from chit-tweezering.

Actually, I suspect that not only have their tastes changed, but also the nature of *games* had changed when they weren't looking. In particular, much of the hunger that traditional war games satisfied has been sated by computer games, which offer much of the same appeal but without the need to set up a game on the bedroom floor for days at a time or fear that an errant schnauzer tearing across the bedroom will utterly destroy Europe.

Likewise I wonder how much of the game biz's offerings will be supplanted by the future, reducing their appeal in the eyes of nostalgia to mutterings of, "Well, it was interesting at the time . . ." Unfortunately, it's very difficult to know what games will be "classics" while you're in the middle of their release cycle. For example, the *Ultima* series of computer games was about as popular as the *Wizardry* series that was released around the same time, but the former still has a vibrant fan community who love the games while the latter has been reduced to something of a footnote.

Will the **d20 System** be remembered in the future as the basis for a hit computer game that internalized its best ideas while jettisoning the dross? Will people still prefer the tactile feel of **Magic** cards, even decades after the technology had been perfected to play the game virtually in a local or global environment?

Some games I have a hard time revisiting; for example, many of the old Infocom text adventures, while beloved at the time, are simply too arcane and unforgiving now. But just as many are still captivating; over Christmas we played **Outburst** at the in-laws' household and it was still as much fun as it had ever been. (However, we did need to remind ourselves, "It's a snapshot of the 1980s, so frame your views and mindset accordingly.")

Fortunately, I was delighted to discover that I still enjoyed *The Electric Company,* even though I've known how to read for several years now. And I'm hoping that my own son -- a cute 19-pound sack of squirm who insists on being carried -- will enjoy them himself once he's old enough to worry about letter combinations.

And who knows? Maybe he'll be nostalgic for the show himself in another couple of decades.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

For those of you in the Illinois area, I'll be a guest next week at [CodCon](#), being held at the College of DuPage. If all goes according to plan, I'll be running a game, talking a bit about what's going on at SJGames (assuming I know anything, of course), and appearing in a panel on Creative Writing for RPGs. I might even have another surprise or two.

And if you're a *Pyramid* subscriber and plan on attending, drop me a [line](#); I might see if I can't dig up something interesting for you.

Icosahedron Adventures

Alphabet Enemies
Twenty-Six Nonstandard Nemeses
(Part Three: Q through Z)

by Owen K.C. Stephens

In this article we finish off our list of unusual enemies, begun in "Part One: A-H" and continued in Part Two: I-P."

Queen of Everywhere: She may be the ruler of the fairy court, able to look upon you from every cloud, flower and pond while ruling over dryad and goblin alike. Or she might be the High councilor of the Psychic's Guild, able to keep tabs on you through clairvoyance while deciding what deep-space ships get psi-guides, and which must brave the void blind. She could be the doctor that runs the Paranormal Research Lab, the SysOp of the Grey Hats everyone has to turn to when a worm threatens to crash the Virtual Interweb, or just Lady Moriarty (officially reformed). She can be of any gender, and even any species, as long as she's in charge of a group with vast powers of observation that world powers need, but don't trust.

You're not sure how you become the focus of "her" attentions. You did a job that affected her empire of data and mysterious forces, but so have a lot of people. But suddenly, she's getting you involved in a lot of things. She insists you be the liaison between your government and her, even though that job should go to someone much more senior. She contacts you at random, and discusses your problems in a way that shows she's keeping very close tabs on you. She invites you to councils with heads of state, recommends you to anyone needing a job done, and insists on your services as payment anytime someone needs a favor from her.

She doesn't seem to be working against you directly, but her attention is making life difficult. Suddenly, you are On the Radar of every intelligence gathering organization, band of ninja necromancers, order of Renaissance conspiracy theorists, and royal clan of street samurai on the planet. Since she's interested in you, they have to be as well. And they all want to know how you got in her "good graces" (not that she's explicitly making you life any easier), and no one believes that you don't know. Your friends and allies don't trust her, and her enemies now hate you. She doesn't seem to want anything specific from you, but she's thrust you to center stage in a much larger game of power plays and intrigue than you're used to. And you have no idea why.

She *is* the Queen of Information; maybe she's knows you're going to be important before you do. Maybe you remind her of an old friend, long lost. Maybe she's using you as the man with one red show, a distraction to groups that want to penetrate her lairs of subterfuge and political machinations. She's not telling. Especially not you.

Repeat, Rewind, Replay: Early in your career, you faced a dangerous foe and defeated it. There were many distinctive features about your foe, ranging from a catchphrase to preferred tactics, mystic weaknesses, specific allies, a style of dress, and even a physical description. Just before you dispatched that foe, it warned you it could return to defeat you, and do so seven times, or seven times seven times if need be.

So far, it's been about 12 times.

Its never exactly the same foe, but the similarities are too great to ignore. There's a pacing to the conflicts, from the first assassin jumping you as you get a cup of coffee to the final confrontation with the pirate wielding a hambone. You've codified the encounters down to seven critical steps. When you make sure they occur in the normal order, you gain a slight bonus over your foes and all its allies (+2 circumstance bonus to all d20 checks and rolls). When you don't, things go against you (-2 penalty to all d20 checks and rolls). The only problems are finding items to meet all the conditions every time, and suffering the same unpleasant consequences over and over. If you broke your arm in the first fight, you now must always break your arms, or lose your advantage.

Slasher Conspiracy: You've heard of it, of course. The knife-handed goblin a knight tried to kill, but only maimed. The engineer that went space-crazy and now hires on to cryogenic ships to drive a power drill through the crew while they're meatcicles. The sociopath mental patient that returns to her old high school on the anniversary of prom night to kill anyone nominated as homecoming queen. You'd heard the stories, but you never believed them.

Until now.

The slasher is real, and you survived one of its attacks. Perhaps you and your friends all did. You thought you'd killed it. But you soon learn that it doesn't stay dead. The secret of its origin and its immortality are one and the same, and they are secrets the authorities don't want known. The church doesn't want word getting out that hell really can kick you out. The company has erased all records of the experimental nanites that keep rewriting people with a psychopath's features and memory. The cult that brainwashes people to think they are Sack-Faced Efrem, the Machete Murderer, has enough police and judges to make sure the story is never taken seriously, no matter how many "Efrems" end up in the morgue.

There's a reason the survivor of the "last" slasher attack is always the next victim when the slasher returns . . . you may figure out the secret someone powerful wants hidden. So the slasher keeps showing up, coming for you at your camps, your engine rooms, your high school. No matter how often you kill it, it shows up again. And it will continue to do so, until you uncover the conspiracy of its origin, and destroy the root of its power.

Temporal Threats: The first time someone claimed to be from the future and tried to kill you, you could laugh it off. The occasional deluded psychopath is an occupational hazard. Besides, his claim of having been sent back through time, naked and acclimated to the culture, to kill you for crimes you would eventually commit seemed both too conveniently unprovable, and vaguely familiar.

The second time, you began to suspect a conspiracy. The method of travel was the same, though the future this second "future" killer came from was radically different than that described by your first out-of-time attacker. By the time a third came along, again from a different universe, and blaming you for yet a third set of future crimes, you had to wonder, could it be true?

Every few months a new, highly-trained assassin appears in your life and tries to knock you off for some terrible, world-spanning disaster that ruins the future. You've been accused of destroying magic, creating a deadly virus, overthrowing the natural order, starting a gang war, creating a black hole in your back yard, and releasing ancient evil from their tombs so they could ravage war-torn 1930s Russia. Each time the temporal killer is untraceable with any current-time resources, and claims to be from an even more harsh and ruined world. And each time, the assassin is a little tougher, and a little more ruthless.

If they are from the future, something is going to go seriously wrong. And no matter how many steps you take to ensure you don't create any specific disaster they mention, a new one pops up blaming you for some new catalyst of apocalypse. Could some other force be trying to ruin the future, and placing the blame at your feet? And if so, can you put a permanent end to them, and free yourself of anachronistic assassins?

Ulcer: Specifically a peptic ulcer. Sure, it's just an open sore in your stomach or upper intestine, where acids can eat at your flesh and cause pain. You're a hero, right? Stress and spicy food (or bacteria, or tiny invisible evil demons of foreign food) are going to cause problem, and you got an ulcer. But it *feels* like a foe out to get you, and its random flairing up can be handled like a recurring foe. For fantasy *d20 System* games, have the GM add your ulcer to the random monster encounter chart. When it gets rolled, your ulcer is a major problem for the next scene. (Many other game systems have different mechanics to determine when a recurring foe shows up, your ulcer can take advantage of them. Failing that, set a percent chance of it showing up on any given day.)

When your ulcer acts up, you suffer the kind of minor set-backs similar to being shaken (-2 penalty to most d20 checks). Since the cause isn't actually the same as being shaken, these penalties stack if you actually are shaken. You may be able to alleviate them with potions, salves, antacids, spells, or psionic biofeedback, but doing so takes time and requires resources you may lose in the jungles of Mu. A doctor (or witch doctor) can suggest a course of treatment to

help, but inevitably whatever he suggests is difficult to match with your lifestyle, causing problems nearly as bad as the ulcer itself.

Virgwe: Virgwe is a ghost of a nordic shield-maiden who thought she was a Valkyrie, and now sub-contracts for the Angel of Death. She's a very minor ghost (low CR, no typical ghost special abilities), but gains a +20 bonus to her checks to see if she reforms after being destroyed (guaranteeing success).

Once you've cheated death (actually been raised from the dead, or just come close to death -- especially if you used action points or a similar mechanic to avoid a fatal result), Virgwe is assigned to bring your in to the afterlife. Since she cannot defeat you in combat, she tries to get you killed by giving advice to those who attack you (pointing out your hiding places, or making insulting comments in your voice during delicate negotiations). She won't quit until she has a permanent death to assign to you, though it need not be yours (you might name a chicken as yourself and have it for dinner, or sell your death to someone as a bundle with other valuables).

Wawelski Smok: Wawelski is a smoke dragon (hence the surname "Smok"). Treat his as a red dragon with no spellcasting ability, but the supernatural abilities of fast healing 5 and gaseous form as a vampire. Rather than heal in a coffin, Wawelski heals when near any part of his hoard (which he normally secrets in multiple places around any are he plans to operate in).

Wawelski can heal any damage except that done by the footwear created by a certain cobbler (or sporting goods designer). He has long since killed the cobbler, but now must seek out every pair of boots, slops and sandals the craftsman made, some of which are magic. And unbeknownst to you, you have a pair. Thus the dragon alternates between trying to buy your shoes, make barefootedness fashionable, and kill you. Of course he can't harass you all the time . . . there are other shoes out there. As you gain levels he gains age categories (much faster than usual, based on how many pairs of shoes he's successfully destroyed), making him a matched threat whenever you face him.

You may not know exactly why he wants your shoes, and unless you are a high-kicking martial-arts adventurer it's going to be hard to take out Wawelski with shoe damage anyway. In this case, your best bet may be to take his stuff, *then* kill the monster, since he can't heal from gaseous form without at list a little of his treasure around.

Xenomorphs: It was alien, though alien may mean from another planet, another dimension, or even just from the lightning-and-steam driven labs of a foreign power. It changed its form to thrive in its surroundings. It grew fins in water, armored scales when shot, flameproof mucus coating near lava, and shifting green camouflage in the jungle. You may have been called in to kill it, or your three-hour boat tour might have just shipwrecked on its island., whatever thee case you killed it where other failed, and the world heard about it.

Now, things like it are popping up everywhere. And you're the renowned expert for dealing with them.

You may take such jobs with gusto, or you may try to avoid them only to be drawn in with bribes, pleas and threats. No one else is able to deal with the creatures, at least not with your skill. But the xenomorphs have begun to recognize you, and seem to take your crusade against them personally. Now they hunt you in preference of other prey, and they're getting smarter. How long before they try to get at you through those you love or need? And, where are they coming from. Are they the vanguard of some more terrible force, or the last vestige of a long-lost race? Research is difficult, as they never take the same form twice. Their lack of consistent outline is their only consistency, and even that is beginning to change as they learn to hide from your expert eye.

Yellow: You're not sure when it started. Probably not before you hit puberty, though you just might not have noticed when you were younger. When you first recognized the pattern, you chalked it up to coincidence. Anyone would. After all, why think the color yellow is trying to kill you?

But it is.

The way yellow comes after you, you'd think a group of blue space gnomes had given you a ring to defend the Earth. Bad things happen to you that don't happen to anyone else, and yellow is always involved. A yellow light malfunctions, and cross-traffic nearly rams you. A gastrointestinal reaction at a seafood restaurant traces back to bad

yellowfin tuna. You're blinded in a sword fight by a shocking amount of light reflecting off a yellow amber broach. The security guards pull you aside for extra security checks because the threat level just hit yellow alert. You learned not to gamble with yellow dice a long time ago. You don't dare even stand near a copy of *The King in Yellow*.

If a random encounter is rolled for, you roll twice . . . the second time just to see if something yellow causes you problems. If it does, you suffer a mild -2 penalty to all attack rolls, skill checks and saving throws, as the hated hue works to end you. If a normal encounter includes strong yellow elements, you suffer a -1 penalty to the same checks.

The problem is you're the target of something truly alien, something that's so outside the experiences, perception, and comprehension of mortal people you can't even really prove it exists. The malevolent force working against you doesn't exist in your world, and can only influence it through a subtle, sentient, yellow trend of misfortune. The best you can hope to do is find accounts of others who have shared your fate, most of whom were killed or went mad at about the age you are now. Some claim blood sacrifice to indecipherable elder gods can end your curse. Others believe you must carry a countermeasure, be that an odd shade of purple or two hairs from a nun. There's some way to fend off yellow . . . but it makes no more sense than the threat of a primary color.

Zombie Plague: The first time you faced an outbreak of zombies, it was disconcerting, but not more than you could handle. They're not that tough in small numbers, and once you learned how they spread you got the plague under control. You hay have burned the village to the ground, sunk the long-lost passenger ship beneath arctic ice, marked the dead world as off-limits to colony ships or sealed the scientific compound with bio-hazard stickers, but however you handled it you considered the issue dealt with.

The second time, you realized things were a little different. The zombies were a bit tougher, a bit faster, and maybe a bit smarter. Worse, they spread by a different vector. Instead of biting their victims, they sprayed infectious spittle from their rotting teeth. Or could all be traced back to the same double-blind drug test. Or infected the local ground water. You dealt with them again, but it was harder. And by the third time, you knew something bad was going on.

They always have the same weakness, which you've learned from so many fights (allowing you and those you train to score critical hits against these undead, representing knowing to go for head-shots, or to try to gouge out their black eyes, or drive a silver stake through their heart . . . whatever it is that kills them well). But everything else is different, including speed, incubation time, origin, increased toughness and vector for new zombies. Everything except they keep turning up connected to you, or other who were present when you first encountered them.

You, or something you carry, is the Typhoid Mary of infectious zombies. You may have a bacterial infection that turns dead bodies into zombies if you spend too much time with them. Your favorite sword may have been cursed by the god of death to spawn his rotting followers. You, yourself, may be a zombie . . . just one with such an advanced form of zombism you don't notice you're dead. Whatever it is, if you don't find it, the plagues are going to keep breaking out, and the zombies are going to keep getting stronger . . .

Pyramid Review

Power Grid

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Friedemann Friese

Translated by Henning Kröpke & Jay Tummelson

Illustrated by Maura Kalusky

Double-Sided Full-Color Mounted Board, 132 Wooden Houses In Six Colors, 84 Wooden Resource Tokens (24 Coal, 24 Oil, 24 Garbage, & 12 Uranium), Elektro Money, Five Summary Cards, 42 Power Plant Cards, 1 Step Three Card, & Eight Page Letter-Size Black & White Rule Booklet; $44.95

Power Grid is a board game comprised of several mechanics built around a very simple theme. Between two and six players control power companies building power stations, buying fuel, generating electricity, building a grid, and connecting cities across a nation. It involves an auction mechanic, a market mechanic, an area control mechanic, and an escalation mechanic; at its heart, however, *Power Grid* is a resource management game low on luck and high in forethought.

However many players, the aim is always the same in *Power Grid:* Supply electricity to the most cities in a player's network -- 20 or more cities, over three escalating stages. *Power Grid* calls them steps, but describing them as stages is more apt. Turns consist of five phases during which every player acts, bidding for power stations, building networks, buying and expending fuel, generating and supplying electricity, gaining revenue for the power supplied, and finally, regenerating resources. Player order varies between turns, determined not randomly, but by how well a player is doing.

The game board is double-sided, depicting the USA on one side and Germany on the other. Each country is marked with 42 cities, equally divided between six regions. Each city has three spaces marked 10, 15, and 20, the successive cost for supplying a city. A grid of pipelines, most marked with a number representing the cost of connecting a city, runs between the cities. The board also has a Scoring Track, a Play Order Track, and a Resource Market Track. The latter has spaces for coal, oil, garbage, and uranium, and indicates both resource availability and cost. Easily identifiable wooden pieces represent these resources, while the wooden house pieces are used to mark the cities a player supplies.

The 42 Power Plant cards are marked sequentially from 03 to 50, indicating the minimum bid that can be made for each Plant. Symbols at the bottom indicate the resources a Plant needs and how many cities it will supply. A Plant can store twice as many resources as it needs to generate electricity, and cannot use fewer resources to generate less electricity.

The higher a Plant's minimum cost, the more cities it can supply for fewer resources. Some Plants are flexible hybrids, able to run on coal and oil, while expensive and desirable ecological and fusion Power Plants require no resources at all.

At game start, each player receives his wooden house pieces and 50 Elektro, the game's currency. Two house pieces per player are used to indicate play order and score on the board. The resource market is seeded with the various fuel

types and the first eight Power Plants -- numbered from 03 to 10 -- are laid out in two rows. The top four Power Plants are in the Actual Market and are available to bid on, while the lower four are in the Future Market and will come up for auction as the top four are sold off.

In Phase 1 of a turn, play order is determined, which is important because it determines who does what and when in subsequent phases. Initially determined randomly, it is subsequently determined by how many cities a player is connected to and can supply with electricity. The Power Plants in the Actual Market go under the hammer in Phase 2, players able to buy the one Plant per turn. Further a player can have a maximum of three Power Plants, so as soon as he buys a fourth he must discard one he already has.

The players buy from the Resource Market in Phase 3 to fuel their Power Plants. The cheapest resources are purchased first, which increases scarcity and forces a price raise. In Phase 4, the players build their networks, starting from one city in their starting regions, with players paying the city's connection cost. On subsequent turns a player can connect to as many cities as he can afford, paying not only each new city's build cost, but also the connection cost from his existing network.

Initially only one payer can connect to city but this changes in subsequent stages. As soon as a player connects to a new city, his score rises, this being marked on the Scoring Track.

Phase 5 is the bureaucracy and last phase. The players expend resources to generate power and earn Elektro for each city supplied, though if no cities are supplied, a player still earns some Elektro. Finally, the Resource Market is re-stocked, the amount determined by the number of players and the game's stage. The highest-valued Power Plant in the Future Market is placed at the bottom of the deck, with the Future Market being refreshed from the deck.

So far *Power Grid* sounds simple enough . . . and it is. Where it gets interesting is in the play order, and in the second and third stages. Play order determines who does what and when during a turn. In Phase 2, the leading player -- the one with the most cities in his network -- bids for the first Power Plant. In Phases 3 and 5, the build and resource-buying phases, this is reversed. This means that although the leading player has first choice in bidding for the Power Plants, in Phase 3, he invariably pays more for his resources because his opponents have already bought the cheaper ones. Building first or earlier in the build phase only becomes important in subsequent stages, but over the course of the game it pays not be the leading player.

Step one ends as soon as a player connects to all seven cities in his starting region. Playing to this point is also a good method of introducing *Power Grid* to new players, being quick and uncomplicated. In step two, players can expand out of their starting regions and connect to cities in rival networks, as cities now allowed to be connected by two players. The amount of resources available during Phase 5 also changes.

The third phase is more complicated. It begins when the Step Three card is drawn from the deck. At game start, it is placed at the bottom of the deck, and because the highest-valued Power Plants have been pulled from the Futures Market and placed under it, the Step Three card keeps the most expensive and capable Power Plants for the third stage. Up to three players can now connect to a city, although still only once by any player.

The exact starting set up and the number of cities to be supplied in order to win varies according to the number of players. But regardless of the number of players the way to win is to supply the greatest number of cities with electricity.

So far, *Power Grid* sounds like a cross between *Monopoly*x and *Settlers of Catan*, but without the random element of dice. Indeed, Power Grid's only random element is the Power Plant deck; even then, the Actual Market clearly displays the Power Plants available in Phase 2. Everything else is visible to every player, who can take account of it in their planning. *Power Grid* is a game of planning, a player having to think ahead what he is going to do.

However, *Power Grid* has built into it a number of effective balancing mechanisms. The most obvious is the variable player order, which lets players with smaller networks have an advantage over the leading player with the largest. Working in a similar fashion, in stages two and three, it becomes increasingly costly to expand a network, as closer cities become unavailable and longer, more expensive connections need to be made.

What downsides there are to *Power Grid* are minor. First there is only one means of winning: the slow methodical build to victory. Second, the game theme is very dry . . . but then, so is *Monopoly,* and many would prefer *Power Grid* over that. Third, the rule book is too dryly written and could benefit from some color. Fourth, the dry theme and colorless rule book make it more difficult to sell the game to prospective players.

Apart from the rule book, *Power Grid* is a nice looking game. The wooden house pieces are rough in places, and the Elektro money is flimsy, but the resource pieces do stand out. The board is very attractive and -- being double-sided -- furthers its replay value. Expansions are available for the game with more boards.

Power Grid feels slightly unbalanced initially, but in the long term, the mechanics work hard to limit the leading player. It should also appeal to anyone who likes resource management games and who likes to think ahead. The theme is dry, but the mechanics do it justice, and they are *Power Grid's* strength.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Combat Pad

Published by Open Mind Games

8.5" × 11" pad with steel core, 26 punch-out magnets (eight blue PC labels, eight black enemy labels, four green NPC labels, two "Next Round" labels, two "Round" arrows, two "Turn" arrows); wet and dry erase surface; $16.95

Bookkeeping remains one of the toughest tasks in a GM's job description, and combat probably ranks right at the top of that. You have over a dozen participants acting at a dozen moments, and that doesn't even include the bystanders. It won't solve all your woes, but the *Combat Pad* is a big step in the right direction.

Who does what when is secondary only to who's suffered how much damage for troublesome accounting. The pad is a flat cardboard plate, 8.5" × 11" (so it fits neatly in with all the rest of your paperwork), with a metal insert. A magnetic sheet is included, with labels and markers stamped into it. Punched out, these become nametags to be arranged on the pad in initiative order . . . simple enough so far.

If the magnetic feature isn't nifty enough, the entire product has been covered with a wet and dry erasable surface. Either type of marker can be used to write on it, and the lettering wipes away easily. This lets you scribble the characters' names on the labels (the tighter your pen writes, the better), as well as making notes about ongoing effects on the pad itself (like the aforementioned damage to combatants). A small arrow marked Turn points at the current PC's tag. When he's done acting, the arrow slides to the next name. When it gets to the bottom, another arrow along a line of numbers at the top of the pad goes to the next round. That way, if the mage has cast a spell that lasts three rounds, you can make a note of that round in the notes column; when the arrow points to the appropriate number, the spell's effects end.

Some heroes choose slightly different maneuvers like readying or delaying their actions. Two more columns are provided for this. If you're going to take a normal action -- move or attack -- you get stacked up one above the other like everyone else. But if you select one of the special options, your label gets shifted a bit off-center to overlap the ready column, or a little further into the delay line. If this changes your turn in the initiative order, you simply switch the magnets when the time comes. Although this is ideal for the *d20 System* set, it works with most any system that allows similar choices; just about any roleplaying game lets you hold an action, and everyone goes in some kind of order.

The quality of the graphical design is pretty important since ultimately that kind of order and clarity is what the product offers. The pad itself seems fairly firm, though ironically it comes packaged with a thick piece of cardboard to protect the supplement during shipping and sales, and seeing it side by side with that insert makes you wish it was a bit thicker. The magnets hold well, but if you're still worried about them getting scraped off during transit it turns out what's left of the magnetic sheet after you punch all the labels out is pretty handy. It's almost like a piece of magnetic netting that overlays everything and sandwiches the loose counters between itself and the pad.

Some of the writing is a bit on the small side, or shaded too darkly, and the row of numbers is a little tight along the top (at least at the low end; the double-digits expand enough to own more of the pad's breadth). The magnetic arrows take care of that, but it's one of the few parts of the set that looks "busy." If the title was smaller, two rows of numbers might have fit (or it could be numbered to 10 instead of 20). There are also numbers running along the initiative column in multiples of five. These must be just for convenience -- the equivalent of putting "high" at one end and "low" at the other -- because there certainly isn't room to put five labels between 0 and 5, 5 and 10, and so on. Finally the label colors are arguably dark -- blue leans to black, green to blue.

All these digs do not add up to a disappointing result. Old-school players might want to stick with pad and pencil, and that's fine . . . there's something to be said for a bookkeeping device that handles more than these few combat stats. And perhaps there's a minute chance magnets of this level could affect your calculator, laptop, or iPod on the way to the game. But if having a place for everything and putting everything in its place is important -- and more to the point, problematic -- then a sweet and simple gizmo like the **Combat Pad** fills the void in the GM's life perfectly.

--Andy Vetromile

The Dark Lore

for *GURPS*

by Ernesto Pavan

This article starts where Kevin J. Chase's article "[Advantage-Based Magic](#)" ends, providing guidelines and samples for a particular kind of magic: the evil stuff.

If you are a GM approaching advantage-based magic for the first time, this material could be the best to start with; dark magic is usually the domain of NPCs, so you will be able to experiment without introducing any new rules to your players (whose main interest would be resistance rolls, expeditious retreats, and oaths of vengeance . . . against the sorcerer, we hope!). If you already use advantage-based magic, you could use this article as a source for adding dark magic to your campaign or to increase your villains' arsenal with curses and vile spells . . . not to mention that you could find the ready-made spells helpful, just in the case you need to improvise.

If you are a player, this material could help you to create or add complexity to an evil sorcerer . . . or to a *non-evil* one! After all, some dark spells are simply too tempting not to be considered at least once in a mage's life: The Vulnerability spell could greatly increase the chances of taking down a tough beast (such as a dragon or giant), while the Soul Germ spell could be just the right punishment for a megalomaniacal tyrant. Likewise, your empathic healer could find casting the Life Theft spell as a legitimate use of magic to save lives, if used on criminals to "recharge" the healer and make him able to save more honest folk. In fact, one of the dangers of evil is that it can hide very well . . . especially in a world without a black-and-white morality.

What "Dark Magic" Means

Dark magic is the magic of evil and corruption. Its ultimate goals are the gaining of extreme power, one way or another; to obtain it, practitioners often go against every moral in exchange for spells they can use against other people. Selfishness and violence are associated with dark magic and its practitioners, who are at the same time corrupted by the darker powers, becoming unconscious (or *conscious*) instruments of their will.

Dark magic often has an *unnatural* feeling: Dark sorcerers twist weather to their own whims, make natural creatures behave in strange ways (such as animals attacking humans with *hate*), and manipulate energies from distant worlds. In some traditions, dark spells cannot harm the innocent; evil fades against those who can stand against it. In others, dark magic is terrible because it can strike *anyone,* and there is no curse worse than the one that can turn strength into weakness, man into monster, hope into desperation. On the other hand, most dark spells involve the worst aspects of nature: Fear, sickness, and sorrow are part of everyone's life, but dark masters know how to afflict others with them at will.

Dark magic is not all about evil outside; it is also about evil *inside.* Indeed, sorcerers are disturbing not only because they can cast evil spells, but also because they seem to know human weaknesses very well. Dark masters can tempt the young and the unwise without showing any of their powers, by using words and a deep knowledge of the human mind.

Dark spells are dangerous, but -- perhaps surprisingly -- they are usually not all that useful in battle. Of course, since slaughtering is Evil's favorite pastime, they are good enough, but in most cases, they do not rely on sheer strength. Destroying is very easy, and anyone wielding arcane powers can do it without the need to summon dark powers; dark magic is feared because it can do evil in a lot of subtle, hard to see ways. In game terms, most dark spells should be based on Affliction (with Malediction; incidentally, *male dicere* means "to speak evil words" in Latin) rather than on Innate Attack.

Sorcerers also seem to lack general utility spells, at least those not involving fire or brute strength. Most "good" mages

can repair objects, heal wounds, and create light; dark mages don't do these things. Rather, they often have servants or slaves doing the work for them. Perhaps evil does not favor the easiest solution, but rather the most harmful outcome for other people's dignity and feelings; this could be especially true in an epic fantasy (or just epic) game. In some settings, sorcerers don't even get access to protective spells, their power being a pure force of destruction. Healing is nearly always out of the question.

From Whence the Darkness Comes

In fiction, dark magic as two main sources: arcane (involving pacts with demons or Things that Man Was Not Mean to Know, or "mundane" forbidden lore) or divine (coming from the will of dark gods). It is *very* rare for it to come directly from inside someone's soul; since dark magic is often tied to the unnatural, anyone it was rooted in would not be completely human. This *could* be true for sorcerers who sold their souls, however! In such cases, the GM should consider allowing players to buy dark spells with the points gained by taking appropriate disadvantages linked to the entity or force that is the source of the power; thus, a sorcerer could gain the knowledge of the Lord of the Flies spell in a mere second . . . but now he must sacrifice a baby once per month to the Nameless One (a -15-point Vow) and do other, very nasty things.

Dark spells often come with the Pact Limitation, especially if sorcerers obtain them from demons or dark gods. If the gods are nothing but very powerful spirits, see below for other suggestions.

In settings where magic is a "neutral" power, untied to any cosmic force, dark magic could be the reflex of people's darker thoughts and emotions. Some gifted men and women can use it as a weapon, just as "white" mages can channel their own love and compassion to heal and protect. In such a world, demons, for example, would not be summoned but created with magic and shaped by the caster's beliefs about how a demon *should* look and behave. Sorcerers could not know that their demonic patrons or dark gods are not real, however! If so, such a setting would not look different from any "classic" fantasy world (even if some clues can be given by the GM, through the words of old masters or high priests). For a sample of such a world, look at Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Avalon* series.

Even *spirits* could be the source of dark magic: They could be demons in a world with deities, or evil spirits in animistic settings. Such entities are often very dangerous, since they have their own goals and agendas, and frequently have a malicious nature; sorcerers should stay aware of what their patrons could ask them in return for their "gifts." Nonetheless, meddling with such evil entities is generally the fastest way to get power, since they are not as distant as ancient masters or as powerful (and thus hard to manipulate) as gods. Spirits are vengeful, however, so even the most powerful sorcerer should avoid angering them.

Spirit powers are Fickle (see **GURPS Powers,** pages 24 and 110); optionally, the GM could allow *situational* modifiers to affect reaction rolls to please the spirits: A suitable sacrifice, performed as a part of the casting, could give between +1 and +3 (the more ritual the sacrifice and the more prized the victim, the higher the bonus). Casting the spell for a goal that meets the spirits' ends (such as destroying the temple of a good deity or weakening the power of good spirits) could be worth +1 or +2. Even mere "special effects" could be worth a +1, if the mage casts a dark spell in the middle of a thunderstorm! On the other hand, using dark spells to perform *good* actions (such as aiding someone, fighting evil, or hindering the spirits' plans) qualifies for penalties between -1 and -5. Since gains and losses balance each other, the power modifier is unchanged.

Who Dwells in Darkness

For the most part, dark sorcerers are callous individualists, striving for dominance and power. The archetypical dark mage is the evil master, an old but unwise wizard corrupted from the energies he manipulates and from which he gains power. The Emperor from *Star Wars* is a perfect example of such a villain, a concentrate of pure evil: His main characteristic is that his goal seems to be *corrupting* more than *dominating,* as he collects power in order to destroy good. A similar sorcerer could be the most dangerous for heroes because of his knowledge and personal power, and because he would not hesitate to sacrifice anybody and anything for his cause.

Another kind of dark mage is the dark lord, combining aspects from the traditional sorcerer with a martial attitude and a strong personal charisma. He differs from the dark masters because he is usually driven either from lust for power or from his own feelings, sometimes predictable (vengeance or hate), sometimes not (he could see himself as *good!*). Dark lords sometimes have a code of honor (perverted or not), which would go against any dark master's plan. J.R.R. Tolkien's Sauron is *the* dark lord, an evil demigod often described as a powerful sorcerer. Sauron is a master of deception, but he does not disdain brute force when it seems the easier way. He too considers corruption a standard practice, but in the form of a promise of immortality and sheer power; the goal is the same, but being Evil more than evil, he ultimately desires more power for himself. Such a villain could be all the more dangerous because of his sheer strength and because he often has hordes of minions at his disposal.

Dark lords and dark masters are typical of high fantasy, a genre featuring "titanic" opponents. More prosaic sorcerers have more mundane goals, and the Brotherhood from Katharine Kerr's *Deverry* novels looks very similar to modern criminal organizations such as the Mob. Low-fantasy sorcerers are usually above fighting in the front line, but they can easily dedicate themselves to immoral activities such as slavery and drug trade. It is simple to develop such characters: thinking about a despised person (real or imaginary) could be a good start. "Mundane" sorcerers are hard to identify, since they tend to blend in with the rest of society, and can strike from unknown directions at any time; thus, they could be the most dangerous enemies for the heroes.

The Dark Magic Power

Sources: Divine, Magical or Spirits (nearly always demons).
Focus: Evil and suffering.

The one presented here is a very generic "dark" power, which can be easily customized in order to adapt it to a given setting. Follow the guidelines in this article to get some inspiration, or use them as a source to emulate any feature seen or read about.

Dark Magic Talent

Talent for dark magic is worth 5 points per level if it is a specialized power, roughly comparable to Evil (see **GURPS Powers** 127) in breadth. If the GM rules that dark magic encompass *any* form of magic use describable as "evil," from creating darkness to summoning demons, he should consider making Dark Magic Talent worth 10 points per level.

Dark Magic Abilities

Since this is a generic power, it is hard to choose a group of abilities that could fit *any* vision of dark magic. Below are some abilities almost every sorcerer should (or could) have access to; feel free to expand or reduce it as desired. Neutralize and Static are included as "counterspells."

- Leech (if the GM rules that spells must Cost Fatigue, Heals FP and Only Heals FP shouldn't be allowed!)
- Mind Shield; Neutralize (Magic)
- Possession
- Resistant, either to the abilities of "good" magic or to evil energies (a knowledge of the dark arts makes the user more protected than an ordinary mage)
- Static (Magic), with Resistible
- Temperature Control
- Terror
- Visualization, with Cursing

Additionally, almost every Affliction 1s possible, provided it causes pain or unease; most of them have the Malediction modifier, but it is not mandatory. Innate Attacks must be Toxic or Fatiguing, possibly with nasty Side Effects or Symptoms and, of course, Malediction.

Being spells, *all* abilities should have the Spell limitation (see below). Exceptions can be made with suitable justifications; an old evil wizard could be Resistant to dark spells due to the fact he channeled evil energies for decades, thus becoming resilient to their effects.

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

Dark Magic Spells

Below are some "generic" dark spells. They are not tied to a specific setting or vision, so they can be taken as written or easily adapted to suit the needs of the setting. Their format is standardized: the spell's name and cost, a description (which includes game mechanics), and the ability itself.

Each sample depicts a "base" version of the spell, which is less costly and easier to learn. Leveled traits are kept at the minimum level, with a few notable exceptions (for Curse of Ugliness, an arbitrary Appearance level has been chosen, and Weakness gives -6 to ST because that is the necessary penalty to make an ordinary healthy human weak as an human child). Master sorcerers would have *far* more powerful spells at their disposal; each description makes some suggestions about possibilities.

Note that each spell has a built-in Costs Fatigue limitation: Feel free to stack it with those suggested under "[Example Skill Levels](#)" from the previous article, or make them the sole cost a dark mage has to pay. (Of course, dark masters could even get a reduction . . . but most often, dark powers do not come without a cost.) The fatigue cost is mainly a balancing tool for the GM; it ensures that sorcerers have limits to their casting powers, so they will have to *think* before entering a battle (it is no coincidence that many fictional evil mages prefer to send hordes of minions instead of just annihilating the heroes) or curse everyone crossing their paths. As Chase suggests, the GM could waive it . . . but if doing so, prepare to face players who try to solve every problem with a spell (which isn't necessarily a bad thing but can become boring quickly).

The Spell limitation is nothing more than the sum of Magic (-10%), Requires Gestures (-10%), and Requires Magic Words (-10%), put together in order to save space and give the right feeling (an advantage-based spell is defined by the fact that it's a spell, not just a sum of traits and modifiers). Note that the power modifier is already included: Do not apply it twice! If dark magic is a Spirit power in the game world, increase Spell's value to -45% (since Spirit substitutes Magic).

Curse of Ugliness [33 points]

This cruel spell transforms the subject into a disgusting mockery of himself. The exact appearance varies from person to person, but he will be extremely hard to identify (especially if this curse is made against multiple people), and only those brave enough to stare at him could try.

This spell costs 2 FP. Make a Quick Contest of Will with the victim, at a -1 penalty for each yard of distance between the mage and him. If successful, his appearance turns to Monstrous. Only the kiss of a person who looks past appearance can end the spell.

Affliction 1 (Disadvantage, Monstrous appearance, +20%; Extended Duration, Permanent, +150%; Malediction I, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Spell, -30%) [33 points]

Life Theft [15 points]

The caster steals someone else's life force. The user must touch the subject's bare skin to "drain" him: If successful, spend 1 FP. A blood-red light flows from his body to the mage's, healing wounds. The victim loses 1 HP, and the caster heals an equal amount of wounds taken (the character cannot increase his hit points above maximum). Powerful sorcerers can drain more than 1 HP per casting, or drain life through armor and heavy clothing. Life force can lead to

addiction, especially if absorbing it is a pleasant or sensual experience. For the Addiction disadvantage, life force is cheap and (very often!) illegal, for a -5-point disadvantage; if it were highly addictive, Addiction to it would be worth -10 points.

Leech 1 (Accelerated Healing, +25%; Contact Agent, -30%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Spell, -30%) [15 points]

Lord of the Flies [24 points]

The sorcerer knows the secret to summon a swarm of the most unclean creatures, those who feed on the dead and the rotten. These flies are not innocent insects, but biting pests who can slip into anything but sealed armor, delivering pain and disease.

This spell costs 2 FP. An eight-yard wide swarm appears from thin air anywhere in a range of 100 yards and last for five minutes, attacking anyone entering it with a skill of 14. Trying to kill the flies is useless, because more appear to replace those killed; they can't leave the space they where summoned into, however. Their minds are too chaotic to influence with spells or Animal Empathy.

The flies deal 1d piercing damage per turn. Their bites are poisonous; a victim must roll against HT-3 or be infected with a disease that inflicts 1d toxic damage per day until he makes a successful roll, dies, or has suffered a total of 5d of damage. This plague is magical and can't be cured.

Piercing Attack 1d (Area Effect, 8-yards radius, +150%; Contact Agent, +150%; Extended Duration 30x, +60%; Persistent, +40%; Selective Area, +20%; Bombardment, effective skill 14, -5%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Nuisance Effect, buzzzzzzzzzzz!, -5%; Spell, -30%) [24 points] + Toxic Attack 1d (Cyclic, 5 daily cycles, resistible, +25%; Follow-Up to piercing attack, +0%; Onset, 1 day, -30%; Resistible with HT-3, -15%; Spell, -30%) [2 points]

Misfortune [32 points]

The mage curses the victim with misfortune. When using this spell, pay 2 FP and make a Quick Contest of Will with the target (at -1 for each yard of distance): If successful, he is destined to fail an important deed, sooner or later; when this happens, the spell breaks. An "important deed" is something *critical* for the target, such as graduating or saving a loved one; Misfortune can cause an automatic failure in a fundamental roll (from a Law roll when dealing with a university professor to a First Aid roll to save his father from a heart attack) or simply make events take the wrong turn (i.e., a shot that misses the victim hits his little brother). It cannot kill its victim, however, just make him suffer (which could be worse).

The spell affects the first "important deed" tried by the victim; the caster has no control over it.

Affliction 1 (Disadvantage, Destiny, +10%; Extended Duration, Permanent, +150%; Malediction 1, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Spell, -30%) [32 points]

Pain [3 points]

The caster can wound a target from inside, tearing cartilage and muscles. Even if the spell is not powerful enough to kill someone -- the time and effort required would be unacceptable -- it can disturb a delicate task, such as concentration or spellcasting, causing its failure. This spell costs 1 FP. Choose a target and make a Quick Contest of Will with him, at -1 for each yard of distance. If the aggressor wins, the victim suffers one point of cutting damage (DR has no effect).

Having no vulnerable internal parts, Diffuse and Homogeneous targets are immune to this spell.

Cutting Attack 1 (Malediction I, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Not on Diffuse or Homogeneous, -15%; Spell, -30%) [3 points]

Soul Germ [29 points]

The sorcerer plants a seed of desperation in a victim's heart. This dark germ grows slowly and eventually blossoms into a black flower, suffocating all the victim's hopes and dreams. There is only one way for him to break free from this spell: He must have it proven to himself that his life is worth living. Sadly, this is not always easy to do.

This spell costs 4 FP. Make a Quick Contest of Will with the target, at -1 for each yard of distance. If successful, desperation starts to grow inside the victim, until he gains the Chronic Depression disadvantage (with a Self-Control of 6) after one week. Sadistic sorcerers use this spell to break proud opponents; even among dark spells, the Soul Germ is definitely evil, since it can deprive someone of dignity and freedom of choice. Only the *worst* character types should learn this spell.

Affliction 1 (Disadvantage, Chronic Depression (6), +30%; Extended Duration, Permanent, +150%; Malediction I, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 4 FP, -20%; Onset, One week, -40%; Spell, -30%) [29 points]

Suffering [16 points]

Imagine salt on an open wound. Then multiply that for a thousand of small wounds all over the body. This is what a victim of Suffering feels.

When casting Suffering, the mage hurls a dart of reddish energy against the target, causing him a flesh wound and a great pain. Pain stops well before the wound closes, but until then, the target feels as if he is being skinned.

This spell costs 1 FP. Roll against Innate Attack (Bolt) to hit. The spell deals 1d-2 cutting damage, regardless of any DR; if even one point of damage penetrated DR, the victim must roll against HT (-1 per point of damage) to avoid suffering Agony for (20-HT) minutes. A creature in agony is unable to act and loses 1 FP per round. This spell is often used for torture (threatening someone with a resumption of the pain gives +3 to Interrogation and Intimidation rolls) or to practice the Innate Attack skill; damage is low, so targets last much longer . . .

Cutting Attack 1d-2 (Cosmic, Ignores DR, +300%; Side Effect, Agony, +150%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Spell, -30%) [16 points]

Terrifying Gaze [12 points]

The sorcerer stares into the victim's eyes and fills her mind with terror. The stronger the user's will, the more terrible the visions; similarly, a strong-willed target could be able to resist the spell completely.

These spells costs 2 FP. Choose a target within 10 yards and make a Quick Contest of Will with him, at *no* penalty; the participants must be able to see each other, but no other condition is required. If successful, the victim must roll on the *Fright Check Table,* adding the margin of success instead of her margin of failure.

Terror (Active, +0%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Spell, -30%; Vision Based, Reversed, -20%) [12 points]

Unhealing Wounds [31 points]

This vile spell prevents a target's wounds from healing, keeping them open; it does not hinder recovery from disease, poison, or other afflictions, but wounds do not close and bones do not knit until the spell's duration expires.

This spell costs 2 FP. Choose a target and make a Quick Contest of Will with him; the mage is at -1 per yard of distance. If successful, she gains the Unhealing disadvantage for (1,000 minutes × margin pf success). Note that 1,000 minutes are more or less 16.6 hours, ensuring that at least one day of recovery will be lost if the spell succeeds.

The most cruel sorcerers cast Unhealing Wounds (usually an area version) against fleeing enemies, condemning most of them to die of bleeding or infections. A healer can identify the spell's action with a First Aid roll at -3 or a

Physician roll at -1, provided he's aware of its existence, but he can do nothing but call a spellcaster. Every roll is at +5 if one day is passed from the wounding (when the wound should have started to heal).

Affliction 1 (Disadvantage, see below, +30% ; Extended Duration ×1000, +120%; Malediction I, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Spell, -30%) [29 points]. *Note:* The bestowed disadvantage is, of course, Unhealing (Total).

Vulnerability [20 points]

This horrible curse acts every time its target takes damage, increasing injuries; cuts spread, fractures extend, and stabs deepen. The target takes double damage from any physical attack.

This spell costs 2 FP. Make a Quick Contest of Will with the target, at -1 per yard of distance. If successful, the victim gains the Vulnerability (×2) disadvantage for (the mage's margin of success) minutes. An area version would be deadly in battle.

Affliction 1 (Disadvantage, see below, +40%; Malediction I, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Spell, -30%) [20 points]. *Note:* Bestowed disadvantage is Vulnerability to Physical Damage (×2) [-40 points].

Weakness [19 points]

Warriors fear nothing more than losing their might, especially if that happens after a mere gesture and a single word of a sorcerer. The Weakness spell does that: It weakens.

This spell costs 2 FP. Choose a target and make a Quick Contest of Will, at -1 for each yard of distance. If successful, the target's Strength is reduced by 6 for (1 minute × margin of success); Hit Points are unchanged, however. An ordinary person would become weak as a child, while a strong warrior would lose so much of his power that even a normal human could beat him. Psychological effects can be even worse than the physical ones: If the mage is good at Fast-Talk, he could convince the victim he'd be permanently weakened unless he does some unspeakable act. Of curse, a powerful caster could be actually able to bestow a *permanent* curse (add Permanent, +300%).

Affliction 1 (Attribute Penalty, -6 ST, +30%; Malediction I, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Spell, -30%) [19 points]

The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!

An Adventure Serial in Six Parts

by Matt Riggsby

What's Going On?

The date is March 1, 1936. The place is Anywhere, USA. FDR is in the White House, the civil war rages in Spain, and everybody is doing the Lindy Hop. The PCs arrive at the home of an old friend to find him dead and his house ransacked. Despite warnings from the mysterious Miss Papillon, they investigate his demise to discover that he was killed by agents of Dr. Z, the secretive Eurasian crime lord and scientist. They must follow him across the globe, fighting an array of enemies and Dr. Z's fiendish inventions to foil his plot to construct a death ray.

No, Seriously . . . What's Going On?

"The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!" is an extended adventure for **GURPS** *Fourth Edition* presented in short linked episodes, much like a cliffhanging serial movie. This adventure serial involves chases, fights, captures, escapes, deathtraps, mad Russians, Mongolian hordes, Nazi zepplins, and, yes, hanging off of cliffs. There's some superscience and no overtly supernatural content.

Each episode of the serial is self-contained, in that the GM can run each one before reading future episodes. Important plot points will be noted to help prevent short-circuits ("The PCs will go to Botswana next time, and for Pete's sake, don't kill the bellboy!").

Certain genre conventions should be observed. First, if the players attempt extremely dangerous actions and fail, the GM should try to avoid immediately lethal consequences. For example, characters who fall off of heights or moving vehicles should have a better than average chance of grabbing a protrusion on the way down, or at least have something break their fall, and those lost at sea should find some convenient flotsam to keep them alive until rescue hours or days later. A [drama point system](#) may work well in this adventure.

Second, NPCs are disinclined to fight to the death, be it theirs or the PCs'. Unless otherwise noted, NPCs will flee if severely wounded or otherwise seriously outclassed. If they're winning a fight, they only seek to disable the PCs and get on with what they were doing, or else to capture them for questioning or a rant from their megalomaniac leader. Players should understand that capture is a fixture of the genre, and if a fight goes badly, surrender is a viable and *temporary* option.

Who Are These People?

PCs should be highly talented normals, built on something around 150 points. If the players are amenable, they might include one higher-powered character to whom the others are sidekicks . . . the usual structure for adventure serials. They'll start in a major American city with a port and a large immigrant community.

The group will find it useful to have a mix of a broad range of fighting, interpersonal, scientific, and technical skills. They may want to (though they won't necessarily have to) ride horses, fly a variety of aircraft, fight with guns, fists, and primitive weapons, navigate in a wilderness, sabotage advanced technology, read ancient inscriptions, and communicate with everything from tribesmen to corrupt officials across the world. Characters should have a strong loyalty to one another and to a Professor Edgar Mathers (an elderly scientist, perhaps an old mentor of the PCs), an intense curiosity, a strong sense of justice, or something else which would motivate them to run around the world to

chase down an international criminal single-handed.

The heroes can include just about any character type who might be found in a large city. However, since this adventure will require a lot of travel, characters who are strongly tied to a given place (say, a PI who relies on local contacts or a scientist who is useless without his personal laboratory) probably won't be much fun.

PCs might have a bit of unusual technology, such as a private zeppelin or rocket guns, and even some low-level paranormal abilities might be acceptable. However, exceptionally good ultratech sensing equipment and paranormal sensing abilities (particularly mind-reading) may short-circuit the adventure, so they should be allowed with great restraint or, better yet, not at all.

Cast of Characters

The series involves a number of recurring NPCs. Their stats and descriptions appear here:

Dr. Z *373 points*

Attributes

ST 10 **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 16 [120] **HT** 10

HP 10; Will 16; Per 16; FP 10; Basic Lift 20; Damage 1d-2/1d; Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5

Social Background

Cultural Familiarities: Asian [1]; Western [1].
Languages: Arabic (Broken) [2]; Chinese (Accented) [4]; English (Accented) [4]; French (Accented) [4]; German (Native) [0]; Malay (Native) [6].

Advantages

Ally (Global network of thugs) (25% of starting points) (Group Size (21-50); 15 or less) [30]; Eidetic Memory [5]; Gadgeteer (Quick) [50]; Less Sleep (3) [6]; Reputation (fearsome crime lord) (3) (10 or less; Small class) [2]

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (15 or less) [-5]; Callous [-5]; Megalomania [-10]; Social Stigma (Mixed Race) [-10]

Skills

Administration-15 [1]; Archaeology-14 [1]; Architecture/TL6-15 [1]; Armoury/TL6 (Body Armor)-15 [1]; Armoury/TL6 (Small Arms)-15 [1]; Chemistry/TL6-14 [1]; Counterfeiting/TL6-14 [1]; Cryptography/TL6-14 [1]; Current Affairs/TL6 (Business)-16 [1]; Current Affairs/TL6 (Politics)-16 [1]; Current Affairs/TL6 (Science & Technology)-16 [1]; Diagnosis/TL6 (Human)-14 [1]; Driving/TL6 (Automobile)-11 [1]; Economics-15 [2]; Electrician/TL6-17 [4]; Electronics Operation/TL6 (Communications)-15 [1]; Electronics Operation/TL6 (Medical)-15 [1]; Electronics Operation/TL6 (Security)-15 [1]; Electronics Operation/TL6 (Sensors)-15 [1]; Electronics Operation/TL6 (Surveillance)-15 [1]; Engineer/TL6 (Electrical)-16 [4]; Engineer/TL6 (Electronics)-16 [4]; Engineer/TL6 (Materials)-14 [1]; Esoteric Medicine Per/H-16 [4]; Expert Skill (Egyptology)-15 [2]; Explosives/TL6 (Demolition)-15 [1]; Finance-16 [4]; First Aid/TL6 (Human)-17 [1]; Forgery/TL6-14 [1]; Gardening-16 [1]; Guns/TL6 (Pistol)-11 [1]; Intelligence Analysis/TL6-16 [4]; Intimidation Will/A-Will+1 17 [4]; Karate-9 [1];

Leadership-17 [4]; Mathematics/TL6 (Applied)-14 [1]; Naturalist (Earth)-15 [2]; Physician/TL6 (Human)-15 [2]; Poisons/TL6-17 [8]; Propaganda/TL6-15 [1]; Research/TL6-18 [8]; Saber Sport-10 [1]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-16 [1]; Savoir-Faire (Triads)-16 [1]; Science!-18 [48]; Smuggling-15 [1]; Streetwise-18 [8]; Surgery/TL6 (Human)-IQ-3 13 [1]; Traps/TL6-17 [4]

Dr. Z is the illegitimate child of a German diplomat and a Malaysian princess. Rejected by his mother's family and grudgingly supported by his father's, he attended Europe's finest schools until he was entirely cut off after his father's death. He excelled in the sciences, but it was impossible for a mixed-race reject of the aristocracy to find an academic position at the turn of the century, so he fell into a life of crime.

But he did so very successfully. Both a scientific genius and a skilled organizer, Dr. Z assembled a team which became the most successful bank robbers in Europe. During the Great War, his organization transformed into a vast global smuggling operation, with sidelines in vice, murder for hire, and a wide variety of other criminal activities.

Since then, Dr. Z has become a part-time crime lord, making executive decisions for his network and spending most of his days in research and experimentation. He has used himself as a subject for experiments, producing a secret formula to reduce his need for sleep in order to carry on even more research. He is now plotting terrible revenge against the entire civilized world which has cast him out.

Miss Papillon   245 points

Attributes

ST 10 **DX** 13 [60] **IQ** 12 [40] **HT** 10

HP 10; Will 12; Per 12; FP 10; Basic Lift 20; Damage 1d-2/1d; Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5

Social Background

Cultural Familiarities: Asian [1]; Western [1].
Languages: Chinese (Accented) [4]; English (Accented) [4]; French (Accented) [4]; German (Broken) [2]; Russian (Broken) [2]; Malay (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Appearance (Very Beautiful) [16]; Double-Jointed [15]; Fashion Sense [5]; Smooth Operator (1) [15]

Disadvantages

Compulsive Carousing (12 or less) [-5]; Compulsive Spending (12 or less) [-5]; Greed (12 or less) [-15]; Lecherousness (15 or less) [-7]

Skills

Acting-15 [8] *; Airshipman/TL6-12 [1]; Carousing-14 [8]*; Current Affairs/TL6 (Popular Culture)-12 [1]; Current Affairs/TL6 (Travel)-12 [1]; Dancing-15 [8]; Driving/TL6 (Automobile)-12 [1]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-13 [1]; Fast-Talk-16 [12]*; Filch-12 [1]; Guns/TL6 (Pistol)-13 [1]; Holdout-14 [8]; Karate-12 [2]; Knife-13 [1]; Lockpicking/TL6-11 [1]; Makeup/TL6-12 [1]; Performance-12 [1]; Pickpocket-14 [8]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-13 [1]*; Sex Appeal-18 [4]* (includes +6 from Appearance); Singing-13 [8]; Stealth-12 [1]; Streetwise-16 [12]*
*: includes: +1 from Smooth Operator

Miss Papillon's picture might be found in the dictionary under "femme fatale." Papillon boasts grandparents from three different countries, giving her an uncategorizable but striking appearance. She is slim, of average height, has dark eyes, perfectly coifed black hair, and pale olive skin. She favors high-necked but skin-tight (and high-slit) embroidered Chinese silk dresses, high heels, dark glasses, opera gloves, fur stoles, and cigarettes in long holders.

Her driving desires are for attention and luxury. If she has to work, she does so as a lounge singer, but prefers higher paying jobs compatible with her flexible morality. She's capable of prolonged attraction, even affection, but she's an opportunist at heart, and while she can be temporarily influenced, she will sell anyone out if the price is right.

Miss Papillon appears in "flashback" in chapter 1 and in the flesh through the series. Keep her alive!

Sturmbannfuhrer Helmut Reitermann   *275 points*

Attributes

ST 12 [20] **DX** 13 [60] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 13 [30]

HP 12; Will 11; Per 11; FP 13; Basic Lift 29; Damage 1d-1/1d+2; Basic Speed 6.5; Basic Move 6

Advantages

Appearance (Handsome) [12]; Fit [5]; Military Rank (5) [25]; Languages: English (Accented) [4]; German (Native) [0]; Patrons (Waffen-SS) (3) (12 or less) [40]

Disadvantages

Compulsive Behavior (Patronizing politeness) (-1) (12 or less) [-5]; Duty (SS Officer) (15 or less (almost always)) [-15]; Fanaticism (Nazism) [-15]; Intolerance (Total Intolerance) [-10]; Overconfidence (12 or less) [-5]

Skills

Administration-12 [4]; Airshipman/TL6-12 [2]; Boxing-14 [4]; Climbing-14 [4]; Driving/TL6 (Automobile)-12 [1]; Expert Skill (Military Science)-9 [1]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-13 [1]; Fast-Draw (Sword)-13 [1]; Gunner/TL6 (Machine Gun)-13 [1]; Gunner/TL6 (Rockets)-13 [1]; Guns/TL6 (Pistol)-15 [3]; Guns/TL6 (Rifle)-15 [4]; Guns/TL6 (Submachine Gun)-15 [3]; Intimidation Will/A-11 [2]; Leadership-14 [12]; Meteorology/TL6 (Earthlike)-10 [1]; Navigation/TL6 (Air)-13 [8]; Piloting/TL6 (Lighter-Than-Air)-12 [1]; Riding (Equines)-12 [1]; Saber-14 [4]; Shiphandling/TL6 (Airship)-15 [20]; Soldier/TL6-14 [12]; Strategy (Air)-12 [8]; Survival (Mountain)-10 [1]; Swimming-13 [1]; Tactics-12 [8]

Auto Pistol 9mm Dam:2d+2 pi Acc:2 Range:150 / 1850
RoF:3 Shots:8+1(3) ST:9 Bulk:-2 Rcl:2 Wgt:2.4
Bolt-Action Rifle 7.62mm Dam:7d pi Acc:5 Range:1000 / 4200
RoF:1 Shots:5+1(3i) ST:10×20 Bulk:-5 Rcl:4 Wgt:8.9

There is little about Sturmbannfuhrer (a Waffen-SS rank roughly equivalent to major) Reitermann which doesn't conform to a recruiting poster ideal: tall, blue-eyed, physically fit, well-educated, and a great believer in technology. He's also fervent racist who will happily sacrifice any number of lesser peoples for the glory of the new Reich. Reitermann is no fool, but he does have an overinflated sense of self-esteem and is capable of being honorable, or at least exceedingly polite. Reitermann thinks he's being polite for not telling Dr. Z that he's a decadent mongrel. Dr. Z is smart enough to know what Reitermann thinks without being told, but it makes no difference to him. Reitermann is useful, and Dr. Z would despise him anyway.

Reitermann appears in chapters 3 and 4. After that, he's fair game.

Alexei Borovitch Koskoff   *165 points*

Attributes

ST 13 [30] **DX** 12 [40] **IQ** 10 **HT** 12 [20]

HP 13; Will 10; Per 10; FP 12; ; Basic Lift 34; Damage 1d/2d-1; Basic Speed 6; Basic Move 6

Advantages

High Pain Threshold [10]; Languages: English (Broken) [2]; French (Broken) [2]; Russian (Native) [0].

Disadvantages

Compulsive Vowing (12 or less) [-5]; Impulsiveness (12 or less) [-10]

Skills

Area Knowledge (Siberia/Mongolia border)-12 [4]; Brawling-14 [4]; Carousing-HT+2 14 [4]; Gambling-10 [2]; Guns/TL6 (Pistol)-14 [4]; Guns/TL6 (Rifle)-14 [3]; Leadership-12 [8]; Musical Instrument (Balalika)-10 [4]; Poetry-10 [2]; Riding (Equines)-13 [4]; Saber-14 [8]; Soldier/TL6-11 [4]; Strategy (Land)-10 [4]; Survival (Plains)-12 [8]; Tactics-12 [12]; Tracking-9 [1]

Hand Weapons

Saber Wgt:2
swing Dam:2d-2 cut Reach:1 Parry:7F ST:8 Skill: 14
thrust Dam:1d+1 imp Reach:1 Parry:No ST:8 Skill: 14

Ranged Weapons

Bolt-Action Rifle 7.62mm Dam:7d pi Acc:5 Range:1000 / 4200
RoF:1 Shots:5+1(3i) ST:10×20 Bulk:-5 Rcl:4 Wgt:8.9

Armor

Fur Tunic Wgt:2 Location:torso DR 1

Although he's scarcely distinguishable from the tribesmen he commands, General Alexei Borovitch Koskoff comes from a more civilized background. Born in St. Petersburg, educated in Paris (though he was thrown out of several schools for drinking and brawling), Alexei was headed for a respectable military career. However, he slept with the wrong general's wife and ended up commanding a Siberian garrison. Though he was angry to be assigned to a dead-end post on the eve of the Great War, it turned out to be just as well when the revolution wiped out the world he knew.

In the chaos around the revolution, he declared himself a general and went into business for himself, leading a group of mostly Mongolian soldiers-turned-bandits. He calls himself the last of the White Russians and definitely hates Communists, but he has no coherent political agenda; despite his anti-Communism, he hates Germans, and therefore the current Nazi regime, as well. Mostly, he raids for loot during the day and drinks, sings and plays music, and recites

poetry (very, very loudly) at night.

Alexei appears in episode 4, though it's possible that he could show up later.

And Now?

You've got guidelines for building PCs, stats for NPCs, and a general idea of what's going on. So join us elsewhere in this very issue for *Episode 1: Death at the Old Farm!*

The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!

Episode 1: Death at the Old Farm

by Matt Riggsby

The heroes brave the chill of early March to visit their old friend Professor Mathers. They set out along the winding country roads to the his family's old farm, now used by the professor as a retreat from his laboratory. It's a difficult trip; they almost wipe out on icy patches several times and nearly collide with a particularly wide Packard coming around a narrow curve in the opposite direction. However, about an hour before sundown, the PCs finally arrive at the farm and drive down the short lane to the farmhouse.

Little of the farm is under cultivation these days, but it provides accommodation for visiting friends and room for long horse-rides. The property is lined with trees and partly surrounded by light woods. The buildings include a large two-story farmhouse and a barn, with a few sheds here and there.

When they pull in, they notice immediately that something is wrong. The front door is wide open to the cold. Inside, they discover that the house has been ransacked. Every drawer and cabinet has been opened, books knocked off of shelves, and so on. Eventually, they find the professor lying on the floor of his study in a pool of blood, stabbed once through the chest. The professor is still alive, but just barely. When the first PC gets close enough to hear him, he whispers the word "dolphin," and expires.

Map of the US

Searching for a Porpoise in Life

It's not immediately clear what the professor meant. A search of the house will turn up nothing dolphin-related, aside from a few books on oceanography and the "D" volume of the encyclopedia. What they can find is a lot of technical work on electronics, chemistry, and engineering. Scientists may (roll vs. Electronics) discover a running theme in the professor's most recent papers, concentrating great quantities of energy through the use of crystals. But they may want to look farther afield. The investigators may know the professor kept a private laboratory in the barn, and looking around the property will reveal a covered well just outside the barn decorated with glazed tiles depicting various animals.

If the PCs approach the barn for any reason, a raggedly-dressed man bolts away from it on a horse, riding bareback. The PCs have a chance of catching up with him on horseback if they take the professor's other horses. None of the horses have been saddled, so whoever chases the fleeing man will have to ride bareback too. The fugitive is fleeing through the uncultivated countryside rather than over open fields, so pursuers must leap over small streams and ditches and avoid low branches, which will make bareback riding that much more difficult.

A car couldn't follow the fugitive through the trees, but a motorcycle might. Even a motorcycle with a sidecar could make it between the trees, though it would have a hard time jumping over a steep-banked stream. However, a car wouldn't have to follow the fleeing man's path. A winding road cuts across the area he's trying to escape through several times. A skilled driver could try to pull ahead on the icy road and cut the man off. Airborne PCs will have bigger problems; they'll only be able to chase from above the trees and could easily lose him under a patch of evergreens or tangled branches. Only mad daredevils

Cowboy Jim Brody

Although he can be a joker and is not above minor pilfering in extremity, Jim is an honest man and a hobo's hobo. He's just a

would follow the fugitive using a rocket pack.

The fugitive gives up quickly if cornered, lassoed, or otherwise immobilized and will not fight unless he is given absolutely no other choice. In fact, once brought to ground, he is as cooperative as the PCs allow him to be. His name is Jim Brody, or "Cowboy Jim" to his friends.

Jim says that he was looking for odd jobs in return for a hot meal and a bed for the night. When he came to the professor's house around noon, he found the door ajar, just as the PCs did, but with a large car parked out front. Looking inside, he saw "a bunch of Chinamen and a real pretty lady" as well as the professor (or, Jim says, "this white-haired old man"). Two men were holding the professor and a third was threatening him with a large, fancy knife, shouting in a foreign tongue. The "pretty lady" was giving the rest of the men orders, slipping into and out of English: "look over there," "it can't be in there, you idiot; try the next drawer," and the like. He remembers her using the word "concentrator" several times; he figures that's what they were looking for, though he's got no idea what a concentrator might be.

Jim was trying to figure out his next move when the lady told someone to look around outside. That decided it. He ran for the nearest shelter, the barn, and hid there for hours. Finally, the whole crowd minus the old man piled into the car and drove off, minutes before the heroes arrived. He doesn't know if they found what they had been looking for, but he knows that they didn't sound happy. He was trying to decide whether or not to leave himself when the PCs arrived. Figuring enough was enough, he borrowed a horse, vaguely planning to leave it a few miles away where it could find its own way home, and tried to avoid any trouble. It didn't work out the way he hoped, but since he didn't do anything, could they let him go, please?

Intensive questioning might turn up details he glossed over the first time: fuller descriptions of all the people involved and a description of the Packard which (on a Per roll) identifies it as the car they nearly ran into on the way over; the grille has a distinctive gold chasing. Other than that, Joe really doesn't know what was going on.

Once the PCs get around to inspecting the well, they'll find that one of the tiles on the well is painted with a dolphin. The tile is loose; behind it is a key with a tag identifying a locker in Brown's Warehouse, a storage facility in town. If they go on to inspect the professor's lab, they'll find a dizzying array of electronic parts, half-finished gadgets, blueprints, and chemicals. Among them, they'll find a rough sketch of a cylinder surrounded by several toruses, labeled "concentrator," but nothing else on the subject.

If the PCs search further, they'll find unending half-finished gadgets, voluminous correspondence in a variety of languages, and souvenirs from the professor's extensive travels, but nothing suggestive of a carload of violent individuals from China. Should they find the professor's other friends and colleagues, they may remember having heard of the concentrator, whose development was funded by a mysterious sponsor. However, there's little evidence of what he was up to, who his Chinese assailants were, and what the concentrator is. If they check out the word on the streets, they'll hear about ongoing gang wars in Chinatown, but no connection to any scientist.

Werehouse '36

wandering soul who wants and offers no trouble. He is particularly eager to avoid the police, who are notably unsympathetic to his lifestyle. He's aware that he survives on the kindness of strangers, so he tries to be as worthy of that kindness as much as a small mischievous streak allows him.

With little formal education but years in the saddle, Jim was a ranch hand in Oklahoma. Like thousands of others, he saw his livelihood dry up and blow away during the dust bowl years, so he took to the road and has been traveling ever since. Jim is big, though neither fat nor muscle-bound, with shaggy hair and a beard. His clothes are a near-random mix of styles: dungarees, Army surplus shirt, tweed jacket, wingtips, and a flat cap. All are second-hand and badly worn, but Jim keeps them clean.

Jim doesn't appear after this, but he could be recycled in future adventures. Though he can provide no immediate reward for anyone who does him a good turn, he may be able to turn up some useful information, do a small (not very skilled) errand, or vouch for the PCs in rough society.

Sooner or later, then, they'll need to visit the warehouse. Brown's Warehouse is a three-story building in a nondescript business district. The bottom floor has a small office in front and shelves and loading docks in back. The upper floors are filled with rows of large closets for more private storage; the key from the professor's house is to a locker on the top floor. They are dimly lit, with dirty windows which let in next to no light even at mid-day. The aisles on the upper floors (ten rows of closets, divided by six perpendicular aisles) are narrow for a storage facility, and the wooden floors, staircases, and doors all creak abominably. Although the staircases are bad for carrying heavy loads, the building has a large open elevator in one corner.

As they approach, the heroes may realize they've got company. On a Vision roll, they notice a particular Packard parked near the warehouse. The gold trim makes it clear that this is the same vehicle used by the thugs who killed the professor, and they're now at the warehouse.

Dr. Z's Thugs

These are the footsoldiers of Dr. Z's criminal army, absorbed from a Chinese triad group which Dr. Z recently took over. They're not professional killers, but they're good enough for a street fight.

Attributes

ST 11 **DX** 11 **IQ** 10 **HT** 10

HP 11; Will 11; Per 11; FP 10; Basic Lift 22; Damage 1d-1/1d; Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5

Relevant Skills

Karate-12; Knife-11; Stealth-11; Streetwise-11

If the heroes arrive during business hours, they find that the front doors are locked, although the "Open" sign in the window hasn't been flipped to "Closed." If they arrive at night, the lock on a side door has been picked. In either case, three Chinese men are in the office, two rifling through papers and one serving as a lookout; any on-duty clerks have been chloroformed and tied up. These are three of Dr. Z's thugs digging through the records in an attempt to find out which locker the professor was renting. If they see the PCs, they'll shout a warning to their companions upstairs. They may attack the investigators, but if they appear to badly outnumbered, they'll try to flee upstairs.

Ready, Aim, Fire!

Speaking of which: While three of the thugs are downstairs, eight more are upstairs, ransacking lockers to find the one the professor rented. Their objective is to find the professor's locker and recover or destroy the contents. The heroes have the advantage of knowing where the professor's locker is, but will find it nigh impossible to move silently. If the thugs become aware of them, which they certainly will at some point, they will attempt to stop the PCs by picking them off a few at a time, striking from the shadows of darkened aisles. Their movements may confuse the PCs, who will glimpse identically dressed men darting through one poorly lit intersection after another.

The thugs will also resort to using an old trick to confuse their enemies: pyrotechnic smoke bombs. They're effective for confounding opponents, but they will also set fire to the warehouse's dry, seasoned wood. Once the fight has gone on for a minute or two, the PCs will start to smell smoke. It should quickly become clear to them that they're in a burning building, surrounded by enemies.

* * *

Smoke-filled aisles! Burning stairways! Fierce enemies! How will our heroes escape? Come back next time for the next episode of *The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!: The Lair of Dr. Z!*

What?! Dreams May Come?

As far as webcomics go, Xkcd is fairly consistent in its abilities to provoke thought (along with some some geek-centric humor). A few months ago there was an installment that made me stop and go, "Hmmm."

For those who haven't read it, it points out how absurd it is that we take dreaming and sleeping in stride; they are little more than incredibly common hallucinations. More interesting to me, I note that dreams and sleep are cultural shorthands. Even while conscious we dream of better tomorrows, endure "unending nightmares," "sleep" on decisions, endure sleepless nights, analyze our dreams and sleep schedules, and so on; the acts of sleeping and dreaming permeate the very stuff of our daily lives in thousands of different ways we don't even realize. (As one example, I assume when someone is discussing their "dream house," they don't mean it's filled with hundreds of doors of different sizes and shapes, behind one of which is a long-deceased grandparent who's also a burning lion.)

Curiously -- I note by way of foreshadowing -- this column is not about dreams.

Now, a bunch of RPGs already utilize dreams to a certain extent. **Call of Cthulhu, In Nomine, Changeling,** and others make heavy use of the nocturnal realms. But what I find interesting is how, to the best of my knowledge, few games or game settings make use of a *lack* of dreams, or of alternate universal "truths" that a race or species might have.

The most obvious example is to consider the idea of how other races view these same ideas, either space aliens in a sci-fi setting or other peoples in a fantasy world. Thus a setting's elves might find the practice of entering into a coma for a third of one's lifetime to be a strange idea, or an alien species might find the notion of dreams fascinating enough for a round of orifice probes for any humans they encounter.

But this idea isn't limited to far-future space opera or dancing-dragon fantasy realms. In our own world, we seem to be on the cusp of developing drugs that allow one to forgo the biological need for sleep indefinitely; it's not much of a stretch to envision a society where a certain subset decides *never* to sleep. Envision a group of humans -- perhaps wildly successful humans, since they can theoretically increase their productivity by 33% or so in the same time period -- who resemble their "regular" brethren in every aspect, but who never sleep . . . who have no idea what a "dream" even is first-hand.

Going a smidge further, envision a dystopian future (or perhaps a *Star Trek*-esque planet of the week) whose human citizens have been drugged from birth by its leaders -- or maybe the ever-popular Precursors -- so that they never sleep or dream. What would happen if the insomnia generators were disabled or destroyed at the same time the heroes visited? Could they survive the chaos that resulted from the comatose states and hallucinations that its people endured for the first time?

Looking at it a bit askew, what other universalisms can non-human species possess that forges part of their collective unconsciousness? For example, the sidhe in some game systems (most notably **Changeling: The Dreaming**) live their lives unchronologically; they experience events out of order. (I used this tidbit to great effect for flashbacks and a flashforward or two in the long-running **Vampire: The Dark Ages** campaign.) Such an existence would probably have a profound effect on their collective society. Not only would notions of cause and effect be turned on their sides, but aphorisms such as "tomorrow never comes" wouldn't have the same meaning . . . after all, it's entirely likely that some members experienced tomorrow last week!

Consider that sleep defines almost every aspect of our lives: Human society has a cycle that assumes most members sleep at night; international commerce is complicated by the need for members to sleep; and the limitations of biology often confound those who live in a world of deadlines (having 48 hours until a project is due doesn't mean you have 48 hours left you can work). As such, coming up with sleep-like universal truths of a species is a great way to emphasize their non-humanity.

Some ideas that expand on this:

Envision a race that divides its day in two biological shifts, evenly divided. They have a "Day Self" and a "Night Self," and the two can evolve entirely separately: Different skills, different personalities, different goals and desires, and so forth. Society would probably evolve around the idea of the conflict these two selves present: some might admire those who seek to unify their halves (leaving each "other" extensive notes, for example), while others might respect those with wild divergence between the two ("leading their selves through two lives" might be a popular saying).

Envision a race that, once a week, spends two days entering a hibernation state where they regenerate and shed their old bodies like a snake discards its skin. Assuming a seven-day week, such a society would probably evolve around the seven groups (dependent on what day the shed-healing begins); they might differentiate between five-pals (folks you could spend five days with) or threesers (those who you could only spend three days with because the other is hibernating). They might even make further sub-divisions, such as divided threesers (those who can only spend one or two days together in a row). Such a race would also probably have metaphors and ideals that revolve around their hibernation; they might "shed a skin" on difficult decisions, or they may speak of needing to give, say, a troubled marriage a "two-day heal."

Envision a race that fills up with a buoyant (odorless) gas that normally dissipates naturally when they are awake. However, their dormant state entails the locking of all their muscles, enabling them to "sleep" (they're fully aware, just locked up) while leaned against a wall. As a result, the gas builds within them during this time, and -- if they didn't take steps otherwise -- they would literally float away. Metaphors would probably revolve around ideas such as "wakefall" (the period immediately after exiting the dormancy phase where members release the gas and return to gravity's influence), or letting problems "rise off you." If the dormancy can come without warning, there might be cultural procedures for how other members deal with each other; taking advantage of a dormant body would be one of the utter taboos, while not acting to tether a sleeping person might be a crime.

I personally envision every species possessing some aspects of their base biology that defines them in ways they don't even consider. Coming up with an interesting twist can not only help define an entire species, it can also provide new and interesting gaming potential; For example, the two-phase race mentioned above would be ideal for players who enjoy playing two characters at once, without being unbalancing from a gameplay standpoint.

And if you're looking for ideas, why not sleep on it? Who knows what you'll dream up.

--Steven Marsh

Your Own Electrical Jesus: John Murray Spear And The Spark Of Life

"I sing the Body electric;
The armies of those I love engirth me, and I engirth them;
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the Soul."
-- Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric" (1855)

John Murray Spear was born in Boston on September 16, 1804, named for (and baptized by) the founder of the Universalist Church, John Murray. He followed his namesake into preaching, becoming a prominent Universalist minister. He gained equal prominence as a political activist, working tirelessly against slavery and the death penalty, and in favor of prison reform, women's rights, and temperance. In 1844, a pro-slavery mob in Portland, Maine beat Spear within an inch of his life; his recovery was long and difficult. It didn't silence him, but it may have given him something of a taste for secretiveness -- he became a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, joined a vigilance committee to undermine the Fugitive Slave Laws, and began building a cell network of like-minded "non-resistants" who believed that allowing the South to secede would easily expunge the taint of slavery from the Union.

But all that slowly receded into the background, as Spear began experimenting with mesmeric trance states and, soon, with automatic writing. His initial intent was to find people in trouble, so that he could go minister to them or provide for their care. He increasingly opened himself up to spirit contact throughout 1851 and early 1852, and toward the end of May, 1852, he received his first communication from the spirit of Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was concerned about a local woman (unknown to Spear) who had been struck by lightning; with Spear's mesmeric aid, Franklin was able to re-absorb "the subtle fluid" that had made his reputation, and heal the woman. As worthy as that practice was, though, Franklin had bigger things in mind for Spear. On April Fool's Day 1853, Franklin announced that Spear was the agent of the "Association of Beneficents," a group of worthy departed including Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and Thomas Jefferson (who had undergone a post-mortem conversion to abolitionism). That Association later proved to be but a sub-committee of the General Assembly of Spirits, which included not just Franklin but Daniel Webster, John Hancock, Lafayette, and Emmanuel Swedenborg. Within the General Assembly, Franklin headed the "Band of Electricizers," tasked with improving humanity by electricity. Franklin passed on to Spear numerous plans for the Electrical Ship, flying streetcars, thinking machines, the Soul-Blending Telegraph, and so forth, all powered by electricity channeled by male and female mediums "mingling into one." Spear toured the country trying to drum up moral and financial support for such schemes. (Among the spots he visited on his first tour was Niagara Falls, where Nikola Tesla would later carry out the spirits' "electricizing" goals on a grand scale.) But the key to them all was the New Motor, which Franklin told Spear had to be built in Lynn, Massachusetts.

"The roofless house, decayed, deserted,
Its living tenants all departed,
No longer rings with midnight revel
Of witch, or ghost, or goblin evil;
No pale blue flame sends out its flashes
Through creviced roof and shattered sashes!"
-- John Greenleaf Whittier, "Moll Pitcher"

Lynn, on the Massachusetts coast between Boston and Marblehead, was a grimy factory town with a bad reputation. ("Lynn, Lynn, city of sin/Ask for water, they give you a gin/It's the damnedest place you've ever been in," or so they said in Boston.) Its girls had a bad reputation, too. ("Lynn, Lynn, city of sin/The girls say 'no' and then they give in.") It was so bad that even its Quakers rioted -- in 1822, followers of the "New Light" busted up a meeting-house in support of their preacher, Mary Newhall, who had "a facility of entering into mystical speculations." Speaking of mystical speculations, Lynn had an intermittent sea-serpent, seen in 1641, 1820, and 1849 -- which would re-appear post-Spear in 1875 and 1947. It even had its own seer, one "Moll Pitcher," not to be confused with the Revolutionary

War heroine. Moll was a genuine Massachusetts witch, who read clouds and cards and told fortunes for sailors for fifty years from Colonial times until her death in 1813. She lived at the foot of High Rock, a 200-foot high outcropping of porphyry where, by Spear's day, the Hutchinson Family Singers maintained a Spiritualist compound and retreat. (Their compound also included Dungeon Rock, where the spirits were fond of hinting at nearby buried treasure.) The Hutchinsons were old friends of Spear's from the abolitionist days, and unlike his more particular allies, welcomed his new turn to the spirit world. They gave him the use of some outbuildings on their property for the construction of the New Motor.

"THE THING MOVES . . . We may say that we have the birth of a new science, a new philosophy, and a new life. The time of deliverance has come at last, and henceforward the career of humanity is upward and onward -- a mighty, a noble, and a Godlike career. All the revelations of Spiritualism heretofore, all the control of spirits over mortals, and the instruction and discipline they have given us, have only paved the way . . . And this New Motive Power is to lead the way in the great speedily-coming salvation. It is to be the physical Saviour of the race. . . . The child is born, not long hence he will go alone. Then he will dispute with the doctors in the temples of science, and then -- "
-- "The Thing Moves," *New Era* (June 29, 1854)

The New Motor was more than just an improved dynamo. As John Benedict Buescher puts it in his thorough biography, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator For the Spirit Land,* the New Motor "would collect and distribute the universal motion 'perpetually' present, flowing through all things." In short, zero-point energy, which we've encountered [before](). But this would be more than a New Motor; it would be "the New Motive Power, the Physical Savior, Heaven's Last Gift to Man, New Creation, Great Spiritual Revelation of the Age, Philosopher's Stone, Art of All Arts, Science of All Sciences, the New Messiah." In that shed on High Rock, the Electrical Messiah took shape, built out of $2,000 worth of materials (around $50,000 today). It was roughly man-shaped, built around a steel cross-piece from which depended two steel uprights like legs and two steel spheres containing magnets, extended like arms. A pile of zinc and copper plates -- the "electric reservoir" -- was analogous to the brain, complete with hairlike antennae stretching up to the rafters. It had a flywheel, mechanical-magnetic "lungs," and plenty of other strange parts variously burnished or tarnished in accordance with Franklin's spiritual instructions. The builders agreed that Spear's complete ignorance of the mechanical or scientific arts was a real bonus, as he wouldn't be tempted to "improve" on Franklin's designs.

As construction continued, Spear began to expose the New Messiah to various spirits and to male and female mediums. Its constructors and acolytes ate powdered metals and took on machine-like behavior to mingle themselves with the Physical Savior. Spear himself put on his "spirit armor" (an arrangement of copper and zinc batteries, metal strips, and gemstones "brought into peculiar conditions by various chemical processes") and spent an hour in a trance imbuing the New Motor with "a stream of light" according to clairvoyant witnesses. But the big day came on June 29, 1854 -- about nine months after construction began -- when the medium Sarah Newton, the New Mary (one of many New Marys that had wandered into Spear's entourage) lay on the floor and engaged in sympathetic pregnancy and labor, delivering "a visible vibratory motion" to the New Creation. It lived! The Electrical Jesus was born!

"We do not believe a word respecting a mob breaking into the building and destroying the spiritual machine. We are of the opinion that it was broken by the crafty author of it, whose schemes had come to the exact point of exposing his ridiculous pretensions."
-- Editorial in *Scientific American,* Vol. 10, No. 8 (November 4, 1854)

Sadly, such carryings on -- along with the increasing emphasis on "mingling into one" and the concomitant disintegration of Spear's marriage -- caused the solid citizens of Lynn to protest to the Hutchinsons. Spear, providentially, received a new spirit communication, telling him to take the New Motor to Randolph, New York, to put on an even higher hill. But in August of 1854, Spear was forced to report that an angry mob of Randolph youths broke into the farmhouse where the Electrical Messiah rested and smashed it. "The little mechanism has been assailed, torn asunder, and trampled . . . " Another report said that "the Spiritual Motor" had been "crucified by a lot of boys." Interestingly, though, the only report of the Passion of the Electrical Jesus comes from Spear or his spiritual communards. No independent account in either of Randolph's two newspapers, no diary entries by local anti-Machine vigilantes, no letter or legal document of any kind has come to light. The true fate of the New Motive Power remains unknown.

"At first appeared the Machine or New Motor with some spectators gazing in wonder at it. Then appeared some persons ridiculing or deriding it, while others threw stones . . . But the Machine seemed to grow in bulk and stature, despite their efforts, and threw off from itself smaller machines after its own pattern. . . . The small ones grew also around their parent, and in their turn threw off a multitude of other little ones, covering a great space of ground, and forming a high pyramid. . . . Next there appeared a movement among the machines . . ."
-- from a prophetic dream reported by Josiah Wolcott (July 5, 1854)

After the disintegration of the High Rock commune, Spear resumed his itinerant ways. He joined the Order of the Patriarchs, a spiritual movement in Ohio, which was building a "Psychocosmon," a kind of super scrying device for attracting stellar energy. It could communicate with the dead (specifically Thomas Paine and Hiram Abiff), and the large version would have a special chair in which a medium would sit and contact other worlds or dimensions. Spear attempted to start a new commune around the "magnetic spring" of Kiantone, New York, on the site of an ancient "Celtic Indian" civilization. Spear began to drift further and further into free love territory, eventually forming "a secret body within a secret body" within his new group, the Sacred Order of Unionists. The spirits sent him on a descent of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, to build a clandestine network of telepathic revolutionaries who would seize power once the Civil War had exhausted the whole country. He had another spiritual child, this one in the form of a nine-pound baby boy, with a different New Mary, in 1858, while Comet Donati blazed in the skies. During the Civil War, he mostly sojourned in England, trying to radicalize English Spiritualists and spiritualize English radicals, with little or no effect, although he did attend seances in London with Sir Richard Burton and Alfred Russell Wallace. He returned to America in 1865 and founded "Blue Anchor," a spiritualist utopia in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. It, too, fell apart. Spear died in 1887 in Philadelphia -- Benjamin Franklin's city.

"Von Junzt did not devote much space to it -- the bulk of his grim work concerns cults and objects of dark worship which he maintained existed in his day, and it would seem that the Black Stone represents some order or being lost and forgotten centuries ago. But he spoke of it as one of the Keys -- a phrase used many times by him, in various relations, and constituting one of the obscurities of his work."
-- Robert E. Howard, "The Black Stone"

So what was speaking through John Murray Spear? What rough beast slouched into Lynn, Massachusetts in 1854? Let's begin where Spear did, with Benjamin Franklin. We've already seen that Franklin was a devious magus with a gift for manipulation -- why should that have ended with his death? Surely if anyone could survive for generations in the form of an electrical spirit, it would be the man who tamed the lightning. Spear's first automatic writing included "also geometrical drawings and strange unintelligible figures, of which no interpretation was vouchsafed." Lovecraftian experiments in hyperspace magick? In body-switching? Did "Franklin" want Spear to build a New Messiah, or just a New Adam Kadmon for his spirit to animate? As we've theorized, Franklin may have been the bodily shell of Johann Konrad Dippel -- whose own "death" in 1734 eerily coincides with Franklin's Masonic initiation -- and whose alchemical experiments and claim to Frankenstein Castle eerily prefigures the electrical golem built in High Rock.

And what about "High Rock," that conglomerate of electrically-potent quartz and granite, material of Pharaonic sarcophagi, embedded on the edge of the spectral city of Lynn? Is it a silicon-based life form, a Powersian nephilim, a Cybele-entity (perhaps a Gin crone?) dwelling in the High Rock baetyl, giving off the "New Light," drinking and returning sexual energy from the bad girls of Lynn and the increasingly ecstatic New Marys in Spear's "secret body"? Is it entirely coincidental that Lynn should produce two other visionary utopians, the founder of Christian Science Mary Baker Eddy, and the American fascist and spirit-contactee William Dudley Pelley? Did the electrical ghost within the High Rock baetyl reach out and shock John Hancock, or jump to Franklin somehow via some Philadelphia Experiment? Was a piece of Lynn porphyry the "philosopher's Stone" that the alchemist Samuel Danforth sent to Franklin in 1773? However it got to Franklin, and to whatever degree Franklin willed it, the baetyl spark waited until the Grand Earth Trine of 1854, when Mars, Venus, and Jupiter were all 120 degrees apart. With male and female equidistant, the androgyne could form and the Great Work emerge, on June 29, the middle of the old Saturnian year, on the day of the Rock and the Visionary (SS Peter and Paul), the patron day of diamond workers. It wasn't quite right -- Comet Donati didn't come along until the Spears' Moonchild was born four years later -- but it was enough to undergo its blasphemous Passion and Occultation. And now, somewhere in a "magnetic cave" along the Mississippi, or in a cellar in London or Philadelphia or San Francisco, the Electrical Messiah waits and grows, breeding "smaller

machines to its pattern," building "a secret body within a secret body," and whirring silently to itself.

The Omniscient Eye

Where's the Nearest Money Laundromat?

What exactly is money laundering, and how is it done?
--Shawn Havranek

Money laundering is the process of taking the profits of criminal activity and "cleaning" it so it can no longer be traced to its illegal roots. Since the majority of criminal activity is transacted with cash, it is predominantly focused on getting enormous quantities of physical cash paid into banks, washed through a variety of electronic transactions, and eventually either withdrawn or used to make legitimate investments.

Money laundering is integral to the drugs trade. A series of studies have shown that between 65% and 100% of all U.S. dollar, British pound, and Euro banknotes in circulation are contaminated with cocaine, heroin, and ecstasy. While many of these notes may have been contaminated by drug users rather than drug dealers, the reality remains that the cash in your pocket is likely to have been in contact with dirty money at some point in its life.

It's not just the drug cartels that need to launder money. Dictators and government heads like Saddam Hussein, Manuel Noriega, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, and Idi Amin stole billions of dollars from their countries, while the Mafia and every other criminal gang in the world has to find a way of getting thousands of used bank notes into the modern electronic banking system.

There are three stages to money laundering: immersion or placement (getting cash into the banking system), layering (hiding the tracks), and integration (getting the clean money back into the legitimate economy).

Immersion is the maximum point of danger for a criminal enterprise. Getting $10 million in cash into a bank without raising suspicion can be a very difficult thing to do. Contrary to popular belief, you can't fit $10 million in an attach case. $10 million would stand over 30 feet tall and weigh more than the average person. Physically transporting such a large amount of cash is a challenge in itself.

You might just be able to fit a million bucks in a large attach case. A stack of hundred dollar bills worth $1 million would contain 10,000 bank notes, would stand 40 inches tall and would weigh 20 lbs. All the notes need to be crisp, new and in high denominations though; crumpled tens and twenties (which is just the kind of cash a street-dealer handles) would make the case burst at the seams.

An additional challenge is that most jurisdictions have a reporting limit on the amount of cash that you can deposit with a bank before they have to report the transaction as a potentially suspicious deposit. In the United States, this amount is $10,000, with additional requirements to report a series of suspicious transactions (for example all at $9,900), or aggregate transactions to the same account in a short period of time that breach the threshold. The launderer therefore has to get around this system, typically by using a system of runners which are often nicknamed smurfs. Every morning, the smurfs stop by the launderer's headquarters and pick up twenty or so bundles of $1,000 each. They then travel around the banks of a suburb (suburbs are most popular -- rural banks are too empty, and tellers usually know all their regular customers so a new face is memorable, while city banks are too busy and take too long), depositing the money in a series of a different accounts. After a few days, the money can be wired out to a different account and the layering phase can begin. This method can be a very slow process: it takes a team of 10 smurfs 10 weeks to get $10 million into the banking system if they're banking $20,000 a day each.

There is another way. Many jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Hungary and Luxembourg, do not require banks to report transactions above a fixed amount. Their reporting requirements hinge on the subjective nature of the word "suspicious," and while it significantly eases the flow of legitimate commerce, it is also a boon to the launderer.

In these territories, "know your customer" is the mantra. Banks in these territories are only required to report a suspicious transaction if it is significantly different from the normal course of business. A small family shop that banked typically $5,000 a week and suddenly started banking $20,000 would a day would be seen as suspicious. But that regular cash income of $5,000 would be regarded as normal given their business. Even the United States has a get-out clause for this type of business, allowing the banks to file a form that says that this customer regularly has significant cash deposits and hence the reporting requirements should be lifted, or the threshold raised.

To satisfy the banks on this point, the business must have a legitimate need to handle a lot of cash. For example, much activity in the building trade is still transacted in cash, including the purchase of heavy machinery such as backhoes, excavators, and cranes. It is entirely possible to purchase this equipment for cash and then sell it, sometimes even at a profit, to a purchaser who is prepared to pay via a bank transfer. Similarly, much of the global diamond trade is transacted in cash, making it a natural haven for money launderers, with the additional benefit that diamonds are lighter and more transportable than either gold and cash. Money launderers prefer to deal in polished stones, which any jeweller will buy for cash, rather than rough diamonds which only a very few diamond houses are willing to purchase.

Gold can be challenging to launder. In 1983, a gang of armed men broke into the secure Brinks-Mat warehouse at Heathrow and -- after terrorizing the guards by dousing them in gasoline and threatening to burn them alive -- left with 6,400 gold bars, worth approximately $40 million and weighing over three and a half tons. To launder them, the gold was shipped to a crooked gold bullion dealer in Bristol. There it was smelted down to remove the identifying hallmarks and serial numbers and mixed with copper and silver coins. It was then sent to the government Assay Office in Sheffield where each bar was weighed, taxed and legitimized, and could then be sold to legal bullion dealers who would re-smelt the bar to remove the impurities. The laundered proceeds were then transferred around the world via the Isle of Man, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, the Channel Islands, the United States, and Panama. Eventually significant amounts of money were repatriated to the UK and at least 5.4 million pounds invested into legitimate property development in London's Docklands.

Gambling provides a fertile ground for launderers. Casinos provide many services that are similar to a bank, including cashing checks, exchanging currencies and paying out in cashier's checks. It is an effective place to turn a stack of small denomination bills into fifties or hundreds. It is also possible to argue that you walked into a casino with $1,000 and emerged with $500,000, but you need to have a compliant casino management to back up your case. Of course, if you own the casino, it's even easier. You would just stuff the cash in the till and get the accountants to mark it down as money lost by a few additional imaginary punters. The U.S. government has clamped down by requiring casinos to report cash transactions in the same way as banks, but casinos remain notoriously difficult to regulate.

Casinos are not the only gambling activity that are targeted by launderers. At a racetrack, a winning ticket is a negotiable instrument. Some punters are only too happy to sell their ticket at a discount to avoid paying taxes, while the laundryman gains a document proving that he has come into his winnings legitimately. Similarly, a big lottery win can be used. Many major lotteries pay out their winners over a long period, so a $20 million win becomes $100,000 per annum for 20 years. Many winners are happy to sell their annuity for cash upfront, and the laundryman buys a totally legitimate income stream for the next two decades.

Restaurants, cafs and bars are particularly popular businesses for launderers; it is no accident that so much fiction shows the Mafia operating out of pizza parlors. These places typically take in significant amounts of cash, and hence depositing cash with banks seems like an ordinary business transaction that would not rouse suspicion. It's not just about running a business, though; the important element is to deposit more cash than the business is actually taking . . . otherwise the laundering is going to be very slow.

One solution is simply to overstate how much money your restaurant is making. If Joey's Pizza Parlor claims that it served 40 pies when it only served five, Joey can place eight times as much money in the bank. Once the money is in the bank, the next stage, layering, can take place.

The objective of layering is to make the audit trail as complex as possible, so that it is difficult for the authorities to track down the money. The layering phase is the focus of highly specialized law enforcement professionals, particularly forensic accountants, who have painstaking work in following the money flows around the globe.

A launderer transfers the money from his business account around the world. There are two objectives: a) to make many transfers so that the audit trail is difficult to follow and b) to travel through a variety of jurisdictions, preferably ones that are insistent on protecting banking confidentiality. So a U.S. mobster might transfer the money via Italy to the U.K., and then further to the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, Panama, Switzerland, Canada, and then back to the United States. For the American authorities to follow the trail, they would have to get cooperation or warrants from the governments in eight countries, four of whom are very protective of the privacy rights of their banking customers. Following this trail is time consuming, difficult, and frequently fails to lead to convictions or confiscations, despite the occasional high-profile case.

Certain jurisdictions see banking confidentiality as a competitive advantage in a global economy. Alongside the traditional banking havens of Switzerland, the Grand Duchy of Liechtenstein, and the Cayman Islands, recent entrants include Aruba, St. Kitts, Nevis, and Panama. Although the days of the numbered Swiss bank account where no name was associated with the account are now gone, in all of these territories, banking discretion is prized and the governments are acutely aware that much of their income and influence comes from maintaining that veil of secrecy.

In fact, in some of the smaller jurisdictions, drug cartels and other elements of organized crime prop up the regimes with the primary motivation of encouraging them to maintain banking secrecy against international law enforcement officials. When the financial clout of organized crime gangs is so much greater than anything the local economy can provide, there is little that local people can do about it.

To add to the levels of secrecy, the banking transactions frequently take place between different companies. It is easy and cheap to acquire a new company (a simple off-the-shelf corporation can be bought in many jurisdictions for as little as $200), and there are professional organizations who will, totally legitimately, provide a company complete with directors and a registered address (which is usually just a plaque screwed to a wall). The directors may not know who the shareholders or beneficial owners are, which adds an additional layer of protection for the money-launderer.

Layering can be also combined effectively with integration, usually through a complex web of interrelated companies. Returning to the restaurant theme, imagine that Joey's uncle Giuseppe owns a food supply business. Joey orders 20 kilos of anchovies from his uncle, receives an invoice, and instructs his bank to pay the supplier electronically from his bank account. Giuseppe's bank will not see any need to file a suspicious transaction report, since the transaction was electronic rather than cash, and is a usual transaction for the food supplier. The money has just started being layered.

The twist in this case is that Giuseppe will only deliver five kilos of anchovies. The bank will never know that 75% of that invoice was fictitious, and Giuseppe's business will seem to be thriving.

An alternative system is the informal banking systems created in India and China before the creation of the modern Western banking practices. Known as hawala in India, and as "chit" or "flying money" to the Chinese, it is entirely trust-based, contains no paperwork, and is essentially impossible for authorities to track. In essence, the system works by transferring money without moving it. If a man wishes to transfer money from London to his family back in Bombay, he approaches a hawala dealer and gives him his cash. The man is given a password or unique code which he tells his family in Bombay. They then visit an equivalent hawala dealer in India and receive their money. It is entirely based on trust and has worked for centuries. (The Knights Templar had a similar system which gives them claim to being the first modern bankers in the world). For a money launderer, this archaic system can flummox the most sophisticated of law enforcement officials.

The final stage, integration, is the safest. By this point, the money has been immersed by a team of smurfs, transferred through multiple jurisdictions and repatriated to the country where it started. It is then typically used in a legitimate transaction, frequently investing in property. The cycle is complete.

Money laundering is a risky business, and a skilled activity. Professional launders can charge fees that may rise as high as 50%, but are typically between 5% and 20%. Additional costs -- such as the smurfs, legal and accounting fees and so on -- add to the bill, plus there is the risk of confiscation or assets being frozen. On the whole a criminal enterprise would expect to receive between 50% and 75% of its dirty cash back in laundered, integrated money.

Of course, woe-betide the launderer who gets greedy. Many a financier has been murdered for the suspicion that he has taken more than his fair share of his client's money.

References

Contaminated Money

- http://observer.guardian.co.uk/drugs/story/0,,837142,00.html
- http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/01/070116093548.htm

Weight of $1 million

- http://www.cockeyed.com/inside/million/million.html

Books

- The Laundrymen, Jeffrey Robinson, Simon & Schuster
- Gangs, Tony Thomson, Hodder

--Nicholas Lovell

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!

<div style="text-align:right">

-14

</div>

Sky Raiders of the Caribbean

by Paul Drye

The Great War came to an end with Germany the victor, if a pyrrhic one. Russia was engulfed by revolution, the morale of the French Army had collapsed after the Nivelle Offensive, and the UK was threatened into submission with starvation. Nominally the new masters of much of the former French Empire, the Germans found themselves with "Victor's Disease": the complete inability to prevent rebellions all over their new possessions, and even an abortive communist uprising in Bavaria. In the chaos, the Old World's economy collapsed by 1921; the United States followed two years later after the assassination of President Wood and the endless riots in New York and Philadelphia.

Faced with a choice between economic strength and imperial prestige, both the French and British took a long look at the economics of their colonies; if it cost money, it was cut loose. The region affected the most by the new policy was the Caribbean, where all the possessions of both countries gained their independence (whether they wanted it or not). At first they were federated according to their former colonial masters and location, but these larger governments all fell apart in the 1920s and 30s.

Political and economic troubles continued to stalk the western world while this was happening, and the Caribbean became notorious as a refuge for the losing sides of revolutions and criminals who found their home countries suddenly too hot. In 1931, the first major piracy of a ship in the Caribbean took place, and by 1935 bandits were routinely attacking shipping. The present day is 1940, and the United States -- though still stretched by troubles at home and a civil war in Puerto Rico -- is trying to crack down on a new golden age of piracy in the Caribbean.

Tactics

The twist this century is that the raiders are using a glut of float planes made available by the black markets now endemic to the western world. All countries are sufficiently dislocated that it's not too hard to obtain an amphibious vessel and, despite official disapproval, arm it with medium-weight weaponry for freebooting.

Most pirate gangs have at least two planes to use; all put at least two in the air during any attack. They either have a specific ship in mind, fingered by observers in port or a compromised crew member, or else they cover large swathes of ocean on the major trade routes until a target presents itself. Both planes buzz the ship in an attempt to intimidate it into surrender, and if it doesn't strike colors they'll open fire. Eventually their target will give in -- it certainly can't run away -- or end up going to the bottom. The latter result is a disappointment, but most of the modern pirates consider it a necessary sacrifice *pour encourager les autres*. In the past, they cultivated a reputation for mercy toward those who surrendered, leaving them their ships (or at least their lives and some means to get back to port). The idea was to make it more palatable to surrender than fight, and it worked, but it's worth noting that there's been a recent trend towards grimmer treatment.

In any case, if the ship surrenders then one plane will land on the water under the cover of the other circling above. Pirates transfer to the vessel, strip it of worthwhile cargo and personal possessions, and may even hijack the ship if they're close enough to their own base.

As well as lifting cargoes, the gangs make a living by kidnapping for profit (which requires good intelligence, but is often worth it), and outright protection rackets run on local shipping lines and governments.

Great Inagua

The main pirate base in the Caribbean is Matthew Town on Great Inagua Island. Technically part of The Bahamas, the impoverished central government can't afford to patrol Inagua, the southernmost island in their domain. For all intents and purposes, it's independent.

Matthew Town is on the southwest side of the island, with the Atlantic Ocean to the south and Lake Rosa -- one of the largest freshwater lakes in the whole Caribbean -- just to the north and east. This vital source of drinking water led Ignacio Rossi to settle here from Sicily in 1933, and start catering to the growing outlaw population in the area. Matthew Town is now his fief, controlled with the help of a few dozen thugs and the implicit support of several main pirate bands who like the town the way it is.

The town has a regular anchorage for both float planes and supply ships -- woe betide any pirate who attacks one of the latter if it's under Rossi's protection. In times of trouble, the planes can be driven or tugged over to the southeast of the town, where the old salt evaporation ponds have been reconnected to the sea by a short canal, and light artillery set up to protect the enclosure.

Saint-Barthelemy

While Great Inagua may be the prime raider base, it's not the only one. It's poorly positioned for attacks on shipping around the Windward Islands, and there are some who don't like its relatively restrictive (even if completely criminal) government. Bandits bothered by either issue end up in Saint-Barthelemy, a former Swedish and French colony abandoned to its fate despite being entirely too small to stand on its own. It rapidly became a complete anarchy, which was co-opted by Caribbean raiders looking to take advantage of Gustavia Harbor's nearly complete enclosure and lack of tides. At any time, as many as 20 seaplanes will be floating there, protected from all but the most severe weather while their crews enjoy shore leave.

The only notable settlement on the island surrounds the three sides of the harbor. Its mouth points north, with Rue Jeanne D'Arc running along the peninsular side of the city, Rue Oscar II (named for a former Swedish king) down the landward side, and Rue de Centenaire connecting them in the south. By far the largest building in the city is the former cathedral at the foot of the harbor, which has been turned into a hotel-slash-brothel-slash-speakeasy since the pirates took over.

The major disadvantage to Saint-Barthelemy is its relative proximity to Charlotte Amalie, the major American policing base in the region.

The US Virgin Islands

Obtained by the United States just a few months before the end of the Great War, Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas Island is the major source of law and order in the Caribbean. This world's America passed Prohibition at about the same time as Homeline's, and hasn't repealed it yet. Organized crime based out of the Bahamas has been rum-running for the last 20 years, and have inevitably joined up with the sky raiders; now the US fights both out of the capital of this territory, as well as supporting the loyalist side in the Puerto Rican civil war.

Charlotte Amalie is the very opposite of other Caribbean towns. The islands were incorporated as a territory in 1925,

and as a state in 1938, and so they're subject to the American constitutional ban on alcohol and state blue laws regarding gambling and prostitution. The whole town has a remarkably Puritan feel, with clean, well-dressed citizens bustling around on business, and new motor-cars plying the streets. Discipline on the Coast Guard's Twentieth District base is strict, and there's little tolerance for "boys-will-be-boys" shenanigans while "in the States." That's what Havana and Port-of-Spain are for

The town has a population of about 11,000, making it by far the largest town in the Virgin Islands. It faces south onto a good deepwater harbor, and is built around two east-west streets: Waterfront and Droningens Gade. Small, dark alleys run north and south between the two. Further to the north is the richer part of town, the Queen Quarter, which climbs a hill as one moves into it. Adventurers might also spend much of their time in the southwest of the city, where the US Coast Guard has its quarters, and where "important people" cluster during the day in the neighborhood around the state legislature building.

Cuba

Past history has kept Cuba the US's closest ally in the region. Unfortunately for the States, they need the Cubans on-side to have any chance of suppressing piracy, and Cuba's notorious corruption makes it difficult to push the pirates as hard as is needed.

Havana here is much like Havana was on Homeline in 1940, or Tijuana's reputation is in the modern day: it's the place to go for licentiousness. Women, alcohol, gambling, and jazz -- you name it, it can be had. Traditionally, the city has been a magnet for Americans, and their policing operations in the Caribbean are often staged from here when Charlotte Amalie is inconvenient for some reason. For a while in 1938-39, Manzanillo on the southeast coast of Cuba was used instead in an effort to enforce moral standards on American seaman. This was suspended when it became apparent that cutting them off from their vices just made them more susceptible to bribery.

Operations Against the Sky Raiders

For all different kinds of actions, the defining factor in how they run is the nationality behind them. American operations are strident, and generally quite effective; pirates know to cut and run when the Stars and Sixteen Stripes of the Coast Guard come over the horizon. If Cuba is against them, though, there's more of a live-and-let-live attitude. The pirates usually escape, and it's just a question of whether or not they can get some loot before they go. On occasions when one of them does need to be captured in order to make the Cubans look a little better, it's not very long before kickbacks to the authorities somehow arrange for the prisoner to break out or be let off.

The exception to this rule is whenever American pressure gets a competent and law-abiding Cuban into the field. That unlucky man knows he's on his own; his own force doesn't actually want him to succeed for very long, and tips are leaking out to his quarry at a prodigious rate. The various bands in his area of operation will join together long enough to kill him or otherwise stop his hunt, then the status quo returns. As The Bard, one of the more important bandits, has been quoted as saying: "With the Americans, we get drama, and the Cubans give us comedy. But an honest Cuban sets up a tragedy."

Major Pirates

Javier "El Caribe" Desanto: Desanto styles himself as the heir of the Carib Indians (though he is, in fact, Mexican). His planes are decorated with Indian motifs, and he constantly smokes indigenous-style cigars -- essentially loosely rolled bundles of tobacco leaves.

Desanto's gang, Los Mugres, has seen better days. One of the first major groups of pirates, they're one of the few of the originals left. They're down to just two working planes, his personal SOC Seagull (stolen from a very surprised Cuban

As it diverged from real world history two decades back, aeronautical engineering won't have produced exactly the same models of planes from being developed here. For simplicity's sake, however, the gang descriptions below include actual float planes from the

crew who had only just taken delivery of it from the US) and a Short S.8 Calcutta equipped with two machine guns but used primarily as a "troop carrier" for boarders. In theory he also has an old Aeromarine AS-2 to use, but it's so decrepit that it's usually beached at Saint-Barthelemy and is near useless even when it isn't.

Everett "The Bard" Colby: Reputedly an Oxford don who left England in the wake of the Student Riots in 1933. Now based out of Matthew Town, he is arguably the pirate hold's most famous citizen. Even if his rumored background is wrong, he plays up his reputation as a cultured man.

Colby has five planes at his disposal: his flagship plane *Ophelia* (a Supermarine Walrus), two Saunders Roe Londons armed with Lewis Guns, and two machine-gun-laden CANT Z.506 Herons for fighters. His personal badge is a pair of theater masks in red and white.

Tsubasa the Butcher: A former officer in the IJN Air Service, Fukushima Tsubasa was cashiered after a massacre under his command during the Japanese invasion of Hainan; his superiors didn't mind, but there was an American newspaper photographer on scene. Fukushima drifted around the world for a while before settling in the Caribbean in 1937. Since then, he's carved out a big piece of the raiding action through the bodies of several rivals. Most gang leaders get along with each other, but Tsubasa epitomizes the new breed. Depending on how much force they can command, other leaders are either wary of or fear The Butcher; there is reportedly bad blood between The Bard and The Butcher, but whether that's just peoples' expectation or the truth remains to be seen.

Fukushima's band is called the Kokuryu, a deliberate attempt to call up the image of the Japanese Black Dragon Society -- he wants to leverage the Society's notoriety in the West. While Tsubasa was a member of the real Kokuryukai while he was in Japan, there is no connection between the two organizations. The raiders can bring five planes to bear: an Aichi E13A which is his personal plane, a Kawanishi H6K/97 armed lightly with machine guns but outfitted to carry boarders, 2 Nakajima E8Ns as fighters and air cover, and an old Vickers Vedette that is normally only used when there's a desperate situation near the Kokuryu's base in Matthew Town.

Homeline and Centrum Interaction

The Sky Raiders don't know it, but they live on Kaiserreich-1, a Quantum 6 timeline that is being steadily penetrated by both Homeline and Centrum; it is one of the worlds on the front line of the Infinity War.

Unfortunately for Infinity agents, the Centrum got here first. The UK is -- naturally -- their base, and they've infiltrated it quite completely. Their goal appears to be sparking another war against Germany, a funhouse-mirror version of WWII, and using their technical expertise to redeem their client's failure in the Great War. Other important nations have moles in place, and since all have veered towards totalitarianism in the last 20 years, it's been difficult for Homeline to get a toe-hold in the face of secret police.

While far from ideal in other ways, Kaiserreich-1's Caribbean has been Infinity's choice for their safe house on this line. The near-complete lack of government has made it impossible for Centrum to track down Infinity's operation, though the enemy outtimers are aware that Infinity is in the area. Their main base is on Saint-Barthelemy, where they front themselves as a non-descript pub and fence for stolen goods, the Calico Meg.

Characters

Rear-Admiral Aaron Sapinski: While not the highest-ranking US Coast Guard officer at the Caribbean station, Sapinski is the point of the spear. He's an RDML, which makes him essentially a captain in charge of more than one ship, or a commodore if the Coast Guard had that rank in the 1940s. He commands the USCGC *Kingfisher*, an 80-ton patrol boat, and helps direct the United States' four other patrol boats when they are on a mission.

Sapinski is, from the standpoint of Infinity, worryingly competent. He's a skilled seaman, strict without being

unrealistic, and honest while avoiding fighting unrealistically against the corruption of the Caribbean. Some agents on Kaiserreich-1 are of the opinion that it's just a matter of time before he ends up on Coventry.

The Rear-Admiral is optimistic about most things, and believes in the face of considerable evidence that he will eventually succeed in his mission to keep Caribbean shipping safe. He likes being in an exotic posting, though not too exotic; he's broad-minded, but more in a voyeuristic way than in his own personal habits. He does not drink, or smoke, or even indulge in coffee (which is nearly unheard of on-board ship and a constant source of wonderment to his crew).

He is 55 years old and slim, with very pale skin, gray hair, and gray eyes.

Andre "Skeezix" Plante: A Homeliner, Plante was a fence in Montreal until two years ago when the Surete de Quebec finally caught up with him. Facing a stretch in prison, he was recruited to Infinity for their Kaiserreich-1 operation; his sentence was commuted to five years of exile.

Acquiring a suitably Forties-style nickname upon arrival, Skeezix is the main contact between Infinity and the timeline's sky bandits. He uses his experience as a fence for the Montreal underworld to acquire and re-sell goods lifted from ship cargoes through the Calico Meg; his native French also lets him serve as a liaison with Quebecois rum-runners out of Montreal engaged in "triangle trade" (whiskey to the prohibition US, cash to the Caribbean, rum back to Canada) as well as the locals on Saint-Barthelemy.

On the other hand, while he is an excellent source of information on the bandits, he doesn't necessarily want to pass it along. He considers being a fence to be his occupation, and his accommodation with Infinity to be a necessary nuisance. He will resist giving up useful intelligence on the grounds that he "needs to keep in the pirates' favor." While this is true as far as it goes, it's not the arrangement he has with his employers. Still, he relies on his distance from Homeline control and general usefulness to wiggle out of as many of his obligations as he can.

Andre is tall and of average weight, and aged 33. He has black, curly hair, and brown eyes.

Adventures with the Sky Raiders

What's Mine is Mine: The group have booked passage on a "safe" merchant ship -- armed, and under an American registry -- for some parachronic equipment that needs to be delivered to somewhere around the Caribbean basin. Unbeknownst to them, the captain and some of the crew have been paid off and barratry is in the works. The ship is to be handed over to a pirate gang while at sea, and the conspirators will be able to retire to a beach somewhere. It's an open question as to whether or not the pirates have somehow got wind of the group's cargo, or if there's something else in the hold that's attracted their attention. If they want an answer, they'll have to get it while in motion: the first sign that something is wrong is the ship coming to a stop in the open ocean, and the raiders' planes buzzing in from over the horizon.

The Great Inagua Turkey Shoot: Lake Rosa on Great Inagua is home to a truly enormous number of flamingos. True to form, the bandits of Matthew Town spend a lot of time shooting them for fun. Back in 1932, Madcap Jack and Marie the Hoodoo decided to settle their long-time feud with a mass hunt: the one with the most flamingos shot would win. Since their epic battle, the bandits have taken it on themselves to recreate the event (if not the subsequent surprising wedding). Everyone on the island goes shooting on the 28th of April, with bragging rights as the prize.

The Big Bang: In their role as fences, Infinity's operation in Saint-Barthelemy has stumbled across a major intelligence coup. A minor pirate band has brought in a cargo of refined weapons-grade uranium. This presents a pretty problem: no-one on Kaiserreich-1 knows about nuclear fission weapons, or so it was supposed. The only likely suspect would be Centrum, but introducing nuclear weapons runs counter to everything they do when subverting a timeline. But if it's not them, then who? This is not to mention "how?" or "why?"

Amber Alert: Tsubasa the Butcher has made a daring night raid on Charlotte Amalie, landing on the east coast of the island and striking across land to kidnap Rear-Admiral Sapinski's young daughter. His motivations are uncertain -- some think he's trying to stir up the Admiral to destroy The Butcher's rivals in the search for young Wendy, while

relying on his own ability to weather the storm.

In any case, the crime has offended several old-school air pirates and they're in on the hunt for the girl, offering a truce and their help to the distraught Coast Guard man. Infinity thinks it wise to chip in, carefully; too much glare of publicity might uncover their secret.

Treasure Island: Legend has it that Henri Christophe, 19th-century dictator of nearby Haiti, buried his fortune on the northwest point of Great Inagua. It's been sought so many times it's become a joke, and most are convinced it's just a story. But now troubling rumors are flying that a minor gang, the Wolves of Providence, have turned up a map or some other piece of information leading them to the cache. A free-for-all is underway for it, even though most at least suspect a trap of some sort. Trap or not, most of the pirate leaders are romantics at heart.

"Human Hair. From My Back.": Somehow, the adventurers end up stranded on a deserted island, possibly in the aftermath of "What's Mine Is Mine," above. There's little food and no water, and no likely prospect of a rescue.

"Served Cold, Hot, Whatever -- I Just Want Revenge": While on a mission some way away from Saint-Barthelemy, the agents discover that they are the target of a vendetta by one of the main groups of sky raiders, who have been cheated by Skeezix Plante. They can satisfy the raiders by either dying the death of dogs or, should that fail to appeal, somehow getting back to base, discovering that the fence has sold on the object of contention, and engage in another mission (dogged by the pirates) to retrieve it and make amends.

In Nomine Voodoo

by Eric Funk

"My friend the witch doctor, he taught me what to do"
-- Ross Bagdaserian, Jr., *Witch Doctor*

This Pyramid article is intended to show how Vodoun shamans and practitioners can be inserted into an *In Nomine* campaign. Beginning with power investiture in humans, it describes how the loas and creatures from *GURPS Voodoo* can be compatible with *In Nomine*'s ethereals, ghosts, and "monsters." Finally, it gives suggestions on how celestials might stack up against these powers. Following the advice on page 7 of *GURPS Voodoo,* this text will refer to the general system of beliefs as "voodoo."

This crossover tries not to break *In Nomine's* canon but there are no rules for partial possessions or Voodoo Initiations. While *GURPS Voodoo* adds the four new "factions" from the Shadow War (Voodoo cults, Loa Lodges, dark cults and loa, and chaotic devourers) to the *In Nomine* setting, the canon attitudes of the Superiors will remain as described in the books. Comments about opinions exist in this article solely as adventure hooks. Only the relative power of ethereals changes.

There are many parallels between *In Nomine* and *GURPS Voodoo* beyond the invisible war behind an otherwise mundane, contemporary setting. For example, in *In Nomine* most people do not meet their ultimate destiny or fate in their lifetime, and thus reincarnate. Reincarnation plays an important part in the world of the Shadow War (see pages 23 and 58). In *In Nomine*, voodoo ("voudon") is defined as a semi-divine religion with some Essence going to divine destinations, and some to ethereal ones (see the *In Nomine Game Master's Guide,* page 65). The dark lodges send Essence to the infernal side of divine religions with ritual murder and torture (see *GURPS Voodoo,* page 38). The *loas* are known as powerful spirits who are not specifically good nor evil. In *In Nomine*, this perfectly fits the conception of ethereal beings and ghosts. Ghosts are somewhat important to the Voodoo setting, and have their place in *In Nomine* as well as remnants (their celestial counterparts). Many loa, spirit guides, and troublemakers are specters (see *GURPS Voodoo* page 53; *Corporeal Player's Guide,* page 80; and *Liber Umbrarum*).

Power Investiture in Humans

"You remind me of the babe
What babe? The babe with the power
What power? Power of voodoo"
-- David Bowie, *Labyrinth*

Initiation in voodoo cults, lodges, and followings of dark beings uses similar mechanics, even if the trappings and rituals appear different. The process is a combination of Sorcerer (exorcist) and Pagan Dream Soldier (see the *Corporeal Player's Guide*, pages 65 and 71; and *GURPS In Nomine,* page 27).

In all cases, the overall process proceeds as follows:

1. The Initiate is introduced by a "cabal" to the ethereral being to see if the candidate has the potential for 6 Forces.
2. If so, then the subject is Awakened and Initiated, and can begin to learn Corporeal Songs (see the *Corporeal Player's Guide* pages 28, 45, and 70).
3. Part-way in the journey the incumbent receives a Partial Ethereal Connection (as per a "Partial Celestial Connection," but with powerful ethereal beings) to contact the ethereal on their own. They can now be empowered ("possessed") by the being (see the *Corporeal Player's Guide* p. 28).
4. As a full member, an initiate is granted the full Ethereal Connection, and can perform Ethereal Songs.

There are 10 known levels of Initiation (see *GURPS Voodoo,* pages 58-62). While the bonuses from the paths quickly

add up such that a 10th level Initiate gains from 6 to 9 Forces (bringing him up to 11 to 15), this is tempered by the fact that each level of Initiation posses four times fewer individuals as the rank below it. It is a mere rumor that there are more than two dozen 9th level Initiates in the world, to say nothing of the few elusive 10th level Adepts. Most PCs will be uninitiated to Fourth level Initiates with 5 to 8 Forces, well below the levels of a starting celestial. Initiation levels proceeds as follows:

1. Sixth Force, granting Symphonic Awareness, Essence Control for skills; Optional: Autotrance.
2. +2 Charisma (Special); Optional: Songs and sorcerous rituals to communicate with spirits, +1 Perception, Partial Ethereal Connection*
3. +1 Celestial Force†; Optional: Servant/2, Metabolism Control/6
4. +1 Celestial Force; Optional: +1 Corporeal Force, Ethereal Connection*
5. +1 Ethereal Force, +1 Charisma (Special); Optional: Channel Spirit, Faith Healing, +1 Charisma, Celestial Form, auto-destiny
6. Song Mastery; Optional: +1 Corporeal Force, +1 Charisma (Awe)
7. Three ethereal Servants at level 4; Optional: +1 Corporeal Force
8. Exorcism at will; Optional: +1 Celestial Force
9. Primal Luck, +3 Charisma (Awe, ethereal spirits only), Intimidation/6 (vs. ethereal spirits only), Agility/6 (vs. mundanes)
10. +2 Celestial Forces, Seraph of Flowers (vs. mundanes only), Charisma +2 (Awe).

* Optional at this level of initiation, but required later.

† Mortal humans (and quite probably immortal ones; see the Power of Fives) may only have 5 Forces per realm, for a total of 15; if the maximum in a realm is reached via Initiation, the player chooses which other realm the Force will go to. (A GM may wish to undo the errata and allow humans to posthumously be able to attain 18 Forces in all, 6 per realm.)

The ritual magic from *GURPS Voodoo* can be represented as Songs with different training. The longer voodoo rituals can be explained as different normal Song performances in that most of the time the voodoo practitioners take extra time for skill (see *In Nomine,* page 47).

Loas and Guardian Spirits (pp. VO87-93)

"You make me wanna break the laws of time and space"
-- "Weird Al" Yankovic, *You Make Me*

Loas are simply old ghosts and powerful ethereal beings in *In Nomine.* They can invest power into mortals. The living humans' belief in the fact of their power grants them Essence through rituals (similar to the Worship Rites from *Corporeal Player's Guide*, page 67). To complicate matters, the belief in these non-divine powerful entities spawns ethereals who believe themselves to be these ghosts, and may replace their inceptors.

Each ethereal loa has its own threads that control its influence. The most powerful also possess Primal affinities (see the *Ethereal Player's Guide,* in particular page 50). In addition, the Loa confronted by the Host appeal to their sense of honor that they are not manifesting on the corporeal plane, but simply aiding humans to purge murderous In-Betweeners and Devourers which would prey on their people. The ghostly loa present a new challenge as the "mortals" can possess up to 18 Forces, and still activate dissonance conditions of some Choirs and Bands.

Possession

A major aspect of human interactions involves channeling other beings' power to aid in supernatural confrontations. Initiates first learn to channel the raw essence of a being, during which time they must engage in a contest of Will each round in order to decide what to do. Usually, the possessor will attack a summoner's enemies first, but there are always exceptions. Most possessions increase Strength. In *In Nomine,* this also increases Body Hits. Lost Hits of any sort will

be taken from the possessing entity before its human host suffers any damage. This can allow a human to leave a dangerous situation unscathed . . .

The Mayabe are primitive -- but often potent -- ethereals which are officially seen as tools by most of the cults and lodges. Secretly, they are ever gaining in power in the organizations. They are one of the problems the celestial generals see, even if the ethereals are usually isolated (see **GURPS Voodoo,** pages 2 and 93-95). Lodges are American street gangs with voodoo training. They can conflict with, or usurp some of David's gangs (see pages 96-98).

Voodoo's Nonhumans in *In Nomine*

The In-Betweeners from **Voodoo** (see pages 38 and 98-102) can be described as Gorgons (mortal halfbreeds with an ethereal parent) or ethereals (see page 38 and the ***Corporeal Player's Guide***). Neither have very good reputations with Judgement or the Game. In-Betweeners with multiple corporeal forms are likely "pureblood" ethereals with multiple Vessels, whereas those without multiple vessels might just make do with the Celestial Song of Form. Some In-Betweeners can be reasoned with, and thus cannot be smote out of hand. Many lodges accept in-betweeners as full members. Sane lodges only accept Cat People into their fold, as all the other common "races" seem to require ritually killing humans as part of their nature.

Voodoo's Monsters in *In Nomine*

They are, in short, darkness and fear given form. *Mayabe* and *Devourers* are primal desires beyond the call of nature into mankind's darkest passions. The Heavenly forces and the Game want this connection cut off. Devourers are insidious powers to the extent that loas, angels, and demons might team up for a moment.

Saminga simply seeks to shorten life spans with corporeal or soul-death, if possible. For the average person, corporeal death forces reincarnation. Baal encourages this, as those who do not seem likely to meet their fate will get a chance to do worse. The powerful ethereals which Force-strip humans to nothing rob the celestials of a valuable resource -- Essence. If the souls are disbanded before reaching their final rest, then the celestial economy is hurt. Angels will also be morally outraged. This is part of the justification of subtle involvement in the human organizations, to both sides of the War, as opposed to just wading in with swords.

There are primal, predatory creatures which do not reason, only hunt. The worst of these are called devourers, terrifying many-Force ethereals on par with ancient ethereal gods and Word-bound Seneschals. Sent out by the hundreds, sendlings are their eyes and ears. These horrors are one of the few things which can unite voodoo shaman, lodge member, angel and demon together for a common cause -- for a moment. Devourers always have a vessel/6, and 12+ personal Forces (see pages 102-103, and page 68 of the ***Ethereal Player's Guide***).

Celestial Operations

"Some roads will get you to heaven
Some roads will wear down your shoes
Some roads you know will be hell-bound"
-- Gowan, *Soul's Road*

In general, the Archangels and Demon Princes are reacting to voodoo as a pagan cult, and trying to dismantle it from within in addition to overt hunting of the ethereal influences in the Marches. In general, both sides are reacting in generally the same way, with some Superiors aiming to restrict ethereals to the Marches, and others seek to hunt down and dissipate any who dare set foot on the corporeal plane. The fact that Divine Essence is flowing in because of this religion is troublesome.

Those ethereals who merely seek influence on the corporeal plane will be judged based on their merits in the Marches. The groups' *modi operandi* are also similar in that over the eons, the "celestial" branch of voodoo have aimed to make

their images more "angelic"/"demonic" to channel more and more Essence to the celestial pool. They emphasize that the Loa are merely agents for a single "supreme being."

This is complicated by the fact that many loa are actually human souls, and belief Essence creates ethereals in the Marches which will grow until they can replace the originator or support his cause. Many of the relatively benign loa and voodoo spirits can be left alone for now, as they are low priority targets who will serve as a good buffer against the more dangerous, predatory spirits, such as mayambe and devourers.

One edge that celestials will always have over ethereals is their ability to grant Celestial Songs. Celestials can perform the Song of Affinity on a linked human to find their Loa. Celestial resonances, especially those of Mercurians, could pick up the otherworldy connections and possibly resonate completely on the ethereal (as per detecting Shedim). Kyriotates and Shedim suggest that their human allies take mild hallucinogens combined with suggestions about what they "might" see before revealing their presence. On the other hand, ethereals can have any sort of "non-living" vessels (see page 68 of the *Ethereal Player's Guide*).

Revealing the War to the Shadow War

In the end, many voodoo spirits and loas can be negotiated with, and accept the role of keeping the *mayombe* back. Celestial intervention is a mixed blessing for a number of pantheons. Some can accept the constraints that come with aid, while others would rather strike out alone. Then comes the work of convincing the humans they work with . . . In the end, it might be best to keep the War secret from those involved in the Shadow War.

Divine

Several Archangels will hesitate to kill a human just to kill an ethereal. Note that there is an "unspoken agreement with Heaven (*The Marches*, p. 104)" and "Laurence's angels generally ignore [these spirits], as long as they behave" (p. 58 and 65, respectively). There is a rumor going around the heavenly ranks that it was the infernals that started the voodoo belief to channel Essence away from Heaven.

Infernal

Voodoo's "flesh eater" spirits are, to some extent, under the sway of Baal and Beleth, but not to the extent that they would lead the Host to believe. Beleth revels in the terror they inspire and create. Thus, Beleth restricts her aid to the corporeal efforts to a minimum, focusing her hunts only on those terrors which kill the quickest. She encourages those ethereals which kill slowly while other humans are watching. Most of the Princes (and to some extent, Jordi) are trying to find some uses for these lesser dark beings of chaos, while the "soul-eaters" are universally hated, at least officially. Unable to completely destroy them, the armies of Hell have resorted to simply directing them to prey on the populace.

Fate (through Sorcery) is fighting with Nightmares about who should control the rituals to summon ethereals. Media is trying to discredit the ethereal part of this battle between good and evil, but unsolved death means ratings, man! Saminga's minions teeter between the extremes of "control these minions of death" and jealousy at their efficiency. Saminga himself remains uninterested in matters ethereal, and is only interested in results. Saminga believes ethereals to be of no consequence, as they are not alive. Other factions model deadly Vessels after them . . . inspiring more nightmares, some of which break free . . . There is a rumor going around the infernal ranks that it was the angels that started the voodoo belief to channel Essence away from Hell.

Neutrals

Some voodoo priests know of spirits than can never be forcibly summoned or mastered (angels) as well as insidious spirits who can never be trusted (infernals, including Habbalite "angels"), but can be bargained with. Just as very few humans are indoctrinated as celestial soldiers or Soldiers, a very few Initiates might be found worthy or pliable enough

to be inducted into the War. A carrot-and-stick approach that might work involves the Partial and Full Celestial Connection offered by celestial Superiors. This connection allows the Initiate Soldier to perform the coveted Celestial Songs, while allowing the Superior to keep an eye on them. It can even be revoked as punishment.

Campaigns

"Weeee dooo vooodooo . . . "
-- Fraggle Rock, Season 5

The two **Voodoo** campaign settings that will blend most easily into the **In Nomine** setting are the Spirit Warrior campaign (see page 117) and Secret Master campaign (see page 118).

Celestial Parties

Celestials have powers similar to mid-level Initiates, but will still be surprised to encounter humans with similar power and Force levels. Warrior celestials might even be physically out-matched by human Spirit Warriors! The first step will be to find out how deep the rabbit hole goes, to discover the number of people affected by the voodoo cults and loa lodges. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands in each major city. The heroes can encounter a string of murders related to a certain social club, and just as they start to narrow it down, a man sends a taped confession, and is found gagged at home. Then, the PCs encounter something which looks like the man they saw on TV just a minute ago. Was he a skin changer? Are the attacks by ethereal "demon-dogs" somehow related to that crazy old man with the shrunken head-on-a-stick? How will PCs react to a second War going on on the Earth? All the occult trappings lead deeper into the realm of voodoo. Next comes confrontation with chaotic evil forces, even moreso than the mad forces of Belial. The Mayombe want destruction, and don't care about the War or cover. It is the voodoo cults and lodges who cover up for them, just as angels often cover up for infernal operations.

Power Invested in Celestials

GMs might allow celestials to receive Initiation, but their superiors will likely be unhappy about their minions receiving Forces from mere ethereals or humans. However, it could be a path for Renegades or Outcasts to progress quickly.

Ethereal Campaigns

Similar to the Secret Master campaign (page 118), the PCs can be guardian spirits or Loas trying to advise and protect their own group, or separate groups, of humans. They must protect them from devourers, mayombe, opposing groups, and . . . unknown spirits (angels and demons).

Introductory Adventures

Under the Wrong Stars: The adventure begins as a dependent of the PCs (or their patron) has a bout of bad luck. When passing by to cheer him up, a friend who is not supposed to know of the War suggests that a curse is upon the dependent. A Song of Plagues is identified as being in effect on the dependent by using an experimental Forceprinter or some Aura Glasses (see **Liber Reliquarum,**, pages 51 and 62).

By the Power Invested in Me: The celestials need to rescue a Kyriotate (or Shedite) from a "voodoo cult." He went undercover, but has not checked in. The voodoo group has a Force Catcher (**Liber Reliquarum,** page 61). They describe it as a net to catch enemy spirits, such as dark loa and mayombe.

Absolutely: A nearby Cherub (or Djinn) is dissonant. He is becoming corrupted by the power of guiding a voodoo group and has been abusing his Choir and Superior's Dissonance Conditions. Having worked his way into the social

circle, he is actually the power behind their leader's abilities. He was attuned to the leader of the loa group, and the load is taking its toil.

Problem's Clearing: A Cherub/Djinn in the area is dissonant. An experimental Lightning-Destiny (or Technology-Fate) device that happened to be connected to the attuned at the time reports that the soul vanished without leaving the corporeal plane. As a case that had qualified for their destiny/fate, they wanted to track its progress to the celestial realm. Tech teams have been able to locate the last point to within a few city blocks. The heroes must find the source and stop it before another valuable resource disappears. Are the heroes prepared for the voodoo quarter, and possibly a devourer behind it all?

Dark Variance

What if voodoo is an entirely demonic project, headed by Beleth, Saminga, Belial, and Kobal? It was started as mockery of Catholicism so beloved by Gabriel and Dominic (which drew in Kobal), but elements of paganism crept in as Beleth's ethereals became involved.

The neutrality of "loa" is a lie: there are too many ways to harm people, and even evil creatures can heal someone sometimes, if it suits some sinister purpose. The role of ethereals is secondary -- after the Purity Crusades there would not be many surviving ethereal spirits powerful enough to play the roles of loa. Devourers are actually large puppets for celestials -- often Calabim of Belial might have their forms recast.

Benefits to this treatment are many. The first is that "loa" may have simple Roles -- they don't hide the fact that they are supernatural, and thus are in character. The voodoo cult provides a steady flow of Essence through the mundanes' rituals for those who need it. Finally, certain Discord (such as Murderous) is tolerated or even encouraged in the participating celestials, and thus can be a dumping ground for the most dangerous individuals.

Possession

Loas (*Voodoo,* pages 87-93)

- Legba: +10 Strength, +4 Damage Resistance, and one of Lockpicking/6, Electronics/6, or Computer Hacking/6.
- Danballa: +3 Strength, +2 Agility, +4 Precision, Climbing/2, Swimming/2, -1 to Voice-related activities, such as Songs.
- Obotala: +2 Strength, +2 Damage Resistance, Must only wear white.
- Chango: +5 Strength, +2 Agility, +2 Precision, +4 Damage Resistance, Immune to Fire, Bad Temper
- Oggun: +5 Strength, +2 Agility, +2 Precision, +2 Perception, +7 Damage Resistance, Weapon/6, Dodge/2
- Ochosi: +3 Strength, +1 Agility, +1 Precision, +4 Damage Resistance, +2 Perception, Tracking/4, Stealth/4, Survival (All)/3, Swimming/4, Throwing/6.
- Baron Samedi, Baron Cemetari, Captain Zombi: +5 Strength, +1 Precision, Toughness/2, +5 Damage Resistance

Mayabe (pages 93-95)

- Zarabanda: +5 Strength, +1 Agility, +1 Precision, Toughness/1, +4 Damage Resistance, -1 Intelligence, -1 Perception, -1 Will, Weapon/4, Bad Temper, Berserk.
- Ikku (Death): +3 Strength, +1 Agility, +1 Precision, +4 Damage Resistance, Stealth/4, Escape/4, Knife/4, Sadism, Sacrifice human once/mth.
- Mbua: +5 Strength, +2 Agility, +2 Precision, +1 Perception, Toughness/3, +5 Damage Resistance, Bloodthirsty, Sadism, Cannibalism.
- Kiyumbe: +3 Strength, +2 Damage Resistance, (Berserk)
- Nkisi: +3 Strength, +1 Agility, Toughness/1, Spirit always in control.

Lodges (see pages 96-98)

- Pan: +1 Strength, +2 Agility, +2 Precision, Toughness/1, +1 Damage Resistance, Charisma +2, Sex Appeal/4, Carousing/4, Musical Instrument (Flute)/4
- Animae: +2 Strength, +1 Agility, +1 Precision,
- Daemons: +2 Strength, +1 Agility, +1 Precision, Toughness/1
- Genii: +3 Strength, +1 Agility, +1 Precision, Toughness/2

Nonhumans in *In Nomine*

In-Betweeners (see pages 98-102)

- Bird People: +1 Corporeal Force, +1 Strength, +1 Ethereal Force, Dodge/1, Toughness/1 - Vessels: human, man-bird - must kill a human every week
- Cat People: +1 Corporeal Force, +1 Ethereal Force, Dodge/4, Night Vision, Corpus (Claws/2, Teeth/1) - Vessels: human, cat, cat-man
- Skin Changers: +2 Corporeal Forces, +1 Ethereal Force, +1 Celestial Force, Toughness/2, 3rd level Initiate, Song of Form/6 or cheap, flawed Vessels (see the *Ethereal Player's Guide*, p. 68-69), Murder Addiciton
- Snake People: +1 Corporeal Force, +2 Strength, + 1 Precision, Toughness/1, 3rd level Initiate, True form with illusion, murder addiction
- The Tontons Makouts: +2 Corporeal Forces, +4 Strength, +1 Precision, Toughness/2, Damage Resistance +2, Vessels: /6, murder addiction

Monsters in *In Nomine* (see pages 93-98)

Mayabe

- Zarabanda (Minor) Corporeal 3 Strength 8 Agility 2; Ethereal 5 Precision 5 Intelligence 2; Celestial 2 Will 6 Perception 5; Habbalite Resonance.
- Ikku (Minor) Corporeal 3 Strength 6 Agility 6; Ethereal 1 Precision 3 Intelligence 3; Celestial 3 Will 6 Perception 6; Song of Plagues (All)/3.
- Mbua (Minor) Corporeal 3 Strength 8 Agility 6; Ethereal 3 Precision 6 Intelligence 6; Celestial 3 Will 7 Perception 7.
- Kiyumbe Corporeal 3 Strength 7 Agility 6; Ethereal 1 Precision 2 Intelligence 2; Celestial 2 Will 4 Perception 4; Habbalite Resonance.
- Nkisi Corporeal 3 Strength 8 Agility 7; Ethereal 3 Precision 6 Intelligence 6; Celestial 3 Will 6 Perception 6

Lodges

- Animae Corporeal 3 Strength 6 Agility 6; Ethereal 3 Precision 6 Intelligence 6; Celestial 3 Will 7 Perception 7
- Daemons Corporeal 3 Strength 9 Agility 7; Ethereal 2 Precision 4 Intelligence 4; Celestial 2 Will 5 Perception 5
- Genii Corporeal 3 Strength 6 Agility 6; Ethereal 3 Precision 7 Intelligence 7; Celestial 3 Will 7 Perception 7
- Demiurge (Minor Manifestation) Corporeal 3 Strength 7 Agility 5; Ethereal 3 Precision 6 Intelligence 6; Celestial 3 Will 6 Perception 6

Devourers (see pages 102-103)

- Devourer (Minor Manifestation) Corporeal 4 Strength 12 Agility 5; Ethereal 3 Precision 5 Intelligence 7; Celestial 5 Will 10 Perception 10; Vessel/6+
- Sendlings Corporeal 2 Strength 7 Agility 3; Ethereal * Precision * Intelligence *; Celestial * Will * Perception * , Vessel/2,

* As that of Devourer

References and Links

Pyramid

- "Golden Fire Seals" by Elizabeth McCoy
- "Lost Souls" by Kris Overstreet

e23

- Liber Umbrarum

* * *

Special thanks to Elizabeth McCoy and Max Belnakov for facing my fears.

Pyramid Review

Mother of All Treasure Tables (for *d20 System*)

Published by [Necromancer Games](#)

Written by Christopher A. Field, K. H. Keeler, Rodney Lucas, John Walsh, Steve Honeywell, Martin Ralya, Deborah Balsam, Darren Pearce, Daniel M. Brakhage, & Vicki Potter

160-page b&w softcover; $27.99
[160-page PDF](#); **$19.99**

Some of the objects in my possession that I consider "treasures" include:

a holographic representation of *X-Men #1* that was a retailer incentive in the early 1990s a copy of the *Mystery Science Theater 3000 Movie* DVD a framed display of six sequential $2 bills from the year they were introduced into circulation a cup full of modern $1 coins of various types (Susan B. Anthonys, Sacagaweas, and George Washingtons) a collection of various Infocom boxes, including the collectible "feelies" my great-grandfather's pocket watch, given to him for decades of service to the railroads

All told, I suspect these items would probably be worth about $500 or so. However, the mere listing of these items is more evocative and, frankly, interesting than saying "I have $500 lying around," or even, "I have stuff worth $500 lying around."

This is the central premise behind the ***Mother of All Treasure Tables,*** a supplement designed as an aid for ***d20 System*** campaigns but useful for any low-fantasy (or greater) setting where heroes expect to get paid by taking the loot of their fallen foes. The book is divided into sections according to value: 10 gold pieces, 50 gold pieces, 100 gold pieces, and so on, up to 50,000 gold pieces and "epic" treasure. (Actually, all sections have some margin of error, so rolling on the 10,000-gold-piece table results in entries that range from 9,800 gp to 10,200 gp.) These sections are also given descriptions for what the assumption was to get to that level of wealth; for example, the 10-gold-piece chapter is subtitled "What has it got in its pockets?", while the 100-gold-piece section is given the description, "Do I really want to cart this with me?"

Each section then consists entirely of a random table devoted to describing what the person finds at that level of value. Entries explain what is obvious or immediately noteworthy about a pile of loot, with italicized bracketed asides providing more information (such as value, object specifics, and so forth). Although this book is devoted solely to mundane treasures (no magic items here), these tables are nevertheless fascinating and offer creative and detailed descriptions for what the person might find. And these descriptions are *detailed;* there are no instances of, say, an entry on the 1,000-gold-piece table consisting solely of, "You find a diamond ring worth 1,000 gold pieces." No, even the less valuable items are chock full of bits. For example, here's one of the 100 possibilities from the "500 gold piece" section:

> You find a canvas sack *[1 sp]* holding two items. The first is a flat, rectangular wooden box *[2 gp]*, which is closed with a hasp but not locked. Inside, the box is lined with green velvet and contains a set of steel cutlery with knives, forks, spoons and serving spoons, six of each. The handles are inlaid with mother of pearl and the blades of the knives bear the hallmark of a well-known steel foundry *[cutlery, 300 gp]*. Tucked into one side of the box is a green leather bag *[2 gp]* and inside it is a silver pot of ink. The ink is still usable and the pot is inscribed with images of fern leaves *[75 gp]*. As well as the inkpot, the bag

contains a tiny set of weighing scales made from brass and suitable for measuring the weights of spices *[25 gp]*. The second item in the canvas sack is a box made from walnut wood with a tiny statue of a fairy on top. *[This is a music box, and the statue rotates as the clockwork mechanism plays a pretty tune; total 100 gp]*. *[Total 504.1 gp]*

The book wisely limits its scope somewhat according to how often it's expected that adventurers will encounter such treasures. For example, the 10-gold-piece and 50-gold-piece chapters are 100-entry tables, since it seems quite likely that adventurers would get loot worth those amounts dozens of times. However, the 10,000-gold-piece section has only 50 entries, and the 30,000-gold-piece section has a mere 20. Some might be bothered by this; however, if a gaming group ever needs more than 10 epic treasure piles (each worth more than 100,000 gold pieces), then they probably won't mind if they get some duplicate unique troves.

The Mother of All Treasure Tables feels well researched and gives an air of its authors having put considerable thought into each entry. For example, it mentions that the inspiration of one entry was the Terracotta Army of Xian and provides advice for how to adapt that entry to other cultures and conditions.

The biggest use that *The Mother of All Treasure Tables* has is in giving an excellent means of allowing games to step off the "pile of loot" rat race. Without creativity, it's difficult to differentiate between various treasures worth the same rough amount, and finding a second pile of 500 gold coins isn't anywhere near as exciting as finding the first. But this book helps stave off the desire to escalate by offering numerous options at the same values. And these entries are much more evocative (and, in many instances, problematic) than piles of cash; after all, what would the heroes do with a silk parasol, a heavy bed and its solid silver bedposts, or a set of six large hoops in various metals (actually rings sized for a giant)? Time and again, reading these entries should spark further adventure possibilities all by themselves.

If this book has any problems, they are mostly inherent in the conceit of the piece itself. Many of the entries -- especially in the more expensive latter sections of the book -- are huge, taking up a half-page each or more, and would take a while to read to a gaming group. It's a special kind of gamer who has need for the kind of detail included in these inverse shopping lists. In addition, the random nature of tables may require the DM to mark off used sections; since each trove is unique and highly focused, it would be obvious if a duplicate were rolled.

Because of the nature of these descriptions, some results require rerolling or modification. For example, killing a critter with lots of expensive loot in a 10'×10' room might yield random treasure consisting of a cavernous vault filled with statues and tapestries, and heroes might wonder how a seemingly unintelligent monster acquired something like an ornate death mask covering a crystal skull bearing the name "Annalisa."

But for those gaming groups with a desire to go beyond enumerated piles of coins and humdrum random jewelry, this book is top-notch. It feels just like the kind of article you'd find in a classic *Best of Dragon* compilation, only expanded to 154 pages. If you're part of a group who would find a product like this useful, the *Mother of All Treasure Tables* delivers exactly what you want, and it does it with class and style.

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Pick

Spirit of the Century: A Pulp Pick-Up Role-Playing Game

Published By **[Evil Hat Productions](#)**

Written By Rob Donoghue, Fred Hicks, & Leonard Balsera

Illustrated By Christian N. St. Pierre

420-page b&w hardcover; $50
420-page b&w softcover; $30
16mb Zipped File Containing Two 9Mb PDF Documents, One in Portrait Format, One in Landscape Format; $15

It is time to stand up and do what is right. The year is 1922, and Doctor Methuselah's time-zeppelins assemble in the skies over Europe to tear open a path to a new future. Gorilla Khan, conqueror of Atlantis, has armies ready to take Africa. Der Blitzmann, scientist gone awry, commands the forces of electricity to nefarious ends. The Great War is over, and even as the Allies struggle to recover, dark forces threaten to plunge the world back into conflict.

Between these dark forces and the world stand the Centurions, the inner circle of the quietly influential and philanthropic Century Club. Born on January 1st, 1901, each Centurion is an exceptional person: long-lived, and capable of actions nearly impossible for the ordinary man in the street. Each player takes the role of a Centurion.

This is the simple, broad set up for *Spirit of the Century,* arguably the best Pulp Action RPG since the Origins-Award-winning ***[Adventure!](#)***, and regarded by many, including *Adventure!*'s co-designer Bruce Baugh, as being even better. And this in a year when four Pulp genre RPGs bucked the ongoing trend of re-designed nostalgia titles. Its Century Club set up device allows the genre's varied character types to come together. So it does the Gadget Guy, the Gentleman Criminal, the Junglelord, the Man of Mystery, and the Primitive just as it can do the Two-Fisted Pilot.

For this, *Spirit of the Century* employs Evil Hat's house mechanics, the Fate system, a ***[Fudge](#)*** variant wherein Fate points play a vital role. They are spent to gain a bonus to a roll, invoke a character Aspect and bring it into play, tag another character or location related Aspect to bring it into play, power a Stunt, or to make a Declaration, adding some small element to the story. The Fate system also ditches traditional attributes, instead defining characters by skills, Aspects, and Stunts.

Skills are what a character can do, and are self-explanatory. Stunts enable a Centurion to push the envelope of an associated skill. For example, with the Drive skill, an ace wheelman can drive something better with the "Custom Ride" or "Prototype Car" Stunts, or maneuver more easily with "Defensive Driving," "One Hand on the Wheel," or "Turn on a Dime." Amusingly, "Unsafe at any Speed" doubles the damage a car does to the surrounding environment, being as much a bane as a bonus. With "Car Mechanic," the Drive skill can substitute for the Engineering skill, allowing a driver to specialize in car mechanics. Many Stunts have prerequisites, and many follow this divide between being innate abilities or object based.

Aspects are more difficult to quantify, more akin to Advantages, but can be a relationship, a catch-phrase, a description, a possession, and can be negative or positive. Examples might be, "I Know a Guy," "Betsy, my faithful .45," "I've got your back," "Hellbent," and so on. Players are positively encouraged to take some negative Aspects, as they not only make a story interesting, but by Compelling them into play, a player earns Fate points. In play, Aspects are used by both GM and players to get the characters interacting with each other and their locations, driving both

game and story forward, by getting the Centurions into and out of situations. How each Aspect operates must be worked out between player and GM, for none are defined, but fundamentally, no Aspect can be boring.

Character creation involves 15 skills, five Stunts, and 10 Aspects. A Centurion possesses one Superb rated skill, two Great, three Good, four Fair, and five Average. Beyond the mere numbers, a Centurion needs a slick name, some background, and a motivation. Centurion creation also involves describing the pulp novels he has starred in, and the guest roles taken in the novels of other Centurions, which further brings the characters together.

To undertake an action, a player rolls 4dF (four Fudge dice) against a target difficulty, figuring appropriate skills, Stunts, and Aspects. Match the target and a player succeeds, but a better result generates Shifts, and Shifts can be spent to decrease a task's time, or to improve its quality or subtlety.

In combat, Shifts represent damage, inflicted as Stress and marked off a character's Health track for physical damage, and his Composure track for mental or social damage. Stress damage is transitory, usually lasting a scene, but suffer too much, and a character is Taken Out, his immediate fate decided by his opponent. Alternatively, a character can take a Consequence instead of Stress, the Consequence acting as a temporary Aspect that can be invoked or tagged. In this way, combat in Spirit of the Century emphasizes its effects not the numbers.

Of course, gadgets are part of the genre, and *Spirit of the Century* handles them with aplomb. The Engineering skill enables a character to build and modify devices, while Stunts like Prototype Aircraft, Prototype Car, Personal Gadget, and Universal Gadget let Centurions have the signature devices so beloved of the genre. Nor does a gadget's every function need defining before play, instead described as needed during play, and some Stunts allow gadget functions to change session to session. Magical artifacts are built in a similar fashion, but Magic does not figure greatly in Spirit of the Century, which emphasizes the wonders of science. The Mysteries skill handles all things occult, including the construction of magical artifacts, and is backed up with Stunts like Fortuneteller, Psychic, Mesmerist, and Spirit Companion. Centurions wanting something flashier need to construct artifacts rather than possessing innate wizardry.

Spirit of the Century devotes much of its page count to explaining how Stunts and skills work and can be used in play under various conditions. The advice boils down to keeping the game action orientated, its tone optimistic, and to embrace the wonders of science. Beyond these basics, the advice given as "Tips and Tricks" is nothing short of excellent. It discusses the elements of the Pulp adventure -- the dangers, certain Doom, plot twists, the final showdown, and the post-showdown breakneck escape; how to handle deathtraps, information, color, and so on; even right down to, "When all else fails, send in the Ninjas." It's all very sound advice, but also discussed is one further feature inherent to *Spirit of the Centur:.* it's designed as a "pickup game."

Of course, *Spirit of the Century* can be run like any other RPG, but it is written to help the GM improvise and then run, and the players roleplay, an adventure at short notice. It is possible to create characters during play, defining and setting character attributes as needed. Indeed, one section gives pickup Stunt packages that can help define a Centurion quickly and easily. The GM is provided with a quick and dirty guide to the Pulp Era and how it might be in his game, plus a sample scenario that pits the Centurions up against the game's signature foes.

Given that *Spirit of the Century* is designed as a pickup game with a revolving cast, it is not intended for long-term character advancement through the traditional method of experience points. Except for Fate point rewards, advancement if any, is meant to be en masse, whether as rare skill improvement, additional Aspects or Stunts, or shuffling skills, Aspects, and Stunts around. This latter represents character change if not growth.

Physically, *Spirit of the Century* is serviceable, with sparse, but decent artwork. However, the writing never fails to engage, with advice and examples aplenty. It may be 422 pages long, but *Spirit of the Century* is a pleasure throughout.

Although the game and its settings and secrets are set in 1922, there is nothing to stop a GM from advancing its timeframe or dropping the slight setting all together. The 1930s are an obvious choice, but the game would work as well in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Further, the mechanics might be tweaked to run other Pulp-style genres, from Space Opera to Swords & Sorcery fantasy with just a little thought and some name changes.

As a gamer, I have wanted (among various others) three things. A good Pulp Sci-Fi RPG. A good pulp RPG. A Pulp version of **_Feng Shui._** So far, the first is yet to appear, and the third is unlikely, but in *Spirit of the Century,* I have the good Pulp RPG. And while its simplicity and shtick-like Stunts make *Spirit of the Century* feel like both Pulp and *Feng Shui,* the Aspect mechanics both feel Pulp-like and -- if used as intended -- drive an adventure forward, encouraging character participation and good storytelling. Above all, after reading *Spirit of the Century,* I want to run and play the game, its mechanical simplicity and the generous advice only making the prospect easier and almost intuitive. *Spirit of the Century* exuberantly exemplifies the pulp genre, and is not only the best Pulp RPG of 2006 and best Pulp RPG in a long time, but one of the best RPGs of 2006.

--Matthew Pook

Pros at Cons -- Random Thoughts for CodCon 2007

This past week was my son's first convention, as he, the missus, and I were guests at [CodCon](#), the convention alluded to in last week's installment. A good time was had by all, secret plans were revealed, and a few dozen people got the exclusive super-secret promotional CD-ROM that we whipped up about 90 minutes before we headed out the door.

As such, this week's installment will just consist of a few random thoughts that spawned from that con.

* * *

This is a photo of my son and me with a Stormtrooper, and my son and me with Darth Vader.

Yes, I look like I've been inhaling the fumes of a biodiesel car. No, I don't normally look like that. I was laughing very hard during both photos; Sam, for his part, was smacking both Stormtrooper and Vader, treating two of the greatest symbols of fear in the galaxy as injection-mold drums.

The following is my funniest story of the convention. There were a lot of kids at this con . . . certainly more than I was expecting. Almost all of them were about five or younger, meaning that the game industry should be in great shape in a decade or two, once these kids move beyond "What do blue crayons taste like?" to making their own fiscal decisions.

Anyway, one of the kids was somewhere between one and two . . . old enough to toddle and have a few words. This tyke was suitably impressed by the Stormtrooper, and went up to his mom excitedly. "Mommy! Mommy!" the kid exclaimed, pointing at the Stormtrooper.

"Yes," said the mommy, with some amusement in her voice, "do you know what that is?"

Without pausing for a moment, the youngling proudly exclaimed, "Snowman!"

Out of the mouth of babes . . . only imperial snowmen are this accurate.

* * *

As one of the serious points I thought I'd bring up with this column, I note that I was delighted that Sam was amused and entertained by Lord Vader and the Stormtrooper. There was even a Boba Fett and I believe an Emperor running around that I would've been tickled to photograph him with.

During one of the quieter moments of the con, I posited a question to the missus. "Isn't it curious that I have no problem with Sam being photographed with Stormtroopers, and -- indeed -- I think it's pretty cool they're running

around? I mean, if folks were here dressed as, say, Nazis, I'd be pretty bothered by that." And it's especially interesting because the Stormtroopers themselves take their names from their World-War-I German counterparts . . . not exactly Nazis, but still pretty close.

I've written before about how I suspect that the attraction for groups that we think of as "evil" isn't a matter of evil, per se, but often more a matter of "freedom." While most modern sensibilities would be offended by the actions of pirates, the *idea* of pirates is still pretty neat to many folks, and I think it's because mentally one can focus on the "good" parts of piratey life: sailing on the open seas, fighting against other pirates, and so on. I think this is much the same appeal that surrounds the "names" of the *Star Wars* universe: Darth Vader, Boba Fett, and so on. It's not about evil so much as freedom to be bad-ass.

But that's not really the case with Stormtroopers. When I think "freedom," joining the Imperial Navy and getting schlepped to some forsaken backwater desert planet isn't the first thing I think of.

Besides the Nazi discomfort, there are other "fan-costumes" out there that would make me uncomfortable. For example, I've always been a bit apprehensive about talking with Civil War reenactors, especially those from the South. They've almost always been pretty cool folks, but every so often I'll get one who's a bit *too* into the mindset, and he'll talk about how it's not for the North to interject its views of slavery upon the South.

Perhaps the best explanation I can offer for my lack-of-squeamishness regarding Stormtroopers is that they are, for the most part, utterly "harmless" (unless you're Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru). They're not very effective, they're more of a nuisance than anything, and conflict in the *Star Wars* universe seldom involves the actual blood and guts of warfare. Whether or not this is a *good* thing is a matter of debate, but it's easy for me to envision any individual Stormtrooper as being the hapless guy who conks his head on the Death Star.

* * *

Speaking of folks being dressed up as things I'd be uncomfortable with in the real world . . .

Tony DiGerolamo -- the writing gent behind Super Frat and *d20 Mafia* -- hosted a *Mafia* live-action event at the Con. (Tony has an amusing anecdote about this LARP that appeared at his blog.)

Suffice it to say, this LARP suffered from a situation I've seen happen all to often at con games (especially LARPs). Namely, the situation is established as some sense of equilibrium or balance before the game begins: certain groups of mobsters/vampires/noble houses/whatever control certain sections of the city. And then, once the game begins, all hell breaks loose . . . usually within the first 20 minutes. It often resembles the first move of a *Supremacy* or *Balance of Power* game being, "I nuke everyone!"

I suspect Tony has encountered this before, because he imposed a one-hour ban from initiating combat. This means that, literally, the bullets started flying in the 8:00 p.m. game at 9:01 p.m.

While it ensures a lively evening, it also makes it very difficult to understand *how,* exactly, the city hasn't erupted into total warfare on any night previously. (The answer is usually inherent in the systems used; initiating combat is a good way to get your character killed; it's also a good way to get another character or two killed in the process. Unfortunately, in a con game, the *players* may not have knowledge that their *characters* possess about how deadly combat is.)

I don't have an easy fix, but I'm always amused whenever I read about a premise in a con booklet that begins something like, "For 10,000 years the nation-states of Foobar have existed in delicate balance." I think to myself, "Well, that's gonna fall apart sometime about a quarter past char-gen."

* * *

Downloading images from a communal camera always means there are bound to be some surprises on the film (or, in our case, memory card). For example, the following image was taken presumably by the missus at some point early in

the con:
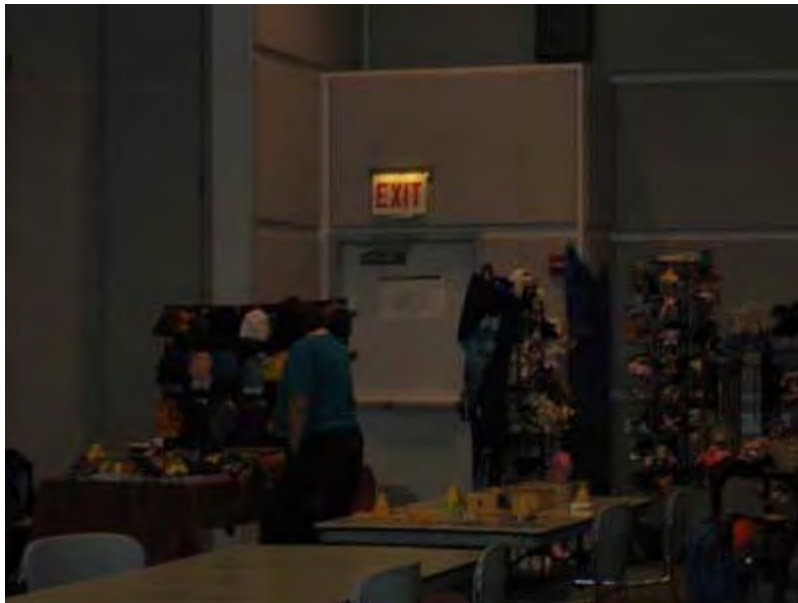
Given the composition of this picture, it seems the exit was foremost on her mind for some reason.

Which seems like a good note to end this installment on.

--Steven Marsh

Signs and Portents

A Model of Magic for *GURPS*

by William H. Stoddard

In *GURPS,* thaumatology is the systematic study of magic. It's used to perform magical research, including inventing new spells and identifying unknown spells. But those uses are portrayed fairly abstractly; there's not much attempt to picture what mages are actually doing that calls for Thaumatology rolls. The level of detail is rather like that of science fiction scripts that say "insert technobabble." For many fantasy games, and for certain genres of fantasy, that's fine. But what if you want a fantasy analog of hard science fiction, where the theoretical concepts embodied in magic are actually important to the storyand where the players have a chance of thinking through a problem about magic?

This article offers one model of what magic is and how it works. It's partly inspired by the treatment of magic in *GURPS Cabal,* and partly an expansion of some passages in *GURPS Fantasy* that discuss the nature of magic. It's not the only way to approach magic, but it's one way of doing so. GMs who want a theoretical foundation for answering questions about magic may find it useful in several ways: for visualizing how spells are cast in more detail, for guiding players' efforts to work out new spells, or for building a world where magic works.

The Theory of Signs

In this approach, the basis of magic is semiotics, or the theory of signs. Semiotics was developed by an American philosopher, C.S. Peirce, in the nineteenth century, though his ideas on it were partly inspired by medieval scholastic theories. In the 20th century, linguists and anthropologists picked it up and ran with it; it became a major influence on the French structuralists, for example.

In the technical language of semiotics, a sign is anything that stands for something else. Signs are divided into three subtypes: indices, which signify something that caused them, as smoke signifies fire; icons, which signify something that they look like, as a portrait signifies the person portrayed; and symbols, which signify something by social convention, as the English word "cat" or the Japanese word "neko" signifies a common household pet.

GURPS Fantasy uses the same three categories, but less technical names, in *The Three Laws of Magic.* It uses the word "symbol" more broadly, for signs of all kinds. It calls the three subtypes *evidence, likenesses,* and *words.* The rest of this article will use those names, not the technical ones, except that it will use the more general word "sign" instead of "symbol."

The Practice of Magic

A common element in a lot of magical traditions is that the magician operates on a sign with the goal of affecting the thing it signifies. For example, a black magician might make a wax image of a human being (a likeness), name it after an intended victim (a word), with some of the victim's blood, saliva, or hair mixed into the wax (evidence) -- and then inflict injuries on it as a way of inflicting the same injuries on his victim.

In this version of thaumatology, this link between the sign and the thing it signifies is the theoretical basis for all of magic. Magic itself is a collection of methods for applying this theory. Every magical operation involves coming up with ways of acting out a desired outcome, using signs of various kinds. The more detailed the acting out, and the more the mage's mind is focused on its intended meaning, the more effect the operation has on the real world.

GURPS Cabal provided a detailed set of rules for this approach to magic, in its rules for the laws of sympathy (pp. 73-74). *GURPS Fantasy* adopted those same rules as the basis for correspondences (pp. 163-164) and correspondence

magic (pp. 160-161).

Two of the laws of sympathy come from Sir James Frazer's classic study, *The Golden Bough.* The Law of Similarity says that things that look or act alike *are,* or, in a magical sense, are the same thing. A photograph, a good painting, or a sculpted image of a person is the person; a series of musical tones is the cry of a cuckoo; an orgy in the fields about to be plowed fertilizes the soil and makes it fruitful. This is founded on the use of likenesses or icons: the "similarity" on which magic is based exactly fits the semiotic relation between a thing or action and its likeness.

The basis for the Law of Contagion was less obvious. It states that two objects that have once come into contact remain connected. A person's blood or fingernail clippings, or his clothing or possessions, is magically linked to him and can be used to cast spells on him. But where does this link come from? Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy stories, set in a world where magic has been turned into a science, explains the connection as a matter of relevance: a garment that has been worn once, for a short time, is not significantly affected by the wearing, because it would be much the same if someone else had worn it, or even if no one had worn it at all, so it has little magical link to its wearer; but a garment that has been worn repeated will have been stretched and worn by the shape of its wearer's body and by his habitual motions, making it different than it would have been had it been left on its hanger. This amounts to saying that its current state has to have been causally affected by its wearer, and is a causally based sign of his having worn it. This is the kind of sign that forensicists look for, which is why **GURPS Fantasy** adopted the name "evidence" for it. The relation of contagion that links two objects amounts to one object having affected the other causally at some point; it fits the semiotic relation between evidence and the thing it evidences.

GURPS Cabal brings in a third magical principle: the Law of Names, which says that knowing the name of a thing gives power over the thing. This obviously fits the semiotic relation between a word and the object or action it refers to. The complications come from the idea that some words are more perfect fits than others -- in the extreme case, that people, or spirits, have true names that give total power over them. (In Jewish legend, for example, Lilith gained her supernatural powers by learning the true name of God, which granted her immunity to God's omnipotence.) The Words of Power of **GURPS Cabal** are the ultimate realization of this principle: words that in themselves can create the things they name. (In the terms of **GURPS Powers,** each Word of Power amounts to a form of the Create advantage, directed to the specific objects and phenomena included within its decan, with some form of the Cosmic advantage, but also with the Trigger and Uncontrollable disadvantages. Bear in mind that the things the various Words create are often fairly abstract!)

Coming up with a spell involves coming up with ways of exploiting these semiotic relations. The spell needs to contain a sign of the thing it affects, and a sign of the desired effect. For a more extreme version, the spell may need to contain signs of all three kinds! In the latter case, the GM should allow the use of "placeholder" correspondences, which grant a zero modifier, but count as correspondences for the purposes of making spells work.

The following table lists correspondence modifiers, including placeholder modifiers:

Any object the subject has ever touched:	+0
An object the subject has handled enough to affect it substantially:	+1
An object the subject has made:	+2
Dead tissue from the subject's body:	+2
Living matter from the subject's body:	+3
The subject's corpse:	+3
Anything shaped like the subject (e.g., a wax doll for a man):	+0
A sketch of the subject:	+1
A natural object that shares one of the subject's attributes (e.g., a heart-shaped leaf for the heart):	+1
A formal portrait by a skilled artist:	+2
A close blood relative, or a vampire's sire or get:	+2
An identical twin or clone:	+3

Any phrase that describes the subject:	+0
An identifier such as a serial number:	+1
A nickname or "use name":	+2
A name used as a signature:	+3
A true name:	+4

Signs as Portents

One important category of magical abilities is divination and soothsaying. Most languages treat perceiving and knowing as actions and represent them as verbs, so it's possible to assimilate them to the standard pattern of "acting on the sign to affect the thing." But the actions involved are more internal than ordinary physical actions. Ordinary perception largely involves knowing things by the signs of those things, so magical perception can rather easily be assimilated to it.

The Law of Contagion makes it possible to know things through other things that they have been in contact with, as in psychometry or psychic tracking. An extension of this is to deliberately arrange the contact to make divination possible, as in reading someone's fate from the leaves at the bottom of his teacup. In addition, this law includes knowing a person's or object's inner nature from its visible exterior, as in palmistry, physiognomy, or the diagnostic procedures of Esoteric Medicine. This sort of awareness is akin to physical sensation, in which an organism experiences an internal state of its own body, such as warmth, cold, or pain, and reacts to the environmental conditions that caused it.

The Law of Similarity gives knowledge of things through other things that resemble them, typically through the creation of pictures or images. Many systematic schemes of divination rely on pictorial models, such as the I Ching, with its hexagrams being described in terms such as "Fire over Mountain," or the Tarot, with the pictures on the faces of cards being laid out in standard patterns that create a kind of story. Even astrology can be interpreted in this way, with the arrangement of the planets against the constellations creating a kind of diagram of a person's mind or destiny. Many of these arts add a touch of the Law of Contagion, as when a Tarot reading begins with the subject choosing one of the cards as his "significator," the image that represents him. This sort of awareness is akin to perception, in which an organism responds to patterns in its environment through senses such as vision, hearing, or sonar.

The Law of Names can be applied in two related ways. In the first place, it allows knowing things through the properties of their names, as in numerology, which assigns numerical values to the letters of a name, adds them up, and gives a meaning to the resulting numerical score. But in the second place, it allows sortilege, or divination by throwing lots, in which the diviner assigns a meaning to each possible outcome of an event such as the fall of a die, and then performs an action that randomly selects one outcome. (Viewed as a magical procedure, playing *GURPS* would involve repeated magically divining the fates of characters through dice rolls!) The level of human awareness that goes with names is conceptual thought, aided by language, in which the production of a word or symbol triggers memory of the thing it names or refers to.

Signs and Realms

GURPS Cabal offers an elaborate magical cosmology, in which Earth and the entire physical universe are only the lowest of four metaphysical realms (see pp. 43-54). It's possible to describe these realms in terms of the theory of signs, and by doing so to gain a clearer image of how things work in each of them.

Assiah, the material plane, is the realm of causal signs, or evidence. That is, its internal functioning is governed by the laws of cause and effect, as studied by the natural sciences. Distance in Assiah, for example, is a function of how far apart two things are in terms of causal pathway -- with the speed of light being the universal limit on causal relationships. Beings in Assiah are made up of matter, whose basic attribute is the ability to be affected by causal agencies, and energy, whose basic attribute is the ability to do work, or to be a causal agency. Their awareness of the world is based on physical stimuli that affect their sense organs causally. The only exceptions to the rule of cause and effect in Assiah are interference effects from the higher planes.

Yetzirah, the astral plane, is a different kind of place entirely. Its internal functioning is governed not by cause and effect, but by representational signs, or likenesses. Distance in Yetzirah is based on how far apart two things are in appearance; for example, two places that both contain roses will be close together, and it's easy to travel from one to the other. This gives Yetzirah a dreamlike logic.

Some parts of Yetzirah are "close" to Assiah: that is, they contain objects and places that look very much like the material world. Others are distorted, surreal, or outright fantastic. Practically any art style that humanity has come up with, from ancient Chinese landscape paintings to Byzantine mosaics to Salvador Dali's surrealistic distortions, can be found in some realm within Yetzirah. The most distant reaches of Yetzirah approach pure abstract geometry, and are "close" to the higher realm of Briah.

Beings in Yetzirah are not made out of matter, though they may resemble material objects or creatures. Rather, they're made out of images and patterns. As a result, the biology of Yetzirah is different from that of Assiah. Some biologists have speculated about "morphic fields" that exist within organisms and control the shape and growth of their bodies; the creatures of Yetzirah *are* morphic fields, existing independent of material bodies. (So far as the morphic fields theory is true in Assiah at all, it's because Yetzirah impinges on Assiah in some measure.) Awareness in Yetzirah is direct perception of patterns without the need for a physical stimulus, or, literally, ESP: extra-sensory perception.

Beyond Yetzirah is Briah, the iconic realm, or the realm of forms. This actually is a secondary attribute of Briah: not how Briah is in itself, but how it is seen from Yetzirah. The far reaches of Yetzirah, devoted to abstract forms (ranging from Euclidean right angles and parallel lines to fractal geometries), are the realms where it overlaps with and resembles Briah. What Briah is in itself is the realm of words, and of related entities such as the symbols of abstract mathematics. Ask any mathematician: diagrams *represent* geometric objects and relationships, but those relationships actually are matters of abstract logic than transcends images.

Entities in Briah are therefore pure abstractions, such as the aethyrs of the 36 decans. Relations between them are grammatical or logical. The distance between them is conceptual distance, a matter of their sharing or not sharing logical attributes. Their space is thus structured like a matrix in many dimensions, with each cell of the matrix representing a specific combination of logical possibilities. Travel through Briah is not a continuous process of movement, through either physical space or the imagistic space of dreams; it's more like moves on a game board. Awareness in Briah involves an intuitive grasp of a concept in its pure form, independent of any perceived or imagined object that the concept refers to. Action involves defining entities, postulating their occurrence, or proving things about them.

Finally, beyond Briah is Atziluth, the realm of the godhead. No category of signs corresponds to this realm. Rather, it's a domain of unity, where the sign and the thing signified are not merely linked, but identical. As in Hindu thought, attaining this level involves setting aside every form of dualism. Magical effects in Atziluth are produced, not by casting spells, but by a simple exertion of will, requiring a Will roll. Similarly, knowledge is attained, not by rituals of divination, but by direct intuitive awareness, requiring an IQ roll.

Icosahedron Adventures

More Modern Magic: Arcane Armament

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Designed for *d20 System* games that include magic and are set in a modern or near-modern time period, this article presents some magic and alchemical modern weapons. Although purchase DCs and dollar prices are given for these items, in many campaigns non-charged items will be encountered only during the course of an adventure, rather than in even the most well-equipped of magic shops.

Ammunition

One of the most common uses of modern magic and alchemy is ammunition for firearms. Many supernatural threats require unusual material to damage them, and in truth normal silver makes for a lousy bullet. The art of arcane and alchemical ammunition is also among the oldest modern magics, dating back to the Musketeers and having been developed extensively by the Texas Ranger (who hunt down evil forces with alchemical silver bullets).

Alchemical Silver

Alchemical silver bullets are nether as soft nor as expensive as real silver rounds. They deal 1 point less damage, but all the damage penetrates DR as a silver weapon. They appear to be silver plated, and can easily be passed off as cheap souvenirs.

Alchemical silver ammunition is alchemical, rather than magical.

Cost: +1 to Purchase DC per reload, or +$5/round

Churchshot

Developed in the 1890s, churchshot is a shotgun load that mixes alchemical silver, cold iron, jade, white oak, and numerous other materials antithetical to various supernatural monsters. Churchshot deals only half damage (many of these materials are poor ammunition choices), but penetrates any DR that can be penetrated by a special material.

Churchshot is alchemical, rather than magical.

Cost: +2 to Purchase DC per reload, or +$10/round

Desplosive

Desplosive rounds deal normal damage. However, whenever they hit an explosive of any type, that explosive must make a DC 18 Fortitude save or cease to be explosive. Upon examination, such deactivated explosives seem to have been duds from their faulty manufacture.

Cost: +4 to Purchase DC per reload, or +$100/round

Hammer-Point

Hammer-point ammunition doesn't deal any additional damage, but all the damage it does deal is bludgeoning damage. These rounds damage objects in the same way a sledgehammer does, making them much better at knocking in doors

and knocking down foes. Anything hit by a hammer-point acts as if a Strength check break attempt (using the item's break DC) or Trip attack (if a target able to be tripped) was attempted, with a total of 1d20+ damage dealt.

Cost: +3 to Purchase DC per reload, or +$20/round

Ice Jacketed

Ice-jacketed ammunition doesn't deal any additional damage, but all the damage it does deal is cold damage. Additionally the rounds melt like normal ice starting one round after they are fired, which often means there is significantly less ballistic evidence remaining after a shooting.

Cost: +3 to Purchase DC per reload, or +$20/round

Sorcerous Safety Slugs

These bullets never hit anything other than the target selected by whoever fires them. That's not to say they always strike the desired target -- the rounds are no more accurate than any mundane ammunition. But if they do miss their desired target, these bullets disappear harmlessly. They can never harm anything or anyone not intended to be their target at the time they were fired.

The sorcerous safety slugs are limited by the perceptions of the character that fires them. If a gunman shoots at a good friend who is under an illusion to look like a zombie, the bullets can hit him as he is the intended target, even though the gunman wouldn't have made that target selection if he'd had all the facts.

Cost: +2 to Purchase DC per reload, or +$10/round

Bull-Rush Grenades

These one-use magic weapons deal 6d6 nonlethal damage in a 20-ft.-radius, and perform a Bull rush maneuver against every target in the area. The bull rush total is treated as being equal to the damage dealt by the grenade, and all targets that fail their strength checks are shoved as far as possible, and knocked prone. Each grenade has a range increment of 10 feet.

It takes a DC 20 Spellcraft check to realize the damage dealt by these grenades is nonlethal. To outward perceptions, the grenade seems to be a typical fragmentation grenade, and targets are all amazingly lucky for not being more seriously injured.

Type: Weapon (magic); *Caster Level:* 9th; *Purchase DC:* 25 or Cost $9,000; *Weight:* 0.1 lb.

Coat of Swords

While wearing this coat, you may Quick Draw a masterwork sword of any style by reaching into the coat's folds (even if you don't have the Quick Draw feat). Any sword produced by the coat breaks into useless scrap if used by anyone other than the coat-wearer, or if left outside the coat for more than 24 hours.

A coat wearer may place a sword of their own into the coat, making it impossible for anyone else to draw or locate it. The coat only holds one such sword, and it acts normally if removed.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 8th; *Purchase DC:* 31 or Cost $50,000; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Decapitator

The *decapitator* appears to be a mundane chainsaw that has seen heavy use. It is always dirty and slightly stained. It resists all efforts to take it apart or open its fuel cap, and always sounds as though it is almost out of fuel.

In fact the *decapitator* is enchanted to function well as a weapon, especially against undead (though it also works well in the hands of undead). It deals 2d6 slashing damage with a ×3 critical multiplier, and is treated as a 2-handed, Medium, simple melee weapon. It never runs out of fuel, but on any natural "1" attack roll it stops working and requires a DC 15 Strength check (a move action) to restart. Against undead, the decapitator deals 3d6 damage and can actually deliver critical hits (despite undead's normal immunity to critical).

When used by an undead, the *decapitator* deals 3d6 damage to any living humanoid, and has a threat range of 19-20 in addition to its ×3 citical multiplier.

Any time the *decapitator* reduces a target to -10 or fewer hit points, it decapitates them.

Type: Weapon (magic); *Caster Level:* 16th; *Purchase DC:* 35 or Cost $175,000; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Lone Revolver

The *lone revolver* is a legendary modern magic item. It appears to be a perfectly preserved silver-plated Colt 1873 Single Action Army/Peacemaker revolver. Legend claims there are two such pistols, but if so they have not been seen together for more than a century. Additionally, the pistols would seem unlikely to work together, though it's possible they consider each other exceptions to the "lone weapon" rule (see below), or that they could be made to function together by a noble enough man, or native Amrican shamanistic magic, or some similar mechanism.

The magic of the *lone revolver* functions only when it is the only firearm carried by its wielder. When this is the case, it acts as a *+1 weapon* that allows ranged attacks to be made as disarms with no penalty, attack of opportunity, or chance of the opponent disarming you if your disarm roll fails. Additionally, all damage from the *lone revolver* is treated as silver, and it never drops a target to less than -5 hit points (nor do its wounds bleed, preventing any roll for characters at negative hit points to stabilize).

Lycanthropes are the exception to the -5 hp rule -- the *lone revolver* not only kills lycanthropes normally, it deals an additional 2d6 points of damage to them on any successful attack.

Type: Weapon (magic); *Caster Level:* 12th; *Purchase DC:* 35 or Cost $150,000; *Weight:* 2 lbs.

Rottweiler Grenades

These one-use magic weapons summon a trained, battle-ready rottweiler (use stats for a wolf). Each grenade has a range increment of 10 feet. The round after the grenade is thrown, a rottweiler appears from the grenade in a puff of smoke. The thrower of the grenade may give the rottweiler order's or it will attack the first living creature it sees. Each rottweiler lasts 2 minutes or until slain. In either case, its body (including any blood or body parts lost) dissolve into smoke at the end of two minutes.

Type: Weapon (magic); *Caster Level:* 9th; *Purchase DC:* 25 or Cost $9,000; *Weight:* 0.1 lb.

Saizuchi Ring

As a free action the wearer of this ring can summon a comically oversized wooden mallet. The mallet is used as a melee weapon, the wielder is automatically proficient with it, and the mallet disappears if it ever leave the wielder's hands. The mallet deals 1d4 points of damage, and forces anyone struck by it to make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + ½ wielder's class level + wielder's Charisma bonus) or be stunned for 1 round.

Type: Weapon (magic); *Caster Level:* 12th; *Purchase DC:* 37 or Cost $300,000; *Weight:* 0.1 lb.

Spellstick

A *spellstick* is lipstick that can be used to store any touch spell. The *spellstick* can only hold one touch spell of 3rd level or less at a time. When the lipstick is applied to a pair of lips (a full-round action), the lips' owner may deliver the spell as a melee touch attack by kissing its target. The spell remains in the *spellstick* even when its has been used to coat a pair of lips, so a second spell cannot be loaded into the *spellstick* until the first has been delivered.

Obviously, no attack roll is required if the kiss is delivered to a willing target out of combat.

Type: Wondrous Item (magic); *Caster Level:* 7th; *Purchase DC:* 20 or Cost $2,000; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Sword Spray

Sword spray is an aerosol can that projects a magic mist that deals slashing damage to all targets in a 30-foot-cone. The spray deals 3d6 damage, with a DC 13 Reflex save for half damage. A typical can has 20 uses and is disguised as hair spray or breath freshener.

Type: Weapon (magic); *Caster Level:* 6th; *Purchase DC:* 23 (20 if 3 or fewer charges remain) or Cost $5,000; *Weight:* 1 lb.

Vigilance Pistols

The *Vigilance Pistols* are a magic pair of nickel-plated M1911A1 Colt .45s that have been carried by various heroes in the past several decades. The pistols never run out of ammunition, and their wielder acts as though he had the Double Tap, Precise Shot, and Shot on the Run feats.

Type: Weapon (magic); *Caster Level:* 12th; *Purchase DC:* 35 or Cost $150,000; *Weight:* 2 lbs.

Taming the Wild Skill

Variant Uses for the *GURPS* Wildcard Rule

by Phil Masters

GURPS wildcard skills (page 175 of the **Basic Set**) are primarily designed to emulate the broad abilities of cinematic characters. However, they can also be used for other purposes -- to represent training that encompasses a very wide range of techniques, while avoiding specific problems that arise with narrower, ordinary skills. This should be handled with restraint in non-cinematic campaigns, but even there, wildcard skills can have a useful place.

Point and Pull

For example, consider the problems faced by undercover agents working for the Infinity Patrol in the *Infinite Worlds* setting. These people may sometimes need to carry firearms, but if they're going to preserve their cover, they'll have to use local weapons. (No doubt Technical Analysis Division can manufacture sidearms that *look* like "local" weapons while actually being, functionally, Homeline models -- but that won't fool close, educated inspection or competent forensic specialists, and the Patrol don't want to generate too much interest from gun nuts and forensics experts across a hundred timelines.) The trouble is, that means such agents will have to carry and sometimes use sidearms from tech levels from 4 to 12, in a wide range of formats, and sometimes incorporating divergent-TL or superscience technologies. In game terms, tech-level penalties will stack with weapon format and general familiarity modifiers, to the point where the agent's standard Patrol pistol or rifle training will be no use whatsoever -- he'll do better to work off a rather poor DX- based default.

Or . . . Infinity institutes a special training course for these people. This isn't designed to familiarise them with every sidearm that they might possibly have to use, anywhere (although students do get to try out an amazing variety of implements of mayhem acquired from across the Infinite Worlds); rather, it represents a broad grounding in the basic theories of weapon design and use, and techniques for adapting rapidly to unexpected formats and behaviours. It doesn't produce great marksmen; it produces people who aren't ever thrown by the oddities of any given gun, and can use anything well enough to survive in a fight, if they're sensible.

In other words, in game terms, it teaches Gun! skill, which disregards TL and familiarity penalties. Students can shoot anything from a Britannica-6 Grey Maggie rifle to a Caliph fusion jezail or an Azoth-7 ruby-pistolle, and do more damage to the target than to themselves. PCs shouldn't usually put more than, say, 6 points into this in non-cinematic games -- more does begin to look too wild -- but with that, a DX 12 agent can handle any sidearm with skill-10 and no arbitrary penalties, and also gets to attempt things like Fast Draw and Armoury with a base 50% chance of success, whatever the setting.

A similar approach might be appropriate for, say, a professional doctor in a multi-species interstellar SF campaign. In a galaxy with hundreds or thousands of sapient species, nobody could learn everything about the medical requirements of every possible patient -- but doctors in a *[Sector General](#)*- style hospital might be expected to provide treatment to all comers regardless, using whatever equipment they have to hand. Hence, a wildcard skill (Xenomedicine!) might be used to represent a very broad "first principles" training regime, combining basic biological and xenological theory with highly practical applications.

Scholarship!

Wildcard skills can also be used in settings where teaching and scholarship aren't organized along quite the same lines as the **GURPS** skills list, and where students are expected to acquire a good, integrated understanding of many different topics -- and where some of what's taught this way serves very practical purposes. For example, medieval

and renaissance European scholarship was based round a set of categories only loosely related to modern concepts of the arts and sciences; see the *Pyramid* articles "Old School" and "Those Who Pray." Realistically, this sort of thing can usually be represented by taking a range of skills at moderate levels, perhaps with optional specialties, or sometimes by taking Expert Skills such as Natural Philosophy (page 194) -- though those last are supposed to have rather limited practical applications. However, GMs running slightly less realistic historical-Europe games, or those based in settings such as ***Banestorm's*** Yrth, may want this sort of learning to be *useful* on a practical level, without breaking things down in the complex detail required to fit it to standard ***GURPS*** skills. Hence, scholarly characters in some games might be permitted to spend a few points on wildcard skills related to the structure of period university educations. The following are a couple of possibilities:

Artes Liberales! (IQ). This not only encompasses the formal content of the medieval liberal arts, but assumes that the character paid close attention to *all* of his initial university education, including the classical texts and references which were used in teaching. He must be literate in his own language, and put at least two points into written Latin. Artes Liberales! replaces Astronomy (Observational), History (all classical-period specialties), Mathematics (Applied), Law (any Ancient Roman specialty), Public Speaking, and Writing. It also covers aspects of Linguistics which relate to the analysis of grammar (but it can't be used to speed up language learning), Philosophy (any "classical" specialty) with regard to basic terminology and formal logic, and anecdotal and historical aspects of Theology (Christian) but not analytical/theoretical aspects. Also, if the character has at least one Musical Instrument skill, it replaces Musical Composition.

Natural Philosophy! (IQ). This is much deeper than the like- named Expert Skill; in a game where it's available, it reflects how the world is actually put together, and can be *useful.* In many ways, it's a low-tech version of Science!, but with rather more metaphysics. It replaces Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Geology, Mathematics (Pure and Statistics), and Physics, and also Philosophy (any "classical" specialty) as it relates to the nature of the material universe, and Theology (Christian) as it relates to the creation of the universe and the relationship between the supernatural and the physical. In some campaigns, the Philosophy and Theology may be as relevant as the other sciences to understanding how things *really* work!

Giving your medieval scholar-wizard a few points in these two skills along with his explicitly magical abilities should help supply him with the appropriate style, enabling him to debate Aristotle or Aquinas with rhetorical precision and formal rectitude. For that matter, GMs creating fantasy worlds can create whole new systems of learning, based round arbitrary theories or concepts, and link all the relevant abilities into a wildcard skill, giving masters of a field breadth and effectiveness while adding to the setting's specific flavor.

Drive to Tears, Take a Left

FOX television, home of the soul-crushing maw that has shunted many a promising show into the inky abyss of cancellation, has done so again with a promising series called *Drive,* which -- as near as I can tell -- was canceled about one-third of the way through the pilot. An intriguing premise (and one with lots of gamerly potential), about . . . oh, heck. Let's just quote What the Internet May Become, [Wikipedia](#):

> The series is set across the backdrop of an illegal automobile road race with the central focus being on the competitors and eventually on the puppet masters behind the race. Regarding the tone of the show, [series creator Tim] Minear has described it as "a secret, illegal, underground road race can be anything from *Cannonball Run* to *The Game* to *North by Northwest* to *Magnolia*-on-wheels. Ours is all those things."

Sounds like a pretty good pitch for a gaming series, eh?

Sadly, after four episodes, *Drive* will now be driven as much as a 1972 AMC Pacer. I haven't had a chance to watch the series yet, but from listening to disgruntled fans, it seems that very few of the series' central mysteries are going to be resolved.

Curiously, I wrote an almost-identically themed version of this column [a year ago](#), when FOX axed a different series: *Reunion* (which, itself, could be transformed into another neat premise for a campaign). Back then I presented a few tips for how GMs might "cancel-proof" their games.

This time, however, I'm going to tackle the subject from a different angle: What responsibilities do players and GMs have when forming a campaign? Or, indeed, all those who partake in games?

At its most basic level, *all* games are social contracts. Everyone plays by a set of rules that are pre-agreed upon, more or less. (I say "more or less" because there are situations where gamers don't agree on the rules, or some gamers might not know the rules well enough to agree to the rules, per se. However, there is the contract that there *do* exist rules, upon which all agree, for the game to continue.)

As social contracts, all players need to come to an agreement about expectations. And, in my opinion, it's bad form when those expectations aren't met. Most of the time these expectations are easily resolved. For example, those who might forgo common sense and play a game of *Monopoly* may need to hammer out whether or not Free Parking is anything other than a waste of turn; the brief debate over this one issue will, no doubt, prove more lively and soul-affirming than all the best aspects of all the most heart-warming games of *Monopoly* ever played by humans.

However, some issues aren't resolvable ahead of time, and can lead to considerable problems. For example, let's say that a big group of friends -- ideally a number equaling some factor of two -- sets up a ping-pong elimination tournament over the course of a couple months. However, each round, some players drop out (even those who have won previous rounds. This places the entire tournament into question; should chosen opponents of dropped players get a "pass"? Should the tournament be tried again from scratch? What's fair for the other players? (The omnipresent shoulder-reading spouse of your humble columnist, fresh from a tour of duty having indexed **GURPS Martial Arts,** suggests having the GM resolve a Quick Contest for both players. Methinks the lines between "reality" and . . . um . . . "whatever" have become dangerously blurred for the missus. Indexing does that. For my column next week, I'm just going to make a Writing check and be done with it.)

Of course, what's fair is the problem never having happened in the first place, which is why those who organize such tournaments often try to get ultra-firm commitments from prospective players. Of course, no matter how much players jump up and down and declare that they're in a game for the long haul, there's little to prevent them from promising the moon and dropping out. (Maybe a $50 deposit from each player, returned if they complete the series and otherwise spent on pizza for the other players.)

This is also fairly common in RPGs. I've been involved in dozens of campaigns -- on both sides of the GM's screen --

where grandiose plans have fallen apart, and what was meant to be a long-running series died in the first session or two (or, as has happened more than once, during character creation). Unfortunately, players have little recourse for how to respond to such developments (whether they are the result of the GM's actions, the actions of other players, or the involvement of fate). Worse, at least in my experience, players take experience from one gaming group session and apply to future campaigns; in my circle, it was very challenging to get players to invest anything more in characters than the bare-bones minimum required to get the campaign going . . . which tended to sabotage those other campaigns as well.

In a lot of ways, the BBC model of television-series production is much fairer. As I understand it, they produce all the episodes of a series before running the first one of the "season" (as they laughably call their six-episode batches). In this way, fans of the series at least know that they get one "season" out of a series they enjoy, and don't need to worry that they've invested time and attachment into something that isn't going to have a payoff.

Conversely, many TV series here in the States don't have this problem, either, since they are structured such that it doesn't matter if they are canceled. For example, *The Tick* live-action series (also on FOX!) was such that episode-to-episode continuity wasn't necessary for the audience, meaning that the batch of extant episodes can be enjoyed by themselves.

Unfortunately, the drive (ha!) to create the next *Lost, 24, Alias,* and *Desperate Housewives* has resulted in many new series premiering that promise a long-term story of mysteries and intrigue that will be revealed, but then die before they provide any resolution. This can result in a death spiral for networks and fans; many viewers (such as myself) refuse to get involved in watching new series because they want to wait for the inevitable DVD release if the series takes off. As a result, these shows don't have the ratings they need to stay on the air, and they die. (The same thing can be seen in the comic-book-publishing world, replacing "graphic novels" for DVDs.)

Two solutions, then: If there's a chance that a game series won't be a long-running one, either design it around the idea of episodic adventures, or get firm commitments for short "seasons" (or, as I call them, mini-series). I find the latter more satisfying, and it's usually easy to wrangle folks for firm commitments for three to six adventures than it is to get them to give up a Saturday night indefinitely.

No one likes to reflect on a contract as being a bad deal, and that applies to the social contract of gaming. Fortunately, by making sure to reduce the potential pitfalls of that would-be contract, and then working to ensure that everyone can abide by them, you can help keep more games from falling apart.

In the meantime, I heartily recommend against watching any series with long-term plots on FOX. Ever.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Dungeon Master for Dummies

Published by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Written by Bill Slavicsek & Richard Baker

Edited by Jean Rogers, Virginia Sanders, Christopher Perkins, Laura Albert, Jessica Kramer, & Tammy Todd Art, graphics by Rich Tennant, Carl Byers, Andrea Dahl, Lauren Goddard, Denny Hager, Wayne England, David Griffith, Doug Kovacs, Chuck Lukacs, Chad Sergesketter, Arnie Swekel, Andrew & Trabbold

408-page b&w softcover with DM cardstock reference insert; $21.99

A successful product doesn't keep you in business for long if you don't learn how to market it. A rather open-ended *Dungeons & Dragons for Dummies* book covered that game in general for the new roleplayers among us, but *Dungeon Master for Dummies* offers more specific advice for the put-upon referee specifically.

The best news is that this book is a more worthwhile reference than the previous gaming . . . *for Dummies* volumes, at least to its target audience. Aimed at those who know the game and want to take their turn behind the screen but haven't the experience, it focuses on the topics most important to the fledgling Dungeon Master: how to start a world, expand it, and make it real; keeping character rewards and challenges on an even keel; and creating memorable adventures.

Of course, what it does first and foremost is explain what a DM is and what he does while lurking behind that shield. If all this sounds rather pedestrian, you're probably not the consumer they're targeting; they see this as a companion piece to the three core volumes, their previous advice book, and maybe the basic starter version of the game. They express some hope that the seasoned folks find useful material here, but that's not very likely.

It's the sort of primer you'd like to see in any roleplaying game you pick up at the shop, but the tips they offer are mostly old hat so they dance dangerously to that which has gone before. If you've been lucky enough to read an RPG with a decent pedigree as far as the referee's advice goes, or sat in on several good sessions with a capable GM, even as a newbie you may be a bit jaded with a lot of what's here. Peppered throughout are some good suggestions, and there's never any telling which facet of one's game style needs attention; the trouble is sussing out the wheat amid all the chaff.

Topics are dealt with in a straightforward manner. Not only do they cover the essentials and do it in an order that lets you wet your feet in an intuitive sequence, it expands the DM's knowledge base in like fashion. You start small, and by the end of the book you have what you need to move your campaign into epics and vast tapestries. There are examples of many of their observations, but there could always be more. Too often you get the feeling the authors are building up, perhaps even on the verge of saying something profound, only to have them finish a piece of advice and move deftly on. If you have to hear war stories, why not get them from the most grizzled soldiers?

There are a couple of adventures, simple and used to illustrate certain concepts, though just one would have worked, too. They offer a home for the adventurers -- a small town called Griffinford -- that neatly demonstrates a springboard for the team with minimal damage to the book's word count.

You should be pleased with their counsel on the whole. If you recognize subjects like the different kinds of players and their motivations for playing the game you're probably past this, but tricks on making traps work for all the right reasons are pretty good, and anyone should be able to get something out of the high-level tips ("Are the PCs going to just fly or teleport past everything I throw at them?"). This isn't the norm for the book, so the danger lies in letting them throw too wide a net over potential readers.

There's more art in this book than you find in the rest of the series, and though you instinctively know, even as you complain about the lack of it, that you don't need it in a reference manual, you're going to be glad it makes a comeback here. It's spiffy stuff, classic character illustrations and soaring landscape pencil drawings for the most part, and it feels great to have it back.

This brings up some oddities in the infamous Part of Tens, however. There are 10 ready-to-use encounters, similar to those randomly inserted snippets you see at irregular intervals in Wizards of the Coast's hardbound books, but these are blissfully (and a little ironically) surrounded by the context that's lacking in the main line. While these bits can easily be dropped into any adventure and have all the details you need to make them work, the maps included are anything but professional. Perhaps they were going for a postmodern feel, but they're all presented as though you were looking at the actual sketches from your DM's graph-paper choked notebook.

Another "part" describes 10 classic adventure modules . . . for nostalgia, it would seem, since they're talking about classic in the sense of first-edition releases. Swell. They then add insult to injury by pointing out the 10 *Dungeon* adventures they recommend were chosen because you might be able to get your hands on them without a fat wallet and an eBay account. Most of these baffling additions are confined to the back of the book where cutesy self-indulgence is expected in some measure, so it's no reflection on the rest of the tome. The book's "cheat sheet" is quick-reference cards for characters and monsters. With three copies of each, some could've been magic item stats instead, but so it goes.

Dungeon Master for Dummies is a solid book chock-full of sage wisdom, and the suggestions it offers aren't even limited to the ***Dungeons & Dragons*** property; referees can put a lot of the work to use by changing the word "bugbear" for "enemy spy" and so on. But again, while there are a few gems of true insight for veterans, their dollars are better spent getting the latest supplement to top off their mental tank, and even newcomers may find the book has a short shelf life in their library.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Bleeding Edge Adventure #2: Beyond the Towers (for the *d20 System*)

Published by Green Ronin Publishing

Written by W. Jason Peck

Cover by Lisa Wood

Illustrations and Cartography by The Forge Studios

32-page b&w softcover; $11.95
32-page b&w PDF; $6.50

The Bleeding Edge Adventure series from Green Ronin Publishing for the **d20 System** is designed to present scenarios with a more contemporary sensibility. This places an emphasis upon roleplaying, investigation, and action over the current trend in nostalgia best typified by Goodman Games' Dungeon Crawl Classics line. Nominally set in the same world as *Freeport: City of Adventure,* each Bleeding Edge Adventure is also generic enough that it can be run in almost any setting.

Designed for 1st- to 3rd-level characters, *Bleeding Edge Adventure #1: Mansion of Shadows* initiated the series, landing them on the continent away from Freeport and got them caught up in a Gothic tale of horror, family strife, and pitchfork-wielding torch-waving villagers. As the scenario ended, the adventurers were on their way through a mountain pass, on the other side of which lies *Bleeding Edge Adventure #2: Beyond the Towers*. This is a wilderness scenario for a party of four to six characters of 2nd to 4th level, one of whom should be a Druid or Ranger, and another a Rogue.

As the adventure opens, the party has made its way out of the Narrow Pass, the easiest route through the Towers mountain range (hence the scenario name), and is on the road to Lonely Shore, a rough little outpost on the edge of the Carrion Swamp. Several reasons for their being there are suggested: seeking adventure, hunting bandits in the swamps, wanting to explore the swamp in search of an ancient civilization, or traveling to meet a patron who has hired them as guards. Beyond the Towers combines these last two reasons for its plot, the patron being Professor Abraham Stewart, a member of the Antiquity Scholars order with an interest in the Hetepkan Empire, a civilization once thought to flourish in the region. With the Carrion Swamp known to be the haunt of bandits and the Professor's team already having been attacked once, he wants fresh and better protection. This of course, is where the adventurers come in.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Beyond the Towers consists of a short trek to Lonely Shore where the adventurers can collect their patron and learn about the dangers of the journey to come. Best done by boat, this gets them to the adventure's main stage: the ruins. These are dominated by an ancient ziggurat, once a temple complex and retreat that was part of the Hetepkan Empire. However, between the adventurers and the ruins lies another problem. This is the camp out of which a sizeable group of reptilian bandits that have been threatening the area. It is composed of two new draconic species: the easily cowed Sesheck and the stronger, more intelligent, shape changing Sevren. In a stand-up fight the bandits represent too difficult a challenge, so the party may have to use the same guerilla tactics that the bandits are so good at.

Once past the bandits, the ruin is revealed to be a four-tier pyramid amidst a series of overgrown pools. Below lies a four-level temple complex of relatively simple design. Partially collapsed in places, it is still heavily trapped, hence the

need for a Rogue. It is also quite light in terms of martial threats, though the few encounters are quite tough. Similarly, it is light on treasure, the bulk of which is made up of archaeological finds that the Professor will reward the characters for. The temple also contains a potential long-term threat in the form of an entrapped priestess, who -- once free -- has designs upon restoring the Hetepkan Empire.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

A two- or three-session adventure, **Beyond the Towers** is a linear affair in comparison with **Mansion of Shadows.** There is just the one alternative staging option: having a rival party searching for the ruins, either as NPCs, or as actual rivals complete with a second DM and group of players. This is in addition to the usual methods of making the adventure suitable for lower or higher level characters. Several loose ends are left to tie up, including chasing down the bandits, searching for more ruins, and even tracking down the Hetepkan priestess if she escapes to the wider world.

Physically, **Beyond the Towers** is a reasonable-looking book. The art varies in quality, but the maps are nice and clear. Lisa Wood's cover is unnecessarily gruesome, though. Although there is plenty of detail given in the scenario -- certainly enough to help a DM create further adventures in the area -- the book does feel a bit short. It is. Compare the page count for this book with its predecessor, and **Beyond the Towers** comes up short by a third, even though the price stays the same.

As a sequel, **Beyond the Towers** is an easier affair after **Mansion of Shadows,** simply because it is more linear. As an adventure itself, it is solid enough, but considering that it is part of a line catering to a contemporary audience, it nevertheless still feels old-fashioned. It feels like that "next scenario after the first one," the one that is a wilderness adventure after that first dungeon bash. This isn't a bad thing, but where this might be a good release from any other publisher, this is merely adequate for Green Ronin. The problem is not that **Bleeding Edge Adventure #2: Beyond the Towers** fails as a scenario; it does not. Rather, it is neither contemporary nor "bleeding edge."

--Matthew Pook

Mélange of Magical Creatures V

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

Once again we look at a [cavalcade](#) [of](#) [curious](#) [creatures](#). Watch your step, and don't feed anything unless instructed to do so.

Shield Snake

"We watched from the boat as negotiations broke down between our landing party and the natives of the island. It seems that two 'champions' will fight it out. Both parties stepped away, letting a man with feathers and a spear square off against a man with a chain shirt and a crossbow. The native shouted to the sky, thrust the butt of his spear into the ground, and reached into a sack on his back. The guard aimed his weapon at the man's leg. Shouting 'Na-lay-a-lay-a-lay!' he seemed to produce what first looked like a silvery whip from a bag on his back, which then coalesced into a shield. Spotting the archer's attention, the feathered man crouched at the last moment, catching the quarrel between the coils of the shield; the head and fletchings of the bolt visible to us. In a fluid motion, he readied his spear and charged the shaven man who had but barely begun to draw his sword."
-- Kievur's Journal, *Voyage of the Rising Yak*

This metallic reptile is a favorite "pet" of warriors from the native tribes of many islands and desert regions. Now found in many warm and sandy regions of the world, these silvery-gray snakes are renowned for their ability to take a rigid circular shape, and to be able to resist many weapons. It is uncertain whether they learned to take this state of rigid torpor as a defensive ability to protect their young from predators, or whether it was bred into them through centuries of subtle tinkering. Appearing to be a glistening cross between a coral snake and a rattlesnake, these non-venomous reptiles are too heavy to swim, but can hold their breath for many minutes to crawl under a river. They have been known to prey on [mining birds](#). In addition to normal prey, they also require sand, which is digested in a separate stomach.

Encountered

They are normally kept in a bag slung on one's back, with a small bag containing a mouse buried in sand inside. If the snake wakes up hungry, it will eat the tiny bag. When using a shield snake in combat as a shield, a warrior can attempt a shield bash at -3 to hit (see page 406 of the **Basic Set**), and the snake will attack the target, who can no longer make an active defense. The -3 penalty can be trained up as a technique. Snakes in shield form normally protect as per a solid medium shield with a DB of 2. In regions with many cutting weapons, the snakes can be trained to assume a second, more ornate form, which requires a Ready action to signal the snake, and one second for the snake to change positions. In this "ornate" form they protect against melee cutting attacks as per large shield (DB +3), but without extra combat penalty (See page 392). However, in this state, all other attack types treat this shield as a small shield (DB +1).

Industrial Uses

"The powers of these snake charmers have been exaggerated in popular fiction. It can't be possible to use the same animal as a shield, a whip, a rope, and a pry-bar. Can it?"
-- Memoirs of General Kievur, "The War of the Gilded Sands"

Older or critically wounded shield snakes are often given a fiery burial to extract the mineral content. Tradition dictates that half be given to the warrior it served the longest. Some traditions hold that the "second" stomach of the snakes is its mana organ, and, after removing the sand, eating it will grant one the snakes' regenerative powers.

Adventure

A strange warrior approaches the swashbuckler, or otherwise lightest fighter of the group, and announces that he sees potential in that person's combat abilities. If the adventurer can pass a few "simple" tests, this native will teach him the way of the snake. If the potential pupil is reluctant, the warrior will understand and return the next day with the same offer. It is not a test to be undertaken lightly. Either way, after the man leaves, a figure showing a badge from a local warrior's guild approaches the would-be student, and makes an offer that the techniques be re-taught to him, or a representative of his. He emphasizes that it could be very worth his while.

Shield Snake

Appearance: A glistening, silvery snake approximately eight feet long.
Category: Reptile.
Diet: Carnivore, Lithovore.
ST 8; **DX** 12; **IQ** 3; **HT** 14.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6.5; Dodge 10; Move 5.
SM -2 (-1 in shield form); 15 lbs; DR 8; HP 15.
Traits: Breath Holding 2; Cold-Blooded (50°); Congenial; Constriction Attack; Fangs; Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Horizontal; Metabolism Control 1; Regeneration (Slow); Regrowth; Resistant to Poison +8; Striker (Tail: Crushing); Vermiform; *Knack:* Iron Arm.

Bouncing Tomatoes

"The pickpocket ducked down the alley. Looking both ways, the thief hid in a shadow for untold heartbeats. As soon as she relaxed, something red bounced off the wall across from her, and exploded at her feet. Engulfed a glue, she could only watch as a silk-clad female dropped from the wall and said, 'There are penalties for ignoring guild rules . . . '"
-- Triza Odlis, *Rulers of the Gutters*

These tasty tomatoes are native to hilly regions, often in valleys. The fruit grow on vines on trees. The tomatoes bounce downhill, yet many birds eat the fruit, and carry the seeds up to their nests in high altitudes. The husk is strong, and chemically resistant. This protects them from decomposing too early, and makes the fruit resistant to pests.

Encountered

The most likely place to encounter these fruits is in weapons caches, or as targets for them in combat. Being struck by a properly seasoned and roasted tomato can feel like being struck with a rubber mallet. This makes them popular non-lethal weapons in crowd control.

Industrial Uses

"Oui. And now, be careful not to bruise ze fruit, grasp it like zo, and gently press with the steak knife, slicing evenly across. Zese slices, they will make a good salad, no? Keep slicing around, until you are left with ze core. And now, to disarm ze detonator . . . "
-- Master Sergeant Philipe Fortin, EOD

When cooked lightly, the skin of the tomato becomes tough and solid. Thus, many alchemists and herbalists choose to use them as potion dispensers; some coat the interior with wax. Depending on the situation, these could contain alchemical potions, holy water, nanomachines, or chem grenades. Those who have the throwing skill can throw these with a -2 penalty, worked off with eight hours of practice per -1. In any case, a miss by 2 means the tomato hit square, but bounced off instead of taking effect at that moment (unless that result does not make sense, such as in a lava monster). Some enchanters have used these fruits to enchant bouncing and defense traits, as well as working in minor talismans and charms to resist magic.

Adventure

There is a tomato-throwing championship going on. The heroes can participate, but it requires training with the Throwing skill. The first challenge is a DX-based Throwing roll to get the tomato through a hoop at a 45° angle. The degree of success is important, with a minimum of 1. Next, a ST-based Throwing roll will determine how far it went. The degree of success is significant, minimum 1. A failure means ½. The two degrees of success multiplied together are added as a percentage to the range (see throwing, page 355; and Extra Effort, page 357). e.g., Success by 4 on the **DX** roll, and a failure on the ST roll nets $4 \times ½ = 2$.

Bouncing Tomatoes

Appearance: tomatoes, with species varying from green to yellow to red.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.
HT 12; HP 1.
SM -8; 1/2-1 lb; DR 2 (tough skin).

Impetu-ites

"Ah, yes. One of the more radical treatments of the Josu Tika weight-loss clinic. They say it is mildly uncomfortable, and one should certainly eat the diet presented and wear the safety equipment. Stopping suddenly is bad for one's health as well. I heard that one girl was summoned away quickly when her grandfather fell ill. She also suffered an unusual illness . . . "
-- Lady Tier Buena, *Trials of the Count*

These mosquito-like insects break fat cells and steal the chemical energy. The advantage is that a person's fat cells are literally broken down, allowing the lost weight to stay off. The problem is that the insects use mild radiation to do it, leading the surrounding cells to break down from radiation. Unfortunately, there is always radiation left over in the host. An unusual side effect is to cause the person to become impatient with the world about them (See below). This has yet to be clearly explained.

Encountered

These pests are most likely to be encountered taking energy from the heroes at night by a campfire. Magical, alchemical, or ultra-tech healing is the only cure. It is recommended that it be applied as soon as possible. Untreated, it causes sensitivity and internal injury (see page 436).

Industrial Uses

"These little beasties can be found naturally in a specific kind of death-aspected area. Some sages have literally spent their entire lives studying abominations like these so that we can have spells to detect and cure the scars these creatures leave in our souls. Many have succumbed to the dark rays they generate. May their souls rest in peace. Now, let us turn to chapter one . . . "
-- Petriw Thald, *Lectures on Energy*

These carnivorous insects can be used to tenderize meat while the animal is still alive, reducing the fat count. Other uses may include "herbal" treatment for growths repeatedly applied to a small surface, perhaps using a glass.

Adventure

A woman comes to the heroes. Apparently, her child is getting sicker, with no visible cause as he stays in bed for

weeks. The healers are stumped. Checking for magical links proves fruitless. Eventually, they will find that they are getting sick as well. A foe is unleashing special (invisible?) mosquitoes that bring a sickness resistant to normal magic . . .

Impetu-ites (see Swarms, page 461)

Category: Insect
Diet: Carnivore
Traits and *Skills:* Treat as per bees, except that the attack inflicts 1 rad damage instead of poison (see Radiation, page 435), and an Affliction (Impulsiveness (6), Nuisance Effect: Graduated: Requires four doses for full effect). Each Affliction increases the Impulsiveness by one level (e.g. from (12) to (9)), but each dose wears off separately, see page 36).

Variant: Giant Impetu-ites

ST 4; **DX** 12; **IQ** 2; **HT** 14.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6.5; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM -2; 10 lbs; DR 3 (Sealed) (No DR on wings).
Traits: Affliction (Impulsiveness (6), Nuisance Effect: Graduated: Requires four doses for full effect (see above));
Extra Legs (Six); Fangs; Flight (Winged; Air Move 12); Innate Attack: (follow-up attack: 1 rad of radiation damage);
Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Wild Animal.
Skills: Acrobatics (Air)-13; Brawling-14; Jumping-12.

Siren Islands

"Aye, the pirate schooner was gaining on us. 'Twas then that the lookout spotted something ahead and starboard. 'A small island with the glint of gold,' he called down. Immediately, Old Tom shouted across the deck 'Nay, 'tis a cursed place!' Perfect, aye thought, and set a course to skim it. Sure enough, the pirate ship dropped anchor and went ashore. We managed to get away. The odd thing was that either the sea was perfectly calm around the island, or it was moving with the tides."
-- Captain Ihgioft of the ship *Fenris*

"Siren islands" are actually large marine animals with a complex life cycle. Their diet consists of krill and seaweed supplemented by seabirds and scavengers. The animals casually strain for krill and seaweed. At the same time, it also extracts minerals from the water. On the top, a siren island has at least one special tree, which produces lots of fruit. The creature then exudes the gold and some other shiny non-oxidizing metals and coalesces them into nuggets, dropping them at the base of the "trees." These have a tendency to attract birds such as ravens. The tree base also exudes an odor resembling dead fish, attracting sea birds and scavengers.

As the birds approach the lures, they are attacked by the tentacles coiled in the trees and pulled inside. These factors have also earned the islands the names "venus fly island" and "honey pot." The tentacles are only able to lift 200 lbs each, but will target anything up to about 500 lbs, with more tentacles coming to help. Most tentacles will be attacking from above, leaving the victims at -2 to defend (see page 402). Attacks to the rear are also effective, as most victims cannot defend (page 548).

If all this isn't enough, the most unusual aspect of this creature is its life cycle. The "island" form grows the plant-trees on its shells. These trees drop fruit, which are carried away by birds. Birds that escape and eat the fruit drop seeds in the ocean. These seeds hatch and mature into the form known the siren islands. (See *GURPS Biotech* for more details on odd life cycles.)

If these creatures find themselves in water of a depth of less than twice their total height, they begin to panic, rising as far as possible out of the water, and moving at full speed to deeper water. If it finds an overabundance of food in an area, it will call more of its kind. It is only after a first encounter with others of its kind upon reaching maturity that its

plants' seeds are fertile; it caches the genetic material.

Encountered

The oldest siren islands can have full ecosystems on their backs, and an outside observer might not notice any difference between the palm trees scattered about. The attacking tentacles can grab most victims and quickly bring them to the mouth. Any clothes but skin-tight protect the victim, giving the tentacle -5 in the contests of ST, although thin layers of cloth may be torn off. Unfortunately for most of its victims, the dress code for men in tropical areas is no shirt . . . A stereotype of larger islands is "native" inhabitants. Myth holds that descendants of shipwrecked castaways survive on the fruit by sacrificing fish to the trees.

Industrial Uses

"Some wonder if it is truly possible to domesticate these creatures as a source of gold and fruit while not attacking people."
-- *Liber Bestiorum*, Volume III

Many naval and pirate fleets have tried to use these creatures as both a depot and as a mineral resource. Some have even had success towing the creature and anchoring it in a deep bay. Some sea-based cultures with few mines rely on tamed or captured siren islands. Some of these countries even export the fruit, not understanding the life cycle. Some cultures and pirates exhibit a "Slash and burn" policy, killing the creature and getting all the gold it currently has, a few more handfuls per tree.

Adventure

The heroes are assigned to locate, secure, and bring back a small siren isle. If no party member knows the Current spell, they are assigned an item that casts the spell, although someone must still provide the energy. Complications include competitors, pirates, natives who want to sacrifice outsiders to the god of the island, and weather.

Siren Island (see also Aspidochelone from the *Fantasy Bestiary*)

Appearance: An island with one or more palm trees.
Category: Mollusk/cetacean hybrid.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 100; **DX** 8; **IQ** 4; **HT** 12.
Will 14; Per 10; Speed 5.5; Dodge 8; Move 5.
SM +10; 10+ tons; DR 20, DR 30 shell.
Traits: Aquatic; Extra Arm (Striker, 1+); Extra Legs (Eight+); Quadruped; Sonar Vision; Subsonic Speech; Temperature Tolerance 3; Wild Animal.
Note: These statistics represent a young adult specimen that is only 10-20 yards across, and has only one "tree" at its center. A GM should feel free to bring in an adolescent with a scale number of ST, HP, and DR, while an ancient could possess 10× to 100× these statistics.

Palm Tree Sub-aspect

Appearance: A palm tree.
Category: plant.
ST 30; **DX** -; **IQ** -; **HT** 13.
SM +2; 2,000 lbs; DR 15.
Note: Each tree contains at least one tentacle, see below.

Tree Tentacle Sub-aspect

Appearance: A brown, fine-barb-tipped tentacle.
Category: Mollusk/plant hybrid.
ST 10; **DX** 14; **IQ** 4; **HT** 14.
Will -; Per 10; Speed 8; Dodge 11; Move 8.
SM +1 (6 yards); 200 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Flexibility; Mute; No Fine Manipulators; No Legs (Sessile); Wild Animal.
Notes: On a human scale, these tentacles have these statistics.
A tentacle damaged down to 1/2 its hit points will release its prey and recoil, not emerging until it has healed to at least 3/4 its max hit points.

Variants: If the GM is uneasy with the idea of tentacles that can lift a man, perhaps the sweet fruit are subtly poisonous to humans, and the tentacles can strangle men.

Beam Cows

"Well, the boss was unsure of the extra cost of importing those first few beam cows. It wasn't long before word spread of 'expensive new cows.' Soon after, we were able to round up a ring of bandits, caught in the daze of a half-dozen scared cattle. Two of the men had serious injuries from being trampled."
-- Kievr Taidn, Lead Farmhand.

This subspecies is similar to mundane cattle, albeit with unusual powers. The most obvious ability is that they can dazzle people who get too close. The second is that they can walk on air. Using a rainbow of force, they appear to walk over thin air, not rising or falling as they do so. Although they seem to have no limit, an animal will rarely go over a body length in the air. An unusual aspect of the subspecies is that those with the above powers always have solid-colored fur. Some alchemists have developed potions that, when fed to a bull, permanently change the fur color of its offspring. Note that the most popular brands of such potions change only the fur's color, and not that of the animal's milk or meat. Potions with such side effects have limited sales, but sometimes are passed off as the more desirable kind.

Encountered

As an engineered, domestic animal, these creatures are generally considered a success in frontier areas. The powers form a mixed blessing, the added protection and resistance to ankle problems from gopher holes is countered by the danger of herds wandering wherever they want. Their mobility is a mixed blessing, and obviously leads to escapees. Some homesteaders have taken to flattening the land of small pens, or building fences higher than the highest point in the pen. In the wild, animals with this power tend to have an advantage in the pecking order, and will confront threats to the herd.

Industrial Uses

"Greetings, and welcome to the 15th annual crystal competition. Here, we have the best of the local heifers. They will be judged on form, sheen, and the quality of beam bridge they project."
-- Orin Wilden, Officiant

In some areas, one or two of these animals can be used instead of bridges and ferries. There is a strong demand for oxen with these abilities. As all-terrain vehicle, they are more versatile than a static bridge. In enchantment circles, the hooves can be used to aid in items to help one to walk on air. The eyes can be used to aid in enchantment of a wand of bedazzlement. Some say the horn can be used to confuse people.

Adventure

A cowhand approaches, looking for help. Some rustlers have taken his prized Rainbow Bulls during his watch and

seeks to get them back before the lead hand comes to check the herd. Discreet inquiries will back up his story. Following the trail leads through a trapped forest. The trail eventually leads around to the nearest town. From a hill overlooking the town, the heroes can see the dozen cattle hovering at the top story of a museum. The criminals have put dark cloth over the cows to blind them and hide the light.

Beam Cows

Appearance: A single-colored steer.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 27; **DX** 8; **IQ** 3; **HT** 12.
Will 14; Per 12; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5.
SM +2 (3 hexes); 2,500 lbs; DR 5 (light).
Traits: As per Oxen, p .B460 (Domestic Animal; Claws (Hooves); DR 2 (Skull only); Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 10); Impaling Striker (Horns); Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Striker (Tail: Crushing; Limited: Rear); Weak Bite.
Plus: Affliction 1 (HT; Daze with Moderate Pain following; Malediction; Nuisance Effect: Rainbow beam); Walk on Air (Nuisance Effect: Rainbow beam).

Oxen Add: Neutered.

Ice Crabs

"These creatures were first discovered in the polar expedition of '06 and were an immediate success back on the continent, having only lost two men to the beasts. The crew took to keeping them in cages off the sides. Hanging them fore or aft caused problems."
-- Captain Ihgioft of the trading ship *Fenris*

What are popularly called ice crabs are actually two species of crustacean found in polar regions. The first is a larger, dark-blue variant found on the sea floor. This type serves mainly as a self-chilling meal. The most often encountered subspecies is a surface-dwelling crab that uses its ability to freeze the surface of water to cross it. What both have is the ability to keep the environment cool. In all but the strongest heat, they can move in a comfortable zone. Even after they die, their meat stays cool, until exposed to flame or acid.

Encountered

These light-blue surface crabs are most likely encountered in captivity, used to chill rooms and ice boxes. They are likely to be bought and sold at prices proportional to the seller's distance from the polar areas. The other aspect most likely to be encountered is that their meat does not go above 40°. Thus it can be packed with other meat and foods. In the wild, adventurers who travel in the arctic regions may find these creatures. Although they shy from fire, they have little fear of adventurers, and seek out living creatures. They then kill, cool the meat, and eat it.

Industrial Uses

"That reminds me of a time a giant snow crab got loose in the bazaar. It was scavenging from the fish stands, and broke some water jars. It terrorized the area until some guards thought of lighting a match and were able to corner it. Healers say over two dozen people caught minor cases of frostbite during its rampage." -- Inspector Bonlieu, Metro West P.D.

In some regions, especially tropical ones, these creatures can be used in all areas of life, from industrial processes to home cooling. The breeding of these creatures is a growing industry. Home and commercial use includes central air conditioning as well as cooling specific rooms. Finally, their meat, while tasty, is essential for long-term storage of

disposable products. Some companies have also designed an icebox with a cage underneath to allow the goods to cool to freezing temperatures. Large-scale projects can also make for artificial skating rinks. To some environmentalist groups, these creatures are near the top of their lists of creatures being abused. Uses in enchantment logically include the preservation of food, and ensorcelments involving cold. Other uses can include simple desalinization by freezing water and thawing the separated ice. High-tech uses can involve freezing out heavy water for nuclear reactors. Ships could fuel themselves indefinitely. The problem with herding them comes in that they frighten off all other animals.

Adventure

The group is hired to deliver a giant snow crab across town. Complications begin with containing and safely transporting the creature, and end with escape, illness, and theft. Frostbite might be a danger, so handlers must dress warm! (As a variant, the heroes might be asked to transport a dozen regular-sized ones instead of the giant one.)

Ice Crab

Appearance: Light-blue crabs.
Category: Crustacean.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 6; **DX** 9; **IQ** 2; **HT** 12.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 5.25; Dodge 8; Move 5 (sideways).
SM -4 (1' long); 10 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Amphibious; Claws (Cutting); Extra Legs (Eight); Fatigue Attack 1d (Emanation; Emergencies Only; Freezing; Link); Frightens Animals; Horizontal; Infravision; Overconfidence (15); Phobia (Fire: *Pyrophobia*) (12); Quadruped; Sharp Claws; Temperature Control 1 (Accessibility: Will not work in Vacuum; Cold only; Emanation; Enhanced Range); Temperature Control +9 (Accessibility: Will not work in Vacuum; Cold only; Emanation; Emergencies Only; Enhanced Range; Link); Temperature Tolerance 3 (Accessibility: Will not work in Vacuum; Cold Only); Wild Animal.

Variant: Giant Ice Crab

ST 10; **DX** 8; **IQ** 2; **HT** 13.
Will 11; Per 10; Speed 5.25; Dodge 8; Move 5 (sideways).
SM -2 (3' long); 35 lbs; DR 6.

Razor Birds

"The lookout moved along the narrow ledge outside the top of the building. Suddenly, a gray-brown form darted past him through the air. Pain shot through his right arm. As he realized that he had been cut, he looked about for an archer, but spotted none. Suddenly the blur passed in front of his face. Clutching his forehead in pain, the man started to double over, and fell off the ledge."
-- Lt. Poind Widke

These modest-sized steel-colored birds seem to be related in shape to ravens. What makes them stand out is the gray color and glossy feathers. Even up close, its most remarkable adaptation is still invisible to those who do not know what to look for. The leading feathers on the birds' wings act as knives, which can damage flesh as they move. In the wild, these creatures use this adaptation to be able to dive through branches and brambles to attack prey beyond such cover.

Encountered

These dangerous birds are most often seen in trained acts on street corners or in circuses. Thus, many people consider these animals to be mere parlor tricks. The real truth, however, is that they can be useful tools and deadly weapons. It is unlikely that the average citizen will own one, as a license will likely be required to train, or possibly even own such

a beast. Some assassins poison the wings just before they release the bird to attack. Some lose many birds using this technique.

"Then, the bar fight took a turn for the worse. We needed a quick exit. It was then that Spike got the idea to send her bird to bring down the chandelier. The bird swooped up, and after a few passes, the cable was severed. Unfortunately, the doors were blocked, so she held the bird, and cut down some curtains with it. After throwing the curtain down the stairs, we left by the window." -- Uri Enckov, Years of Adventure

Industrial Uses

Trained birds fetch a good price in thieves' guilds, mercenary companies, and military scouts and special ops units. By-products of the feathers some use in exotic melee weapons, such as combat fans, and finger claws. Some gladiators use them as signature weapons, weapons and finger claws. A few barbarian clans have also made a sort of "scale mail" armor using these feathers. Don't wrestle with persons wearing this armor. Enchanting spells of sharpening and increased damage are made easier by by-products from these avians.

Adventure

In the last year, the some overzealous, pigeon-hating citizens had vigorously been poisoning pigeons. Unfortunately, the local lord's prized hunting falcon died because of the poisoned prey. Thus, it has become a great crime to harm a bird. Thus, it is a great quandary to PCs under attack by even a handful of razor birds.

Razor Bird (see falcon, pp. BE14, B457)

Appearance: A brown to gray raven.
Category: Bird.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 3; **DX** 12; **IQ** 3; **HT** 11.
Will 11; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 3 (Ground).
SM -4 (1' long); 3 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Acute Vision 1; Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Cutting Attack 3 Damage (Wing Buffet) (Armor Piercing (10); Linked; Melee); Enhanced Move 0.5 (Air Move 18); Flight (Winged; Air Move 12); No Fine Manipulators; Peripheral Vision; Sharp Beak; Claws (Sharp).
Skills: Brawling-15.

Note the *GURPS Fourth Edition* FAQ that indicates that *relative* Size Modifier is used in combat (to a maximum bonus of +4 in melee). Thus attacks to a human's Face are only at -1 (see page 399)!

Variant: Giant Razor Bird

ST 4; **DX** 11; **IQ** 3; **HT** 12.
Will 12; Per 13; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 4 (Ground).
SM -2 (3' long); 10 lbs; DR 3.
Traits: As above, but the Cutting Attack is 2d.

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. There can be snakes with iron skin, fruits with rubbery skin, short-lived insects that inject radiation, and megafauna that can be mistaken for islands. Cows can have a piercing gaze, endothermic blue crustaceans are possible, and birds could have extremely sharp feathers.

Interesting *Pyramid* Links

- "[Art of Cattle Raiding](#)" by Conall Kavanagh
- "[Golem Construction System for GURPS](#)" by Steven E. Ehrbar
- "[I was a Teenage Dinosaur!](#)" by James L. Cambias
- "[Isle of Women](#)" by Ron McInnis
- "[Saroo](#)" by Matt Riggsby -- a village being towed by a neutral large creature
- "[Trespasser's Isle](#)" by Graeme Davis -- packed full of maps and horror

* * *

Many thanks to my beloved for the introduction to the creatures of her nightmares.

Special thanks to Gary J. Bartz for his fine-combed teeth processing the article . . .

Department of Universal Quality Control

by Eric Funk

"We regretfully inform you that your universe has performed an illegal operation and needs to be restarted. During this period of transition, and for an unknown period of time after, we will require viewpoints familiar with 'normality' to observe, and, to some extent, correct these anomalies. Those that perform well may be offered positions in future projects."
-- Letter of offer from the Department of Universal Quality Control

Introduction

The heroes -- either separately or collectively -- encounter some kind of distortion or ripple in reality. It may be as simple as seeing the same ball fall off a roof several times, as weird as green glowing winged sewer rats, or as remarkable as being in an imminent car accident in which the cars pass through each other, arriving safely out the other side, and no one else seeming to notice.

Each adventurer will then receive a visitor some time in the next day. Although the individual's description cannot be remembered clearly, they will be handed a sealed envelope. On the front is marked a warning: "Urgent, this letter is available for only 24 hours after delivery." Inside there is a letter which reads: "Dear [true given name], If you wish to learn more about your strange encounter at [location], [time], please come alone to the [nearby park] fountain, two noons from the delivery of the message." True to its word, the envelope and contents vanish after exactly 24 hours.

At the appropriate time, there is a man in a a gray trench coat waiting for them at the meeting place; his appearance is unmemorable, and the heroes' eyes will have a hard time picking out any distinguishing characteristics. He talks about how various factors cause holes in the universe, and that they must be patched. He will continue to detail the job's duties, as determined by the GM in "Quality Control Teams," below. If the adventurers seem interested, he will then hand them identical envelopes as last time. Opening them reveals duplicates of simple, one-page job offer contracts. They begin with the opening paragraph of this article, and mention that for those passing their probationary period, "all needs will be taken care of." If asked, the man explains this refers to meals, water, shelter, and education. Upon termination of this contract by consensual means, a full employee may choose to retire on any world he has served, assuming it still exists. With director permission, full benefits may be continued as a reward for good service.

Quality Control Teams

A Quality Control (QC) team is generally composed of rookies doing the footwork, reporting to a veteran agent. This gives the heroes full autonomy to investigate and close holes in reality. In any such campaign, if the troubleshooters are not careful or fast enough, police and other authorities may begin to link them to strange happenings. They might even assign their own version of Mulder and Scully to the case, making it an "X-File."

If it fits the campaign style, the Office can gradually grant powers related to the mission. It might begin with a power to "repair" holes in reality of up to three-foot diameter at a time, taking a minute of concentration to activate, where the agent must be within 10 or 20 feet of the event during this time. Multiple agents acting simultaneously will not make the rip close faster, but will serve as good backup in the event that one loses concentration (e.g. if attacked). Any aspect of this power can be improved as a reward for good service. Another likely power is the detection of such rips in reality. It may begin with a general awareness of the location of such -- for example, that there is a rip within 100 yards -- but not where, or how strong. Upgrades can include clarity and range, as well as the ability to detect beings from other planes, and eventually to detect people and items affected by such beings' powers.

Connecting Campaigns

The fastest way to introduce this campaign idea with a minimal impact on the continuity of an ongoing campaign is for the adventuring party to find something "weird," encounter a QC team on the case, and together solve it. Afterward, the second team disappears, never to be heard from again.

Example: Rats are infesting a sewer and are driven up into a warehouse. Local rat catchers can't do enough, and so ask the PCs to investigate. After angering the rats, they notice that they all appear to have the same patterns of movement, the same mannerisms and appearance, and so on. Meeting the investigation team and comparing notes, they work together, the PCs distracting or destroying the rats while the QC team deactivates or destroys the rip that is cloning rats.

An adventuring party could also be working for QC agents. If the QC Patron feels stretched out and cannot get enough "inside" help on a problem, he is well within his rights to call on the heroes. Finally, one or more of the adventurers may be QC operatives, albeit those never expected to be called in during the lifespan of the campaign. The GM may, therefore, reduce the Duty and Patron to a Quirk and Perk, respectively. Next comes a campaign where the Duty is not insignificant, but calls the PCs to action, sometimes in conflict with others' disadvantages. Such interactions can be exciting to roleplay and reward.

Example: "No, your black phone can't be ringing now! My blood enemy, Dr. Destruction, was just spotted downtown!"

Finally, the all-QC party may also possess these dynamics to a limited extent with "mundane" commitments, even if they have super powers. In the ongoing campaign where weirdness keeps happening, the PCs may be blamed!

Adventures

Weird adventure seeds can come in a variety of forms. In some, the technical aspect is easy, but the moral or social choices are hard. For example, the heroes discover an older lady who can actually heal people; she has found a room that accelerates healing rates, while distracting the patients with new age mysticism. Other tasks involve combat or a physically challenging event, such as a ghost refusing to depart, actively fighting the PCs' progress toward its anchor. It could be as dangerous as the villain from *The Frighteners* or as silly as the ghosts in *Beetlejuice.* Finally, there may be doorways to otherwhere and things that come through them. What will the adventurers do with the mail they find below the mail slots?

Adventure Seeds

A Luring: Local children have discovered a small hole in a tree stump. The other end seems to float over a different vendor in the nearby open market each day. Thus, using fishing lines, they angle down and take candy.

"Broken Tunnel?": One end of a disused tunnel is in a dark area of the campaign city, the other in Cairo, Egypt. The heroes might want to stop criminals from using it for getaways. Of course, using the tunnel may prove problematic, since those on both sides may not speak the language on the other side.

Electron Counts: Water passing through a certain section of the park turns into something with a similar effect to alcohol. It is extremely intoxicating, and causes a gasoline engine to run at near 100% fuel efficiency, giving off dark red smoke.

Wining and Dining?: Books in a small private library are weeping wine. Inhabitants below begin to complain about strange grape stains. The challenge may be social: gain access. Where is the owner? Evidence shows that some small things have pulled him through a doorway. Will the PCs investigate, or close the hold behind him? Investigation shows that he was last seen just before a new moon; in fact, that is when a portal opens in the middle of the library. Cleaning just the shelves will not affect this.

Evil Inside: Fluorescent lights in a warehouse change hues, and are inhabited by electric spirits, which have

frightened away the workers there. In addition, they seem to be collecting various metals, forming a structure in the center of a maze of metal boxes. In addition to being an eyesore, they have a penchant for electronics and may corrupt technical spirit-breaking tools.

When You Wish Upon a Star: At a tiny wishing well, superstition works! Wishing on a star, opening fortune cookies, tossing salt over one's shoulder, even breaking a mirror . . . Can the heroes bear to close it down?

Complications can be added to any above in the form of mundane investigators, from the unscrupulous to the honest, depending on the GM's mood, be they reporters, police detectives, or FBI agents. They all want something to report back, and to be the first to get the scoop as to exactly what happened, "who" did it, and how it can be prevented.

As an additional complication, one of the above agencies contacts the PCs, asking for help in solving a mystery due to an anonymous tip that they have occult knowledge that might help. It is possible that it is a coincidence, and a murder was arranged to look like a ghost killed them. It may be a distraction planned for the heroes to hide a PHASE operation (see below). The crime is related to a rip, such as air being let out of car tires in a parking lot. It happens that air is disappearing from the entire parking lot, slowly. Finally, and most dangerously, it could be a low-level PHASE operation.

Opposing Forces

Nevercorp

The PHASE Department is called Phenomenal Harvesting and Signal Exposition on paper, and Paranormal Hunting and Secure Elimination by its victims. These suits are looking for and securing places where water runs uphill and cheese turns into gold. The level of secrecy, weaponry, and tactics varies by campaign, but their city's headquarters shouldn't be within the reach of PCs, except perhaps at the end of a story arc. These agents will often attempt to distract heroes nosing around their operations by mysteriously "revealing" or amplifying existing holes that are worth no profit. These "humanitarian" cases can even make the news at times. e.g., a lone picture that drips blood might become "contagious" if brought into a museum.

Known PHASE plans involved the harvesting of odd molecules for their various effects on the human body (see ***GURPS Calahan's Crosstime Salloon***) and building a turbine in a perpetual waterfall.

Variants

*"Actually, I heard where the wizards were saying that the universe **was** destroyed all in one go, but instantly came back all in one go."*
-- Terry Pratchett, *Going Postal*

Disconnected

By agreement, the PCs could now live outside a normal human life. They are "saved" at the moment of "restore" such that they have memories of the agreement, and slightly augmented bodies. Meanwhile, a twin continues normal life, with family, friends, and a day job. The office provides a modest cash salary to pay for incidentals, such as cab fare. The augmented bodies do not need to eat or sleep. Contact with old friends and relations is, of course, forbidden.

No Fears

People "cleansed" using these powers may have their memories removed or fogged from the time they were first "infected." This can have a *Men In Black* effect when dealing with ordinary citizens. Heroes should have some immunity to extradimensional corruption, although trying to piece together one's memories is a staple of horror and science fiction. Many agents are working for a company just to try to find themselves!

GURPS

Some **GURPS** advantages may help the PCs may include Illuminated and Oracle to find the real news in papers and tabloids, Arcane from **GURPS Mage: The Ascension** p. 44 to avoid notice, Resist +8 (Extradimensional Corruption) [3], Immunity (Extradimensional Corruption) [5], Power: Purification: Healing (No Signature, +20%; Costs FP 1, -5%; Preparation Required: one minute, -20%; Not Melee: C, +40%; Melee: 4, -15%; Dimensional Rip "Disease" only - 80%; Net: -60%) [12]; Sense Rips 1: Detect (Rips: rare; Vague, -50%) [3]; Sense Rips 2: Detect (Rips: rare) [6]; Sense Rips 3: Detect (Rips: rare; Precise, +100%) [12], as well as the more usual Regeneration (Slow) [10] and Sanitized Metabolism [1] to reduce evidence. The office is also a powerful Patron that can reattach limbs, and cause them to regrow. It is recommended that one get a cast to wear as it heals. Popular enhancements to powers include Cosmic, +50%, Selective Area, +20%, and Reliable +1, +5%.

In Nomine

The even-increasing amount of disturbance in Symphony has crossed a limit, and now reality is breaking down. Each note of disturbance caused by celestials is actually causing tiny rips in the fabric of space, leaking in pieces of the Marches. After all, angels and demons aren't native to the corporeal plane. The party, in this case, might be the "janitorial team" operating in the areas with high celestial traffic. It even might be composed of agents from both sides of War, celestials and Soldiers alike. The sponsors could be Yves, Eli, Michael, or even Baal and Kronos. Subtle opposition could come from the "pro-Armageddon" Superiors.

As a variant, suppose that the day to day disturbance caused by intruders to the corporeal plane has ruptured reality! What seems to be all Hell breaking loose is actually a flood of ethereals down a number of Tethers around the world. If not capped soon, then all humanity may believe that the end is now, thus causing the tears to instantiate this belief, which causes world havoc, which in turn . . .

Variant Cataclysms

A Banestorm or [Manaclysm](#) unleashed upon a pre-*Technomancer* world can also wreak havoc. Such events may destroy civilization as the players know it, to the extent that it is not longer fun to game in.

The Cabal could accidentally cause something from beyond to enter the world, which promptly escapes. This creature then summons more of its ilk until the number of holes to its home dimension eventually causes the Earth to sink into the parallel world, destroying the universe.

Illuminated cataclysms can include the use of a world or mind-shattering device causing a mass disturbance in the collective unconscious of humanity. The death throes of billions cause all suppressed telekinetics to destroy the earth, as well as give all Jedi in the universe migraine headaches.

It's The End of the World . . . Not Really

If the GM has been backed into a corner by decisions or die rolls, then a restore of this sort may be in order for a new direction in the campaign.

Links and References

Pyramid

- ["Creating and Saving the World in Three Easy Sessions"](#) by Steven Marsh
- ["Endings"](#) by Steven Marsh
- ["Five More Magical Revolutions"](#) by Kenneth Hite

Anything else by Kenneth Hite, for that matter, including the *Suppressed Transmission* compendiums
- ["The World Ended In 1978; We Just Haven't Noticed Yet"](#) by Steven Marsh

Links

- *Ah! My Goddess* -- Debugging with the metaphor of whack-a-mole.
- *Men in Black* -- Discovering weird happenings in tabloids. Secret war.
- *The Matrix, the Animatrix* -- The "reality" is as we believe it.
- [MovieMistakes.com](#)
- *Kingdom Hearts* -- A game series that involves holes in space.
- *Time Bandits* -- A classic movie that deals with holes in time.

* * *

Special thanks to Bevan Thomas for helping melt the swiss-cheese of a space-time continuum back together.

Numina: Angels of the Old World

for *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*

by Jody Macgregor

"The common man's belief in Angels seems harmless enough; the idea that the gods have human-like servants who protect and shelter us must be of comfort to them. But it is also purest heresy. Sigmar needs no servants save us, it is the dark gods of Chaos who do their work through intermediaries. Those who claim to deal with Angels are really the dupes of cunning Daemons and must be shown the ultimate mercy of purifying fire."
-- Abelhelm Mueller, Witch Hunter

The Old World is harsh and unfair, yet its ordinary citizens persist in seeing the hands of beneficent gods in every piece of rare good fortune they have. It's a natural part of the way Humans personalize fate, removing the randomness of existence by anthropomorphizing it so that when something bad happens it was caused by evil spirits, and when something good happens it was the action of Angels. And in the Warhammer World, they're right.

Daemons and Angels do walk the earth. Not very often, admittedly, as both are beings of the Realm of Chaos and cannot survive long in the magic-poor Warhammer World, just as Humans cannot survive long underwater. Angels are even rarer than their counterparts; whereas Daemons have their gateway at the center of the Chaos Wastes to enter the world by, Angels must either wait to be summoned or force their own way through the veil when the Winds of Magic blow strongly. For this reason, while Daemons may come in hordes, the Angel usually arrives alone.

The summoning of Angels -- or Numina, as the scholars call them -- was practiced by Priests in the Old World's earliest days, but in the Empire and Bretonnia it ended with the rise of Sigmar and the Lady. Neither nation's god has been seen to have Angelic servants, although ignorant peasants of Bretonnia have insisted on believing the Grail Damsels to be such. Zealous followers of Ulric have even used this lack as evidence that Sigmar is a false god, causing the Sigmarites to retaliate by having belief in Angels declared heretical and artist's impressions of them burned.

In other nations the practice persists, and Priests of Myrmidia and Morr especially continue to summon Numina when dire need arises. The rituals of summoning are dangerous to perform -- they have been known to call down the wrath of the gods when overused or performed incorrectly -- and even when all goes well the Numen in question may not react as the Priests wish. Numina are immortal beings with their own desires and plans, and may ignore the orders they are given to pursue agendas of their own, whether because they see a greater purpose for themselves or because they have unfinished business from their last visit to the world. A Numen may insist on completing a previous mission before attending a current problem, or in the case of Numina of the gods of war, insist on avenging themselves on someone responsible for driving them from the world on a prior visit.

Religious authorities in Tilea, where study of Numina is most common, have it that each Numen is a fragment of the god they serve, given purpose and personality to perform a specific task in the world. This suggests that the gods have limits on how directly they may influence the world, an idea certain cults object to, but it would explain much. Why is it that certain places seem cursed or blessed while other havens of villainy or purity go unpunished or unrewarded, if not because the gods have limits?

Of the other races, only the Elves have any mention of Angels in their cosmology. Throughout history, chosen Elves have been capable of drawing down a part of their gods and embodying them as avatars, and they see Sigmar as a rare Human who was capable of becoming such an avatar. But when a worthy host cannot be found these embodiments walk the magic-soaked Elven lands on their own, doing the work of their gods.

The Numina give themselves use-names while among mortals, often typical names for the culture they find themselves among that derive from the name of their god. A Numen of Ulric in the Empire may call himself Ulfred or Ulli, while

a Numen of Rhya would be Renata or Rhiannon. Those Numina who visit frequently may grow attached to their use-names and persist in keeping them even when among other cultures, so some Numina will have names in very old languages indeed. The true names of Numina follow the same construction as the true names of Daemons, which gives those who consider them one and the same yet more proof.

In the Empire a secret society exists that is dedicated to perpetuating the worship and summoning of Numina. Called the Angelici, this society smuggles forbidden texts and works of art that heretically depict the Numina from the nations of Tilea and Estalia. They are led by Father Jon Denk, a Priest of Verena who keeps his identity secret lest he be cast out for heresy. He believes that his discovery of the book *A True and Faithful Relation of Angelic Conversation* was a gift from the Goddess of Knowledge herself, and has dedicated himself to learning the secrets of the Numina, gathering a group of likeminded members of disparate faiths around him. At their secret library near Totensee the Angelici gather and practice their summonings, praying that mistakes in translation haven't changed their rituals into summonings of darker beings. . .

Catspaws

Numina of Ranald, God of Tricksters

"He said his name were Rannalt. Seemed like an ordinary napper. I let him in on the job on Ralf's say-so. Did his part well enough -- good climber, I remember that. Scurried straight up that wall like a lizard. But after the job things got interesting. When we counted it up, there wasn't as much dosh as there should have been. Sombebody was holdin' out, see? But we couldn't say who. Next day, we found Slippery Eckhardt tied to a tree with no pants on, cryin' like a babe. Soon as we cut him down, he coughed it up, handed over every penny he'd nicked from us. Said it were Rannalt that twigged him. We never saw Rannalt again, but to this day Slippery Eckhardt pays a tithe to the shrine club and jumps whenever he sees a black cat. And he never welshes on his mates no more."
-- Leonard Massmnster, Entrepreneur

Ranald's Catspaws (sometimes known as Crowsclaws) look like ordinary males of a criminal persuasion. The only things they have in common are jet-black hair and that they wear fingerless gloves so that their claws can be unsheathed at a moment's notice. The Catspaws rarely use their claws for violence, and will only do so in self-defense. Their main use is for climbing while committing acts of burglary.

A Catspaw may join a gang of thieves who are planning a masterful heist if the target has somehow angered Ranald, perhaps by exploiting the poor or closing down one of his favored gambling halls or grog houses. The only thing Catspaws frown on more than exploiters and killjoys are thieves who break his tenets, either by employing unnecessary violence or robbing other members of the cult. Catspaws have a mean sense of humor, and are only too eager to play their tricks on those who don't do right by their god.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
45%	45%	40%	35%	75%	45%	35%	50%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
2	12	4	3(5)	5	0	0	0

Skills: Charm, Concealment, Disguise, Dodge Blow, Evaluate, Gamble, Gossip, Haggle, Intimidate, Perception, Pick Lock, Scale Sheer Surface +20%, Search, Secret Language (Thieves' Tongue), Secret Signs (Thief), Shadowing, Silent Move, Sleight of Hand, Speak Arcane Language (Angelic), Speak Language (any)

Talents: Acute Hearing, Alley Cat, Angelic Aura, Excellent Vision, Luck, Mimic, Natural Weapons, Sixth Sense, Streetwise, Swashbuckler, Trapfinder, Will of Iron

Ferrymen

Numina of Morr, God of Death and Dreams

"When the moons are two sharpened daggers,
With points that could draw blood from stones,
They fly through your dreams on black wings,
And the trees in the moonlight are bones."
-- Old Tom, Drunken Streetcorner Poet

The Ferrymen are dark, skeletal figures who wear long, black robes and have raven-like wings growing from their backs. The superstitious place small statues of them in the Gardens of Morr to aid the dead in their journey, although these icons are called Morr's saints in the Empire to avoid charges of heresy.

The Ferrymen appear in places where the ethereal Undead dwell to show them the way to Morr's realm, by force if need be. They wield swords and scythes capable of harming even insubstantial Ghosts. Infrequent reports of Ferrymen come from the cursed city of Mordheim, the only place where they have been seen in numbers in the last thousand years.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
45%	30%	45%	40%	35%	45%	60%	15%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
2	12	4	4(6)	4(6)	0	0	0

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Necromancy), Follow Trail, Magical Sense, Perception +20%, Row, Search, Speak Arcane Language (Angelic), Speak Language (Classical, Tilean)

Talents: Angelic Aura, Flier, Frightening, Strike Mighty Blow, Will of Iron

Merciful

Numina of Shallya, Goddess of Healing, Mercy, and Childbirth

"She came to us cured of a plague that we had been unable to treat, but refused to explain how the cure had been brought about. Oh, she had some fanciful story about a Merciful Angel who wept while she wiped away the buboes with her touch, but we saw through her lies. The only way to cure her disease was with the aid of the Plague Lord. We turned her over to the proper authorities, and now she receives a punishment far worse than any plague. It is no less than she deserves."
-- Grietkin Beck, Imperial Priestess of Shallya

Such an intense aura of holiness surrounds the Merciful that, even if they did not fly on dove-like wings, they could not be mistaken for mortal women. With this aura of holiness comes an aura of sadness; the Merciful weep perpetually for the torments of mortals. These tears have sometimes been collected by Priests and used as potent holy water.

The Merciful are capable of curing diseases or healing wounds with a touch, and when they visit the Old World they quickly exhaust themselves among lepers and plague victims before fading away. They leave behind devout followers who often go on to join Shallya's cult or found new temples, spreading the word of how they were part of the Healing of the Hundred or the Cleansing of Spielburg.

The expressions of pity and sorrow on the faces of the Merciful only vanish when faced with agents of Nurgle, the

Plague Lord. Then they are replaced with tears of fury, and the Merciful draw their burning swords to visit quick and merciful death upon their opponents.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
35%	30%	30%	30%	35%	45%	50%	55%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	12	3	3(5)	4(6)	0	0	0

Skills: Heal Wounds, Speak Arcane Language (Angelic), Speak Language (any)

Talents: Flier, Strike to Injure, Surgery

Special Rules

Healing Touch: The touch of the Merciful cures any disease and heals d10+3 Wounds. It may also cure a single insanity.

Myrmidisir

Numina of Myrmidia, Goddess of War

"I served under General Cobbe for a time, before the Storm of Chaos. He was an inspired tactician; Cobbe's Traverse is still taught to students today. What they aren't taught is that behind Cobbe there was a woman, a mysterious Tilean lady who was only rarely seen outside of his tent. The men thought she was a mere courtesan, but I knew Cobbe better. She was his closest advisor, and on the eve of battle he would allow no one else but her to see him. There was gossip of course, but I believe they spent their nights talking of nothing but stratagems, for surely such inspired tactics came from an extraordinary source."
-- Colonel Senf von Scharf, Imperial Army (Retired)

The Myrmidisir, the watchers of war, appear as strong-featured women of noble temperament, although in times of crisis eagle's wings grow from their back and they stand revealed in all their terrible glory. These watchers are fascinated by the to-and-fro of battle and are sometimes glimpsed by soldiers, looking down on them from hills or even soaring overhead. They prefer to watch the warfare of intelligent races; the brute force and lack of subtlety displayed by the Orcs and their kind bore them. They interfere with a battle only when the rules of combat are grievously broken, such as when an army mercilessly slaughters civilians or prisoners. On these occasions they fly into battle wielding spear and shield, fighting with a fury that is terrible to behold. Few have ever lived to tell of an attack by the Myrmidisir.

The Myrmidisir have studied strategy closely and are among the greatest tacticians in the world. They only share their secrets on rare occasions, but just as Myrmidia was smitten with the mortal Ottokar according to legend, the Myrmidisir may grow fond of mortals who display a mastery of strategy and grant them their favor and knowledge.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
50%	50%	50%	40%	50%	50%	50%	40%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
2	12	5	4(6)	4(6)	0	0	0

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Strategy/Tactics + 20%), Command, Dodge Blow, Intimidate, Navigation, Perception +20%, Read/Write, Speak Arcane Language (Angelic), Speak Language (Estalian, Tilean)

Talents: Angelic Aura, Disarm, Excellent Vision, Flier, Lightning Parry, Quick Draw, Specialist Weapon Group (All), Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Stun, Will of Iron

Scripsisters

Numina of Verena, Goddess of Learning and Justice

"I have seen evidence that the famed engineer Leonardo of Miragliano did consort with an otherworldly being who answered to the Classical name 'Nemosynian,' that he kept her magically chained and bound that she would help him in his endeavors and fabulous inventions. These inventions, therefore, came from a heretical source and the possession of such amounts to a grave crime. The Emperor will not hear me, but still it is my holy duty to remove these abominations from the world."
-- Vinzenz Falkensteiner, Witch Hunter

The Scripsisters appear as ordinary women of a scholarly bent. When entering the world by their own means they gravitate to great libraries and centers of learning where they use their powers to secretly aid devout scholars in their research, leaving relevant books in exactly the right place to be stumbled across or placing enchantments on them so that they seem to snag the fingers of those who touch them. For this reason some Verenans trail their fingers along bookshelves when browsing them in case a Scripsister has left such an enchantment behind.

Some scholars have also summoned Scripsisters to aid them in important works. They make excellent research partners as they know unerringly where to look for the right information, even in seemingly tangential or irrelevant texts.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
25%	30%	25%	25%	35%	75%	50%	45%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	12	2	2(4)	4	0	0	0

Skills: Academic Knowledge (the Arts, Astronomy, Daemonology, Engineering, Genealogy/Heraldry, History, Law, Magic, Necromancy, Philosophy, Runes, Science, Strategy/Tactics, Theology), Concealment, Evaluate, Lip Reading, Magical Sense, Navigation, Read/Write, Search, Silent Move, Sleight of Hand

Talents: Angelic Aura, Linguistics, Will of Iron

Special Rules

Gift of Tongues: The Scripsisters speak every language, even those secret or arcane, and never need to test on them.
Gift of Knowledge: A Scripsister's aid grants a +40% bonus to any Academic Knowledge test.

Wolfskin

Numina of Ulric, God of Wolves, Battle, and Winter

"With a terrible howling he came, Ulric Blood-hand himself, in the guise of a berserk with the head of a silver mountain wolf. He leapt over us and into the ranks of Archaon's horde, lashing out with tooth and fang. With every blow a

> *New Talent:* **Angelic**

servant of the dark gods fell. He was truly terrible to behold, yet glorious at the same time, a god in his righteous fury. I've heard no one else tell of it, but he was truly what saved Middenheim that day. Yes, all this came after I took the blow to the head. What of it?"
-- Johann Schlitz, Soldier of Middenheim

Wolfskin take the form of broad-shouldered men, as large as the largest Norscan, with a thin coating of fur over most of their bodies. Their heads are those of fearsome wolves. It is said that in the days before the Empire's founding a Wolfskin mated with a woman who then gave birth to children who were able to take the forms of wolves or men, but few give credence to this tale.

The Wolfskin love nothing more than battle, and when called they can be difficult to control. There are tribes of raiders in Norsca who have summoned a Wolfskin to aid them only to fall before his attack themselves after the battle was thought won. They are indifferent to mortals, and care only for the shedding of blood, though they will attack the followers of other gods in preference to followers of their own.

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
50%	0%	50%	45%	40%	25%	50%	15%

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
2	12	5	4(6)	4	0	0	0

Skills: Dodge Blow, Intimidate, Perception, Secret Language (Battle Tongue), Speak Arcane Language (Angelic), Speak Language (Norse)

Talents: Angelic Aura, Frenzy, Frightening, Natural Weapons, Night Vision, Strike Mighty Blow, Strike to Injure, Swashbuckler, Will of Iron

Numina of Other Gods

Rumors persist that Numina of other gods than those described above exist, although they have been sighted so rarely they make the Numina here seem common. An underwater creature with the body of a man and the tail of a fish seen by some sailors has been called an Angel of Manaan, King of the Sea. Strange, mean-natured spirits or "Spites" seen within the forest of Athel Loren may be servants of Taal and Rhya, the nature gods. Followers of Ahalt the Drinker speak of corn-men who absorb blood through their roots, and followers of Handrich, God of Trade, may be convinced under duress to speak of the unlikely Angels of Accountancy.

Aura

Description: Numina are made of the very stuff of magic and this protects them when they are in the mortal world. Any time a non-magical weapon hits a Numen, the Numen's Toughness Bonus is treated as though it were increased by +2. Additionally, the Numen's own attacks are considered to be magical. Lastly, Numina are completely immune to the effects of poison and suffocation.

Appendix Z

Random Sci-Fi Gun Generator

for *GURPS, d20 System, Savage Worlds, FUDGE,* and *D6 System*

by Nikola Vrtis

Need a new weapon for your sci-fi/space-opera campaign? This script randomly generates game characteristics for one, complete with a technobabble name. Some combinations are more "space opera" than others, so you might need to create a few guns before you get something that suits your needs. The details of the gun's history and technology are left to you.

Click [this link](#) for the generator!

Marriage Is Two Different Entities That're More Interesting Together

My poetry professor in college, [Dr. David Kirby](), did what many good professors do in instructing their classes: He wrote the book we used. The book in question, *[Writing Poetry: Where Poems Come from and How to Write Them,]()* contained an overview of the various "shapes" a poem can take. Most of the shapes don't have much direct relationship to gaming (for example, there isn't a direct RPG corollary that I can think of for the "formal" poem, which encompasses sonnets, haikus, and the like), but a couple of them have a direct application to the gaming world. This week and next I'll be discussing those forms that make sense to plumb for ideas, in the neverending quest for inspiration.

And, as an extra "bonus" bit of shameless file-drudging, I'll be digging up a poem or two from my archives. This one is over a decade old now, and I can even pretend it's directly gamerly related because its inspiration is taken from a gaming book.

Fly in the Cold War Ice

In addition to sabotaging machinery, spies can sabotage events. These operations often resemble enormous practical jokes. . . . [One] such incident occurred at the Chinese Communist Culture Exposition in Japan. CIA posters advertising that event promised, "Lots of free Chinese food." Over 18,000 people appeared for an event expected to involve 400.
-- Thomas Kane, **GURPS Espionage**

The free world was protected by pranksters,
the ones once vanquished to corners in conical hats
and forced to "think about what they'd done."

But war made for strange bed fellows,
and the global powers made experts in short-sheets.
We slept at night for their heroic efforts:

the East Berlin Doggie Doo Drop,
the Krushchev UN Whoopie Cushion Plot,
the Korean "I've Got Your Nose" Maneuver.

Episodic, these years were spent waiting,
waiting for payoffs, punch lines, the inevitable
that never seemed to come, except by surprise.

Children hid under desks, frightened and snickering;
the terror of the U2 falling with its clown nose
payload, shot down by a Soviet pie launcher,

the slow menacing spread of Sarcasm
to China -- North Korea -- Vietnam,
the Cuban Exploding Cigar Crisis.

But the wall was torn down, destroying
graffiti that read, "There once was a man of Datong. . ."
and the pranksters are old and forgotten.

These times are tame, with little to think about.
We don't live in fear of Brezhnev's handshake,
but no one smiles anymore as they're shot in Dallas.

That's an example of a marriage poem, so called because it marries two disparate concepts . . . in this case, "espionage" and "pranking." Marriages generate a lot of their energy based on the level of difference between the two ideas.

When it comes to campaign ideas, "marriage" is probably the most common form for a lot of concepts. More often than not, one of those partners is "magic": "magic and cyberpunk" (*Shadowrun*), "magic and Victorian" (*Castle Falkenstein*), and so on. "Horror" is another popular marriage partner (with "magic" usually tossed in for free as part of that bargain), as seen in *Call of Cthulhu* (horror/pulp) and *Deadlands* (horror/Westerns). But, really, marriage can come from uniting pretty much any interesting ideas and figuring out *how* they mesh. Want to marry sci-fi with fantasy? Well, that's *Star Wars* (or most other space-opera settings) or *Spelljammer,* depending on the mix. Or how about marrying fantasy with anime (*Exalted*), post-apocalyptic (*Dark Sun*), or pulp (*Eberron*)? And, of course, you can choose how you want to mix things; tweaking the "horror/fantasy" marriage can result in *Ravenloft* or *Earthdawn.*

But marriage is good for more than campaign ideas. Really, almost any two disparate concepts can be thrown together and make an interesting character: "con man who wins the lottery," "highly skilled bureaucrat who's legally dead," or "bloodthirsty assassin who's a parent." (Really, "who's a parent" is a great hook to hang a bunch of character concepts; just about any of your standard adventurer tropes become revitalized by giving 'em a child.)

And, of course, it can be a neat way of thinking up new adventure ideas, too. Marry a "recover the antidote to save humanity" plot with "elaborate bank robbery caper," and you've got something pretty new: the heroes learn of some selfish-but-skilled folks' efforts to break into MegaConEvilCo's headquarters to steal an antidote to a soon-to-be-released pathogen, and the good guys need to assist and tail the robbers' efforts well enough so they can help them succeed, while still hoping to apprehend them in the end. Or, as another example, marry a traditional "boy meets girl" romantic subplot with . . . oh, *Hamlet.* How will the wacky antics of the new love interest play out when it's revealed that that the interest believes his uncle killed his father?

Unlike the viewpoint of most churches, there's nothing to limit the number of elements in a marriage to two. Of course, the more you add, the trickier it becomes to balance everything and make sure none of the elements are being underutilized or left out in the cord (not unlike a real-world marriage, I suppose). But, still, "con-man assassin who's a parent" has a nice ring to it.

While there are no new ideas under the sun, there's still plenty of fertile ground to be found my mixing and matching extant ones. And there's a good chance that the married couple is more interesting than either element left to its own devices.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Rippers: Horror Roleplaying in the Victorian Age (for [Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds](#))

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Christopher W. Dolunt & Simon Lucas

Illustrated by Max Humber, Pawel Klopotowski, Chris Waller, & Cheyenne Wright

Cover & Cartography by Robin Elliott

140-page full-color hardcover; $29.99

The Plot Point campaign books for _Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds_ have done several genres, from post apocalyptic fantasy to swashbuckling magic, from superheroes to oddball fantasy. What it has not done is the horror or Victoriana genres, but it brings these together in **_Rippers: Horror Roleplaying in the Victorian Age._** The year is 1892, and everything you read in the penny dreadfuls is true. Monsters stalk the gaslit streets of London and haunt the deep forests of Eastern Europe, while the ancient undead plot from beneath the sands of Egypt. Against a strengthening threat known as the Cabal stand the redoubtable men and women known as Rippers. Strong of heart, Rippers not only use the arcane lores of magic, miracles, psionics, and weird science against the growing monstrous threat, they also possess a new biotechnology -- Rippertech. Quite literally they rip parts from the bodies of the monsters they slaughter and either make potions from the organs or implant them directly into their bodies.

Rippers is a game of supernatural horror that references many of the 19th century's most notable authors, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Jules Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mary Shelley, H. Rider Haggard, Bram Stoker, and H. G. Wells, as well as Alan Moore and Jeffrey Grant Rice. It provides a campaign model that centers on Rippers operating from a player-created Lodge, which the Rippers must maintain and garner support for, as well as maintaining their own social standing and keep hidden their monster-hunting activities. The campaign itself throws the Rippers up against some of the genre's most notorious monsters, delves deep into the secrets of Rippertech, and forces them to tread that fine line between great power and mind wrenching insanity.

Possible roles include crime fighting acrobats, mind probing alienists, gun-slinging cowboys, detectives, doctors, explorers, scientists, soldiers, gadgeteers, vampire staking slayers, fury driven vengeants, and gadget using vigilantes. The most notable include the London based vigilante Spring Heeled Jack, and the slayer Johan, adopted son of Abraham Van Helsing, the man who leads the Rippers. The Rippers are divided into factions: the Masked Crusaders, the werewolf hunting Old-Worlders, magic using Rosicrucians, the Slayers, The Order of St George, and the Witch Hunters.

Character creation for _Rippers_ follows the standard process for _Savage Worlds,_ but adds two new statistics. Status can be used for influence rolls, but must be maintained through the necessary expenditure, while Reason is a measure of a Ripper's mental faculties. It can be positive or negative, and is used as a modifier for all Spirit-based rolls and rolls on the Fright table. Through scares and frights, Reason can only be lowered to zero, and the only way to make it negative is by installing rippertech. A host of new Hindrances and Edges are added, many being faction related, but the only new skill added is Knowledge (Rippertech). This is necessary to research, build and implant Rippertech.

And thus Rippertech lies at the heart of the campaign. Implant a piece of Rippertech and a ripper has amazing abilities though with some side effects that can be avoided with a good Knowledge (Rippertech) roll. For example, implanting Bone Stiffening grants extra Toughness but reduces Agility. Implanting a Hellfire Heart grants the subject fire breath and protection from cold, but prevents a ripper from entering consecrated ground. Alternatively, a ripper can imbibe an extract made from the donated material, often preferable to the Reason-reducing effect of an implant. Rippertech also has a far darker side effect that becomes apparent only during the campaign.

Most of the Plot Point campaigns published for **Savage Worlds** have been quite tightly scripted and dependent upon character experience level. **Rippers'** Plot Point campaign is more driven by player decisions, beginning with the creation of the characters' base or Lodge, by default based in London. This Lodge is measured by four stats -- Influence, Membership, Resources, and Facilities -- which take time and money to increase. Improvements reflect a Lodge's growing importance to the Rippers, and also how it can support the characters' efforts to research Rippertech and face the Cabal. The players must pay attention to their Lodge not only for the benefits (and roleplaying aspects) it provides, but also because it actually caps character level. Further, when a Lodge reaches a certain size the Rippers can assign recruits to lesser missions.

The bulk of Rippers' Savage Tales need to be GM created, and are categorized into Hunting, Investigation, Recruitment, Research, and Socializing adventures. A series of tables ease this creation process, but really act as a set of pointers for the GM. The given campaign is shorter than most Plot Point campaigns because it is intended that the GM add to it. Its focus is on delving into the setting's secrets, on travelling the world, and on presenting opportunities for the Rippers to meet some of Victorian literature's most notable monsters. Beyond the campaign itself, **Rippers** introduces a method of handling sanity loss along with this host of classic horror monsters to the Savage Worlds system.

Because the campaign requires more input upon the part of both the GM and players and there are fewer pre-written scenarios, the downside is that, unlike other Plot Point books, **Rippers** is not as easy to pick up and run. **Rippers** is easy to play though, owing its horror to the pulp end of the genre and even the Hammer Horror and Universal Monster films, and so calls for all those involved to play up to the associated clichés. Yet despite it being a game of supernatural horror, it owes something to the Cyberpunk genre in that Rippertech is akin to cybertech, although much, much grislier. In comparison with the Cyberpunk genre, the emphasis in this campaign is very much upon fitting into society as much as it is upon fighting monsters, although **Rippers** gives more support to the monster hunting than Victorian mores.

One part "The Ripper-Files," one part "Molly Millions: the Vampire Slayer," one part "Kolchak by Gaslight," **Rippers: Horror Roleplaying in the Victorian Age** brings two genres to the **Savage Worlds** system, but in emphasizing the monster hunting, leaves the period's history and manners in the hands of the GM and players.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

The Art of Dragon Magazine

Published by Paizo Publishing, LLC

Compiled & edited by Erik Mona

Art direction by Sean Glenn

160-page full-color hardcover; $34.95

Everyone has a favorite memory about gaming, and for many that means a particularly striking piece of illustration in a manual or, for you **Dungeons & Dragons** fans out there, the flagship magazine. It's worth a thousand words and all that. Since the venerable old roleplaying game has turned 30, a number of items have been produced as part of the celebration, and for the graphically inclined there's **The Art of Dragon Magazine.** Editor Erik Mona and his team went through several years of back issues to uncover the best. That's a relative term, of course, but it sure seems like they've scored some of the most iconic imagery.

There are five sections, each focusing on a different element of what makes this the game it is. Just as in the core rules, character comes first. "Adventurers" is all about your in-game alter ego and how cool he looks when portrayed by some of the most talented names in the business. "Magic" adds the most special of effects, and "Monsters" populates the pages with vicious foes. Sadly, that second part zeroes in on a lot of humanoids, particularly the undead or foes in armor identified only by their glowing eyes. There are some dinosaurs and beholders and the like, but too few real critters to claim anyone struck a good balance. The "Worlds" chapter isn't a letdown, but it is a bit harder to justify those shots. You get a little taste of everything -- martial arts, some steampunk, the near-future -- but there's doubtless a good reason this section is so brief.

There isn't a section called "Dungeons" (c'mon -- you know what the background is going to be for many of these pieces) but the book does finish strong with "Dragons." **Dungeons & Dragons'** bread and butter, an assortment of the big lizards in various modes of activity (and at either end of the fantasy food chain) spans the pages. Had the "Worlds" been sacrificed there might have been space for more of the mag's *raison d'ê:tre*, but maybe the editors have similar feelings on just how far a few fire-breathers take you.

Some of it is stirring stuff, and you wish more of them had titles just as evocative. Who suspected the ride would last three decades? If they knew someone was going to enshrine them after all that time, they probably would have taken a few more minutes to come up with something spiffy. This does lead into one of the few problems with the book, however, and that's consistency in labeling the illustrations. When two pages are taken up by one or two full-page entries, there's no place for the titles. The names are instead placed on the page preceding it, unless they're placed on the page after it. They call them spreads, except where it's "overleaf." If it's two distinct pieces, they put the left-hand piece's title first, above the right-hand piece, unless they reverse that order. Which way they go is obvious from the parenthetical "left-right" labels, save those occasions where those are omitted.

They must have concentrated on the rest of the writing, of which there isn't much. There's some introductory text at the front of the book and again to kick off each chapter, but what there is is deftly written and to the point. The compilers are as fond of their recollections as the rest of us, and they know when to leave off talking and let the art speak for itself (come to think of it, that's the title of the introduction).

The biases, if there really are any, don't seem all that overt. Some pieces, it must be said, fade into the background (it takes real skill to make the umpteenth dark elf stand out from a crowd), but the styles, subjects, and source materials

come from across the spectrum and focus on no one era of the periodical's history (yes, issue one is here). Some artists get more time than others, but it's not a parade of the same names on an endless loop.

It's going to be hard for anyone to look through it and not find something terribly familiar, something that recalls a fond afternoon at the game shop or in the rec room. It's a shame things are so up in the air about the fate of the magazine these days, but *The Art of Dragon Magazine* reminds us that art lasts forever, and so many familiar frames indicate the shared experience goes far deeper than the printed page.

--Andy Vetromile

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Omniscient Eye

Is That a Nuclear Weapon in Your Pocket?

During the last 60 years, nuclear weapons were miniaturized from a load for a B-29 bomber down to a six-inch artillery shell. At the same time, both higher and lower yields became available.

I'm gaming in far-future science fiction backgrounds like *Traveller,* so let us ignore the messy (and probably classified) details of building a physics package and focus on the physical limits in terms of weapons-grade stuff:

- **Is there a formula to calculate the yield of a nuclear weapon from the weight of the materials, and does it apply to very large and very small yields?**
- **Some SF games talk of "micronukes." Are rifle bullets in the 0.001-kt range possible using physics (not engineering) as we know it?**
- **How large would a gigaton-range weapon be, and it is possible to build fission, fusion and AM weapons with this yield? Or are there reasons beyond sheer bulk why larger warheads tend to be fusion bombs rather than fission bombs?**

--*Onno Meyer*

This is a surprisingly complex question. To take each part in order:

Size Doesn't Matter (Much)

No, there is no direct formula to relate weapon mass (or the mass of reactive material it contains) to its yield. All current weapons rely on an initial implosion, but the way this is triggered has a huge effect on the efficiency -- the fraction of the material that fissions -- and in the case of a multi-stage weapon, the emphasis is less on trying to maximize the yield from the initial trigger and more on tuning the way the energy comes out to suit the second-stage (and possibly third-stage) assemblies. The Little Boy bomb used at Hiroshima contained 64kg of uranium, of which 0.7kg underwent fission and 0.6g became energy. There is an upper limit to the yield, which would be achieved by putting all of the reactive material through whatever transformation is being used; however, increasing this efficiency is an asymptotic process involving more and more complex (and thus heavy and bulky) trigger devices, worsening the yield per mass of the device as a whole.

Nuclear-weapons designers work essentially with a given volume and weight budget, and try to get a useful yield out of that. This has proven practical. Current nuclear weapons systems have warheads rather smaller than previous ones; from the 1970s onwards, a great deal of effort was put into improving the accuracy of missiles (some of which spun off into today's smart weapons) rather than making bigger bombs; getting a bomb to half its predecessor's distance from the thing you want to blow up has roughly the same effect as increasing its yield by four or more times, and can usually be done more easily. Aircraft and artillery bombs need to have low-enough yields that the firing unit stands a chance of survival. And so on. These current weapons can typically generate a yield of one or (at most) two kilotons per kilogram of weight (achieved at the end of the 1950s), but this is not a formula that should be projected into the future (or past) or outside the range of contemporary devices.

For a given yield, the smallest and lightest bomb is not the one with the least reactive material -- the more complex trigger will outweigh any savings in mass of nuclear explosive. This is just one of the tradeoffs of nuclear weapon design; cost is also important, making a reasonable level of efficiency desirable (the reactive material is usually the most expensive part of the bomb), as well as reliability of detonation. The mass of fissile materials in current and

historical nuclear weapons is less than 10% of the mass of the device. Even selection of isotopes for weapons very rarely considers their yield per mass; other factors, such as low spontaneous radioactivity (so that the weapon can be stored for a long time before use) and ease of machining, are rather more important.

How Does a Nuclear Weapon Work?

All nuclear bombs work on basically the same principle: Bring enough radioactive material close enough together (to form a critical mass) that the neutron emitted from one decay event has a high chance of hitting another atomic nucleus and prompting another decay event . . . and so on, with a prompt energy release. Perhaps fortunately, this is quite hard.

The amount of material that constitutes a critical mass varies with the specific isotope in use; for a bare sphere of uranium-235 it is about 50kg, and for plutonium-239 10kg. Use of a neutron reflector can allow a nuclear detonation with only 15kg of uranium-235.

One problem is getting sufficiently pure radioactive material; non-radioactive isotopes will dilute the effect and may prevent it from occurring completely. (Which is why purifying -- or "enriching" -- uranium is such a big deal.) Another problem is that, when you do bring the pure material together, it starts to generate lots of radiation and heat. That's what you *want* to happen . . . but the initial mini-explosion has a nasty tendency to blow the bomb apart before most of the contents have had a chance to react. That gives you a much lower yield than you might have expected, and lots of radioactive material all over the landscape.

There are two basic solutions to this. The gun-type fission bomb (as used at Hiroshima) fires a slug of fissile material into a pit in another piece of fissile material; it's moving quickly enough that the deceleration from the initial energy release doesn't slow it down sufficiently to prevent an efficient reaction. More recent devices have relied on large quantities of explosive, carefully arranged and detonated with sub-microsecond accuracy, to crush a hollow form of fissile material into a compact space.

Fission bombs rely on heavy elements such as uranium or plutonium, and cause their atomic nuclei to be split. Fusion bombs (aka "hydrogen bombs" or "thermonuclear weapons") use lighter ones, such as deuterium or tritium (isotopes of hydrogen), and cause their nuclei to be combined. In basic form they are essentially similar to fission devices, but they release rather more energy and require correspondingly more energetic initiators; rather than conventional explosives, all fusion weapons to date have used a fission device as the initiator. Some three-stage weapons have used one fission-triggered fusion bomb to trigger a larger fusion bomb; the Russian 50MT Tsar Bomba was of this type, and there is in theory no limit to how large a fusion device could be set off in this way.

An alternative three-stage treatment is a fission-fusion-fission device, which wraps a conventional two-stage fission-fusion bomb with more enriched uranium, which is detonated by the internal explosion. This can substantially increase the yield for a relatively modest investment of fissionable material.

What Happens When It Goes Off?

The radius damaged by a nuclear explosion in atmosphere increases with the size of the bomb, but not in an immediately obvious way. Air is essentially transparent to thermal radiation, so destructive radius increases as the square root of the yield just as with any other electromagnetic radiation; however, larger bombs emit heat slightly more slowly so the damage per joule of heat is reduced. Blast is a volume effect (energy is deposited in each piece of material through which the blast wave passes), so it decays as the cube root of distance. Nuclear radiation is an inverse-square effect in vacuo, but in atmosphere it is strongly absorbed by the air so decays even more quickly than blast effect. The rules of thumb are:

r_thermal = $Y^{0.41}$ (enough for third-degree burns)
r_blast = $Y^{0.33}$ (4.6psi overpressure)
r_radiation = $Y^{0.19}$ (500 rem)

where Y is measured in 2.5kt units and the radii are in kilometres.

It seems likely that thermal and blast effects for an antimatter explosion would work in much the same way, though radiation effects would be very much lessened; however, the total quantities of antimatter produced to date are so small that this can only be theory for the moment.

Small Bombs

In the micronuke arena, the only plausible way with current physics is by using antimatter. There is a good rule of thumb that you cannot build a nuclear device, no matter how hard you try, that weighs less than a bare critical mass of whatever fissile material is chosen. Even with exotic transuranic elements, this imposes a minimum mass around the five-kilogram mark (Californium-251). Something that might improve on this would be vastly more powerful chemical explosives, but a bullet-sized nuclear device is still well beyond what can reasonably be expected.

The antimatter-warhead bullet would have to contain a long-term storage system sufficient to survive firing stresses. However, if a gram of antimatter could be made to react completely, it would develop a yield equivalent to about 20 kilotons of TNT. (Technically it would be twice this, since an equal amount of matter would be annihilated, but roughly half the yield is as neutrinos which have little or no interaction with other matter.)

It might be desirable to seed an area with a large number of small antimatter bombs, in the style of modern cluster weapons. This would destroy targets in a larger area without wasting energy on vaporizing the center as a single bomb does. This will depend very much on the mission and on the target profile.

Big Bombs

When it comes to gigaton-range weapons, a fusion device is smaller, lighter, cheaper, and -- above all -- safer than fission. Fission bombs beyond about 200 kilotons tend to be awesomely inefficient with (expensive) fissile material, and also unsafe; you can't spread the critical mass out far enough to make the weapon comfortably subcritical, and still assemble it quickly and reliably enough to get a detonation. Possibly the most awful specimen that was ever deployed was the British Green Grass device (used in the Violet Club and Yellow Sun Mk I air-dropped bombs), which barely reached 400kt yield and was created as the result of politics (the government had promised the RAF a "megaton-class" weapon); the safety device (10,000 small ball bearings) had to be removed before an aircraft carrying it could take off, which meant that it could not be taken on missions where there was the possibility that it might not be dropped . . . similarly, the American W47 warhead was safed by a boron-coated wire inserted at the time of manufacture, which could not be replaced once it had been removed. This had obvious implications for both training regimes and war-fighting procedures.

If the yield per mass of nuclear weapons could be improved by a factor of five, which seems physically plausible given vastly better conventional explosives to initiate the process, a megaton weapon would fit into 100kg and a gigaton into 100 tons. An easily portable gigaton weapon is going to have to use antimatter (a minimum of around 50kg of it).

If you have a technology that enables you to manufacture and store gram quantities of antimatter, the principal problem with using it for bombs is getting it all to annihilate at once. While all of a piece of antimatter exposed to normal matter will certainly explode, the explosion generated by the initial contact with matter tends to repel the antimatter from the point of contact, delaying the next small detonation. This would tend to spread the energy release over time (estimates vary as to just how long -- not enough antimatter has been produced to try it in the real world -- but possibly several seconds), rather than producing the very prompt release necessary for explosive applications. It is not yet clear how to get around this problem. Using antimatter bit by bit in a particle accelerator (*GURPS Ultra-Tech's* "pulsar" weapons) might be rather more effective than making a bomb with it.

How Do You Store Antimatter?

It has to be kept isolated from all normal matter. There is one technique used for doing this at the moment: suspending antiparticles in a collection of powerful magnetic and electrical fields such as a

Really Big Bombs

Bombs stop being useful when their destructive area is larger than any target you want to aim at. In "tactical" terms the largest target would probably be a division or corps. Nobody has yet seen fit to develop a weapon with a yield greater than 100MT, which the Tsar Bomba could in theory have reached; its blast circle, with a diameter of up to a hundred miles, would leave a huge hole in the enemy forces, but it would have to be well back from the battlefront to prevent friendly casualties. There would also be constraints on destroying strategic resources or valuable cities. Once all the "off limits" areas are marked on the map it might be hard to find a place for even a 20-mile wide blast (2MT).

If destroying enemy cities is acceptable or desirable, you still have the problem of only wanting to blow up one country at a time. Even the Soviet Union had areas less than 2,000 miles wide north-south. A bomb with a 3,000 mile blast diameter (400GT, assuming the relationship holds at this sort of scale) is going to have very few useful targets, unless you're waging war on an entire continent at once; this scale of energy release seems likely to cause huge disruption of weather patterns as well, spreading its effects round the world even before fallout is considered.

On the other hand, if your aim is to reduce planets to rubble, you want your weapon deep underground. Methods of emplacing it have been devised; one proposal involves dropping a series of megaton-range nukes into the same crater at 10-minute intervals to dig a deeper and deeper hole. You have to go to bigger ones gradually to maintain a slope on the hole and keep it from collapsing. (Lava will also be a consideration.) When you're down a thousand or so miles -- the biosphere was toast a long time ago -- you drop your gigaton bomb into the crater, set off a few large ones outside the crater to fill it in a bit and get some tamping, and then blow a chunk of the planet away at more than its escape velocity. (Actually blowing the Earth into infinitesimal pieces takes rather more energy: 30 zettatons at the absolute minimum. But that is another article . . .)

Penning trap, which can even contain neutral antiparticles if they are sufficiently cooled (to small numbers of milliKelvin above absolute zero). This is a power-consuming device, which would not be suitable for warehouse storage; current models contain only small numbers of particles, nothing like enough for a useful bomb.

A hypothetical storage technique is to insert negatively charged antiparticles into a molecule of fullerene; the electron cloud of the cage structure of the fullerene should repel the particles and keep them centered within the molecule. This has not yet been demonstrated, but seems the best bet for a hard-science storage system.

Nuclear weapons are complex and intrinsically fairly safe; many things have to happen with just the right timing in order to produce a nuclear explosion. By contrast, an antimatter bomb will detonate given any failure of containment -- perhaps not in the most effective way possible, but certainly releasing its full quota of energy.

References

- Institut de Radioprotection et de Surete Nucleaire, Evaluation of nuclear criticality safety data and limits for actinides in transport -- http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/nuclear/transport/doc/irsn_sect03_146.pdf
- Carey Sublette's High Energy Weapons archive -- http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/
- Rhodes, Richard (1986). *The Making of the Atomic Bomb.* New York: Simon & Schuster. ISBN 0-671-44133-7.
- Rhodes, Richard (1995). *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb.* New York: Simon & Schuster. ISBN 0-684-80400-X.

The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!

Episode 2: The Lair of Dr. Z

by Matt Riggsby

When we left our heroes, they were trapped in a burning warehouse, surrounded by thugs. If a character can fight his way through Dr. Z's thugs, he could make it to the professor's locker before conditions get too bad.

The closet contains folios full of papers, notebooks, and bits of unfinished equipment, including an object closely resembling the sketch of the concentrator. The concentrator, a hollow, ringed metal tube about a foot long and six inches across, weighs no more than five pounds, and most of the individual folios and notebooks are likewise quite light. However, the other equipment is very heavy, and the combined weight of all the papers is over 100 pounds. With the air turning smoky, the heroes have to pick what to take in a hurry.

Getting to the closet wasn't too difficult. Making it out is another question. First, a few thugs may be creeping around the warehouse, ready to leap at passing PCs. Second, the fire spreads rapidly, filling the aisles with smoke and flame. Will the PCs take the rickety stairs? Shimmy down the elevator shaft? Crash through the windows?

Regardless of their solution, by the time the investigators get outside, the police and fire department will have arrived. The police are inclined to detain anyone who looks like they may have been involved in a fight or in setting a fire. The thugs are uncooperative and will be dragged away in a black Mariah, but before things get straightened out, the heroes may also have time to pickpocket one of the thugs or ask one good, intimidatingly phrased question with a reasonable chance of getting a short answer.

If the PCs convincingly claim to know nothing or don't appear involved, they get away with no more than cursory questioning. However, the police are suspicious of anyone carrying stacks of papers or unusual hardware, so the investigators may want to temporarily hide whatever they've recovered.

The PCs may now have several leads. First, if they recovered some notebooks, study by someone with scientific skills reveals that they detail the development of a device which takes electrical power and turns it into a focused beam of energy through a large, carefully shaped crystal. The notebooks contain sketches, obscure calculations, musing about specifications, and the like. There is speculation that different crystals will produce different energetic effects: light, heat, radio waves, etc.

There are several references to going to Occident-Orient for more equipment, and several blocks of formulae have been copied into the notebooks from another source, with notations that the originals have been destroyed. One of the notebooks uses a red paper napkin as a bookmark. The napkin is stamped in gold with "Lee's Seven Happiness," the name of a nightclub in Chinatown which, on a Streetwise roll, is identified as a front for criminals.

A Physics or an appropriate Engineering roll identifies the ringed tube as a working prototype of the concentrator. With the aid of the notebooks, an electrical power source, and a large quartz crystal, a character with Engineering could rig it into a remarkably powerful spotlight.

Second, the thugs may provide clues. They don't speak English and are uncooperative in Chinese, but physical evidence indicates their loyalties. Most carry matchbooks from Lee's Seven Happiness and have tattoos indicating (on a Streetwise or Heraldry roll) membership in a gang called Triumphant Fist. Some have business cards for the Occident-Orient Import-Export company, with an address near the docks about a mile from Chinatown, and these are clearly men who rarely see business cards. If the PCs spotted the Packard, they can trace the license number to a Mr. Shang Ti Lee.

It all ties together. Lee is a prominent figure in the Chinatown underworld. His

legitimate business interests include ownership of Occident-Orient and Lee's Seven Happiness (where Miss Papillon currently performs). His more lucrative interests involve gambling, protection, and smuggling, with muscle provided by Triumphant Fist, a Chinatown street gang.

Of course, it'll take legwork to make the connections. At some point during the investigation, the most attractive (in case of a tie, the most attractive and wealthiest) male PC receives a visit from Miss Papillon. She appears when the character is alone, perhaps lounging on his sofa one night when he gets home or in the passenger seat of his car when he goes for groceries. Miss Papillon knows, broadly, who the heroes are and what they're doing. She also knows where the PC she's talking to keeps his weapons; she'll place herself between him and them if possible, and has a gun-toting thug nearby just in case.

Miss Papillon has come to warn the hero away. He is, she says, too cute to die in an ugly way. Professor Mathers's death was unfortunate, but there's nothing she could have done to stop it (which is close enough to the truth). The professor got in too deep with things he didn't understand, and the investigators are on their way to doing the same. She won't provide more detail than that, and after a few minutes of shameless flirtation will slink away into the night. If the hero tries to stop her by force, she won't hesitate to fight dirty, distracting him with seductive banter until he finds a knife in his back, a pistol in his gut, or a knee somewhere uncomfortable . . . and she does have the aforementioned thug to call on.

Presumably, the heroes won't accept her warning and will eventually get to Seven Happiness or Occident-Orient. On the surface, both the nightclub and the import-export warehouse are normal-looking businesses. Seven Happiness is a large, busy club with a bar, kitchen, dance floor, and a stage for the big band. It is garishly decorated with red-and-gold dragon-patterned wallpaper and Chinese good luck symbols. If the investigators appear during business hours, Miss Papillon is performing; she'll wink at her PC contact but won't associate with any of the party. The import-export warehouse is physically a larger version of Brown's Warehouse, packed with rice, cheap clothing, toys, machines, and other goods entering or leaving the country.

Shang Ti Lee

The heroes might want to go after Lee. That's a bad idea. He always has a few gunmen with him, and more available on short notice. He also rarely leaves his home turf in Chinatown. If they somehow manage to isolate him, he'll avoid answering questions as long as possible (denying that he speaks English, is Shang Ti Lee, owns businesses, etc.). He knows next to nothing about Mathers and will only remember him after a detailed description. Even then, he knows only that his organization funneled money and equipment to him on the orders of Dr. Z, who also "borrows" members of Triumphant Fist from him, but he doesn't concern himself with details.

Lee's ineffective in combat, but he's ruthless, devious, and will happily lead the PCs into a trap. If captured, he'll try to lure the investigators to his club or warehouse for a nasty surprise.

Both hide a layer of criminality. Back rooms at Seven Happiness host illegal gambling, and some of the bundles at Occident-Orient contain opium. All are guarded by a handful of thugs; the police have been paid off and won't come close to either place unless something spectacularly illegal happens.

The important parts, though, are underneath. Secret stairways lead to underground chambers used for hiding fugitives and prisoners, smuggling large quantities of goods, and storing weapons and money. The chambers are always occupied many thugs, and more are available at a moment's notice. The club and warehouse chambers are linked by a disused subway tunnel, allowing Lee to move contraband freely between them.

Heroes infiltrating either establishment will eventually find whatever doors lead underground (perhaps pointed in the right direction by an easily intimidated busboy or shipping clerk, or perhaps seeing too many people go down a dead-end hallway and not come back). The underground rooms are a maze: boiler rooms, basements from older buildings the current ones replaced, sections of disused sewer, and new excavations to link everything together.

Between the cramped quarters and the presence of guards, infiltrators will eventually be discovered. Each PC can avoid detection by making a Stealth roll every minute, at a cumulative -1 per minute (they might be able to hide indefinitely in a closet, but there wouldn't be much point in that). Among the rooms, they'll find a mix of contraband, financial records, weapons, and ammo, plus makeshift living spaces used when people need to lie low. Some contain

suitcases packed with lightweight clothing, and a few of those contain maps of North Africa and Egypt.

Dr. Z's Gunmen

Attributes: **ST** 11 **DX** 11 **IQ** 10 **HT** 10

HP 11; Will 11; Per 11; FP 10; Basic Lift 22; Damage 1d-1/1d; Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5

Relevant Skills: Guns (Submachine gun)-12; Karate-12; Knife-11; Stealth-11; Streetwise-11

SMG, .45 Dam:2d+1 pi+ Acc:3 Range:190/1750
RoF:13 Shots:50+1(5) ST:11† Bulk:-4 Rcl:3 Wgt:15.7

Once detected, guards raise the alarm and attempt to capture the heroes. The PCs may initially outnumber their opponents, but more come from all directions, cutting off avenues of escape and eventually heavily outnumbering them. If demands for surrender, unarmed combat, and light gunfire don't work, they'll try one of Dr. Z's new inventions: sleep gas grenades. Characters exposed to the gas lose one FT per turn of exposure and must roll against (Will - Fatigue loss) every turn to stay awake.

Eventually, at least some heroes will be captured. Wounded characters receive first aid and unconscious characters are awoken. All prisoners find themselves guarded and chained to the end of a metal shaft over a pool in a large underground room. A vaguely Asian-looking man enters, followed by more guards and Miss Papillon, who shrugs apologetically at her PC contact. This is the villain, who has shown up for some exposition:

"Good evening, my young friends. I am Dr. Z. It appears that despite warnings to the contrary, you have persisted in meddling in my affairs, just as your clever friend Professor Mathers did. But since you shall not live to see a new order with me at its head, I shall satisfy your curiosity. Your professor wondered about the capabilities of the device I had him design and what I would do with it. So much the worse for him when I sent for the last of his papers. So now I shall abandon this dreary place for the tomb of Khuthmet, which shall make me the world's ruler, and you shall meet your maker."

For PCs slow on the uptake, Dr. Z will spell it out: He hired Mathers to develop the concentrator on the condition that Mathers retain no models or records of the project. However, he ordered Mathers killed when the professor asked too many questions.

He also explains the device they're strapped to. It's part of an abandoned experiment to use tides as a source of energy. When thrown into operation, the rising tide raises a float on the far end of the shaft, which is in a chamber on the other side of the wall. As it rises, the other end falls, slowly putting the PCs under several feet of water and keeping them there for a few hours. If this deathtrap seems too simple, you can certainly [make your own](#).

"And so, my young friends, I leave you. May your new knowledge make you happy in the next life." Throwing a switch to start his infernal device, Dr. Z turns to leave the room, followed by all the guards; Miss Papillon blows a kiss on her way out. The water starts to flow, and the heroes start to descend to a certain death . . .

A terrifying plot revealed! A watery death! How will our heroes escape? Come back next time for the next episode of The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!: Tomb of the Lost Pharaoh!

Pyramid Review

Cineplexity

Published by [Out of the Box Publishing](#)

Designed by JonMichael Rasmus, John Sams, Sean Weitner, Matt Mariani, Mark Osterhaus, Al Waller, & Ellen Winter

Graphics by John Kovalic & Cathleen Quinn-Kinney

full-color boxed game with 504 cards, two plastic card trays, & rules; $24.99

Sometimes you get the feeling Hollywood is getting its ideas for movies by throwing darts at a bulletin board covered in theatrical elements and using the results to crank out a title and script. If you can imagine this process in reverse, you'd have a pretty good sense of how to play *Cineplexity.*

The object of the game (for four to 10 players) is to be the first player to score the requisite number of game cards.

To get the party started, someone is chosen to play the part of director for the turn. He takes one of the dual-slot trays full of cards from the box and pulls a card from each slot, placing them in the middle of the table and announcing them so everyone knows what's in play. They list movie elements from nine different categories: theme, setting, critiques, genre, characters, scenes, actors, production, and props.

Players begin calling out titles, trying to offer something that covers both cards. For example, if you have a card that says there's a scene in a bathroom and a prop card that says there's a gun in the film, you could choose *Saw, The Godfather,* or *True Lies,* but these bits don't have to be in-frame at the same time so it could also be *Teachers* or *Starship Troopers.* The director selects the first right answer he hears, though discussion is allowed and reference material may be brought to bear to convince him an earlier suggestion was right. Attention must be paid to who is playing director at the time since it's his interpretation that applies (critiques in particular ask for an opinion). For example, if a card says the movie has "gratuitous nudity," was "overrated," or contained a "noteworthy kiss," those are all in the director's view.

The right answer earns the player one of the two cards; the other stays on the table and is paired up with a new card for the next turn. The tray moves clockwise to the next director who now adjudicates the action. If no one can combine the two cards in play, a third may be added to widen the options; players must match two of these cards, not all three. If these three don't generate an answer, a new set of cards is chosen. The fewer players you have, the more cards they must score to win the game, and the first to rake in that many cards wins.

In an industry that seems to be skimping on cardstock of late, it's good to see cards so full and stiff they could draw blood. Not only are they firm enough, they're colorful and the text on them is as large as the creators could make it, to forestall complaints that the round was over before you could read the cards. The illustrations are small and usually just functional icons, but they're there for you Kovalic (and Quinn-Kinney) completists.

If the shrink-wrap and the website are anything to judge by, the initial offering of this game is the "premiere limited edition" and has more than 200 bonus cards. This obviously suggests the second go-round at the printers will have fewer cards (the components are packed tightly into this iteration). 300 cards is still a tidy number and should provide plenty of options for play, but you go through the cards a lot faster than "500" might hint at. Extra cards may also explain why some card backs are blue while others are darker, almost purple.

The game is another of those painfully simple ideas that produces an entertaining pastime, though it must be noted: The more you know about movies, the less challenge there may be to the game. It's still a lot of fun trying to pull something from memory to fit the requirements (and to be the first to do so), but much of the time it's just not that hard to do if you're a buff. There will always be occasions when an awkward pairing turns out to be tougher than anticipated, but those moments come too seldom, and it's a shame because that's when you feel the adrenaline and the heat. (Try coming up with a movie when one card lists Steve Martin, Steve Buscemi, or Steve McQueen, and the other John Goodman, Cloris Leachman, or Gene Hackman . . . *without* using the [Internet Movie Database](.))

As simple as the rules are, there's still plenty of debate flying as the game progresses. Most of it is the "all in good fun" brand and not the "holes in the rules" kind, but tempers can flare so get your house guidelines about what you will and won't allow in order as soon as possible. Use of outside materials can slow things down if you don't already have a laptop and a video guide propped onto the table (a game can take as little as 10 minutes). Also take heed that you need at least four to play.

There's plenty of replay value, and since the company does junior and alternate versions of many of its games, it stands to reason sequels and supplements can't be far off. ***Cineplexity*** is another good movie game, forcing you as it does to reverse-engineer your own trivia, and another winner for the Out of the Box Publishing crew.

--Andy Vetromile

Reversal, Reverse All

[Last week](#) we started looking at the types of poems cribbed from the book *Writing Poetry: Where Poems Come from and How to Write Them* by Dr. David Kirby (my college poetry professor), in an effort for some easy inspiration; the first installment was about marrying two ideas together. This week we wrap it up.

The other idea of those presented in the book -- one which has direct application to gaming -- is the idea of the reversal. In other words, take something you know to be true, and reverse it, so that the opposite is true. So say you write a poem about Little Red Riding Hood, only you reverse it; Red is a hunter, roaming the woods looking for wolves to kill . . . perhaps using her seeming innocence as a lure.

The idea of reversals is nothing new in gaming. In fact, probably the biggest tabletop gaming explosion of the past couple of decades resulted from a reversal: You *are* the vampire/werewolf/mummy/whatever . . .which is a reversal of the idea of "vampires/werewolves/whatever are these enemies which the PCs are expected to fight." Likewise Drizzt Do'Urden, the good "dark elf" from the **Forgotten Realms** setting, is a quintessential reversal from a character viewpoint.

Many other movies and television shows have premises that are reversals in some aspect: "the cops *aren't* the good guys, and can't be trusted to do the right thing" *(The Shield),* "the usual good guys are now bad guys" ("Mirror, Mirror" from *Star Trek,* among other places), and so on.

So, let's start with some campaign ideas that can arise when you assume some kind of fundamental reversal.

Okay . . . pretty much every generic fantasy game world assumes a great deal of freedom of religion. Shrines to various deities are permitted on most corners, and even temples to more questionable gods are usually allowed without too much fuss. ("Hmmm . . . how will this Tower of Set affect the resale value of our house?") But what if this is reversed such that there is *no* religious tolerance, akin to modern China? No temples, no miracles, no discussion of deities, etc. With this twist, the priest, one of the most common character types -- indeed, one of the most important of most fantasy groups -- becomes an outlaw. Do the heroes fight for more religious tolerance (even if it means giving a foothold to less savory religions)? How does the party react to encounters with seemingly benevolent religious forces?

Or let's look at a cyberpunk campaign. One of the fundamental ideas of many cyberpunk worlds -- or other dystopian near-future settings -- is the ability of the protagonists to communicate instantly and with some degree of anonymity, whether via cell phones, e-mail, BBS systems, or the like. But what if this wasn't possible? What if *all* electronic traffic were either blocked outright (in the case of analog radio waves), or monitored such that any communications would be instantly intercepted and acted upon . . . either blocked if obviously encrypted or otherwise undecipherable ("A.I. detects possible code usage at 87.9%. Blocking message, sending investigatory unit."), or recorded and stored for future analysis. In one fell swoop, this setting becomes an Elizabethan Cyberpunk campaign, where *all* actions against the Powers That Be need to be conducted in person or by non-electronic means. (Cybernetic carrier pigeons!) Most of the modern tropes of the standard setting -- instant communications, personal and goal positioning, walkie-talkie coordination -- become impossible. Suddenly a lot of interesting avenues are opened, with one simple reversal.

Of course, reversals can also be used for adventures. As one example, the typical dungeon crawl consists of traveling from a village to the bottom of a dungeon. Let's reverse it: As the heroes bed down one night in the sleepy town of Plotonia, the entire village awakens to find itself at the bottom level of a large dungeon. The heroes now need to escape *out* of the dungeon (either leaving the village to its own devices or helping to lead everyone out). Even a standard-seeming dungeon crawl becomes a lot more claustrophobic when the heroes aren't working from an area of safety downward.

Or let's look at a typical modern-day tale: the hostage situation. Reverse it. The heroes learn of a hostage situation at a local bank, and are contacted by their Mysterious Morally Ambiguous Benefactor to not interfere, and to keep the police from resolving the situation; the hostage-taker is actually uninterested in the bank's contents, but is attempting to extract important information from one of the hostages (who may confide in the "robber" out of fear, or in one of

the other hostages . . . who's actually another plant). Do the heroes agree with this mad plan and work to escalate a hostage situation? Do they become involved and attempt to find out this information via another way? Or do they do something else? Regardless, a relatively trivial reversal throws the players' (and characters') expectations into wild disarray.

Finally, a reversal can become a good means of whipping up different characters. For example, let's look again at the religious situation of our typical fantasy world. Now, in most of them it's assumed that priests are pious, devout individuals, fully dedicated to their patron deities. But let's reverse that presumption. It must be possible to devise a priest of a deity who entered the profession because it's just another job; maybe they wanted to be a healer or have access to some other perk of the priestly profession. Sure, they do what's required -- prayer, devotions, vows -- but without any more passion or dedication than a police officer repeating Miranda rights. (In a fantasy world with a large enough pantheon, it must be possible to envision a deity who doesn't care *why* someone is performing the right devotions, just so long as they are.) Again, this conjures up a completely different view of an otherwise oooooold concept: "Okay; as a follower of Ewbuntu, I'm required to try to convert you to our faith before administering a healing miracle. I'll keep it brief. HaveyouconsideredthewonderfulthingsEwbuntucandoforyou? Okie-doke . . . let's get on with the healing."

Or envision your typical super-heroic origin of "child orphaned when parents were killed by baddies." Flip the lever on the Reversomatic, and what pops out? A hero who *says* he was orphaned when his parents were killed. In fact, the hero was always ashamed by his parents, and took the opportunity of a childhood attack by a bad guy to leave his old life and associations behind. How would the rest of the Justice Club when they learned that Batguy's parents were alive and well, and living in a trailer park?

Of course, reversals are one of those spices that can only be used so often; if nothing is as it seems, then the players will quickly learn to look for the twist in everything. But as a means of taking something seemingly familiar and turning it into something different, you can't go wrong by going right to a reversal, an old idea that turns things new.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Paths of the Damned: Forges of Nuln (for [Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay](#))

Published by [Black Industries](#)

Developed by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Robert J. Schwalb

Cover by Christer Sveen

Illustrated by Tony Parker & Christer Sveen

Cartography by Shawn Brown

96-page b&w hardcover; $24.99

With *Forges of Nuln,* Games Workshop and Green Ronin bring to a close the Paths of the Damned campaign for the second edition of *[Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay.](#)* Begun in the core rulebook's "Through the Drakwald" adventure, it got into its stride with *[Ashes of Middenheim,](#)* and continued with *[Spires of Altdorf,](#)* telling of how a stalwart band of adventurers traveled across the Empire in search of the three artifacts containing the essence of a Daemon of Khorne known as Xathrodox Incardine. With the first two items -- the Brass Skull and the Dagger of Yul K'chaum -- having already been destroyed, there remains just one more, the Chalice of Wrath. If it is not destroyed and the Chalice falls into the wrong hands, there is still the chance that Xathrodox the Red Flayer will walk the Old World again and lead a Chaos army into the lands of men that are still reeling from the Chaos incursions of the "Storm of Chaos." All of the clues indicate that the Chalice of Wrath has been taken to the city of Nuln, "the Jewel of the Empire."

Once the capital of the Empire, Nuln is built upon the ruins of an ancient High Elf settlement. Hit by both great plagues and Orcish hordes in its long past, Nuln is the true home to the Cult of Sigmar, and also the Imperial Gunnery School. As the Empire's technological and industrial heart, its great forges constantly belch a pall of thick smoke, all to produce the artillery that gives the Imperial Army an important edge in battle. The successful casting of every gun is noted and celebrated by every Nuln citizen, but the forthcoming unveiling of The Magnus, a wholly new design that is a marvel of engineering and craftsmanship, is drawing nobles and merchants from across the Empire for the week's worth of partying and celebration that is Black Powder Week.

It is during this week that the adventurers must come to Nuln to search for the third artifact; their efforts are hindered by the influx of people come to celebrate. Just as much hindrances are rumors of a mutant attack ready to boil up out of the sewers, of plagues festering in the city's poorest regions, and of a murderer stalking the city streets striking victims both high and low born. Although they do not know it, the week long celebration is also the exact time limit within which the adventurers must locate the artifact and prevent other plots playing out in Nuln from coming to a head.

As with the first two parts of Paths of the Damned campaign, *Forges of Nuln* is one part city sourcebook, one part campaign. Roughly a quarter of the book is devoted to describing the city, its history, its layout, its characters, its inhabitants, and its customs. Mixed in with this description is a diverse mix of adventure hooks, the bulk of which pleasingly do not involve a Chaos threat whatsoever, which is a nice change from *Spires of Altdorf.* Also unlike *Spires of Altdorf,* the map in *Forges of Nuln* of the city is larger and better, though there are some similarities between the

maps in the two books. Along the way the author references the canon's major sources on Nuln: "The Oldenhaller Contract" adventure from the original *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* rulebook; and the novel *Skavenslayer,* in which the book's heroes face a Skaven incursion. Two new careers are included, both with an industrial (even Victorian) feel, being the Chimneysweep and the Dung Collector. Both can replace starting careers from the core rulebook. Finally there are notes on finding other work in the city, this in addition to the scenario, "Sing for Your Supper," found in ***Plundered Vaults.***

The adventure itself begins back in Altdorf, with the adventurers triumphant after the successful destruction of the Dagger of Yul K'chaum. Clues -- and the GM will need to work hard to ensure that his players understand their significance -- to the last item's location point to Nuln, and conveniently, there is a bodyguard job that gets them there. This is via a luxury riverboat, a trip that harks back to the classic adventure, Death on the Reik, and solving the almost obligatory murder mystery aboard gets the party a weighty purse and a leg up on the social ladder. Both of which will probably help them in the days to come.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

It is the seven-day time limit that presents the toughest challenge to players (though it will not necessarily be obvious to them) and GM alike. There is a lot for the characters to do and a lot for the GM to keep track of in a scenario that is heavy on both investigation and social interaction. The search for the Chalice leads the party into the scenario's various parallel plots that in turn involve a series of murders, a plague outbreak, mysterious happenings near The Magnus, and a Mutant attack. Of these, only the first is related to the search for the Chalice of Wrath, the others increasing the difficulty that the adventurers will face at the scenario's end if not dealt with. In an unfortunate and uninspiring move, dealing fully with one these plots actually gives more for the GM to do, essentially having to create as many as nine mini-dungeons for the player characters to trudge through. The climax itself is essentially one big fight, primarily against a Frankenstein's Monster-like creature, which if not defeated will kill enough victims to enable the return of Xathrodox Incardine. Defeating him requires another fight (of course).

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Although ***Forges of Nuln*** is a busy affair, its climax feels drawn out, almost a series of individual climaxes that deal with each plot one after the other. It works well enough if ***Forges of Nuln*** was a scenario on its own, but as part of the Paths of the Damned campaign, it feels underwhelming and uninspired. For the players there is also little in the way of reward for their efforts, which is to be expected in a ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** campaign, as the authorities will not want the recent events widely known and the heroes unlikely to be awarded medals. Even so, the discussion of the aftermath is rushed and only covers loose ends.

Looking back, the Paths of the Damned campaign trilogy has been an uneven affair; and, of course, the campaign as a whole suffers in comparison with the classic that is ***The Enemy Within,*** lacking the latter's scale and grandeur. Yet, just like the original *Star Wars* trilogy, its middle part, ***Spires of Altdorf*** remains the best episode. ***Ashes of Middenheim*** was too simple and emphasized combat over the setting's other elements, though ***Spires of Altdorf*** redressed this imbalance to pleasing effect with a more involved storyline and more for the characters to do. ***Forges of Nuln*** is really not a bad scenario, but it does nothing more than continue in the same vein as ***Spires of Altdorf;*** ultimately, it brings the campaign to a close rather than a climax.

--Matthew Pook

Dynamo

for *GURPS*

by Reverend P. Kitty

Hamilton Stewart just wanted to finish his thesis. Honestly.

The first in his family to earn a degree, Hamilton was pursuing his doctorate in the field of robotics development. He was chosen to head a DARPA-sponsored research fellowship to develop powered armor for special operations. While different sub-teams tackled seperate engineering issues, Hamilton worked on synergizing their results into an actual design. Eventually, he had a schematic . . . but, fearing public failure, he played "creative accounting" with the grant money to build a prototype at his house. It was buggy, but it functioned. Hamilton fed the "theoretical" problems to the appropriate sub-groups, letting them work out the solutions. More misappropriated grant money allowed him to implement the fixes, and the prototype gradually developed and grew.

It was then that DARPA cut their funding. Unhappy with the amount that the fellowship was spending on "just research," they decided to focus on another team which was producing results. Hamilton wanted to unveil his prototype, but realized that he'd probably be arrested for embezzling military funds if they looked at the records. So he quietly spent the next few months tweaking the design, until a nearby four-alarm fire spurred the armor's first field test. Without thinking, Hamilton ran to the apartment building and began saving people. The crowd cheered for their new "local superhero" afterward, which did wonders for Hamilton's flagging self-esteem.

The ego boost faded quickly the next day, when Hamilton received a blackmail call from Dr. Wayne Sullivan, the professor who had been overseeing the DARPA fellowship. He had suspected Hamilton of misusing research funds, and now knew that there was physical evidence as well. For a thousand dollars a month, he'd keep his mouth shut, and would even pass along useful new research. And if he asked for a favor from time to time, he expected it done. Hamilton could see no choice but to agree.

Desperate for money, Hamilton struck a deal with Marty Sizemore of Sizemore Bail Bonding Services (SBBS). He'd bring in the supers who jumped bail, asking for only a decent paycheck (under the table) and complete anonymity. Sizemore weighed the legal danger against the potential cash flow and agreed.

Years later, Hamilton has expanded his initial prototype into an array of specialized suits. Known publically as Dynamo, he brings super villains in for justice, while maintaining his secret identity. Of course, he's working for SBBS illegally while occasionally having to destroy or compromise research projects belonging to one of Dr. Sullivan rivals, but he's praying that no one's realized that Dynamo is behind that. Or Hamilton Stewart.

And he still hasn't finished his thesis, darn it.

Hamilton Stewart a.k.a. Dynamo   *1,000 points*

Hamilton is a slim, 25-year-old, light-skinned African-American. He keeps his hair short and wears clear plastic-rimmed glasses. He typically wears cargo shorts or casual slacks and a t-shirt with an obscure geek reference.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 15 [100]; **HT** 12 [20].

HP 12 [4]; Will 13 [-10]; Per 14 [-5]; FP 12 [0].

Speed 6.00 [0]; Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9; Parry 10.

Advantages: Alternate Forms 5 (750 point templates; Once On Stays On, +50%; Requires Battlesuit, -30%) [840]; Contact (Dr. Sullivan; Skill-16; 6 or less; Usually Reliable) [3]; Eidetic Memory [5]; Gadgeteer [25]; Less Sleep 2 [4]; Lightning Calculator [2].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Mitigator, Glasses, -60%) [-10]; Debt 5 (Blackmail; $1,000) [-5]; Debt 10 (Suit Maintenance; $2,000) [-10]; Duty (Dr. Sullivan; 6 or less; Involuntary) [-7]; Duty (SBBS; 9 or less) [-5]; Guilt Complex [-5]; Low Self-Image [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Secret (Embezzled funds and now works for Dr. Sullivan) [-20]; Secret (Working for SBBS illegally) [-10]; Secret Identity [-5].

Quirks: Perfectionist; Thrives on the attention received from being a super; Tries to dress "cool geek." [-3]

Skills: Aerobatics-12 [4]; Area Knowledge (Local)-15 [1]; Brawling-14 [4]; Computer Operation-15 [1]; Current Affairs (Headline News)-15 [1]; Driving (Automobile)-12 [2]; First Aid-15 [1]; Forced Entry-14 [4]; Games (First-Person Shooters)-15 [1]; Innate Attack (Projectile)-15 [8]; Interrogation-14 [1]; Intimidation-12 [1]; Inventor!-14 [12]; Law (U.S. Bail Enforcement)-13 [1]; Lifting-12 [2]; Observation-14 [2]; Repair!-13 [6]; Science!-14 [12]; Shadowing-14 [1]; Speed-Reading-14 [1]; Stealth-13 [4]; Traps-14 [1]; Writing-14 [1]. (All at TL8.)

The Battlesuits

Hamilton's various suits are bought as Alternate Forms, as he can only wear one at a time. The custom limitation reflects the fact that he has to have a particular suit physically present to change forms, which adds 250 pounds of dead weight unless he stashes it somewhere and risks it being stolen. Every suit lists several *Breakable* "systems" of generators and servos which power the advantages shown. Each system has HT 10, HP 10, SM -4, and is protected by the suit's DR. Realistically, *any* attack which penetrates DR might hit vital equipment instead. Roll 1d; on a 1, a random system is damaged instead of Hamilton. Extra Effort also damages a system -- it loses HP instead of FP when "pushed." (This is a special effect, trading critical system damage for Hamilton losing HP or FP.) The *Suit Features* line encompasses integral traits which are not *Breakable*.

Within each writeup, *Injury Tolerance (No Eyes; Protected)* reflects that the suit protects Hamilton's eyes against damage and (non-supernatural) blinding attacks. *Electrical* and *Maintenance* are full disadvantages; a powerful surge can knock Hamilton out while wearing a suit and extended wear can be hazardous without proper upkeep.

L. D. B. (Land Domination Battlesuit)

Hamilton beefed up the armor on the original suit and added fast-acting hydraulics that give it a deadly right hook and the ability to jump up to 96 yards forward or 21 yards straight up at Move 20. Like all of Dynamo's suits, it has ST 20 -- but in emergencies he can overload the servos to boost Lifting ST to 110 (BL 1.21 tons). This is Dynamo's suit of choice for taking out a single strong super. He relies heavily upon aimed taser shots (which get Acc 6 with his 200-yard range Radar) and will All-Out Attack (Determined) if he believes his opponent can't penetrate his DR.

- *Basic Radar:* Imaging Radar (Breakable, -30%; Extended Arc, 360, +125%; Targeting, +20%) [43].
- *Communications:* Radio (Breakable, -30%; Secure, +20%; Short Wave, +50%) [14].
- *Hydraulic Jump:* Super Jump 5 (Breakable, -30%) [35].
- *Hydraulic Punch:* Crushing Attack 20d (Breakable, -30%; Melee Attack, C, -30%; Variable, +5%) [45].
- *Life Support:* Doesn't Breathe (Breakable, -30%) [14].
- *NBC Filters:* Sealed (Breakable, -30%) [11].
- *Strength Amplifiers:* Lifting ST +10 (Breakable, -30%; Super-Effort, +400%) [141]; Striking ST +10 (Breakable, -30%) [35].
- *Super-Taser:* Small Piercing Attack 9d (Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Breakable, -30%; Increased 1/2D ×5, +10%; No Wounding, -50%; Side Effect, Unconsciousness, +250%) [130].
- *Suit Features:* Accessories (Onboard computer; Searchlight; Tool kit) [3]; DR 60 (Hardened 2, +40%; Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [300]; Electrical [-20]; Injury Tolerance (No Eyes; Protected, -20%) [4]; Maintenance (One Person; Weekly) [-5].

A. D. B. (Air Domination Battlesuit)

Dynamo's second suit was designed for engaging multiple fast opponents. It emphasizes awareness and mobility, flying at Move 12/192. The radar can detect subjects at 11 miles out, make out fine details at 1/10 that range, and lock onto up to five targets within 500 yards. Once locked on, Dynamo can release a salvo of up to 15 mini-rockets (either HEAT or Taser) amongst the targets; the rockets ignore range penalties, attacking with Move 100 and effective skill 16 plus any RoF bonus. Hamilton stays defensive with this suit, making heavy use of retreats and acrobatic dodges.

- *Advanced Radar:* Radar (Breakable, -30%; Extended Arc, 360, +125%; Increased Range ×10, +30%; Multi-Mode, +50%; Targeting, +20%) [59].
- *Communications:* Radio (Breakable, -30%; Secure, +20%; Short Wave, +50%) [14].
- *HUD:* Enhanced Tracking 4 (Breakable, -30%; Multiple Lock-Ons, +20%) [18]; Hyperspectral Vision (Breakable, -30%; Extended Low-Band, +30%) [25].
- *Life Support:* Doesn't Breathe (Breakable, -30%) [14].
- *Mini-Rocket Launchers:* Crushing Attack 10d (Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Breakable, -30%; Explosion 1, +50%; Homing, Hyperspectral Vision, +75%; Increased 1/2D ×10, +15%; Increased Max ×5, +10%; Rapid Fire, Selective, RoF 15, +110%) [265]; Small Piercing Attack 10d (Alternative Attack, ×1/5; Same modifiers, with Explosion replaced by No Wounding, -50%, and Side Effect, Unconsciousness, +250%) [41].
- *NBC Filters:* Sealed (Breakable, -30%) [11].
- *Strength Amplifiers:* Lifting ST +20 (Breakable, -30%) [21]; Striking ST +10 (Breakable, -30%) [35].
- *Thrusters:* Enhanced Dodge 3 (Breakable, -30%; Only while flying, -30%) [18]; Enhanced Move 4 (Air; Breakable, -30%) [56]; Flight (Breakable, -30%) [28].
- *Suit Features:* Accessories (Onboard computer; Searchlight; Tool kit) [3]; DR 40 (Hardened 1, +20%; Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [160]; Electrical [-20]; Injury Tolerance (No Eyes; Protected, -20%) [4]; Maintenance (One Person; Weekly) [-5]; Temperature Tolerance 5 [5].

S. D. B. (Sea Domination Battlesuit)

This suit has yet to see action. Life support is distributed and redundant, proof from attacks. Its electrified surface keeps enemies at bay while submerged and remains a useful melee weapon on land. In LPI mode, Dynamo's sonar can lock onto a target over 5 miles away, allowing him to launch an explosive or sonic stunner mini-torpedo (with Move 50, effective skill 16, and three chances to hit) at it. (See p. B415 for explosions underwater.) On land, the sonar and torpedos have 1/100 their normal range. Given the dangerous environment, Hamilton will likely try keeping his distance when using this suit.

- *Communications:* Radio (Alternative Ability, ×1/5; Breakable, -30%; Secure, +20%; Short Wave, +50%) [3]; Sonar Comm (Breakable, -30%; Increased Range ×50, +50%; Secure, +20%) [14].
- *Electrified Surface:* Burning Attack 9d (Area Effect, 16 yards, +200%; Armor Divisor (3), +100%; Breakable, -30%; Emanation, -20%; No Incendiary, -10%; Only underwater, -30%; Side Effect, Stunning, +50%; Surge, +20%) [171]; Burning Attack 9d (Alternative Ability, ×1/5; Armor Divisor (3), +100%; Aura, +80%; Breakable, -30%; Melee Attack, C, Destructive Parry, -20%; No Incendiary, -10%; Not when underwater, -10%; Side Effect, Stunning, +50%; Surge, +20%) [26].
- *Hydrojets:* Enhanced Move 4 (Water; Breakable, -30%) [56].
- *Sonar:* Sonar (Breakable, -30%; Extended Arc, 365, +125%; Increased Range ×10, +30%; Low-Probability Intercept, +10%; Targeting, +20%) [51].
- *Strength Amplifiers:* Lifting ST +20 (Breakable, -30%) [21]; Striking ST +10 (Breakable, -30%) [35].
- *Torpedo Tube:* Crushing Attack 6dx2 (Breakable, -30%; Explosion 1, +50%; Homing, Sonar, Three passes, +90%; Increased 1/2D ×5, +10%; Increased Max ×100, Only underwater, +21%) [145]; Small Piercing Attack 6d (Alternative Ability, ×1/5; Area Effect, 8 yards, +150%; Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Increased 1/2D ×5, +10%; Increased Max ×100, Only underwater, +21%; No Wounding, -50%; Side Effect, Unconsciousness, +250%) [25].
- *Suit Features:* Accessories (Onboard computer; Searchlight; Tool kit; Water Analysis Kit) [4]; Amphibious [10]; DR 40 (Hardened 1, +20%; Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [160]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Electrical [-20]; Injury

Tolerance (No Eyes; Protected, -20%) [4]; Maintenance (One Person; Weekly) [-5]; Pressure Support 2 [10]; Sealed [15]; Temperature Tolerance 5 [5].

E. C. B. (Electronic Countermeasures Battlesuit)

After getting his systems scrambled by an enemy gadgeteer, Dynamo returned with a new suit composed of optical and fully hardened systems. Its EMP does 5d (quadrupled for knockback) to those nearby, but only electrical systems take actual damage and risk being shut down. The launcher can load one lethal "stingray" dart or three nonlethal versions at a time; the difference is the size of the capacitor. Additional accessories can locate power sources and hack computer systems. Hamilton prefers to use the system hacker and dart launcher to slow down an opponent before closing in to use the EMP.

- *Communications:* Radio (Breakable, -30%; Secure, +20%; Short Wave, +50%) [14].
- *Dart Launcher:* Burning Attack 6d (Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Breakable, -30%; Increased 1/2D ×10, +15%; No Incendiary, -10%; Rapid Fire, RoF 3, No Wounding, +25%; Side Effect, Stunning, +50%; Surge, +20%) [111]
- *Ducted Fans:* Flight (Breakable, -30%) [28].
- *EMP Generator:* Burning Attack 5d (Area Effect, 8 yards, +150%; Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Breakable, -30%; Emanation, -20%; Link, +10%; No Incendiary, -10%; Only affects electrical, -20%; Side Effect, Unconsciousness, +200%; Surge, +20%) [163]; Crushing Attack 5dx2 (Area Effect, 8 yards, +150%; Breakable, -30%; Double Knockback, +20%; Emanation, -20%; Link, +10%; No Blunt Trauma, -20%; No Wounding, -50%) [80].
- *Life Support:* Doesn't Breathe (Breakable, -30%) [14].
- *NBC Filters:* Sealed (Breakable, -30%) [11].
- *Sensor Suite:* Detect (Electromagnetic Energy; Analyzing, +100%; Breakable, -30%; Precise, +100%; Selective Effect, +20%) [58]; Imaging Radar (Breakable, -30%; Extended Arc, 360, +125%; Targeting, +20%) [43].
- *Strength Amplifiers:* Lifting ST +20 (Breakable, -30%) [21]; Striking ST +10 (Breakable, -30%) [35].
- *System Hacker:* Mind Control (Breakable, -30%; Cybernetic Only, -50%) [10]
- *Suit Features:* Accessories (Onboard computer; Searchlight; Tool kit) [3]; DR 40 (Hardened 1, +20%; Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [160]; Injury Tolerance (No Eyes; Protected, -20%) [4]; Maintenance (One Person; Weekly) [-5].

C. I. B. (Covert Infiltration Battlesuit)

This suit looks nothing like the other three . . . not that anyone has ever gotten a good look at it. (Or so Hamilton prays every night.) He uses it *only* when forced to sabotage some project for Dr. Sullivan, even though there have been times when it would have been useful for more legitimate work. The suit incorporates audio dampers and light-refractive technology, as well as an automated computer system scrambler. The arm-mounted grenade launchers fire a nonlethal nerve gas derivative that Hamilton obtained from Sullivan. He designed the grenade casings to launch quietly and self-destruct afterwards.

- *Audio Dampers:* Silence 10 (Breakable, -30%; Dynamic, +40%) [55].
- *Baffled Ducted Fans:* Flight (Breakable, -30%) [28].
- *Communications:* Radio (Breakable, -30%; Secure, +20%; Short Wave, +50%) [14].
- *Grenade Launchers:* Fatigue Attack 6d (Area Effect, 8 yards, +150%; Breakable, -30%; Contact Agent, +150%; Hazard, Missed Sleep, +50%; Increased 1/2D ×10, +15%; Low Signature, +10%; Persistent, +40%) [291].
- *Life Support:* Doesn't Breathe (Breakable, -30%) [14].
- *NBC Filters:* Sealed (Breakable, -30%) [11].
- *Refractive Array:* Invisibility (EM Vision; Affects Machines, +50%; Breakable, -30%; Can Carry Light Encumbrance, +20%; Extended, Sonar, +20%; Fringe, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [64].
- *Strength Amplifiers:* Lifting ST +20 (Breakable, -30%) [21]; Striking ST +10 (Breakable, -30%) [35].
- *System Scrambler:* Affliction 1 (HT; Based on IQ, Own Roll, +20%; Breakable, -30%; Contact Agent, -30%; Disadvantage, Total Amnesia, +25%; Extended Duration, Truly Permanent, +300%; Malediction 1, +100%;

Melee Attack, C, -30%; Only affects electrical, -20%; Seizure, +100%; Selectivity, +10%; Unconsciousness, +100%) [75]

- *Suit Features:* Accessories (Onboard computer; Searchlight; Tool kit) [3]; DR 40 (Hardened 1, +20%; Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [160]; Electrical [-20]; Injury Tolerance (No Eyes; Protected, -20%) [4]; Maintenance (One Person; Weekly) [-5].

Campaign Role

Whether Dynamo fills the role of hero, tragic hero, or anti-hero depends primarily on the intentions of Dr. Sullivan and SBBS. Any version of Sullivan is a manipulative cad, but a light Doctor only sends Dynamo out to sabotage experimental projects from other professors and scientists with questionable motives, while a dark version will force him to wipe out a cure for cancer if it threatens his funding or position. Similarly, Marty of SBBS may be a nice guy who keeps Hamilton afloat with a decent job, or he may send Dynamo out to settle old scores or as a hired thug (unknowingly) by showing Hamilton forged bail paperwork.

Dynamo could also be used as a pregenerated PC. If so, it would be in-genre for his player to keep 18 bonus character points saved whenever possible. Those points could then be spent to design and build a new suit overnight, adding it to the collection.

Adventure Seeds

Bring 'Em Back Alive!: Heroes are always getting arrested for things they didn't (or sometimes *did*) do. Those that bail out tend to immediately violate the terms of bail in the name of finding the evidence to prove their innocence (or justify their actions.) If they have powers or similarly unusual abilities, Dynamo is the logical enforcer to track them down and bring them back.

Presenting My Scientific Breakthr--huh? Scientist and gadgeteer adventurers are always creating something useful, while rich philanthropist PCs support such things. Dr. Sullivan has gotten word of one such project which would render one of his inventions obsolete. The next morning, guards wake up from bein gassed, all of the records are wiped clean, and the project is ruined. While Sullivan has the motive, he clearly doesn't have the means . . . right?

Whose Criminal Is It Anyway? The supers are fighting the latest supervillain team to form up, when help arrives in powered armor. Regardless of their wishes, Dynamo focuses on taking down a single enemy and then getting away with him. Since he cannot reveal his true motive for capturing the bail jumper, will they take his word that he just *has* to be the one to take this one super-crook to jail?

A Mélange of Magical Creatures VI

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

Reality presents more creatures to confound and confuse those who deal with the natural (and not-so-natural) world.

Shock Worms

"We charged the enemy lines in the confusion. The enemy replied by sending their lances toward us. Suddenly, some halfling mercenaries popped up out of hiding. Slinging worms at us, they were able to neutralize our cavalry with repeated volleys. It hurt."
-- Lieutenant Kievr, 4th Cavalry.

These long, solid-colored earthworms are suspected to have developed under high-iron trees that are often struck by lightning. One of the first signs of their appearance is an underground electrical disturbance, resulting in a static electricity buildup at the surface. The gap across their head to tail can be many volts, enough to stun a bird. If such a worm contacts one's limb, the appendage is stunned for some time. If it hits one's head or torso, the whole person is rendered unconscious. A wax or rubber coating will keep them away.

Encountered

These vermiforms will likely be encountered wherever people leave wire and metal on the ground. When attached to their prey, these worms look like lampreys. Left long enough, they can slowly leech the conductive metals out. They can also be found in buried treasure, much to the chagrin of many a thief. Sleeping shoed horses can also be targets, and stepping on a worm could injure the horse. They are a favorite weapon for undersized humanoid slingers against unarmored foes, or foes in metal armor.

Industrial Uses

"Two men stood surveying the last slightly singed junction box. The dark machinery about them was testament to its function. The older man was the first to speak.
'Ok, lad, pass me two 225-volt lengths, and that will about do it.'
The apprentice reached into the shielded box with his thick rubber gloves and, one at a time, passed the older man the worms he had asked for. The veteran carefully laid them into the panel, and each completed connection lit up small lights in the panel. Finally, he stepped back, and testing the apprentice, motioned to the master breaker. The lad carefully examined the box, flipped a reset switch, and pulled the breaker. The machinery about them came to life."
-- Machinist's Guild training book #3.

The current prevalent use of shock worms is as a non-lethal weapon. Special treatments can lower the worms' metabolisms, causing them to emit lower voltages which permits them to be used in muscle therapy. Conversely, they could be caused pain, increasing their voltage to levels high enough to be agonizing while also causing the worm's death. A TL4+1 society might be able to use a string of worms as conductors or batteries in an organic power system. They could be used as filaments for light bulbs when air evacuated, or internally in battery production. Live worms could be sustained for hours in mostly-full jars of metal salt water and used as batteries. Enchanters might find uses to help in items of Lightning, Flexibility, Body of Metal, or Conduct Power.

Adventure

A popular warrior has held the public's admiration for a long time. Recently, the duels he fights in private have been shorter than usual. His supporters claim it is due to his experience and training. Detractors say many foes he has bested lately have been lacking in experience or training of their own. The relative of one such foe begs the heroes to break the rules of engagement and watch up close, for the honor of her family.

Assuming they do, they will find a diminutive woodsman hiding in a similar spot across the path. With each clash of the celebrity's weapon, the woodsman flings a small worm at the foe's back, along with some twigs. When the combat is over two pages rush over, and help polish both combatants' armor, while ushering them from the scene.

Shock Worms

Appearance: solid-colored worms.
Category: Insect.
Diet: dirt.
ST 1; DX 10; IQ 1; HT 14.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 1.
SM -6 (1' long); 1 lb.
Traits: Blind; Affliction (HT; Aura; Malediction (Limit: Non-metal armor DR adds double to resistance -- natural DR does not help); Incapacitation: Seizure; Surge; Usually On; Variable); Injury Tolerance (No Brain, No Neck, No Vitals); Night Vision 2; No Manipulators; Regrowth; Striker (Tail: Crushing); Tunneling; Vermiform; Vibration Sense; Wild Animal;

Giant Shock Worm

ST 8; DX 9; IQ 2; HT 15.
Will 11; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 4.
SM -1 (5 1/2 feet long); 20 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: As above, but the Afflicition is resisted at HT-2.

Light Bugs

"O insect of light
Carry the sun's message far
Ride the summer's warmth"
-- Prayer to the sun goddess Liandera, Book 36, Stanza 116.

These lofty insects are suspected to be the handiwork of sequestered monks of the temple of Liandera, the goddess of the sun and healing. These small light-colored bettles can be seen riding light waves above the clouds. Attracted to the border between light and dark, they will dance around the sharper shadows left by clouds on each other, as well as the ground. They are considered by some to be a bane of vampires, even though they do not cause them harm or dread. In reality, light bugs are merely frightened by other beings with no shadow, including some vampires and will-o-wisps. It is suspected that these creatures draw nurishment from the interplay of light and dark, especially from plants' shadows and those cast by flame.

Encountered

In the wild, these creatures can be glimpsed at dusk and dawn, chasing the penumbra across the land. At other times, they can be seen dancing in the clouds. In cities, they can live in mirrors, often getting trapped there. Some puppet shows and dramas use them as stage lighting to highlight shadows. Light bugs are popular at parties. The host would have a strong light in the center, and then release the insects to dance along guests' shadows.

". . . and that is why they claim that the rainbow and its 'pot of gold' is a swarm of these insects at the end. The temple

of Gmortch has long held a rainbow in a mirror in one of its more sacred places. From interviews with those permitted to enter, it appears to be a silver mirror with many light bugs imprisoned within. It is said that sacred writing put there will be highlighted for all to see . . . "
-- The sage Benouillous, on lighting effects.

Industrial Uses

Preserved light bugs make for exquisite curios, especially when hung as mobiles or sun-catchers. If one traces a permanent shadow inside a mirror, these bugs will highlight it, creating a sign. Some researchers are experimenting with the idea of using them to carry messages. The most successful use for live bugs in the security field is to locate living shadows (or people using spells to become so). Enchantment uses can include spells to see invisible, and grant dark vision.

Adventure

A wizard's child has been kidnapped, and forbidden to turn to the authorities, the parents ask the heroes to go after the crooks. As the heroes pass by points, and their torches strike the wall the right way, they cause shadows to fall where light bugs have been stuck, causing a shimmering effect. The adventurers will then have arrows and clues to help find the lost child. The kid does seem to have some magical power.

Light Bug swarm (see Swarms, page 461)

Appearance: Tiny flying prisms.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Photovore.
ST -; DX 12; IQ 1; HT 12.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 4.
SM -10 (<1 inch).
Traits: Chameleon 2 (Always On; Fringe); Enhanced Move 1 (Air Move 8); Flight (Winged); Night Vision 3; No Shadow; Quadruped; Wild Animal;

Giant Light Bugs

ST 4; DX 11; IQ 2; HT 13.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6 (Air Move 12).
SM -2 (2.5'); 1 lb DR 2.

Blink Scorpions

"It was our second day driving these wagons through the desert. I then spot what looks to be another mirage . . . a patch of green dead ahead in the gulley we're following. Just before we're upon it, it looks to be a bunch of eyeballs on stalks turning to look at us! Not hearin' nothing b'neath our hooves, I glanced back, and our trail was clear, but slowly closing back in."
-- Jack "Ace" Calloway, lead hand on a *Centaur Express* caravan.

Blink scorpions have no stinger, but an upward-facing human eye in the tail, and sharper claws. From a modest distance, it is relatively easy to visually distinguish from a normal scorpion (+2 to skill rolls to tell them apart, e.g., Naturalist or Survival rolls). Insects, however, rely more heavily on scent, and thus are at -6 to realize that this is not the predator they fear. If the tail is covered slowly, it will not blink. This aids in capture and trapping.

Encountered

The natural habitat of this creature is desert-like regions, particularly those that get lots of sunlight. Due to the unusually grotesque appearance, most people would suggest avoiding this creature on principle. Entophobes are at an additional -1 to control rolls against these creatures. Its gruesome appearance is used by a few particularly vicious desert cults as part of their logo.

Industrial Uses

There has been some success in using the creatures in the field of detecting enemy fliers, and using the scent glands to protect users from insects, even giant ones. There is much experimentation in growing eyes to replace lost eyes, giving Restoration a chance for "instant" healing (see **GURPS Magic,** p. 93). Work continues in the area of using them to send messages across walls, and flipping switches. The field of enchantment has long used these creatures' various products to aid in the creation of blink items, Wizard Eye foci, as well as smell protection. A relatively recent development is an inconspicuous hat that grants 360° vision, upward or around one's head.

Adventure

A noble sends the heroes on a quest for a familiar for his young wizard child. The heroes must obtain -- and bargain for -- a blink scorpion of a particular breed . . . it must match his son's rare eye color: orange-green. It is also a rare eye color for scorpions. The closest breeder is the only one who has such a creature. Unfortunately for the heroes, it has already been paid for by a powerful lord. Depending on the campaign's direction, the PCs might be able to bribe the merchant to "lose" it. Perhaps the adventurers could purchase a different one and change its eye color; perhaps the higher noble did not really choose the creature for its looks, but simply because it was rare, and could be persuaded to trade for two slightly less valuable scorpions; or perhaps the noble did like the color, but the *creature* is optional . . . if the heroes could find another orange-green monster, he might trade it.

Blink Scorpion

Appearance: As a scorpion with a human eye instead of a stinger.
Category: Plant/insect hybrid.
Diet: Photovore/insectivore.
ST 1; DX 9; IQ 2; HT 15.
Will 10; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 11; Move 3.
SM -5 (10" long); 2 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: 360 degree vision; Acute Vision 2; Appearance (Hideous); Claws (Sharp); Combat Reflexes; Extra Legs (Six in all); Night Vision 2 (shifted); Night Vision 2; Quadruped; Warp (Combat Only); Wild Animal

Giant Blink Scorpion

ST 8; DX 12; IQ 2; HT 16.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 8; Dodge 12; Move 8.
SM 0 (1.5 yards square "footprint", 4 hexes); 100 lbs; 12 HP; DR 5.

Dust Moths

"I had followed the card shark to a abandoned warehouse. I had told him I was gonna get back tha' money he stole from me. As I rounded a corner, he took a swing at me from outta nowhere. I returned the favor. Next thing ya know, we had knocked over a few card tables, sending dust flying. That was the last thing I saw until I got myself the tha' healers . . ."
-- Fiev "Knuckles" Sanchez

These moths are powdery white and seek dust to lay their eggs. Their larva filters the silt for dust mites and other such creatures. The tracks in the dust are the only sign that this life process is underway, but by then it is too late for many

individuals. A female moth that has just laid its eggs might attack a nearby predator to wound it and give its offspring a chance.

Encountered

These creatures are places where there are extreme dust buildups occur. Frontier towns, mines, quarries, gravel roads, beaches, and even riverbanks after a flood or places with volcanic silt can cause population booms. Any disturbance of the dust could incite the mother moths to attack passers-by.

Industrial Uses

"NiteHawk223's regular shipment of dust moths has been diverted to our outlet in the city of Dante. Exactly how did our contact say he knows that the nearby volcano will cover it in ash next month?"
-- Internal message on the BioMart, Inc.

Some corporations have made use of these creatures to keep storage rooms clean. One down-side is that they attract dinge bats. Still, if the crate retrieval services are automated by forklift, golem, or steam automata, then there is little problem. Enchantment uses include the berserk potion and the Sterilize spell.

Adventure

During a ritualistic coming-of-age ceremony, people have been falling and disappearing. The adventurers are asked by a parent of the next child to take a trial. As disinterested observers, they can observe, and hopefully prevent the same thing from happening to their child. The problem takes place when the ascendant is to cross a bridge alone. Custom dictates that all villagers must be on the other side of the temple. Only a few mute priests can watch from the top of the temple. The crossing is checked, and there is no oil or such upon it.

What is happening is that someone is using this opportunity to kidnap healthy youths for a slave camp. Soon they will have enough to send a shipment back. Soon before the trial, they powder the middle of the log, release some ready dust moths, and when the aspirant crosses, the moths are angered, making him fall. The kidnappers pull the youth to the side where the priests cannot see, and lock him up.

Dust Moth Swarm

Appearance: Gray Moths.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST -; DX 10; IQ 1; HT 12.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -10 (<2" long); 1 lb; 12HP to disperse.
As bees, but it is a contact poison that bypasses DR with "Tough Skin." Note that as SM-10 creatures, they can attack humans' eyes without penalty and bypass worn armor (see ***GURPS Powers,*** p. 76).

Giant Dust Moth

ST 6; DX 12; IQ 2; HT 14.
Will 11; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM -2 (20"-23" long); 2 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Affliction (Choking; Environment: Air; Variable); Enhanced Move 0.5 (Air Move 13); Extra Legs (Six); Flight; Night Vision 2; Quadruped; Teeth (Sharp Teeth); Wild Animal;

TK Mice

"What began as a experiment to test new drugs went awry. Four batches of mice escaped before some higher ups noticed them missing. By then, of course, it was too late. On the up side for civilization, their dominant genes will mean that they breed slower. Fortunately for cats, litters are also smaller."
-- Professor Anthwerp, *History of Emergent Intelligences 101*

These mice have a talent that seems to have begun as the ability to pull food from a distance without endangering themselves, but has blossomed into much more. They are gaining in mental power without an individual intelligence. Some fear that it serves as step toward a gestalt intelligence. A close measurement of their skulls reveal an increased cranial size.

Encountered

These creatures will most likely be encountered before they are seen. Food will be missing. Traps will be disabled, and doors opened. They can cause problems for wizards who do not have spells to detect psionics. One of the few things that keeps them in check is a heightened fear of cats.

Industrial Uses

"No traps worked. The ship's cat was scared to leave my cabin. The ship's wizard said there was something amiss before he, too disappeared. I guess it's just me and the mice, now . . . wha---" -- Last written log of Captain Franklin of the *Ruckus Ranger*

Industrial computing might be possible, if one could keep the collective happy. Surely governments would like a computer with IQ 16 . . . although the 4,000+ mice needed to reach that level would take up a lot of room, considering that about 12-24 mice are a 1-hex swarm. It is operated by using the mouse in front of the screen to issue commands. Enchantment uses will be for Apportation, Air Golem, and Communication spells.

Crunchy Numbers

Each doubling increases collective IQ by 1. Thus two mice means IQ+1, four IQ+2, eight IQ+3 . . . sixty-four mice together will have human-level IQ, but that is a rare gathering. (Unfortunately, when they are sufficiently powered up to IQ 8 at 16 mice, they are unaffected by "Animal" spells . . .)

For the combining of telekinetic powers, see Linking Up, *GURPS Powers,* p. 170. Summed up, all the mice's powers are of the same power and origin. Assume The Leader's Power is 3, and has N followers, the net power is 3 + N/2. Thus with 12 followers, they have Power 3 + 12/2 = 9. ST9 is enough to lift a small person of 128 lbs (see p. B17, B353). (4,096 mice total ST 2,050, with a lift of 3,362 tons . . . a 15-story 4,000 square-foot building.)

Adventure

The heroes are hired by a young dependent to find her pet mouse. She last saw it near a warehouse. Her mouse has joined a collective. They are annoying the dock workers, who are about ready to call a big-time exterminator. Apparently the cheap exterminator automatons they buy keep getting demolished. Taking the single mouse will be impossible; negotiation with the collective is the only way . . . (What happens next might involve murder plots, flying daggers, missing ships loaded with cheese, or a secret government ruling the city through puppets.)

TK Mice

Appearance: Mice, with a slightly lighter head color.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST <1; DX 15; IQ 4; HT 13.

Will 10; Per 12; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 2.
SM -7 (5" long).
Traits: Acute Hearing +3; Discriminatory Taste/Smell; Gregarious; Night Vision 1 (shifted); Night Vision 2; Peripheral Vision; Phobia (Cats: *Ailurophobia*) (6); Quadruped; Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast Iron Stomach); Resistant to Disease +3; Resistant to Poison +3; Striker (Crushing); Telekinesis (1-3); Wild Animal;

Giant TK Mouse

ST 4; DX 14; IQ 4; HT 14.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5.
SM -2 (2' long); lbs; DR 2.
Traits: As above, but Telekinesis (4-6);

Storm Knockers

"Historians have concluded that this species was the product of the vengeful wizard-king Rithkal. It seems that the King was once bitten by one of his cousin's pet squirrels. It was much later that he fomented revenge in the form of these giant carnivorous woodpeckers."
-- Scribe Tithindel, *Follies of Human Kings, Volume XLI*

Storm knockers prey on tree-dwelling prey, such as squirrels, owls, and bats, and they build nests in high places. These large scavenger-hunters prefer to have valley walls or tall trees to dive from. The primary hunting grounds for these vulture-like birds are in wooded areas, although towns can support this breed. Nominally created to handle a "pest problem" in King Rithkal's kingdom, many migrated or were exported abroad, and storm knockers now can be found worldwide.

Encountered

Storm knockers are often a nuisance for druids and dryads who shoo them from their favorite trees. City dwellers find them a mild nuisance, but are glad to have owls and mice removed from their attics. On the flip side, many rural areas consider a storm knocker knocking on the house to be an ill omen.

Industrial Uses

"This cross between a condor and woodpecker was cited as a reason for international regulations on the development of new creatures."
-- Year in review, *Metacreatures Monthly*

Some lumber mills have experimented with using storm knockers as drills or routers, especially in low-mana area. With clipped wings, these birds make good mousers in a warehouse. Uses in enchantment include as sensors, such as Wizard's Tongue, and in wood-piercing arrows.

Adventure

One villager claims to have spotted a storm knocker, and is afraid that the local shaman will see it and declare it an ill omen. The heroes must prevent ill omen by staying on the roof all night, keeping such birds away. If the shaman's meditation is disturbed, he might consider *anything* an ill omen, so the heroes must also keep their mission a secret from him. Unbeknownst to them, opposing villagers want to relocate the settlement, and are thus trying to coax such birds to attack the shaman's home. (As a twist, instead the heroes must be the ones to bring about change, outsmarting villagers on the roof.)

Storm Knocker

Appearance: A large eagle with a sharp beak.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 5; DX 12; IQ 4; HT 12.
Will 10; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 3 (Ground).
SM +2 (10' tall) (SM+0 with wings furled); 12 lbs; DR 1 (DR 8 beak).
Traits: Acute Vision 2; Affliction (DX-1; Link; Stun); Combat Reflexes; Discriminatory Smell; Enhanced Move 1.5 (Air Move 18); Extra Arm (Tongue: flexible, reach 1 yard); Infravision; Melee Attack Modifier (Armor Piercing; Link; Wood only); Night Vision 1; Peripheral Vision; Striking ST +10 (Beak Only; Wood Only); Teeth (Impaling); Vibration Sense (Tongue only); Wild Animal
Skills: Brawling-16.

Giant Storm Knocker

ST 10; DX 11; IQ 4; HT 13.
Will 11; Per 13; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 5 (Ground).
SM +4 (30' tall) (SM+2 with wings furled); 50 lbs; DR 2 (Beak DR 16).

Conch Spiders

"The conch bug is yet another example as to how natural creatures will almost always beat gengineered creatures. They can stand up to most predators, and can scavenge what they want."
-- Master Maximilian Trisel, *Lost Heritage of Natural Creatures*

This gray slow-moving crustacean covers its shell in rocks. It uses a special excretion from a spinneret to stick them to its shell. When predators attack it, the shell ablates, with the newest pieces stuck to the predator's strikers. One can identify a conch bug's habitat by the stones that are collected on it.

Encountered

In the wild, these creatures are most likely encountered on rocky beaches, or in natural quarries. Larger versions can be seen around some modern construction sites. The mortar is also useful for making casts to help protect broken bones.

Industrial Uses

"The gangs have a new way to get rid of someone. To each of his bare feet, they stick a conch bug, then toss him into the river."
-- Detective Tonners, 3rd Precinct

There is one use for which these creatures are being bred larger -- their glue. It is first scraped off the insect along with gravel, and stored in a barrel that prevents hardening. Kept warm, and in gyration, this conch excretion is taking off as an industrial mortar. It has been discovered to be even more effective if one lays a grid of coke-steel first. The resin itself might be useful to create a sort of bio-plasic, as armor or building material when a cloth or paper is soaked in it . . . Aside from the mortar business, enchanters find the glue glands make for powerful spells of binding, be it Hex, Hold Fast, Knot, or Paralyze Limb.

Adventure

The heroes have been called upon as part of a covert operation to catch criminals in action. The order calls for the adventurers to innocuously drop some special food in the hopper for the conch spiders fuelling a construction project

on the edge of town. The contact says it doesn't matter whether they talk their way in, or sneak in, but there must not be any violence. Publicity is bad for the mission. (As a complication, perhaps the "undercover police contact" is really a rival who has sent them to poison the food, and produce poor mortar.)

Conch Spiders

Appearance: A cross between a hermit crab and a spider.
Category: Insect/crustacean hybrid.
Diet: Scavenger/omnivore.
ST 2; DX 11; IQ 4; HT 13.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 2.
SM -2 (1' long); 20 lbs; DR 2 (ablative).
Traits: Claws (Sharp); Extra Legs (Eight); Lifting ST +2; Quadruped; Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast Iron Stomach); Resistant to Disease +3; Resistant to Poison +3; Teeth (Sharp Teeth); Wild Animal;
Skills: Armoury (Armor)-16.

Giant Conch Spider

ST 8; DX 10; IQ ; HT 14.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 4.
SM 0 (3' long); 200 lbs; DR 10 (ablative).
Traits: As above, but Lifting ST +8;

Humungous Conch Spider

ST 15; DX 9; IQ ; HT 15.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM 0 (6' long, 2 hexes); 600 lbs; DR 20 (ablative).
Traits: As above, but Lifting ST +15;

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. Shock worms could have bioelectric powers similar to those of electric eels, while bugs are often light-sensitive. Hybrid creatures can appear to be disturbingly human. Creatures can find nourishment in the strangest places, even dust, or around volcanic vents. Mice can often seem smarter than they look, and several movies have featured escaped lab animals. Why can't large woodpeckers exist? Natural enzymes can follow processes that dazzle science.

* * *

Special thanks to Gary J. Bartz for helping wrangle these abominations.

Pyramid Review

Roleplaying Mini-Campaign #1: The Planet of Dr. Moreau (for *Battlestations*)

Published by **Gorilla Games**

Written by Jeff Siadek

Cover & Illustrations by Tegre Layne

48-page b&w softcover; $14.95

From the *Justifiers* and *Albedo* RPGs to *SkyRealms of Jorune* and *Traveller,* science-Fiction roleplaying has a long tradition of anthropomorphized animals, or humans in furry animal suits. Of course, this tradition is a bit old fashioned by contemporary mores, and today it is more likely that you will find an Elf or an Orc in a spacesuit than your cat, dog, or gerbil. This trend though, is bucked by *The Planet of Dr. Moreau,* a new supplement for the hybrid RPG/boardgame, *Battlestations,* which brings the anthropomorphic critter back to gaming.

The Planet of Dr. Moreau is not only a new supplement for *Battlestations,* but a new *type* of supplement for the game. In *Battlestations,* the players take the roles of a Universal Republic Expeditionary Force (or U.R.E.F.) ship's crew, undertaking a series of *Star Trek*-like missions, the game combining roleplaying and frantic personal action with ship-to-ship combat. The crew must run between stations, operating and repairing them as required, and even fending off boarders, all the while maneuvering to get the best shot on the opposing ship. To date, the two *Battlestations* supplements support this style of play along particular themes, including civil war with *Galactic Civil War* and exploration on the new frontier in *Pax Galactium.* This new supplement supports this style of play also, with a standard five-part campaign. Its central premise, however, is a different kind of play style, one that emphasizes roleplaying in another five-part mini-campaign of loyalty, memory loss, mystery, and ovine revolt.

The inspiration for *Roleplaying Mini-Campaign #1: The Planet of Dr. Moreau* is obviously the H.G. Wells novel, *The Island of Dr Moreau,* in which the survivor of a shipwreck is washed ashore an island populated by strange Beastmen creatures created by a brilliant, but shunned vivisectionist. Despite the efforts of the amoral scientists, the Beastmen eventually assert their true nature and -- upon discovering their origins -- turn on the Doctor.

The Planet of Dr. Moreau transplants the story to *Battlestations'* sci-fi setting, Dr. Moreau becoming a renowned genetic engineer whose brutal research methods would have led to his arrest had he not fled Earth first. Retreating to a private planet that he paid very well to keep hidden, Dr. Moreau has continued his work, unfortunately aided by the arrival of a fresh set of subjects aboard a passing spaceship.

The first of the campaigns in *The Planet of Dr. Moreau* is the roleplaying campaign. The "Beastmen" campaign casts the players in the roles of the Doctor's loyal creations. In return for their loyalty, the Beastmen receive constant medical attention; have a place to sleep, plenty to eat, and all the sheep that they can hunt. Invaders come though, threatening the paradise that the Doctor has created, and as members of Alpha squad, the player critters must crew the interceptor that is the Doctor's first line of defense.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

During the five-part Beastmen campaign, the characters will see off incomprehensible alien invaders, put down a sheep uprising, and thwart an escape attempt by another squad, all before the full weight of the authorities comes

crashing down on Moreau's world. They may also learn of their own origins, although the Doctor has been suppressing any interest towards this via a medical monitoring device. If the Beastmen do discover their origins -- simply an inversion of the Beastmen origins in the novel in that they were originally human -- and realize their status as partially mind-controlled slaves transformed by the Doctor, an extra scenario details any escape bid.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

To support the Beastmen campaign, **The Planet of Dr. Moreau** provides rules for creating anthropomorphic characters along with 13 new species, from Avianoids and Crocodilians to Rabbitoids and Rhinoceroids, each with several special abilities. One species, the Sheepling, is included as Red Shirts and lunch. The campaign also adds a new sub-skill for the Science skill with Notice, useful because the Beastmen campaign does not have **Battlestations'** standard perfect knowledge granted to every character though head up displays and so on. A full map of Moreau's Compound is included along with a set of campaign handouts and the layout for the Beastmen interceptor ship. Also, unlike a U.R.E.F. standard campaign, where death means rebirth in a cloned body, in the Beastmen campaign, death is almost -- but not quite -- final.

The second "Seeker" campaign is played as a standard **Battlestations** game, with the crew of a U.R.E.F. vessel hunting the source of bestial raiders operating in the Meeks sector. Eventually they will learn that Moreau's world is that source and the campaign ends with an assault upon Moreau's compound. To simulate the investigative part of the campaign, another Science sub-skill, Interrogation has been added.

Physically, **The Planet of Dr. Moreau** is a slim booklet containing everything necessary to play bar the core game. Advice on running the Beastmen campaign is light; essentially that it needs to be run with a more flexible approach than the standard Battlestations game requires. The layout is a little cramped though, and the book does need another edit.

Two small things irk. The first is that the overview of the Beastmen campaign is not as thorough as it should be -- some story elements only become apparent during the reading of the campaign. The second is the choice of names for the Beastmen species -- why not keep to one style of names like Felinoids and Ursinoids that owes to the Latin, rather than the silly sounding Rabbitoids and Snakoids? Doctor Moreau *is* a scientist, after all. One option not covered is the suggestion that the two campaigns could be run in parallel with each other or with two different groups. In roleplaying terms, this might be a little too complex for **Battlestations.** Indeed, for the straight board gamer who plays **Battlestations,** the roleplaying aspect of the Beastmen campaign might be too much. However, roleplayers will have fun with it.

Minor niggles aside, **The Planet of Dr. Moreau** is actually a likeable affair. It is undoubtedly rough around the edges and perhaps outdatd in gaming terms (though that is really down to its genre), but it adds several new things to the **Battlestations** game, most obviously the Beastmen species. Of course, a GM does not have to add the Beastmen to his campaign. As the author explains, he never intended to have them in the game, but he has reason enough . . . since they can be killed off easily enough. Just a little old fashioned and rough around the edges, **Roleplaying Mini-Campaign #1: The Planet of Dr. Moreau** takes **Battlestations** in a pleasing new direction, and hopefully, future Roleplaying Mini-Campaigns will be a little more polished.

--Matthew Pook

Medieval Diplomacy

by Matt Riggsby

The most obvious historical models for traveling adventurers are soldiers and merchants. There are other travelers, of course: religious pilgrims, itinerant entertainers, Gypsies and other ethnic minorities who might have a difficult time settling down, and so on. But there's another class of historical traveler who combines mobility with power, wealth, and romanticized depictions which might appeal to players: diplomats. This article discusses the practice of diplomacy during Europe's Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, and, of course, how PCs can get involved.

What Was Diplomacy, Anyway?

Most diplomatic activity was concerned simply with sending messages. In an age without phones, telegraphy, and even formal postal services (the Byzantines, following on their Roman ancestors, had an extensive postal system within their empire but not beyond, and in western Europe, postal systems didn't reappear until the 15th century), every communication sent to someone else was a unique event, and every bit of news was important. It's difficult to imagine in this information-rich age, but at the time, just knowing that a nearby kingdom had a bad harvest or a new heir to the throne was difficult information to get and very useful to know. Moreover, most people in power were usually busy with their own realms, and few could afford to leave their homelands for very long, so "summit meetings" were a very rare event, usually held at carefully chosen spots on the border of two neighboring countries. Moreover, not all rulers were quick but even-tempered negotiators. Therefore, messengers and emissaries, carried by people with the skills and temperament for the job, were by far the most common instruments by which international relations were handled.

In the earliest years of the Middle Ages, an ambassador was anyone sent on someone else's behalf. Townsmen would send them to their episcopal overlords, minor lords to their lieges, and so on. The prevailing pre-modern situation of difficult travel was compounded by loosely organized feudalism, which made just about every interaction between lords, bishops, and other powerful entities a one-off arrangement rather than something informed by a comprehensive body of law. A variety of terms, largely interchangeable at the beginning, evolved to describe these representatives: legates, nuncii, procurators, ambassadors, and others. As the political situation stabilized and Medieval law, class relations, and diplomatic practice shook out, those terms all took on more specific meanings and "diplomacy" came to be regarded as something which took place between countries and rulers. Rather than get into the frequently inconsistent specifics of the titles, we'll refer to "diplomats" in general, whether they're carrying out delicate negotiations or just, as they usually did, delivering messages.

Although there was only the faintest possible legal tradition surrounding early Medieval diplomacy, we can pick out a few significant principles: First, peace is good, and people who can promote it should therefore be protected. Few would disagree with the first part, but European diplomats and writers on diplomacy were particularly keen to push the implication that supporting diplomats meant supporting peace. The second is that diplomatic negotiations took place between equals. It's a very weak definition of "equal," of course. No one would pretend that, say, Milan or Florence would be a patch on Spain or France. However, there was a tacit acknowledgement that neither power in a diplomatic negotiation was the subject of the other. If the kings of France and Spain reached an agreement, it was because they chose to, not because one owed it to the other as a duty. This is rather different from diplomacy farther east; such powers as the Byzantine empire, China, and later the Ottoman empire had a large ideological investment in being the theoretical masters of the world, which limited the diplomatic concessions they might be willing to make and tinged the tone of their diplomatic dealings. For example, the emperors of China reflexively addressed foreign monarchs as subordinates, and the Ottoman sultans would receive diplomats, but didn't send them. It's also worth noting that the countries of western Europe shared a similar legal, cultural, and religious background and even a vague sense of community. The same can't be said of the big empires to the east, which had to deal with profound cultural differences past their borders.

Who Were the Diplomats?

A ruler sending a diplomat had to balance several competing considerations. First and foremost, the diplomat had to be trustworthy. Both rulers involved needed to be sure that messages would be relayed accurately, without editing or embellishment, and that the diplomat would not overstep his bounds when negotiating. It served no one to have the middleman distort what went on at either end of the communication. In a related vein, in this only moderately literate era, diplomats had to have good memories. They were often sent in pairs so that one could correct the other if either forgot or misremembered something.

A diplomat had to be able to communicate with whoever he was sent to see, which often meant he had to be bilingual. At times, that was remarkably difficult. For example, it wasn't hard for the king of England to find someone who spoke French -- indeed, many kings and large sections of the court spoke it -- but harder to find someone who spoke (say) German, and it probably would have been impossible to find someone who spoke Hindi or Chinese (the first recorded Chinese speaker in England arrived in the 1690s). Here, the flexible structure of early feudalism sometimes came to the rescue. A nobleman who had sworn fealty to two different kings often spoke both rulers' languages *and* had a relationship with both rulers, which meant that he could be trusted all around. Failing that, people from noblemen to minor clerks sometimes found themselves employed at a foreign court (an English knight in Spain, a German count in England, and so on). Such people were natural messengers for diplomatic correspondence going to their homeland. They knew the lay of the land and both relevant languages.

Finally, a diplomat had to be of a minimum social status appropriate to his message. If a mere clerk or a simple knight, who could reasonably be sent for routine messages, were sent to discuss a royal marriage or a military alliance, the recipient of the message would be deeply insulted that the sender wasn't treating the issue with sufficient seriousness.

Potentially, therefore, diplomats were by preference drawn from a number of classes and professions:

- *Heralds*. Heralds had at least nominal freedom to travel and immunity to arbitrary punishment. This made them useful for carrying messages to hostile rulers who might feel inclined to execute lesser messengers carrying unwelcome news, such as declarations of war. However, as the military feudal class declined later in the Middle Ages in favor of royal bureaucracies and noblemen more inclined towards commerce or urban life, heralds and their use faded as well.
- *Warriors*. Heralds were good for difficult destinations, but for difficult journeys -- for example, to carry messages to destinations on the far side of a nation at war -- experienced soldiers, particularly knights, were often chosen. However, few warriors had the education or an appropriate temperament for serious diplomacy.
- *Clergy*. Catholic clergymen had a number of attributes making them good diplomatic messengers. They had built-in respectability from their station and had in common a knowledge of Latin, allowing them to communicate with other Catholic clergy everywhere. Of course, the problem there is that many rulers *didn't* know Latin, which meant messages would have to go through a double translation. Clergy also had dual loyalties: to their own ruler, and to the papacy. Consequently, their loyalties in more sensitive negotiations could be questionable. Western Catholics weren't the only ones frequently depending on holy men for diplomacy. The Byzantines often depended on missionaries to carry diplomatic messages for them; they often knew or at least soon learned local languages and would frequently meet local rulers. Missionaries weren't necessarily ideal diplomats, but since they often had to cross more cultural borders than their western counterparts, they were typically

I'll Have To Ask My Mom

While this article mostly covers formal diplomacy, important *informal* diplomacy could be carried out by visiting relations; heads of state might not be able to visit other countries, but their close relatives could. During many periods, the ruling families of any number of territories were intertwined with one another. For example, in the 16th century, Catherine de Medici, a relative of the dukes of Florence, married Henry II, king of France. Her children, in turn, married the king of Spain, the queen of Scotland, the duke of Lorraine, and an Austrian duchess who was the daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor. This meant that for much of the century, the rulers and major noblemen of most of western Europe were cousins or, at least, married to cousins of other rulers. Similar situations cropped up now and again on scales from the provincial to the international.

the best available.

- *Merchants.* They travel regularly, usually to countries in which local rulers will have an interest, and they may know foreign languages. If one can be found heading to the right destination, he can be a reasonably good messenger. However, like a priest, a merchant may have conflicting loyalties.
- *Major noblemen.* The traditional respectability of a herald, the durability of a warrior, the sanctity of a priest, and the flexibility of a merchant are all well and good, but for the really important work, one must send a peer of the realm. Important nobles who are close associates of the ruler, and whose fortunes rise or fall with his, have both good reason to negotiate in good faith and the prestige necessary to establish that their commitments will be respected by their principal.

Preparing for Discussion

Having chosen the messenger, someone sending a diplomat also had to compose the message. The first thing a diplomat had to do was to establish that he was, in fact, able to negotiate on the behalf of the ruler he claimed to represent. In the earlier, less literate Dark Ages, signet rings and other personal symbols often stood in for the written word. By the later Middle Ages, it became common practice for a diplomat to present the ruler he was visiting with a letter from his own ruler to establish his credentials. These letters came to be known as "letters of credence." They became highly formalized, with sections greeting the recipient, vaguely setting out the sender's reason for dispatching a messenger, and describing the messenger himself.

But such letters were more identification than communication. Although they usually outlined the writer's concerns, great trust had to be placed on the courier himself. Rulers and administrators recognized that written word, though in some ways potentially more authoritative than the spoken word, wasn't sufficient to transmit all necessary information. There was always the chance that some important fact the reader was interested in would be omitted or that a poorly chosen phrase would be misinterpreted. They were also insecure, and if a letter fell into the wrong hands, so would the sensitive information it contained. Therefore, diplomatic letters usually contained a brief outline of concerns. More importantly, though, they commended the courier to the reader, pointing to him to fill in the reader with the bigger picture and making him available to answer any questions the reader might have.

Still, while a detailed letter to the recipient of a diplomatic mission might not be the best thing, rulers did often prepare memoranda for the diplomats themselves, setting out the message they were to convey and the limits of their authority in negotiation. In addition to a verbal briefing from the ruler (or, for less important missions, a minister or advisor acting in the ruler's name), diplomats would usually receive a memorandum called, confusingly enough, a credence. Again, though, a credence might fall into the wrong hands, so particularly sensitive details would only be discussed, not written down. Nevertheless, at times the ruler the diplomat was being sent to see might be inclined to demand to see the diplomat's instructions to assure himself that the diplomat wasn't speaking beyond the bounds of his mission. Therefore, the diplomat might be given a second, secret set of instructions, perhaps reminding him that a particular outcome, while technically authorized by his credence, would not be preferred.

This was sufficient for routine communication, but more serious matters (for examples, transfers of land or money, military alliances, granting of significant rights for foreigners) required yet more documentation and authorization, called a procuration. This might take the form of a nearly completed agreement, with a few important details left blank, to be filled in during negotiation. Missions with procurations were important, but formed a small minority, just as modern

This made it possible to do "back-channel" diplomacy through family visits. Instead of going through the very public business of diplomatic correspondence which might otherwise upset an ally or alert an enemy (where both allies and enemies include foreign powers and important figures in one's own kingdom), a ruler could, for example, suggest that his sister visit a cousin or an in-law in another nation. That relative, or one of that relative's retainers, could have unofficial conversations with someone ultimately answering back to the local ruler, and eventually arrive at a useful understanding. Such diplomacy wouldn't be very useful for concluding formal agreements, but it could lay the groundwork for such agreements to be made with remarkable speed once the possibility publicly arose.

What Documents Look Like

Since physical copies of

diplomatic contacts are mostly communication of routine information rather than treaty signings. And missions with procurations certainly *were* important, in a social as well as a political sense. Much as [monastics distinguished between simple and solemn vows](#), so did diplomats distinguish between simple and solemn missions, the latter having procurations. A series of simple missions usually laid the groundwork for a solemn mission concluding in a significant agreement.

Conducting the Mission

Once the diplomat was briefed and given his papers, he had to take the long, expensive, and occasionally dangerous journey to his destination. The custom developed that someone sending a diplomat would reimburse him for expenses on the road, including transportation and maintenance of a suitable entourage (that's the theory, anyway; returning diplomats had to document their expenses and wrangle payment out of an often reluctant exchequer). Once the diplomat reached his destination, the hosting party would support the diplomat for the duration of his stay as they would any other guest.

There was also subsidiary documentation which went beyond credences and letters of credence. Medieval diplomats did *not* have the current version of diplomatic immunity, under which it's essentially impossible for a host country to punish a diplomat for any crime without his native country's approval and the hosts can do no more than permanently expel a misbehaving diplomat. However, they were not without legal protections, some enshrined in legal tradition, others spelled out in letters from the rulers who would host them. With their respected position as peacemakers, diplomatic parties were exempted from customs duties, inspections, and other restrictions which made travel more difficult. Anyone who attacked or hindered a diplomat would have the local ruler to reckon with, with a number of crimes against someone on a diplomatic mission punishable by death; even angry rulers were legally prohibited from taking out their frustrations on visiting diplomats. They were even entitled, under certain circumstances, to financial aid from local governments, even if they were in a country other than their ultimate destination. They were still subject to laws against espionage, violent crimes, fraud, and so on, and could be tried and punished in courts they were visiting, but could only be tried in the highest court in the land.

Once the diplomat arrived at his destination, events typically followed a predictable progression. If the message's recipient knew a diplomat was on his way (usually the case for solemn missions but not necessarily for simple ones), the diplomat was greeted by an escort of suitable size and composition to fit his status. He presented his identifying letters to whomever he had been sent to see, typically the ruler but, again, possibly a lesser official for minor missions. After being formally welcomed, the diplomat was politely and temporarily dismissed; no one, after all, would assume that a ruler could immediately drop everything the moment a messenger appeared. After a few days, when the ruler had assembled appropriate advisors and freed up time to consider important diplomatic matters, the diplomat was summoned again to formally deliver his message, answering questions posed by the ruler and his councilors. The diplomat was dismissed again for several days while the ruler composed his response, which was typically presented in the form of a counter-credence and verbal briefing on how the diplomat was to respond to his principal at a third

treaties and letters were indispensable in early diplomacy, it's worth knowing what form they might take. Many documents were single, large sheets of parchment with writing on one side. More public documents weren't enclosed (the technical term is "sealed patent"); they might be rolled or folded and kept in a case. Those which were enclosed didn't have separate envelopes. Instead, they were folded into as small a package as possible, with a thin strip cut along the bottom of the sheet but not quite separated. The strip was wrapped around the package, looped through itself, and sealed. Some were pierced, with a thong passed through the hole and tied or sealed to help keep it closed.

Wax seals were obligatory for authenticating documents. A number of rulers could use multiple seals and delegated the use of some to ministers, choosing one depending on the circumstances (by the end of the Middle Ages, the kings of England could choose from four). Grand royal seals indicated the ultimate in solemnity, but would seem excessive under some circumstances. Some were also so large that they could completely envelop the small letters they sealed. Their use might also be delegated to senior officials. Therefore, a ruler might want to use a less impressive personal seal to indicate his personal involvement with a diplomatic mission, as opposed to routine business carried out by officials.

One form early treaties took was the chirograph. The text

meeting.

Delays could interpose themselves, of course. During difficult negotiations, a diplomat might have to send a courier home with a request to clarify the initial credence. Obviously, this would take weeks, and wouldn't be an option in some circumstances, but a delay was generally thought preferable to ending negotiations in failure. And even a fully prepared diplomat might not meet a fully prepared king. A few rounds of clarifying questions, resembling repeats of the second meeting, might have to be held.

Deviation from the usual procedure might be regarded as a snub. Not greeting the diplomat with an escort or sending an insufficient one could imply a disregard for the diplomat or his principal. However, judging the diplomat's reception might be difficult. Diplomatic precedence could become quite complicated, since it had to take into account the status of both the diplomat and whoever sent him. A mid-rank nobleman sent by one king, for example, would take precedence over a priest sent by a king of equal standing. However, the priest might take precedence if he had been sent by the Pope, who takes precedence over temporal rulers. On the other hand, a duke sent by a ruling prince could take precedence over both, since his personal status would be *much* higher than that of the other two envoys, despite the relative status of their respective principals. If a ruler quickly received a diplomat, demanded to hear his message at once, and sent back an immediate reply, that might imply that he was treating the message lightly, not giving it any thought. On the other hand, constantly asking for clarification could be taken as stalling.

During his visit, the diplomat was likely to be lodged near the ruler he was sent to visit and expected to act like any other courtier. This mostly meant being on hand for appropriate events (hunting expeditions, plays and concerts, weddings, religious ceremonies, and the like), deferring to the ruler's tastes and judgments, and performing small errands. Socializing with members of the foreign court was a useful forum for informal negotiations and dealing with sensitive issues which neither ruler is eager to set down on paper just yet. Of course, it also provided the diplomat and his staff with a chance for espionage and intrigue with amenable local factions.

Once he had received a formal reply, the diplomat asked permission to take his leave (not to ask permission would be a profound insult, though not to grant that request would be insulting as well). The host might also present the diplomat with some small gifts. It might take a few days for all the appropriate letters to the diplomat's principal to work their way through the bureaucracy, but at this point the diplomat would pack his bags, gather up his entourage, and return home. Once he returned home, the diplomat would deliver a report on his mission, presenting the counter-credence along with a verbal debriefing. The diplomat's job was done; the next move was up to his principal.

Diplomatic Adventures

So how are the PCs going to get involved in all of this? As with merchant adventures, heroes can find employment as guards and other hangers-on, helping someone richer and more important than themselves get around and visit far-off lands. A diplomat might want warriors to help him get through hostile countries, guides, servants, and other assistants. A particularly important diplomat would have a sizeable party with him, which could include a personal physician and confessor priest (and, in a fantasy world, personal magician). Most of the usual set of PC professions are suitable for accompanying a diplomat.

And, of course, a PC can be a diplomat himself. A low-end diplomat is essentially a glorified mailman, a common clerk or very minor nobleman who is close enough to a more important lord to be sent off with messages to his allies and enemies. They might work solo or in small groups to carry routine messages to important rulers, important messages to less-important rulers, safe-

was written twice on the same piece of parchment, with one copy above or beside the other, separated by a line of text or other symbols. Both parties to the treaty could read it, satisfy themselves that the texts were identical, and sign or put their seals on both versions. The authenticated treaty was then cut in half, through the line symbols separating the texts.

Permanent Diplomacy

Until the Renaissance, diplomacy was an occasional activity; an embassy was an expedition, not a place. But as the Italian city-states became wealthier, more powerful, and more sophisticated, it became clear that one-off diplomatic missions weren't enough. They began to place permanent, resident ambassadors with one another. It's not surprising that this custom arose first during the Italian Renaissance, where

passage requests for more important diplomats, or unwelcome words which may endanger the bearer. A reasonable long adventure might involve a clerk and a knight carrying a message to a distant ruler, the merchant adventurer on whose ship they have hired passage, and a few hangers-on and assistants.

A high-end diplomat, on the other hand, is a powerful person in his own right: a bishop, an important nobleman, or even a member of a royal family. He'll have wealth and power of his own, and likely a batch of competent allies and followers. His journeys will be largely secure from random bandits and minor bureaucrats, but there may be armies in his way and, since he'll be responsible for negotiating major agreements, intrigues to deal with both abroad and at home.

many states were relatively close, and therefore more likely to run up against one another, but as governments became more sophisticated and complex through the rest of Europe, they took up the practice as well. By the 1600s, permanent missions had replaced *ad hoc* ones through the continent.

In addition to all of the adventure possibilities posed by long journeys (unexpectedly changing routes, bandits and civil unrest, haggling for mounts or sea passage, etc.), the work of diplomacy is very good for characters built with an eye toward social and political wrangling. They may have to deal with factions hostile to their interests in the court they're visiting, hostile diplomats from other countries, and rulers who are disinterested in their message, unable to understand it, or eager for more than they can provide. The GM can create an entire vocabulary of ceremony to suggest how rulers, their courts, and other diplomats regard one another and let the PCs decode it. Does the length of the greeting on his letter of credence communicate high regard, or is it mildly sarcastic? Has the ruler he's being sent to provided an escort led by a nobleman in disgrace as a slight to the diplomat or a chance for the nobleman to recover face? In audiences, do ministers do most of the talking because the king wishes to appear a lofty judge, or simply indifferent? The purely professional problems can be compounded by personal ones: inadvertently insulting local courtiers, becoming involved in dangerous affairs, or being drawn into irrelevant but potentially dangerous side issues (for example, a Catholic diplomat visiting a pagan king in western Asia once found himself debating religion with a Byzantine missionary and several Muslim holy men also at court).

Here are some more specific adventure ideas for PCs as part of a diplomatic mission:

Spy vs. Spy: In a time without ready communication, any first-hand intelligence is useful intelligence, so it can be difficult to draw a fine line between spying and just looking out the window. However, any attempt to find out something not immediately obvious probably qualifies, and covertly trying to influence him certainly does. The diplomat or some member of his entourage has been charged with using the mission to gather information (for example, military intelligence or whispered rumors about the dangerous affairs members of the court are carrying on). At the same time, members of another country's diplomatic mission are attempting to do the same thing. Members of each mission must gather their information but try not to look like they're doing so while under the watchful eye of the other; being exposed would certainly mean a diplomatic defeat. And it'll be all the more dangerous if *both* sides are trying to influence a weak-willed ruler's decisive but mentally unstable favorite . . .

A Little Favor: A diplomatic party is visiting a kingdom afflicted with a simmering internal conflict. The king asks the diplomat to escort a young cousin on her way to an important social occasion, a coming-of-age party informally announcing her availability for marriage. It should be clear that this is an honor for the diplomat and a favor it would be unwise to refuse. On the way there, the party is attacked, and the masked attackers (common thugs hired by a shadowy figure not on the scene) attempt to abduct the young lady. If the diplomat and his party fight the attackers off, they'll have the king's gratitude and that of most of his dominant faction, but will have aroused the anger of some in the opposition and, strangely enough, of the girl herself. If they fail, they earn the king's mild displeasure for having lost the girl (though not outright disapproval; they were on a social call, after all, not a combat mission), as well as the serious enmity of scattered members of both sides. What's going on behind the scenes is that the girl has fallen in love with a major heir of the opposition. They decided to marry secretly before she could be presented as marriageable, a socially necessary pretense which would lead quickly to an arranged match. The planned engagement to a member of her own faction was a lightly-kept secret, so the prospective husband and his supporters will be unhappy with the PCs if they don't keep the girl safe. However, her secret lover, who is ultimately responsible for the abduction attempt, will be all the more upset with the PCs if they succeed, as will a few people on both sides who oppose the match and have figured out the truth on their own. The PCs have a long struggle ahead of them to figure out why they've got new

opposition in court and how to fix it. And when they've done that, they might start to wonder who set them up for this no-win scenario . . .

The Purloined Letter: It's hard to overstate the necessity of documents in regular diplomatic discourse during this period. Without a letter of credence or similar authentication in hand, a diplomat -- even one likely to be trusted if acting on his own behalf -- would probably be turned away. As a diplomatic party arrives at its destination, the senior diplomat discovers that his important file of letters has gone missing. If he can't find the file, the mission will fail and the party will return home in disgrace. However, they've got a few days before the king they're visiting returns from a visit to the provinces and their lack of documentation can no longer be concealed. They can retrace their steps as they very quietly search for the letters (or the person who took them), and perhaps even agitate events which will delay the king's return, but getting caught looking by their hosts (or rival diplomats) would be a disaster.

Rhazes-2

by Stephen Dedman

Rhazes-2 is a world loved by Infinity's researchers, but less popular with others in the organization. It's relatively safe, but not considered a holiday spot. It does, however, offer considerable potential for adventure.

World Name and Current Year: Rhazes-2, 535

At some unknown time, probably in the late Pliocene, a mutation in the genus Saccharomycetales turned all naturally-occurring alcohols on Rhazes-2 into a biotoxin as deadly as arsenic (**GURPS Basic Set,** page 439).

Infinity's anthropologists are still trying to ascertain whether this alone was enough to change the course of human culture, or whether there are other divergence points yet to be discovered. Whatever the explanation, few of the cultures or languages on Rhazes closely resemble those of Homeline. While civilizations rose in many of the same places, they left fewer signs of their passing: no Pyramids in Egypt, no Great Wall of China, no Parthenon, no Stonehenge, and few large castles or fortresses. There are cities on the same sites as Cairo, Istanbul, Shanghai, Mumbai, Marseilles, Lagos, Lima, San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney, but these are much smaller than their counterparts on Homeline. Cities and towns have their own guardsmen, who usually cooperate with their neighbors, as well as a militia of reservists. On most parts of Rhaze-2, two-thirds of guards encountered will be male; women make up half of the night watch, artillery, and cavalry divisions, while the infantry and navy are almost exclusively male domains.

Rhazean nation-states are also small, and most are ruled by monarchs who pass power onto a popular subordinate rather than an eldest son. Their wars seem to have been smaller, shorter, and less bloody than those of Homeline -- though some researchers suspect that this is partly because Rhazean art and literature downplay conflict and death, treating them as embarrassing rather than glorious. There have been no religious wars except between the Mesoamerican theocracies.

Most Rhazeans dislike snow, and cold and mountainous regions are mostly populated by prospectors, hunters, bandits, and outcasts. Mammoth, woolly rhino, dire wolves, and sabertoothed cats still exist in small numbers in the far north, attracting hunters from Homeline.

Coffee, tea, and marijuana play a big part in most Rhazean cultures and religions, and coca and peyote less so; all of these are forbidden in different regions, making trade problematic and sometimes risky. Rhazeans have bred new strains of all of these plants, which White Star Trading exports for the luxury market. Homeliners find most Rhazean cooking rather bland, and Rhazean art and entertainments have not become popular on Homeline, but Rhazean designs for furniture and utensils are widely copied.

Most Homeliners find adapting to Rhazean cultures difficult for reasons other than the unavailability of drinkable alcohol. For one thing, Rhazeans have fewer nudity taboos than TL9 Homeliners. Workers of both sexes usually wear nothing more than protective gear (usually a loincloth or a backless apron, boots, and a broad-brimmed hat). Middle-class and formal wear for men is a long-sleeved shirt, a jacket, and an alarmingly short kilt; pants or leggings are only worn for protection. Formal wear for women is usually a sari that leaves one breast exposed, or a split skirt with a thin bodice (older women are more likely to wear opaque jackets or short capes). Though homosexuality is no more common than on Homeline, kissing is a common greeting between people of all sexes; cosmetics, perfume and jewelry are worn equally by both genders; and Erotic Art is taught from adolescence in most schools. Savoir-Faire (Rhazes-2) and Savoir-Faire (any Homeline culture) default to each other at -5.

Rhazeans mostly have the same advantages and disadvantages as other TL4 humans -- except for Alcoholism and alcohol-related perks and quirks. All forms of Pacifism are slightly more common; Illiteracy extremely rare.

Cannon and flintlock muskets have mostly replaced catapults and crossbows as military weapons, though bows and slings are still popular with hunters: flintlock pistols are rare and expensive, and mostly owned by high-ranking cavalry. Melee weapons and military equipment are similar to those of Asian TL5 societies on Homeline. Stickfighting styles similar to Escrima, and unarmed martial arts resembling Jujutsu and Savate, are widely taught to both sexes.

Current Events: The Andean God-king Hatirikinu is aging, and it is likely that on his death the empire will plunge into civil war between the supporters of his eldest son and former heir, and those of his youngest son and chosen successor (the only child of his favorite wife). Merchant vessels are being fitted with cannon to protect against increasingly heavily armed pirates. Suicide cults which use alcohol as a poison are on the rise in parts of Japan and northern Europe. A gold rush in Australia has led to a population surge, mostly from India and Japan, causing conflict with the indigenes.

Divergence Point: Unknown

Major Civilizations: Orthodox (multipolar). Japanese (empire with satellite states). Indic (diffuse). Andean (empire, potentially fragmenting).

Great Powers: Mediterranean Alliance (oligarchy, CR 3). Japanese Empire, includes Korea and Western China (constitutional monarchy effectively ruled by bureaucracy, CR 4). Bengali Raj (feudal principalities stretching from Afghanistan to Vietnam, CR 3-4). Andean Theocracy, Mexico to Chile (CR 5).

TL: Rhazean technology is TL4+2: there is little in the way of mass production, but their grasp of mathematics, astronomy and some aspects of physics is surprisingly sophisticated. Their inventors have produced a few steampunk devices, including submarines and dirigibles, though these are mostly toys for the very rich. Medicine, chemistry, and other sciences are mostly TL5.

Mana Level: Low
Quantum: 7
Infinity Class: R
Centrum Zone: Orange

Ying Alene   100 points

Ying Alene teaches self-defense and erotic art at high school, and is a gunnery training officer for the Saghir (Marseilles) city guard. In her eight years of service, she has never fired a shot in anger, either from her musket or the cannon in the city's guard towers.

Alene is a fairly typical Rhazean Guardsman; characters with similar skills and gear might be found in any culture on Rhaze-2, including among the bandits and pirates.

Ht 5'9", Wt 140 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 27.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, brown hair, green eyes; a healthy woman with a calm manner.

Languages: Doch (Native). TL: 4. Cultural Familiarity: Rhazean European.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Fit [5], Honest Face [1], Law Enforcement Powers [5], Rank (Military) 2 [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Chauvinistic [-1], Duty (9) [-5], Overconfidence (12) [-5], Responsive [1], Sense of Duty

(Comrades) [-5], Slow Riser [-5].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Erotic Art (A) DX [4]-13; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-11; Gunner/TL4 (Cannon) (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Guns/TL4 (Musket) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Judo DX+1 (H) [8]-13; Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11; Soldier (A) IQ [2]-11; Teaching (A) IQ [2]-11.

Gear: Shortsword (usually sheathed and used as baton); Cloth Armor with sleeves; Leather helm; Boots.

Tokalau Dan (Daniel Torres) *210 points*

Dan Torres was a wealthy businessman with a knack for languages and an art collector's interest in other cultures. When his wife and son were killed in a helicopter crash, he went on a short but intense drinking binge; after sobering up, he tried to distract himself by throwing himself into his work, and soon became White Star Trading's resident expert on Rhazes-2. When he was offered the job of running Infinity's safehouse and trading center on Rhazes-2, he saw it as a way of getting away from everything that might remind him of his loss and accepted.

Taking the common Rhazean name Tokalau Dan, he gradually learned to blend in with other merchants in the marketplaces of Hamalat (Istanbul), buying cloth, coffee, tea and marijuana for export to Homeline. He was sufficiently successful that he has become a respected figure in town. Apart from trading, he and his staff also work hard to see whether any Homeline or Centrum technology (particularly alcohol) has emerged on Rhazes-2, and to investigate any possible breaches. When dealing with Rhazeans, Dan is famously close-mouthed -- partly for fear of influencing their culture, and partly because discovery of his secret could lead to him being imprisoned and interrogated by Rhazeans eager to learn how to make more advanced weapons.

As well as warehouses and an inn, Dan's caravanserai boasts high-tech resources useful for parachronic travelers: medical facilities, an impressive armory, computers with information on Rhazes-2, and so on.

Ht 5'10", Wt 190 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 59.

Appearance: Dark brown complexion, graying black hair and beard, dark brown eyes; a heavily built man with large hands.

Languages: Spanish (Native); English (Accented), Chinese (Accented). Rhazean languages: Ashar (Accented; local), Nikava (Accented; North African), Keiyuri (Accented; East Asian), Tuastest (Accented; Florida and Caribbean). [14 points]. TL: 9. Cultural Familiarity: Western; all major Rhazean cultures [4 points].

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

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 14 [5]; Per 14 [5]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Acute Vision 1 [2], Charisma 1 [5], Eidetic Memory [5], Language Talent [10], Status +1 [0; +1 Status free with Wealth], Talent (Business Acumen)/2 [20], Voice [10], Wealth (Wealthy) [20]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance [-1], Broad-Minded [-1], Greed (15) [-7], Horrible Hangovers [-1], Imaginative [-1], Overweight [-1], Post-Combat Shakes [-5], Responsive [-1], Secret [-20], Workaholic [-5].

Skills and Techniques: Acting (A) IQ+1 [2]-13; Administration (A) IQ+3 [4]-16*; Area Knowledge (Hamalat) (E) IQ+2 [4]-15, (Rhazes-2) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Artist (Drawing) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Connoisseur (Visual Arts) IQ+2 [8]-15; Current Affairs/TL6 (Popular Culture) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14, (High Culture) (E) IQ+2 [4]-15, (Science and Technology) (E) IQ [1]-13, Business (E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-14; Diplomacy (H) IQ+1 [2]-14#; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [2]-15#; Finance (H) IQ+2 [4]-15*; First Aid/TL9 (E) IQ [1]-13; Gambling (A) IQ+2 [1]-15*; Guns/TL9 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-11; History (Arts) (H) IQ [4]-13; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-13; Makeup/TL4 (E) IQ [1]-13; Market Analysis (H)

IQ+1 [4]-15*; Merchant (A) IQ+4 [8]-17*; Mimicry (Speech) (H) IQ [1]-13#; Observation (A) Per [2]-14; Photography/TL9 (A) IQ [2]-13; Research/TL9 (A) IQ [2]-13; Savoir-Faire (Rhazean) (E) IQ+3 [2]-16#; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-14; Singing (E) HT+1 [1]-13#; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-13.

* +2 for Business Acumen
# +2 for Voice

Gear: TL9 Ballistic Vest disguised as fashionable jacket; Palmtop; Hideout Radio; Personal Basics (TL9). Rarely armed, but sometimes carries a Needle Pistol.

Adventure Seeds

Behind Enemy Lines: The PCs are in Ecuador, transporting 500 lbs of jewelry and assorted artworks (worth $240,000 on Homeline, but only about $40,000 as trade goods) back to the White Star Trading office in Lima, when the Andean God-King Hatirikinu dies and civil war breaks out.

Hatirikinu's elder son, Huileokupi, governs the Central American region; his half-brother Huzunikuri, Hatirikinu's favorite and chosen successor rules in South America. Their armies have met in Panama, now a war zone. Huzunikuri distrusts all foreigners; Huileokupi is more broad-minded and businesslike.

The PCs have their saddle horses, three small mules, and what personal equipment they can hide on their persons or disguise. They can go north, try to cross the war zone, and head for the office in San Francisco; hide in the jungle, and take their chances with the wildlife and bandits; continue south to Lima, through territory controlled by Huzunikuri's army; or call for pickup by Search and Rescue, and forfeit half of the value of their cargo.

If the traders can consistently convince Huzunikuri's patrols that they are working for the new king, they may get to Lima unscathed. A Neutral to Good reaction means that anything of military value (animals, weapons, food, etc.) will be confiscated, but nothing worse. On a Poor or worse reaction, the soldiers will attack. Characters of handsome/beautiful or better appearance may be taken as slaves; others will be killed.

An Ill Wind: A xenophobic mob attacks the White Star office in Lima. The staff and the conveyor are still safe in the shelter under the warehouse -- but by the time the PCs arrive, the warehouse is on fire. Worse still, the bales of marijuana are burning: to reach the shelter, the PCs will have to fight their way through the spectators, the flames, and mildly hallucinogenic smoke.

And a Bottle of Rum: A pirate chieftain named Nistar has been robbing ships in the Mediterranean. What disturbs Dan Torres even more is that Nistar reportedly challenges prisoners to a drinking contest. Is he immune to the effects of Rhazean alcohol, or is someone supplying him with offworld booze?

Torres asks the Patrol to track Nistar down. It's reported that his loot is being sold in Saghir, so the PCs would find it useful to team up with the city watch.

Blowups Happen: A team of vulcanologists travels to Rhazes-2 to see whether Krakatoa erupts in 535. When it does, many of them get too close to the volcano, and Search and Rescue have to be called in.

Fimbulwetr: The eruption of Krakatoa causes a volcanic winter: summer snows, cloud cover that blocks the sun more often than not, and major crop failures worldwide. Hunger causes unrest everywhere, particularly the still war-torn Andean empire. More young people in Europe and Asia join suicide cults, and bandit and pirate raids for food become more frequent.

Dan Torres and the Miracle Workers do what they can to help the people of Hamalat by importing food from other timelines, but when it's rumored that he has huge stores of grain, honey, and salt in his caravanserai, the compound is besieged by a horde of brigands and desperate citizens. Torres and the PCs (Miracle Workers, traders, scouts, or field researchers) have to help defend the base. Torres wants to keep casualties to a minimum, but preserving the Secret is

even more important.

Dead Drunk: After 19 people are found dead in a bar in Campbell, Infinity's biochemists discover that a major brewery in St. Louis has been contaminated with Rhazean Saccharomycetales and has already shipped out thousands of barrels and bottles of poisonous beer. I-Cops have to stop the beer being distributed without endangering the Secret. Complicating matters, a truck loaded with bottled beer has been hijacked by mobsters, and the PCs get the job of tracking the stolen cartons down before they're sold on the black market.

Cuddles the Miniature Horse

by Caias Ward

In an obscure part of Warehouse 23 is a miniature pasture. On it, a miniature fence, a miniature barn with a miniature door . . . and a miniature horse. Attached to his mane is a short blue ribbon with one word: "Cuddles." He has a small saddlebag hanging on his side full of tack and treats.

Cuddles is a closely guarded secret of Warehouse 23. Still, he escapes from time to time, and those responsible for watching Cuddles spare no effort to find him . . .

The Magic of Cuddles

Cuddles is a miniature horse, standing about 32 inches at the withers. Chestnut in color, his mane and other hair is thick almost to the point of appearing feral, a trait that adds to his cuteness. Thickset yet agile, Cuddles appears eager and friendly, often making friends with whoever is supposed to watch over him. He uses this opportunity to escape and explore the world.

Cuddles often appears to those who are having trouble of some sort not entirely their fault. A major illness causing financial difficulties, job loss due to layoffs, or simply a personal failing that a person is trying to overcome, Cuddles will find it and try to make it better. Should the person react favorably to the miniature horse wandering up to him, Cuddles will start attracting positive attention for the person. Perhaps a person will want to "hire" Cuddles for a photo shoot; maybe a girl will find Cuddles cute and talk with the shy owner . . .

The new "owner" will find many of the reasons why he couldn't keep Cuddles mysteriously solved: a normally uncooperative spouse will relent and put up with Cuddles "just until we find his real owner," landlords won't bat an eye, and Cuddles will find bags of apples lying around. As people spend more time with Cuddles, they will change in behavior and outlook. People will be more positive, work harder and be in better health. Slowly, the owner's life will turn for the better; despair will fade, more people will enter his life and his old relationships will improve, he'll build the better perpetual motion machine . . .

Then, just as he arrived, he mysteriously disappears, either vanishing or his real owners from "some warehouse company" showing up and paying a substantial reward for his return. As sad as everyone will be to see him go, they will know Cuddles has more good to do in the world . . .

Powers of Cuddles

Cuddles has an amazing series of quirks and gifts that make him very powerful:

- Cuddles is unusual. Being a miniature horse attracts a great deal of attention, especially from people of the gender the owner may seek. For shy or unconfident people, this is a godsend, and will result in lots of social interaction and even dates without the owner having to say a word. Being as he is also friendly, Cuddles will go out of his way to drag his owner to new places and wait patiently outside shops and other buildings. Also, Cuddles is distracting, making the most serious and focused person playful and carefree.
- Cuddles is incredibly intelligent and perceptive. Included in his tack is a set for assistance animals, which he seems fully trained in using as a guide animal. Those who have met Cuddles swear that it's like having a bright six year-old who notices everything.
- Cuddles is resilient and strong. He resists exposures to pathogens, chemical attacks, radiation, and explosions with little worse than a few nicks and scrapes. Direct small arms fire will cause a great reaction but will result in nothing more than a graze that will heal in several days, all the while not slowing him down. He has resisted attempts of several superhuman men to pick him up and kidnap him, and has also knocked down strong wooden

doors.

- Cuddles listens. His owners have reported solving their own problems by discussing them at length with Cuddles, whose reactions trigger amazing insight in people. Crime victims, shut-ins and the battle-scarred have all shown incredible progress after some time with Cuddles. Meanwhile, scientists report incredible breakthroughs.
- Cuddles is resourceful. Besides providing for himself, he will "find" things that are needed at the time. Missing car keys, a brown paper bag with money in it, a mint Honus Wagner . . . anything that will help solve a problem. Barriers, impediments, and delays pose no problem; Cuddles will find himself inside locked buildings and open the door with his mouth, clear away obstructions and make the trains run on time.
- Cuddles commands respect. No matter what the cause, having Cuddles behind it makes it seem far more important and moral. Rumors persist of a strange horse Rosa Parks met days after her arrest . . .

The Danger of a Miniature Horse

For all the good Cuddles causes, there is a reason Warehouse 23 keeps him under tight wraps. Despite his friendly nature and good character, he is still a horse, easily misled by a bad person who is particularly charismatic. All of Cuddles' abilities in the hands of an unscrupulous person would result in crime sprees and whole regions gripped in fear. Distracted police, plutonium just showing up in the hands of terrorists, and evil masterminds having a sounding board for their outlandish schemes would be but part of the madness inflicted on an unsuspecting world.

Adventure Seeds

- A crime spree grips the city, where banks, jewelry stores and museums discover the crime after the fact. No one can describe the perpetrators, except for vague references of a miniature horse showing up and garnering lots of attention.
- The heroes engage in a normal extraction of an unwilling targeting, only to find themselves subject to a series of terrible circumstances and misfortunes. Several times, as the PCs escape from pursuing police or other interested parties, they spot a miniature horse with someone to rescue and vengeance on his mind . . .
- The adventurers, in a jam way beyond their means (trapped in an impassible dungeon, caught in the basement of a government building with the Feds on them, or the like), find a door opened by Cuddles that leads out of their predicament. The fun starts when Cuddles needs some help with a challenge of his own and drags the characters along.
- A very offensive political candidate or faction (from a wicked baron and his court to a reprehensible state senator) has his popularity skyrocket, much to the suffering of oppressed minorities and the poor. Strangely, few oppose the villains despite efforts to rally them, believing "anyone Cuddles likes can't be that bad." The PCs will have to kidnap Cuddles and convince a tiny horse that he backed the wrong human . . .

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Old Stuff Is the New New Stuff

I was reading a retrospective article on the *Ghostbusters* video game for the Commodore 64 (which I believe you should be able to read online).

For those of you who never had the pleasure, *Ghostbusters* was really an arcade economic simulation wrapped around the supernatural. You controlled a Ghostbusters franchise, and earned money to power up your gear and car. (The engine was apparently based on some similar code for some game called "Car Wars." I wonder whatever happened to that one . . .) Anyway, it was very popular for its day, and it became one of the most ported games ever.

Now, in *Ghostbusters,* you're never looking to replace the Ecto-1 with a newer, better car; instead, you're always improving it. What I find interesting, from a gaming standpoint, is how rare (relatively speaking) a codified system of improving your Stuff -- whatever "Stuff" may entail -- is in RPGs. The purest example I could come up with is **Birthright,** the innovative **Dungeons & Dragons** where players portray the rulers of nations, who can have adventures as individuals or as the leaders of their nation's resources, troops, and so on.

That's not to say that games are devoid of stuff-improvement. Rather, most games do not treat "stuff" as anything that is, necessarily, worthy of improvement. For example, in an **Autoduel** game, players may take considerable effort into improving their characters' cars. But -- and here's the key -- they may just as likely scrap their cars altogether and just buy new ones. In other words, the attachment comes not from *improving* the stuff so much as making sure it's the *best* stuff available.

Compare this with, say, *Star Wars.* Can you imagine Han Solo giving up the *Millennium Falcon* for any reason other than it had been reduced to subatomic particles? And, even then, wouldn't Han and Chewie's first reaction be to get a new ship with a ramscoop to try to sweep the site of the Falcon's destruction, capturing every subatomic particle they could?

Likewise a stuff-improvement **Autoduel** campaign would look a lot like . . . well, *Knight Rider.* After all, KITT was upgraded several times over the course of the series, but it was never even an option for KITT to be replaced.

At its core, the stuff-improvement campaign treats its stuff as characters. The items may be mute, nonsentient, and/or inanimate (or not!), but they are as irreplaceable as any other members of the gaming party . . . which, hopefully, means "not terribly." They should be upgradeable in some meaningful ways, although it's possible -- or even likely -- for them to "max out." (For example, it's likely the *Millennium Falcon* was about as tricked out as it could be.)

So let's look at a few examples at how such campaigns might resemble (or, quite probably, "elements of a larger campaign"). In all of these, GMs might encourage the development and improvement of the Stuff by, say, splitting experience equally between the character and the Stuff (for systems that support such abstractions, such as **Champions** or **GURPS**).

The Blades of Nobility: In this campaign each character inherits a sword upon coming of age; this magically imbued weapon assumes the characteristics of the types of battle and conflict the character undertakes. Thus a sword that is taken on lots of sneaky missions might grow shorter and more dagger-like, and improve the stealth of the wielder; while a weapon that is taken on bloodthirsty rampages may become thicker, heavier, and tinged with a bloodthirsty rage. Intended as the only armament of its wielder, each weapon is the sum total of that character's experience; as such, not only does it provide considerable benefit for the wielder (and only him . . . these swords aren't interchangeable nor do developed abilities work quite right for others), but the weapon's loss would be a considerable blow to the hero's overall ability.

Mindbots: Characters take the role of pilots of large robots (akin to *Voltron* or *Robotech* . . . they can transform or not, as desired). An essential component of each characters' robot is its central core module -- no doubt looking like a glowing, seamless hovering orb -- around which the rest of the robot is developed. This core has sentience and can communicate with the pilot; improvements can be made to the robot, but only if the core approves of them. There are a

very limited number of these cores in existence -- maybe only enough for the heroes and a small number of closely related adversaries -- so protecting the core over the course of its robot's upgrades and modifications is a key concern.

Broadswords and Board-Room Parties: This meta-concept assumes that all characters are multi-millionaires (or more) in charge of their own companies in a larger campaign (such as a private investigatory and security firm in an *X-Files*-esque universe, or a high-technology company in a supers universe). Thus adventures can focus on the micro level of the individuals trying to advance their goals (say, a Tony Stark-type character becoming Iron Man) or they can relate to the companies as individuals (for example, protecting the company from hostile takeovers, attempting to develop product lines or services that will boost revenues and funding to supply revenue for larger projects). Really, this is just a re-envisioning of the ***Birthright*** concept for modern times . . . although it's up to the reader to determine what the modern-day business-world equivalent of the "neighboring nation of undead legions" is.

Given how many characters are defined by their trademark gear, it's suprising how often equipment is interchangeable in RPGs. Perhaps tweaking that formula a bit can give an otherwise-old concept a bit more flavor. Remember: Your gear has often been in as much trouble as you have yourself.

--Steven Marsh

The Day After Ragnarok: Reality Urdha

"The will that wanted to shape an entire world according to its wish can finally attain nothing more satisfactory than . . . annihilation."
-- Richard Wagner, program note to *Götterdämmerung*

Welcome to the world at the end of the world. The skies are shrouded with burning, oily smoke, the earth groans under a poisoned corpse, and the only way out may be deeper into the belly of the beast. Like Reality [Thaumata](#) or Reality [Futura](#), worlds we've visited before, this is a world about a flavor and a feel as much as it is about extrapolation. That said, this world should have a harder edge to it -- it's a world nearly killed by the death of wonder, although not all the wonders are dead. Think of it as a cross between Richard Wagner and Tom Waits, or between Ken Russell and Ken Loach. Put the "grim" back in "grime" and see the world outside the smeared Perspex windscreen. See it smolder. See if you can save it.

"The Nazi myth which is important . . . [to] men like Hitler requires a Götterdämmerung . . ."
-- U.S. War Department counterintelligence assessment, Feb. 12, 1945

Patton's death in September didn't do it, although the wilder-eyed addicts in the Wewelsburg basement claimed that Skorzeny's "Operation Valküre" had changed things, that the American general was "the rope of the Norns," somehow tied to past and future in a way that others weren't. His breaking, they swore, signaled the new Twilight. But the Bulge ground to a halt in sight of the Mosel, and Montgomery slowly pushed the Wehrmacht back across the Ardennes. Not to worry, swore the Ahnenerbe men, sweating out the amphetamines and stinking of extinct herbs pulled from Finnish bogs. The Norns' rope was broken. Things would be different.

Montgomery swept into Lübeck, and Bradley's armor growled closer to Nuremberg, and Zhukov smashed across the Oder, and the sun of July rose over a prostrate Reich. Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* played on Berlin Radio night and day, and the smoke blotted out the stars. And then it happened; the whole world heard the howl of Garm, and the moon was eclipsed in blood. And the head of Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, 600 miles across, breached the surface of the Arabian and rose up. Its first lunge destroyed three troop convoys and their escort carriers, swallowed in one bite 100 miles south of the Azores. A coil of the Serpent stretched across Africa from Mogadishu to Morocco.

"Thor shall put to death the Midgard Serpent, and shall stride away nine paces from that spot; then shall he fall dead to the earth, because of the venom which the Snake has blown at him."
-- Snorri Sturlusson, *Prose Edda*

When the head reared up again off Vigo Bay, it gulped down the U.S.S. *Essex* and TF 24, and paused to splinter a few hundred thousand tons of shipping. President Truman gave the go-ahead, and a lone B-29 took off from Iceland. Its original target had been Berlin, but Captain Joseph Westover had new orders. He, and the crew of the *Strange Cargo,* were to seek out and engage the Midgard Serpent with the Trinity Device. On July 21, 1945, spotter planes for "Operation John Henry" zeroed the *Strange Cargo* in on the Serpent, its head 20,000 feet above Oslo and moving southeast at 80 knots. Captain Westover was an ace pilot, capable of flying a plane through something much smaller than a snake's pupil twenty miles across. The Device detonated, tearing a piece of the sun down from heaven and destroying the Serpent's brain in a torrent of atomic fire. Westover and his crew died instantly. Jörmungandr took a little bit longer than that.

"The victor Perseus with the Gorgon-head,
O'er Libyan sands his airy journey sped.
The gory drops distill'd, as swift he flew,
And from each drop envenom'd serpents grew,
The mischiefs brooded on the barren plains,
And still th' unhappy fruitfulness remains . . ."
-- Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Book IV (trans. John Dryden)

The polar vortex drove strong high easterlies that day, and a plume of radioactive venom hit the upper atmosphere and headed west. It slowly fell out of the sky into clouds and storms, twisters and waterspouts all headed west. Dark crimson rain fell from Dublin to Denver. Where it struck, the seas boiled and the earth drank poison. And things engendered, mutated horrors born of dragon's blood and broken strontium atoms. Some coiled down to the sea's depths; others clumped together and pulled apart ships. Some climbed or flopped or skittered or slunk from swamps and sewers and gutters and ponds and everywhere else rain ran in eastern North America. And some people and beasts drank from those pools and reservoirs before they knew, and some people's blood changed and they knew it not. Or at least not yet.

But it hardly mattered, not at first, because the fall of the Serpent's body back into the Atlantic sent up a wall of water a hundred miles high that smashed into the coast from Halifax to Havana. New York, Washington, Boston, Charleston, Philadelphia, Miami (and poor low-sunk New Orleans) all drowned. Montreal and Cleveland and Chicago, and Veracruz and Houston and Caracas, were merely battered. Salt water (flecked with venomous foam, right enough) lapped against the Appalachians.

"There are many seas and rivers flowing over this world, but there was not a drop of water for Nasren. There are many loudly resounding freshets cascading down these mountain valleys, but Nasren was wrapped in chains and could only thrash from side to side. Unable to get even a glassful of water he was dying of thirst. He was covered in the ice of the high mountains and his arms and legs were squeezed in the vice-like grip of the chains. Nasren would roar and moan, his cries being carried by the winds down from the summit of the Caucasus . . ."
-- John Colarusso, *Prometheus Among the Circassians*

The shock was felt all around the world, but nowhere more than in the icy depths of the Caucasus Mountains. These peaks that Hitler tried to reach in 1942 (on what advice, learned from what unknown insects' mead?) held the bound giant who had betrayed the gods. Hitler would call him Loge or Loki, the Eton-and-Oxford lads would have known he was Prometheus, but to the Ossetians of the valleys he was Nasren, greatest of the Narts, the giants at the dawn of the world. The thunder of the Serpent's fall shook him loose from his icy chains and he slid down the mountains, walking north toward Moscow, where he knew another god-hater ruled.

"Jove's bird on sounding pinions beat the skies;
A bleeding serpent of enormous size
His talons trussed; alive and curling round
She stung the bird, whose throat receiv'd the wound.
Mad with the smart he drops the fatal prey,
In airy circles wings his painful way,
Floats on the winds, and rends the heavens with cries:
Amid the hosts the fallen serpent lies;
They, pale with terror, mark its spires unroll'd,
And Jove's portent with beating hearts behold."
-- Homer, *The Iliad,* Book XII (trans. Alexander Pope)

The Serpent's head, with its skull cored out by nuclear flame, kept moving toward Nuremberg, where it had been Called, but its dead muscles overshot their mark. The head finally crashed to earth in Egypt -- or rather, on Egypt. Its body followed it down, thunderously settling across Europe in a 600-mile wide swath from Scotland to Sicily. England, the Low Countries, Germany, Austria, Italy Yugoslavia, southern Greece all smashed beneath the monster's coil. Wales was not obliterated, a stretch of western France and Savoy could see the sun, Spain survived. (Portugal was drowned in the other side of the tsunami.) Most of the armies of the Western Allies, and millions of those they had come to liberate, were dead, smashed beneath the scales. The coil across Africa had also come down hard, mostly in the Sahara, although Ethiopia had little chance to enjoy its hard-won independence. The Mediterranean and Red Seas were blocked by reptilian flesh. The earth trembled, cities around the world toppled and burned. Smoke filled the air.

"A third I see, that no sunlight reaches,
On Dead Man's Shore: the doors face northward,
Through its smoke vent venom drips,

Serpent skins enskein that hall."
-- *Voluspá,* the "Song of the Sibyl" [trans. W.H. Auden]

East of the Serpent's fall, the Red Army was mostly intact, and Eastern Europe likewise, safe in the Red Army's embrace. Russia had lost little, and the few hundred thousand dead in Hungary were nothing next to the thirty million that Stalin had killed or left to die in the last two decades. Moreover, the deadly venom fallout never touched Mother Russia; her monsters would be solely of human making. And of the giants; Molotov and Suslov declared Nasren a bogatyr, a glorious Russian giant born of Soviet Man from the scientifically nurtured soil of Soviet Georgia. Stalin's scientists (and those who had been oh-so-recently Hitler's scientists, at distant camps in Poland) pulled venom from the fallen beast and injected it into volunteers, or listened to Nasren's wisdom about the dawn time. Mysterious fires burned all across Siberia. Frozen mammoths struggled back to their feet, and resumed chewing their buttercup breakfasts. Other giants clambered out of the permafrost; Soslan of the steel body, Batyrez the invincible swordsman, Satanya the beautiful. It is a shame, Stalin tells each of them, looking at them with his wise brown eyes, it is a shame that your sons the Chechen and the Ingush were killed to the last child by the fascists and the imperialists. It is a shame, they agree, and their own icy eyes narrow.

"Now death is the portion of doomed men,
Red with blood the buildings of gods,
The sun turns black in the summer after,
Winds whine. Well, would know more?"
-- *Voluspá,* the "Song of the Sibyl" [trans. W.H. Auden]

It is the third year without a summer since the Fall of the Serpent. President Earl Warren has held onto Hawaii, turning the Japanese back toward China and their endless war there. There's no more stomach for war in the Pacific, and the Russians are welcome to the wreck of Europe. The Americans (and Texans) have their own continent to win back again, from the things that wash up now with every Atlantic tide. The last of the great monsters have been driven back down east of the Rockies. Negotiations with Texas are going well -- perhaps President Garner will consider running on a joint ticket in 1948. If the Army says it's safe to hold elections, that is. Fascist Mexico and Argentina are making noises about war; with who, nobody quite knows. Franco and the surviving French have come to their own agreement. The Welsh still swear to Queen Margaret in Sydney, as does some of India ("Congress India" is fighting two or three civil wars), and South Africa, and what's left of Canada.

It is British Petroleum who came up with drilling the Serpent for oil, and Royal Dutch Shell who set up the great cracking plants in Wales and Kenya to refine it. The Russian advisers in Arabia and Persia don't like it, but there's nothing they can do, yet. It is the Royal Navy that dives deep to salvage things from the rift where Jörmungandr rose. It is the Royal Society who have cut into the Serpent at Hereford, and (at hellish cost) brought back living samples of the things, the cultures, swarming in its cavernous belly. It is Rhodes University men who took those writhing creatures and strapped them down and drew out the sera and built the equipment that allowed Sir Edmund Hillary and his team to climb to the top of the Spine and look down at the curving world, and Vickers who hired Goddard from New Mexico to build the rocket planes to get there faster. It is Prime Minister Menzies and his government who alone seem worried about what Stalin means when he promises a "final titanic struggle." Spies, and rocketeers, and oil-men, and speleo-herpetologists gather in Sydney and Capetown and Plymouth and Nairobi, and wonder if the sun has set on the British Empire at last, or if somewhere in this smoke-stained poisoned world there is still room for a green and pleasant land.

Pyramid Review

The Deck of Many Things (for *d20 System*)

Published by Green Ronin Publishing

Layout & Design by Hal Mangold

Art by Eliane Bettocchi

Twenty-four cards (22 artifact cards & two rules cards); full color, in a tuck box; $9.95

They say any good GM can really put his performance over the top by providing a few props in play. They need to be something special, though, like treasure maps, replica weapons, or paper made to look like old parchment. However, even better than this would be something custom-made for your game, though how many groups outside the miniatures companies actually offer something useful in this respect? *The Deck of Many Things* may not be a *wand of wonder* or a *cloak of displacement* but it's a lot easier to simulate and it has actual uses for anyone sitting around the table.

If you've only been playing *Dungeons & Dragons* for, say, a week, you might not know what this deck is. It started as an insert in an issue of *Dragon* magazine and became one of the most infamous items ever: a deck of cards from which strange and wonderful occurrences might arise. Or not. A stout hero states how many cards he's willing to draw from the deck and, once committed, pulls them out one at a time.

Sometimes it's good. A dedicated follower might appear and pledge his steel to your cause, or you could gain riches, or you may be granted a certain number of *wishes.* On the other hand, you might not be so lucky. All your magic items could be drained, you could be attacked, or you might be cast into the dreaded Void. Then there are a few results that could be interpreted either way, like a sudden change of alignment. You can't go back on your agreed draw, so if you said you'd pull three cards you can't wuss out just because one of your friends was magically turned against you (though if you fall into the aforementioned Void, you're pretty much excused from additional draws).

While the article directed readers to use a regular deck of playing cards or, for that added whiff of fantastic "realism," a tarot set to duplicate the relic, Green Ronin has created the deck itself. Okay, it isn't made of plaques or vellum like the (again, quotation marks) "real" thing, but it's designed to look like the artifact proper.

The set consists of the 22 cards from the canonical deck, right down to the card names that have been twisted just a bit to reflect those you'd find in a fortuneteller's deck, like Balance, the Fates, and Skull. There are also two more that list the rules and effects of the individual cards. If you've read the original article, you've seen the text they have here as well. There isn't much added, unless you count the d20 Open Game License. Though the deck does not bear the *d20 System* logo, that's its pedigree; you can use the set with another game if you're ready to file off the serial numbers and come up with concomitant rewards. They may have taken more than just that, in fact, because part of the descriptive material still tells you to simulate the magic cards by substituting the tarot cards listed in a column that isn't actually provided. Ditto the column that tells you how to do this with ordinary playing cards. Either the text was lifted verbatim, or someone forgot to trim that section when they excised those columns.

Concentrating on what the gamer really wants, though, the cards have some good artwork. Once more, it's not the sort of thing that accurately reflects a device that's been sitting in a dungeon waiting to be claimed by adventurers; the drawings, while colorful and clean, suggest a cross between fan favorite Dan Smith and old mythological illustrations from Chinese tapestries. You get less a sense of hoary legend and more that RenFest feeling. Would that paper prices would let the cardstock quality match the fine imagery, but while these are oversized cards worthy of a tarot deck, they

aren't terribly sturdy. They're going to need some fondling, too, before the cards stop sliding so easily over one another and upsetting the deck.

Not every Dungeon Master opts to have these magic devices lying all over his game world, so maybe this isn't something that's going to see enough use to justify a sawbuck. Then again, if you had something fun to draw from, you might be able to get your players to throw caution to the wind. Who can resist playing with the cool toys? There are probably a lot of people out there who would pony up the cash for something that more closely resembled the full-blown and fanciful artifact as described, but for those who want to use *The Deck of Many Things* more than admire it, you won't bust your wallet getting this darling little prop.

--Andy Vetromile

Oil in Akkad

by Paul Drye

In Akkad, the 22nd century BC sees King Sargon more than a century dead and his great-grandson Shar-Kali-Sharri sitting on the throne. The Gutians threaten his empire from the north-east, and if history runs as expected the empire is close to collapse.

Meanwhile on Homeline, KMP Petroleum have recovered from the dark days after stolen fusion power technology swept away their business. They now make even greater profits than their predecessors by bringing oil from easily accessible fields on other worlds to timelines where fusion is still a fantasy.

The two meet because one Akkad, on Mesopotamia-9, is sitting on a stable nexus portal as well as the usual North Arabian oil fields. No matter what the remaining circumstances, KMP sees this as a jewel without match. In the decade since the timeline was discovered, the company has made Mesopotamia-9 home to one of its largest operations, and they've given the king important personal support. Unfortunately for them, their presence has inadvertently stirred up the peasantry, and it's becoming a race to see who'll come down on them first: Infinity, or a mob of dirt-poor Akkadians.

The Nexus

There are hundreds of pre-industrial Middle Easts for Homeline to use, so it takes something special on one for someone to set up shop. In the case of Mesopotamia-9, its distinguishing feature is a plug of volcanic material rearing up out of the swamp just west of the modern-day site of Rahhaliya, Iraq. The arrangement of basalt columns, similar in appearance to Homeline's Giant's Causeway, has no analog on any other known timeline. Once it was discovered (by a KMP petrologist who immediately noticed how out of place it was), it was examined as a potential parachronic anomaly and Infinity found its crowning nexus portal. KMP laid claim once it became clear where the portal went: to Mesopotamia in Britannica-1, a timeline where oil was worth about $40 per barrel.

On the far side of the portal, KMP bought up a near-bankrupt petroleum company with stakes in that timeline's Iraqi oil fields. They then built an "oil refinery" in Rahhaliya that apparently processed crude oil pumped from their stakes; of course, it was just a cover for the nexus portal's terminus, and the crude was coming from Mesopotamia-9, hoisted up the side of the basalt columns through several large cargo elevators.

Natural portals are never as reliable as artificial ones, though. The Akkadian nexus doesn't always connect to Britannica-1. Every now and then, there's a slow build-up of parachronic energy over the course of an hour or so, then the portal "flips" to another destination. A few minutes later it flips back to pointing at Britannica-1. Fortunately, the first time this happened the new end point was an unoccupied timeline; Infinity was able to cover up the resulting oil spill and put detectors into place that warn when the next event is about to occur. Even so, no one has ever been able to

figure out when the nexus is going to flip until the buildup begins, or why it flips at all. They can't even explain why it never connects to the same destination twice. Since the nexus was commercialized, it's hooked up to no less than 19 different alternative destinations.

KMP Petroleum

Based out of New York and backed with Kuwaiti and Venezuelan oil money, KMP's business is preponderantly out-time. After the Gulf War, the Kuwaiti government received claims on Iraqi oilfields on other timelines as partial compensation for the damage their country had suffered. Teaming up with a large American oil company to get access to the parachronic technology they needed, the new conglomerate has been exploiting their stakes to the hilt, and ship hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil from empty or pre-industrial timelines to worlds where petroleum is getting scarce.

Akkad

Even before the portal was discovered, Mesopotamia-9 drew some interest as one of the few timelines where the city of Akkad was available for study. In many universes, Akkad was the capital city of one of the first empires in human history. There are several timelines where the point of divergence from Homeline is firmly rooted in Akkadian events. Despite being historically important, and numerous attempts being launched to find it both pre- and post-parachronics, early Akkad remained thoroughly lost on most timelines. When Mesopotamia-9 was discovered and its first surveyors proved that it wasn't a historical echo (and so was safe to visit extensively), Akkad became a nexus of archeological exploration; one of these visitors was on retainer for KMP and discovered the nexus portal.

Akkad itself remains a minor focus of Homeline interest, with the academics becoming progressively more annoyed at KMP Petroleum for the way the company is warping the society they're trying to study.

The city is on the west bank of the Euphrates River, about 30 miles southwest of Homeline Baghdad's location. Southern Iraq in the 22nd-century BC is not quite as dry and used-up as it is four thousand-plus years later. While the land away from the river is arid, erratic seasonal floods leave swampy, rush-ridden areas in old oxbows of the river and in other low-lying areas.

The city is walled, like all other settlements in Mesopotamia, though as an imperial capital its fortifications are impressive by ancient standards. Fired clay bricks line the outside and inside of a 10-foot-thick wall, with clay filling the interior. This wall runs in an arc from the north to the southeast, enclosing a loop of land with the river on the other sides. From the river, a 15-foot-wide canal runs east to west, passing through the wall near the main gate. Other small gates dot the walls at roughly equal distances, while the canal carries on into the farmland that surrounds the city.

Within the walls, Akkad is different from what travelers used to other time periods might expect. The city is more a ceremonial center than a place for masses of people to live; everyone within the walls is either a priest, a servant, or a member of the king's extended family. Economic productivity in the 22nd century is quite low (there are no horses or donkeys to use as draft animals, money is more than a millennium in the future, and the list of domesticated plants is short), so the middle class is non-existent. Trade over any kind of distance is chancy, and tends to be limited to things that can't be produced locally no matter what the cost (e.g., tin from Cyprus, or cedar wood from the Empire's outlying province in Lebanon).

The main areas are a temple complex to Shin (the moon god) and another to Ishtar making up the "wings" of the town to the north and southeast; a temple to Anu and Adad (the linked sky/bull gods associated with divination) between them; and a palace complex where king Shar-Kali-Sharri lives. A joint "dwelling area of the gods" is on a flat, two-tiered ziggurat in the center of all these buildings. Previously this was a private area where the divine connected to the Earth, but the previous king Naram-Sin started the practice of Akkadian rulers claiming to be gods, and the periphery of the ziggurat is open for anyone to see the new "god" engage in the rituals that keep the world and the heavens in order.

In contrast to the well-kept temples and palace, the remainder of the area inside the walls is given over to a warren of mud houses for servants and a small contingent of fighting men. Many of the servants work in official capacities, fanning out into the countryside to collect taxes of grain and oversee the construction of roads and canals. Almost all are slaves, with the palace servants being drawn from the local population and the officials from elsewhere in an attempt to combat corruption and favoritism.

Life for almost all people in Akkad is nasty, brutish, and short. Peasants live about 50 years (if they clear childhood), and poor nutrition dwarfs them: men are about 5'3" on average, and women shorter still. Their material lives are basic as well, with most people wearing one loincloth until it falls apart, and what little food they have being bland: wheat, beans and lentils, onions and garlic for taste, and the odd bit of mutton or goat. Water is often deadly to drink, so the peasantry get by with foul wheat alcohols. The main reason the priesthood and nobility exist is to get some relief from the monotony; for example, cotton fabric and chickens are a recent introduction to the region and are reserved for the powerful. Grape wines are not much older, and are similarly hoarded.

The Gutians

Akkad is threatened to the north and east by the Gutians, a semi-nomadic people who raid the flatlands east of the Tigris from their home in the Zagros Mountains. They rely on mobility, attacking villages and livestock then escaping before the Akkadians can counter-attack. To modern eyes, the most remarkable thing about the Gutians is that they do this without help from horses; the invention of the chariot is a few hundred years in the future, and the horses of the 22nd century BC are too small to ride. Instead, they're kept as meat animals and objects of veneration, while the Gutian warriors move on foot. A lifetime of practice has given them astonishing stamina, the equivalent of top long-distance runners.

As well as stealing property, the Gutians have another motive: expansion. They've realized that the Akkadians are dependent on their irrigation canals, and try to destroy them when they can. Clogging channels with debris and fouling the water with corpses can ruin a crop, and one crop failure causes a famine. Without intervention by the king, the land will often revert to waste, which makes a perfect home for their lifestyle. In the next few hundred years, they'll be co-opted by the surpluses and luxuries of civilization, but for now they're diametrically opposed to it.

The Highway Worshippers

KMP uses the same cover story as any overt Homeline organization does on a primitive timeline: they are wizards from far away, interested in specific, non-threatening things in the area and quite willing to trade valuable magical services for permission to dwell here.

On that basis, Infinity has allowed KMP to import industrial technology, particularly since both the nexus portal and the Kifl oil field are small and can be secured from the eyes of the locals without much difficulty. Unfortunately, the two are separated by 40 miles and any reasonable route between them runs through inhabited land. A regular pipeline would have to be underground to protect from Gutian attacks, and that would have cost a lot more than KMP was hoping to spend. The petroleum company instead obtained permission to build a two-lane asphalt highway, and runs a fleet of 20 tanker trucks back and forth carrying 20,000 barrels of oil per day.

The Homeliners expected there would be some disruption in the lives of the Akkadian peasants near the highway, but assumed it would be small enough that they could justify it to Infinity. In the event, though, they've just proven how hard it is to think along with a human who's 6,000 years of cultural evolution away from modern people.

Since the trucks began running, a grassroots religious schism has developed centered around the gods Anu and Adad. Those divinities' symbol is the bull, and many peasants have been taken with the idea that the swift trucks are enormous, mystical bulls of some sort. Their shape is vaguely right; the headlights are eyes; the sound of the air horns that the warns the impious off the gods' most-unusual road is clearly the bellowing of the great animals. And don't they rumble with thunder and cause a great wind as they pass, as befits the gods of the sky?

From KMP's perspective, the new belief is a problem because of the consternation it causes in Akkad's powerful. Highway-worshipping peasants are much less likely to listen to the established priesthood of any Akkadian god; after all, the gods are out in the fields, not in the holy cities of Nippur and Ur. Taxes are harder to collect as the king himself is supposed to be a god, and his ziggurat seems less important for the proper appeasement of the spirit world if one can appeal directly to the gods as they whiz by on their mysterious business. In all, the highway is threatening to become a bizarre echo of the Protestant Reformation for the Sumerian pantheon, divorcing religious authority from the priesthood and bringing it back to the believers.

The established religious authorities and the king have replied in the usual fashion, engaging in violent reprisals against the heretics. The heretics in turn are digging in their heels and fighting back, with the whole situation threatening to turn into a widespread rebellion. The one thing most likely to end the situation is to stop running the trucks, but if that happens KMP's profits go out the window. Failing that, there's a plan afoot to drive the trucks into local villages, priests riding on them to establish their dominance, and spend a day at each locale letting the locals play "petting zoo" with the Homeline tech. Unfortunately it's foundering on priestly fear of actually sitting on the trucks while they move around at the unearthly speeds of, say, 20 to 30 miles per hour.

Characters

Leonardo Nodals: A survivor from the bad old days when Petróleos de Venezuela was falling apart, Nodals has moved into the new era with KMP. He's too conservative and frightened of failure to get to the uppermost echelons, but his experience and skill have landed him at the head of KMP's crown jewel in the field.

Apart from the traumas of the fusion era, Nodals' life is shaped by a terrorist attack eight years past that cost him his legs and one arm. Since then the director has lived his life as a cyborg, but without the positive side that might imply; Homeline can make cybernetic arms and legs but they're inferior replacements to the originals. Nodals limps along on his artificial legs, adaptive programs keeping him upright if jerky. Maintenance is a problem too, especially around the joints when Mesopotamia's sand and heat attack them.

Mawiyah al-Sanousi: A distaff relative of the royal al-Sabah family in Kuwait, Mawiyah is the liaison for KMP in Mesopotamia-9 with all outside parties: the press, investors, and (most importantly) Infinity. She's an unusual figure, one of the leading lights in the current Sheik's program to involve more women in the Kuwaiti government and other positions of power. As the program isn't entirely popular in Kuwait, she's a black sheep to many people; her strength is that she doesn't mind.

Educated in the UK, her background is in communications; as a favor to the Kuwaiti government, she has also had some Infinity agent training so she can better operate on another timeline and understand the concerns active agents bring to her. Her loyalty is to KMP and the interests of her family first, but she has sympathy for the agents she works with. Unfortunately, she also has a taste for going out in the field with them, and sometimes wonders aloud if there's an alternative version of herself on some timeline where she carried on with Infinity rather than going back to the family business.

Shar-Kali-Sharri: Literally "The King of Kings" -- it's lese majesté to speak his birth name aloud -- Shar-Kali-Sharri is the fourth king of the Akkadian Empire and the first one who looks as if he'll leave his country in worse shape than it was when he ascended to the throne. He was a decent, if uninspired ruler for most of his reign, but now that's he's passed three score years he's become increasingly obsessed with his own mortality. KMP's power rests on their ability to relieve him of some of his ailments, like arthritis and dental cavities.

While this gives the outtimers considerable control over him, the king is not happy with his dependence. His entire life he's been supreme in everything, excepting his relationship with the previous king. When Naram-Sin died, it was a profound psychological relief to him. Now that KMP can subvert his actions, he's disquieted again. He may not understand it in those terms, but he would welcome another option and put the oil-men in their place if he could.

If he's unlucky, though, he might become even more hen-pecked. The crowning achievement of Naram-Sin's reign was stabilizing his family's relationship with the priesthood by appointing his three daughters as high priestesses of Sin,

Shamash, and Enlil. All three live in different cities to the south, but "the crones" (as their brother calls them) are in a position to make his life very difficult if they feel the need.

Adventures in Akkad

Get in the Car: The Asiatic Lion is nearly extinct on Homeline, and one of the first varieties of it to disappear was the one that lived in the swamps and scrub of southern Mesopotamia. There are still some around in 2200 BC, though, and the GDREP (see "Infinite Crossroads-3: GDREP") wants them. Agents are assigned to trudge through the muck and sedge to "bring 'em back alive." Those who take the time to interrogate the locals before heading out will hear of Shir, a leonine demigod who supposedly rules over all the prides. Is he just an oversized cat, or is there more to the tale?

Through the Looking Glass: Both KMP and Infinity would like to better understand the nexus portal's alternative destinations. KMP wants to smooth their exports, Infinity wants to continue their mission to explore the multiverse. Unfortunately, since the connections only last a few minutes, and never seem to repeat, Infinity's usual cautious approach to investigating a new timeline isn't good enough, Some brave agents could be assigned to go through the nexus each time it connects to someplace other than Britannica-1.

Red Star in the Sky: One of Infinity's continuing problems is its relationship with the ornery Russian government on Homeline; one of KMP's main competitors is the Russian-owned Gazprom. Neither is averse to dirty tricks if they feel the need, and they decide to make a combined play aimed at disrupting KMP's operations on Mesopotamia-9. Adventurers can become involved at an early stage when the identity of the fifth column is unknown, or later once the Russians have safely ingratiated themselves with the local power structure.

A Little Help Here?: A radio call comes in from one of the tanker trucks hauling oil along the Rahhaliya Highway. He's broken down and the natives are restless. Someone needs to get there and retrieve the situation before the "mechanical bull god" is reduced to matchbox-sized pieces by its overenthusiastic worshippers.

I Thought You Said "No Magic": Mesopotamia-9 is intended as a no-mana timeline, but there are possibilities for GMs looking to lull their players with an apparently normal timeline then pull a switch. The Old Kingdom of Egypt fell about 80 years before the timeline's present day, with one of H.P. Lovecraft's favorite Egyptians -- the probably apocryphal femal Pharoah Nitocris -- in on the kill. Her revenge on her brother/husband's murderers (Herodotus anachronistically calls them Persians) traditionally took quite a lot out of her and led to her death. Creative types are justified in giving her a recovery period and then a return across the Sinai as an undead queen looking to finish the job against the people of the Tigris and Euphrates.

Pyramid Review

GameMastery Critical Hit Deck

Published by Paizo Publishing, LLC

Concept & design by Jason Bulmahn

Developed by Mike McArtor & Jeremy Walker

Art by Sean Glenn & Eric Deschamps

55 cards (52 critical hit cards, one OGL cards, one instruction card, one advertisement card); full color, in a tuck box; $9.99

Critical hits -- those much-beloved and so-seldom achieved results in the thick of combat -- are among the fondest memories some *Dungeons & Dragons* players have. Just when the team needed that extra push to put them over the top, or the one roll that would turn the tide of battle back in their favor, there it is: a natural 20 on the die. This simple mechanic has undergone changes and been offered variant rules throughout the game's lifetime, and some maintain that it is, along with days of the month, the only reason to keep a 30-sided die around.

On the other hand, just rolling a 20 and getting a little something extra is kind of boring.

At least, the crew at Paizo thinks so, so they've come up with their own method of codifying and expanding the flurry of joy that comes from getting the right roll, and that's the *GameMastery Critical Hit Deck.*

The 52 cards form a draw deck. A player still has to roll a natural 20, and he must still confirm his hit with another die roll. If he passes this muster, however (that is, if he's on the heroes' side . . . more about the bad guys later), instead of settling for simple double damage he can enjoy other crazy effects designed to add a little spice to the brouhaha. He might damage more than the hit point total, for example, crippling an enemy's wisdom with a skull shot or reducing the dexterity with blows to the arms, hand, fingers, or muscles. It gets colorful sometimes, with piercing attacks that may pin a foe in place.

There are four types of damage offered: bludgeoning, piercing, slashing, and magic. Most of the results seem to be in keeping with the individual styles -- for example, if you pierce someone, that's the best way to get results like deep, festering wounds or organ damage. Some things come up more than others; for example, "Spun Around" shows itself on more than a couple of cards. Magic is portrayed here as an exceedingly fickle beast. Some of the cards give you benefits like not expending the spell you just cast, while others take utterly baffling shapes. Sending your opponent into a planar rift? Losing him for a few seconds to a time vortex? Heck, in some cases you yourself may become invisible, though the card that turns the villain briefly incorporeal seems like it could hurt your cause.

Not that the bad guys always get to play with the set. The DM is asked to decide just who gets the cards and how. Variants put forth include letting anyone with a crit use a card or forcing enemies to possess this "power" as their feat, but mostly they figure it's restricted to the heavies in your game and perhaps their henchmen.

Graphically, the cards do what they're meant to. The only real art to speak of is the severed orc head on the back of each card (and as severed orc heads go, it's pretty good). From a design standpoint, the fronts could use work. The labels for the different damage types is small, painful to read, and an unsatisfying red-on-black combination. There's a corresponding symbol to go with each type, but these look like a graduating teddy bear, a Christmas tree, and a spatula

(the lightning bolt is pretty clearly a lightning bolt). Fortunately, the types and order never change so all it takes is a taste of familiarity to spare you some squinting. Better is the design work, with a parchment-like motif that's strategically spattered with blood. The cards are thin and slide around a bit unless you have a really level tabletop or you limber them up with some shuffling to relieve them of their pristine nature. Oh, and the Ps in the title look almost like Fs.

These complaints make the cards sound much worse than they really are. When you look past the graphic presentation, what you've got are some interesting and usually straightforward (though still creative) rewards for your troubles. The actual effect text is plain and concise, the titles are evocative and give you a clear idea what the special effects are before you even read the rest of the box, and most cards don't even make you go to the book for a rule. Sure, you get the occasional slip (is that -5 on the free attack applied to your roll to hit, or to the enemy's defenses?), but there's not much here to second-guess (though the text of "Decapitation" causes an amusing double-take).

The ***GameMastery Critical Hit Deck,*** just like dice, is another lovable toy for the players and the GM to make use of. It may not be as giddily humorous as the infamous ***RoleMaster*** charts, but players love to tell war stories, and these may become even more exaggerated with this pile of inexpensive, deadly results.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Cannibal Sector 1: The Kingdom of Death in the World of Progress (for SLA Industries)

Published by [Cubicle 7 Entertainment Ltd](#)

Written by John Dodd & James Desborough

Illustrated by Dave Allsop, Clint Langley, & Derek Dow

164-page b&w softcover; $29.99

Just when you thought a game line dead, up pops a supplement to prove you wrong . . . but then, **SLA Industries** has always been like that. Originally published in 1994 by Nightfall Games, its history has seen it in the hands of Wizards of the Coast and Hogshead Publishing before finding a home with Cubicle 7 Entertainment. Not only will this English publisher be supporting the definitive Scottish RPG with a second edition, but will also be releasing a second edition of *[Victoriana.](#)* Its first release, though, is **Cannibal Sector 1: The Kingdom of Death in the World of Progress** for SLA Industries.

For an RPG with just four supplements along with the core book, **SLA Industries** has maintained a very loyal online following that has kept the game alive during its leaner times. What kept the fans loyal was the setting and background, a combination of science fiction, dark corporate horror, deep secrets, and structured play set-up, all taking place in the World of Progress. This is dominated by one company, SLA Industries, run by one being, Mr. Slayer, and headquartered on Mort, a world with one single feature. This is Mort City: vast, labyrinthine, and home to billions cowed by television and rampant commercialism. The players take the roles of Operatives, troubleshooters working for SLA Industries to gain income, media exposure, and security clearance. Yet not everyone in the World of Progress believes in Mr. Slayer's message, and even a corporation like **SLA Industries** has its failures. This is the focus for this new supplement.

Cannibal Sector 1 is the first of four regions abutting Mort City, and the most notorious. It is a fecund, fetid, parasitic boil that is poisoned by the City as much as it feeds on its effluence . . . not just its waste, but also the City's failed experiments, contraceptive hormones, mutagens, radio actives, and other chemicals. Once part of Mort City, Cannibal Sector 1 sits under a layer of ash from the constant fires, is strewn with tower blocks (both fallen or ready to fall), and home to diseases so virulent and deadly that they will kill someone in two hours. Other denizens include Cannibal Clans (descendants of the sector's original inhabitants), tribes of the doglike Carrien, insect swarms so thick they can bring down vehicles, sociopathic leftovers from the "Chrome Warrior" fad a decade before, soft companies rival to SLA Industries, and guerilla forces individually more capable than anything SLA can field. At its heart stands Salvation Tower, the kilometer-tall beacon to the Fall, the catastrophe that marked SLA Industries' first failure.

Between Mort City and Cannibal Sector 1 is the Wall. Standing 20 meters high, 10 meters thick, and 7,200 km long, it is manned by almost 2,000,000 defense forces or Shivers, plus hundreds of penal troops and vehicles. The Wall is a sign of SLA Industries' failure as much as it is the company's desire to protect its citizens. It is cheaper to protect them against Cannibal Sector 1 than it is to deal with it, and it has become a huge source of media revenue. Reality TV shows are shot on and beyond the Wall, and the number of BPN files or missions for the Sector has grown. Given the lethality of the Sector, this presents the perfect opportunity for up-and-coming (though not necessarily experienced) Operative teams to make a name for themselves where others have failed.

In response to the dangers of Cannibal Sector 1, SLA Industries has publicized one secret and kept another. The former

secret is the existence of the Sector Rangers, dedicated to patrolling the sector and equipped with an advanced SMG/bolt thrower combination and a modular armor system that can integrate other armor pieces. The other secret is the existence of the Grit Stormer variant. Stormers are SLA Industries' ultra-loyal clone warriors that come in several variants. The standard model is tough, has claws, and can regenerate. The Grit Stormer does that and more, but comes with one extra, media-unfriendly feature: the consumption of freshly killed brains to extract tactical information.

Cannibal Sector 1 presents all of these dangers, diseases, and denizens in detail. What it does not do is get down to geographical specifics, nor is there a map. This is intentional. Cannibal Sector 1 is too large to map and is not really geographically diverse enough to warrant one. Instead from the broad details given, the GM is expected to design BPNs and threats for his players to face.

To help, the GM is given several sample BPNs, ranging from easy escort duty in the sewers below the Wall right up to a virtually suicidal apocalyptic mission into the Sector's heart. Other campaign types are also discussed, including all-Shiver, all-ganger, and all-civilian campaigns. The book is also one big catalog of threats and dangers to throw at the Operatives. The advice on running and staging a game in Cannibal Sector 1 is excellent, focusing upon its empty, silent nature compared to the claustrophobic hustle and bustle of inside the Wall.

The supplement also lifts the lid on a couple of SLA Industries' secrets. Not the *big* secrets, but still sizeable nonetheless. These expose who Digger -- the Manchine operating in Salvation Tower -- is and what he is up to, and who the highly capable Scavs are. Discovering these secrets could land the characters in really big trouble.

Physically, *Cannibal Sector 1* is a clean looking book. True, it needs another proofread, but all the same, it is an enjoyable, informative read. However, it does lack an index. This inexcusable absence is made all the worse given that there is space for it. The highlight, though, is the artwork, always one of the game's most notable features. Dark, disturbing, and unsettling, every piece is evocative of the nastiness that is Cannibal Sector 1.

If you are a fan of *SLA Industries,* then you will be buying *Cannibal Sector 1.* After all, it increases the number of supplements published by a quarter. Of course, you will really be buying it for the exposé upon a region of Mort discussed in hushed tones, for its revealed secrets and dangers, and its new playing options. But if you are not a fan of the game, what is in *Cannibal Sector 1* for you? As a whole, probably not a lot, though its contents could easily describe a hell hole of a world to visit in any sci-fi or cross-parallel-world RPG or campaign. Individual details can be mined to add something nasty to any of those games. Either way, *Cannibal Sector 1: The Kingdom of Death in the World of Progress* is informative, interesting, and makes for a well-written expansion to Scotland's (and one of the United Kingdom's) best RPGs.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Future Boy

by Eric Funk

This young man is a well-meaning, but slightly misguided individual. He is loyal and dedicated to the point of neurosis, but he has not seen much of the real world, learning most of his geography and history from the tales of heroes, whether shown on TV, described in newspapers, or recorded in books.

Future Boy (a.k.a. Arthur "Arty" Hammond) never had a stellar education. Standard federal testing put him in the middle of most curves. He chose well, but his grades never put him on the lists for extra achievement exams. Despite this, he was randomly chosen to represent his schools in various tours and celebrity meetings. It was on one of these trips that he first witnessed some heroes in action. (If one or more of the PCs have been active heroes for a few years, then they could be the ones he saw!) Perhaps he was even rescued from a villain's plot or indiscriminate use of power such as a giant robot knocking over a building or throwing a school bus. After that day, his life changed; he dedicated it to Saving The World. Taking the bits of his dreams that he could recall, coupled with impossible luck, he was convinced that he had some sort of precognitive powers. Despite failing ESP and clairvoyance tests, the lad is no less determined in his efforts. He believes that his powers are either too subtle, or too powerful to be tested in that way. Having studied thousands of comic books and listened to many tales, he now has chosen the group of heroes to apprentice himself to -- the PCs. At this, he will dog them in any way he can until they accept him as their ward.

Encountered

Future Boy is almost terminally optimistic. He firmly believes that the heroes will succeed in the end, even if it costs them their lives. He is cheerful, and will seek to befriend the heroes at every opportunity and do the things they do. He sees any failure on his part as a chance to learn. The scenario presented here is best implemented in a situation where the heroes already know Future Boy's parents through their "mild-mannered" identities. Arthur's alias will vary depending on the style of the campaign and apparent power levels. In a secret magic campaign, perhaps he will use the call-sign "Librum," or in a cyberpunk campaign, "Dex."

Probable PC Reactions

Option 1: Avoidance

Attempting to avoid him can result in his unconscious use of his Serendipity, and thus it cannot be used to help the team when he does catch up to them. Can they convince him that the eldritch horrors they fight are not worth the risk for someone of his age, or will his parents pay the PCs a visit to ask awkward questions as to why their son is upset? If the heroes spurn the boy's aid, will he return embittered after a few years of solitude, bent on the destruction of those who would destroy a child's dreams?

Option 2: Compliance

When he joins, weird stuff starts happening, reducing the ability of the team to remain covert. The boy's parents will want to meet the people he has been spending so much time with, and thus can begin a new role-playing situation involving the heroes' mundane alter-egos. If some of the heroes had a mundane background, perhaps they can identify with Arthur's attempts to try to keep such a lifestyle.

In the end, even if the PCs do not "buy" him as a Dependent, he should still be rolled as one, with a value of "6" (see page 131 of the *Basic Set*). Even if his number does not come up, there will likely be some sort of unusual event happening with Future Boy involved (which the heroes might not hear about until later). Such will be memorable, inconvenient, and may switch one certainly bad situation for another equally bad situation that can be dealt with. For

example, if the PCs are stuck in a pit with walls closing, an abandoned aquarium truck with multiple tanks could crash in sideways, jamming the closing walls. After an appropriately dramatic amount of time, the tanks break, half-filling the pit with water containing angry sharks and octopi.

And Then . . .

Adventure Seeds

Sensei: Future Boy has the will to learn, he just needs to grow. If trained vigorously, be could gain as much as two points of attributes per year! The players, and perhaps their characters, might find some enjoyment in planning his training and tests. Perhaps they can devise tests to remove the limitations on his Wild Talent. Finally, as his IQ rises, the Reliability enhancement on his advantages should be reduced.

One way to get Future Boy out of the heroes' hair, at least on a part-time basis, will be to find a local teacher for him, so he can learn the secret moves and lore required by the setting. A hope may be that as he learns of the real world, he will realize that there are other groups he could seek to join. There remain several obstacles: finding a teacher or two, convincing them to consider teaching the boy, getting the boy there regularly, his passing an entrance exam, and his accepting the idea!

There are some places that a child can explore inconspicuously that adults cannot, such as school yards, play grounds, amusement parks, and malls. If caught in a place they shouldn't be in, they can feign ignorance and innocence. On the other hand, if the cadre must investigate a bar or racetrack, such a minor would be left out.

Example 1: Future Boy comes to the heroes, and claims to have found one of the items they seek, be it a wall sconce emblazoned with a jade dragon, a book on necromancy, or an autographed Babe Ruth bat. It was during a school tour of a local private museum owned by a suspicious local wealthy individual. Can the heroes pass as "parents" in the next tour?

Example 2: Future Boy has spotted a villain making a getaway from the scene of a crime. Being a minor, he is not allows into many bars and nightclubs, but only he can identify the individual. Choices must be made quickly!

Super Size Me: Future Boy has awakening powers! While on a mission, or any time they are hanging out, these uncontrollable effects can lash out. If the heroes have the faith and patience to see this through, they will be rewarded with a potentially useful ally! Until then, and even then, his youth will be an object of ridicule by villains, allies, and patrons. The end of the journey toward his manhood will mark the beginning of yet another adventure . . .

Love In the Air: The character may have a romantic crush on a female protagonist, and will try to court her. He will not be able to tell her directly, nor approach her, but he will try to fulfill her expressed wishes (such as her mentioning that she wants a newspaper or likes roses). This opens the question of a variant: Future *Girl,* enamored with a male PC . . .

Arthur "Arty" Hammond, a.k.a. "Future Boy," a.k.a. "Librum," a.k.a. "Dex"   *100 points*

Human Male, Apparent age 14, 120 lbs, black hair, freckles.

Primary Attributes: ST 10; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 10.

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/1d-2; BL 20 lbs; HP 10; Will 12 [10]; Per 10; FP 11; Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 10*; Block 9* (cloak, default use). (Total: 10)
* Includes +1DB from cloak.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Common Sense (Reliable +4, +20%) [12]; Danger Sense (Reliable +4, +20%) [18]; Intuition (Reliable +4, +20%) [18]; Photographic Memory [10]; Pitiable [5]; Serendipity 2 [30]; Wild Talent (Emergencies Only, -30%; Focused: IQ skills only, -20%, Reliable +5, +25%; Retention +25%; net +0%) [20]. (Total: 128)

Disadvantages: Nightmares (12) [-5]; Obsession (Save the World) [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Sense of Duty (The Party of Adventurers, and other good people of the world) [-5]; Weirdness Magnet [-15]; Xenophilia (15) [-5]. (Total: -50)

Social Traits*: Duty (Parents, Non-hazardous, 9-) [0]; Duty (School, Non-hazardous, 9-) [0]; Patron (Parents, 15-) [30]; Social Stigma (Minor) [-5]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25]. (Total: 0)
*The non-zero entries are from the Children package on page 20.

Skills: Hobby Skill (Hero Fandom)-11/9 (IQ E) [1]; Running-11 (HT E) [1]; Savoir-Faire (Heroes)-11/9 (IQ E) [1]; Swimming-11 (HT E) [1]. (Total: 4)

Languages: Native (native) [0];Second Language (Native) [6]; Sign Language (Accented/NA) [2]. (Total: 8)

This character reacts to superheroes at +2, police at +1, criminals at -1 and supervillains at -2.

Quotes

*"It's not luck, it's **Destiny!**"*
"Neato! That's exactly how Thinoman would have done it!"
"Wow, cooler than Paragirl's teleport effect!"

While this character is an archetype of superhero settings, there are examples available from almost any genre of an idealistic, unprepared individual -- often a youth -- ready to jump up to the front lines, even if he must stand on a box to do so. Some pass the trial by fire, and some do not. A few examples include Brody from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade,* Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope,* Gozlyn from *Darkwing Duck,* and Elliot from *E.T..* Others include the sidekick wanna-be "Incredi-Boy" from *The Incredibles,* Chaz from *Constantine,* and the raving fan the "Flaming Carrot," the founder of the *Mystery Men.*

Variants!

Other disadvantages that can work:

- Curious (12) [-5];
- Delusion (The World Needs to be Saved) [-5];
- Fanaticism (Heroic cause, Extreme) [-30];
- Oblivious [-5];
- Odious Personal Habit (Optimistic) [-5];
- Odious Personal Habit (Quotes comic books in all situations "The same thing happened to Omniman in issue #1,297 . . .") [-5];
- Quirk (Appreciates a good story for what it is)[-1].

* * *

Special thanks to Johnathan Carryer and Bevan Thomas, for telling Arthur's parents what he did.

What Exactly Are We Selling Here, Anyway?

For those who have no interest in game-business-related columns, this one is sure to disappoint. So, before this veers off entirely to trade discussion, I guess I can offer the following for such folks: Ummm . . . Gamers, talk to each other. Don't be a jerk to your fellow gamers. Eat your veggies.

Okay; time for industry navel-gazing.

Every so often I'll let my mind wander to the great questions of the universe. Most recently, having sorted to my satisfaction whether or not essence precedes existence, I've been considering the market value of a gaming line, such as **Dungeons & Dragons.** Sadly, since I probably have about seven decimal places too few in my checkbook to even entertain an offer (not that I know of any plans whatsoever to find the industry stalwart a new home), I'm forced to devote the bulk of my mental CPU cycles to tackling this question obliquely. Namely, "What, exactly, is a gaming company selling to its customers?"

To most, this answer is painfully obvious: games. But I'm not too sure it's that simple. After all, the value of a product isn't necessarily in the value of the actual "product" it's selling. The most obvious example is the world of soft drinks. For the most part, there are few sodas that don't have a corresponding "generic" version, and this knock-off brand is often close enough to the real thing (at worst), at substantial savings. But since consumers aren't generally paying for the product itself, so much as the ephemeral aspects of that product, this discrepancy in cost is gladly paid by the soda-drinker.

But let's look at our "game" assertion. Are folks who buy into a game buying it for the rules? For some games this seems unlikely, especially in the RPG world; after all, one of the first things many groups do is tweak the rules for a new game to its own liking. (And, of course, the halls of online fandom are rife with folks complaining about various aspects of popular RPGs.) It seems that, with all this wit and wisdom available, it should be possible to make the "ultimate" version of some games' rules . . . especially, with **Dungeons & Dragons** in this particular era, when the game's core rules are easily available for commercial tweaking via the **d20 System.**

Does a gaming property get its value for the setting, then? Or the characters? It's possible; various licensed novels set in gaming universes sell enough copies to be worth a bunch of shelf space in most bookstores, and I suspect that many of those readers are folks who only have a passing interest (at best) in the setting as a game. But even so, it's hard to envision a character like Count Strahd having quite the same appeal as Dracula, or even Lestat.

Is a game popular because of community? In this theory, people buy games because other people are buying the same game, and folks want to be a part of a group to play the game with. This seems likely with some games (such as **Magic: The Gathering**); while it seems likely that CCGs have come along that have had better rules or more interesting subjects, the most popular games tend to be part of a cycle of popularity that acquires and keeps players because folks looking to get involved want to maximize their chances of playing the game. As I understand it, the notion of community was also one of the ideas behind the opening of the *d20 System* license in the first place; the idea was that, by enabling others to create product for the *game,* the *community* was being broadened at no additional cost to the game's owners . . . and that's where the money (supposedly) is/was. (Were this a Wikipedia article, the previous sentence would almost certainly be tagged with a "citation needed" stamp.)

Is a game popular because of availability? (This one is closely related to community.) I believe this is the case with some games, such as *Monopoly* . . . a game I find inconceivable that people would choose to play for fun, yet routinely is one of the most popular games in the country. Why? Well, when you go to buy a game at a store, if **Apples to Apples** isn't available -- indeed, if you've never even *heard* of **Apples to Apples** -- then you buy what is available. (Of course, some games are also available because they're good; *Scrabble,* for example, is a great game that has, in my mind, stood the test of time.)

The idea of what brings value to a game is interesting because it can greatly affect the fiber of the game itself. For example, the original **Torg** suffered somewhat from the idea of "character bloat" . . . there were *lots* and lots of

characters to keep track of -- mostly bad guys -- each with their own stories, goals, and motivations. Now, this isn't a bad thing if the game is selling as a "game," since RPGs need lots of adversaries, and "faceless huge dragon" isn't a possible adversary in a game devoted to individual named villains. But having lots of characters a bad thing if *Torg* is selling because it's a "setting"; too many characters means too many folks for readers to keep track of. (Consider how many major villains there are to keep straight in the mind's eye in the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Six, maybe? Of which only two are onscreen and/or alive at any given time?)

In all, I find it amazing how the concept of "game" can be broadened so greatly. Consider the notion of "football." (American rules, for the sake of our discussion.) If you were really into "football," what exactly would that mean? Do you like to play the game? If so, do you play it "live," on the computer/video game console, via board/card games, or some other way? Do you watch the game live? (With professionals or college players?) Do you keep up with your favorite players? Do you buy trading cards or action figures of certain players? Do you keep up with a favorite *team?* Do you buy clothes with a team's logo on it, or shirts that celebrate a particular game? Do you watch movies and TV shows based on the game?

As the most extreme example that I can think of, one of the most-watched television programs every year in America is the Super Bowl . . . and a non-trivial percentage of people watching are doing so because they want to watch the expensive commercials of the event. In other words, *all* other aspects of the game -- the rules, the teams, the players -- don't matter to such viewers. In this case, those consumers wouldn't care one iota about any changes or improvements made to the "rules" of the game, except for the value it continues to add to the event that is the Super Bowl for advertisers.

As the third *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie comes barreling to theaters this weekend, I note that the movie is based on a ride set in an attraction park meant to bolster the community of those interested in animated features based on a set of characters. And it's a direct line from a black-and-white "Steamboat Willie" cartoon to Jack Sparrow action figures.

Which is a roundabout way of saying that I have no idea of where the value of a game lies or how much its worth. But if a *Queen of the Demonweb Pits* movie was released, or a *Ravenloft* amusement park opened, or if *Spelljammer* action figures came out, my interest would be piqued . . . in much the same way as if a new edition of the parent **Dungeons & Dragons** game came out.

--Steven Marsh

The Omniscient Eye

If I Were An Herbalist, Would I Be Rich? Or Useful?

Herb lore, both mundane and magical, is a fantasy staple. In the real world, what could a patient expect of the historical pharmacopoeia? How reliable was it, and what variety of effects were known? What kind of economy surrounded this information (was "being an herbalist" ever a full-time job, or just a sideline at best)?
--William Keith

"The herb is good for something, because God made nothing in vain."
-- Nicholas Culpeper, 1616-1654

It is clear that there has been herbal knowledge for at least as long as there have been written records of any kind, and that herbal remedies -- whether because of spontaneous recovery, the placebo effect, or actual beneficial properties -- have been widely believed to be effective.

An herbalist is not a doctor, physician, apothecary, nor surgeon; such gentlemen (and they all seem to have been male before the late 19th century) had and have an interest in more general theory and remedies rather than confining their treatments to the strictly herbal. Some of the more interesting medical theories -- such as those involving the position of the stars and planets at the time a remedy was administered or a plant's relationship to the humours or to classical gods and goddesses as causing it to work better at particular times of day or lunar month, the suggestion that carrying a dried frog in a bag round one's neck would ease rheumatism, and that writing charms on paper, dissolving the ink in water and drinking the water would turn aside the plague -- were unlikely to be lethal but were unlikely to be particularly helpful either. They might be combined with herbalism proper, particularly by people who made a living from the practice of medicine in one way or another, but such people were not properly speaking herbalists and will not be considered here.

Medical practice in general, between classical times and the advent of modern medicine in the 19th century, relied heavily on the Hippocratic theory of the four humours. This system became over time too complicated to explain fully in few words, but holds essentially that the four elements of the human body -- blood (hot and moist), phlegm (cold and moist), yellow bile (hot and dry) and black bile (cold and dry) -- must be balanced for the body to be healthy. If for whatever reason the balance of the humours was disturbed, it could be restored by the administration of herbs corresponding to the humour that was deficient; thus someone whose humours had become unbalanced in favor of the hot and moist could be brought back to the proper balance by a treatment concentrated on herbs related to the cold and dry. The theory was holistic, and treatment would include advice on diet, exercise, and care of the body in general: one was treating not the illness but the body, and once the balance of the humours was restored, the body would be able to restore itself.

Ordinary village herbwives, on the other hand, would accept that an herbal remedy was ideal for the treatment of a particular ailment, and that it helped the body to fight the disease, without having anything more than a very rudimentary acquaintance with the theory of the humours; they were pragmatic rather than theoretical in their treatments. This led to considerable confusion when an old-wives' remedy worked, and a plant had to be hastily re-classified by a theoretician as to its properties of cold, hot, dry, or moist in order to explain its success.

Regarding professional medical practitioners of any kind, it might be reasonable to assume that someone with an interest in treating all manner of ills in all manner of patients in return for cash payment might be likely to be less impartial than someone whose interest was in helping a relation, friend, or acquaintance to recover from an illness. The reliability of those making their living by treating diseases may be judged to some extent by the fact that the richer the patient, the more costly the treatment for what ailed him was likely to be: exotic plants, dried in Cathay and imported at great expense, were a remedy for the rich where the poor made do with local plants picked in the hedgerow -- and

the latter were as likely to be effective. Black pepper and ginger were claimed as cures for an extraordinary range of conditions and diseases at one period and another, and the more either cost at any given time, the more it was likely to be prescribed to the rich by people who were in a position to sell it to their patients. Such people were also inclined to assert that they could cure diseases about which anyone who had to live in the same village as the victim's relations would have hesitated to do anything except ease the pain with syrup of poppy. The claims made by professional physicians were often a great deal more far-reaching, and also far-fetched, than any a wise woman would have dared to make. It is remarkable how many expensive and completely ineffective "cures" for venereal diseases were peddled before the discovery of penicillin: a clear case of the triumph of hope over experience.

Actual herbs and their demonstrable medical properties have not on the whole changed very much in the past couple of thousand years, and observation of them was as acute in previous ages as now: more so, perhaps, since in those times the only remedies available to most people were herbal, and more people lived in places where plants grew rather than in towns where they did not. Mint is still a mild and somewhat unreliable abortifacient; willow-bark tea still helps to stop a headache; blackberry or cherry syrup still reduces a dry cough and still has the advantage of tasting pleasant; chamomile tea will still ease a child's stomach-ache in many cases; ginger in any form is still recommended by some midwives as a specific against morning-sickness and by some doctors as a remedy for nausea; raspberry-leaf tea (and indeed the raspberry fruit, much more palatable) is still a good tonic for pregnant women and for people who are anemic. Such things were known, and such remedies were used, and on the whole even if they did not affect a "miracle cure" did not harm the patient. It is difficult to take a fatal overdose of willowbark tea: quite apart from its needing prolonged preparation, it tastes revolting, and one will almost certainly be sick long before one has managed to consume a lethal amount.

Much of the "old wives' herbal lore" of previous generations became lore simply because it worked, and had been observed to work over many generations and even hundreds of years, just as clichs tend to become clichs because they are frequently observed to be accurate. Today tips about infant health are shared by members of a mother-and-toddler group; in previous times when a child was ill its mother would consult older women who had successfully reared children (those "old wives"), in the hope that her child too would survive if the right remedies were applied. In most settlements there would thus accumulate a pool of information about remedies for infantile disorders. In the year 1000, if little Johnny had diarrhea somebody might very well advise his mother to grate a sweet apple very fine and give it to him to eat, and when he was cured by this, that remedy would be remembered and passed on; during the 1940s one of my aunts, in training as a nurse in Canada, was instructed by her matron to use it as a first resort when a child in her ward had an upset stomach. Remedies for adult disorders too would be shared, tested, and passed on.

Herbal remedies in common use would therefore rely on two things: first, they had demonstrably done at least some good for a previous patient and done no harm, and second, that they were available in the vicinity. A plant that grew nowhere within a 50-mile radius of a village could not be used in that village, however marvelous its properties might be rumored to be, unless it had been harvested elsewhere and imported, which would be costly. A woman living on the Mediterranean Sea might know that cloths saturated in lemon-juice and wrapped round a baby's legs would reduce a fever, but a woman in Northumberland would not, since she would not have ready access to lemons. In the same way, although the classical herbals list umpteen plants as remedies against the bites of venomous serpents, this particular information would have been of little use in Ireland or Northern England where venomous serpents are few and far between.

While detail varies from place to place and time to time, as a general rule the people living in any given area would accumulate information about the herbal remedies that were available and worked for them where and when they were.

The patient's expectations would in general be lower: where we now expect or at least hope for a quick-fix cure (and become annoyed and start to talk about legal action if it is not forthcoming or is unsuccessful), earlier ages merely hoped for any relief at all. In general, the objective was to alleviate the symptoms. A cold would take between three days and three weeks to clear up, just as it does today, but nobody expected it to be prevented from running its course by a herbal tea; what they *would* expect was that the various symptoms might be made less severe or painful. An herbal syrop good for coughs, wheezing, and difficult breathing would not reduce the duration of a cold, but might make it more tolerable while it lasted. Similarly, herbal remedies would not cure the patient of measles, but might reduce its severity, duration, or long-term effects; an infusion of a febrifugal herb might make convulsions less likely

to occur by reducing the fever, and thus mean the difference between a fatal attack and survival, and the application of a specific herbal ointment to the eyes might lessen the risk that the patient would be left blind.

The aim of early herbal practice, as of all medicine at the time, was not so much to heal or cure the body as to help the body to heal or cure itself. For instance, there is no instant cure for a broken bone, which is going to be painful for some time, but it need not necessarily be fatal or leave the victim incapacitated. The bone must be set, after which the herbalist's business was to provide herbal preparations that would reduce any fever, herbs that were believed to help knit the bones, and herbs to relieve the pain. This is not so very different from the treatment given in a hospital nowadays, if a broken bone is not to be pinned.

If the body proved unable to heal, the business of the herbalist, having given what help he could, was to administer herbs to ease the pain of the body and assist the passing of the spirit.

The more exotic diseases and serious, continuing conditions were unlikely to be cured by herbal remedies, though their severity might be lessened and their most unpleasant effects reduced. Some illnesses, such as the various plagues, could not be reliably cured prior to the discovery of antibiotics; smallpox, tuberculosis and diphtheria can be prevented by vaccination but were unlikely to be cured by herbal remedies; cancer was as intractable then as it is now. (Unfortunately the herbal preparation that is presently being tested as being helpful in the treatment of cancer is poisonous if ingested; although a paste of the same herb was applied to skin cancers, reportedly with beneficial effect, it could not easily be applied to internal organs before the invention of the hypodermic needle.) Bronchitis and pneumonia could be eased but not cured by herbal treatment, as could rheumatism and arthritis. Tetanus and rabies were not curable.

Wounds treated with the application of herbs would generally tend to heal more readily than those treated in any other way. This was because it was usual to "seethe" (boil) the herbs either in water or in wine, which would then be used to cleanse the wound before binding the herbs over it. Water clean enough even to drink safely was not universally available, and washing a wound with unboiled water would be as likely to cause as to prevent infection. If a wound became infected, a hot bread-poultice or barley-meal poultice made with honey and herbs boiled in water, wine, or vinegar would help to draw out the poison: the herbs might not themselves make very much difference one way or the other, but the sterilizing effect of their boiling would certainly do no harm even though the application of the very hot poultice might be agonizing.

The reliability of herbal treatment would depend to a very large extent on the person administering it. Some preparations have a beneficial effect in small doses or applied externally, but would have severe or fatal side-effects in too great a quantity or applied internally. A knowledgeable practitioner would have a good idea how much one might expect to be able to do in the case of a particular disease or condition, and how much one might safely use of any given remedy, where someone with less knowledge (and patience) might make matters worse by over-enthusiastic or inappropriate treatments.

For this reason one would want if possible to choose with care and by personal recommendation which herbalist to consult and whose advice to trust; but then one would prefer to exercise care today when choosing one's doctor, and might demand a second opinion.

Those who dealt exclusively in herbal remedies were at least as likely to be female as male; herbs were considered to be part and parcel with cookery and brewing, which were the business of women. Many different herbs have been used, and still may be, to flavor ale; beer is in any case made from "herbs" in its widest definition, which includes barley as well as hops, and wines are also made from herbs in a similarly wide definition.

While a busy woman of a village would be unlikely to spend her whole time studying the effects of herbal preparations even if she had enough patients with a wide variety of malaises available for experiment, she would learn about remedies as the need for them arose, and would then pass her knowledge on freely for the benefit of her community. An older woman who had gathered information over a lifetime might harvest, prepare, and store plants at times when others were too busy to do so; she might become the accepted authority on their use, and be offered payment in kind for her help, but cases of illness serious enough for her services to be essential would not be frequent enough for this to provide her with a living.

The lady of a manor would have the treatment of illness and injury as part of her duties, and would gather information about herbal remedies to help her fulfill her obligation as well as possible. She would almost certainly cultivate plants that were not common in the area but which had been found to be useful and imported for that reason, and would harvest and dry them for use at times when the plants were not growing; she would also keep herbal preparations ready made-up in her stores for immediate use. Recipes for remedies would be compared and exchanged among the women of her family, and among the ladies of other, nearby manors; in this way a woman might accumulate considerable information about herbal remedies and share particularly useful recipes widely. (Such women were frequently as literate as or even more literate than their husbands, and had a wide-spread network of correspondents.) She would also consult local villagers she had reason to think knowledgeable and reliable. This medical practice would not be either her livelihood or her sole occupation, and her remedies would be distributed to her dependents, and also to guests and visitors, free of charge.

Another source of herbal lore, and of free medical treatment for the poor and for those who were on the road away from their homes for whatever reason, was the Church. Every monastery had an infirmarer as a matter of course for the benefit of the monastic and the wider community, and the monastery gardens would include plots devoted to medicinal plants of all sorts. As with the network of manor ladies, those members of an order of monks whose business was the care of the sick exchanged information and herbal recipes, and pooled their knowledge about what was and was not effective in the treatment of every disease and condition they had to deal with. They also had access to classical herbals and to more modern treatises in which they could search for treatments with which to try to ameliorate conditions that had proved intractable to their usual remedies. Furthermore, they sent seeds, roots, bulbs, and whole plants from place to place as gifts from one House to another, so that their gardens might all have as complete as possible a range of plants that had been found to be useful in the treatment of the sick.

The main difficulties facing a modern person when considering particular elements of traditional herbalism are:

- establishing which of the herbal remedies now known to be valid would be likely to have been known in the chosen period,
- establishing which of the beliefs current in that period would have been completely ineffectual or even dangerous and which were of some value, and
- identifying the actual plants.

When wishing to investigate any question about herbal lore in a particular century and area, there is difficulty in finding a written "herbal" or such text in which the commonly-held beliefs of that time are set out, particularly in a modern translation. Many of the more widely-known texts were available both in the original and in translation into the local language all over Europe and were given credence for many centuries after they were first written, but they are difficult to locate, and even a later text which repeated matter from the "masters of old" (Galen, Dioscorides, Pliny the Elder and other classical sources) is likely to be in a language that requires either expert knowledge or a translation into modern English to be comprehensible.

I tend to use a late-20th-century edition of *Culpeper's Complete Herbal,* in modern English and with an index of diseases and conditions as well as of the plant-names, to locate generally-accepted herbal remedies both during the mid-17th century when Nicholas Culpeper was writing and from earlier times; he copied much of what he wrote from earlier sources. Most plants to be found in England between 500 and 1500 appear in Culpeper, as well as many from other countries. For the modern cross-check I consult Mrs. M. Grieve, *A Modern Herbal.* This choice of reference works was made mostly because these books were available at the time I needed them, and subsequently retained because I found Mrs. Grieve's work one of the most comprehensive modern herbals I have read. She has the advantage that she sometimes marks as poisonous those plants to be treated with care, and she sometimes gives the earliest dates from which plants were found growing wild in England as opposed to having to be cultivated.

Having identified in the old text a plant to suit the ailment, one can then refer to the modern herbal in order to find out whether the plant is still considered useful as a remedy and if so whether it is a specific for the particular ailment or condition. The modern herbal will also give warning of side-effects and contra-indications. Mrs. Grieve frequently makes life even easier by quoting Culpeper so that one can be sure that she is writing about the same plant, and

commenting (or pointedly refraining from comment) on his recommendations. For example, Culpeper says of *Alkanna tinctoria* (Alkanet, Dyer's Bugloss, Spanish Bugloss, Orchanet) that it is "as gallant a remedy to drive out the smallpox and measles as any is"; this is true, in that it is not known to have any more or less effect on either disease than any other plant. It does make an excellent colorant for both pale marble and inferior port wine and is reported by Mrs. Grieve as being "perfectly harmless" when used for the latter purpose. She does not mention smallpox or measles in her entry on *Alkanna tinctoria.*

Once the plant has been selected, one may be at liberty to exaggerate its efficacy if desired or necessary, or simply to assume that the claims made for it by an herbalist writing at the time were accurate rather than hyperbolic -- which amounts to much the same thing.

A febrifugal herb such as *Potentilla reptans* (Five-leaf Grass, Cinquefoil, Five Fingers, Five-finger Blossom, Sunkfield, Synkefoyle) may reduce a fever; Culpeper says that in various different forms it will also cure an ague, be it what ague soever, cure quinsey and yellow jaundice, cure the falling sickness (epilepsy), relieve palsy (shaking or stroke), cure the shingles, running and foul scabs, sores, and the itch, cure gout and sciatica, reduce ruptures, heal bruises and stay the bleeding of wounds in any part, inward or outward. Mrs. Grieve more moderately describes it has having "Medicinal Action and Uses: Astringent, febrifuge." *Lamium album* (White Archangel, White Dead-nettle, Blind Nettle, Dumb Nettle, Deaf Nettle, Bee Nettle) and *Lamium purpureum* (Purple Archangel) according to Culpeper should be "bruised, with some salt and vinegar and hog's grease" (purified lard), and would then be "very effectual to heal green wounds and old ulcers; also to stay their fretting, gnawing, and spreading; it draweth forth splinters, and such like things gotten into the flesh, and is very good against bruises and burnings"; Mrs. Grieve reports that "the whole plant is of an astringent nature, and in herbal medicine is considered of use for arresting haemorrhages ... it has the reputation of being effectual in the healing of green wounds, bruises and burns." The more strongly smelling *Lamium galeobdolon* (Yellow Dead-nettle, Yellow Archangel, Weazel Snout, Dummy Nettle) is regarded by Culpeper as being superior to either of the other colors; Mrs. Grieve reports his view, but does not go so far as to endorse it.

At this point the third potential problem, identifying or describing the actual plants, must be noted.

The Swedish naturalist Linnaeus imposed a universal system on the nomenclature of plants in the 18th century. Before then, one plant might have had several different names varying from region to region even of the same country: to take an example completely at random rather than because of any medicinal properties, in England *Galium aparine,* which I was brought up to call Goosegrass, is also known as Bedstraw, Clivers, Cleavers, Barweed, Hedgeheriff, Hayriffe, Eriffe, Grip Grass, Hayruff, Catchweed, Scratweed, Mutton Chops, Robin-run-in-the-grass, Love-man, Goosebill, Tonguebleed, and Everlasting Friendship; it may have had other names that have not happened to come to my attention. In addition the same name may have been given to two or more quite different plants: *Prunella vulgaris, Valeriana officinalis,* and *Stachys palustris* have all been called All-heal. This sort of confusion really only needs to concern someone who is unable to find some other, less ambiguous plant for which the required medicinal properties were claimed at a chosen period, or who is planning actually to prepare a decoction or a tincture and administer it.

Further difficulty may arise when reading herbals from one country that are translations of something written in another: the translator may simply not have been sure which plant is intended in the original, either because it did not grow in the country in which he lived or because the original plant was not supposed in the translator's country to have the properties ascribed to it by the original writer, whereas another similar plant was. In such cases the translator may substitute his own information or plant, and is quite likely not to bother to mention that he has done so. Again, this need not bother a non-practitioner too much.

In many cases a common name for a plant gives a decided clue as to its use. Culpeper writes: "It is not to be supposed that Goutwort hath its name for nothing, but upon experiment to heal the gout and sciatica," in other words that it does precisely what it advertises, and Mrs. Grieve agrees: "Diuretic and sedative. Can be successfully employed internally for aches in the joints, gouty and sciatic pains, and externally as a fomentation for inflamed parts. The roots and leaves boiled together, applied to the hip, and occasionally renewed, have a wonderful effect in some cases of sciatica." Its other names are not quite so obviously informative: *Aegopodium podagraria* is also called Herb Gerard, Jack-jump-about, Goatweed, Ashweed, Achweed, English Masterwort, Wild Masterwort, Pigweed, Eltroot, Ground Ash, Ground

Elder, Bishop's Elder, Weyl Ash, White Ash, Bishopsweed, and Bishopswort, and although it would be pleasing to think it might cure one of a nasty attack of bishops, this does not seem entirely likely. (Mrs. Grieve points out that Culpeper gives a different entry to "Bishop-weed" in his herbal, calling it additionally Aethiopian Cummin-seed, Cummin-royal, Herb William and Bull-wort, which is a good example of a thorough confusion of plants and nomenclature.) Eyebright is the common name for *Euphrasia officinalis,* and although it is not mentioned in classical texts as having this particular property, nor as far as I know does it in fact have it, was widely believed by the time of Culpeper to be able to "help all diseases of the eye." *Symphytum officinale* was known as both "Knitbone" and "Boneset," as well as "Bruisewort," and it isn't exactly surprising to learn that in the middle ages it was believed to be a good herb for assisting bones to knit; its most common name, Comfrey, is a corruption of *con firma,* a reference to the belief both then and now that it will help unite bones that have been broken. It is also unsurprising that *Artemesia cina,* which is poisonous to roundworms and threadworms ("anthelmintic" or "vermifuge"), should be known as Levant Wormseed.

This last plant does bring us back to the drawback of herbal remedies in the hands of the unskilled, which is the same as that of modern drugs in unskilled hands. The active constituent of Wormseed, Santonin, kills roundworms in a small dose; in too large a dose it kills people. Mrs. Grieve notes that its side-effects may include a yellowing of the vision, headaches, nausea, vomiting, and, if a non-fatal but over-large dose is administered, epileptiform convulsions. Interestingly, she does not list "Wormseed, Levant" as poisonous.

As a final step in authentication the plant's habitat and the areas in which it might be expected to be found should be confirmed in a botanical text if possible, because it would be silly to expect anybody to be able in Scotland to pick a plant that is a native of Devon and Cornwall but has never been observed growing further north than Gloucester, or to put onto a granite mountainside a plant that is only found growing in marshy peat soil. In the same way, if it is possible to establish that a plant grew wild in England at a particular date, this is ideal, but it is extremely difficult to do so. It is known that Hyssop was introduced at some time around 1200, and Rosemary in about 1338, but in most cases there is no way of knowing whether a plant noted by Mrs. Grieve as being "Southern European" was introduced by the Romans, by the Normans, or at a later date for cultivation in monasteries because of its useful medicinal properties.

It is easy to understand why herbalists in fantasy tend to be secretive about precisely what plants they are using to cure their patients: if one is too explicit, somebody may pipe up and say "But Viper's Bugloss grows on chalk, she wouldn't find it in a pine forest" or "When you say Bishopswort, do you mean Betony or Herb Gerard?" (*Betonica officinalis* or *Aegopodium podagraria*) or even "He can't use that, it wasn't introduced into England until 1500."

Anyone working in a world other than our own is clearly free to invent any herbal remedy and herb-name required. It is worth considering, however, that infallible and instant cures for all manner of ills would alter the social structure in ways that need to be thoroughly worked out. That standard Fantasyland wish-fulfilment, the reliably contraceptive herbal tea, would have altered our own world out of all recognition by changing the balance of power between the sexes. Suppose that there were a berry that instantly removed all traces of a headache, or an herbal ointment that eliminated arthritis, or a plant whose leaves steeped in wine dissolved gall- and kidney-stones, or a plant whose juice prevented cataracts from forming; what would the consequences be, and how wide-spread?

No such wonder-herb exists in our present world. Even moly, the plant that will change you back from porcine form, has never been identified, though many suggestions as to what it may have been have been put forward; of course the problem is that in order to test them one would need also to be able to turn someone into a pig, which does present some difficulty to the researcher. Herbs have had some remarkable claims made about their properties, generally by doctors who were trying to sell themselves and their expertise to the desperate and the credulous, but the actual benefits of herbal remedies were then much as they are now: they help, and in some cases they heal, but they are not and never were instant and infallible cures for everything.

Bibliography

- Culpeper, Nicholas, *Culpeper's Complete Herbal* (Ware: Omega Books, 1985) on-line edition at
  http://www.bibliomania.com/2/1/66/113/frameset.html

- Grieve, Mrs. Maud, *A Modern Herbal* ed. C.F. Leyel (Adelaide: Savvas 1985 in association with Jonathan Cape) on-line edition at http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/mgmh.html
- Hunt, Tony, *Plant Names of Medieval England* (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1989)
- Landsberg, Sylvia, *The Medieval Garden* (London: The British Museum Press, 1992)
- McLean, Teresa, *Medieval English Gardens* (London: Collins, 1981)
- Well-known authorities from the earliest texts to the seventeenth century include
- Hippocrates of Cos (c.460BC-c.370BC), called "the father of medicine" and frequently quoted or referred to as an ultimate authority.
- Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbos (fl. 40-65 AD) founded the tradition of Western herbals. His *De materia medica* composed c.64 AD deals with about 500 plants and was constantly copied, revised and appropriated for 1500 years in many languages and by many herbalists.
- Gaius Plinius Secundus aka Pliny the Elder (c.23-79 AD) wrote the *Historia Naturalis* in thirty-seven books, which was mined and adapted constantly over the following 1500 years.
- Galen of Pergamum (129-200 AD), was widely known and quoted.
- Isadore of Seville (c.560-636) wrote an encyclopedia entitled *Etymologaie,* of which Book 17, chapters 6-11, deals with botany. Information taken from earlier books, including Dioscorides, not including Pliny. His work contains a lot of errors, but was influential.
- *Macer* (authorship uncertain, possibly Odo of Meung-sur-Loire) is the name usually given to an 11th century poem of 2269 Latin hexameters entitled *De virtutibus herbarum* which deals with over 70 herbs, drawing on previous authors.
- *Circa Instans,* properly *De simplicibus medicinis,* is a list of 229 plants and their properties, compiled around the year 1150 by one of the celebrated Salernitan medical family Platearius.
- Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) covered 138 herbs in her *Liber subtilitatum diversarum naturarum creaturarum* written between 1151 and 1158.
- John Gerard (1545-1611/12) published a list of the plants cultivated in his garden in 1596 in his famous "Herball" *The General Historie of Plants,* which was enlarged and edited in 1633 after his death. Derivative but elegant and authoritative.

--Chris Bell

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!

The Writer's Block Column

More owing to a lack of time than anything else -- our household's 2.0 model has discovered crawltech, and no object remains vertical and/or assembled for long -- I'm trotting out my "writer's block" column (first alluded to years ago. Curiously, I do have ideas for other columns, but none that I can whip out at the full rate of my 80+ words per minute. Not like writer's block.

Anyway, back in my college days -- circa the McKinley administration -- I worked on my creative writing degree via the proscribed means as laid out in the academic guidebook: hanging out in smoky coffee shops with other writers and thinking about writing. (In hindsight, perhaps spending much of that time actually *writing* might have yielded more fruitful results.) Anyway, in our writing workshops, we would all pass out copies of our masterpieces to our professors and peers, and we'd critique them.

One of the surest signs in creation that someone had absolutely no idea what to write about was when the writer chose to write about the act of writing . . . or, worse, write about how they have nothing to write about. These are usually poems that begin along the lines of, "As I stare at the keyboard, ashtray full of the remains of my lack of inspiration, my screen remains blank." And then they wander on about how they have nothing to write about, or how they've discarded ideas, or -- if they want to mix it up in a hoary clichéd "twist" -- they might reveal that their lack of anything to write has resulted in *[SPOILER!]* the very poem you're reading. In a fiction course, the main character would be a writer who struggled with the act of writing, or was confronted by a great idea that he tried to cope with, or some such. In our dramatic course, the protagonist was a playwright who . . . I think you get the point. So common was this in my writing workshops that a common comment toward the end of class would go along the lines of, "Of all the 'sitting in front of a computer trying to come up with an idea' poems we did this week, yours was the funniest."

Although sympathetic at first, as the courses ran on (and I recognized the folly of signing up for a half-dozen writing courses at once was not in creating the output, but in reading reams of my peers' efforts), I grew steadily less tolerant of this motif. It's not that the act of writing about writing is inherently bad, *per se;* many fine writers have dabbled in that as a plot device. But one, it's common; and two, it's difficult to do well (or, at least, "well enough to elevate above all the others"). And, perhaps worse, on some level it's an act of pure navel-gazing; it's tough for an audience to admire your cleverness if you keep pointing out how taxing it was for you to do it. (In much the same way that having the chef come out at a fancy restaurants and say how difficult it was to make *your* steak, and here's another funny anecdote about the slab of meat you're about to cram down your gullet . . .)

Tying it into gaming, I note that I've been a part of at least a half-dozen gaming adventures -- which, percentage-wise, is a small but significant number -- that have revolved around the idea of roleplaying. Thus in a **Werewolf** game the PCs might get entangled in a plot involving a game called **Wolfman** that encourages kids to take the role of werewolves and kill people. Or a sci-fi game might have people enter a holographic construct where they are forced to play a scenario where they are nothing more than characters in a game. Or in a modern-set game, the heroes need to make up characters for themselves in *another system* within the game world for . . . aw, heck, whatever contrived reason.

If you're a GM, I recommend you resist the urge to succumb to the temptation of gaming about gaming. While it makes sense in some settings (such as **Dream Park** and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* campaigns), for the most part it's very difficult to pull off . . . *especially* if the session is about how the PCs need to play a roleplaying game to advance the plot. I believe there was a section in the **Holodeck Adventures** book for Last Unicorn's iteration of the **Star Trek: The Next Generation** rules that points out the pitfalls of doing something unreal (like puttering around a holodeck) in a game that is, inherently, built around doing something unreal.

Fortunately, in an RPG, there's an easy answer. In a long-running campaign, it's perfectly possible for *nothing* to happen . . . at least, nothing directed by the GM. It's called downtime, and it's up to the players to direct what they want to try to accomplish in those sessions. (And, in general, it's pretty popular among players.)

So that's my "writer's block" column: Resist the urge to roleplay about RPGs. If you're that tapped for ideas, break out

a card game for that week and detox as a group of gamers playing a game . . . in the *real* world.

--Steven Marsh

Icosahedron Adventures

Campaign Composition Concerns

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Most **d20 System** games have massive, odd, largely unstated underlying premises: They assume a group of about four people (with radically different skills unlikely to have been gained from similar backgrounds) band together to face a never-ending line of threats which constantly ratchet up in difficulty (always just dangerous enough to be interesting without ever massively overwhelming the heroes). The reasons for this assumption are obvious, and the games are popular enough to suggest there's good reason for it. But an ongoing campaign that doesn't explain why that's how things work can get bogged down with lack of suspension of disbelief from players or (in severe cases) the characters themselves.

However, it is possible to set up the background of a campaign so that unspoken assumption becomes spoken (or at least whispered in dark corners). Below are a few examples of core campaign ideas that easily lend themselves (or even overtly enforce) the stepped-threat format the **d20 System** does best. While some of the campaign suggestions are offbeat, they have the advantage of tying strongly to what the **d20 System** rules tend toward anyway, giving them the option of turning a potential drawback into a genre-confirming rule paradigm.

Back Order to the Future

It turns a limited form of out time travel is possible. While physical objects can't be moved backwards through time easily, information can. People and groups from the far-flung future use this ability to arrange for minions in the past to do their bidding. The primary form this bidding takes is to arrange for goods and commodities to be moved around so they are at a given location at a given time. Many of the strange economic events of the past few centuries, and not a few famous discoveries of ore and archeological valuables, are actually the result of futureling machinations through "current" agents. By changing the past (or trying to resist changes made by others) a few powerful groups in the far future have become time moguls, able to send messages back to any period of time to secure their own future.

The problem is, paradox is a constant threat to those who manipulate the past. Time turns out to be resilient, but only up to a point. You can't make changes big enough to ensure you change the past (and thus your present). Time itself only allows you to alter things so your desired outcome is possible. Generally, the best you can arrange for is a 50% chance. After that, time rejects your manipulations and annuls your effort to affect how things turn out. As a result, future time-moguls must employ many different teams of agents native to different timelines, each at a different level of competence. When a time mogul wants to change the past, he must find a group of agents just competent enough to have a decent chance of succeeding.

The PCs are special agents for Western Union's "unusual requests" division. It's their job to make sure letters from the 1800s are at a given crossroads in the 1980s, vaults of hoarded canned food are moved out of impending floods, patents reach the patent office on exactly the stated day and hour (and not a minute later *or* earlier), building blueprints are exactly accurate to how buildings are actually constructed, and items hidden for future "sleeper" bequests (not needed until the 2050s or later) aren't tampered with.

Of course, the heroes are acting as agents of future moguls. As a result, they are only assigned to missions where they have a good chance of success, rarely encountering problems that are either a cakewalk or a party slaughter. They are drawn from radically different backgrounds because the future moguls hiring the company that pays them prefer a few flexible teams to dozens of groups of specialists (sending requests back in time may be reliable, but it isn't cheap). Of course the heroes keep running into similarly-powered and broadly-skilled groups working for *other* time moguls, as well as the normal day-to-day risks of adventuring around the globe.

In This Hex There Be Dragons

In many ways this is a "default" campaign set-up that many fantasy **d20 System** games are built around, in at least a hand-waving kind of way. It's also very similar to how many MMORGs handle the same questions of carefully graduated threats.

In essence, there are zones of different danger levels, with the lowest levels of threat closest to the PCs home. Once the heroes are experienced enough that local threats aren't a challenge (or have all been defeated), they move further out to areas known to be more dangerous. In a typical campaign questions soon arise (why *do* the hill giants of the Ironswack Hills stay near their wasteland of a home, instead of invading the lands of the orcs of the Fertile Forests?), requiring the PCs to either move fast enough to ignore such issues or eventually look behind the curtain.

With a "In This Hex There Be Dragons" campaign, however, there is an outside force keeping most everyone in their own region (with thanks to everything from *Riverworld* to *Midnight at the Well of Souls*). It may be gods who divided up the world for their own worshipers long ago (and have the divine power to enforce it) or an ancient curse long since forgotten (the Last Dragon King decided it was easier to gather taxes that way) or even an "alien" experiment (everyone is actually reincarnations of races from a thousand fantasy worlds, and the otherworldly Transplanters have set it up so they don't get into fights).

Different homelands are set at different levels of danger ecology. The heroes' homeland is safe and peaceful, but those around them are slightly more dangerous, and the ones accessed from that ring are even *more* dangerous, in an ever-expanding selection of increasingly deadly lands filled with opportunity, villains, or just mysteries that need to be delved to satisfy curiosity. The level of technology, magic, and psionics available in each homeland may vary (letting groups experiment with rules from splatbooks without committing to them long-term).

For whatever reason, however, the heroes are able to move from homeland to homeland, but only when they're together. They may be agents of the Transplanters (or gods, or whatever) doing systems maintenance, or they might be unplanned heroes who happen to be an exception through prophecy and destiny. There may even be a universal way for anyone to earn the right to travel from homeland to homeland, involving gathering a band of individuals to pass through a deathtrap (restricting the ability to those willing to risk their lives to earn it). Once they can move more freely, the PCs can either have an overarching plot to follow (from fixing minor problems to finding a criminal who is fleeing one world a head of them or even a quest to find who is responsible for this set up and demand changes), or they can adventure purely for the experience and wealth.

They may even be forced to undertake their homeland-hopping to counter a more powerful force that has also learned to move from zone to zone, and set out to conquer (or just eliminate) all other homelands.

Saturday Night Dungeons

If all you really need is a thin excuse to set adventurers up on life-threatening missions in exotic places without anyone asking too many questions, why not just admit it to the characters themselves? The Saturday Night Dungeon borrows from **X Crawl, Dream Park,** John Varley's Gaea Trilogy, as well as professional wrestling, reality television, and every movie that showed gods using heroes as chess pieces.

It doesn't matter if magic and technology are mixed, or if magic is simply advanced enough to duplicate the effects of mass media. Reality programming is the top of the heap, be it satellite pay-per-view or CBN (crystal ball network), and creatures powerful enough they might as well be gods are the main client. You can spin this with dragons running megacorporations or angels who have the unenviable task of keeping young deities amused so they don't start cross-reality battles, but someone needs to create entertainment based on small bands of heroes facing difficult odds in unlikely situations.

The player characters are transported, willingly or not, to ancient underground cities overrun by humanoids from cultures with distasteful personal codes and easily liquidated trade goods, dungeons filled with professional damsels in

need of rescue from endangered specifies of psychic lizards, and lost jungle temples were teams from competing networks see who can summon the biggest demon. In more upbeat games the characters are sent to deal with actual villainy and oppression. In darker settings they're as likely to destroy peaceful but ugly humanoids, as long as it looks good on screen.

Since the heroes are teleported into and out of their core adventure zones, downtime can be pure training, carousing, and equipment upgrading with no need for long rides to major cities. That doesn't mean there's no place for non-combat roleplaying. Contract disputes, corporate executives "re-imagining" the heroes, fan mail, stalkers, and general behind-the-scenes drama can be just as driving as wooing the local baroness and building a tavern for retirement. And of course, if the system sending the heroes hither and yon is itself a major evil it may form a meta-plot, where the heroes must work within the system in the hopes of eventually brining it down.

The Men From MERLIN

If the tropes your game call for don't make sense in most settings, it may be easier to change the setting than the things both game system and players count on to cut through the "boring" parts of the game and get to the action.

The Magical Emergency Response League Intervention Network realized long ago that heroes are most effective when controlled from a central headquarters. There are hundreds of major threats to arcane stability and peace, and it makes no sense to have archmages and warlords stopping minor goblin wars while apprentices and squires find themselves facing titans and evil eyes. By using a whole branch of mystic seers looking for potential threats and crunching their prophecies through omen-golems run by dwarven data-smiths, MERLIN manages to match dangers with team of agents most suited to dealing with them.

Of course there's always high demand for the most accomplished agents, so threats are prioritized based on who has the minimum talents needed to overcome them. That's a harsh reality, and MERLIN controllers try to protect their own teams as much as possible, but there's just no way to spare younger agents from being thrown in over their head now and again. The best MERLIN's upper-level commanders can do is try to prepare every team with proper training and equipment, and assure them that if something really is way beyond them, bigger guns will get called into play.

MERLIN works best when villains are unaware of it, so its field houses are generally disguised as large inns and taverns with extensive private meeting rooms and a tradition of mysterious figures hiring roving mercenaries to find lost treasures. The truth -- that this is the cover MERLIN uses to get its field teams mission briefings -- should be obvious but is somehow overlooked by most commoners. Indeed, the idea that big taverns, in many cases too large for local merchant traffic to justify, are hotbeds of adventure is one way MERLIN enlists new agents. If a band of young hopefuls turns up looking for someone to sell them an old treasure map, MERLIN recruiters are more than happy to run them through the basic level training testbed. If they survive that a few minor but real missions might be offered to the heroes, before a recruiter approaches them with the truth of the secret mystic wars.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Just because the adventures the players actually play through are carefully balanced for them doesn't mean that's all their doing. In a world where experience comes from threats that stretch your abilities and being dead is more an inconvenience than an end, it may be the heroes run through four or five adventures for every one you play out. They may also get together with lots of other characters, often more in keeping with their individual backgrounds, for the adventures you don't play through.

For example, a new game session might begin by telling the fighter he's been on caravan duty, and easily swept away the attacks of goblins and kobolds. The cleric put down an outbreak of skeletons at a country chapel with other members of her order. The rogue tried to steal from a traveling merchant who turned out to be a dragon in disguise, and the money made just exactly paid for a *raise dead* and *restoration* to undo the damage from that effort. The sorcerer was part of an arcane army that faced inhuman threats on the ethereal plane, and while that fight went well the sorcerer just got changed back from spending three weeks as a newt.

Oh, and the sorcerer spotted a small contingent of ethereal foes go to ground at an old temple not far from here. Since the arcane army is still healing from wounds sustained, the sorcerer needs to get together at least a few allies to go deal with the temple. The cleric is obvious, since she's of a rival sect to that of the temple. The fighter has guarded sorcerous caravans in the past, and a dragon ally suggest keeping an eye on the rogue.

In this campaign, only the highlights of each character's career is actually played out. The day-to-day stuff -- incluing spectacular successes and disastrous failures -- is all off-screen. The main benefit is the GM can introduce concepts without dealing with the PCs direct responses: maybe a lich that kills the cleric in every other off-screen adventure is a major foe for the PCs in eight levels. It also gives ample opportunity to pass time and allows heroes to have lives outside the in-sessions adventures.

The major drawbacks are a need to come up with down-time for every player (though a GM might allow the players do so much of that work themselves), and the establishing of few penalties for failure. If the players are told they get beaten periodically and always manage to overcome their loss, they can reasonably expect the same to be true if they fail miserably during play-time. On the other hand, since that allows everyone to get back to "the fun part" quickly, it may not be such a bad thing.

Pyramid Review

Terror (for [Call of Cthulhu](#))

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Troy C. Wilhelmson

Illustrated by Todd C. Wilhelmson

Cartography by David Conyers & Carolyn Schulz

32-page b&w tapebound softcover; $10

When a scenario opens with their characters under interrogation by the NKVD, it should be clear to the players that they are in a very bad situation indeed. Since they also know that they are playing a scenario for *[Call of Cthulhu,](#)* they are equally justified in knowing that their situation is undoubtedly going to get worse.

This is the opening set-up in *Terror,* a monograph from Chaosium that marks a return visit to the Soviet Russia of the 1930s last seen in the atmospheric one-shot, *[Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37.](#)* As a monograph, *Terror* is available only direct from Chaosium, but it marks it as something that the publisher believes to be of interest to the *Call of Cthulhu* devotee, but for which it does not have the resources to fully publish and make available through the normal distribution channels. This means that the publisher has given it the minimum of attention prior to limited publication, leaving the editorial and layout chores to the author. In the past this has meant that some monographs have been a little rough around the edges, but with *Terror,* the production values are surprisingly reasonable. The writing is overall error free, and the illustrations -- if not of the best quality -- are dark, murky, and interesting.

Where *Machine Tractor Station Kharkov-37* was set deep in the wilds of Russia, *Terror* takes place in Moscow, in the winter of 1932. Stalin rules as the "man of steel," maintaining a tight terror and paranoia-fueled grip over all the Soviet Union in order to remain in power. Designed for six characters (though it can be played with as few as four), the PCs -- engineers, chemists, bureaucrats, lawyers, doctors, and even criminals -- have fallen victim to one of the purges that have helped keep Stalin in power. They find themselves under arrest for disloyalty to the Party and for crimes against the State.

With their lives at stake, the characters are thrown a lifeline. Already dead as far as the State is concerned, their interrogator offers them the chance to begin anew by investigating a threat to the very heart of the State. Given false papers as "Special Agents" of the NKVD, the now-investigators have little choice but to look into a strange death at Moscow's huge railway yard.

What the newly appointed investigators discover is a boxcar dripping with frozen blood and containing a score of bodies, all dead from various means. From this starting point, their task is to track down all those connected to the train and what it was transporting. In carrying it out, the Muscovites have two factors at their command beyond their mere wits and intelligence. One is a sense of desperation, knowing that their lives are on the line. The other is the false papers in their possession that enable them to play upon the same sense of paranoia that they have been living in under Stalin. Of course, the investigators do need to be careful here, as the papers will not withstand any thorough examination.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

At the heart of *Terror* is yet another take upon the Tunguska incident of 1908. Previously used in the recently re-published *Spawn of Azathoth,* the object that fell to Earth was in fact a larval outer god that has varying effects upon those exposed to it. At best the exposed is simply melted, at worst the exposed either goes insane or is mutagenically transformed into a "thing" capable of metamorphing into other creatures or people, able to sprout wicked teeth and tentacles, and possessing thick armor. This last effect and Stalin's interest in the object do not bear contemplation, but then how did he acquire the "man of steel" sobriquet?

From that, it is obvious that the author has built the scenario around placing the creature from John Carpenter's Thing From Another World in Stalinist Russia. This is not as awful an idea as it might sound, since the transformative aspects of the Thing nicely suit the sense of paranoia that should instill the scenario. More so given the fact that the player characters have the chance of being transformed themselves. Of course, such a transformation might not be enough to save the investigators in the end . . .

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Terror was originally a tournament scenario run at GenCon run in 1997, but it has been clearly revised for publication as a monograph. Yet the revision has not been carried far enough, because as a one-off scenario the author could have made it easier to run. There should have been some background on Moscow and the Soviet Union of the period to help both the Keeper and his players gain a feel for the setting; a map of Moscow would have helped; and general advice to the Keeper would not have gone amiss. A nice addition would have been to Sovietize the handouts, as they are very plain. And since this is a one-off scenario, why not include a full set of ready-to-play characters, or at least give some advice on creating suitable characters for the period? Yes, the author does include the new skills Bureaucracy and Party Knowledge, but it is not enough. Certainly some information on weapons of the time and their availability should have been included, thus covering something that the players are certainly going to ask about.

Despite leaving more preparation and research up to the Keeper to conduct than it really should have done, *Terror* is a nastily effective exercise in paranoia . . . at least, it deserves to be in the hands of a good Keeper, or any GM who wants to adapt it to the modern day rule set of his choice. As it is, *Terror* is nevertheless playable, but it should have been allowed to deliver more and then it would have lived up to the aim of the monograph series, being fully worthy of a *Call of Cthulhu* Keeper's attention.

--Matthew Pook

A Mélange of Magical Creatures VII

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

In the real world, nature seems subdued only by a lack of time and the laws of physics. But in a fantasy world, where magic and mana can be channeled to do the impossible, it's quite likely that nature would be even *more* creative. Here, then, are seven more entities that run the range from the useful to the dangerous to the just plain weird.

Nest Mimic

"The lookout climbed the tree and moved to take a position at an upper branch. As he stepped out onto it, he noticed a nest midway out on the branch. It looked empty. Nudging the nest with his foot, it nudged back. He tapped it with his climbing hook, and it scooted off to a side branch, only for it to return to its previous position. By then, his counterpart across the way had already spotted him."
-- Private Enmok, 1st Cavalry

This gray-brown arachnid is a form of trapdoor spider that carries a nest to trap unwary birds and nest thieves. Covering its back with sticks, it sits in wait snaring small birds and egg-stealing predators. Some larger predators, such as cats, have learned that they can tackle them from below.

Encountered

Usually found in trees, these nest mimics can be annoyances for people who would reach into a nest. They rarely stay in dead wood, prefering leaves to help camouflage themselves. In winter, nest mimics hibernate in the nook of a tree, looking like a bundle of twigs.

Industrial Uses

"There it was, we had just felled the last tree of the day. We were all tired, and Larry, here, backs toward the trunk to sit down. Wouldn't you know it that it was at that moment, a nest falls out of the branches beside him. So, he sits down on the trunk and puts his hands out like this to lean back, see? Next thing we know, he's panicking 'I can't move me arm! I can't move me arm!' The little blighter managed to scuttle away while we were laughing . . ."
-- Overheard in the tavern *The Prancing Gorilla*

Some orchards use these insects to clean out trees of small predators and invading birds as a form of biological pesticide. Their hibernation instinct allows for easy storage. Enchanters have found use in the construction of items that remove scents, imitate scents, and aid in jumping.

Adventure

The heroes must dress up and deliver a giant nest mimic for a wizard. They must feed it a chicken every week and make sure that special sticks are available for it to build into the nest. The former might call for a Fright Check at +2 if unused to such an event.

Nest Mimic

Appearance: a grey-brown arachnid with a nest on its back.

Category: Insect (Arachnid).
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 3; DX 13; IQ 2; HT 12.
Will 11; Per 11; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 3.
Creature: SM -5 (10" long); 2 lbs; DR 1.
Nest: SM -5 (7", square); 2 lbs; DR 1.
Total: SM -4 (10", square); 4 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Affliction (HT, Paralysis; Blood Agent*; Link); Chameleon 2 (Smell); Clinging (Natural Surfaces); Combat Reflexes; Extra Legs (Eight); Metabolism Control 10 (Hibernation); Night Vision 2; Quadruped; Sanitized Metabolism; Wild Animal
* Apply the victim's Size Modifier as a modifier to HT roll.

Giant Nest Mimic

ST 8; DX 15; IQ 2; HT 14.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 7.25; Dodge 11; Move 7.
Creature: SM -3 (2' long); 10 lbs; DR 2.
Nest: SM -3 (18", square); 5 lbs; DR 2.
Total: SM -2 (2' square); 15 lbs; DR 2.

Ghost Gum

"I know it sounds strange, but with a ghost behind us, we ran for the graveyard. As we crossed the seal, we heard a loud 'thump' as it the spirit hit a barrier. Looking back, we could see the stone walls glowing in a luminescent goo while the angry specter pounded at the invisible barrier. Cracks seemed to form in the lichen. The three of us then took the moments we knew we had left to try a last-ditch effort." -- Ghost-breaker Ivon Estevey, *The Ill-Fated Mission*

What is commonly known as "ghost gum" is actually a putty suspension of a derivative from a form of lichen. This gray fungus can feed off necromantic energy in the place of sunlight. When receiving light to moderate amounts of energy (in addition to nutrients from rainwater), it grows stronger. As a part of its symbiosis, it also generates a barrier that is resistant to extraplanar creatures. In particular, the weaker-willed ghosts tend to have the most difficulty with "gum lines." This natural barrier can also help ghosts in their Will rolls to stay (see page 35 of *Spirits*). Those who recognize its potential seed this lichen around cemeteries, mausoleums, and mansions.

Encountered

The mold extract is a common component in hedge medicine when dealing with hostile spirits. Suspended in a clay, it can be stuck to walls and floors to form barriers. The down side is that simple distilled essence naturally decays; preserved, it can last much longer. Some say indefinitely.

Industrial Uses

"It has also been prescribed to those who are holding to life tenuously, to keep them here. They say it has had some disastrous consequences. There are tales told of a gang of murderous thieves who made a suicide pact, and each drank a large vial of ghost gum. They all returned at midnight as undead, and nearly wiped out the whole town."
-- Autobiography of Judge Traigman.

Some patented "ghost barriers" are merely canvas painted in ghost gum. The cheapest are sold by con men, and deteriorate quickly. Certified alchemical workshops find no end to contracts to produce ghost gum. Ghost gum is used as part of some Pentagram enchantments, although it is not powerful enough to keep back strong-willed beings on its own. It can also create a barrier to restrict astral projectionists.

Adventure

The adventurers are hired to pick up a shipment of valuable high-quality ghost gum and erect a barrier around a sensitive outpost. Complications can include missing paperwork, stolen goods, hostile spirits, and restless natives who seek to use it for their own ends.

Ghost Gum

Appearance: Naturally, it is a green-blue or green-gray lichen. Refined, it becomes a similarly colored paste. Commonly, it is sold suspended in a soft clay putty (of varying purity).
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.
HT 12.

Variants: Gengineered ghost gum, which captures necromantic energy more effectively, has a reduced growth rate and emits the excess energy as light or electricity. It could be used as nearly eternal light or power source. For those not concerned with ethics, just capture a spirit into small enough container covered by the substance . . .

Shadow Hand

"The origins of this unusual creature are uncertain, but the most credible sources point to an adjudicator who wished to answer the question as to whether or not creatures of shadow were inherently evil or not. To answer it, she carefully asked questions of different extraplanar beings, and eventually she was pointed to this creature. As her work was under much scrutiny, her triumphant summoning of one of these creatures was cut short when an earthquake severed the pentagram, and three Ancient spirits broke free. The surviving Elders declared a state of emergency, and these shadow hands were loosed into the world, forgotten."
-- History of the Hiltine Elders, *The Fall*

This two-dimensional starfish-like creature is made of shadow. Tales fly about it, but its species is not evil (in general), but tame. Children are most often the ones to discover these living shadows. Adults are too often caught up in their lives to notice such things. These strange creatures can manipulate objects through their shadows. They live in total silence, being completely mute and silent. They respond well to shadow puppets and signs. They have their own language, but can be taught human sign languages.

Encountered

Sometimes seen dancing around candles and camp fires, these creatures normally appear in groups of one to six. The fewer, the more likely that they are going to want to play games with a person. Labeled a nuisance in many urban areas, they are considered a form of benevolent spirit in many rural communities. They can be easily trained.

Industrial Uses

"As the bard played his lute, he caused the candle and harp strings to dance. The shadows on the wall moved in harmony. Just then, some extra shadows began to dance in time with them. A child bounced a ball in that direction. Then, it seemed to be caught in mid-air, ant it bobbed with the music, caught by the shadow hands . . . "
-- The Bardic text *Rhythm*, *Shadows on the Wall*

Research continues to try to find large-scale uses for this creature. Tentative uses include using them to clean behind things, inside intricate parts as well as posting as guard dogs and sentries . . . Enchantment opportunities include telekinesis, air golem, and illusion independence.

Adventure

A wizard wishes to lead an expedition to the land or world of the shadow hands' origin. He and some of his coworkers seek to create a way to return them all there. The adventurers need to gather at least a hundred of these creatures to help open the gateway. Whether they agree to join the second half of the project is another matter . . .

Shadow Hand

Appearance: A black blob with five appendages, somewhere between a hand and a starfish.
Category: Plant/insect hybrid.
Diet: Unknown.
ST 1; DX 14; IQ 3; HT 10.
Will 10; Per 8; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 3.
SM -4 (18" long); 2 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Body of Shadow; Combat Reflexes; Deaf; Quirk: Dislikes Bright Sunlight; Domestic Animal; Extra Arms (legs); Extra Legs (Five Total); Flexibility (Double-Jointed); Injury Tolerance (Homogenous); Mute; Night Vision 9; Regrowth; Quadruped; Telekinesis 1 (Via Shadow Only; Accessibility: Must Touch Shadow); Vibration Sense
Languages: Hand Signal (Shadow Hand) (Native).
* Up to normal Telekinesis limit (see p. B92).

Giant Shadow Hand

ST 10; DX 12; IQ 4; HT 12.
Will 11; Per 9; Speed 6; Dodge 8; Move 4.
SM -2 (3' long); 20 lbs; DR 4.
Traits: As above, but Telekinesis matches ST.

Humongous Shadow Hand

ST 20; DX 10; IQ 5; HT 14.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM +0 (6' long); 100 lbs; DR 6.
Traits: As above, but Telekinesis matches ST.

Sky Whale

"Then I was running through the dark along the small path cut by the shallow creek. A few of the Baron's men were behind me -- I hadn't done anything yet -- and they spotted me first. Cursing my rotten luck, I instinctively threw myself to the ground to avoid a huge shape. It passed over me in a second, and I was up and running. A glance behind me told me that it was a sky whale! The splashes that followed a few moments later told me of the guards' dexterity. I kept running anyway."
-- Overheard at *The Waltzing Badger* tavern

Although the appearance can be surprising, these gentle giants have been known to help travelers. Their sky blue skin makes them hard to see from below, although the red spike ridge on their back makes them visible from above. The hazard they create for air navigation is lessened slightly by the trumpeting that is part of their form of communication. They filter the air for insects. Pigeons and birds of prey try to use them as perches. Whales in a pod look out for each other, trying to scare or crush the offending birds . . .

Encountered

These giants are most often seen on open plains, over rivers, flying low to scoop up insects with its baleen. Some can be found over swamps and dells, and must be chased away from the space over garbage dumps.

Industrial Uses

"Records indicate that the first appearances of sky whales are from the kingdom of Tria-Rikel. The wizard-king Yuzik moved his family from the coast to the plains. At this time, his young daughter pined for whales. Thus, he designed these creatures to fill the void. To answer the most common question, Yuzik himself commented that the red spine ridge was an unintended side effect."
-- *Flying Creatures Made Easy*, Chapter II

Research has been very slow as it was discovered that sky whales are immune to "animal" magic, and instead respond to "people" enchantments. A few armies have recruited sky whales as steeds for flying chariots, as well as scouts. Some cultures use them as muscle for mill wheels. Although it is opposed by well-meaning "civilized" nations, many tribal cultures find that the thick hide is useful for armor. While most will not look a gift from the gods in the mouth, only morbid cultures will seek them out to kill them. Enchantment of flight and levitation items is made much easier by recycling the large masses of these creatures as is sound sense.

Adventure

Must find two to recruit to serve a local mercenary unit. They require the adventures to mediate with them. The nearest pod agrees to send volunteers, if the heroes can organize prayer at the nearest temple to the insect god. This will cause some consternation, and the kind of human that would serve such a temple might not be the most savory of characters.

Sky Whale

Appearance: A smallish blue-colored whale with a red spine right along its back.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Carnivore (Insectivore).
ST 25; DX 12; IQ 8; HT 12.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Air Move 12.
SM +3 (21' long, 6 hexes); 4,000 lbs; DR 5.
Traits: 3D Spatial Sense; Absolute Direction; Flexibility (Flexible); Flight; Ichythoid; Night Vision 5; Penetrating Call; Peripheral Vision; Scanning Sense (Sonar; Extended Arc 360°; Penetrating; Targeting); Striker (Blunt Horns: Limited Arc: Dorsal); Subsonic Speech; Wild Animal

Small Sky Whale

ST 15; DX 13; IQ 6; HT 11.
Will 11; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Air Move 12.
SM +1 (9', 2 hexes); 200 lbs; DR 2.

Intelliworms

"Immediately after we entered the office, Marius' frog sensed something was amiss. Bringing it around the room, it focused on a chair covered in cat hair. It took two searches, but we eventually found an inchworm. After examining its markings, master Lu let the frog eat it. This certainly explains why toad familiars are so useful."
-- Adept Zuric, Memoirs

These gray-brown inchworms were engineered to record sound. Most are programmed to begin listening at a cue, and then to record the next human voices until cued to stop or its memory is full. When waiting to record, they seem to dance around. They are perfectly rigid when recording sound. Spaces in conversations are removed. Some are also trained to emit a sound cue when their memory becomes full, so that another unit can continue from that point.

Encountered

The PCs could encounter this creature as targets, or agents to plant it. Most likely, they will be discovered as media, carrying messages such as "Your mission, should you choose to accept it . . ." One-shot uses of these creatures will make useful disposable message devices.

Industrial Uses

"While one can commonly find white papers documenting the earliest use of these creatures, none describe the modern, reusable intelliworm. They all describe the time-honored tradition of how one can use it once, dessicate it, and break it to play the message."
-- Sargent Vickers, 3rd Precinct

Modern techniques are closely guarded from the public, and many organizations punish civilians for possessing the tools to operate worms capable of learning multiple messages. Single use "voice mail" could become common place. The providing companies like the idea of such one-shot message devices. Unfortunately, each message takes a toll on the creature, and its storage capacity reduces by 1% of its original maximum each time its memory is cleared. Thus, many low-capacity, public surveillance worms are *rented* to the civilian population for message recording after seeing 30 to 50 uses in the government's service. Enchantment can include perfecting the memory as well as spells that record sound.

Adventure

The heroes are instructed to find an intelliworm, reprogram it, and bring it to their patron. He will record something on it while the PCs go for lunch. When they return, they must mummify it for transport. Complications early on can take the form of a dead ninja with an open capsule in hand. Inside is an intelliworm that looks identical to that which is carried by the PCs . . .

Intelliworm

Appearance: A small inchworm, normally dark or light grey in color.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST -; DX 4; IQ 1; HT 10.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 3.5; Dodge 6; Move 1.
SM -10 (1 inch).
Traits: Acute Hearing +5; Domestic Animal; Duty (Reprogrammable); Eidetic Memory (Limited to 1 hour; Can be reset); Extra Legs (12 legs in all); Injury Tolerance (No Brain; No Neck; No Vitals); Protected Sense (Hearing); Quadruped
Treat a swarm as follows: Move 1, Inflicts 1FP of sonic damage each turn unless DR completely covers and is Sealed. It is dispelled after 5HP of damage.

Giant Intelliworm

ST 2; DX 6; IQ 1; HT 12.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 4.5; Dodge 7; Move 2.
SM -5 (1' long); 2 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: As above, but it can record several hours' worth of conversation.

Tiny Intelliworm

ST -; DX 3; IQ 1; HT 9.
Will 6; Per 6; Speed 3; Dodge 6; Move 0.25.

SM -12 (1/10 inch).
Traits: As above, but it can record only a few minutes' worth of conversation. The statistics are for a swarm of thousands.

Sticker Plant

"After the ambush, we set out on the road right away. It started to rain lightly, and we discovered the extent that the enemy aerated the canvas roof of the wagon. Sargath tried to glue patches on, with little success. Alita then moved to the front and -- spotting something -- hopped off the wagon. She soon returned bearing a plant with thick leaves. Crushing a leaf between the tarp and a patch, it quickly solidified into a sticky waterproof adhesive. These patches would hold until the wagon was carried away a year later . . ."
-- Tirgin the Sage, *Adventuring Years*

This deciduous plant has a brown stalk and unusually thick leaves. It is so because it actually has two separate circulatory systems. Both carry nutrients and help cool the plant. Experiments show that it can operate with only one operational. The first benefit that this brings is the coolant, and the second is that when the enzymes mix, they bond to form an adhesive that is so powerful that it can kill insects and small animals by gumming their mouths shut. It is a serious inconvenience for larger creatures.

Encountered

Some angry homesteaders plant sticker plants as an angry response to "free range" laws. It is a health hazard for children and pets, thus it should be kept at a height. Youths have been known to "plant" these leaves where they will be broken inconveniently: in books, underfoot, and in door jambs.

Industrial Uses

"The royal mint jelly was frosted with icing sugar, and the red wine fire blossoms. Unfortunately for Lord Joachim, he chose to fire his taste tester in the middle of the meal. Fortunately for the kingdom, he was dining alone at the royal table that evening, his family headed out early while he finished business. The aforementioned foods each contained copious amounts of halves of the glue. They solidified in his gut in the night, and he died of hemorrhaging in the night."
-- *Cooking with Death*, Volume II, Chapter IV

Obviously useful as an adhesive, it can aid in the manufacturing of everything from wooden chairs to aircraft decals. Its prevalence is limited only by the fact that it is immediately dangerous to children and small animals. The enchantment industry benefits in the way of any item that makes the use stickier, such as Climbing items, glue, and wall walking.

Adventure

The heroes are sent after a snake-oil salesman that has sold some local craftsmen poor glue. He claims that it is the fault of the supplier who he is heading to see. His sample glue works just fine. Is he telling the whole truth, or did he know it all along? The truth is that he did suspect something, and received an unusually low price on that shipment of glue to which he thought was his haggling skill.

Sticker Plants

Appearance: A deciduous plant with thick, green leaves. The flowers are small and white.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.
HT 12.

SM -3 (tall); 5 lbs.
Unusual Traits: Binding 10 (One-shot; Sticky). Note: ST 10, DR3, see page 40 of the ***Basic Set.***

Pigment Fish

"Their water and corrosion resistant coating is a sort of enamel from refined sand that can clog pores, making these fish very lonely. Navigation in some reefs is done by color, following the migration of different schools."
-- Captain Ihgioft of the ship *Fenris*

These pickerel-like fish come in a variety of colors. As a defense, they seem to drop pigment ambiantly on areas they go to to make it harder for predators to locate them. In infant fish, the coloring power lays dormant. When they reach maturity, their color is decided by their population density. In a sparsely occupied pond, they join the majority. In a densely populated area, they tend to take on random colors, and migrate away. These fish are hard to keep in aquariums; the glass keeps getting painted over, even the outside. Thus ponds are popular corrals. These creatures are considered a great nuisance when they escape to the wild. Fortunately, the do not tolerate cold well, and head toward warmer climates as soon as possible.

Encountered

Found in all sorts of colors, they can be hard on fabrics, and are normally stored on a table in the center of a room. The aquariums and table often have slots to store items to be painted. Pigment fish that get loose are obnoxious and hard to catch.

"A trick that apprentices like to play on each other is to swap fish. When it is known the victim is about to put an important project 'under the fish,' someone will then swap the fish inside the aquarium when he leaves. The next morning, both the project and the aquarium will have the new colors."
-- Marvus the Smith, in his autobiography

Industrial Uses

Items next to the tanks are painted as well. It can be good for coating metals. Assembly lines can place many bowls with a small variety of colors along them, and the item can be coated with virtually any color. Enchantment of aura, measurement, and scribe spells are simplified.

Adventure

Escaped pigment fish are leaving stripes on boats in the harbor. As it is not even the middle of the summer, and a VIP is coming next month. The harbor must be clean by then. Make it happen.

Pigment Fish

Appearance: A uniformly colored fish. Breeds vary wildly.
Category: Fish.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 2; DX 13; IQ 2; HT 15.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM -5 to -3 (10" to 24" long); 3 to 6 lbs; Sealed.
Traits: Aquatic; Filter Lungs; Gills; Ichythoid; Night Vision 2; Peripheral Vision; Pressure Support 2; Toxic Attack (Color Coating: Emanation; No Blunt Trauma; No Damage; No Knockback; Usually On); Wild Animal
Notes: Color range: 1 foot.

Giant Pigment Fish

ST 5; DX 13; IQ 2; HT 15.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM -3 to -2; 7 to 15 lbs; DR 1 (Sealed).
Notes: Color range: 1 yard.

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. A Nest Mimic is a trapdoor spider. Ghost Gum is a lichen said to have mystical properties against forces that normal people cannot see. Sky Whales are not impossible, if they utilize lift gas. Intelliworms are in the realm of possibility in their ability to record sounds, but playback would require technology of some sort. Sticker Plants are very feasible, considering the many varieties of plants out there. Pigment Fish simply refine sand in a way similar to most fish eating sand . . . it merely suspends it in a hydrocarbon and disperses it in the water.

* * *

The Omniscient Eye

So Why Do We All Meet In a Tavern?

"You all meet in a tavern . . ." until the owner throws you out for being roughneck deadbeats who do nothing but feel up the help and start fights. Yet bars are everywhere in fantasy and sci-fi, from "The Prancing Pony" to "The White Hart" to the Cantina at Mos Eisley. Why do watering holes exercise such influence in our storytelling?
   --Bob Portnell

The watering-hole is a common trope of modern fiction primarily because it has been used successfully in earlier works. When the protagonists descend on an inn, a pub, or a spaceport bar, the readers or players know roughly what they can expect. How it got to be that way is another matter.

It has been suggested that alcohol was one of the principal motivators for the shift from hunter-gatherer to agrarian societies. Whatever the truth of that, sitting around in a group and drinking is one of the oldest and most pervasive human activities, just as much as sitting around in a group and telling stories; it was perhaps inevitable that these should come together.

Historically, presenting fiction as such is a recent development; older fictional works tend to have some sort of framing story such that the author can claim that he is personally telling the truth, that he is not the originator of this blatantly untrue narrative. The nature of framing stories varies: Victorian adventure stories tended to start with the author describing papers found in a dispatch-case or a message in a bottle, while Sir Thomas Malory claimed he was copying from an "old French book." However, a much earlier technique and a way of binding together a portmanteau of disparate works was to give an account of (fictional) people telling stories to each other, at a dinner-party (the *Satyricon*), a drinking-party (the *Symposium*) -- or in a tavern (*The Canterbury Tales*).

As it became more acceptable to present fiction as fiction, the framing story largely fell into desuetude, though Dickens resurrected it to some extent with *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* and *The Old Curiosity Shop.* The frame came into its modern form with Count Jan Potocki's *The Manuscript Found at Saragossa* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights,* the latter of which was widely copied by other Victorian writers. However, the greatest single influence on the modern science-fictional or fantastic bar story is probably Lord Dunsany, with his tales of Joseph Jorkens and the Billiards Club: a combination of realistic and fantastic elements with characters and a setting that continue between stories.

Dunsany was (and is) read by many authors of science fiction and fantasy, and must be considered a primary influence particularly on Arthur C. Clarke, whose *Tales from the White Hart* were also in part inspired by post-war meetings of the London SF Group at the White Horse; Isaac Asimov wrote several series of stories set in clubs. These in turn are likely to have influenced Larry Niven (the Draco Tavern stories), Spider Robinson (Callahan's), and so forth; during the cyberpunk boom of the 1990s, the newsgroup alt.cyberpunk.chatsubo used a bar as the jumping-off point for a wide range of stories written by its participants, a shared world only in the loosest sense.

In a recent or contemporary setting or in a relatively pure framing story, the pub or bar (or, until as late as the 1930s, the club) is less likely to be an isolated travelers' rest and more often simply a gathering-place of friends; the clientele is fairly homogeneous, as people tend to meet in a place that caters for others like them. Patrons are likely to be local (at least in terms of travel time) and habitual rather than passing through. The modern as well as the classical bar-story tends to be about story-telling, the recounting of tall tales; if action is called for, it is likely to happen within the sub-narratives, just as in Petronius. The narrative convenience is that one may be among friends but still meet strangers, thus giving an excuse to tell one's tales and hear what they have to say - mediated as always by alcohol, so that even the least reasonable tall tale may gain a veneer of plausibility. Many mediaeval romances begin with the familiar

setting of a feast (*Sir Gawan and the Green Knight, Arthur and Gorlagon, Yvain*); the drinking-house is a similarly familiar jumping-off point for a tale that may become quite fantastic.

A more medieval type of tavern (still with story-telling involved, but with rather more risk of violence than the framing-story offers) got its boost following the unexpected popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* and the consequent boom in fantasy literature. Many of the new generation of writers imitated Tolkien perhaps rather too closely, and along with hordes of faceless enemies, ancient magic swords, and Mysterious Cloaked Figures felt the need to insert into their fantasy trilogies a scene in an inn. This medieval tavern on the Tolkien model (which shows up only thinly disguised as the spaceport bar, as exemplified by the Mos Eisley cantina) breaks out of the frame and becomes in itself a location significant in the narrative; it is one setting of many, both a site of action and a springboard for further development.

Tolkien was also of course a significant influence on **Dungeons and Dragons.** As roleplaying developed from its wargaming origins, players felt the need for a reason for their disparate pawns -- who had never met each other before the first adventure -- to choose to risk life and limb together . . . and, indeed simply to have an excuse to run in to each other in the first place. Why would a noble knight, a studious magician, a pious priest, and a disreputable thief ever find themselves in the same place? With the inn at Bree surely in mind, as well as the shadow of millennia of storytelling, some nameless DM must first have come up with the phrase now so well-worn that it has become a cliché of roleplaying: "You all meet in a tavern."

In the real medieval world, very few people traveled in the first place; before the Black Death, most were tied to the land. Those who did tended to be very important (and could thus foist themselves on local notables), monks (who would travel from one religious house to another), pilgrims, or itinerant tradesmen. In theory, that last class would include anyone whose trade could not be supported by a single village -- such as masons traveling to work on castles and cathedrals -- but in practice it tended also to include an array of faintly disreputable people who might find it advantageous to be elsewhere in a hurry.

Long-distance travel on foot is tiring, and undertaken with a goal in mind; one has little time to speak with people one might meet on the road, unless one happens to be going in the same direction at the same speed. The only time one might have to meet and converse with other people would be at the end of the day's journey. From telling stories in an inn, it is only a short step to telling stories that are set in an inn.

The Tolkien model of inn was a place where people who did not live in the village or town would be able to find (or find out about) somewhere to sleep for the night, and get a meal, once the monasteries no longer existed. (Some of the oldest pubs in England -- for example, the George at Norton St Philip in Somerset -- claim to have been part of a monastic establishment in the first place.) The inn is neutral ground in a way that someone's house is not. It is a place where anyone can go, with no more reason than wanting to get out of the weather. It is a place to meet people, starting with other travelers, who might share news of the roads ahead, or indeed wish to band together for protection on the following day's journey. (*The Canterbury Tales* is perhaps the canonical example of strangers meeting in an inn and moving off as a group)

There would also of course be some locals, who might know news and rumors interesting to someone looking for a place to ply his trade, and would certainly want to hear news from far-off places such as the next village but one, to say nothing of who the King was . . . which might have changed since the last time a traveler passed through in the previous year. In a small village where everyone knew everyone else's business, even the most prosaic stranger was a breath of fresh air, and the tallest of his tales were at least new and entertaining.

Almost anyone might arrive at an inn, stay there for a while, and talk with

> ## Real Hostelries
>
> In England at least, in the real early medieval world neither "tavern" nor "inn" was the term for a place for travelers to stay. That was the role of "victualling houses" (and later coaching inns), which were to be found only in towns or on major routes between large settlements; a village would simply not see enough travelers to justify keeping rooms aside for them. Generally the victualling house would cater only to travelers; locals would tend to have their own pub elsewhere, or in earlier times drink at the house of whoever had recently made some beer.

others. It is also a place where thieves might gather -- both local and traveling -- aiming to prey on people who would not have time to stop and try to get their property back. (In reality, though, any place that got a bad reputation would simply have been burned down by the retainers of the local lord, so the idea of an innkeeper in league with thieves is primarily a modern development.) If there is going to be a free-for-all fight in a village or town, it will probably happen where people are drinking alcohol and not in their homes. In a larger town, an inn may well be where people gather to take a coach that leaves at a set time, and a tavern or coffee-house in a mercantile area is likely to be a significant place of business (the origin of the Inns of Court in London).

All of these functions provide hooks for incidents that can advance the plot of a story or add background detail. It must be remembered, however, that The Prancing Pony and its imitators are based on an idealized vision of the country pub, not on a real one (which still survived in places even in the 1930s, and with which Tolkien, Lewis and their colleagues were certainly familiar). The Shire itself, in spite of its medieval trappings, is really more of a never-never land in which villainous saltpeter was never digged out of the harmless earth.

The "Tippling Acts" of the early 17th century (James I and Charles I) were an attempt at a sort of limited prohibition, and offer a suggestion as to what the victualling house was meant to do (and what in practice it may have been doing): it was not intended as a place for drinking, but rather "for the receit, relief and lodging of wayfaring people traveling from place to place, and for such supply of the wants of such people as are not able by greater quantities to make their provision of victuals and not meant for entertaining and harbouring of lewd and idle people to spend and consume their money and time in lewd and idle manner."

Bibliography

- Plato: *Symposium*
- Petronius: *Satyricon* (c.65AD)
- Boccaccio: *The Decameron* (c.1350)
- Chaucer, Geoffrey: *The Canterbury Tales* (c.1400)
- Potocki, Count Jan: *The Manuscript Found at Saragossa* (c.1815)
- Stevenson, Robert Louis: *New Arabian Nights* (1882) et seq
- Lord Dunsany: *The Travel Tales of Mr Joseph Jorkens* (1931) et seq
- Thompson, Flora: *Lark Rise to Candleford* (1945)
- Scithers, George H., and Schweitzer, Darrell (1987): *Tales from the Spaceport Bar* (Avon, 0-380-89943-4)
- USENET:alt.cyberpunk.chatsubo
- Clute, John, and Grant, John (1997): *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (Orbit, 1-85723-368-9)
- Mortimer, S. E. (2005): "On Inns, Taverns, and Alehouses"

--Roger Burton West

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Lord of the Rings: Battlefields Expansion (for the *Lord of the Rings Boardgame*)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Illustrated by John Howe

Three double-sided color boards, one sheet of double-sided color illustrated tokens (20 trigger tiles, 30 enemies, 5 fellowship members), 27 cards (6 feature cards and 3 Gandalf cards, each in an English, French, and German version), and a 20-page color trilingual rule book; $29.95

After a five-year delay, Fantasy Flight Games has finally released the third (and supposedly final) expansion for Knizia's award-winning **Lord of the Rings** boardgame. Was it worth the wait?

For those readers unfamiliar with it, **Lord of the Rings** is a co-operative boardgame in which two to five players take the part of hobbits trying to survive the journey to Mt. Doom to destroy the One Ring. The game itself fights against you in the form of events and die rolls which gradually corrupt your hobbit, strengthen Sauron, or otherwise bring you closer to losing your way. The first expansion, **Friends & Foes,** added two new scenarios, several cards, and enemies that you had to fight along your way. The second expansion, **[Sauron,](#)** allowed another person to play as the dark lord himself, for those who preferred more competitive play. (**Battlefields** is compatible with both of these expansions, primarily because it doesn't really interact with the new rules from either.)

This brings us to a question frequently voiced by new players: "So, what about the *rest* of the fellowship?"

Battlefields answers that, by adding five tokens for the other fellowship members and a "battlefield board" for each scenario, representing an important fight tied to that location. The boards cover the battles in Weathertop (for Bree), the Chamber of Mazarbul (in Moria), Amon Hen (near Isengard), the fortress of the Hornburg (in Helm's Deep), Pelennor Fields (with Shelob's Lair), and the Black Gate (of Mordor). There are five different enemies for every battlefield board, each printed on a different color token.

The expansion also includes 20 "trigger tiles" which each show 0-5 colored swords and a number from 1-4. These tiles are placed by every space on the main track of the scenario board, and also next to each "sundial" event, with the leftovers (four to six tiles) all dumped on the last event. As each player advances down the track (or draws a sundial), he collects these trigger tiles from the board. After his turn, he starts flipping them over. Every colored sword activates the appropriately colored enemy; if he isn't on the board yet, the first sword puts him there (the number on the tile tells you which of the four spawn points to use), with further swords moving the enemy piece. The board itself tells you where to move each enemy as you flip over trigger tiles, with arrows showing which way the enemy will move next and an alternate path (if both are blocked, he doesn't move). Most of the spaces have negative effects, like corruption, moving backwards on the main track, or losing all your shields.

To counter this, the active player can discard Fighting cards to place fellowship members on the board. Boromir (1 card) prevents an enemy from doing damage. Legolas and Gimli (2 cards each) do the same but can block most enemies, while Aragorn (3 cards) can block anyone. Gandalf requires 2 Joker cards, but kills the enemy instead of blocking them. Some boards also have special squares in which any enemy can be killed by discarding 2 Joker cards. If you kill an enemy, you get the reward shown on its token, which can be healing, drawing cards or shields, defeating

Foes, or even moving Sauron one space back.

Thematically, **Battlefields** is a qualified success. Overall, the concept makes sense and it works. The battles were chosen wisely, and each board is set up in a way that *tends* to reflect the specific fight in question; at Weathertop, the Nazgul spiral in at you from the outskirts, while at Pelennor Fields, Sauron's armies come in a straight-on charge. A few things detract from the theme, though, such as the inability to move a fellowship member once you've placed him, and the oddity of the complete fellowship fighting at Weathertop.

Battlefields' strength is in its game play. The trigger tiles and board layout work as a basic AI (in the video game sense), allowing the game itself to control the enemies, as they attempt to flank the fellowship and slow the hobbits' quest. This further reinforces the cooperative, "it's us against the game" feeling. Despite the occasional rewards obtained for defeating a foe, the expansion adds a significant challenge to the game, making it that much more rewarding to finally make it to the top of Mt. Doom. Fighting and Joker cards become much more important, as does card management -- which indirectly makes this expansion somewhat more difficult for larger groups than for smaller ones.

The quality of the components is top-notch. The tokens are printed on thick, durable cardboard with a linen finish which emphasizes their "painted" quality. Howe's artwork is absolutely gorgeous, bringing the tokens to life despite their small size. The battlefield boards are attractive, but due to the necessarily built-in functionality, they look like a cross between a flowchart and a choreography aid. This may turn off some gamers who were drawn to the beautiful and evocative artwork which covers the other boards. On both the tokens and boards, the icons and arrows are clear and easy to use in-game without having to consult the rules.

Battlefields is similar to **Friends & Foes** in that it adds another layer of game play; with both expansions, you'll be simultaneously shepherding hobbits across Middle Earth, fighting foes along the way, and guiding the rest of the fellowship in their own battles. **Battlefields** is not nearly as seamless, though, playing like an expansion rather than a natural extension of the game. *If* you already have **Friends & Foes** and would like to add further depth to your **Lord of the Rings** games, **Battlefields** is definitely recommend. It's a solid expansion worth adding when you're ready for a greater challenge.

--Reverend P. Kitty

The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!

Episode Episode 3: Tomb of the Lost Pharaoh

by Matt Riggsby

When we last left our heroes, they were chained to Dr. Z's deathtrap. The shaft descends slowly, so characters with Escape skill have significant time to get free. Also, any PCs who escaped Dr. Z's thugs have a good chance to explore Dr. Z's lair -- now largely free of guards -- and rescue their friends. However, Dr. Z is gone, and most of the guards with him. If heroes who evaded capture were keeping an eye on Occident-Orient, they saw several crowded cars leave.

With a dearth of guards, the investigators can search the underground complex if they're quiet about it (make a Stealth roll every 15 minutes). Dr. Z has left behind lots of scientific gear, mostly in the deathtrap room. Further investigation nearby uncovers a few lavish apartments. One, probably used by Dr. Z when he was in town, has several scientific and technical journals on the shelves. Other finds of interest include:

- notebooks containing calculations identical to some of those copied into Mathers' notebooks
- an empty, opened envelope addressed to Lee at the address of Seven Happiness; the return address is the German consulate in Washington
- an apartment which was probably used by Miss Papillon, still smelling of her perfume
- a room converted into a combined electronics lab and operating theater
- stray copies of itineraries for steamship tickets to Cairo, indicating a fast run of 12 days (add a three-day train trip if Anytown is on the West Coast) with departure not long after Dr. Z left the PCs to their fate
- enough physical evidence of smuggling to put Lee away, if the PCs could get the cops to listen to them.

At this point, the PCs should have two priorities: following Dr. Z to Cairo and figuring out what he's up to. If the PCs are determined to have it out with Lee, they've got a chance, but they'll be wasting time (see sidebar).

Places to Go, Tombs to Thieve

The heroes might deduce that Dr. Z's plan has something to do with the Mathers concentrator. They'd be right, but what's the connection to Cairo and "the tomb of Khuthmet"? Clearly, there's a need for an Egyptologist. Scholars can work in Anytown, but superior libraries can be found in Egypt, if they care to wait. The name Khuthmet belongs to several figures in Egyptian history, most notably a possibly legendary pharaoh whose tomb has never been found. Although a minor historical figure, Khuthmet is said to have been a great mystic, practicing magic and dealing with the gods of death and the underworld. He was overthrown by terrified subjects after a very brief reign. His tomb was lavishly provided with riches for the afterlife, but protected with powerful curses. Sharp-eyed researchers may (on a Vision roll) take note of a photo of a painting of Khuthmet carrying a staff surmounted by a large blue gem. In case someone studying Mathers' papers asks, a sapphire would make the concentrator fire an amplified electrical pulse, like directed lightning.

The PCs must hurry if they want to catch up with Dr. Z. If they go for relatively affordable transportation (at least $600 per person in steerage on a cargo ship), they'll reach Cairo a week or more after him. If they wrangle a fast liner ($900/person and up), they'll end up two days behind, but they'll likely be sold out that close to sailing. If they take a

liner to Gibraltar, then a plane (at least another $120), they might catch up, or even beat him by a few hours. Well-connected PCs might talk their way on to an experimental mail flight between New York and London and beat Dr. Z to Cairo by a week, though there will be limited room, splitting the group. Whatever they choose, the faster the route the PCs try, the more expensive and difficult to arrange it will be. This may involve weather delays, transfers to the wrong vehicle, running to make connections, bribing customs officials not to open that violin case, and stowing away if berths on the fastest ship available are sold out.

But eventually: Cairo. Like many colonial capitals, the city is divided into a new section, largely built by and for Europeans, with hotels, restaurants, tidier and more familiar (and expensive) shopping districts, broader and cleaner avenues, and the like, and an old section, with less deferential natives, dusty, twisting streets and countless dark alleys, and hardly anybody who speaks English. Cairo is a major tourist destination, and Westerners will be besieged by beggars, souvenir-sellers, and eager guides until they hire one.

When Dr. Z arrives, he'll go to a fine hotel and send for Francois Gaudet, a disgraced French Egyptologist who spends his days drinking. Gaudet believes he has found Khuthmet's tomb in the [Valley of the Kings](#) near Luxor, about 250 miles or two days by boat south of Cairo, and is trying to sell the information for as much as possible. Once Dr. Z has that information, he will take a party south via chartered riverboat to recover the blue gem.

Characters researching Khuthmet in Egypt may hear about Gaudet themselves; he's known in the expat community mostly for selling forged artifacts, but also for an obsession with a pharaoh who many people don't believe existed. A little Streetwise can help track him down. If they can't or simply don't hear about him, they might shadow Dr. Z when he arrives and see what he's up to. After all, they've got his itinerary, or can easily find where he's staying by checking out the limited number of good hotels. Shadowing Dr. Z is fairly safe. He believes the PCs dead, so while his men will be on their guard (Cairo can be dangerous), they won't be looking specifically for the PCs. On the other hand, western PCs are conspicuous. If the heroes are discovered (some of the thugs can recognize them), Dr. Z will try to have one captured and interrogated to find out what they know; he'll suspect they're part of a larger group.

Gaudet will talk to anyone buying drinks, but won't reveal his secret without letting Dr. Z make a counteroffer. However, a persuasive character may be able to get the general region of the tomb (winning a contest of a Will of 11 and Carousing-1) and the cryptic statement that Khuthmet was buried "at the doorway to autumn" (contest against Carousing-3). Kidnapping or killing Gaudet would alert Dr. Z to the heroes' survival, and if need be Gaudet could have hidden secret notebooks which would keep Dr. Z on the right track.

The weak link in Dr. Z's group is Miss Papillon. If she spots her contact among the PCs (which would be entertaining, so you may want to engineer such an encounter), she'll give him a chance to seduce or bribe her into not spilling the beans. A persuasive character could get her to tell what she knows: Dr. Z is looking for a blue gem with the aid of a greedy drunk, and after they find it, they're heading to Ulan Bator with "some boring German." A *very* persuasive character might convince her to talk to Gaudet for him, in return for a promise of a cut of the loot if the heroes come out ahead. She won't directly betray Dr. Z, but she will hedge her bets.

Though available clues are sparse, the PCs may want to get to Luxor as quickly as possible. If they get a head start, they can begin searching before Dr. Z gets there, but even if they figure out Gaudet's hints, it'd be a long shot for them to find the tomb. Dr. Z, on the other hand, can find out exactly where he should go from Gaudet. Khuthmet's well-hidden tomb lies at the end of a side canyon near the Valley of Kings facing west; specifically, it faces the point of sunset of the last day of summer. The tomb is small: a narrow hallway with lavish inscriptions leading to a treasure room. From there, another short hallway leads into a larger room containing a sarcophagus. There is the mummy of Khuthmet, carrying a staff topped with a large blue crystal.

Fun in Cairo

If the pace in Cairo, which is probably heavy on research and shadowing, starts to flag, local color can be used to perk things up. Adventurers might have to deal with:

- Thieves in dark alleys
- Runaway donkeys in a marketplace
- Angry crowds inflamed by unexpected etiquette violations (getting too familiar with a lady, stepping on someone, etc.)
- Inadvertently running into one of Dr. Z's thugs

Regardless of who gets there first, it's likely that the heroes will get to Khuthmet's tomb just before Dr. Z appears, or -- if the PCs simply follow Dr. Z south -- he and his thugs will open the tomb before the protagonists can get to it (given the genre, you should make sure of it). Worse yet, Dr. Z will have a number of thugs roving around to make sure that nobody comes close to his operation. Sooner or later, there's going to be a confrontation.

If the heroes beat Dr. Z to the tomb, his objective will be the tomb and the blue crystal. He'll personally inspect the tomb to make sure the PCs have what he's looking for, and he may negotiate, but for a limited time and not in particularly good faith. If it's the other way around, his thugs will fight a defensive action and make their way away from the tomb, but not back towards the river and their transportation. Rather, they head towards the desert. In either case, Dr. Z's thugs take a prisoner if it's feasible.

Sooner or later, somebody has a surprising revelation. It will be clear to anyone with relevant knowledge (roll against Geology, Jeweler, Archaeology, or an appropriate Expert Skill at +5) who sees the crystal close up that it *isn't* a sapphire. It's a prism of blue glass, now patinaed with age. Dr. Z will be surprised when he finds out, but ultimately appreciates the irony and continues the retreat into the desert.

Topping a hill, the PCs will understand why he's heading that way. Sitting on the plain beyond is a large gray airship with a swastika on the tail fins. If the heroes are determined to follow, the airship crew will lay down covering fire with machine guns, which have *much* better range than whatever the PCs might carry. But Dr. Z won't depart without a final speech (from a safe distance): "You are quite remarkable, my young friends, to have escaped your fate, but you must remain with the dead this time." With that, he takes a small box from his pocket, presses a button, and strides up the gangway onto the zeppelin, followed by his thugs. The zeppelin crew casts off and heads away into the sky. Could a daredevil character sprint close enough to grab a mooring line and climb up to the zeppelin? Only one way to tell . . .

And what could Dr. Z have meant about remaining with the dead? Anyone who looks back towards the Valley of Kings will find out: shambling towards them out of the shadows is the hulking figure of a mummy.

An alliance with Nazis! An ancient curse comes to life in a crumbling tomb! How will our heroes escape? Come back next time for another episode of The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!: The Hordes of Mongolia!

Adventurous Occupations: Computer Expert

for *GURPS*

by Paul Stefko

Since the creation of telecommunications networks, a secret war has been raging across phone lines, broadband cables, and now the ether of wireless communication. The soldiers on this new battlefield are experts at manipulating the security of computer systems, whether for good or ill.

This conflict has entered the public consciousness through movies like *WarGames* and *Hackers*. Even the otherwise over-the-top *Matrix* series included elements of real-life cyber-intrusion. Today's computer experts form the basis for the entire cyberpunk genre, with its glittering neon realms of virtual crime.

Below, we present several templates for creating characters that are at home in the glow of a display. These characters provide critical service to an adventuring group, stealing (or protecting) valuable data. At 75-100 points, these templates leave room for a great deal of personalization when creating PCs and NPCs.

New Talent

The following talent is useful for computer experts on both sides of the line.

Computer Genius: Computer Hacking (if allowed in the campaign), Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Electronics Operations, Electronics Repair (Computers), Expert Skill (Computer Security).
Reaction bonus: computer professionals, hackers. *5 points/level.*

Lenses

The following lens may be added to any of the templates below, but it is only appropriate in highly weird and highly conspiratorial campaigns.

Seen Too Much (+15 points): Your exposure to so much data has opened your mind to elements of reality beyond the experience of most. You are now privy to the world's secrets, and powerful forces want to see you silenced for this knowledge. Add Enemy (Illuminati; 6 or less) [-20], Illuminated [10], Racial Memory (Passive) [15], and Reawakened [10].

Security Expert   *75 points*

A security expert is a professional skilled in analyzing a system or network of systems for possible exploits and shoring up its defenses against them. He may have a permanent position with an organization (with appropriate Patron and/or Duty) or work freelance.

Allies and Contacts: The security expert often maintains contacts in corporatations and law enforcement, allowing him to call on a wide network of resources and information. Rarely will any of these associates rate as Allies, however. They'll answer the expert's questions, but they won't fight his battles.

Equipment: Typically, a security expert will be provided appropriate equipment by his client or employer. Often, and especially among freelance troubleshooters, the expert also will have his own hardware, typically portable, which he uses to test systems and diagnose problems. At TL8, this is usually a high-end laptop computer (Complexity 3, p.

B288) running standard operating and programming software (no bonus to skill). At TL9+, design a Small computer using the rules in Chapter 2 of *GURPS Ultra-Tech.*

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].

Advantages: 25 points chosen from IQ+1 [20], Computer Genius [5/level], Contact (Business or Police) [varies], Favor [varies], Patron [varies], Security Clearance [5 or 10], or Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: -15 points chosen from Addiction (Stimulants) [-10], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Duty (Nonhazardous) [varies], Honesty [-10*], Insomniac [-10 or -15], or Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Computer Operation-14 (E) IQ+2 [4]; Computer Programming-12 (H) IQ [4]; Expert Skill (Computer Security)-12 (H) IQ [4].

Secondary Skills: Pick *three* of Cryptography-11 (H) IQ-1 [2], Electronics Operations (Communications)-12 (A) IQ [2], Electronics Operations (Security)-12 (A) IQ [2], Electronics Operations (Surveillance)-12 (A) IQ [2], or Mathematics (Computer Science)-11 (H) IQ-1 [2].

Background Skills: 7 points chosen from Current Affairs (Science and Technology) and Games (Computer Games), both IQ/E; Administration and Electronics Repair (Computers)†, both IQ/A; or Intelligence Analysis, IQ/H.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see page 120 of the *Basic Set.*
† Raised from Computer Operation default.

Lenses

Underground Ties (-15 points): You work for a criminal organization. You may be an in-house security expert for organized crime, or you may have a legitimate job as cover, utilizing your employer's resources in criminal activities. You may be forced into this position through blackmail or threats. Add Duty (12 or less) or Duty (Involuntary; 9 or less) [-10], Patron (Fairly powerful organization; 9 or less; Provides equipment up to starting wealth, +50%) [15] and Secret (criminal) [-20].

Hacker   *75 points*

The hacker is a modern rogue. Instead of picking locks, grifting, or counterfeiting, he breaks encryption, steals passwords, and fools unsuspecting sysops.

Allies and Contacts: Most hackers maintain a network of like-minded peers for the purposes of trading tools and information. Some hackers organize into "guilds" that support each other on particular difficult tasks. A few hackers may have contacts in law enforcement that can tip them off if investigators get too close.

Equipment: The hacker will usually be operating from a high-end desktop computer (Complexity 4) running home-brewed software and tools collected from various underground sites. A more mobile and adventurous hacker may use a laptop like the security expert's above combined with a wireless modem, stealing access from various open networks in public spaces.

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 11 [-10]; Per 13 [0]; FP 10 [0].

Advantages: 25 points chosen from IQ+1 [20], Ally (hacker) [varies], Alternate Identity [5 or 15/identity], Computer

Genius [5/level], Contact (Police or Street) [varies], Favor [varies], or Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages: -25 points chosen from Addiction (Stimulants) [-10], Enemy [varies], Insomniac [-10 or -15], Loner [-5*], Odious Personal Habit [-5/level], Overweight *or* Skinny [-1 or -5], Unfit *or* Very Unfit [-5 or -15], or Wealth (Struggling or Poor) [-10 or -15].

Primary Skills: Computer Operation-14 (E) IQ+1 [2]; Computer Programming-14 (H) IQ+1 [8].

Secondary Skills: Pick *four* of Cryptography-12 (H) IQ-1 [2], -13 (A) IQ [2], Electronics Operations (Communications)-13 (A) IQ [2], Electronics Operations (Surveillance)-13 (A) IQ [2], Fast-Talk-13 (A) IQ [2], Mathematics (Computer Science)-12 (H) IQ-1 [2] or Scrounging-14 (E) Per+1 [2].

Background Skills: 7 points chosen from secondary skills or Current Affairs (Science and Technology), Games (Computer Games), and Savoir-Faire (Net), all IQ/E; Electronics Operations (Media), Electronics Operations (Security), Electronics Repair (Computers)†, Research, and Streetwise, all IQ/A; or Psychology (Human), IQ/H.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Raised from Computer Operation default.

Lenses

Got Caught (-28 points): You have been convicted of cyber-crime and are currently serving probation. You are prohibited from using any electronic communication device and are monitored semi-regularly by a probation officer. This lens assumes that you have broken the terms of your probation. If the government learns of this, you will be sent to prison. Add Enemy (Probation officer; 6 or less) [-3], Secret (hacker) [-20], and Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5].

White Hat (+7 points): You have reformed and joined the "good side." You now work for a corporation or government agency as a security expert (see above). Add Patron (Fairly powerful organization; 9 or less) [10], Duty (Nonhazardous; 12 or less) [-5], and Expert Skill (Computer Security)-12 (H) IQ-1 [2].

Decker   *100 points*

The decker is a cinematic cyberpunk hacker. Armed with a neural interface jack, a high-end computer ("deck"), and a whole lot of attitude, the decker is the king of cyberspace.

On the downside, deckers are often embroiled in the depths of the criminal underworld, associated with the lowest of lowlifes. It is easy for a decker to break the wrong promises to the wrong people and find himself in serious trouble faster than he can boot up his OS.

This template assumes a cinematic TL9 cyberpunk-style campaign.

Allies and Contacts: For an Ally, the decker might choose an AI that runs off his deck, useful for covering his back on intrusion runs. The computer below could run a dedicated IQ 8 AI or a non-volitional IQ 6 AI simultaneously with his hacking suite and a dedicated suite for the AI.

Equipment: At TL9, his Signature Gear gives him a fast, high-capacity Small computer (Complexity 5, 10 TB, 0.5 lbs., 2B/20 hrs.) and a suite of Good-quality hacking software (+1 to Computer Hacking, not included in the template), and he still has plenty room for weapons, electronic lockpicks, or what have you.

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].

Advantages: Cable Jack (Sensie, +80%) [9]; Computer Genius 1 [5]; Signature Gear 1 [1]; and 35 points chosen from IQ+1 [20], Ally (AI or human) [varies], Alternate Identity [5 or 15/identity], Chip Slots (4) [17/slot], Contact (Business, Police, or Street) [varies], Gadgeteer (Software only, -20%) [20], more Signature Gear [1/level], Single-Minded [5], or Zeroed [10].

Disadvantages: -35 points chosen from Addiction (Sensies) [-15], Addiction (Stimulants) [-10], Duty (Involuntary) [varies], Enemy [varies], Loner [-5*], Social Stigma (Criminal Record or Second-Class Citizen) [-5], or Wealth (Struggling or Poor) [-10 or -15].

Primary Skills: Computer Hacking-13† (VH) IQ [4]; Computer Operation-15† (E) IQ+2 [2]; Computer Programming-14† (H) IQ+1 [4].

Secondary Skills: Pick *four* of Cryptography-12 (H) IQ-1 [2], Electronics Operations (Media)-14† (A) IQ+1 [2], Electronics Operations (Security)-14† (A) IQ+1 [2], Electronics Operations (Surveillance)-14† (A) IQ+1 [2], or Mathematics (Computer Science)-12 (H) IQ-1 [2].

Background Skills: 7 points chosen from Current Affairs (Science and Technology), IQ/E; Scrounging, Per/E; Electronics Repair (Computers)†, Research, and Streetwise, all IQ/A; or Computer Programming (AI)† and Psychology (AI), both IQ/H.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see page 120.
† Includes +1 from Computer Genius
‡ Raised from Computer Operation default.

Lenses

Under Your Skin (+4 points): Instead of using a portable computer, you've had your deck (a genius Tiny computer) implanted inside your own body. You can deck wirelessly with a radio implant. Software tools may be purchased with starting wealth. Replace Signature Gear with Computer Implant [7] and Cable Jack with Implant Radio [7] (both found in Chapter 8 of *Ultra-Tech*).

Here, There, and Everywhere

Last night the missus and I took young Sam to the [Children's Museum of Indianapolis](#) for a free open house targeting new and expectant moms; the cake, fruit, drinks, and goodies made us wonder why we'd bothered with dinner beforehand.

Anyway, among other fascinating displays and exhibits -- including Sam's interaction with the water table -- was the "Fireworks of Glass." This glass sculpture by Dale Chihuly is "the largest permanent installation of blown glass ever." This thing was huge, so I'm willing to bet their assertion is right. (Check out pictures at http://www.childrensmuseum.org/themuseum/fireworks_ofglass/index.htm)

Anyway, as long as you're clicking on random links, take a gander at the floor plan: http://www.childrensmuseum.org/generalinfo/floorplan.htm . See the blue shaded area? The 43-foot-tall glass sculpture is in the center of that region (with the square delineating an ascending walkway that can be used to go all the way to the top floor), visible from all central points.

On our way out of the building to go home, we . . . err, we got lost. We went to the bottom floor the (Lower Level of elevator fame), when we really wanted to go to the first floor. As we were wandering around said level, looking for a nonexistent exit, my wife noticed something amazing. "Look up!" she exclaimed. Upon doing so, I noticed that the "ceiling" was in fact clear glass, and we were able to see the underside of the 43-foot-tall brightly colored glass sculpture. For some reason, the realization that I was under umpteen zillion pounds of glass made me very uncomfortable. (Despite the fact that I'm frequently under umpteen zillion pounds of concrete and steel, glass just somehow seems less . . . fluffy.)

In the gaming world, there's often a tendency to compartmentalize locations. Rooms seldom spill over into others and -- especially in classic dungeon crawls -- there's not much interaction between denizens or their locale. But in the real world, events happen all the time that impact others. If someone opens a window in the bedroom, the resultant cross breeze can cause the door to the office to slam shut, sending someone in the kitchen to scurry to see what happened. If my upstairs neighbors decide to practice the guitar at 4:00 a.m. (not a hypothetical), my son awakens with a banshee's howl while my wife assumes the half-wolf form, fangs slathering to rend the flesh of musicians.

Computer games tend to do a better job of simulating changes in environment, probably because it's one thing that's easier to keep track of or -- if need be -- make up (unlike realistic NPC reactions, which are the realm of human GMs). As a minor example, in the classic computer text-adventure game *Zork,* one room is too loud with an echoing roar to do anything in other than leave. (In fact, in a neat bit of meta-gaming, any commands you try to do merely echo back the last word; typing in "EXAMINE PLATINUM BAR," for example, produces the response of "Bar . . . bar . . .") The reason this room is so loud, you discover, is because a huge dam is pouring water over the top of the room; closing the dam results in the room becoming eerily quiet, and you can then get the treasure in that room as well as leave it for other environs. As another example, in the game *Planetfall* you learn that the water level of the planet is rising; as the game progresses, some rooms become inaccessible as they become submerged.

But areas in RPGs are usually compartmentalized; this is especially true in published adventures, where that route is usually taken to preserve the keyed encounter feel. But this tends to compartmentalize the adventure, turning it into a series of episodic scenes with little relation to each other. (After all, does it really matter in the grand scheme of things if the heroes faced the skeletons *before* the mad mage instead of after?)

But by having the environment -- either the actual place or the interactions of other beings -- as something that exists outside of a self-contained room, you open up all kinds of possibilities. For example, how much spookier would the classic adventure **Ravenloft** (called **Expedition to Castle Ravenloft** nowadays) be if the GM kept track of monsters that the heroes were likely to hear, and moved them according to some kind of predetermined pattern . . . giving the players aural information as appropriate? ("The sound of bone scraping against metal starts getting louder again below you, but soon trails off to the north.")

Or what if the adventure takes place in a mad scientist's laboratory where there's a Big Boom about midway through the adventure; suddenly the entire landscape of the once-familiar complex becomes alien. Alternate routes need to be found, difficulties need to be navigated, and decisions may have lasting repercussions on the location . . . including future points of the adventure. ("There's an access tunnel we can get to behind this vat of liquid nitrogen . . . but to get to it, we need to tip the vat over!")

Or take your standard "trapped in a haunted house" riff. Part of the standard appeal is that no one knows exactly what's in the next room. But what if we turn it on its ear (in a reversal): The heroes wake up in a strange room in an unusual house. Oh, and the entire house is transparent, as if it were made of clear acrylic. They can see their adversaries, they can see the strange horrors as they navigate the environment that they're familiar with while the heroes struggle -- it's tricky finding a clear doorknob on a clear door! -- and, as the horrifying but still-distant creatures shamble from floors above and below, the heroes need to come up with a plan. Fast.

(This "transparent" idea can be used to rejuvinate any classic adventure; what would the **Tomb of Horrors** or **Ravenloft** be like if the tomb or castle were transparent? Of course, in a sword-and-sorcery campaign the notion of "line of sight" would need to be sorted out ahead of time as well . . .)

Most locations are interconneted with others, in ways that may not be obvious. Keeping this in mind can help the GM spruce up an otherwise bland adventure. After all, no matter how many foes the heroes dispatch, they're always surrounded . . by someplace.

* * *

On a completely unrelated note, those of you who use the *Pyramid* chat function will note that we're turning off the non-secure accessability sometime within the next week. Information for how to access securely is over at our chat page, and updates will be somewhere on the discussion boards as well.

See you in the ASCII world!

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Elvish Checkers

Published by [Three Sages Games](#)

Designed by David Wainio

16 stones (seven each of two colors & two Stone Men), cloth map, string, rules sheet, and storage instructions, stored in a clear plastic mail tube; $12.95

Every time someone wants to do a game about elves, or has elves show up in their stories or their game world, they always start the same way: "Not much is known about the elves." *Elvish Checkers,* -- a new board game from Three Sages Games -- is no different, but it doesn't attempt to take us on a tour of the entire elven culture. Rather, it limits itself to this one facet of their lives.

The rules start by telling us not much is known about what this game means to elves. Is it a leisure activity? A way to train potential recruits should war break out? A metaphor for their civilization and its customs? Maybe. You're paying for it, so you decide if it has deeper meaning.

Regardless of what you decide, the object is to be the first to get all your elves into the opposing player's village.

Two village spaces sit on opposite sides of the board, and between these extremes are several leafy glades, the sort elves seem keen to inhabit. Both players occupy the spaces nearest to their home towns, and the village itself contains a large and imposing Stone Man, a summoned creature who -- like a golem of legend -- has a limited ability to discern what the summoner really wants. Lines from one village or glade to the next indicate where units can move (mostly it's a crisscross pattern).

An elf can move into a glade so long as there's room. Two elves (from either side -- you and your opponent can occupy the same space) fill up a glade, as does a single Stone Man. You must move one unit one space per turn (backing up and moving laterally are no-nos), and if you have no moves, you forfeit. Stone Men cannot move onto each other, and if one enters the opposing village, it crumbles and reforms in its home town (only the elves leave the board). If these titanic elemental creatures move onto a glade with elves, the smaller units scatter to their respective villages and begin their journey anew.

Forced to move and unable to go backward, eventually one team or the other gets all its elves into the opposing village. From there, they discover the fabled Elvenhome and win the game.

It's a simple game from a component standpoint. Everyone is represented by stones, with larger pieces used for the Stone Men. It's hard to be more descriptive; if you've ever seen polished rocks in any form in the genre industries, you know the sort of thing to expect here. The color may vary between sets, and the light plays funny tricks, but if one copy is any benchmark, it seems easy enough to tell the colors apart, and they fit onto the spaces.

The board is worth mentioning for two reasons. First, it's a cloth with the play area printed on it, rather like the sort of rubbery imprinting you find on some sweatshirts, but the cloth is a stiffer material. Second, the company includes a length of string. The stones can be placed in the cloth and the whole thing gets tied into a small bag for that Renaissance-fair feel. Whatever the cord is (twine? yarn?), it's rough enough that even a single cinch seems to keep the bag closed. What effect this has long-term (on the string or the rubbery map printing) is unknown, but it's clever. It comes in a plastic tube, so unless you're going for a look as you carry this about with you at the convention, there's not much keeping you from using it . . . it's every bit as secure.

As for actual play: It's hard to convince some people you can't just throw counters into a box, add a board whose parameters are themselves a decorative design (even if it isn't made of cloth), and call it a leisure pastime, but Three Sages knows what they're doing. Perhaps with practice, the game becomes one of those annoying exercises where going first gives you an edge mathematically speaking, but that doesn't always play out. It's a simple idea, an even simpler execution, and a wonderful challenge.

The strategy changes as the game goes; certainly the Stone Men start out as big, stompin' behemoths, but as you near the end, they're closer to goalies in a soccer game. Do you try to block your opponent's pieces, or do you race up the sides where a megalith might get hung up? Do you try to intercept your enemy out in the middle of the board, or reach for the other village so you can cycle back home and protect it from intruders? And is your rival willing to stomp his own elves if you pair yours with his? It's quick; it's fun; it's portable: What's not to like?

The game has a copyright date of 2004, but local game store shelves say it's new. This could just be one of those hiccups where the game was created before funds were available for production, but regardless of the reasons, it's heartwarming to see a small company make good and live up to its hype with a small and unassuming winner like **Elvish Checkers.**

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Pirates of the Spanish Main: Swashbuckling Roleplaying in the Age of Sail

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Paul "Wiggy" Wade-Williams with Simon Lucas & Clint Black

Illustrated by Aaron Acevedo, Nicole Cardiff, Julie Dillon, Mo Ellliott, Chris Griffin, Mike Hamlett, Vincent Hie, Satya Hody, Dan Howard, Slawomir Maniak, R K Post, Joe Slucher, Christophe Swal, Justin Sweet, & John Worsley

Cartography by Robin Elliott

258-Page full-color hardcover; $39.99

Here is a curious thing: Just when you thought a genre was utterly passé, up pops a game to prove you wrong. Pirates were all the rage back in 2003, riding the wake left by the film *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl,* so it is surely no coincidence that the latest entry in the genre, the ***Pirates of the Spanish Main: Swashbuckling Roleplaying in the Age of Sail*** RPG, has been released just before the debut of *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End.* The game is based upon the WizKids CSG of the same name, which itself got a new expansion prior to the opening of the film and also happens to be the only game that survived the 2003 trend.

The ***Pirates of the Spanish Main RPG*** uses [Shane Lacy Hensley's *Savage Worlds*](#), also from Pinnacle Entertainment, but it is a complete, standalone RPG and does not need the core rules. Although the genre is not new to ***Savage Worlds*** -- Pinnacle having visited it before with [*50 Fathoms*](#), a more fantastical take upon the genre set in a drowning world -- ***Pirates of the Spanish Main RPG*** is not a Plot Point campaign. This latest pirate book is an ahistorical take upon the Spanish Main, set in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, but blending three centuries of history to get an idealized version of the Spanish Main. Furthermore, because this RPG is based on the core setup for ***Pirates of the Spanish Main CSG*** and its first expansion, ***Pirates of the Crimson Coast,*** it involves the Dutch, English, French, Pirate, and Spanish factions only. Although the game touches upon some supernatural elements -- enough to model the events of a certain 2003 film by adhering to just the first two sets -- this RPG forgoes the American, Barbary Coast, Viking, and even the Chinese factions, as well as the monstrous sea beasts of recent expansions from the CSG.

The ***Pirates of the Spanish Main RPG*** is an opportunity to swashbuckle your way around the Spanish Main, all against a background of the major European maritime nations jockeying for power and prestige. They war for dynastic, economic, and religious reasons, primarily through sanctioned privateers, even as pirates sail in search of the next big prize -- perhaps even a Spanish treasure ship. Slavery is on the wane, and although the position of women might not be equal, the Spanish Main is the place where a woman can make a name for herself. This is a setting in which player character pirates are more rogues than vicious, bloodthirsty raiders -- that is left to the villainous NPCs. Gaming possibilities include intrigue, subterfuge, rapier wit, and high swashbuckling action.

Character generation in the ***Pirates of the Spanish Main RPG*** follows that for ***Savage Worlds.*** A player buys dice for his character's attributes and skills, chooses Edges, Hindrances, and equipment. Edges and Hindrances certainly help enforce the game's piratical theme. These include Hindrances such as Branded (facially as a pirate) and Seasick; while

Bilge Rat lets a pirate fight in the cramped below-decks without penalty, and Wall of Steel enables a pirate to face multiple foes unpunished. In addition, Professional Edges such as Explorer, Helmsman, and Rope Monkey define a character's role aboard ship or ashore, while Fencing Academy grants fencing school membership where a character can learn a secret fighting maneuver. Although not all schools teach fencing styles, there is one taught by a peg-leg pirate for other amputees. The character generation rules offer plenty of choice, but curiously this section lacks any full example. Considering that this is a complete RPG aimed at players of the CSG as a crossover product, this is an unhelpful omission.

Mechanically, *Pirates of the Spanish Main RPG* relies on the reasonably easy and pulp-action-orientated *Savage Worlds* system, the simple rules encouraging characters to use the kind of tricks so beloved of the genre. The system not only handles brawling, musketry, and dueling on a personal level, it executes mass combat with the same ease. It is also can support miniatures combat, although it abstracts this slightly for land engagements, understandably focusing on ship-to-ship engagements. And if the *Pirates of the Spanish Main CSG* is one thing, it is a ready source of inexpensive, attractive ship miniatures and seaborne scenery.

The obvious choice for handling the RPG's naval combat would be to the CSG's rules. Yet those rules lack the detail necessary for the RPG, and thus it provides its own. Much like the CSG, these rules begin by defining a ship by the number of her masts, but adds color and flavor with various nautical Edges and Hindrances. Templates are provided for use with these rules, which emphasize the role of the crew aboard and whatever position the player characters take. The damage rules are also more detailed than in the CSG, which only measures damage taken by masts lost.

The GM's section includes a guide to the Caribbean full of details that can be brought into play, from towns and forts to people of note and even ancient Mayan ruins. An additional set of tables helps the GM create his own islands and adventure hooks. Actual GM advice begins with the basics -- getting a group together before going on to discuss the expected but is nevertheless sound advice. It includes a starting adventure, "The Lady's Favor," which starts off with an increasingly tired cliché -- somebody in peril in the street -- and winds up including treachery, treasure, cannibals, and the opportunity for derring-do.

Rounding out the book is an extensive bestiary and encounter list that offers fully detailed versions of several legendary figures from the CSG. More importantly, it also provides the game's only coverage of the supernatural. The write-ups of ghost ships, kraken, mermaids, and sea serpents all point to the CSG's inspiration as much as the CSG itself, as does the inclusion of a trained monkey.

Physically, this is a nice-looking hardback. The artwork -- drawn from the CSG -- is decent, as is the writing, and what looks like oddly colored text is actually a series of clues in a treasure-hunt competition.

Personally, the *Pirates of the Spanish Main RPG* is not the best pirate-themed RPG available. That is still Green Ronin's *[Skull & Bones: Swashbuckling Horror in the Golden Age of Piracy,](#)* which is more interesting and more detailed, but this new release is certainly not a poor entry in the genre. It is not quite the introductory RPG it wants to be, but as a crossover RPG from the CSG, it does a passable job. Being ahistorical and cinematic in both style and source, the *Pirates of the Spanish Main RPG* is very accessible. Considering the lack of piratical RPGs currently on the gaming shelf, it fills that niche rather well. Mechanically and thematically easy to pick up and play, *Pirates of the Spanish Main: Swashbuckling Roleplaying in the Age of Sail* lets players swash their buckles and commit acts of daring with élan.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

A Thanatopsis Of Basilisks

"ANNE. Out of my sight! Thou dost infect my eyes.
RICH. Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine.
ANNE. Would they were basilisks, to strike thee dead!
RICH. I would they were, that I might die at once;
For now they kill me with a living death."
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III,* I:ii:144-152

In that bit of byplay, Shakespeare says it all. That a gaze can infect, and that seeing the danger may only -- or also -- create it. Thus perception makes reality, and reality's only defense is to kill you. Or to blur your perception so much that you don't even know what you've seen. All those answers, mirror-wise and backward, infect the eyes of the basilisk. Or is it the cockatrice? Do they exist if we can't see them? Or must they exist if we can't see them? Well, that, as the Bard says elsewhere, is the question . . .

". . . All who see its eyes expire immediately. The basilisk serpent also has the same power. It is a native of the province of Cyrenaica, not more than 12 inches long, and adorned with a bright white marking on the head like a sort of diadem. It routs all snakes with its hiss, and does not move its body forward in manifold coils like the other snakes but advancing with its middle raised high. It kills bushes not only by its touch but also by its breath, scorches up grass and bursts rocks. Its effect on other animals is disastrous: it is believed that once one was killed with a spear by a man on horseback and the infection rising through the spear killed not only the rider but also the horse. Yet to a creature so marvelous as this -- indeed kings have often wished to see a specimen when safely dead -- the venom of weasels is fatal: so fixed is the decree of nature that nothing shall be without its match."
-- Pliny the Elder, *Natural History,* VIII:33

Good old Pliny isn't quite our earliest source for the basilisk. That honor goes, if my murky data are to be relied upon, to Democritus of Abdera, most famous for developing the atomic theory of matter in the 4th century B.C. But Pliny is by far our most complete résumé of classical intelligence on the beast, leaving almost nothing for later writers like Aelian to do except add that the basilisk fears cock-crow, which is fatal to it. But as befits its regal state ("basilisk" comes from the Greek *basileos,* or "king"), the basilisk is far more fatal to its surroundings. Pliny covers every possible base: the "basilisk serpent" kills with its gaze (or at least kills those "who see its eyes"), its hiss, its touch, its breath (which may be fiery, as it "scorches up" vegetation), and last but not least its supremely venomous blood. As the poet Lucan says, it creates a desert wherever it dwells, rather like Agricola's Roman legions.

"They hatch cockatrice eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper."
-- Isaiah 59:5

About 350 years or so later, Cassianus informs us that the basilisk is born "from the eggs of birds which in Egypt are called ibises," probably based on a misunderstanding of Ammianus' report of the ibis' propensity for eating baby snakes and laying eggs, though not snake eggs, through its beak. Things got even more snarled up when Isidore of Seville tried to combine Ammianus, Cassianus, and the passage from Isaiah above with an entirely different story from Pliny, one about the bird (or snake) that lives inside the crocodile's jaws. Isidore wound up saying nothing clearly at all, but later commentators doped out that a weasel somehow lived in the crocodile's jaws and killed it. Just like weasels kill basilisks. With the kind of thoroughgoing malapropism of which only the medievals were truly capable, Isidore's conflated texts from Pliny got intermixed with Cassianus' garbled Ammianus to produce the word "cockatrice," probably derived from *crocodilis* via *cocodrilis* and many similar scribal hiccups. The (crowned) snake, possibly born of an ibis egg, who fears the crow of the (crested) rooster became, by the time of Alexander of Neckham's bestiary (ca. 1180), a snake born from a rooster's egg.

The illustrations in 12th-century bestiaries already show the basilisk with a rooster head, and two generations later Pierre de Beauvais explains that the rooster's egg, laid on a dung-heap and hatched by a toad, produces a half-snake half-rooster that fears only cock-crow, weasels, or mirrors. (Around this time a few classical-minded scholars,

remembering that Lucan had said the basilisk grew from the blood of the Gorgons -- about whom more in another Transmission -- decided that its gaze might petrify people in addition to just plain killing them.) The end result of all this tomfoolery was to replace the simple snake (or lizard) of Pliny with a kind of chimerical half-snake half-rooster (the "basilicoc" of Chaucer), which eventually became the default version of the creature. To get back to the snake version, some authorities had to postulate that the cockatrice's egg, in turn hatched out by a toad, produced Pliny's supremely venomous serpents, occasionally with two heads, one on each end, for more efficient death-vision.

"But the Basilisk of elder times was a proper kind of Serpent, not above three palms long, as some account; and differenced from other Serpents by advancing his head, and some white marks or coronary spots upon the crown, as all authentick Writers have delivered. Nor is this Cockatrice only unlike the Basilisk, but of no real shape in Nature; and rather an Hieroglyphical fansie, to express different intentions, set forth in different fashions."
-- Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*

So now that we've got at least two versions of the myth, what could the basilisk have been in dull old reality? (There's a real-life "basilisk" in Mexico, but it's a lizard named for the legendary beast, and needn't detain us further.) I think it's fairly obvious that the beast Pliny refers to began as the king cobra, which combines the "royal diadem" on the head with the erect posture he noted. Its cousin the spitting cobra can even blind or kill foes -- including birds -- at a distance. The Egyptians venerated the cobra, and it's not impossible to imagine them buying all kinds of snakes from dealers in Arabia, India, and wherever else they could find them, explaining how the various types of cobra could have joined in one "uber-cobra" legend. The slam dunk is Pliny's reference to the basilisk's mortal enemy, the weasel, which just screams "mongoose" to anyone paying attention. Some cobras eat eggs, which would explain their seeming emeregence from ibis (or chicken) nests. The cock-crow stuff might just be a standard folklore trope -- cock-crow drives away demons and ghosts, after all -- or a garbled reference to cobras' legendary (and fictional) susceptibility to sound. On a somewhat wilder note, we could postulate a now-extinct cobra species spitting a resinous, incidentally herbicidal venom that killed plants all around it and hardened over its prey.

"They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust."
-- Deuteronomy 32:24

Since apparently nobody could decide what the things looked like -- and since seeing them would almost invariably kill you -- it's not surprising that there is a dearth of basilisk sightings over the years. Pope Leo IV killed one with prayers in Rome in the ninth century, but not everyone can bring that kind of clout. Pierre de Beauvais reports on a basilisk hunt (with a mirror) in 1202; there exists a similar report from Vienna in 1212. In 1350 the knight Frettard de Claunay killed a cockatrice at cock-crow (though it returned every ten years), while in 1356, an earthquake nearly destroyed the city of Basel, and the town fathers apparently blamed the homophonous basilisk for the deed, making it the civic emblem thereafter. A man named Green killed a cockatrice in Wherwell, Hampshire, in 1538, also with a mirror, earning a patch of forest called Green's Acres to this day, where (eerily) very little vegetation grows. In the early seventeenth century, Father Eugene Roger saw a dead one in Syria, and a Kansas City preacher named Bob Jones (no relation to the university) had apocalyptic visions of the Basilisk Antichrist on July 23 of both 1996 and 1997.

I haven't seen any direct theorizing to this effect, but it strikes me that the drawings of the rooster-snake cockatrice look a whole lot like -- and may have come from -- similar depictions of Abraxas, the rooster-headed, snake-legged Demiurge postulated by a Gnostic heresiarch named (intriguingly enough) Basilides. We know Abraxas (or Abrasax, or Abarasx) from his appearance on amulets protecting against, among other things, the evil eye starting in the 2nd century A.D., but he remained very popular throughout the East. I offer up the likewise unsupported connection between the Jewish-Gnostic Abraxas and the Jewish demons known as the shedim, who were reported to have the feet of cocks and be the children of serpents. The best known of the shedim is Ketev Meriri, the "bitter destruction" linked in the Deuteronomy verse above with "the poison of serpents of the dust." In other words, with the poisoned desert of the basilisk. Ketev Meriri is covered with scales and (in one rabbinic report) resembles a turning ladle -- which is to say, an upright snake. And what was Ketev Meriri's power? Among other things, he killed with a glance.

"Another isle is there toward the north, in the sea Ocean, where that be full cruel and full evil women of nature. And they have precious stones in their eyen. And they be of that kind, that if they behold any man with wrath, they slay him

anon with the beholding, as doth the basilisk."
-- Sir John Mandeville, *Travels*

The combination of eyes, snakes, poison, and killing brings us around to our old friend the Lamia, who as it happens came from Libya, just like the basilisk. (And just like the Amazons, who perhaps provide the necessary feminine danger adduced by Sir John Mandeville, above.) What else happens in Libya Ultraterrestria? Why, St. George kills a dragon -- at "Silene," perhaps another Isidorean misprint for "Cyrene" -- with a spear, no less, just as Pliny urges us not to kill a basilisk. The death of George's dragon relieves a famine and nourishes a desert; again this very serpentine dragon seems rather basilisk-ish. And once more around the coil, as if distorted in the cockatrice-thwarting mirror, we have the tale of the Argonaut Mopsus, who knew the Language of the Birds, killed by snake-bite in Libya. Bird and serpent, cock and basilisk, the secret of the Sirens (Cyrenes?) traded for death in a serpent's hiss.

"But when they would represent Eternity differently, they delineate a Serpent with its tail covered by the rest of its body: the Egyptians call this Uraeus, which in the Greek language signifies Basilisk . . . The Egyptians say that Eternity is represented by this animal; because of the three existing species of serpents, the others are mortal, but this alone is immortal; and because it destroys any other animal by merely breathing upon it even without biting. And hence, inasmuch as it thus appears to have power over life and death, they place it upon the head of the Gods."
-- Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica*

But our path takes yet another snaky turn when we confront the 4th-century A.D. Greek adept Horapollo, whose interpretations of the hieroglyphs transcended petty linguistics to shape medieval magic for a millennium. To him, the basilisk is a symbol of immortality, and it becomes a divine halo, the Uraeus. Some versions of Horapollo depict the basilisk as a ouroboros, the serpent biting its own tail -- which, for a basilisk, might well be a suicidal act. This leads me ineluctably toward the conjunction of the basilisk with the phoenix, which also symbolizes immortality through death. The phoenix, remember, begins as a "worm" inside an egg -- just as the basilisk begins as a "wyrm" inside an egg. Both basilisk and phoenix are identified with fire, with Egypt, and with the "dog days" of the heliacal rising of Sirius. During these hot weeks, the phoenix returns to Heliopolis, and the cockatrice eggs are laid. The dog days also roughly correspond with Bob Jones' basilisk visions, and with the *bein hametztarim* or "perilous straits" -- the 21 days between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av, during which the Ketev Meriri is abroad.

Pliny describes the basilisk's blood as "brighter red than cinnabar," implying a connection between basilisk blood and mercury. This leads us to the perhaps not surprising by now revelation that the alchemists considered the basilisk a mighty symbol. The cockatrice, especially, conveys the Conjunctio, the Alchemical Marriage of opposites. (Like basilisk and phoenix, perhaps?) Albertus Magnus quotes Hermes Trismegistus (incorrectly) as saying that the basilisk skin gives silver the appearance of gold; by the 15th century Sir George Ripley, court alchemist to King Edward IV of England, was quoting Ramon Llull (also incorrectly) as saying that as the basilisk fixes its prey by eye, so operates the Azoth on matter. The basiliks fixes, kills, what it sees -- the Azoth fixes, distills, mercury into silver. And since Hermes tells us that the basilisk skin turns silver to gold, what could the basilisk be but the Philosopher's Stone itself, the True Red Elixir? Ripley lets the cat out of the bag himself, writing: "Our Baselysk, otherwyse our Cokatryce, our great Elixir most of pryse." It's probably just a coincidence that a nuclear fusion reaction would transmute minerals, just like the Stone -- and petrify (or mummify?) a target and blast the land far around into desert, like the basilisk. (Browne describes the basilisk's poison as "pestilential Atoms." Democritus invented atomic theory and first describes the basilisk. Coincidence, yep.) Could the basilisk's "hiss" and "glare" be sonoluminescent fusion, emitted by whatever negative space, whatever Hawking chimera, whatever ineffably twisted superstring the cockatrice truly represents?

"If he who saw you is alive,
Then your history is entirely lies,
If he died not, he can be ignored,
If dead, he could not have told a word."
-- Francisco de Quevedo, "The Basilisk"

Having chased the basilisk this far, where have we got to? Risking death, we see that something about this beast does not want to be seen, does not want to be known or apprehended. Pliny warned that it was not to be approached, despite the curiosity of kings. Indeed, attempting to pin it down results in a comic-opera etymology in which the basilisk is the

enemy of the crocodile which is the name of the cockatrice which is hatched from the cock which terrifies the basilisk which is the prey of the weasel and so on around in an ouroboros spiral. No wonder the thing can only be killed with -- seen in -- a mirror. If the Lamia is the quantum options of perspective as epistemology, and the Phoenix is the eye of destruction flickering from world to world, perhaps the Basilisk is the necessary indeterminacy between them and the warning of its necessity. Seeing is believing, and believing -- picking just one option, collapsing the wave front, focusing in and perceiving the twisted shape in the desert -- can kill you when you see it. So now you don't.

Pyramid Interviews

Free RPG Day Extravaganza
Aldo Ghiozzi of Impressions Advertising
Joseph Goodman of Goodman Games

Interview by Steven Marsh

A few months ago, a buzz began building in the RPG world about an event sure to pique the interest of tabletop gamers . . . especially for those seeking something new or for folks on a budget. Free RPG Day is coming on Saturday, June 23, with over a dozen publishers offering up a free adventure, quickstart rule book, or RPG supplement (while supplies last) for those who visit participating retailers. And the plan is to ensure that these items are brand new, so you've never seen these items before.

But how did Free RPG Day come about, and what does it hope to accomplish? For answers, *Pyramid* first went to the man with the plan: Aldo Ghiozzi -- owner of Impressions Advertising & Marketing -- who is the mastermind and ringleader behind Free RPG Day, sat down for a few moments with us to give us the inside scoop.

* * *

Pyramid: **Okay . . . Free RPG Day: What's the 100-word-or-less pitch?**

Aldo Ghiozzi: We hope retailers use the giveaways to create an event and experience in their store to help spur interest in RPGs.

Pyramid: **Who is Free RPG Day targeted at? Is it intended for hardcore gamers that publishers are hoping to woo with something new, folks familiar with RPGs, people who have no clue what this RPG-thing is all about, or some combination?**

Aldo: I have said straight from the beginning that I have no intention to try and make this event something to attract people who have never heard of RPGs before. My goal is to either get the hardcore RPG players to play more or get the players who have gone away over the years.

Pyramid: **How big do you see the "fallen away" audience being? Is that a vast untapped reserve, and -- if so -- how hard do you think it's going to be to get them back?**

Aldo: Wow . . . I don't think I have the knowledge or ability to answer this. Again, I just believe some consumers got so sick of *d20 System* this and *d20 System* that, that they just walked away.

Pyramid: **I'm presuming this is based on the success of the Free Comic Book Day, right?**

Aldo: Correct. I wish I could say I was being creative, but it is taken directly from FCD.

Pyramid: **Free Comic Book Day has generally been timed to coinside with a super-hero-themed blockbuster movie. Is there a reason June 23 was picked?**

Aldo: Most consumers will not see the significance of the date, but I picked it because it was after two industry trade shows (GamesExpo and GTS) so I could pitch publishers and retailers. And, it was before Origins and Gen Con so we could see if it helped spur some sales for some publishers at those shows.

Pyramid: **Aldo, you're the contact person for this. Was this event your idea? How long has it been "in the**

works"?

Aldo: Ironically, no, this was not my idea. The spark came from Joseph Goodman from Goodman Games while we were having lunch last December. He wanted the event for his own *Dungeon Crawl Classics* series, but then I said we should just open it up and get a few publisher friends and retailers on-board. Well, 300 stores and 14 publishers later . . . .

Pyramid: **Yeah, getting over a dozen publishers to do *anything* coordinated is a real accomplishment! <grin> How enthusiastic of a response did you get from them? Was it something where you had folks jumping all over this opportunity, or were they wary?**

Aldo: I wish I could say it was that easy, but in the hobby game market, it is always hard to get publishers to spend money. Many wanted in, but they had to determine if printing 1,000-3,000 copies of something was worth it.

Pyramid: **Well, even assuming that you can get those numbers down to $0.50-$1.00 a copy, that's still a big chunk of change. On the other hand, it *is* a chance to get to target 1,000-3,000 would-be-customers directly . . .**

Aldo: Yes, and that is the key: hitting 300 stores and hopefully thousands of consumers that are completely and utterly interested in RPGs is very valuable to the publishers.

Pyramid: **And how has the response from retailers been? Have they been excited, or did they need convincing?**

Aldo: The retailers have been the ones with the overwhelming desire to make this work. I was floored to get 300 stores; my goal was 100. On top of all of this, I had to cut off stores from signing up three weeks ago because we barely have enough product to satisfy the existing stores. *And* . . . these are only stores in the U.S. I had a lot of Canadian and European stores getting mad at me because I told them that Year One is a test and only available to U.S. stores! (Don't worry, though . . . worldwide next year!)

Pyramid: **Was the decision to limit this to the United States because of logistics, economics, something legal . . .?**

Aldo: Total logistics. I did not want to go out there and promise the sun, moon, and sky on year one; I wanted to make sure to get it right the first time, and if something did go wrong, I had the small group of U.S. stores to deal with. Year two will be worldwide, so no worries after this year!

Pyramid: **There's been at least one other "bring attention to games" program that I'm aware of: National Games Week. In your opinion, how does this program differ from that one (in outlook, participation, philosophy, or anything else)?**

Aldo: NGW's goal was to brings games to the mass market. As I said above, my goal is to only inspire existing gamers are past RPG players. On top of that, NGW was just about playing games and selling games to consumers; FRD is all about giving away the freebies so folks have something instantly new to play as each product freebie has to be a never-before-seen RPG product.

Pyramid: **It seems like you've been adamant that Free RPG Day contain that "new product" element, insisting that publishers not use this as, for example, an opportunity to dump existing stock. How important is this to you, and why?**

Aldo: Adamant is a strong word. This is just another copied element from Free Comic Book Day; they only give away never-before-seen comics, so I just figured it was par for the course.

Pyramid: **In looking over the fact sheet, it looks like publishers are publishing 1,000 items, to be distributed among "100 stores." Now, according to the website, 300 stores have signed up. How does this work out? Are those 1,000 items being distributed to all 300 stores, are only some stores getting the 1,000 items, are publishers printing more than the 1,000, or something else creative?**

Aldo: Yeah . . . that was the original goal [to divide each publisher's 1,000 freebies among the participating retailers]. Since then, publishers like White Wolf, Goodman, Flying Buffalo, and others agreed to send more than the 1,000 required to cover the extra stores.

Pyramid: **Okay; so some of the publishers are going to be coming up with extra stock, and there's at least 1,000 copies floating around for some stores. Does this mean that if I'm really looking forward to, say, the Quickstart rules for** *Castles & Crusades* **or** *Changeling: The Lost,* **what is my best bet? Are my odds pretty good if I show up at store opening on that Saturday, or should I call ahead to my shop and sort it out with them? Or should I not get my hopes up for any particular offering and instead go in with the idea of seeing what** *is* **available?**

Aldo: That's a tough question; I think it depends on the store and what they are doing to create excitement. If you see a store with flyers, posters and a calendar talking about free food, free prizes and gaming all day, then chances are you will be fighting for the key freebies. On the flip side, some folks may be lucky to find the stores that are just putting the freebies on a table for folks to grab with no challenge from other consumers.

Pyramid: **Have you reached any kind of agreement with publishers about this being "exclusive" product, or are these freebies all things that could find a home elsewhere (perhaps as free or for-pay PDFs from the publishers after the event)?**

Aldo: This is actually a requirement. The product *must* be new and cannot be given away until *after* June 23; the whole point is to get consumers to have a reason to go into their local retailer. If they were available online, then why go in?

Pyramid: **Sorry; I phrased that poorly. After this year's Free RPG Day, the publishers can do what they want with any extra copies or electronic versions of their giveaways, right?**

Aldo: Correct. Some publishers are even printing them with alternate covers to sell later on through distribution.

Pyramid: **You've got 300 stores signed up; do you have any idea what percentage that is of all RPG retailers?**

Aldo: All of them! <laughs> There is actually a joke in RPG publisher circles that there are only 200-300 stores in the U.S. that carry RPGs in any capacity beyond Wizards of the Coast and White Wolf. I wish I had stats, but I don't.

Pyramid: **It's obvious that this has been a program designed with the retailer in mind from the beginning, since the freebies are only available at participating stores. This says to me that you view brick-and-mortar shops as being a vital part of the effort to get new gamers since -- for example -- you could have done the entire promotion as an "online only" event, with the books being offered free for one day. Can you expand a bit on this philosophy here (assuming my assessment of it was correct)? Additionally, is this a case where the scarcity of these books makes for a more effective promotion?**

Aldo: Yes, definitely made for the brick-and-mortar retailer. These are the people that are in the trenches everyday trying to evangelize games, and I believe a retail store location is the only way consumers can get excited about games (except maybe at local cons). Free RPG Day is all about the experience, and I hope stores do everything they can to get people excited to play RPGs more . . . or once again.

Pyramid: **What are your thoughts on the current state of the RPG industry? Do you see Free RPG Day more as being a means of revitalizing a suffering industry, or an effort to help grow a healthy one?**

Aldo: I actually don't see RPGs as suffering anymore. I continue to see RPG sales for *d20 System* and non-*d20 System* products increasing. In my opinion, things have settled from the glut and people are back on track to play more . . . and my hopes are that Free RPG Day will help get those people to play new RPGs from publishers they have never heard of before.

Pyramid: **How do you define "success" for this program? Do you have any concrete goals or ideas, or is it more a case of "I'll know we've done well when I see it"?**

Aldo: That is a funny question to me because I always said that my goal for the event is to financially break even! Each charge to the retailers and the sponsorships to the publishers have gone straight into a pot to pay for every expense to make the event as big as possible. Any profit was put into marketing the event: posters for stores, an ad in *Dungeon,* flyers, postcards, exhibit booths, etc.

Pyramid: **Assuming Free RPG Day is successful, do you have any ideas for how you'll tweak it next year?**

Aldo: I did mention this above, but the big change for next year is that it will be available worldwide.

Pyramid: **It looks like no one's signed up for the Gold-level sponsorship. Any theories as to why that is?**

Aldo: Yeah, that was interesting, but it was part of the learning experience. Actually, Wizards of the Coast was going to do it, but we only gave them five months advance notice for the event and they need 10 months to create new product. They wanted to just pay the sponsorship and put in a catalog, but after a lengthy conference call we all thought that it might make consumers and retailers believe there was a Wizards freebie . . . and we didn't want that. They have verbally committed to 2008 and told me to call in July to work it out. I still believe though that the Gold Level sponsorship is very much worth it considering it was based off of only 100 stores and we got 300 . . . but I am sure that since this is a first year event, publishers want to sit back and see how it goes.

Pyramid: **Again, assuming it's successful, do you plan on tweaking those levels next time?**

Aldo: Tweaking in price? Yup. Tweaking in a package sense? No. <grin>

Pyramid: **So any last thoughts before we get in line at our local game shops?**

Aldo: In the end, I just want people to know that I have no goals or hope that this event will "save" the RPG industry or bring in vats of new players. Many people think that is my goal and I always stress that the goal is to just get people excited to play more or bring in players who happened to stop playing over the years.

And with that our interview with Aldo Ghiozzi ended. But *Pyramid* had a question or two about the origins of Free RPG Day, so we tracked down the previously mentioned Joseph Goodman of Goodman Games. While we had his ear, we asked a bit about a publisher's point of view for this promotion.

* * *

Pyramid: **Joseph, do you have any anecdotes or insight as to how you originally envisioned this promotion? How does the promotion as it shaped up compare to what was in your mind's eye?**

Joseph Goodman: A lot of my promotional ideas are based around how to get fans excited about game stores. That's why I sponsor my 20% off sale every May, why I provide free *Dungeon Crawl Classics* spinner racks to retail stores, why I created the Click-to-Brick Conversion Project to send online gamers back into stores, and why I started producing $2 modules. My idea behind "Free Adventure Module Day" (the original concept) was to give fans a reason to physically step into a game store and see what's new, giving brick-and-mortar stores a little something that nobody else had. Aldo suggested broadening the concept to "Free RPG Day," and the final result is better than I'd ever hoped; we have a broad publisher base and a huge number of stores signed up.

Pyramid: **How do you see the current state of the gaming biz?**

Joseph: I think things are good. This is a fad-based industry, and things are always best when lightning strikes. It's been several years since the last lightning bolt, but that's not always a bad thing! Millions of people are still gaming, and game stores everywhere are still selling a lot of pen-and-paper games. It's the job of everybody in the industry to give fans a reason to walk into a store to buy a game. Publishers who are being proactive with events like Free RPG Day are seeing the rewards. Fans everywhere are excited about the event, and it's shown me there's a lot of energy out there . . . all you need is a lightning rod to tap it.

Pyramid: **You've mentioned a couple of times that one of your goals is to get fans and would-be fans into brick-and-mortar game shops. Why do you feel that's important?**

Joseph: I think stores are the best place to expose fans to new games, build the social network surrounding game play, and introduce new fans to games. The Internet allows existing customers to pursue their hobby, but doesn't expand the fan base. Conventions operate on a similar principle. But stores . . . stores are in the public space, and every day they show new people what our hobby is all about.

Pyramid: **How will Goodman Games measure the success of this promotion?**

Joseph: By more people gaming with our products. The retail-level promotions I've done in the past have always resulted in significant, retail-level sales increases. The first $2 module I released resulted in a huge spike in backstock sales, and the first 20% off sale I sponsored more than tripled my usual sales. Every sale means another fan playing one of my games. If Free RPG Day works as well as previous promotions, I expect to have several thousand new fans after June 23.

Pyramid: **Goodman Games obviously has a lot of fans who would no doubt clamor for new adventures (especially free ones!), but Free RPG Day seems to be targeting folks who aren't already fans of the various promoted lines. Are you afraid that the die-hard fans will scoop up the goodies . . . or is it okay so long as they find a good home?**

Joseph: I'll share a funny anecdote. On one of the RPG collecting web sites, a fan lamented that he couldn't get a copy of my Free RPG Day modules because no local store signed up for Free RPG Day. His response was that he would stop collecting my products because I was making them too hard to acquire. I laughed at that. I'm literally spending thousands of dollars to give away thousands upon thousands of free adventure modules on June 23. These aren't cheap-o products; they have the same production values as the modules I normally charge $8 to $10 for. Some of the die-hard existing fans will definitely see this as an opportunity to scoop up a rare collectible, and I do expect to see some folks standing in line at 6:00 a.m. to make sure they get a copy. That will only add interest to the casual fans, who will wonder what all the excitement is about. One guy on a forum complaining that he can't get something only makes the rest of the fans want it more!

Pyramid: **Did the minds behind the giveaways approach these items any differently than your regular adventures (in terms of ideas, execution, philosophy, etc.)?**

Joseph: Goodman Games has been doing promotional modules like this for years. *Dungeon Crawl Classics #11* and *#31* are both priced at $2. *Etherscope: Just a Delivery* is $3. *Xcrawl: Dungeonbattle Brooklyn* was already in production as a $2 module before I designated it for Free RPG Day. So we've got a lot of familiarity with the concept. Promotional modules are designed to introduce fans to a larger concept, so they have to be archetypal and good examples of the larger brand. Aside from that, they're just like the rest of the product line.

Pyramid: **For fans who can't make it out to the event (especially those outside the United States), are there any plans for to make Goodman Games' Free RPG Day offerings available after June 23?**

Joseph: The basic concept behind Free RPG Day is to get fans into game stores. I am not entirely altruistic in this endeavor. I believe that game stores are the future of this industry. If a fan wants a free RPG product, I'm willing to give it to them, but the fan's part of the deal is they have to patronize their local store. I've already had a number of stories from fans who used www.freeRPGday.com to find a store nearby that they hadn't patronized before. That's great!

Overseas stores will be eligible to participate next year, and were only excluded this year because Aldo and I had to work out the logistics entirely on our own without support from the every tier of the industry. At this point it's obvious that the June 23 proof-of-concept should warrant support from all tiers.

* * *

Will there be riots outside game shops in two weeks? Will thousands of gamers find a new game line or publisher they didn't know they loved? Only time will tell.

Until then, however, we noted that information on the official sponsors' page about the actual products being offered was a little scanty (consisting of nothing more than a title or cover image). Seeking to fill this void, our agents tracked down a few more details about some of the products being offered.

The Temple On Terilek Prime (*Amarillo Design Bureau, Inc.*): Written for both **d20 System** and **GURPS** *Fourth Edition,* this 16-page booklet includes a follow-the-numbers adventure exploring an ancient temple on a distant planet. It includes sample characters with full data for both systems, along with rules for phasers, tricorders, and communicators. Players take the role of a small Star Fleet team that has been left to explore the temple while their starship goes to solve some crisis. They quickly discover that a Klingon military intelligence officer and a swashbuckling gang of Orion Pirates are already inside the temple, copying its ancient weapons technology. This adventure is designed to showcase the **Prime Directive RPG Universe.**

Check It Out If You Like: Classic sci-fi television, movies, and games.

Imperial Town Of Tell Qa: Northern Bastion Of The Falling Empire (*Adventure Games Publishing*): This 16-page campaign setting sourcebook for **Castles & Crusades** includes an entire town set in the Empire of Viridistan in the **Wilderlands of High Adventure.** Tell Qa is a town on the border between civilization and savagery, on the frontier of a crumbling, decadent empire with monsters and barbarians peeking over the walls. A bastion of law and order amidst howling chaos, Tell Qa provides countless opportunities for urban, wilderness, and dungeon adventures, as well as a complete home base for an adventuring party. (Preview available online at http://jamesmishler.blogspot.com.)

Check It Out If You Like: Obviously, the **Wilderlands of High Fantasy** campaign setting, home of the classic **City State of the Invincible Overlord;** the classic **The Village of Hommlet** adventure; and other classic urban "swords & sorcery" and fantasy settings.

Dungeon Crawl Classics #51.5: The Sinister Secret Of Whiterock (*Goodman Games*): A 16-page 1st-level adventure for the **d20 System** that can be run on its own or as preparation for the blockbuster 500-page **Castle Whiterock** dungeon crawl coming out later this year. This adventure is a great introduction to the **Dungeon Crawl Classics** line, which has more than 50 adventures available to support campaigns from 1st to 20th level.

Check It Out If You Like: Old-school classic dungeon crawling, epic campaign adventures.

Wicked Fantasy Factory #0: The Temple Of Blood (*Goodman Games*): This 16-page 1st-level adventure for the **d20 System** is a great introduction to the Wicked Fantasy Factory and its high-energy approach to gaming.

Check It Out If You Like: Hack-and-slash dungeon crawling, the **God of War** video games.

Xcrawl: Dungeonbattle Brooklyn (*Goodman Games*): If you love dungeon crawls, you'll love **Xcrawl.** This special alternate-cover edition of the introductory 24-page 1st-level adventure sends the heroes into their first professional crawl! **Xcrawl** is like **Dungeons & Dragons** meets the WWE meets a modern game show: The players are superstar athletes taking their chances in a live-on-pay-per-view dungeon death sport. It's a modern-day world with a fantasy twist. Citizens of the North American Empire tune in every week to watch their favorite celebrities get eaten, paralyzed, turned to stone, and ripped apart. The nations hunger for blood and mayhem grows with every contest. How will you fare?

Check It Out If You Like: Reality television, professional wrestling, tongue-in-cheek hack-and-slash fun.

Pyramid Review

Zombies!!! 6: Six Feet Under

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Written by Kerry Breitenstein and Todd A. Breitenstein

Illustrated by Dave Aikins and Kurt Miller

16 map tiles, 32 event cards, 10 sewer tokens, one-page rules sheet; $14.99

Zombies!!! 6: Six Feet Under is another expansion set for *[Zombies!!!](#),* the board game of tile-laying, shotgun-shucking, dead-body-blasting mayhem in which the players must escape "Anytown America" by using its resources and coping with the endless hordes of the corpse cortege between them and the Helipad. Of course, the players have an advantage in the benefits that the game's Event Cards grant, all superbly illustrated to ghoulish effect by Dave Aikins. And while the players might end up in the grave if a game goes badly, that is not what *Zombies!!! 6: Six Feet Under* is about. No, this expansion focuses on going below ground to get around, specifically via the sewers and the underground.

Since its publication in 2001, *Zombies!!!* has received four expansions and one complete add-on game. Not all have been that successful, too often just increasing the game's sprawling nature or providing a fiddly new mechanic. Fortunately, *Zombies!!! 6: Six Feet Under* is a whole lot better than that in three simple ways. First, it does not add another area to explore -- and find space on your table for. Second, it is designed to be mixed in with the basic *Zombies!!!* game, rather than being played from a separate pile. Third, its new Event Cards and mechanics are a better fit for its "get around underground" theme.

Of course, *Zombies!!! 6: Six Feet Under* does come with several new standard tiles, mostly road sections, but also some new buildings, including the Bank, the Record Store, and the Liquor Store. The latter has one card associated with it: "Inflated Self Esteem!" This depicts a drunken man gesticulating rudely at zombies looking on through the windows, and when played in the Liquor Store, allows a player to raise his health to a maximum of 5 by missing a turn. It is a great card and also my favorite card in this expansion, but it highlights the lack of associated Event Cards for the other two buildings. As but one example, the Record Store card could have provided an opportunity for some disc-throwing mayhem as in *Shaun of the Dead.* Its associated card could have enabled a player to take out any three zombies in the building or outside it, and be called (say) "Spin This!!!," "My Favorite 45s," or "These Are from My Record Collection!!!"

The other new building tile is the Subway Station. A player can enter this just like any other building, but by missing a turn, he can travel to any other Subway Station currently in play. This means that he cannot remain aboard a train and shuttle between Stations, and of course, there has to be more than one Subway Station in play and he must still deal with any zombies immediately threatening him in the Station before he boards the train.

The new rules for sewer movement require the use of the Sewer Tokens. Every player begins the game with two. To enter a sewer, a token is played on a street space and a player lays his pawn on its back to indicate his current subterranean status. For each turn spent moving in the sewer, a player loses one Health token (or Guts token if playing with *Zombies!!! 5*). A player staying underground too long will run out of Health and die. Entering the sewers, though, allows him to move unhindered by the cadaver cavalcade, which dislike the sewers. To exit, the second sewer token is placed down and the player's pawn is stood up to indicate he has returned above ground.

Many of this expansion's Event Cards are tied into this new form of movement. For example, "Flood" forces a player

to leave the sewers, while "Oh . . . That's New" blocks a sewer exit or entrance, by (as the card shows) making the road closed for sewer construction for a turn. The underground-specific card is "Missed Stop," which forces a player to exit by a Subway Station other than the intended one.

Some of the new less-conditional or location-specific event cards are really vicious. For example, "Are You Scared Yet?" cancels out the effect of all weapon or item cards in play for a turn, while "Zombies!!! Come Out and Play" adds a zombie to every possible space adjacent to every player. Then there is "It WAS Here!?!" This is a game-busting card because it moves the Helipad tile, the destination and escape route for the game, to any legal spot on the board. Used at the right time, this can deny a rival player the game or bring it a lot closer to someone. Either way, it is one way to lose friends.

This is one of the best expansions for *Zombies!!!* to date, primarily because it alters how the game is played. Normally, movement is sedate, a few squares at a time, hampered of course by whatever zombies are in front of the players. Now a player has additional movement options (other than those already provided by Event Cards), both of which let him avoid the walking dead. Sewer movement is best used to avoid pockets of zombies because a player has more control over it, while Subway movement is dependent upon the placement of stations but enables a player to travel a far greater distance. The danger, of course, is that Subway Stations become focal points for the game, a player battling to enter and leave them to gain the movement bonus as his rivals seed the streets around the Station with zombies. This is part of the game anyway, and the new rules just give the setting of zombies on the other players a potential geographical foci.

The *Zombies!!!* game line gives you plenty of choice in terms of expansions and options, but for whatever reason, it is rare that all of the expansions are played at once. Certainly this is so for my regular gaming group, so we pick and choose the expansions we want to include in our game. Indeed, we even pick the bits out of the expansions that we like and ignore the rest. *Zombies!!! 6: Six Feet Under* is not like that, for despite a missed opportunity or two, we liked this expansion as a whole, and it is one that we have happily mixed into our game. *Zombies!!! 6: Six Feet Under* feels the most tightly focused expansion in some time and benefits by doing its theme fair justice.

-- Matthew Pook

Big Mouths and the Monsters that Have Them

by Nick Grant

We have too many monsters today. We all know what monsters are: Those distorted, horrific things that hang out with villains. Usually not masterminds in and of themselves, they still present some threat and need to be overcome. Between the fourth installation of the *Monster Manual* series, the *Encyclopedia Cthulhiana* and the who-knows-how-many **GURPS** supplements with extensive bestiaries -- not to mention the mythological literature which inspired all that content -- we have hundreds on hundreds of unique, fascinating, and imaginative monsters. But do we really need that many?

There was a time in my childhood when the word "monster" meant something specifically ambiguous. Back when Bill Watterson painted those terrifying red eyes hovering over teeth that somehow caught the only light in the room and Berkeley Breathed drew a carrot-topped kid in pink pajamas screaming at a horned horror from his closet, I didn't care if the creature had 10D8 or 10D4 hit points. They were there, they were hungry, and they could gobble up a tiny little kid like me with two bites . . . maybe three. This was back before fear was quantifiable.

Now, of course, inundated as we are with yugoloths and yuan-ti it's hard to differentiate between monsters without numbers. Mountain Giants have STR 20, scary. Hill Giants have STR 8, not scary. Somehow, now that we know the difference between a ghoul and a ghast, neither are frightening. They've lost that fundamental mystery that the slobbering beasties under the bed had, and that Sunday morning comic strip writers seemed uncannily able to evoke. What was it that their monsters had that our crypt-haunting dungeon-stalking bundles of walking XP lack?

I came up with a few keys that I think can be used to generate solid, scary monsters. I can't promise that your player's 20th-level fighter will be quaking in his stylish-yet-not-so-affordable boots, but using these guidelines to make, modify, or present the monsters in your campaign will keep them fresh and interesting. And who knows . . . maybe they'll stop tallying how many hit points they've knocked off the thing and start treating it like the big broiling obstacle it ought to be.

Monsters are Grotesque

The word "grotesque" gets thrown around a lot these days, especially in gaming circles. In my group, it's usually used to mean something along the lines of "super-gross" (i.e. "wasn't it grotesque, what we did to that village?" or "I can't believe you're wearing his stomach as a hat; that's just grotesque.") The facts that the word sounds so silly and that it's meaning is so dark makes it popular. Regardless of its common use though, it has a more specific meaning which I'm using here today: something is grotesque if some aspect of it is changed beyond acceptable limits. Let me explain.

There are basically two kinds of grotesquery, both rooted in the forced identification with something horrible. Physical grotesquery has to do with weird manipulations of human body, and social grotesquery with perversions of human (you guessed it!) social interactions and drives. One of these is bound to pop up in any monster you employ: monsters completely tangential to human experience generally have little effect on us. The Color Out of Space wasn't scary until it drove humans insane, and ghouls weren't chilling until we saw their distorted, exploded hunger.

Physical grotesquery doesn't get as much pure play in the West as it does in the East. Here, the physical break from human form tends to be absolutely minimal or totally complete: there are fewer of those disturbing grays which pervade Eastern (and particularly Japanese) mythology. Take White Wolf, for example, who are arguably the industry leaders on deep, complex looks at monsters. Of their current *World of Darkness* games, only one -- *Promethean* -- explores physical grotesquery extensively, while three *(Vampire, Mage, Werewolf)* are overwhelmingly social. Though both *Vampire* and *Werewolf* do dabble in the physical side of things (in the Nosferatu and Gauru, respectively), both games achieve that unity of empathy and repulsion because of social deviations. Also, although *Promethean's* horror depends on physical grotesquery, it does so in service of a more nuanced social aspect: the line between automation and sentience.

By contrast, Asian mythologies have a glut of weird physical deformities. Such bizarre creatures as *huta kuchi onna* (the two-mouthed woman), *rukuro kubi* (long-necked woman) or the *noppera bou* (faceless man) are iconic Japanese monsters. The West has a few of these -- Medusa comes to mind, as do giants and the ambiguous horned, tailed, pitchfork-wielding demon -- but they aren't nearly as prominent or frequent.

The key to powerful physical deformity is the human body. From this base (a commonality for all players) you can multiply, divide, increase, transpose, invert, and redefine any of the constituent parts. The most effective monsters push the bounds of this body a little too far. A beautiful woman may have long, flowing hair . . . animate it and you have Medusa.

Some parts of the body are iconic because of how they are used, and magnifying that property makes them scary. Hands are a good example, because they are so versatile. Harden them, add some rending claws and you have Grendel: horrific partially because he can only use his hands for destruction. Lengthen the fingers to super-dexterous lengths and you have ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer's*** The Gentlemen: frightening projections of upper-class elites who manipulate and master manual minutia with their extended digits. Psychic monsters might have huge heads that their necks have trouble supporting, while under-the-bed monsters might have uncomfortably big teeth. The important part of physical grotesquery is that the body is being manipulated in unnatural ways, so push the deformities to awkward extremes for the most effective results.

Social grotesquery is subtler, and more difficult to convey in a dungeon setting. It comes in a few different brands. The distortion of drives is the easiest to show, because it can be done with solitary monsters. This is what drives Vampire and Satyr mythology. White Wolf crystallizes the vampire situation well: they are in a constant struggle between their humanity and a perverse desire for human blood. You could hardly ask for a more clear-cut example of social grotesquery. Satyrs, while not necessarily horrific figures, are known for their grotesque sexual appetites. This magnification makes them compelling nemeses in certain settings (Paul Czege's ***Bacchanal*** comes to mind), and makes them interesting monsters regardless. There are any number of different drives to riff on for new monsters: hunger, thirst, friendship, dogma, sex, self-destruction, and novelty are all fine choices.

Permutations of social conventions are rarer and harder to model, but can be rewarding if you work them in right. The unholy feasts of Lovecraftian ghouls, the brutal hierarchy of Burning Wheel orcs, and the terrifying normalcy of the pod people all exemplify conventional grotesquery. These all take some pattern of social behavior and modify some part of it. The ghoul's feast takes an iconic human celebration -- the feast -- and makes two minor changes: the greediness of the participants is magnified and the normal food is replaced with corpses. By changing these elements, a normal celebration becomes a repulsive sacrilege, and the participants become monsters. The power here comes from the familiarity and the disgust. Players identify with the feast, but despise the cannibalism. That dissonance is the stuff that fleshes out a monster in the imagination.

Monsters are Dangerous

There's a paradox in gaming. We want danger, but we don't want to risk anything. We want excitement, but we dislike jeopardy. We spend hours looking up rules, auxiliary rules, and counter-rules to minimize the threat to our characters, and then complain that the adventure was boring. In order to make adventures fun, there has to be a real danger, but we also (theoretically) want to avoid character-death as much as possible. This puzzle of how to make monsters dangerous-but-not-too-dangerous has yielded some interesting answers, some angry answers, and some downright dumb answers.

The worst answer, to me, is that players should be able to kill everything they run across. The overwhelming fear at seeing a dead skeleton spontaneously animate and advance with menace in its burning eye sockets is lacking after having already bashed 30 of them to death with the good old club of clobbering. These fights are the useless, unstimulating tripe that should be reserved for video game systems. They belong nowhere near the vibrant, creative world that pen-and-paper RPGs have the potential to create. Ingenuity and a grasp of human emotion and drama is one of the things that humans still have machines unconditionally beaten on, and should be employed mercilessly in whatever game you're running.

Dangerous monsters are fun. The resolution to the paradox lies in distinguishing between dangerous and deadly. There are threats that have nothing to do with a character's vitality, but which are nevertheless undesirable. This is easy in games with complex goals and thoroughly developed characters: the antagonist presents a threat to the PC's family or friends, or starts a political revolution in his lands, or destroys his great cathedral. It is a little more difficult in games with one-dimensional characters, but is still possible: think along the lines of curses (gold becomes tin at the touch, anti-magic fields, conditional damage) and complications (if this little dinosaur gets away, he might be able to find a big dinosaur mother). Vary how the monsters imperil your adventurers, but make sure the threat is always palpable and serious.

Another bad answer to the paradox stems from absolute literalism. My first GM employed this philosophy: the world is a tough place. If your character dies, you were dabbling in the wrong places. He designed a massive world. There were cultures, histories, laws, maps, and charts. There was so much world in that game that there was hardly any room for our characters. We nevertheless pushed heroically forward, throwing caution to the wind with a pioneering spirit. As one might expect, it wasn't long before we died, made new characters, died again, and elected a new GM. The problem with this approach isn't that it is too dangerous (although it is), nor that this particular setting was un-fun (although it was), but rather that there is no sense of dramatic danger. The world wasn't against us; it was indifferent.

Monsters, to be effective, not only have to be dangerous, but have to be personally threatening in some way. A cliff may be dangerous, but is so impersonal that it's completely lame as a monster. The best monsters always apply to the characters' stories somehow. Sometimes the application is abstract and symbolic, sometimes it's direct and obvious, but it needs to be there for the characters to actually be engaged with the monster as a villain. The Boogey Man is a shadowy, shifty specter because he manifests children's fear of the dark. The brute power and grotesque size of the giant of the beanstalk is exciting because Jack is a young boy -- weak and small in a land of normally giant adults. By being significant in their daily lives, these monsters bring with them an emotional weight which will cause your players to invest more in the adventure.

Monsters are Alien

At home, whether it be a castle, an apartment, or a spaceship, the characters are comfortable. If it weren't for that dastardly prince who defamed their families, those ugly Reavers who cannibalized their ships, or that pernicious singing landlord who must have the rent, the characters could all stay at home and watch VH1 until their brains drizzled out their noses. But that's not the case, and now they are on an adventure. Monsters are there to add a touch of excitement and exoticism to the new world the characters venture into. They are manifestations of precisely what is dangerous and scary about their new setting. In some situations this is really easy to take advantage of, while in others it's a bit trickier. In either case, dealing with the alien nature of your monsters will contextualize them and make them more interesting to your players.

The simplest cases involve actual new worlds that characters venture into. In *The Wizard of Oz,* the fascistic flying monkeys reflect the dangerous aspect of Oz's randomness. The new world for Dorothy is typified by creative chaos, but that very creativity is dangerous in so far as it can be controlled by evil witches. So, by highlighting the difference between Dorothy's everyday world (sepia, anti-epic, logical) and the Wonderful Land of Oz (bright, mythological, creative), the monkeys do more than raise the stakes: they show just how different this world is from the old one. The monkeys are monsters because they represent an alien threat, rather than a normal one. Miss Gulch may be dangerous (and her nose bordering on grotesque), but she's not quite a monster. The same logic that created the monkeys can be applied to any game where the players venture to a fundamentally different dimension, planet, or even country.

The more complicated cases involve local problems. Whenever you don't technically have a new location to contrast with your adventurers, it's harder to forge monstrous creatures. The known isn't scary. However, the archetypical monster under the bed has continued to inspire fear in generations of children who have performed exhaustive searches of the crannies beneath their mattresses in daylight hours, so there must be something to the familiar.

In adventures that take place on the characters' turf, there is inevitably some upset to the normal balance. A new company came into town, the stars aligned in new ways, or the room suddenly became dark. By upsetting the status

quo, the home territory becomes the foreign territory. The idea of "home turf" no longer means the two acres in Kansas where the Dorothy grew up, but rather the social order of those acres, with Auntie Em making lemonade, Toto running around the yard and Ms. Gulch antagonizing -- but not actually changing -- the lot of them.

So how can monsters be made out of this unheimlich feeling? The movie *The Descent* comes to mind. In it, a spelunker suffers an accident after exploring a cave. Her daughter dies and she's hospitalized. After she has recovered, she and her friends go spelunking again, in a supposedly small cave. She soon discovers though, that the cave is actually a massive system, akin to what she and her friends would explore before the accident. At this point the impact of the upset status quo -- caves are now a source of fear, rather than adventure -- sets in and the movie becomes horrific. Blind, cannibalistic humanoids appear and start to terrorize the women. The reason we accept these weird monsters is because they are directly applicable to what psychologically distinguishes the caves now from the caves then. They are dangerous, random, and hateful, rather than being adventurous and fun. In the same way, whatever makes the world different now from how it was in more idyllic times in your campaign should be the motivation for the monsters you make, and should underpin your descriptions of the monsters you borrow.

Monsters have lost a lot of their impact over the years, but there's no reason they can't make a bloody resurgence. They don't have to be rarefied, they just need to become significant again. My hope is that like the misshapen, hungry creature-of-the-dark under Calvin's bed, the monsters of modern gaming can snap their teeth and hear a response other than "can we move into flanking position?"

Bibliography

- ***Bacchanal*** (http://www.halfmeme.com/bacchanal.html): A rare example of grotesque sexual appetites in roleplaying (and for free, too!)
- *Bloom County:* A good comic. The monsters may not give you nightmares, but they have an amusing psychological dimension.
- *[The Descent:](#)* A good look at how monsters can fit in modern games.
- *House of Leaves:* One of the most layered horror compositions ever, ever. The monster in it hits all of these guidelines with fantastic depth.
- The Obakemono Project (http://www.obakemono.com/index.php): This website has a pretty good compendium of Japanese Monsters and makes for a good resource.
- ["Pickman's Model"](#): a good example of social grotesquery, and a good story anyway.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Disguised and Endangered

A few days ago we returned to the [Children's Museum](#) in Indianapolis, this time for a proper visit (instead of the new-parents open house we attended the first time). Although we had planned to make a full day of the event, in order to fully see everything, we need not have worried; there was more than enough to do that we almost certainly didn't see half of what the museum offered. We're already making plans to go back in a week or two, to upgrade to an annual membership; really, this column is on the cusp of becoming the gaming essay equivalent of *Waiting for Godot,* with the audience as Vladimir and Estragon, and columns not about the Children's Museum filling the role of Godot.

Anyway, one of the exhibits I found most interesting was called "Spymaker," a temporary exhibit on loan from the [London Science Museum](#). In this exhibit -- one that's about 90% of the way to a full-blown roleplaying session -- participants take the role of new spies, going through training and engaging in activities that reveal clues and information about OSTECK, an evil corporation engaged in a typical nonsensical Bondian plot involving global domination via cell-phone-transmitted viruses. I'm more fully realizing that "activities targeted at kids" is also a reasonable subset of "activities that gamers would find interesting." For example, one of the spy games was attempting to discern a secret message in a seemingly mundane communication by taking a board with holes and putting it atop the message, revealing certain letters or words that form a sentence. (Of course, this breaks down if any modicum of thought is applied to the process; why *would* a high-tech company use a simple letter-shift cypher to encode their tippy-top-secret messages?)

One of the most interesting aspects of the entire exhibit for me, however, was the part when your "training" ends and you're expected to infiltrate OSTECK by pretending to be an OSTECK employee. Stepping through the vinyl flaps, one enters a separate display area (accessible only after passing through a "body scan"). This part of the exhibit is designed to look just like an evil office/research facility (in smaller scale); there are signs warning about spies (i.e. "you"), call buttons to alert security if one *does* see a spy, information to uncover in research stations, security cameras (including amusing signs such as "This camera is to make sure you work harder"), and so on. It's amazing how on edge I felt at this part of the exhibit, even though I was in no danger and -- in fact -- there wasn't anyone who would stop me . . . everyone present was a fellow museum attendee.

In a gaming world with sufficiently interesting adversaries (which is to say, "hopefully almost any game world"), there's something thrilling about infiltrating the Other Side: trying to get behind enemy lines, maintain a cover, and achieve some goal. This adventure type also turns standard tropes on their ears. In many adventures (such as the typical dungeon crawl), the heroes push their way further into bad situations. In this structure, there's often an implicit understanding that the heroes are controlling the pace of the proceedings; if things get bad, there's a good chance that they can retreat to safer havens to recoup and recover. But if they're deep in enemy territory, that option is greatly lessened. And if they're clandestinely in enemy territory (especially in disguise as the enemy), their options are even more reduced.

In addition, this style of adventure gives some character concepts and skill sets a chance to shine. For example, most out-and-out warrior-types are not as useful in these type of adventures; when you're surrounded by bad guys, going berserk isn't usually the way to survive (especially if the bad guys' base of operations is a long way from home).

Finally, these types of adventures are a good way to bring out interesting background information on characters the heroes might not otherwise be privy to, as well as forcing them to consider the opposing point of view. For example, an adventure in the classic *Star Trek* universe which had Federation spies donning prosthetic ears and goatees and going behind enemy lines into Klingon territory would make them try to understand a philosophy that combines honor and pugilism in equal parts. (It's also a good way to justify those "enemy culture" sourcebooks that never seem to get as much play as the "gadgets and powers" books.)

Even more interestingly, the heroes might be forced to come to grips with information that the enemy has that the good guys don't. This can be made even more problematic if that information is difficult to act upon. For example, consider an Empire-era *Star Wars* campaign. What if the Rebel heroes have managed to worm their way deep into Empire territory through forged credentials, only to discover some dire threat that could endanger both Empire and rebels alike

(say, an alien invasion that has its sensory organs fixated on targeting Yavin and Coruscant)? The Empire is keeping this information private (no doubt in an effort to turn the situation to their advantage), but the investigating Rebels discover internal communiques that admit the Empire doesn't know if it can handle the threat itself. Do the Rebels risk their spies' identities to broach the subject with the Empire? Or did the Empire plant this evidence in an effort to suss out suspected spies?

Or what if the heroes encounter some piece of information that forces them to concede that the bad guys may not be monsters, and/or that they know more about the heroes' situation than the heroes do? Going back to our *Star Wars* example, what if the spies learn that Admiral Ackbar is dying . . . a fact that the Admiral hasn't revealed to anyone in the Rebellion? Or what if the rebels uncover a file of war crimes the Rebellion has supposedly committed on remote worlds . . . crimes which sound pretty serious? (And, again, the same caveats involving misinformation apply.)

Sneaking behind enemy lines is a great hook for all sorts of adventures. Whether it's to gather information, strike the baddies in their heart of darkness, or acquire some item or person of interest, leaving the comfortable world behind to become surrounded by threats is a true mark of a hero. Unless they discover your identity . . . then it's probably the true mark of a corpse.

--Steven Marsh

Schermo Argento

by Paul Drye

Resources and scientific knowledge are not the only important crosstime imports. For example, culture and history have benefited from parachronics now that lost or alternative works by Aristotle, Rembrandt, and others are available to Homeline. Even so, this isn't where the man in the street puts his heart. If you want to make money out of art, the movies are the place to be.

There are now so many options for viewing, it being so easy to pirate out-time films, that the days of the blockbuster are done. Audiences are fractured into dozens of interests, and there's not enough money concentrated in one place to produce big films on Homeline anymore. Big commercial properties like Homeline superheroes and fantasy icons remain tied up by expensive copyrights, so "studios" tend to be small, nimble operations that either snap up franchises that don't exist at home, or else focus tightly on a particular genre.

There are dozens of small operations devoted to importing movies, spread across every timeline where "talkies" have been invented, especially color films (though old black-and-white and even silent films have their constituencies back home).

Cinecittà

One typical example of out-time movie entrepreneurship is *il Palazzo,* a theater-house in Palermo, Italy on Bonaparte-6 (see page 114 of *Infinite Worlds* for an overview of the timeline). The year there is 1971, and entertainment technology is quite similar to Homeline in the same year; films there have been big business since the teens.

Palermo is the preeminent city for movie-making on this timeline, as the Roman Republic is a leading country in the world; the industry moved to Sicily en masse in the 1920s after Turin and Milan priced themselves out of the rapidly growing business.

When Homeline first made contact with Bonaparte-6 in the early 2000s, its movie industry had sprung from that move into a golden age of historical romances. This was fortunate, as the 1950s on that timeline were like the 1970s back home: a world of hideous fashions. This is a common problem for people looking to pirate modern culture from other worlds, as actors can look distractingly odd to Homeline audiences. Languages can be dubbed, soundtracks replaced, and even plot points driven by unusual mores can be accepted, but if the leading man has a foot-wide afro or purple pants the movie becomes an inadvertent comedy. If a movie has a historical setting no more than a few decades after the divergence point (less, if the branch is in the 20th century), the issue fades away.

With a promising timeline at hand, a group of producers and actors -- still rich from pre-parachronics movies, but hurting as their industry imploded in the face of nearly cost-free competition -- set up *il Palazzo.* The front was a

major, but otherwise unremarkable, theater in Palermo which had access to prints of all Bonaparte-6's new releases. Behind a secret door in a maintenance corridor, though, a set of stairs led down to a photography lab with all the necessary technology for working with film and transferring a copy to Homeline.

Fontana della Vergogna

The theater that houses *il Palazzo's* Bonaparte-6 operations has supplied its name to the whole corporation -- they also own a small office building in Los Angeles on Homeline. It's near the center of Palermo, right next to the small Quatro Canti crossroads defined by the city's two main streets. In most cities such a prestigious location would be expensive and a little too noteworthy for Infinity to approve a corporate partner's headquarters, but *il Palazzo* depends on two coincidences. First, the Piazza Pretoria dominates the street in front of the theater, and that includes the Pretoria Fountain; Homeline art aficionados will recognize the enormous fountain as a masterwork, but Bonaparte-6's citizens consider it an eyesore. It drags down the property values of everything in its line of sight.

Second, one of the buildings directly facing the piazza on Homeline is Palermo's city hall, a refurbished old palazzo. The same building exists on Bonaparte-6, and so negotiations to set up parachronic equipment in the basement of the municipal hall on Homeline were relatively easy. The out-time version of the palazzo was bought, gutted, and turned into a theater.

At the time it was quite an opulent establishment, but its Homeline owners have subjected it to benign neglect in the two decades since then and *il Palazzo* is starting to go to seed.

Visitors pull up to near the theater in cabs (visitors might walk from nearby hotels) on the via Maqueda, one of the two main streets mentioned earlier, and stroll through the piazza to reach the entrance. The building itself is made of pinkish-orange stone, faced with false pillars in yellow. There are three floors at the front, subdivided into offices and storage space, but the entire back part of the building is opened up to form a lobby and the movie hall itself. The dome on top of the building has been given a floor, and is used as an attic.

Movie-going is still a relatively formal event in the Roman Republic, though with allowances made for the largely middle-class audience that takes them in. Men dress in their best plus-fours and tailed coats, while women wear voluminous dresses and paint their faces white overlaid with a colorful pattern (a butterfly, perhaps, or a coiling vine). The timeline's movies are considerably longer on average as well, so there is invariably an intermission at the one-hour mark for the audience to retire to the foyer for a drink, smoke, and discussion. If the show is more than two hours long (as is often the case), there is usually another anywhere from 45 to 60 minutes after the film begins again.

Whenever a new film is being shown, the print will be run once more during the day not long after it's acquired. This time it's through a cantankerous, 50-year-old Fernseh telecine machine, which copies the movie to video for shipping back to Homeline. Use of the aged device (which looks for all the world like the 1960s-era conception of a computer, down to the cabinets and the spinning reels on front) is dictated by Infinity, which wants *il Palazzo* to have equipment that would pass cursory inspection in lower-tech Bonaparte-6. Advanced digital equipment is strictly forbidden to civilians.

Botteghino Grosso

The movies parasitized from Bonaparte-6 have had better days. When the timeline was discovered (the last of a slew of Napoleon-centered worlds discovered in the early days of parachronics), it was one of the first that was advanced enough to have movies to import. *Il Palazzo* made over $100 million dollars on several movies into the 2010s, but their offerings needed to be dubbed into English and came from a relatively alien culture. By the second decade of the 21st century, much of their business had been taken away by movies stolen from timelines that diverged post-WWII.

Il Palazzo's most profitable current venture is the Castelli series. In these. Antonio Castelli -- a young officer in Napoleon's intelligence service during the wars of unification -- battles mystical foes determined to thwart the Enlightenment republic he serves. While a middling success on Bonaparte-6, the movies have caught the attention of

Homeline's public. The second movie was one of the few to clear $50 million in box office in 2022, good enough to crack the Top 20 that year, and is making money in the home entertainment market to boot. Though the third and fourth movies started the series' decline, *il Palazzo* is still very interested in seeing more in the same vein, and were glad to announce to their backers that filming had begun on a fifth installment earlier in the year.

The latest epic is *Sabbia nera* ("Black Sands"), wherein Napoleon's invasion of Egypt is threatened by the shadowy forces of an undead wizard, and it's up to Castelli to save the Italian army. Unfortunately, the movie itself is what needs to be saved. Shot in Tunis as a cheaper substitute for Egypt (with the Medjerda River impersonating the Nile), the set has fallen afoul of that region's recently resurgent Islam-fuelled unrest. Meanwhile, the Sicilian mafia has reached across the straits to put the squeeze on for protection money. The actors are upset about living in relatively primitive conditions, and even the special effects robot playing Castelli's alchemically driven companion RD-22 is plagued by sand in its gears. In a few weeks the production will be out of money, and will shut down.

Il Palazzo's backers have made the unprecedented decision to put some of their own money into the pot. This poses some problems, not least that the tax authorities are going to be awfully suspicious if a non-descript Palermitani movie house supplies a boatload of cash; Palermo is, after all, a center of Mafia activity in this timeline too. Even if their suspicions of criminal involvement are wrong, Infinity considers any attention too much, and insists on a finance company as a front. Essentially, anyone in this project will be engaged in money laundering.

The second difficulty is liquidity. Homeline takes money out of Bonaparte-6, it doesn't put it in, and it's not like one can convert Homeline dollars into Republican lira. Entrepreneurial spirits are going to be reduced to barter or counterfeiting, as their skills dictate.

There is one other problem the would-be financiers will likely not see at first. The manager of the theater is Lorenzo Basso, and he doesn't want to return to Homeline. He's been in Bonaparte-6 for the last five years avoiding his wife and his relentlessly dull existence back home. He likes this timeline, and in particular he likes his mistress here. He's got his eye on a house in Cyprus where he holidayed last year, and he thinks the sum passing through his theater during this scheme (nearly five million lira, equivalent to about two million Homeline US dollars) is the answer. If possible, he's going to embezzle it, marry his paramour, and then skip the country with her.

Leone Vecchio

Rudolph Petersen is the star of the Castelli series, and is a popular-if-fading actor. Born in Vienna to a German father and an Italian mother, his dark good looks and intense acting made him an idol when he was younger, an out-time counterpart to James Dean. Unfortunately, middle age and a bad car accident have ensued since those days; Scogliera is less marketable now and addicted to pain killers, though he still has enough ability and cachet to help drive the Castelli movies to success.

So far, Petersen has been bringing off some of the best acting of his late career during the filming of this latest installment. He's also miserable, and for the same reason he's been resurgent: in Tunisia, he's somewhat cut off from the compliant doctors who supply his drugs. As time goes by, however, he's getting plugged more and more into the local scene, and is going to need baby-sitting if the production is to continue. Not only does everyone want to keep him clean for performance reasons, getting in touch with Tunisia's underworld is not the safest thing in the world. It's a turbulent region beyond even organized crime.

Tunisia

One of the most politically important parts of the Roman Republic, Tunisia was only annexed in the 1880s after the local government defaulted on loans from several Italian banks. Since then, the Republic has suffered periodic crises over the role of Italian settlers in the region, as Tunisia is the country's last remaining frontier -- Egypt and Greece already being exploited to the hilt. The republican government is considering making it an autonomous region, but have been stymied by frightened Italian colonists who've experienced various local uprisings and want more Roman control, not less.

The latest attempt by native Tunisians to throw off their overlords has been going on since last November. It's quite confused, as the previous set of malcontents was thoroughly crushed back in 1962. New organizations have sprung up but there are serious fractures in their solidarity. Some use a military approach, making the Aurès Mountains of the northwest quite unsafe and the cities are targets of bombings and shootings. Opposing them as well as the Italians is a group devoted to civil disobedience. This has further consequences for the shooting of films in the country, as sometimes local workers don't show up for weeks on end.

Appasionato Numero Uno

The Bonaparte (or rather, in this timeline, Buonaparte) family has been a political dynasty in the Republic since Napoleon reunified Italy and conquered Greece and Egypt. Besides Napoleon himself, his son was commander-in-chief of the Army in the 1840s and 1850s, a nephew was First Consul of the Republic, and in the present day (after the reforms of the 1920s), his great-great-grand-nephew is one of the triumvirate that makes up the executive of the Roman government.

The latter is Carlo Buonaparte, who owes his position to his name more than his natural talents. A dissolute man just 31 years old, he spends most of his time spending the money built up by his ancestors. One of his particular obsessions is cinema, and he's come to the conclusion that he wants a theater in Palermo, the epicenter of the movies in his world. He's set his heart on purchasing the grand old *il Palazzo,* where he saw the premiere of a favorite movie of his as a child. He was enormously surprised, then irritated, when his generous offer was turned down and is now turning to less-aboveboard methods to get what he wants.

It's within Carlo's power to exercise eminent domain in pursuit of various laws passed by the Senate. One morning, the theater's employees arrive to discover that soldiers (the army being under triumvir control) have been posted around the building. A decree from Bonaparte will be handed to the manager, indicating that the building is to be demolished in order to widen the via Maqueda.

The triumvir doesn't intend to tear the theater down, of course, but is going to keep the shows closed to pressure for the sale he wants. On the other hand, out-timers know that just because he's blocked all the doors and windows, it doesn't mean he's cut off every means of access. There's another Infinity station in Rome, and they just have to get to it while giving the slip to the private detectives Bonaparte has hired to keep an eye on them.

Other Adventures in Bonaparte-6

I soliti sospetti: A series of spectacular murders has been taking place of Spanish citizens living in Palermo. Each has been killed, decapitated, and their heads thrown into the Pretoria Fountain in front of the theater. Fortunately, *il Palazzo's* employees have been cleared by means of iron-clad alibis and the police are not examining their facilities too closely. The upset to business is annoying however, and Infinity can't yet rule out that the Centrum isn't behind it for obscure reasons. Certainly the police are baffled. Their main theory is that it has something to do with the fountain itself, which was built during the years the Spanish ruled Sicily and was considered a shameful reminder of that time. The Spanish origin of all the victims dovetails with this nicely, but doesn't really explain why they murders are occurring at all; being upset by the former Spanish control of Sicily is a bit like being angry about the Battle of Hastings -- it was all a very long time ago.

Vero christiano: The building next to the theater is an old church, the Chiesa di San Giuseppe dei Teatini. It's not a site of any great note, but it's got a new priest and he's looking to make a name for himself. Palermo itself is quite deeply sunk in moral relativism, rather like Hollywood on Homeline. Also like its Homeline counterpart, it's often viewed as a symbol of anti-Christianity. This problem is exacerbated by the rural parts of Sicily still being quite conservative. The town picks up many immigrants from the countryside each year, and these people are often shocked by the things that are accepted in Palermo. They're correspondingly willing to listen to a person who wants to work against "immorality."

The priest is a relatively enlightened person, and won't condone violence or illegality, but on the other hand there's a very good example of civil disobedience going on across the water in Tunisia. If he's allowed a free hand, the theater is going to have to suffer sit-ins, shunning, and picketing until it starts showing more wholesome fare. Unfortunately, these movies are absolute dogs on Homeline; to make their real profit, *il Palazzo* needs more nuanced shows to copy.

Innocente: The island of Pantelleria, just to the south of Sicily, is the isolated, expensive resort to which movie types retreat whenever public scrutiny gets to be too much. A cloud of lower-level figures covets the occasional invitation to hold court with stars and moguls, and negotiate secret deals with the latter while indulging in a 24/7 party.

The hapless Lorenzo Basso has traveled there for the first time, and his typical cloud of bad luck has followed him. Actress Marietta Appennini has fallen from a high balcony in suspicious circumstances, and is in a coma. She may have fallen while stupefied on alcohol, or it might have been a murder attempt. Not only is she a huge star, rumor has it that she is involved with Carlo Buonaparte (a married man) and that he was on Pantelleria to visit her when she fell. A blast of publicity and pressure to solve the case is about to ensue, and needless to say, *il Palazzo's* boss was in the same small hotel as Marietta was when she had her accident.

Using Il Schermo Argento in Other Settings

When *il Palazzo* is used with Infinite Worlds, adventurers have two things to hide: a secret and The Secret. Only the former of these is necessary, that they're engaged in naughty (if not illegal) activity with the movies they legitimately show. This set-up is surprisingly robust, since it relies on only one basic principle: if A wants to prevent B from copying his intellectual property while also giving C access to it, he's in an impossible situation if B and C are the same party. The only question remaining is what motivates B to do what he does.

In modern-day settings, the answer is already known to any person paying attention to tech news. There's money in the piracy of movies, if one has access to markets like East Asia or the former Soviet Union.

Near-future and SF settings likely have the same motivation available, but there might be others. What if someone has access to a newly discovered original copy of, say, *The Magnificent Ambersons* or the oeuvre of Theda Bara? There will be some people who want to open such a cultural treasure to the world, and the law can go hang.

In the past, there's the question of censorship. Under the Hays Code (in the United States, but similar set-ups existed throughout the world) after the 1920s, the morally upright viewed films and cut out sections they considered objectionable no matter how much commercial tastes may have disagreed. Suppose that a cabal in the screening room is working counter to their employer, passing on unedited, racy prints to the Mob in Chicago or Vegas and you have the seeds of an adventure.

Even pre-20th-century settings can work with this idea. Helpful clerks working for the Vatican's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* can get their hands on unexpurgated works by the likes of Galileo for a rich Italian natural philosopher, or Rabelais for a French libertine with more coin than virtue. Any number of printing houses might want to make copies of books on the sly for sale on the black market. There are immense commercial possibilities throughout the more-strictly Catholic countries in Europe.

This in turn leads to fantasy settings. There are ancient librams and folios, redolent of brimstone and worse, banned throughout the gods-fearing world. Someone with access to them, possibly as adherents of some god of knowledge, might not like his clientele, but their gold is untarnished even if their souls aren't. Just don't mind the chthonic tentacles that start showing up in the basement once you get a little too involved.

The Omniscient Eye

How Heavy Is Dense Reading?

GURPS Technomancer indicates that storing the average spell takes 20,000 words. I heard that the average GURPS Third Edition softcover book is about 100,000 words.

Classically, how big would a book be to hold 20,000 words? Written the other way, what dimensions/mass of encumbrance would the average book be and most importantly, what is its capacity, in snapshots across history? What is the average density for "feature" civilizations such as the Greeks, Egyptians, Norse, Romans, Dark Ages, and Renaissance (and any others the Omniscient Eye would care to mention)?

Does this severely "bust" the archetype of a wizard's spellbook with hundreds of spells?
--Eric Funk

How big is an average book and how much does it hold? Here, as with most things in history, an "average" isn't a particularly useful or meaningful quantity. What we'll be exploring here is information density, how much information various societies can or appear inclined to pack into a given space. Information density depends on several factors: materials, script, style, and purpose of the text. There are some trends across periods and societies, but all of these show a great deal of variability *within* any given period as well, to the point that a value somewhere in the middle of the range of variation doesn't necessarily represent a typical or even particularly common example. Details? That's what the Eye is here for . . .

Book Technology

We'll start with the physical constraints of writing media. The very earliest writing comes to us from Mesopotamia, using a medium the vast alluvial plain had in quantity: mud. Scribes produced smooth-surfaced slabs of wet clay and used triangular sticks to impress characters into them. In hot, dry Iraq, this proved to be a pretty good medium for writing. The stiff mud took impressions well and would soon dry into a fairly durable form. Moreover, if they should happen to be exposed to fire, they would simply bake into an even more durable ceramic.

The drawbacks of cuneiform tablets are that they're extremely heavy and can chip or shatter if mistreated. The density of dried clay isn't actually far off from that of paper or parchment, but a cuneiform tablet is far thicker than a paper or parchment page. Even the smallest tablet is likely to be at least a half-centimeter thick, and larger ones could easily be two or three centimeters, thick enough for a scribe to write on the side as well as on the primary writing surfaces; some tablets have been found with dates or other identifying information on the side, as on the spine of a modern book.

This also made it difficult to create books in any recognizable form. There was no practical way of binding them together, or at least no means practiced by the various Mesopotamian civilizations; linking together more than two or three tablets would make the whole arrangement unwieldy. Someone might have a shelf full of tablets (archaeologists have found any number of "libraries" of tablets) which would constitute something we'd recognize as the contents of a book or other long text, but they were collections of unconnected slabs, not a single physical unit.

The next development in book writing came with the invention of much thinner writing surfaces. The best known in the west is papyrus, made from strips of the pith of a reed growing along the Nile, pressed together and dried. The Chinese, it happens, developed similar pith-based writing materials, generally called rice paper but almost never having anything to do with rice.

A single piece of papyrus was limited to no more than 50 centimeters by 20 to 30 centimeters, with a thickness between a third and a half of a millimeter. For longer texts, papyrus sheets were glued or otherwise fastened together to form scrolls. The end pieces of the scroll were typically made from heavier, stronger bits of papyrus; since one end or the other would be the outside of the scroll, it needed to stand up to a bit more punishment. A scroll might come with one or two spindles to assist rolling and unrolling, but those were far from standard. It might also come with a protective case and a tag displaying the work's name and author, so that the scroll could be identified without having to unroll it. Scrolls could be huge. One monumental scroll which has come down to us is nearly 17 meters long. But practical concerns typically made them much smaller, rarely going over ten meters and often no more than three.

The great advantages of papyrus and similar "papers" over clay tablets are, of course, their extremely light weight and the ability to compose longer works with them. With papyrus, a single scroll could contain a long philosophical treatise, a complete story, or a lengthy legal commentary which could be read without stopping to move to a different text every few minutes; it is at this point that we can start talking meaningfully about "books." Nevertheless, the constant rolling and unrolling put considerable strain on the relatively brittle papyrus, and with a practical maximum size of between one and three square meters, it was still hard to write really long works. Papyrus's durability was particularly problematic in more humid areas than arid Egypt. Papyri could last hundreds of years in the right climate, but crumbled relatively quickly elsewhere.

Europe came up with two reactions to the limitations of papyrus scrolls. The first was the adoption of parchment, animal skins dried and scraped smooth for writing. Parchment could be made from the skin of sheep, goats, calves, and very occasionally other animals, making it far easier to cultivate away from Egypt, and it was more durable in the more humid climate. The size of a piece of parchment obviously can't easily be standardized, since the animals from which it is produced don't come standardized either. A full sheet could easily be anywhere between three quarters and a full square meter. The thickness could vary considerably; anything from .1 mm to .5 mm is entirely reasonable.

Figure 1

The second is a fundamental change in the form of the book. The scroll started to give way around the first century AD, when the Romans started to fold their scrolls accordion-wise, making it easier move through the text and to keep one's place. There was also a quick realization that, unlike scrolls which typically only had writing on one side, the scribe could write on both sides of a leaf without worrying about damage to the back while it was being rolled up, thus effectively doubling the writing surface of a single piece of material. This new form of book was called the codex, and in its broad outlines is essentially the same as many modern hardcover books. The pages of the book, once stacked, are stitched together, possibly with a strip of cloth backing to guide and aid the process. The bound pages are then put between stiff covers connected by a flexible spine. Unlike a modern book, which uses cardboard covers, older book covers were thin wooden boards (typically a bit under a centimeter thick) wrapped in thin leather. A skillful book-maker could produce codices containing over five hundred leaves, providing a writing area that could rise to over 200 square meters. Most books, though, were much shorter. Works which would run over two to three hundred pages were, more often than not, broken up into two or more volumes.

A side-effect of the invention of the codex was the rise of terms to describe, in general terms, about how big a book was. They arose when book-makers realized that they could fold a single piece of parchment or, later, paper multiple times and cut off the edges, producing stacks of pages of sizes convenient to various purposes. Most books are made from a number of these

Other Writing Surfaces

A variety of societies have uses writing materials other than the paper, parchment, and clay discussed here. Cloth was an occasional writing medium, particularly in Asia before paper came into widespread use. However, it's also expensive and usually somewhat thicker and therefore heavier relative to paper and its cousins. Large dried leaves were used as writing material in some areas; leaf pages are likely to have a density similar to paper, but they do tend to be a bit thicker and share papyrus's storage problems. Some early Chinese books were made from thin slats of bamboo. They were, not surprisingly, heavier than paper books, but not so heavy as clay tablets.

One particularly exotic writing surface is shown in Figure 1. This "page," which comes from a Buddhist text from Southeast Asia, has a strip of cloth at its core, stiffened with lacquer, and coated with gold leaf.

stacks, now called signatures, piled up in order and stitched together. These folding schemes, mostly named according to powers of two, would produce more, smaller pages with each fold: the folio (folded once) produced two leaves in the finished book for each original sheet. The quarto (folded twice) produced four leaves, the octavo produced eight, and so on. There are a few "odd men out" which break the power of two rule; the most common is the duodecimo which is essentially a quarto folded into thirds for twelve leaves per sheet. Books smaller than sextodecimos (made from sheets folded four times for 16 leaves; this is the modern standard, which is why most books you buy have a page count divisible by 16, even if some pages are left blank) are rare, but occasionally books made with sheets folded five or even six times were occasionally, if inefficiently, produced.

Stacks of them would be held together with a rope (there's a small hole for it near the center of the right side) to form a book.

Paper-making, introduced into Europe in the 12th century, had less impact than one might expect. It did provide another writing medium, but the process of producing a book was sufficiently difficult and expensive for several centuries that it didn't have a massive impact on writing. Paper was cheaper than parchment, certainly, but not astronomically so. Besides, the more important price factor was the immense amount of labor needed to write the book's text. There was no more standardization in paper sizes than there was in parchment sizes, though most paper sizes remained in the general range of the parchments they supplemented, perhaps because anything larger becomes unwieldy and difficult to produce. Paper is also usually somewhat thinner than parchment (though, certainly, thicknesses vary for paper as much as for parchment) and less dense, so paper books were lighter and slightly thinner than parchment books.

The next major innovations in book-making was the invention of printing. Printing didn't change the size of books at all, and the demand for paper only slowly ramped up as reduced publishing costs pushed the cost of books down. The major effect, so far as information density, was that it made it easier to produce some kinds of content than others. Instead of creating each page from scratch, pages could be more efficiently composed from a set of pre-built elements (which is to say, the letters and punctuation marks of sets of moveable type). What this means is that, instead of it being not much more time-consuming to produce a richly illuminated page than to produce a page of carefully written text, it became relatively inexpensive to concentrate on what could be done with type and dispense with ornamentation. In time, this led to books which were much heavier on text than on decoration, and therefore denser on information.

Running Some Numbers

Let's get down to cases to demonstrate both historical trends and the range of variability. As our yardstick, we'll take advantage of the historical continuity of Christianity. The Bible is probably the most widely reproduced book in history, which allows us to make some comparisons over space and time (the Qur'an would be another useful text for this exercise, since it's almost always found in Arabic regardless of time and place even into the modern period, but the data for historical bibles and biblical texts is somewhat more accessible). The Bible is, to be certain, very large, with just about every version coming in at something over 700,000 words. Subsets of the Bible were also produced in large numbers. Indeed, given the size and expense of an entire Bible, subsets were more common than the complete work. The two most common were psalters (collections of the psalms which were often used in worship) and the gospels. These three books can be regarded as close as one comes to "typical" books during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and though there's greater diversity in publishing these days, we can still compare modern versions with their predecessors.

For the most part, we'll be looking at Latin bibles and subsets of the bible, since Latin was a constant across most of western Europe. Though there are small variations, psalters are about 37,800 words, gospels 58,900 words, and a full Latin vulgate bible, the version most widely used in the regions in question here, 712,000 words (for anyone wanting to extend comparisons to modern storage media, the Latin vulgate is about 4.15mb as a text file). The Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts listed below are selected from illuminated texts curated by the British Museum. More modern books include the Gutenberg Bible, which is an edition of the vulgate but printed rather than manuscript; a modern copy of the King James Bible (at about 750,000 words, a bit longer than the Latin bible); and our notional 100,000 word *GURPS* book.

Type	Date	Height (mm)	Width (mm)	Leaves	Writing area (sq m)	Words/sq m	Thickness (including covers) (mm)	Mass (kg)	Words/kg	Notes
gospels	698	340	240	258	42.11	1398.86	79.10	6.555989	8984.152	
psalter	725	235	180	153	12.94	2920.32	47.60	2.139344	17668.97	
gospels	750	130	100	66	1.72	34324.01	21.50	0.336843	174858.9	densest information
gospels	800	365	208	208	31.58	1864.94	64.10	5.023475	11724.95	
psalter	840	235	185	172	14.96	2527.52	53.30	2.432948	15536.71	
bible	840	510	375	510	195.08	3649.88	154.70	29.02888	24527.3	most writing area
psalter	900	130	90	200	4.68	8076.92	61.70	0.74763	50559.77	smallest pages
gospels	1010	265	200	141	14.95	3940.85	44.00	2.500196	23558.16	
psalter	1020	380	310	73	17.20	2197.83	23.60	3.28609	11503.03	
psalter	1023	290	170	193	19.03	1986.36	59.60	3.052434	12383.56	
gospels	1050	255	190	199	19.28	3054.49	61.40	3.082219	19109.61	
psalter	1050	250	145	129	9.35	4041.70	40.40	1.586717	23822.78	
psalter	1075	305	190	149	17.27	2188.88	46.40	2.865135	13193.1	
gospels	1090	275	185	169	17.20	3425.26	52.40	2.803798	21007.22	
bible	1097	580	390	240	108.58	3278.81	73.70	17.01929	20917.44	Part of two volume set
gospels	1100	260	185	51	4.91	12005.22	17.00	1.041774	56538.18	
bible	1120	510	370	301	113.60	3133.87	92.00	17.46107	20388.21	Part of two volume set
psalter	1140	220	130	179	10.24	3691.84	55.40	1.65727	22808.6	
psalter	1143	215	140	218	13.12	2880.31	67.10	2.07699	18199.41	
bible	1148	535	353	301	113.69	3131.30	92.00	17.47541	20371.48	Part of two volume set
bible	1148	430	305	207	54.30	4371.09	63.80	8.640752	27466.74	Part of three volume set
psalter	1150	320	230	142	20.90	1808.40	44.30	3.492835	10822.15	
bible	1156	475	330	256	80.26	4435.81	78.50	12.50489	28468.87	Part of two volume set
bible	1172	540	355	243	93.17	3821.13	74.60	14.58655	24406.05	Part of two volume set
psalter	1180	255	160	93	7.59	4981.02	29.60	1.369472	27601.87	
psalter	1200	230	160	224	16.49	2292.80	68.90	2.601907	14527.8	
psalter	1205	250	180	168	15.12	2500.00	52.10	2.46726	15320.64	
psalter	1250	255	175	182	16.24	2327.08	56.30	2.623816	14406.5	
psalter	1250	215	145	197	12.28	3077.44	60.80	1.965568	19231.08	
psalter	1260	315	210	284	37.57	1006.04	86.90	5.802281	6514.679	
psalter	1260	345	240	193	31.96	1182.70	59.60	5.126603	7373.303	
psalter	1260	285	200	193	22.00	1718.03	59.60	3.529184	10710.69	
psalter	1265	300	200	257	30.84	1225.68	78.80	4.80357	7869.147	
bible	1270	315	200	582	73.33	9709.27	176.30	10.84841	65631.73	most pages (pre-printing)
psalter	1275	300	210	263	33.14	1140.68	80.60	5.150912	7338.507	
psalter	1284	240	140	136	9.14	4136.03	42.50	1.537402	24586.94	

psalter	1285	235	160	174	13.08	2888.85	53.90	2.12549	17784.13	
gospels	1290	310	200	173	21.45	2745.66	53.60	3.487221	16890.24	
psalter	1290	230	165	170	12.90	2929.55	52.70	2.10224	17980.82	
psalter	1300	220	160	167	11.76	3215.16	51.80	1.919966	19687.84	
bible	1300	395	235	546	101.36	7024.13	165.50	15.03681	47350.45	
psalter	1310	375	235	228	40.19	940.65	70.10	6.330724	5970.881	
psalter	1310	275	175	319	30.70	1231.12	97.40	4.698757	8044.682	
psalter	1325	330	220	175	25.41	1487.60	54.20	4.124588	9164.553	
psalter	1335	355	245	309	53.75	703.25	94.40	8.24536	4584.396	least dense information
psalter	1410	195	140	208	11.36	3328.40	64.10	1.806386	20925.76	
bible	1413	625	430	350	188.13	3784.72	106.70	28.60172	24893.61	largest pages
bible	1430	515	370	289	110.14	1292.92	88.40	16.98401	8384.358	Part of five volume set
Gutenberg bible	1450	445	307	641	175.14	4065.31	194.00	25.80978	27586.44	most pages
Third Edition **GURPS** book	1999	279	216	64	7.71	12963.79				
Gideon KJV bible	1999	184	130	609	29.13	25742.62				

There's a wide range of information density here. The Medieval and Renaissance books range from just over 800 to nearly 34,000 words per square meter, with something in the 3,000-4,000/sq. m range appearing reasonably common. However, we don't see any consistent changes in information density across the period of manuscripts encompassing the whole of the Middle Ages and the early years of the Renaissance.

The invention of printing doesn't initially make a lot of difference. The Gutenberg Bible has a slightly *lower* information density than contemporary manuscript bibles. The 100,000 word **GURPS** book falls on the upper end of the words-per-area scale, but there are several much earlier books with a greater information density. The final bible on our list of texts is a modern Gideons' KJV bible, available in any hotel room in the United States. With its small print, narrow margins, and thin paper, it packs a lot of text into not very much space and appears to push the practical limits of information density with an alphabetic script . . .

. . . except for one of the earliest texts on our list, a copy of the Gospels from 750 AD, the tail end of the Dark Ages. This particular item was composed with portability in mind. It's small and light enough to slip into a pouch one might wear on a belt or around the neck. This tiny, densely written volume has even smaller text and thinner margins than the Bible printed more than a thousand years later.

Figure 2

Figure 2

The differences in information density probably lie mostly in the purpose of the individual books. The modern bible and the gospels from 750 (and, to a lesser extent, the **GURPS** book) share a particular characteristic: to put information into as compact a form as possible. Most of the other texts were intended as art or visual spiritual inspiration as much as mere information. A great deal of space is taken up by ornamentation, such as illuminated illustrations and giant decorative capitals. Even so, there are some aspects which might be chalked up to cultural preferences. There's a general tendency for ancient texts to have what we would regard as very large

How Long?

Since we're considering other attributes of books, we can provide a ballpark figure for how long they took to write. Canonically, it took about a year to produce a bible, which translates into something just shy of 2,000 words a day. A scribe working for utility rather

Figure 3

than artistic merit could probably skip the illuminations and double that figure. An early printing press could crank out something like 200 bible-sized books a year.

margins (for example, see some examples here). Our ancestors probably regarded smaller margins as crowded. They also operated in a literary tradition where writing one's own notes and comments in a book was regular practice, so the extra space was downright utilitarian. Scribes at least as far back as the Dark Ages could produce books as densely written as we can today, but they rarely did. There's a curious cross-cultural tendency for that preference. Figure 2, a 17th-century Coptic text with a parallel Arabic translation, reserves a good deal of room for capitals but otherwise leaves a lot of blank space, while figure 3, from an 18th-century Persian Qur'an, has about half of the page taken up with neatly written main text. The curving lines of text around the central box are a reader's commentary. Big margins aren't just a Medieval European thing; they show up in the separate textual traditions of Iran and northeast Africa as well.

Artistic standards aren't the only reason for most texts leaning towards the low end of the spectrum; cultural practices play a role as well. In many times and places, perhaps because of low general literacy rates, reading appears to have been a public act. One was read to more often than one read alone. Entire law codes were inscribed on huge plaques and put in public places rather than tucked away in books so that the whole community could see them, and books were written in large print so that someone could stand at a lectern and read them aloud. A few really big books which have survived the Middle Ages, weighing tens of kilograms and measuring over a meter on a side with writing of proportionate size, were meant to stand on a lectern in front of a choir so that large groups of singers could all sing from the same text. We've excluded books which are clearly built for that scale, but even so, there's a leaning towards public rather than private reading throughout.

Of course, that's just how much information was packed into a given area of writing space. When considering encumbrance, we might also want to consider weight and volume. For the weight and volume calculations above, we've assumed that the parchment on which the books were written is an average of 0.3mm (though, as we've said, it could vary considerably) and that the parchment has the same density as leather, about 0.945 grams/cc. In addition, each book has a wooden cover (a total thickness of 1.6 cm at 0.45 grams/cc). For anyone who cares to extend the calculations to paper books, the average thickness of a paper leaf of this period is closer to 0.25 mm (though with a similar range of variation to parchment), with a mass of about 0.7 grams/cc. A paper book is likely to weigh about 62% as much as a parchment book of the same height, width, and page count.

Other Periods

So much for the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and some of modernity. How does this compare with some other periods? Greek and Roman papyri appear to have had a similar information density per square meter, fitting 25 to 45 lines of text in columns typically from a quarter to a third of a meter high, about what one would find in a larger Medieval book or the Gutenberg bible. Margins were somewhat less generous, but columns of text were narrower, so the amount of white space on the side of the scroll that was used wasn't too different from a codex page.

Cuneiform texts are a different matter. They start at nearly 10,000 words per square meter and go up from there, with some texts having an information density in excess of 50,000 words per square meter. Part of the reason, of course, is the issue of margins and ornamentation. Many cuneiform tablets are utterly utilitarian records, the equivalent of accounting ledgers and sales receipts, with little or no attempt to make the text attractive. For example, on this tablet, the text is not just tightly packed, it even starts to slide over the edges. Another reason is that the script used in the cuneiform texts is a syllabary, not an alphabet. Each character represents a group of sounds (for example, nam, ni, ha, mas, ab) rather than a single sound (n, h, m, a); syllabaries naturally result in more compact text, because fewer characters are needed to represent the same words.

On the other hand, while a cuneiform text could hold several times as much information as a similar area of an alphabetic text, its *volume* would be vastly higher. The thinner cuneiform tablets we have are tiny sales receipts and

similar records, about the size and shape of a thin charcoal briquette and at least fifteen to twenty times thicker than a sheet of paper or parchment. Longer texts are frequently on thicker slabs of clay, the equivalent of a hundred or more pages of paper.

It might be worth noting that many of the cuneiform texts which have come to us contain incantations and alchemical formulae which are mere hundreds of words, not tens of thousands. However, their brevity may be explained by the fact that they don't work.

Conclusions

Clearly, then, this means that at 20,000 words per spell, a magician in a pseudo-Medieval or pseudo-ancient world isn't going to be carting around a spellbook with hundreds of spells. Even something Bible-sized (which would hold no more than 40 spells) would be large, heavy, and difficult to use in the field. At five volumes, the 1430 bible comes in at nearly 85 kilograms, probably heavier than anyone who attempted to read it. The 750 AD gospels, though pocket-sized and only a third of a kilogram, would have held the equivalent of a mere three spells. A single very densely written papyrus scroll three to four meters long might contain a single spell, which might be convenient for filing (and is pleasingly agreeable with the typical gaming assumption that one scroll equals one spell), but spells would most likely go on longer scrolls or be split across multiple scrolls. At the most common information densities, whether papyrus scroll or paper or parchment book, a single spell comes in at between half and a full kilogram. A few hundred spells, while not enough to fill a "typical" half-ton oxcart, would certainly be more than anyone would consider portable. In a more modern setting, such a collection would fit comfortably on a CD, or have plenty of room left over on a DVD or a good flash memory card. Looking at it from another direction, with typical manuscript information densities the storage capacity of an oxcart is about 67mb, though it could be more than eight times higher for unornamented, closely written texts; it'd take nearly 200 oxcarts or a medium-sized cargo vessel to transport a manuscript version of Debian Linux 4.0, enough capacity to feed a typical Medieval city for half a week. If a historical magician has a library of spells, it's a library, not a notebook.

On the other hand, the script used and writing for utility rather than pleasing presentation are significant factors. For one thing, a "typical" book may not be an appropriate model for a wizard's spellbook. A wizard, scribbling notes for himself, might pack information more densely on the page than a scribe working for beauty and ease of reading. Writing on the order of the 750 gospels or the Gideons' bible makes lugging a library around difficult but at least thinkable. We've also been limiting ourselves to major languages in Europe and the Near East, which may not be appropriate for fantasy campaigns. The west has long rejected syllabic and logographic (where symbols represent entire words) scripts, such as Egyptian hieroglyphics, cuneiform, and early Greek syllabaries. However, syllabic and partly logographic scripts are alive and well in Asia. Such scripts, though, are clearly more space-efficient than easier-to-learn alphabetic scripts. If the fantasy world in question uses a pseudo-Chinese or pseudo-Mesopotamian writing system and the wizards or the scribes on whom they depend treat the material they're writing on as though they're paying for it themselves, a magician might actually be capable of carting his spellbooks around with him.

The Usual Escape Clause

Since we're talking about spell books, we can't forget that magic throws regular concerns out the window. The literature has a number of examples of magical spellbooks which are not constrained by the limits of their physical media. The witch sisters of *Charmed,* for example, used a book whose contents changed from time to time. Likewise, in an episode of *Angel,* the more-evil-than-average law firm of Wolfram and Hart had a magic book which could be used to view the contents of any other book in their library. Maybe a wizard *can* use a single book for all of his spells, as long as he knows the right spell for it.

How Many Oxcarts?!?

Be sure to check out our data to oxcart converter to get a rough idea at how many oxcarts a given amount of data would fill.

Pyramid Pick

Shogun

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Dirk Henn

English translation by Christine Biancheria

One two-sided board, 110 cards (53 province cards, 25 war chest cards, five special cards, five daimyo cards, 10 action cards, 12 event cards), five individual player boards, 330 wooden army cubes (62 each in five player colors, 20 green farmer units), 55 wooden war chests (35 one-point, 20 five-point), five wooden victory point markers, five wooden rice markers, 80 cardboard building tiles (28 castles, 26 temples, 26 theaters), 42 cardboard revolt markers, battle tower, storage tray, rules, rules supplement; full-color boxed set; $64.95

It is the 16th century, you are a daimyo, and Japan is in need of the stabilizing influence of a shogun. Much more setup than that and there won't be any room left to talk about the game.

Dirk Henn has transplanted his mechanics from the Thirty Years War in *Wallenstein* to feudal Japan. The object of *Shogun* is to have the most victory points at the end of two years of infighting.

Three to five warlords take control of various provinces across the island nation, filling them with their armies. Each location comes with a small reference card and is rated for the money, rice, and civic improvements it can produce or hold. Money funds troops and building projects while rice staves off famine during the long winter. Other appetites have players expanding into adjoining territories.

Three things moderate your actions. First, you have to bid for turn order and the special card that comes with it. If you go first, you get the card in that position. If you'd rather do a different action than the one in the first position, you're stuck with the turn position on which that card sits. Second, the "seasons" of play are accompanied by event cards. The top half gives a benefit or drawback: money is scarce, or deployment requires more of it, or an overtaxed populace may be assuaged by the creation of new buildings. The bottom half is only used in winter, telling you how much rice is lost. Players know what four event cards are coming in a given year, but not their order. Finally, play runs according to the 10 action cards along the side of each board.

The first five action cards are face up, and players can plan with that much certainty. The other five action cards are only revealed as play proceeds, an unknown quantity for everyone. Your individual board shows all 10 actions (and its chart provides information about all the provinces so you don't have to ask coyly, "Say, Sam, apropos of nothing . . . how much money does your Settsu province produce?"). You must choose a war chest card (rated zero to four) to bid for turn position, and the rest of the province and war chest cards are assigned to the various actions.

For example, if you want rice, place a province card on the rice symbol on your individual board. When the *Confiscate Rice* action comes up, flip that card and collect the rice that area lists. To assault a neighbor, put the attacking province on a *Battle* space. The order means everything: If *Collect Taxes* comes up fifth, expenditures before that -- say, *Build a Temple* -- aren't possible unless you've saved money from last round.

Armies are small wooden cubes, and battles are fought by dumping the participants blindly into the battle tower. This

hopper has a series of ledges and other irregular features that can catch some pieces and release others (perhaps some from previous battles), then spill them into a tray. Opposing units pair up and kill each other, and the winner puts his survivors back in the disputed territory. If everyone dies, the location is left neutral until someone moves armies in anew to confront the farmers. Fighting also breaks out if the people tire of having too much rice and money taken from them; then the daimyo has to contend with revolts by the green farmer armies.

Come winter, the rice is used to sustain the people. If you haven't squirreled enough away for everyone, there may be more farmer uprisings.

You score points for controlling provinces and buildings, with bonuses awarded for having the most of certain building types. After two years (eight seasons), the point leader wins.

The components are beautiful; and the graphic design, which is just as important here, is a mark in the win column as well. There's a lot of information, and it's repeated anywhere you may need it with extensive cross-referencing. Wooden pieces abound, the board is solid, and there's room for everything (paramount for all those itty-bitty armies). It can be a nightmare trying to find the province listed on the cards, but you get as much help with diagrams as the creators can give you. Getting used to the layout is taxing, and as soon as you get it down you realize on the other side of the playing surface is *a whole other map,* just in case familiarity breeds contempt and too many wins for the same person.

Game play is involved, no way around it. Planning for your turn can be slow as you try to balance what happens when (and what only might happen when), and "program" the actions to your best advantage. It's not an impossible task and, while daunting, it all comes together splendidly. When you see it, it's hard not to admire it. A strategy game that allows you to plan attacks, and yet does not depend on endless warfare to carry it, is one to be congratulated. You're as much up against your own planning skills as you are the other players, but without feeling it's just overcomplicated victimization.

Shogun is like a graceful host, offering something to everyone, keeping everybody occupied, never lingering too long on one subject, and thinking ahead to all your needs. Whatever you require is close to hand as soon as you think of it. The game's creator has thought of everything, leaving you nothing to do but play. And you will.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Magic Item Compendium (for *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designered by Andy Collins (Lead), Eytan Bernstein, Frank Brunner, Owen K. C. Stephens, & John Snead

Cover by Francis Tsai

Edited by Chris Thomasson, Logan Bonner, & Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

224-page full-color hardcover; $39.95

If you are the type of gamer who likes to trick-out your character with the best equipment, or the type of GM who likes to give your players lots of quests items and reward the PC's efforts with goodies and gear then you will likely find this book both interesting and useful. The designers of this book have pulled together a vast number of items and introduced new rules to make implementing magic items more systematic, and made it perhaps more fun for players who may have learned their first fantasy gaming from computer rather than table-top experiences.

The book contains more than a thousand magic items along with their price and description. The items are organized by their usage. The book is sectioned into Armor, Weapons, Clothing, Tools, and Magic Item Sets. Each section contains alphabetized entries for the items that make up the category. Some of these categories are pretty obvious, but two bear further description.

The Tools section includes items that aren't covered in the main categories of Armor, Weapons or Clothing. Magical things like bridles, elixirs, bandages, rods, spheres and a variety of other items can be found in this section. The Magic Item Sets provide a group of items that is composed of various magic pieces which each have their own effects, but which provide additional powers when more portions of the set are equipped and/or worn together. If you have ever played the video game *Diablo II* (or similar computer RPGs) this will be a very familiar concept. By using these rules, a GM may be able to make it so that relatively mundane magic items a player character is already carrying can turn out to be part of such a set. These item sets are all adventures waiting to happen.

The Weapons section of the book introduces a new way to augment existing items. Augment Crystals are magical gems that can be inserted into weapons to add extra magical features. The gems are not permanently bonded to the weapon so that they can be switched out as a move action, allowing a mundane weapon to become capable of a variety of magical effects (ranged attack defense, mental attack defense, improved stamina, and so on). These are a novel and potentially inexpensive way to improve the efficacy of your party without the difficulty of reforging weapons, or having runes inscribed by some expensive NPC craftsman. The crystals come in three grades (least, lesser, and greater) with the power of the effect improved proportionally with the quality of the gem.

Relics represent a new class of item. They are powerful magic items which become even more powerful if wielded by users aligned to the divinity of the entity powering the magic. These are something like mini-artifact level items, and there is usually a price for gaining the extra abilities of these items, such as sacrificing a spell slot each day to allow the divine power to go into the item.

The Armor section includes many novel pieces of defensive, and also provides beautiful illustrations. Like the best weapons, named armor is usually powerful and appealing. Most of the effects of the armor involves simple stat

bonuses and could probably be made up by a GM with a little effort, but the fantasy names, prices and descriptions are all listed here for your convenience.

Continuing on the subject of pricing, the book contains lots of new items, but also includes items from various **Dungeons & Dragons** books that Wizards of the Coast has put out in the past few years. The prices listed in the book vary wildly from the original items, and the designers explain in one of their "Behind the Screen" entries that the pricing listed in this book is intended to be based on the relative usefulness of the item rather than its exact GP value as calculated by the original value rules in the **Dungeon Master's Guide.**

This cross-reference with other non-core **Dungeons & Dragons** books leads to the first of two complaints about the **Magic Item Compendium.** The book reprints the vast majority of the needed detail to make each of these items useful . . . but items that aren't in the core **Dungeons & Dragons** books, such as those from "Libris Mortis," merely reference you to get the particular spell properties from the book from which they are derived. That's a nice way to sell a few extra copies of these other books, but if this book were truly the reference compendium it is trying to be then that detail should be included. The second complaint is that, like many new gaming books, there is no index. Sure, the items are ordered alphabetically by section . . . but why leave out the index? A compendium with this many items should have tools to facilitate ease of use.

Those complaints aside, the book does include some very useful charts. The items in the book are arranged in detailed tables organized by the type of item and then sorted by price. Also tables are included for rolling up some random treasure out of the book. Items are sorted by level so that you can provide proper random goods for encounter the PCs have survived.

In addition to all the items, rules are included for how to craft new magic items as well as several suggestions on how to handle buying and selling items in a fantasy market economy. Care is also taken to advise GMs on how to handle the price changes encountered in this book.

The art in this volume is superb and abundant. More than 28 artists are credited on the book, yet the work in the book has a common feel and doesn't seem discordant. Though the majority of the art merely shows the items described in the text, they are colorful and crisply rendered illustrations, making it simple to imagine the various uses of the depicted entries.

At times the whole book seems like a holiday catalog for the discerning adventurer, a veritable seer's wish-book. Whether the magic items in the **Magic Item Compendium** will make it into actual game play is an entirely different question, but it couldn't hurt to buy your GM a copy of this book to find out.

--William Blake Smith

Son of Stupervillians!

More Costumed Nuisances for Supers Games

by J. Edward Tremlett

In our last episode of "Stupervillains!" we explored the world of inept, loser supervillains. These humorous "special guest stars" for your Supers campaign were possessed of power, but either shockingly inept or mind-bogglingly disorganized, and . . .

Wait, you didn't get that issue? Well, never fear, true believers; this time we shall up the ante by presenting even more Stupervillians than ever before! The following Garrulous Groups and Terrible Team-Ups present *gangs* of miscreants for your Supers campaign.

As before, they have notes on powers, strengths, and weaknesses, and are listed in increasing order of power. Stat guidelines go: Poor, Average, Medium, Impressive, Powerful, Way-Powerful. Almost-ready-made comedy relief is yours with the addition of game mechanics and your own setting. (Batteries not included)

The Disco People (Has-Been Musicians Going After Solid Gold)

Put your hands up, now, baby! Do a hot dance, now, baby! Gimmie the dough, now, baby! Watch us go, now, baby!

The '70s were an era when talented but homely people in loud clothing could make beautiful disco together, and actually be paid for their efforts. But then came punk, new wave, and hair metal, which left noble, beautiful Disco in the dust.

One of those left behind was Leif Wonderland Bohannon, lead musician for the Band Called Midnight Wonderland (not to be mistaken for the Wonderland Band, Midnight Rhythm, or Midnight Rhythms Wonderland Band). In his prime, he'd been a funky trombonist and passable singer admired for the length and style of his mustache. And he and his 16-piece ensemble rode to temporary stardom on the back of their one single, "Midnight Wonderland," from their one LP, cleverly entitled Midnight Wonderland.

Stardom was fine, but fickle and fleeting. BCMW might have gotten a few more singles out, but arguments over pay, petty jealousies, and in-fighting among the horn section ensured that they didn't even make it onto Soul Train before imploding. And by the time Leif got to thinking about rounding up more musicians for another try, Disco was on the outs, leaving him to fall back on his largely-unlauded talents in sound engineering to pay for mustache wax.

What finally pushed him from behind-the-scenes hitmaker to disco-style lawbreaker? No one knows. All that is certain is that, after years quiet research, Leif discovered that certain combinations of pulsed sound and light could make the audience open to suggestion. After a few low-key experiments in frequency modulation and stage lighting, he gathered four refugees from BCMW since relegated to session musicians and talked them into joining a new kind of band.

The first appearance of the Disco People was almost their last. The five '70s relics in hypnotic sequined jumpsuits and musical belts attacked a shopping mall, using their personal music and light shows to hypnotize onlookers and get them to dance while they robbed them blind. Unfortunately, the blind, deaf, and mute Swashbuckler -- who fights crime by sense of smell -- appeared from nowhere, and slashed the miscreants' belt buckles with his silvery blade, dispelling the effect.

Somehow they managed to get away but did not learn their lesson. Since then, they've pulled off decreasingly lucrative heists, the most recent being the Oogy-Boogie Bowling Alley ($123.50 and a hot dog). Leif is unhappy with the way things are going, but he's leading this enterprise like he led the band, with no regard for others ideas or concerns. So

it's only a matter of time before he either hits the right step, or lands them all in jail.

Powers: Their flashy clothes, flashing lights, and hot hypnotic music put everyone within 50 feet into a Medium mesmeric trance. It's powerful enough to let the Disco People compel simple, non-harmful instructions, such as "Gimmie your money," "open the safe," and "dance to the *muuuuu*-sic"! but nothing more complex than that.

The only problem is that they are just as susceptible to their own gimmick! They have to wear special earplugs and sunglasses, which means they can't effectively communicate with one another during a job. So any serious change to the plan -- hero, rival supervillain, people resisting the hypnosis, etc. -- puts the gig in serious jeopardy.

D

Leif Wonderland Bohannon; 49; American citizen with no criminal record (yet)

Stats: Average Body; Medium Mental; Average Spirit

Appearance: 510, 250 lb, long brown hair in wavy curls, blue-blue eyes, and the longest, waxiest mustache you've ever seen. Still wears leisure suits open to his nipples and gold chains with groovy love medallions.

I

Marvin Fly Eye Freeman; 47; American citizen with a criminal record

Stats: Average Body; Average Mental; Average Spirit

Appearance: 55, 190 lb, shaved bald with a full soul beard. Wears blue jeans, denim jackets, and a gold strip tiara he stole from one of Earth, Wind and Fire's roadies, back in the day.

S

Samuel Soul Man Caruthers; 50; American citizen with no criminal record

Stats: Poor Body; Average Mental; Average Spirit

Appearance: 57, 300 lb, with a six-inch-high afro that's balding badly from the front. Wears huge pants held up with suspenders, a collection of ratty T-shirts and thick orthopedic shoes. His girth is such that he has to wrap himself in a girdle to fit into the group's special costume.

C

Charlie Blower Bilbokowski; 46; American citizen with a criminal record

Stats: Average Body; Average Mental; Poor Spirit

Appearance: 511, 204 lb, long straight red hair weighed down with beads. Still wears the gold and silver pants and jacket he wore on stage with BCMW, even though they've been repaired -- badly -- close to a hundred times apiece.

O

Orenthal Oh-Oh Orangestein; 47; American citizen with a criminal record

Stats: Average Body; Poor Mental; Average Spirit

Appearance: 55, 150 lb, black hair cut short and scraggly with an unkempt Fu-Manchu mustache. Wears tight pants

and wife-beaters. He also wears big black cowboy boots, which is where he keeps his stash of mind-melting medicine.

Costume: Everyone wears more or less the same costume: suggestively cut red, white, and blue jumpsuits covered with spangles and pulsing lights. Each one has platform shoes and a special belt buckle in the shape of their codename (D, I, S, C, and O, respectively) that pipes music from the master player in the Disco Van (also painted red, white, and blue, and fitted with lights and sound blasters to effect an entrancing getaway).

The Curse, and Company (Worlds Unluckiest Would-Be Conqueror)

"Now, allies seven of The Curse, into the breach! The City will see the full price of defying . . . The . . . wait, no! You fools! You're driving your earth-shakers into the same location! You'll be . . . oh, oh no. Call off the attack! Retreat before we're seen! The Curse cannot withstand another such embarrassment!"

Baron Gunter von Groleichenschlo (Gunter von Gross to his enemies) is the hereditary ruler of Leichenland, son of one of the great criminal geniuses of our age, and horribly doomed to fail in anything grandly evil. Every plot falls apart, every henchman dies a horrid death, and every attempt to redeem his evil standing collapses . . . leaving him to crawl back to the ancestral home of the Groleichenschlo, all alone.

Many years ago, Gunter was a callow, privileged youth living under the shadow of his father, the criminal arch-genius known as Baron Cadavre. Befitting his name, his father was a cold tyrant who preferred his offspring to be neither seen nor heard in his presence. Gunter, his only child, was barred from being within so much as shouting distance of his father, which eventually led him to take up a profligate lifestyle outside the castle.

So it was that one fateful day young Gunter became terribly drunk, weaved his fancy Daimler through the villages, and collided head-on with a donkey. The beast survived, but the car did not, and yet Gunter woke up a short time later in the wreckage, miraculously unharmed. And the first thing he saw was the donkey's owner tut-tuting him, telling him that the donkey -- the oldest and most powerful in all Leichesland -- had cursed him to a long life of rotten luck for his foolish ways.

Gunter laughed it off, at first, but after that he *did* have rotten luck. His house burned down, his servants developed leprosy, and every car he owned thereafter wound up crashed and burned by the side of the road. And yet Gunter survived all . . . including his now-more-insane-than-ever-before father's attempt to turn Leichenland itself into the center of the world. The über-insane plan failed without outside interference, turning the green and lovely country into a black, rocky, and unpopulated wasteland.

The plan also killed Baron Cadavre, leaving Gunter with a cracked and crooked castle filled with wonky android copies of his father, two corpse-servants named Hubert and Jurgen, and decades of notes, plans, and strange, untested devices. It would have been the perfect fixer-upper for a budding supervillian, except that Gunter knew next to nothing about science, invention, or conquering the world. He also had a hard time reading his father's strange supervillian vernacular, in which he'd penned his notes and plans, as well as the instructions on the devices, themselves.

A chance meeting with his father's colleague Barronet Zero, the Fine Red Menace (who stopped by to claim Baron Cadavre's artifacts for himself), proved useful, as Zero spoke fluent supervillian. Together, they formed The Two, and sought to dominate the world from Leichenland. And Gunter took the name The Curse, vowing to redeem the power and majesty of the line Groleichenschlo before claiming the mantle of Baron Cadavre.

Unfortunately, he also took one of his father's as-yet-untested armor variants for himself. The suit went haywire in a fight with the Liberty League, and he was rocketed into the middle of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, Barronet Zero got one of the weird knob-things on his helmet-crown caught in untested war machinery, and was turned into a fine red mist.

Undaunted, The Curse assembled the Mad Tinker and the Master of Puppets to his side to form The Three. Their attempt to march the population and resources of The City across a skybridge to Leichenland failed due to the Liberty League, atmospheric disturbances, and the push of the wrong big button. The plan failed, two of The Three died in the resulting conflagration, and The Curse was left a laughing-stock, once more, just as he was after the subsequent loss of

The Four and The Five.

The Curse is currently assembling The Nine, but is having a hard time making a proper go of it. It's not that he's short of volunteers, mind, but after seeing off 28 worthy criminal super-geniuses and world-conquerors, the cream of the crop has been replaced by the dregs.

Powers: His suit provides Impressive strength, armor, and flight. The armor has numerous techno-wonder weapons hidden within it, but chances are good they will fail at a bad moment.

Plus, Gunters lineage provides him with near-limitless finances and resources, decades of scientific equipment and weaponry, manufacturing facilities . . . and a reputation (however undeserved) as a dangerous criminal genius, just like dad, whose notes are now his own. He has vault upon vault of impressive war machines, exotic weapons, and deadly doomsday devices, none of which work exactly as advertised. He also has a near-endless, if wonky, army of android duplicates of his father, and the ability to make loyal, if fragrant, servants from specially-pickled corpses.

The problem is that pesky curse. So long as he lives, any attempt to do anything evil or selfish will fail . . . badly. Any who seek to do it with him will die -- horribly -- unless they're already dead or robots. And he alone will escape . . . unharmed, but embarrassed. The only way to be rid of this fate would be to seek the donkey's forgiveness, but unbeknownst to Gunter, it died in the same cataclysm that leveled Leichenland.

The Curse: Gunter von Groleichenschlo; 40; Ruler of Leichenland (pop. 1)

Stats: Average Body; Average Mental; Average Spirit

Appearance: 62, 180 lb, long blonde hair down to his belt and a somewhat pale and cadaverous yet pretty face (the pretty comes from his long-vanished mother). He wears his costume at all times, but leaves the helmet off unless he's in battle, a meeting, at work, or on his throne.

Costume: His father's armor variant is a bronze-colored, baroque suit of armor with a horned, skull-like helmet that seems to be lit from within by baleful, orange fire. He also wears a heavy, red cape lined with black fur.

Hell And Damnation (The Devil's Children, Improperly Reared)

"So, how'd you like to enjoy unlimited power and wealth on Earth in exchange for you know, this really is a crappy deal . . ."
"ON YOUR KNEES BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF YOUR MASTER, WORM!!!"
"For crying out tears, will you stop with the fire-breathing already?"
"I WILL RAIN BLOOD FROM THE SKYYYYYYYYY!!!!"
"Oy . . ."

Yes, it's true what they say: the Devil *does* have human children. Back during the '70s he took advantage of the goings-on at certain religious institutions to plant some seeds, planning to tend to them later. But the greed and cynicism of the '80s and '90s were such a playground for him that he completely forgot about his kids, leaving their rearing to their mortal carriers.

But then the '00s hit, and with them came a certain ennui. So he decided to correct his mistake . . . but a little too late, it seems. Most of his whelps turned out to be little angels with no head for cutthroat business, which meant he had no use for them. But there were two who suited his needs, sort of.

Glenn Warner was a 30-something stoner who lived in his mom's basement, sang in terrible heavy metal garage bands under the stage name Hell, and secretly lived for Satan . . . at least as he'd been presented to him, thus far. The one thing his wayward mortal father had left before taking off was his collection of '70s and '80s heavy metal, on vinyl, which Glenn listened to rather . . . errr, religiously. So when the Devil appeared and revealed himself to be Glenn's real father, come to bestow him with his rightful title and powers, the deal was as good as sealed.

Helen Applebaum was a different story. Raised a good girl in a good, reform Jewish household, her first reaction on hearing of her true parentage was to laugh and ask if she should be impressed, or something. But after a few demonstrations of his power, she wasn't so sure that this was the Satan she'd been told about. At any rate, blood knows its own, and she soon realized that the fellow *was* her real father, and -- loath as she was to admit it -- the air-guitaring weirdo calling himself Hell was her half-brother, too.

The plan, their father said, was for the two of them to be his agents in the world: bring him souls and infernal bargains. He would reveal to them the powers needed to accomplish this task, and in return they would rule by his side at the end of days.

Helen was utterly appalled by her father's plans, but decided to pretend to go along with it. She'd learned enough about business from her father, who made his money credit-counseling others out of debt, to know how *not* to run a business. So she figured she could engineer any number of good-sounding, but doomed, ideas to keep daddy occupied until he got tired, or something.

So Hell frolics in their mansion outside The City, puts out truly awful CDs, sees a harem of supermodels, and drives Italian sports cars he can't pronounce. Meanwhile Damnation -- as Helen calls herself -- creates convincing-looking schemes that go nowhere and/or self-destruct, and keeps her half-brother from doing anything really explosive and stupid.

It's a full time job saving the world from her extended family, but Helen's nothing if not stubborn. At least she comes by that honestly . . .

Powers: Hell and Damnation share the same powers, which are magical in nature and Powerful in level (their father's are Way-Powerful, of course). They do not age, sicken, hunger, or thirst, and can live forever -- and die and come back -- at their father's sufferance. They can generate fire in any form they care to, including turning their own bodies and/or clothes into living flame, and can fly while fully aflame. They can change their appearances and voices, so as to look and sound like anyone they can imagine, including real people. They *cannot* force anyone to do anything, but they can make various alternatives -- such as signing a certain contract -- look either very enticing or very bad. And they are capable of masking their true intentions from *anyone,* which is why Hell and the Devil have no idea that Damnation is pulling a scam on them.

Hell

Glenn Warner; 35; American citizen with a criminal record

Stats: Poor Body; Poor Mental; Poor Spirit (defends and attacks as though Powerful)

Appearance: 59, 237 lb, long greasy black hair. Usually wears greasy, holey and unwashed heavy metal t-shirts, black jeans and sneakers gone green when no ones looking.

Damnation

Helen Applebaum; 34; American citizen with no criminal record

Stats: Average Body; Medium Mental; Medium Spirit (defends and attacks as though Powerful)

Appearance: 52, 160 lb, short curly black hair. She tends to wear black glasses and mostly-modest business suits that show off some cleavage.

Costumes: None to speak of, but Hell thinks it's really cool to have a body of fire, generate fiery wings, horns, and a tail and wear skin-tight black leather from head to toe, so he does whenever he can. Damnation prefers to keep it low-key, except for the cleavage.

Variation: If you'd rather leave the real-life occult out of your game, then the father of Hell and Damnation isn't *the* Devil, but just another spirit in a long, long list claiming to be him. Alternatively, he's some other supervillian who can bestow or awaken powers in others, and is either seriously deluded or enjoys this kind of prank.

Pyramid Review

Unspeakable Words

Published by [Playroom Entertainment](#)

Designed by James Ernest & Mike Selinker

Art by Tony Steele

full-color boxed set with 96 Letter Cards, 30 Cthulhu Pawns, one 20-sided die, & rulebook (in English, Spanish, French, & German); $20.00

It's never too early to start teaching your children: warning them not to talk to strangers, telling them to look both ways before crossing the street, alerting them to the hazards of congress with eldritch beings whose sole goal is the perversion of mankind. *Unspeakable Words* isn't just an educational game about spelling, it's a public service.

The object of the game is to be the first player to make it to 100 points without going insane.

Two to six players can join in, and each gets a hand of seven cards and a set of five Cthulhus. All the cards in the game have a letter on them and a helpful pointer that uses H.P. Lovecraft's mythology: A is for Azathoth, B is for Byakhee, C is for . . . well, that's probably obvious. On your turn, you must play a word of at least three letters. If you cannot, or don't want to, you must trade in your hand for seven new cards. Letters are worth as many points as they have angles in them. An E is worth four points, for example, while an O or U is worth nothing. Having points is a mixed bag, because the hounds of Tindalos enter this reality through angles in the architecture. The more one dallies with unknown forces, the closer one comes to having the Abyss look back into you.

Don't worry, you'll get your points. But at what cost? After every word you play you must roll the 20-sided die; if the result is equal to or greater than the points you scored, you've cheated fate. If it's less, your mind becomes just a little bit more unhinged as secrets make themselves known unto you, and you must give up one of your Cthulhu Pawns. If you give up your last piece, you go completely mad and must retire from the game. Whoever gets to 100 points first, or remains when every else has fallen to the predations of insanity, wins.

There are two material issues with the Letter Cards, neither of them encouraging. They're awfully thin, and shuffling them is surprisingly difficult. The texture is the same on both sides. They slip together beautifully as you fan the two halves of the deck together, but then tamping them all together is like scraping paint (and you have to shuffle them at least two or three times in a six-player game). The art is a different matter. The illustrations, recalling more savory children's resources, show the various beings in delightful storybook situations. Some of it is awkward and gangly, but then given the subject matter that may not be the criticism it comes off as. There's a sly sense of humor in every card that adds to the fun.

The creators could have asked for, would have gotten, and may yet want, 20 bucks for a bag of Cthulhu Pawns alone. These are unbearably adorable little figures of a miniature, squatting Cthulhu (showing a bit much at the back, and if Cthulhu tush-crack isn't enough to warrant a sanity check, there is no balm in Gilead). With their beautiful green color and tiny, painted eyes, you'll have to be careful no one swipes them.

This game is half word construction and half playing the odds. The closer you get to your goal, the more cautious you are . . . no one wants to score so big they lose their last pawn, so slow and steady may win the race. Then again, if someone is ahead of you in points, you may be tempted into learning more Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. It doesn't help that some of the most common letters in the English language are worth more points than you'd care to

win in one go. You never wanted a U this much in **Scrabble** (though to be fair getting stuck with the Q isn't as bad, either).

Once you get past the arguments about the angles (B is worth five points, and I is worth four), there's not much fault to find. There are a number of alternate rules that deftly cover what players want to know most ("Can I get my pawns back?"), and Playroom again provides the rules in multiple languages. If you're wondering how they're going to get a new generation of gamers in this age of console and computer play, the answer is with games like **Unspeakable Words.** Assuming they're not of gentle constitution, even the kids are going to love learning with this clever pastime, and they may get a taste for the source material while they're at it.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Projection Racket

At some level, most RPGs are about wish fulfillment. Certainly the most successful ones have been about giving the players the chance to run wild on an interesting playground where their abilities set them apart from common folks.

But one aspect of wish fulfillment that doesn't get as much attention is the ability to play "what if?" with various tropes. After all, when watching a horror movie the viewer can do little more than yell at the screen: "Don't split up! Don't in that room alone! Look how many improvised weapons there are in that kitchen; *grab one!*" But when playing an RPG, gamers can engage with classic situations on their own terms, with their own sensibilities. Thus a player in a horror campaign based on our example movie can make whatever decisions he'd like to ensure his PC's survival, knowing that character isn't a victim of a sadistic scriptwriter (or, at least, the sadistic scriptwriter allows a lot more choice).

But are injecting one's own sensibilities something that should be downplayed, or encouraged?

On the one hand, part of the fun of an RPG is the ability to project one's own feelings onto other times or genres. Probably the most common example of this is the glossing over of the past's various discriminations; realistic sexism and racism -- outside of the occasional plot point and window dressing -- aren't most gamers' ideas of fun. In addition, it allows the gaming group to do a certain amount of "this is how it *should* be" versus how things actually went; this is the same mindset that permits one to play in a fantasy/medieval campaign and believe feudalism doesn't seem like that bad a governmental style.

It also lets players act in ways that wouldn't be acceptable for the genre. For example, a devil-may-care wisecracking atheist would find himself excommunicated and run out of town (or worse) throughout the Middle Ages, but it's a perfectly viable character concept for most fantasy/historical campaigns. *Army of Darkness* is basically a projection of a modern tough-cool guy onto a fantasy/horror plot, in the same way that *Jack of All Trades* was a modern tough-cool guy projected back to the early 1800s. (Aw, heck; everything Bruce Campell touches is a genre projection of . . . well, Bruce Campbell.)

On the other hand, some genres require so much handwaving that the mere act of participating requires leaving some modern sensibilities at the door. For example, participating in a four-colors supers campaign usually means that PCs need to refrain from killing, even though both sides know that the crazed world-threatening villain will just escape at some point and run amok again.

Likewise in a **Call of Cthulhu** campaign (or many other horror settings), one of the best things the heroes can probably do once they learn the extent of the baddies' ambitions and powers is stay home. Sure, you may die along with the rest of the planet when the unimaginable evil plot comes to fruition, but at least you'll do so with your mind mostly intact and your couch cushions suitably indented. (This doesn't even include that seemingly endless group of adventures that has the heroes serve as unwitting instruments of the adversary: "Fools! You have been accumulating the Rod of 3.14 Parts because you believed it alone would have the power to stop me, when all along I was manipulating you into gathering them for *me!* Bwahahahahahaaaa! . . . Sorry; it's an inside joke. Anyway, your destruction.")

As with most things gaming, I believe that it's up to each group to sort out its own feelings in terms of projecting modern ideas and ideals to the past. Personally, I tend to approach such projections with abandon; the only restriction -- one which seems likely to be shared by many groups -- is one against any projections that actually hinder the ability of the campaign to exist, like our "let's just stay home" **Call of Cthulhu** example. (Besides, if I want to gun down golden-age villains, what the heck am I doing in a golden-age campaign in the first place?)

Of course, that doesn't mean that projections that question the status quo of the campaign are against my beliefs. For example, I'd be fine with a character in a golden-age supers campaign having a more self-centered "What's in it for me?" attitude, even though I'm not aware of any characters like that back in the era. But that's probably because such a character would be well-suited to be played by Bruce Campbell . . . and, really, Bruce Campbell works in any genre,

any time, anywhere.

--Steven Marsh

Crimefighters Of New York!

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

Introduction

Bringing new players to *GURPS* involves certain challenges. One of these is the complexity of the character design system. Although the enormous range of options is a distinct advantage for GMs designing campaign worlds and players interested in unique characters, the learning curve can be daunting to some people. For this reason, having a stock of "Characters, Ready to Use" and pre-made campaign settings are helpful tools for GMs who are planning demo games for conventions or trying to introduce *GURPS* to new players.

This article contains six 350-point superheroes, suitable for any modern setting (although the default world is a Cliffhangers setting centered on New York City in which masked crimefighters battle spies, cult leaders, and criminal masterminds; this is why all wealth is calculated for TL6). The six characters were designed to cover a spectrum of player interests. Bricks, nature spirits, psychics, and master detectives are all provided, and have enough overlap in skills and abilities that no one character is essential for making a campaign (or one-shot) successful. The 350-point level was chosen because it allows for significant paranormal abilities without overwhelming new GMs and players with too many options. In addition, more experienced players may find it an interesting challenge to play superheroes who are merely legendary rather than godlike. For settings other than New York in the 1920s or 1930s, some aspects of the character histories and certain skills (Area Knowledge, Typing, etc.) might have to modified, but this should not be very difficult.

If players come up with their own characters, GMs may find these characters useful as rivals, allies, contacts, or patrons. With a little tweaking (e.g., replacing Code of Honor and Pacifism with disadvantages like Greed and Megalomania), they would even make good villains! River Girl could easily become a vicious, uncontrolled avenger of nature. Iron John could be a thug or a dangerous religious fanatic. Seven could be a thief or an assassin. And so on . . .

The origin of mutant powers has been left to the GM. For modern settings, latent radiation from atomic tests is the usual suspect. For earlier settings, having the Earth exposed to strange radiation when it passed through the tail of a comet -- which happened in 1861 and 1910 -- should work well enough, if anyone asks.

All six characters have been designed with Unkillable 1. This is probably the easiest way to simulate how superheroes can soak up incredible amounts of damage, and often get knocked out, but somehow never seem to get hurt badly enough to bet killed.

Certain aspects of these characters have been deliberately left open-ended. Reputations have not been defined for them; it is assumed that different people view masked heroes as everything from vigilantes little better than criminals to virtual saviors (assuming they have even heard of a particular hero . . . most people do not know River Girl even exists), so there is no general reaction modifier for them. It is also left to the GM to determine how masked crimefighters are viewed by the police and other authorities. It is assumed by your humble author that, as long the heroes do not break any laws themselves, the police are not interested in arresting them (and, again, opinions probably vary between those who dislike amateurs sticking their noses into police business and those who are grateful for their help).

Roleplaying games being what they are, it is also assumed that the authorities generally treat the use of force in apprehending criminals or in self-defense with some leniency; if the bad guys start shooting at the heroes, the heroes should be allowed to shoot back.

Finally, it is left to the GM to determine whether and how these particular heroes know each other before the start of the campaign. It is possible that the adventure begins with them all arriving on the scene of a crime, meeting for the first time, and deciding (or declining) to work together. It is also possible that they have known each other and worked together as a team for years. (Tommy Nickels has a big enough place that a team of adventurers could use it as a headquarters; he usually has coffee and sandwiches on hand, too)

Iron John

John Washington worked in a chemical factory in New Jersey from the time he had graduated from high school. He was 22 when a chemical leak and an explosion changed his life forever. The strange combination of chemicals and the sudden shock of the blast triggered the manifestation of his latent abilities. It saved his life, but when he woke up in the hospital three days later, he found it had changed his life, too.

The most visible change was that his skin was now a dark metallic red. It was also hard, like armor. Knives would not cut him; fire would not burn him. In fact, he was safe from almost any attack less powerful than a machine gun. And he was much stronger than he had been. A little experimenting revealed that he could lift about five times what a normal person could manage.

It was a miracle. John had always been a very religious young man, but now he had proof that the Divine was at work in the daily lives of men and women. He was alive when he should have been killed; it still bothers him that five other men died in the explosion -- good men, men with families -- and he was spared. And he had been given the gifts of strength and protection from harm. It had to be a miracle. And John knew what he had to do. He had to dedicate his life to protecting others from danger and crime.

New York was already the home to a number of crimefighting mystery men. John was able to gain introductions to some of them and learned from these heroes the business of crimefighting. Soon, he was a respected member of the New York superhero community. Unfortunately, being a crimefighter usually does not pay the bills. However, early in his career as a crimefighter, John had the good fortune to rescue a garage owner who needed a new worker. John is actually a very capable mechanic and electrician, and his boss understands that there are times when John may have to miss a couple of days of work every once in a while to fight crime or rest up from a big battle, so the two men have a good working relationship. John does not even try to keep his identity secret, but he never boasts about his crimefighting activities, and aside from his odd appearance lives a very normal life, so he is about as much of a celebrity as a minor league baseball player.

Using John in a campaign is fairly straightforward. He is good in a brawl, able to soak up a lot of damage and then deliver his own powerful blows to subdue foes. In addition, he is a good-natured, easy-going fellow (he is devout, not intolerant) who mixes well with people and can gather information in informal settings. (It does not hurt that he has an excellent singing voice -- John is a valued member of his church choir -- which can sometimes be a good way to break the ice at a party or in a country roadhouse bar.)

John Washington (a.k.a. Iron John)   *350 points*

Attributes: **ST:** 25 [150] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 12 [20]

Basic Lift 125 [0] HP 25 [0] Will 12 [5] Per 11 [0] FP 12 [0] Basic Speed 6 [5]

Cultural Familiarities: Western (native) [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Damage Resistance 15 [75]; Unkillable 1 [50]

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Crimefighter) [-10]*; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Unnatural Feature

(Metallic red skin) [-1]

* This represents the dedication to investigate crimes and other nefarious activities, intervene when a character sees a crime being committed, etc., even if it is inconvenient for the character or places him in danger, although it does not require him to fight to the death, commit suicide if he fails, etc.

Quirks: Believes most superpowers are Divine gifts and one is obliged to use them accordingly [-1]; Devout Christian [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (New York)-11 [1]; Brawling-15 [12]; Carousing-12 [1]; Dancing-11 [2]; Driving (Automobile)-10 [1]; Electrician-12 [4]; Mechanic (Automobile)-12 [4]; Singing-12 [1]; Theology (Christian)-10 [2]

Starting Wealth: $10,000 ($2,500 in cash)
Income: $1,600 per month
Cost of Living: $600 per month

River Girl

As long as there have been people in the Valley, there have been spirits in the River. One day, one of the spirits came out of the River to defend it and the people who lived by its shores from evil.

Her name is Muhheakantuckikwemanitou, which means "Woman spirit from the river that flows both ways," but she tells people to simply call her River Girl.

River Girl has no idea how old she is, but she remembers when the first humans came to the River, and that was at least 8,000 thousand years ago. She has no idea why the River has chosen this point in history to tell her to come up out of the waters and help people. She only knows that is what she is supposed to do.

River Girl understood that the world had changed in the centuries since the White Men came to the River, and so she did not simply walk out of the water one day and ask to be introduced to the Chiefs of the City. That, she knew, was likely to get her locked up as a madwoman. Instead, she watched from the shadows for several weeks and, when the time was right, introduced herself to local crimefighters.

She appears to be a strikingly beautiful Native American woman barely out of her teens. Despite her appearance, she is very strong and a ferocious fighter; in fact, she is a little on the bloodthirsty side. More than once, her fellow crimefighters have had to remind her that she must abide by the law of the land, not the law of the River, and that she is not allowed to simply mete out punishment as she sees fit, no matter how foul her adversary. Sometimes it is difficult for her to accept this.

In addition to her formidable fighting skills, River Girl is an excellent scout, and she can go places no human scout can go. She is perfectly at home 50 feet below the surface of the water and can stay there indefinitely. And she can ask animals and even plants what they know about an area or the people who live there (sometimes the answers are a little cryptic, as fish and honeybees and oaks have different interests than crimefighters, but River Girl can usually find something useful in them; GMs should note that this is a good opportunity for both puzzles and humor).

River Girl understands the concept of money, but has none, and desires none, as she is perfectly capable of finding, catching, or making anything she needs. (She does not have negative Status because she is utterly outside human society, in terms of wealth; she has no cost of living and therefore cannot be living below it. This is a 0-point feature of her unique form of existence and it would be completely inappropriate for most characters. However, as she has no money, she is unable to buy anything she cannot find, catch, or make herself. She does not mind this, but it is sometimes a disadvantage.)

A water spirit, River Girl must return to her River once every day for at least an hour or she will begin to die. In addition, as an innately magical creature, if she was ever forced to enter an area or dimension without mana, she would

immediately begin to take damage and would die in a matter of minutes. (Technically, in a no mana zone, a number of her abilities should no longer function, either, but as she cannot survive in such zones, the issue a moot point pretty quickly.) One interesting aspect of her being a magical creature is that she always looks clean and well-groomed. (This does not mean she will not get her hair mussed in combat, but she does not appear to experience any cosmetic ill-effects from sleeping underwater or the like.)

An interesting aspect of her relationship with other New York crimefighters is that Iron John, a devout Christian, finds her a little unsettling. She is, after all, a pagan spirit, and one who politely dismisses Christianity with remarks like, "Every tribe has its own name for the Great Spirit. I do not need to learn a new one." But he refuses to give up on her (he assumes that she has a soul -- or rather, that she *is* a soul that for some reason was never born into a normal human body). It is one of the things she likes about him.

River Girl)   *350 points*

Attributes: **ST:** 12 [20] **DX** 14 [80] **IQ** 11 [20] **HT** 12 [20]

Basic Lift 29 [0] HP 12 [0] Will 13 [10] Per 14 [15] FP 12 [0] Basic Speed 7 [10]

Cultural Familiarities: Native American (Native) [0]

Languages: Algonquin (Native, spoken only) [3]; English (Accented, spoken only) [2]; French (Accented, spoken only) [2]; Proto-Algonquin (Native, spoken only) [-3]*

* this represents the languages spoken by the prehistoric peoples of the Hudson River Valley area; it is also the native language of ancient supernatural creatures from that region

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Appearance (Very Beautiful) [16]; Charisma 1 [5]; Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Absorption) [15]; Outdoorsman 2 [20]; Pressure Support 1 [5]; Regeneration (1 HP per hour) [25]; Resistant (Metabolic Hazards, +8 to resist) [15]; Speak With Animals [25]; Speak With Plants [15]; Unaging [15]; Unkillable 1 [50]

Perks: Always appears looking clean and well-groomed [1]

Disadvantages: Bloodlust (15-) [-5]; Dependency (Mana, constant) [-25]; Dependency (Waters of the River, daily) [-60]; Vow (Bring evildoers to justice) [-10]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25]

Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance [-1]; Completely uninterested in wealth and money [-1]

Skills: Armoury (Melee Weapons)-13 [8]; Armoury (Missile Weapons)-13 [8]; Axe/Mace-15 [4]; Boating (Unpowered)-15 [4]; Bow-16 [8]; Brawling-15 [2]; Expert Skill (River Lore)-16 [24]*; Knife-15 [2]; Leadership-13 [4]†; Leatherworking-14 [1]; Sewing-14 [1]; Stealth-16 [8]; Survival (River/Stream)-16 [2]‡; Survival (Woodlands)-15 [1]‡; Thrown Weapon (Axe/Mace)-15 [2]; Tracking-16 [2]‡

* may be used for any knowledge skills related to the Hudson River Valley, including Area Knowledge, History, Literature (Native American Folklore), Naturalist, Occultism, etc.
† includes: +1 from Charisma
‡ includes: +2 from Outdoorsman

Starting Wealth: None
Income: None
Cost of Living: None

Grease Monkey

Tommy Nickels was born ugly. As far back as he can remember, the other kids called him Monkey. In fact, he looked like a monkey: short, squat, and hairy, with a sloping skull and bulging eyes. It did not help that Tommy wore his heart on his sleeve; when he was hurt or angry, people knew it, and the neighborhood kids who teased him knew they were getting to him. Tommy finally figured out that the only thing he could do was fight. He got good at it, and so most of the kids stopped teasing him because they knew he could beat them.

As Tommy grew older, he realized that he was more like a monkey than he had thought. He could climb almost anything, moving in darkness with ease. And he was clever, too. He had an uncommon affinity for machines and he could fix or modify almost anything.

Tommy came from a poor family, but he put himself through college by working nights. He is not a particularly erudite or well-mannered individual, so he never quite fit in with the wealthier students from socially connected families, but he easily made friends with other students who, like him, who were from working class families and who were interested in science and engineering.

While at university, Tommy developed a number of small, useful inventions, most of them manufacturing components that increased the efficiency of certain machines, and he now lives very comfortably off the royalties from his patents.

Tommy is not the kind of fellow to hold a grudge. But he gave in to one temptation. When he finally had enough money to do so, he bought a new house on Long Island for his parents and used his industry connections to get his father a job that paid nearly twice as much as his old one. And he made certain that the people from his old neighborhood, -- people who had tortured him when they were kids but who were now mostly stuck in poverty and dead end jobs, some of them already old and tired even though they were only their 20s and 30s -- knew that he had made good. He never said a word to them, kind or cruel, but he wanted them to see what a Monkey could do.

And now what? Tommy was set for life. He owned his own small lab and had enough money that he did not have to work, although he often took temporary jobs as a technical consultant to keep his skills fresh. But he felt as if there was something else he could be doing.

He had seen what crime did to people growing up in his old neighborhood. Maybe he could do something about it, make a difference. He met with local crimefighters, learned new sciences, and honed his physical skills. Now, he goes by the name Grease Monkey. He is a quite versatile as a crimefighter. He can scout by climbing across the rooftops, make sneak attacks with a crossbow loaded with drugged darts, provide technical support to a team as a driver or a mechanic, use and defuse explosives, and even operate heavy weapons should the need arise. And he always has one of his small inventions handy to help things along.

Tommy Nickels (a.k.a. Grease Monkey)   *350 points*

Attributes: **ST:** 11 [10] **DX** 13 [60] **IQ** 14 [80] **HT** 11 [10]

Basic Lift 24 [0] HP 11 [0] Will 12 [-10] Per 13 [-5] FP 11 [0] Basic Speed 6 [0]

Cultural Familiarities: Western (Native) [0]

Languages: English (Native) [0]; German (Accented) [4]; Japanese (Broken) [2]; Latin (Broken) [2]

Advantages: Artificer 2 [20]; Brachiator [5]; Catfall [10]; Contact (Vice President of a Manufacturing Firm, Administration, Effective Skill 18-, Available 9-, Usually Reliable) [6]; Gadgeteer [25]; Gizmo 1 [5]; Independent Income 3 [3] Night Vision 2 [2]; Status 1 [0]*; Super Jump 1 [10]; Unkillable (1) [50]; Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30]

* one free level from Wealth

Disadvantages: Appearance (Ugly) [-8]; Code of Honor (Crimefighter) [-10]; Easy to Read [-10]

Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Likes jazz [-1]; Regular Joe (prefers baseball games to poetry readings, sandwiches and beer to French cuisine, etc.) [-1]; Sarcastic [-1]

Skills: Acrobatics-12 [2]; Architecture-13 [1]; Area Knowledge (New York)-14 [1]; Armoury (Heavy Weapons)-15 [1]*; Armoury (Missile Weapons)-15 [1]*; Armoury (Small Arms)-15 [1]*; Astronomy-12 [1]; Boating (Motorboat)-12 [1]; Brawling-14 [2]; Carousing-11 [1]; Chemistry-12 [1]; Climbing-17 [8]†; Crossbow-14 [2]; Current Affairs (Science & Technology)-14 [1]; Driving (Automobile)-13 [2] Driving (Heavy Wheeled)-12 [1]; Electrician-15 [1]*; Electronics Operation (Communications)-13 [1]; Electronics Repair (Communications)-15 [1]*; Engineer (Automobile)-15 [2]*; Engineer (Electronics)-15 [2]*; Explosives (Demolition)-13 [1]; Explosives (Explosive Ordnance Disposal)-13 [1]; First Aid-14 [1]; Forensics-12 [1]; Gunner (Machine Gun)-13 [1]; Guns (Pistol)-13 [1]; Guns (Rifle)-13 [1]; Guns (Submachine Gun)-13 [1]; Law (American Patent)-12 [1]; Lockpicking-13 [1]; Mathematics (Applied)-12 [1]; Mechanic (Automobile)-15 [1]*; Mechanic (Diesel Engine)-15 [1]*; Mechanic (Gasoline Engine)-15 [1]*; Mechanic (Heavy Wheeled Vehicle)-15 [1]*; Mechanic (Household Appliances)-15 [1]*; Mechanic (Light Airplane)-15 [1]*; Mechanic (Motorboat)-15 [1]*; Musical Instrument (Drums)-12 [1]; Navigation (Sea)-13 [1]; Pharmacy (Synthetic)-12 [1]; Physics-11 [1]; Piloting (Light Airplane)-12 [1]; Seamanship-14 [1]; Stealth-14 [4]; Typing-13 [1]

* includes: +2 from Artificer
† includes: +2 from Brachiator

Starting Wealth: $200,000 ($40,000 available in cash)
Monthly Income: $6,000 per month
Cost of Living: $1,200 per month

Seven

Alan Severen was just getting started on his career as an archeologist when he chanced upon some mysterious caverns in Mexico. He and his team went into the caves.

Something happened, something he will not talk about. Severen was the only one who came out of the caves and he was Changed. He could move and think with superhuman speed. What happened to him is a mystery. Aliens? Ancient artifacts? Magic? He will not say. He claims he does not remember, and it is possible that he is telling the truth.

However, for some reason, he has decided to be a crimefighter. Is he trying to assuage the guilt he feels over the disappearance of his comrades? Did he make some kind of pact -- his powers in return for the promise to defend the innocent? Is he simply bored? Again, he will not say.

He calls himself "Seven," because his abilities make him roughly seven times as fast as a normal person. He actually has a costume, a form-fitting black outfit with the number seven emblazoned in scarlet on his chest. Naturally, his incredible speed makes him an asset to any team of crimefighters. He can outrun and outmaneuver most foes; in fact, he can actually outrun most automobiles. He is rarely surprised in combat and can strike his opponents at least three times as quickly as a normal person; his speed also allows him to strike with the precision of a prizefighter. In addition, being a trained scholar, he is skilled at doing the sort of library research that is often necessary when tracking down certain kinds of information.

He makes a good living as a professor of Archeology at a local college, keeping his adventures as a superhuman crimefighter secret to avoid unnecessary and possibly embarrassing publicity for his employer. (This is sometimes a bit of a strain because his powers have left him with one physical disadvantage: He does not feel fatigued when he uses his abilities, but he does need a little more sleep than most people to restore himself. For Severen, who has a full-time teaching job, moonlighting as a masked crimefighter and taking care of himself by getting enough sleep leaves him with very little time for a social life.)

The secret of his abilities is actually simple. Something in the caverns -- and he truly does not know what it was --

killed his fellow explorers, literally vaporizing them, but for some reason did not kill him; instead, he absorbed some of the energies of the other men, and this is the source of his powers. (In fact, certain forms of energy seem to be able to short out his powers on a temporary basis.) Severen would very much like to know exactly what happened to him and he spends much of his free time researching strange and mysterious events and groups around the world. The true source of his powers is left to the GM, who should feel free to use Severen's obsession to learn the truth behind his abilities as a way to get the player characters involved in adventures.

As for his motivation, it is not really guilt (he does not blame himself for the death of his fellow explorers because he knows he could not have foreseen what was going to happen . . . at least, that is what he tells himself every time he has nightmares about the incident) but he does feel he survived for a reason and he should put his powers to good use.

Alan Severen (a.k.a. Seven)   *350 points*

Attributes: **ST:** 11 [10] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 13 [60] **HT** 10 [0]

Basic Lift 24 [0] HP 11 [0] Will 12 [-5] Per 12 [-5] FP 10 [0] Basic Speed 7 (Basic Speed includes +1.75 from 'Extra Basic Speed') [0]

Ground Move: 7/56

Cultural Familiarities: Western (Native) [0]

Languages: Aztec (Accented, written only) [2]; English (Native) [0]; Mayan (Accented, written only) [2]; Spanish (Accented) [4]

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Enhanced Ground Move 3 (Super, -10%) [54]; Enhanced Time Sense (Super, -10%) [41]; Extra Attack 2 (Multi-Strike, +20%; Super, -10%) [55]; Extra Basic Speed +1.75 (Super, -10%) [32]; Fit [5]; Striking ST 4 (Super, -10%) [18]; Tenure [5]; Unkillable 1 [50]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]

Disadvantages: Addiction (Tobacco) [-5]; Code of Honor (Crimefighter) [-10]; Curious (12-) [-5]; Extra Sleep 2 [-4]; Nightmares (12-) [-5]; Obsession (To learn the secret behind his mysterious powers, 12-) [-10]; Overconfidence (12-) [-5]; Secret (Gained powers through the deaths of others) [-5]; Secret Identity [-5]

Quirks: Aloof [-1]

Skills: Anthropology-12 [2]; Archaeology-14 [8]; Area Knowledge (New York)-13 [1]; Boxing-13 [8]; Climbing-11 [2]; Connoisseur (Ancient Artifacts)-13 [2]; Driving (Automobile)-11 [2]; Expert Skill (Strange Powers)-12 [2]*; Guns (Rifle)-11 [1]; Occultism-12 [1]; Research-14 [4]; Riding (Equines)-10 [1]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-13 [1]; Survival (Desert)-12 [2]; Survival (Jungle)-12 [2]; Teaching-13 [2]; Typing-12 [1]†; Writing-12 [1]

* may be used as a substitute for such as Physics, Weird Science, Thaumatology, Theology, Literature (Mythology), etc. to handle questions about uncanny, supernatural, and other strange abilities
† based on default from Research

Starting Wealth: $20,000 ($5,000 available in cash)
Mostly Income: $3,200 per month
Monthly Cost of Living: $600 per month

Scarlet Sparrow

Wren Williams was always interested in being a detective. It was so exciting, so daring. Solving mysteries, bringing criminals to justice . . . it all sounded so romantic. As a young girl, she devoured mystery stories such as those about Sherlock Holmes. She followed news stories about crimes. When her brother joined the police force, it was the

proudest day of her life.

Her brother quickly let her in on the secret that being a police officer was often dull, dirty, and dangerous. There was little romance to breaking up a bar brawl and hauling the drunks down to jail. And there was nothing romantic about real murders, which were usually sordid, ugly things. But he also told her that it was a very satisfying job. Helping people in trouble and bringing actual criminals to justice was a lot more interesting than just reading about it. It was hard work, no doubt about it, but it was good work, work that was worth doing.

Wren and her brother were very close. Her parents had been killed in an automobile accident when she was three and she did not even remember them. They had been raised by their grandparents and, after their grandparents passed away when Wren was in High School, her brother, in his early 20, became her legal guardian.

But even her brother did not know about her secret.

Wren could fly. Her powers had manifested when she was 14. At first, she simply felt strangely light on her feet. Eventually, she could levitate a few inches off the ground, which terrified her the first time it happened. She told no one. Gradually, over the years, she taught herself how to control her abilities. By the time she had graduated from high school, she could literally fly like a bird. Her top speed was around one hundred miles per hour.

Wren had always been the smart one in the family. Her brother recognized her potential and helped her go to college. She studied chemistry. She had always been good at math and science. (In high school, she had been drawn to science partly because detectives in the mysteries she read often relied on it to solve crimes, but she quickly learned that she found the subject interesting in and of itself.) She also took every course she could in subjects like criminology. After graduation, she got a job at a chemical laboratory.

She was 23 when her brother, who had been promoted to the rank of detective only three months earlier, was killed in a shoot-out with gangsters.

Wren swore revenge. She knew she had the skills to be a great detective. And she knew her special ability gave her an edge that would be hard to overcome. She got a job with a detective agency and learned everything she could, including how to fight and how to shoot. Five years later, she was a licensed private detective, and decided to run her own one-woman agency; it made it easier to pursue criminals her own way, as the Scarlet Sparrow. The Scarlet Sparrow is an asset to any team of crimefighters because she can both scout and attack from above (and being hit by a 100-pound woman moving at 50 or 60 miles an hour, when she is controlling the blow, is enough to put a serious dent into most people). She is also a very capable detective with scientific training who can spot, collect, and analyze clues. Finally, she is an actress whose skills will let her pose as a maid or a secretary, allowing her to infiltrate the homes or businesses of a suspect.

Wren Williams (a.k.a. Scarlet Sparrow)   *350 points*

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

Basic Lift 20 [0] HP 10 [0] Will 13 [5] Per 13 [5] FP 11 [0] Basic Speed 6 [0]

Air Move: 12/48

Cultural Familiarities: Western (native) [0]

Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Enhanced Air Move 2 (Super, -10%) [36]; Flight (Super, -10%) [36]; Unkillable 1 [50]

Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1]

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Crimefighter) [-10]; Secret Identity [-5]

Quirks: Misses her brother and sometimes drinks a little too much because of it [-1]

Skills: Accounting-10 [1]; Acting-13 [4]; Administration-12 [2]; Aerobatics-15 [12]; Area Knowledge (New York)-13 [2]; Brawling-14 [2]; Carousing-12 [2]; Chemistry-12 [4]; Criminology-14 [8]; Current Affairs (Headline News)-12 [1]; Dancing-12 [1]; Detect Lies-13 [4]; Disguise-12 [2]; Driving (Automobile)-12 [1]; Escape-12 [2]; First Aid-12 [1]; Forced Entry-13 [1]; Forensics-14 [11]*; Guns (Pistol)-15 [4]; Guns (Shotgun)-14 [1]†; Guns (Submachine Gun)-14 [1]; Housekeeping-12 [1]; Intimidation-14 [4]; Judo-14 [8]; Law (American Criminal)-10 [1]; Leadership-12 [2]; Lip Reading-12 [1]; Lockpicking-13 [4]; Observation-14 [4]; Poisons-11 [2]; Research-13 [4];Search-14 [4]; Sex Appeal-13 [4]‡; Shadowing-14 [8]; Stealth-13 [2]; Streetwise-12 [2]; Typing-13 [1]

* based on default from Criminology
† based on default from Guns (Pistol)
‡ includes: +1 from 'Appearance'

Starting Wealth: $10,000 ($2,500 in cash)
Income: $1,600 per month
Cost of Living: $600 per month

John Washington (a.k.a. Iron John)   *350 points*

Doctor Nightcraft

James R. Chapel II, the handsome and intelligent son of a wealthy and prominent New York surgeon, started hearing voices when he was a teenager. He thought he was going crazy. Fortunately, the psychologists his parents sent him to realized very quickly that he was not insane, but was somehow having sporadic telepathic episodes. They taught him some mental exercises and meditation techniques that allowed him to control his abilities. In addition, as he got older, his abilities became more stable (they also became more powerful, but this was something he kept to himself). He later learned from his own studies that strange abilities often manifested in puberty, as a result of hormonal changes in the body, but once hormonal balance was achieved in adulthood, the powers usually stabilized, too (and sometimes simply vanished).

Not surprisingly, James became fascinated by how the brain worked. And, with his special gift, he knew he could help others. He studied medicine and psychiatry, and for a few years established a very successful practice. He married. He bought a house. He thought life was perfect.

He was betrayed. James was careful not to read minds unless he thought someone needed help. And so he never knew about the affair between his wife and a prominent attorney until she tried to shoot him. She missed. And then tried to shoot again. In the moment of crisis, a new ability manifested, and he was able to stun her with a telepathic blow.

Then he read her mind and learned everything.

James divorced his wife; he achieved some satisfaction by being able to prove the attempt on his life, sending her and her lover to prison. Although no one would have accepted what he learned from reading her mind as evidence, he now knew all the details of the plot, some of which were easy enough to prove through simple police work once he put the police on the right trail. But the wound was not healed. He closed his practice (to his surprise, he found the hardest thing about the process was leaving his patients). He began to travel. He studied at monasteries in the Far East, honing his talents. When he returned to America after five years, he was ready to return to his psychiatric practice, but somehow, he wanted to do more. His abilities were now truly impressive. He decided to moonlight as a crimefighter.

Chapel has been unusually successful as a crimefighter, or perhaps just unusually lucky; he has been instrumental in

the arrest of two organized crime kingpins. In addition, the fact that he can read minds makes him particularly unnerving to criminals. As a result, even more so than with most masked crimefighters, the mob is hunting for him, trying to find some way to find him and destroy him.

His wealthy family knows nothing about his "other job." He suspects they would be embarrassed and troubled by it, so he keeps it a secret, using the alias Doctor Nightcraft when he patrols the streets or confronts evildoers. It is not too hard to keep his secret; most people who know Chapel view him as a dedicated professional, a pleasant and charming man who spends a lot on his clothes (it is one of the few luxuries on which he refuses to skimp) and who probably takes the suffering of his patients too much to heart for his own good, but not as someone obsessed with fighting crime.

James R. Chapel, II (a.k.a. Doctor Nightcraft)   *350 points*

Attributes: **ST:** 11 [10] **DX** 11 [20] **IQ** 13 [60] **HT** 11 [10]

Basic Lift 24 [0] HP 11 [0] Will 14 [5] Per 13 [0] FP 11 [0] Basic Speed 6 [10]

Cultural Familiarities: East Asian [1]; South Asian [1]; Western (Native) [0]

Languages: Cantonese (Accented, Spoken only) [2]; English (Native) [0]; German (Accented) [4]; Hindi (Accented, Spoken only) [2]; Japanese (Accented, Spoken only) [2]; Latin (Broken) [2]; Mandarin Chinese (Accented, Spoken only) [2]

Advantages: Appearance (Handsome) [12]; Independent Income 5 [5]; Mental Blast (Affliction 1; Malediction 2, +150%; Daze, +50%; Based on Will, +20%; Psionic, -10%) [31]; Mental Illusions (Affliction 1; Malediction 2, +150%; Hallucinations, +50%; Based on Will, +20%; Psionic, -10%; Alternate Attack, x1/5 cost) [7]; Mind Reading (Sensory, +20%; Psionic, -10%) [33]; Mind Shield 5 (Psionic, -10%) [18]; Status 1 [0]*; Unkillable 1 [50]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20]

* includes one free level from Wealth

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Crimefighter) [-10]; Code of Honor (Physician) [-5]; Enemy (Organized crime, Large group, 6-) [-15]; Light Sleeper [-5]; Secret Identity (Serious Embarrassment) [-5]

Quirks: Cares deeply about his patients [-1]; Snappy dresser [-1]

Skills: Acting-12 [1]; Anthropology (Human)-11 [1]; Area Knowledge (New York)-13 [1]; Boating (Sailboat)-11 [2]; Boxing-12 [4]; Current Affairs (People)-14 [2]; Dancing-11 [2]; Detect Lies-13 [3]*; Diplomacy-12 [2]; Driving (Automobile)-13 [8]; Expert Skill (Strange Powers)-12 [2]; First Aid-15 [1]†; Gambling-13 [2]; Guns (Pistol)-12 [2]; Hypnotism-12 [2]; Interrogation-13 [2]; Leadership-12 [1]; Meditation-15 [8]; Observation-12 [1]; Occultism-12 [1]; Pharmacy (Synthetic)-12 [2]; Physician-15 [12]; Physiology-12 [2]; Psychology-15 [12]; Research-12 [1]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-14 [2]; Sex Appeal-15 [2]‡; Shadowing-12 [1]; Streetwise-12 [1]; Typing-11 [1]; Writing-12 [1]

* based on default from Psychology
† based on default from Physician
‡ includes +4 from Appearance

Starting Wealth: $50,000 ($12,500 available in cash)
Monthly Income: $5,700 (includes $2,500 per month from Independent Income 5)
Monthly Cost of Living: $1,200

Free RPG Day Report: Indianapolis Area

June 23, 2007

by Steven Marsh, Nikola Vrtis, & Sam Vrtismarsh

Since Free RPG Day seemed like one of the biggest cross-publisher cross-retail events since . . . well, *ever,* we thought it would be appropriate if *Pyramid* went on its first investigative road trip to nearby Friendly Local Game Stores to see how the event turned out for them. Unfortunately, the definition of "nearby" proved to be somewhat problematic; there was only one store within half an hour of where we lived. Expanding that definition to "those within an hour's drive" opened up many more possibilities; it also meant that there might be as much as a two-hour drive between stores. Nevertheless, we persevered and picked a plan that took us to five stores over the course of 10 hours . . . and a couple of the stores we visited more than once.

The weather was decidedly uncooperative throughout the day, and we had overcast periods intermingled with torrential downpours that made driving along state roads even more exciting. We had envisioned our journey as beginning at around 9:00 a.m. Saturday morning, so naturally we headed out the door at 10. This didn't prove to be a problem, as we discovered that the first store we arrived at didn't open until 11:00; faced with our first dilemma, we decided to skip that store and continue onward.

And thus we arrived shortly after 11:00 at our first stop of the day, Reader Copies.

Reader Copies
2976 N. Scatterfield Road Ste 131
Anderson, IN 46012
765-642-4028
www.readercopies.com

Reader Copies opened at 9:00 a.m., and there were some customers playing a card game, as well as a few milling around holding Free RPG Day material. Reader Copies is owned by an affable gentleman named Rembert Parker, who -- among other talents -- has also written for the gaming industry (including *Airwaves* for *Over the Edge*).

Reader Copies is a traditionally appointed comic and game shop, with separate rooms of what seemed to be a former office building converted into various sections. Reader Copies had plenty of space for in-store gaming, including a separate back room where trusted customers could lock up at the end of the night after the store had closed.

By the time we arrived at the establishment, a couple of the items were already low or out, despite the one-item-per-customer limit the store had placed on the Free RPG Day material.

We spoke with Keilah Clay and Tim Ward, gamers who drove from

Richmond, IN (about a 75-minute drive), and who were deliberating over which items they wanted to pick out. Keilah, a fan of *d20 Modern* and *Dungeons & Dragons,* hoped that the event would serve to bring more gamers into the hobby; it seemed to her that there weren't as many players as there were when she started gaming four years ago. Both Keilah and Tim had heard about Free RPG Day on Free Comic Book Day, when the store handed out promotional material about the gaming event; Keilah wasn't sure if she would have heard about it otherwise.

As we were talking, another customer arrived asking about Free RPG Day, and Rembert directed him to the various offerings on the table, pointing out each item by name and giving a brief description.

After we finished talking with Keilah and Tim, the store quieted down for the first time since we'd arrived, and we chatted with Rembert a bit about the state of the gaming world. He also saw the lack of players as a potential problem: "It's very difficult to get game groups together anymore; we get four to six people for an event, we're happy." Reader Copies' biggest problem is finding people to run games, especially GMs for roleplaying events.

Rembert was pleased with the way the event had transpired up to that point, and he seemed most affirmative about whether he would participate in the future, especially if the cost remained reasonable. He would have liked to see more variety in the material, especially from bigger-name publishers (most notably Wizards of the Coast); he compared the level of publisher involvement with its counterpart in the comic world: "With Free Comic Book Day, every major comic book publisher is involved."

Reader Copies specializes in diversity, with no one game or product line dominating sales; as such, maintaining or expanding on diverse offerings was crucial for Rembert in making future Free RPG Days more successful to him. As such, Rembert would have also liked to see other companies ancillary to the gaming world participate, in particular miniatures and dice manufacturers. One of the items in the retailer kit was a set of four dice with the store's name on them; Rembert would have liked the option to purchase a hundred of those dice to use for promotional purposes.

We thanked Rembert for his time and moved on.

The Danger Room
2213 S. Scatterfield Road, #6
Anderson, IN 46016
(765) 646-634
www.danger-room.com

The second store we visited was the Danger Room, located in the same town as our first stop. While the previous store felt more like a traditional comics-and-games spot, the Danger Room seemed more like a media retailer that included games as part of its mix (along with DVDs and CDs, comics, pinball and arcade gameplay, and other merchandise). Although relatively small, the location made excellent use of its limited space, while still providing an on-site gaming area in the back. We arrived shortly after their noontime opening, and the

store was still setting up their Free RPG Day event.

The Danger Room's plans centered around running RPG demos all day and offering the Free RPG Day publications as prizes for those who participate; it sounded like each participant would receive one product. The demos were run by Jason Korthuis, who also viewed the lack of players as a problem facing the industry, and hoped that Free RPG Day would prove useful in efforts to recruit new or lapsed players. "I think a strong community push would really do wonders, because everyone knows what *Dungeons & Dragons* is. Everybody's heard about it, but not that many people have played *Dungeons & Dragons,* or had the experience of sitting around a table with four other guys or girls and playing a game." The event was still warming up in our time there, and only one player was seated who was interested in participating in a demo when we arrived. It looked like Jason was going to be running *The Sinister Secret of Whiterock,* one of the Free RPG Day offerings from Goodman Games.

Although it was still too early in their day to judge the success of the event, General Manager Tony Lakas was happy with how the products were presented by the publishers. Since Tony was utilizing the event as an extension of their demo program, he would have liked to see some more demo-ready product, with pre-prepared character sheets and the like. (In another odd bit of industry synchronicity, it turns out that Tony is also a member of the GAMA Retail Division.)

Carrying on a theme established with the visit to our first store, Jason took a break from setup to purchase a card-game booster pack along with a few sodas to have on hand for the day's demos. "Diversification works!" quipped Tony, commenting on the two disparate items purchased.

After that, we headed out again.

It was around 3:00 p.m. when we stopped at Krypton Comics; although the door was open, business at the store didn't officially get underway until 4:00, so the owner wasn't on hand for comments. We pressed on, vowing to return.

The Game Preserve
101 W. Kirkwood Ave.
Bloomington, IN 47404
www.gamepreserve.com

Our third full stop was the Game Preserve, which we arrived at shortly before 4:00 p.m. We were actually familiar with the Game Preserve

name, since another of their shops does business in a mall about five minutes from our house. It turns out that there are four locations total, of which the [Bloomington branch](#) is the third. Bloomington is a [college town](#), so the clientele and atmosphere was very different from other shops we'd visited that day.

Located in a storefront situated along a main street, the Game Preserve is a deceptively deep store, with a large selection of games: board, card, miniatures, and RPG. We spoke with Assistant Manager Jessica Leach as she was learning how to demo a new game that was expected to arrive next week.

Apparently the relative quietness of the store when we were there belied a bustling business in the hours before our arrival. According to Jessica, there were eight tables running eight demos earlier in day; they would have run more if they had room, and they were turning folks away from events. Demos included the new *Changeling: The Lost;* the *Warehammer Fantasy Roleplay* adventure *The Pig, the Witch and her Lover;* and *Castles & Crusades.* Interestingly, they also ran demos of the new *Star Wars Saga Edition RPG* as well as *Dungeons & Dragons.* According to Jessica, the Game Preserve has a good relationship with their Wizards of the Coast delegate, so it wasn't hard to arrange demos and prize support through them. We found this development interesting; where other stores had lamented the lack of Wizards of the Coast's official involvement, the Game Preserve took matters into their own hands.

By the time we got there, the Free RPG Day offerings had been fairly well picked over, despite the store's strict one-item-per-customer limit. "I wish they would have sent us a few more of certain ones," Jessica admitted, "It would've been nice to have more so people could get more than one." This was especially true of the high-demand items (primarily the Goodman Games books, which were "gone immediately").

Jessica had been promoting the event heavily in the weeks leading up to Free RPG Day, telling regular customers as well as those who browsed the RPG section about their plans. Besides updating the in-store signage and online message boards with information, she notes that news about the event "spread around by word of mouth, and the fact that people are excited to see something like the new *Changeling* RPG or *Warhammer.*"

When asked how she felt the event went, Jessica replied, "I'm impressed!" She believed the event served them well as retailers, "because for some of the games that are question marks it will help us generate pre-orders and will allow us to be more informed about our ordering." One game she sited as an example was the new *Changeling;* the old version of the game has a large following in town, and she wasn't sure how much interest there was in the new version.

Jessica disagreed with the need for a larger demonstration program, stating her belief that it was the store's job to find demoers: "I roped people in," she said.

We thanked her for her time and left her to continue learning new games.

Krypton Comics
152 N Main St
Martinsville, IN 46151
(765) 346-7169
groups.myspace.com/KryptonComics

We retraced our steps back to Krypton Comics, which was now fully open when we arrived at 4:30. This was a smaller shop that had a mixture of comic and game product on its walls, plus a demo table in the front and a separate gameplay area in the back. Despite being only half an hour away from the previous store, the clientele for Krypton Comics was decidedly different, as we learned in our discussion with store owner Eric Singer. They weren't expecting a large turnout among their customers, and -- in comparison to reports of folks arriving at or before store opening at other retailers -- it didn't seem that many items had been taken yet from their display.

Eric is a believer in developing gamer interest at the local level, and one of the signs incorporated into the Free RPG Day display was a sign about the "Fun & Games at the Library" program he participates in that targets grades 6 to 12. He was disappointed that the promotional items only arrived a few days before the event, because he would have liked to be able to read the material and prepare demos of some of the products. "They really should have gotten this merchandise to us a month ago . . . at least two weeks," he said. We were again reminded of regional differences in store locations when we learned that there was little buzz among his customers about Free RPG Day; similarly, they never got a large turnout for Free Comic Book Day. Because of this lack of a regional push, Eric wasn't expecting to restrict the number of items customers could take. We learned that Eric had limited the display area for Free RPG Day to include only those items with color covers that he could display attractively (thus leaving the *Prime Directive, Dark Alley,* and *Runequest* items behind the counter). Said Eric, "They're not attractive; with any kind of thing like this, it's got to be attractive; if it's not attractive, the customer doesn't look at it." Likewise he didn't believe it was worthwhile to put out items he received too few copies of (such as the *Septimus Quickstart* and the *Little Ork Wars,* both of which he only received one or two).

Like the other stores we went to that day, Eric sited diversity as a strength of both his store and the game market: "There's so many different games out there besides *[Dungeons & Dragons],* besides *Magic.*"

We continued our journey, returning to the store we had first attempted to check out . . . ironically, a store that has ties to the first store we visited.

Reader Copies TWO
2325 Conner Street
Noblesville, IN 46060

(317) 774-8220
readercopiestwo.com

It was late in the day by the time we arrived at Reader Copies TWO, a partner store to the location in Andersonville. It wasn't wildly busy in the store when we got there, although a group of folks were sitting down to a game of *Settlers of Catan,* including owner Matt Phillips. Taking a break from his Catan-settling, Matt willingly answered our questions about how the event went. "This is the quietest it's been all day," he said; the store had seen a lot of foot traffic, and the state of the Free RPG Day display table bore out this observation.

Matt viewed this event as a unique opportunity to get the word out about his location. Said Matt, "The biggest problem we've had is the same as everybody else: letting people know we're here." This was especially true for Reader Copies TWO, which moved to its new location a month ago from the other side of town. "It's actually brought in a lot of new faces," said Matt. "There have been a lot of roleplaying game people coming in and out all day long, and I've been really impressed, because I didn't think it would work." The store wasn't limiting what people could take from the Free RPG Day offerings; they only they had was "don't take the last of something." They were hoping to run demos of some of the titles later and could only do so if they had the product.

Reader Copies TWO used the occasion to tie in the event with material of local interest; *Rifts* is a huge seller for the store, so the regional Megaversal Ambassador from Palladium arrived early in the day with a box of *Rifters,* which were made freely available on the same display as the other Free RPG Day offerings.

Continuing a theme we'd encountered many times throughout the day, Matt volunteered his impressions on the Free RPG Day publications, noting the "good mix of *d20 [System]* and non-*d20 [System]*" material. Obviously any store that has a huge *Rifts* following must believe in market diversity to some extent.

And with that, we drove home, having added five stores (1.66% of participating locations) to our belt and 232 miles to our car. Despite the similarities one might expect from having five stores in the same general region, each approached the event in its own way; in much the same way that each store was different, so too was their utilization of Free RPG Day.

While diversity is usually something to be frowned upon in the business world -- most Wal-Marts are alike, and they're more similar than dissimilar to Targets -- in the gaming world, it seems to be a hallmark of the industry: diverse interests, diverse products, diverse stores, diverse customers. Hopefully in this sea of diversity some gamers have some new ideas of what they're going to be doing next Friday night, just as some store owners have some new ideas about what they're going to be doing for next year's Free RPG Day.

The Legend of Mr. Box

by J. Edward Tremlett

What if you could be anywhere in the world with a single word? The late (?) Mr. Box discovered the secret of teleportation through the "Whereaway Box," and used it to power a life of freewheeling theft. This generic Supers article presents this supervillian, and explores ideas on what to do with him, now that he's "dead."

* * *

When Daniel Whereaway was 10, he saw space fold by the River Thames, right in front of his hand.

It was on a school trip to Westminster to see Cleopatra's Needle, at the Victoria Embankment. As he stared up at the ancient obelisk, the tour leader explained that there was not one Cleopatra's Needle, but *three:* one here, one in New York, and the other in Paris. All were different, yet all three were "Cleopatra's Needle," even if Cleopatra herself had nothing to do with them . . .

It was an interesting story, but Whereaway wasn't listening. He was imagining that the three needles, all identical in his mind, were somehow the *same* object -- somehow existing in three different places at once. If he wrote his name on one, would the other two now bear his signature? If the Russians bombed London, would the other two vaporize?

And if he were to touch one, and desire to be at another, could he speak a word and find himself *somewhere else?*

He reached out his hand towards the needle in wonderment, closed his eyes, and breathed the word "Paris." In his mind he imagined the world whooshing by underfoot: the Thames, the South of England and its Channel, the North of France, and then the great city he'd only seen in picture books, magically zeroing in on another great finger of red granite . . .

He just might have opened his eyes in Paris if Robert Fisk, class bully, hadn't picked that moment to thump him on the head. The injury left Daniel seeing stars for the rest of the afternoon, and forever taunted by the thought of surprise-calling his parents from France.

Which is why, 25 years later, Mr. Fisk mysteriously disappeared from his London flat and reappeared in the air over Paris, crashing messily to earth not far from the Place de la Concorde. London Investigators found a small, white cube in his recliner seat. And their French counterparts discovered another cube affixed to the bottom of a plane -- one that had been over Paris just as Mr. Fisk's favorite show had come on.

The super-thief known as "Mr. Box" had struck again. He was always pulling little jokes on his enemies and occasional allies, but that was the first time he resorted to murder. No one -- not even his arch-foe, The Stabilizer -- was certain why Whereaway's methods took a turn for the deadly.

But given the rumors of his impending demise from cancer, some suspected he was losing his mind . . .

The Man

The bump that Fisk gave him may have gone away, in time, but Daniel Whereaway never abandoned the idea of a thing being in two different places at once, and instant travel between them. He read and watched anything he could (*Dr. Who* being a particular favorite) and daydreamed to the point of obsession. And when he went to University he pursued a study of theoretical physics so esoteric -- perhaps "crazy" -- that only three scientists in the world knew anything useful.

It was a long, grueling process, traveling to each man, in turn, and learning at his feet. He had to cross the line from

dedicated student to thieving vagabond several times, just to survive his treks across the world. But after 10 years of studying bilocation, matter transportation, and dimensional transcendentalism he emerged with a solid theory of how to achieve his lifelong dreams.

It was not to be an easy path, as he had no funding to speak of, so Daniel used the skills he'd learned to survive his education. He turned to confidence schemes to finance his researches, and outright theft to acquire the things he needed. In time he gained a reputation as something of a gentleman thief, and his dandyish manner of dress -- borrowed from one of his favorite Doctors -- certainly didn't hurt.

After years of theft and feverish experimentations came his first miracle: a small box which, when energized through the process he'd discovered, became two . . . and yet one. One he had sent to Paris, with precise instructions on its placing at Cleopatra's Needle. The other he kept with him, waiting for the predetermined time. When it came close, he marched down to the Victoria Embankment, pulled the box out of his pocket, consulted his watch, and said one word: "Paris." And then Daniel was gone.

Mr. Box -- as he'd rechristened himself -- stayed near, at, or under the Place de la Concorde for the next 10 years. His hideout was a treasure trove of objects d'art from the entire world, with only the finest and most exquisite things "borrowed" for his collection. And it was quite an honor for a fellow superthief to be invited to tea or dinner at his place, though anyone trying to steal from *him* literally vanished.

Attempts to nab Mr. Box, in or after the act, proved highly elusive. The Stabilizer -- Europe's greatest superhero detective -- seemingly came within inches of achieving this goal on several occasions, but it turned out those inches were misdirection on Box's part. And the one time his rivals seemed to beat him to the goal, and truly deter him, was simply a generous feint: Daniel hadn't wanted that painting, anyway, and only wanted to give The Stabilizer a merry Christmas.

All was well and good until this last year, when Mr. Box's behavior became more erratic: desperate, and lacking his usual poetry. When El Palo Rojo apprehended The Chiurgeon in Madrid, among the criminal doctor's many confessions was that Mr. Box had come to him for treatment, and he'd discovered numerous outbreaks of cancer throughout his entire body. The Chiurgeon was willing to try some radical treatments, but Box politely refused, saying he preferred a dignified end.

Then came the death of Mr. Fisk, followed by The Chiurgeon's inexplicable escape from his holding cell. A short while later, The Stabilizer received a card in the mail from Mr. Box, telling him where to find his hideout, and that all his "borrowed" things might now be returned. At first he thought it another misdirection, or perhaps a joke, but the hideout was indeed there, and within it was a decade's worth of exquisite theft.

That was almost a year ago, and though there has been no further sign of Mr. Box, The Stabilizer refuses to count him gone. His file is still marked "Solution Pending."

Daniel Whereaway, 40; British citizen with criminal record

Stats: Average Body; Impressive Mental; Medium Spirit

Appearance: 5'9, 190 lb, wavy red hair, green eyes, handsome features.

Costume: Crushed blue velvet smoking jacket with white cravat, gloves and spats. Often carried an ivory sword-cane, but never needed to use it.

Family: Mother and Father, 60 and 59, (estranged)

Power: The Boxes

A Whereaway Box is nothing special to behold, at least at first sight. Each one is a solid, white cube made of smooth plastic, ranging anywhere from about the size of a sugar cube to one the size of a small elephant. There are no

markings of any kind on the sides, and nothing inside. The length of each side, whether in millimeters, centimeters or meters, is Pi, and they smell slightly of ozone.

What is truly special about the boxes is that each one is actually two, and therefore in two places at once. Whatever is done to one box happens to the other. And as well as allowing instantaneous travel between them, they also allow whoever's holding one box to be vaguely aware of the immediate surroundings of the other.

Travel is conducted by simply touching a box, which can be set to active or passive mode. In passive mode the box must be activated -- sometimes by codeword or thought, sometimes by touch -- in order to work. In active mode it is set so that it will activate whenever *anyone else* comes into contact with it, regardless of whether they know what they're doing or not. (This is how the late Mr. Fisk met his maker in Paris.)

Upon activation, the box transports its operator and anything he may be wearing, carrying, or even touching at the moment. This is how Mr. Box was able to steal extremely heavy, amazingly-secured or guarded things, so long as they, or their secure housings, were relatively free-standing. He only needed a moment to touch the object of his desire while activating a box, and then he and the object were gone before anyone, or anything, could react.

The size of the boxes has nothing to do with how much a user can carry at once, but how many trips one can make with them. The smallest, sugar-cube sized box is good for one trip only, while something 31.4 meters to a side is good for thousands of trips back and forth. The only physical difference between a functioning box and a spent one is that the ozone smell has dissipated.

To this day, no one is quite certain if Whereaway learned some secret process for constructing his boxes, if he developed a special power to imbue them with their singular abilities, or some combination of the two. He was careful to destroy all his notes and journals, and teleport his equipment to the bottom of the ocean, prior to his disappearance. And he shared the secret with no one, in or out of the criminal fraternity.

The closest anyone's gotten to duplicating Whereaway's secret was the would-be superthief Planar, who tried to reverse-engineer a spent box. His first heist was also his first field test, and proved fatal. He dropped down dead in Mexico City, still clutching the statuette he'd attempted to steal, while a perfect duplicate of himself materialized in Acapulco, also dead, and clutching an exact copy of the statuette.

Ideas for Use

Whereaway is . . .

- **Dead.** He'd conquered all, and was unable to think of new vistas and conflicts to allay his boredom and wanderlust. After planting the story (and a means of escape) with the Chiurgeon, and "thanking" Fisk, he teleported to a remote location in the Andaman Islands to enjoy one last sunset on a beach. The wine was stolen from the best vineyard in France, and the poison was slow and painless, almost like falling asleep. The waves and fish claimed what the authorities could not.
- **Missing, presumed dead.** He *did* have terminal cancer, and rather than suffer, he rigged it so The Dimensioneer unwittingly teleported a box, just as Whereaway activated the other. That was however-many blind teleport tests ago, not even The Dimensioneer knows where it could be. But he insists that none of his journeys are ever necessarily one-way: Mr. Box may well return, one day.
- **Hiding.** The Stabilizer, who can also track molecular processes, was closing in on Whereaway's secrets. So he paid the Chiurgeon to lie, abandoned all he had and vanished, and is currently living in Paris under an assumed name. One day The Stabilizer will get self-assured and careless, just like every other hero, and on that day Mr. Box will stage a grand comeback, so that his beloved rival might regain his true glory.
- **Redeemed.** The cancer had been caused by his boxes, or so he surmised, and in his despair he blamed Fisk. But the utter glee and ease with which he dispatched his old, childhood nemesis -- crossing the line from thief to murderer -- scared him. So he's faked his death and is spending however much time he has left perfecting his boxes. He hopes to present them to the world as a parting gift, and restitution, before his demise.

The Omniscient Eye

If There's No Up in Space, How Do I Know I've Got the Right Elevator?

Beanstalks, orbital elevators, call them what you will, but what's the experience of riding one likely to be like? For example:

- **How thick is the cable going to be?**
- **How will you get into one of the "cable cars" that goes up to orbit?**
- **Would they be able to stop and start individually, like trains on a track, or would there be some sort of continuous belt arrangement, so the whole system would either be running or stopped, like a ferris wheel?**
- **How will bad weather on the surface (say, hurricanes) effect the system?**
- **How big could the cars be? Automobile-sized? Tour bus? Hotel?**
- **How long would the trip take, how long until you're above breathable atmosphere, and how would gravity change during the trip to the top?**

Let the Omniscient Eye take you on a tourist trip up the Space Elevator. We fly into Doorstep Airport, a hundred miles from the elevator's anchor point. The train from the airport takes us past the missile batteries protecting the elevator from terrorist aircraft. The anchor facilities look like the world's biggest train station. Containers just arrived from orbit are hauled to the airport while others wait their turn to go up.

Passengers go straight to the reception lobby. We pay for our reservations and walk over to the noon passenger car. It's roughly the size of a Greyhound bus stood on its end. Twenty passengers and crew would make it very crowded, but since it's made out of the same materials as the elevator cable almost the entire volume is available for living quarters and cargo instead of structure. A movie about the glories of the elevator entertains us until it's our car's turn to go up. It moves horizontally 300 meters to the elevator and locks onto the "up" cable.

The end is the thinnest point of the cable. The cable is shaped as a flat ribbon, providing a good surface for the climbing engines to grip with their rollers. If it was compacted into a square it would be only 1.5 millimeters on a side. This version of the cable can handle a 20-ton load at the end. The thin initial deployment could only support a 600 kg car without breaking. Future plans are being developed for a thicker cable to handle hundred-ton cars; now that a second cable has been set up for down traffic, anchored 200 meters west of the first, there is even more demand for trips to GEO and beyond.

After the final safety checks the car's engines start hauling it up. The acceleration is gentler than the elevators in some skyscrapers. It feels like we're creeping along the elevator but the view is too fascinating for us to care. The security zone has gone back to jungle since it was evacuated for construction. The mountains behind it grab our attention next. Behind us a boy tries to frighten his grandmother by pretending he feels the car shaking from the wind. A steward quickly spikes him by explaining that all Anchor Station traffic is shut down when the winds are even half of the strength needed to shake a car on the cable. The lounge entertainment is replaced by a dry documentary about how little effect Hurricane Margaret had on the elevator 12 years ago. All but one of the test cars sent through made it. While the cars had a hard time holding on in the wind, the cable had less stress from the hurricane than from its normal traffic load.

When the world looks round we realize we're actually in space now. The first 100 kilometers took us nearly an hour, going slowly to avoid excessive drag. A few hops reveal that gravity is noticeably lighter now. 3% less isn't much of a difference, but it feels like taking off a backpack. The elevator has reached its top speed and is climbing at 400 km/hr with the engines fighting gravity, not accelerating.

The stewards serve dinner six hours into the trip. Not bad, compared to airline food. As soon as we finish we're back at the windows. The world looks stationary from up here. It's only when we come back that we realize how much we've moved.

At midnight we give in and climb into our hammocks. A real bed might be more comfortable, but nobody on this trip wanted to buy an extra ticket to pay for the weight of the mattress. Ninety hours is too long a trip to stay up the whole time. When we wake up we're only a fifth of our normal weight. At breakfast all the parents are busy keeping the kids from spilling their drinks to watch the low-gee splashes. The windows aren't grabbing as many people with Earth over 7000 km away. Most of the passengers have switched to normal travel pastimes: books, videogames, and cards.

Finding a quiet corner for a card game makes us accidental witnesses to a milestone in the trip. As dinner approaches the head steward opens the control console, disarms the parachute deployment system, and activates the emergency maneuver thrusters. We've passed 23,500 km. If the car had fallen off the cable below that altitude it would have landed on Earth. The parachutes would have softened the landing enough for most of us to survive. Now a loose elevator car would stay in an elliptical orbit. The thrusters would maneuver it enough to avoid hitting the cable on the next orbit. There's a week's worth of air and water on board, enough to hold us until a rescue rocket arrives.

Gravity drops quickly down to near-zero over the rest of the trip. The stewards are good at spotting imminent space sickness but one kid throws up before they can slap an anti-nausea patch on him. The downstairs lounge is taken over by the active types exploring low- gee acrobatics. The stewards have ice packs and finger splints ready for the inevitable.

By the time we get to GEO Station we're used to free fall. The business travelers head out to their jobs. A pair of gray-haired greeters escort new residents to the zero-gee retirement home. The rest of us go on the station tour.

The elevator engineers constantly fight proposals to hang permanent structures on the cable. The lowest 1,000 km of the cable is a perfect place for tourism and observation platforms. Some people even want to put manufacturing and luxury housing there. Their weight would cut directly into the carrying capacity of the elevator. The lower the altitude the more effect it has. Geostationary altitude is the only place where mass can be connected without putting stress on the cable . . . and with the engineers' blessing GEO Station has been expanding steadily since the elevator first went operational.

Structures placed east and west of the cable exert virtually no force on the rest of the station. North and south extensions are pulled toward the equator by gravity, compressing the middle, which is easily handled. It's up and down extremes that cause the problem by pulling away from GEO. More than one tenant has had a module forcibly dismantled for disturbing the balance of the station. It's grown into a rough cylinder including the up and down cables (now over a kilometer apart), stretching along the equator for over 2,000 meters. The original spacecraft servicing hangers have been converted into pharmaceutical and integrated circuit factories. New hangers are on the ends of the station to make docking easier and safer. In between are the living quarters, communications antennas, hydroponics gardens, and government facilities with no identifying markings. A new residents-only recreation facility just opened, catering to "Jacks" who don't want clumsy visitors getting in the way of their zero-gee sports.

Other Elevator Concepts

The description of this trip is focused on one type of space elevator, an enlarged descendant of the NIAC study design. There are lots of other designs out there. Until we actually build a 1,000-km-long cable which is strong enough to support a space elevator everybody has to work to assumptions about what the elevator will be made of and how it will behave. Carbon nanotubes are the current material of choice, but scaling them up into huge structures may have emergent effects that don't match their theoretical behavior. By the time there's enough market demand for a elevator we may be capable of producing cables of solid diamond, or of composites with currently undreamed of strength.

Other design choices have to be dealt with regardless of the material. The elevator cars can be powered by their own batteries, draw off a power line attached to the cable, or receive a radiated power beam. The climbing motor can surround the cable, cling to one side of the cable (allowing up and down traffic on the same cable), or even be on the cable instead of the car. There are published designs using all of

After the tour we get back in our passenger car, now flipped over with its top toward the Earth. Our trip resumes upward, headed for the end of the cable 72,000 km from the center of the Earth. 20 hours later we notice gravity is back. More precisely, centrifugal force is now slightly stronger than gravity and we're being very gently pressed against the spaceward side of the car.

There's one bit of excitement on this leg. The stewards tell everyone to seatbelt, the first time we've used them. We suddenly feel Earth-heavy as the car brakes to a stop, then heads back down the elevator. The head steward explains, "We're doing vibration damping. Moving cars changes the resonance of the cable and absorbs the energy of a wave. Normally we just use cargo cars for this, but because of the special event we've got much less cargo on the elevator than usual, so passengers have to help out." After an hour we get the seat belt warning again. A table of careless players have all their cards wind up on the ceiling as the car accelerates up again.

The windows on the car only face away from the cable. Early passengers looking at the cable had been shocked by other cars zipping by at a relative 800 km/hr. As we approach Departure Station -- 2,000 km before the end of the line -- everyone lines the windows to catch a glimpse but the huge structure flashes by in a few seconds.

We finally arrive at Top Station, the counterweight holding up the entire elevator. One steward leads us to an observation dome while the rest help load ballast into the car before immediately heading down again. In the dome we look up but Departure Station blocks our view of Earth. We're at 0.03g and don't feel upside down at all even though the planet is directly "above" us. A display shows cars positioned all over the upper elevator for damping duty as well as a countdown. The Jacks worry more about the damping; departure is "ready or not" by now and they're concerned about whiplash damage. Like the rest of the tourists we just watch the countdown. When it gets close to the end we lie down to watch the show without getting a crick in our neck.

The station manager does the traditional last 10 seconds of the count. Anyone expecting pyrotechnics should've know better. Departure Station is just retracting the arms holding *Zeus* in place. The monitors show the separation increasing. To the naked eye the it's all one big jumble of trusses and pressure vessels. We still cheer as the first manned Jovian expedition starts on its way.

The next hour gives us a better look at *Zeus.* The crew sees itself traveling in a straight line perpendicular to where they left the elevator, a stone slung by Terra's sling at over 18,000 km/hr. To us the ship is heading straight up along the elevator at 2,000 km/hr. Seeing something kilometers long heading toward us at that speed makes some of our fellow tourists nervous. The rest of us watch in awe as the huge ship swells above us, finally passing by only 300 klicks away. A few of us catch our breath before joining the stampeded to the Farside observation dome.

The elevator is going back to normal operations. The "twang" from releasing the ship was about as strong as analysis had predicted, so the vibrations were quickly damped by the cars in place along the cable. When *Zeus'* propellant tanks were being filled there wasn't much capacity left for routine cargo. Now all the low-priority loads are being sent up using both cables for "up" cars. We'll be spending a few days at Top Station while waiting for them to catch up.

Reference link

- NASA NIAC report on space elevator development -- http://www.isr.us/Downloads/niac_pdf/contents.html

those options.

An elevator will also change over time. The initial line will be the minimum necessary to hold itself up, to make deployment easier. As time goes by it will be augmented or replaced by stronger cables. Some elevator concepts have three or six cables close together as their eventual configuration.

How will this affect the passengers? Not all that much, most likely, if all that's changed is the infrastructure. A huge change in the strength of the cable will be noticed. At the weaker end of the possible cables humans travel suited up in Gemini-size capsules, with no tourists allowed. When the cable reaches its full potential there'll be additional platforms for tourists to stop off at, such as the "One Hour" right above Earth's atmosphere described in Gerrold's *Jumping Off the Planet.* But regardless of how comfortable the trip is the view (and the gravity) will be the same.

--Karl Gallagher

Pyramid Review

Walk the Plank

Published by [Green Ronin](#)

Designed by Brian Hess & Evan Sass

Edited by Bill Bodden, Brian Hess, & Eric Sass

Art by Ramsey Hong, jim pinto, & Hal Mangold

70 cards (five suits of 13 cards each, two Walk the Plank! cards, one Sea Monster! card, one I'm the Captain card, one advertisement), rules sheet; full-color, tuck-boxed, three to nine players; $14.95

For a group whose romanticized contingent disappeared over a century ago, pirates are certainly hale and hearty when it comes to modern media. There's no getting rid of them in the game industry, that's for sure, though in Green Ronin's new trick-taking card game *Walk the Plank* you may have to dispense with a few of them.

The object of the game is to be the last one to take a trick and become captain.

You and your mates (three to nine of you) have your ship; what you don't have is a leader. Everyone has it into his head that he is best suited to wear the mantle of captain, but he needs to convince everyone else. The man in command (for now) is whoever draws the highest card from the deck. For the first round, everyone receives seven cards. They number one to 13 in five different suits (Monkey, Doubloon, Hookhand, Pegleg [sic], and Parrot); somewhere in the deck also sit two *Walk the Plank!* cards and a lurking *Sea Monster!* Another card is flipped up to show what the trump suit is for the inaugural hand.

At first blush, it's a lot like Hearts. The captain leads with whatever suit, uh . . . suits him. If you can you must follow suit; if you have nothing from that run of cards, you can play whatever you like. The highest card from the lead suit takes the trick (everyone playing one card from their hand is called a battle) unless a card from the trump suit is played. Then it's the highest card from that suit. Either of these can be beaten by making the other contenders *Walk the Plank!,* however. Even that can be beaten by the arrival of the *Sea Monster!,* but in that case no one takes the trick.

Whoever took the most tricks during the hand is captain for the beginning of the next round. He gets to choose the trump suit after seeing his new hand. Attrition being what it is on the high seas, a) if you did not win any tricks that round it means your "friends" have disposed of you in some appropriate fashion and you're out of the game entirely; and b) everyone gets only six cards this time. Play continues in this fashion, the hands dwindling by one each round, until everyone has either been forced from the game or you get to the last round with one card each. The winner of that hand wears the captain's hat, and anyone who feels otherwise had better be prepared to back it up with steel.

When, oh when, will the paper embargoes of the world end? They didn't by press-time for this game. Like too many of its recent fellows, the cards are terribly flexible. They may possess some quality of weaving that allows them to hold up well under strain (and they need to, given how often they must be shuffled), but they can still bend alarmingly. There's a touch of irony to be found in the fact that the rules sheet is a pretty darn thick piece of paper. The artwork is okay for the *Plank* card, though it looks like someone tried to fit too much detail into what was meant to be a cartoon; the *Monster* accomplishes this much better. The rest of Ramsey Hong's pictures -- the suit cards -- are far better, with heavy, loving ink strokes that show a lot of character.

It's always worrisome when a game advertises itself as being like some other, more familiar game. Too often it amounts to a few little tweaks to the rules that don't amount to much. This does not fall into that category. It doesn't sound just from reading the rules -- a rather complete accounting that offers examples of play and definitions galore in just one sheet -- as if it's much of a simulation of pirate life. But when the rounds start and your competitors (your competitors if you're lucky) start falling to the wayside, there's a rush that comes from surviving one more turn.

It can be irritating shuffling the deck each and every turn, especially when you're doing it for the sake of a couple of cards, but they mix smoothly. Anyone who can resist the siren call of talking like a buccaneer during play is too much in this world, and probably deserving of embracing the briny. **Walk the Plank** is rapid, fun, and more than worthy of a little treasure from your own cargo.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Weird Wars: Tour of Darkness (for Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Teller with Shane Lacy Hensley, Simon Lucas, Rob Lusk, Greg Whalen, & Jason Young

Illustrated by Niklas Brandt, Cheyenne Wright & Richard Pollard

146-page black & white hardback; $29.95

Except for **Recon,** both in its original version published by RPG Inc. and the revamp released by Palladium, the Vietnam War has to date remained the province of the war-gaming rather than the roleplaying hobby. But **Revised Recon** is now joined by a second, **Weird Wars: Tour of Darkness.** As the title suggests, this is a sequel to 2001's [**Weird Wars II: Blood On the Rhine,**](#) but unlike that game, Tour of Darkness is not powered by the **d20 System.** Instead it uses [**Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds,**](#) the pulp orientated RPG also used for [**Evernight**](#) and [**50 Fathoms.**](#)

Spanning roughly a 25-year period, **Tour of Darkness** encompasses the history of Southeast Asia from the end of World War II to the fall of South Vietnam. Games can be run during France's attempted reoccupation of her Indochina colonies, during the early build up of U.S. forces in the early sixties, and finally in the desperate years of the late 1960s when conscripts spent a hellish year in-country. **Tour of Darkness** can be run as a straight military game, but as it also happens to be a **Weird Wars** title, there is a lot more going on. Horrors lurk out in the jungle, temples to dark gods stand forgotten, ready to reveal best forgotten knowledge to those that dare, and the U.S. military finds willing allies in tribes of cannibals. If he is lucky, a conscript will hear no more of this than rumors. Then his tour will be up and he can go back to the real world.

On the other hand, contact with the outré -- perhaps with strange beasts or with North Vietnamese sorcerers, and the soldier is likely to come to the notice of certain people in high places. Then he is a candidate to know the truth and once he knows, his tour is for the duration.

In the default setting, players take the roles of grunts, part of a 10-man squad serving in the U.S. military. This can be in the Army, the Marines, the brown water Navy, or even the Air Force; or serving with allied forces from Australia, New Zealand, South Korea or South Vietnam. Civilian characters are also possible: nurses, reporters, CIA spooks or archaeologists looking to investigate ancient sites before the North Vietnamese do. Characters are created using the standard **Savage Worlds** rules, players spending points to buy up the skills needed to qualify for a particular service branch. Unlike Blood on the Rhine, a player is expected to think about what his character did before his tour. One new Hindrance, the (political) "Activist," ties easily into this. The other Edges and Hindrances are all war related, such as a machine gunner's "Hose 'Em Down," and "Thumper King" for use with the M79 grenade launcher. Others tie into service branches, training, skills and command experience. The Rank Edge figures predominantly as it is possible for one player's character to outrank the others. Many also tie into the wargaming aspect of Tour of Darkness, such as "Command Presence" and "Spotter." A new and simple system of Sanity is introduced to handle the mental strain of encountering the setting's Horrors.

Up until page 35, **Tour of Darkness** is still a normal Vietnam-set game and players should have access to the sections covering setting and equipment information. (Pleasingly these first 35 pages are available as a player's book in PDF format). After that, the book is for the War Master's eyes only as it deviates away from the "reality" of the war.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

This begins with a true history of the war, that Ho Chi Minh employed not only guerrilla tactics, propaganda and so on to subvert South Vietnam, but also arcane magics and sciences scavenged from the Japanese and Nazi research programmes of World War II that were investigating an ancient evil empire.

In response, the successor to the OSI -- the Office of Strategic Intelligence who foiled the Nazi's arcane machinations -- now seeks to thwart North Vietnamese sorcerous chicanery. But unlike in World War II, the Central Office of Foreign Experimental Technology is not fighting fire with fire. Members do not have access to Rune Magic and instead seek to destroy instances of sorcery, though elements of the CIA are interested in harnessing the ancient knowledge to their own ends.

Besides the threat of North Vietnamese soldiers and guerrillas, player characters may encounter a variety of horrors. These include Ape demons that guard the temples; Moon Walkers, the risen corpses of tortured prisoners; and Vampire Leeches, that suck out pints of blood when they latch on. Some creatures come from American actions in theatre. Napalm Horrors were napalm-bombing victims and seek to inflict those flames on new victims, while Blights were born of the defoliation programs. Interestingly, the Hsia Thung are snake men opposed to the Vietnamese use of sorcery, which could easily be tied into **Delta Green** as Serpent Men. And then again the Tcho-Tcho could easily replace one of the setting's cannibalistic tribes.

Besides the set of mission generator tables that let the War Master create assignments for both the French and US forces, **Tour of Darkness** includes some 20 "Savage Tales." These are fully prepared missions all ready to play spread across both the French and American involvement in Vietnam. All but one of the French Savage Tales could easily be run later during the sixties with US troops. That single one takes the characters to France's defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, so it could be run as a flashback. Most of the Savage Tales are ordinary military missions tied into the ordinary history of the Vietnam conflict, but some are more. These are "Plot Points," and are tied into the "real" history of the conflict. Played in order, perhaps with ordinary missions generated by the War Master scattered in between, the 20 Savage Tales take a set of player characters from the start of their tour to their first encounter with the occult, increasing the number of these encounters until they are no longer fighting the spread of communism, but preventing the use of dark magic by the North Vietnamese leadership.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Tour of Darkness is more of a hybrid between miniature war games and RPG than previous **Savage Worlds** supplements. Characters are part of a 10-man squad that one player is expected to command, and as characters rise in rank, players are expected to command their own units. This is in conjunction with the mass battle rules from the **Savage Worlds** core book. A series of heavy weapon fire templates are also included for use with these rules.

Physically **Tour of Darkness** is a slim hardback, reasonably well edited but sparsely illustrated with either photographs or line art. This is where the problems with the supplement begin. Not enough of the equipment or the horrors is illustrated. This is not a problem for the former, as references can be found elsewhere. But then again, not everyone knows what a MAT-49 SMG looks like. In the case of the horrors, the lack of illustrations is far more of an omission. Another problem is the lack of an index, which makes finding various details of the setting's altered history somewhat difficult. Another hindrance is the lack of an extensive glossary, useful to those who know little of the conflict.

Although rules are included for player promotion, no guidelines are included for handling this process. Also missing are rules for winning decorations and a list of North Vietnamese military ranks.

Further, **Tour of Darkness** suffers from being a hybrid between a Vietnam game and a horror game. The latter is better supported than the former and a War Master may have to refer to other sources to get more information on the Vietnam conflict. Unfortunately the book lacks a bibliography, which would have helped in this. One such source might be Palladium's **Revised Recon,** still the definitive RPG of the Vietnam War.

Yet **Tour of Darkness** successfully slides the arcane and the horrors under the setting of the Vietnam War, the idea

being that the U.S.A. is not fighting the war to stop the spread of Communism, but to stop the acquisition of sorcerous power by the North Vietnamese leadership. The book is strong on atmosphere, and the setting is much the better for not being as pulp like as was **Blood on the Rhine.** The Plot Point campaign is also well designed and successfully gets across the desperate nature of the situation described.

As the first new **Weird Wars** supplement for the **Savage Worlds** system, **Tour of Darkness** is the first non-fantasy and first modern-set supplement. It is a successful transition and makes more of the core game's Mass Battle system than the previous titles. Anyone looking to find a combination of dark horror roleplaying and wargaming will find no better example than **Weird Wars: Tour of Darkness.**

--*Matthew Pook*

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

Routine Difficulties

Whenever I run a *Vampire* campaign, one of the aspects that I try to impart early on is how *different* an existence is when you're only permitted to be animate during the hours of darkness. Establishing a bank account? Getting a driver's license? Signing for a package? Shopping at most non-24-hour locations? Impossible on your own.

Think about that for a moment, and let's take this to the logical extreme. The greatest curse of being a vampire isn't the weight on the soul caused by the need to drain the blood of the innocent night after night to stave off the pangs of an insatiable hunger. No, the greatest curse of a vampire is far more insidious: the need to spend the rest of eternity, doomed to shop at Wal-Mart.

The situation is even worse in any non-modern historical eras, before the era of Internet shopping and 24-hour convenience. In *Dark Ages* campaigns, when people still actively believed in vampires, the slightest slip can expose your secret, especially if you act too suspicious: "Why, exactly, do you insist on meeting in church only when it's night, my pasty-skinned friend?" And there aren't all-hours rocket-trains to whisk you away to safety should it all fall apart.

In case you haven't guessed, this column is about an omnipresent force that plays a part in each and every one of our lives: Wal-Mart.

Er, no. Our daily routine.

I've talked before about looking at how sleep helps define our lives. In a broader sense, though, sleep helps define our lives. I can't speak for everyone, but the act of sleep tends to define the beginning and ending of my days, to the point where -- if I miss an evening of sleep (an all-too-common occurrence) -- I tend to fall a day behind in my mental calendar until I take a moment to adjust myself. (In that case, "shower" usually substitutes for sleep.)

But what is a "day in the life" for your character? If you weren't adventuring, what would you be doing . . . or not doing? An early issue of the Indiana Jones comic book from Marvel Comics -- released shortly after *Raiders of the Lost Ark* came out -- opened with Indy using his whip to snatch the cigarette out of the mouth of one of his female students after class, so he wouldn't get rusty. Now, whether or not one agrees with this characterization of Dr. Jones, it's certainly an evocative piece of information to detail a pulp character. And, coupled with the information we get from the movie, we can develop a portrait of such a character in his mundane moments: He teaches their minds and endangers their bodies . . . with archeology!

Superman is another good example of someone who has his "day in the life" pretty well established. In his heroic identity, it's been established that he usually acts nonstop to help out as best as he can, untangling traffic jams, rescuing kittens in trees, stopping mundane crimes, and so on. In a gargantuan city such as Metropolis, there's always going to be *something* to do, and Superman's just the guy to do it. (Curiously, there was a classic Batman story that covered much the same ground in the 1980s; the entire issue revolved around an overworked Bruce Wayne/Batman trying to get a few hours of sleep, and how events in both identities kept conspiring to thwart him.

As a thought exercise for your character -- one you can keep to yourself or share with your GM -- give a map of what a typical block of time looks like to you. I'd recommend Thursday through Saturday, since that covers two standard work days as well as one of the weekend days.

- Does your character need a normal amount of sleep? What time(s) does he go to bed?
- Where, how, and how often does your character eat?
- Does he have a job? If so, does it keep him late with any frequency? Does he ever need to work weekends?
- Does he have any hobbies that take up any significant periods of time? Are those accomplished at or away from home?

And so on.

Once you have an outline of a few days in the life, you can begin to see where there are opportunities for story ideas, either injected by the GM or proposed by the player as a subplot.

For example, let's say you've defined your character as a respected scientist for a top-secret project, who also researches Things Man Was Not Meant To Know on the weekends. You shared your thought exercise with the GM. A couple of the facts it reveals is that the character eats off-site for an hour an evening, and the character occasionally needs to work late. The GM ties the two together and has the PC informed that the evening is going to be a late one because of his job, but he's encouraged by his bosses to go get a meal. Traveling off-site, he is encountered at the beginning of his meal break by a mysterious person who reveals some aspect of a nefarious plot that needs to be resolved quickly. Does he attempt to solve things with the remains of his meal break? Try to shirk his overtime duties? Work his overtime, all the while hoping that nothing goes BOOM! until he gets off work? (In the last case, he may also be dealing with sleep deprivation if kept too late into the evening.)

It could be said that adventure is the thing that gets in the way of a nice comfortable rut. Of course, without adventure there's nothing for heroes (and players) to do . . . but it's much more interesting to have your life upended if you know what your snow-globe life was before it got shaken.

--Steven Marsh

Twenty Tips for Free RPG Day 2008

by Steven Marsh

The first Free RPG Day is now a fading memory, but it's never too early to plan for next year. To that end, here are some tips for everyone who could be involved in the future, from someone who spent a *lot* of time thinking about the matter.

Organizers

Get a Better Look! I think it would be ideal if there was a better trade dress or logo; the "come to the circus!" theme of the star-burst logo suits some products, but on others -- especially on more serious fare such as *Changeling: The Lost* or *Septimus* -- it's inappropriate. (You may even want to offer an incentive to publishers who incorporate it into their cover designs, to dissuade them from simply viewing Free RPG Day as a chance to print a new batch of promo items intended for year-round use.)

As Seen On . . . The biggest problem Free RPG Day had, as best I can tell, is getting the word out more than it already was. While some stores had exceptional promo machines, others could use help. I would do research among customers who participated in the event, and try to figure out how they learned about Free RPG Day. You may learn otherwise, but in general I've found that (for example) a one-shot expensive magazine ad often doesn't offer as good an exposure as more modest methods might. One good idea I heard about in my trek was Free Comic Book Day's use of plastic bags with the logo and date on them, distributed months before the event. Such a program translated to Free RPG Day would give an immediate conversation-starter, a reminder that sticks around the house, and be a useful item for many stores to boot. I also heard a request from a couple retailers for signage larger than an 8½"×11" sheet of paper.

One inexpensive way to get the word out would be to come up with some goodies to give stores and fans who promote Free RPG Day (probably with a separate prize for best store idea and best fan idea). I think Free Comic Book Day does something similar, so it'd be easy to ape their program.

More Is More! Come up with the means of making additional product available. For example, it may not be economically feasible to allow stores to buy multiple packs (although if it is, great!), but it might be possible to let them purchase additional copies of specific books for which they believe there will be a demand in the store . . . perhaps at the publisher's cost (which would be more expensive per unit than buying more packs but should still be fairly affordable).

This is especially true for "high-demand" items; in my travels, I saw and heard about many customers coming for the one item they were interested in, then leaving. Almost always these were folks who were already players of that game line, so the promotion probably didn't do much to sway them to buy more (either of the chosen publisher's material or of the other publishers whose material wasn't chosen).

Expand Your Mind! Three of the retailers I visited mentioned that they would like to have seen other aspects of the gaming world represented at the event. While I tend to believe that it's best to keep the event a Free RPG Day (as opposed to a "Free Game Day" . . . does that mean board games, war games, video games, LARPS?), I'd like to see some of the ancillary ideas related to tabletop gaming become a part of this event. This is especially true of miniatures and dice; I think a painting contest held at each store, where participants get to keep their entry, would be a neat event, something that's likely to get the comic readers or DVD buyers to say, "What's going on there?"

We Want . . . Information. Get as much information as you can from participating retailers. Most entries on the shop list this year only had a store name and address; only a few had a phone number, and none had any more information than that (such as a website or store hours). By getting that information from the retailers, you can make it easier for customers to seek out unfamiliar stores . . . which is part of the whole idea in the first place.

Publishers

Part of a Whole . . . Telling customers how your freebie fits in with the larger whole is a good thing. For example, if an adventure leads into another one (or can be connected), or if some plot point is explained elsewhere, then it's great to bolster a sense that a product fits into a larger line.

. . . But Standalone. By the same token, you don't want the customer to feel like they haven't gotten a complete or worthwhile experience out of the item they've chosen. Since, for many folks, this will the first exposure to a particular game or product line, it's a good idea to try to make it as complete an experience as possible. Some game lines have it easier than others; for example, *d20 System* adventures can't possibly reprint all their rules, but the system's well-known enough (and freely available online) that they can simply -- and should -- inclue an adventure with the characters, background, and so on required to make it work. Even so, it's great if a pared-down version of the rules can be presented along with characters and an adventure. This is a case where having a well-developed website can come in handy. For example, if there isn't room for pre-generated characters but there are suitable examples online, then you can add a URL to those characters and let would-be players print them out themselves.

Be Attractive! They say you can't judge a book by its cover, but lots of gamers do every day. Do whatever you can to make the exterior of the promo look appealing; otherwise, it may not even make it out of the box onto the freebie shelf, let alone into the hands of customers.

Now 'n Later! Ideally, a freebie adventure has something in there that makes me want to keep it around even after I've played the adventure or been enticed to pick up the full product. For example, maybe a *d20 System* adventure has new monsters or magic items that are interesting.

Recruit Your Minions! Provide incentives for your fans who arrange events with local stores and/or make themselves available for demos and the like. You may even want to make any such bribes *extra* special, such as offering to incorporate them (or their character) into next year's Free RPG Day product if they help with this years.

Retailers

More Is More! Figure out how to let customers get more product per person. As it stands, many stores had no choice but to limit one item per customer, probably because they didn't have enough (or they were afraid they wouldn't have enough to last the day). At stores where it's feared that product will run out, I'd consider coming up with a tiered system to allow customers to get more stuff. Thus each customer might be entitled to get one book for coming into the door. They might be eligible for a second book if they participate in a brief (five-minute) demo of some neat aspect of one of the sponsor RPGs. They might get a third book if they take part in a longer (hour-long) demo. They might get a fourth item if they *run* that five-minute demo for six other patrons. And so on. This will open up the possibility of more enthusiastic patrons -- the ones more likely to be or become larger spenders -- to get more stuff at the expense of their time or being exposed to new product lines. And by making folks jump through a few hoops, you should also avoid the problem of greedy folks barging in, snatching one of each item, and darting for the door to spiral out into the night.

Make It an Event! One thing I learned in my trip to various retail locations is that this event seemed to be whatever the store made of it. Those who pumped it heavily and ran lots of events saw lots of people coming, while those who treated it more low-key tended to have smaller turnouts.

Let Us Know, Let Us Know, Let Us Know! Provide information by whatever channels you have with your customers and would-be customers. If you have a website or mailing list, post information about what your store has planned for the event. Print up fliers a few weeks before the event and hand them out with every purchase. Put up posters about the day in your store.

Get Info! Or at least try. It's amazing now that I think of it, but none of the stores I visited seemed to be taking any information from folks (such as being added to an e-mail list). Such information is usually trivial; having a raffle for a

snazzy prize usually works, as does offering a discount or other goodie for those who sign up for more information from the store.

Contact Publishers Yourself! When I worked retail at a FLGS, I had surprisingly good luck contacting companies and asking for additional support (posters, promo items, and so on). If there's a particular company or two that does consistent business for your store, why not send them an e-mail and see if they can do something extra for you? Sending a couple of pictures of appropriate displays or demos can help show the publishers that you're serious. If you're going to make an event of it anyway, you might as well try to tailor it to your own store's customer base.

Fans

Ask! Many FLGSes simply may not have heard of the program, or have heard a bit about it but declined to participate. If your shop doesn't have posters up about the event, or if it doesn't seem to be aware of it, feel free to ask. Maybe if enough cash-carrying customers make inquiries, the FLGS might change its mind.

Run, Forrest, Run! For locations that offer in-store gaming, you might want to consider running demo sessions of a favorite system (especially if that game has a freebie offered). Even if a shop doesn't normally have in-store events, it might still be possible to become involved. For example, if there's a local club or con that you're a member of, see if you can't work some kind of cross-promotion (say, a guarantee of having the freebies you want, in exchange for being on-hand to answer questions about game systems or offer brief demos).

Tell Your Friends! This one is obvious, but it bears repeating: There is seldom better advertising than word of mouth. If you're excited or intrigued by Free RPG Day, tell your gaming group. This is especially true if you know a lapsed gamer, since these products are especially designed to appeal to those folks. Besides, it's always more fun braving a potentially hectic event (like any of the various Free Days) if you've got a friend watching your back.

Don't Be Greedy! If you're fortunate to have a store that doesn't closely monitor Free RPG Day offerings, it can be tempting to take multiple copies or to snatch up material that you're not really interested in. By all means, flip through stuff that you're on the fence about, but don't take stuff that you know you don't want just for the sake of owning it.

Order! Finally, if the publishers have done their job correctly and stoked the longing in your heart for a new game or supplement, order it from the shop you got the promo from. Yes, it might seem obvious, but it would be a shame if the local game shops that make such events possible were to fade away because inspired customers went elsewhere to seal the deal.

* * *

There's no such thing as a free lunch, but at least one day a year there might be a free game. If customers go to their local game shop with a closed wallet and open mind, they may well go home with a something new that gives them whole new avenues for their tabletop amusement. And that's a game where *everyone* wins.

Pyramid Review

Marvel Heroes

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#) & [Nexus Editrice Srl](#)

Designed by Marco Maggi, Francesco Nepitello, Roberto Di Meglio, & Salvatore Pierucci

Art, graphics, & layout by Fabio Maiorana, Kurt Miller, Salvador Larroca, & Paco Roca

Sculpting by Bob Naismith

English edition edited by James Torr

Mounted map board, 20 painted miniatures (Captain America, Hulk, Iron Man, Thor, the Human Torch, the Invisible Woman, Mr. Fantastic, the Thing, Daredevil, Dr. Strange, Elektra, Spider-Man, Cyclops, Phoenix, Storm, Wolverine, the Red Skull, Dr. Doom, the Kingpin, & Magneto), eight specialty dice, 218 cards (12 Master Plan, 24 Story, 36 Headline, 12 Team Power-Up, 50 Resource, 10 Scenario, 50 Villain, four Team Reference, 16 Superhero Reference, & four Mastermind Villain Reference), 122 counters (one First Player, one Archnemesis, 12 Combat Power, one Game Round, one Action Round, four Team Victory Point, 13 Super Hero Wound/KO, 36 Threat, 52 Plot Point, one Trouble Level Track); full-color boxed set; two to four players; $59.95

Every year sees a new crop of superhero films, and that's accompanied by someone -- usually a top toy company -- putting out whatever game design they have close at hand. Sometimes it's a decent time-killer, but more often it's a sloppy effort that just capitalizes on the market for a couple of months. Something that reaches deeper like the *Marvel Heroes* board game is another matter entirely.

Based on the books from the Marvel Comics Group, the object of the game is to finish the scenario with the most victory points.

Everyone takes a set of four superheroes; the available teams are the X-Men, the Avengers, the Fantastic Four, and the Marvel Knights (a loose confederation of loners like Spider-Man and Daredevil). Another player portrays your team's mastermind opposition, so for example if you're the Fantastic Four the person to your left plays Dr. Doom. Plot Points let you ready heroes and allies with which to patrol.

Manhattan Island is divided into districts and Headline cards advertise the trouble plaguing each area, and superheroes are dispatched to confront them. Some heroes are better suited to certain disturbances, lowering the Trouble number (how many dice are rolled). This roll determines how many points opposing players can spend to bring out Villain cards and other effects. If it's a Mastermind Headline, the team's arch-foe may step in as well.

Heroes have three combat powers, each rated for Attack, Defend, and Outwit. The hero and villain players secretly

select a power and trade blows using those stats, alternating offense and defense; if no one wins they go to the Outwit phase. Combat uses the specialty dice imprinted with Hits, Trouble, and Boosts. Hits hurt your enemy, and Boosts may produce heavier damage. Successful heroes gain Victory Points from Headlines while unlucky ones end up in Recovery licking their wounds. The really unfortunate ones find their Mastermind is behind the current plot, ready to fight another battle with special options (like rolling extra dice) and activate Master Plans. Successful plans improve the villain so he's harder to deal with next time, but heroes counter this with the Story deck. These bits of background color in a champion's life can be turned in for team improvements.

Every game has a Scenario card, based on those annual summer comic-book crossover events, that changes how events play out. Villains may be tougher or deprive you of Victory Points. They may just make the goal harder, or they might offer new ways to win -- or lose.

You're going to love the miniatures that come with this game. They are solid, A-level icons, beautifully crafted and colorfully rendered. Storage is a thorn -- the molded tray holds them immobile even upside down, but you could bend or break them prying them out or reinserting them. It's best to just throw them in the box. The map is big and bright, with plenty of room for everything. One strange quirk: There's a dedicated, preprinted space for Scenarios but not for Headline discards; you only use one of the former in a single game and cycle constantly through the latter. The cards hold a combination of old and new art, and once more we find the nice thing about comic-book games is the library from which to pull illustrations. The rest of the components, including the rules and the many counters, are all good (unless your experience with *Fantasy Flight*'s teeny-tiny cards, of which there are some, has put you off before).

Let's get the biggest issue out of the way: The learning curve is sheer nightmare. How is this possible? Mostly it's the instructions. Every new set of rules requires some period of adjustment, but this game would definitely benefit from a flowchart to facilitate familiarization. Everything works together to produce a greater whole, and that gestalt is not only enjoyable, it's perfectly understandable. The question is, will the players stick with it long enough to find out how workable and engaging the game can be?

Characters are painted in broad strokes, but there's detail enough to provide a richer experience. A hero's powers change focus depending on whether he leads the charge or holds a supporting position. Even with only 20 characters, the Villains and Allies you can draw upon provide the flavor of the larger Marvel Universe. The choices one must make -- manipulating the Story cards, moving to intercept trouble -- mean there are multiple ways to gain power and score Victory Points, and subtle use of weaker abilities can turn the tide. There's not a lot to remember, just a lot that needs to be done to achieve the win. *Fantasy Flight* has brought out a supplement for many a game, and ***Marvel Heroes*** is a clever setup for which this would definitely be welcome . . . especially if it included a flowchart.

--Andy Vetromile

American Phaëthon: Casey Jones

"Come all you rounders if you wanna hear
The story about a brave engineer.
Casey Jones was the roller's name
On a 6-8 wheeler course he won his fame.
Caller called Casey 'bout half past four
He kissed his wife at the station door.
He climbed in the cabin with his orders in his hand
Said 'This is the trip to the Promised Land.'"
-- Johnny Cash, "Casey Jones" (1963)

Casey Jones, the greatest locomotive driver that ever lived, was under the gun. He'd just finished a record twelve-hour run, and he was wrung out and looking to unwind. But his brother engineer Joe Lewis took sick, and when they found Casey he volunteered to take Joe's place in the cab of the "Cannonball Express," running through the night across the West. Thanks to that illness, and the delay in calling Casey (who might not have been home that night), the train got started ten hours late. Casey, who never blew a schedule in his life, had to make up the time by holding the valves down and blasting across the countryside faster than any man had driven any train before. He and Sim Webb, the fireman, used up every ounce of coal in the tender, and cut up the benches in the cab to boot. Casey's train climbed sheer hills at top speed, blew through flooded crossings, flew across flat rails without touching them, and rattled across bridges so fast they fell to pieces with the wind of his passage. Casey's famous whistle screamed out his name under the moonless sky. After an all-night run, he had made up all but two minutes of the time, but he and the "Cannonball Express" were at their limits. Suddenly, the lights of another train loomed up on the track ahead. Casey blasted his whistle, but the train ahead didn't move aside. "You better jump, Sim," Casey said to his loyal fireman, and threw him bodily out of the moving cab. Sim hit a ditch, rolled, and came up to see Casey and the "Cannonball Express" slam into the train ahead in a titanic crash. When they cut open the cab, they found Casey Jones dead at his post, one hand on the whistle and the other on the brake.

"'Twas around this curve he spied a passenger-train.
Reversing his engine, he caused the bell to ring.
Fireman jumped off, but Jones stayed on --
He's a good engineer, but he's dead and gone."
-- earliest known version of "Casey Jones" (1908)

That, at least, is the story the way I heard it as a kid, as I heard most all my American mythology; in pieces and thrown together from Burl Ives records and Disney specials and brightly-colored books out of the library. And just a little less grandiloquently, it's how America heard it all, too, in a smash vaudeville hit called "Casey Jones, the Brave Engineer," with words by T. Lawrence Seibert and music by Eddie Newton. Seibert and Newton weren't the first to sing about Casey; there's that 1908 version, published in the *Railroad Man's Magazine* and credited to Jones' "negro fireman." A black engine-wiper named Wallace Saunders is usually credited with first immortalizing Casey in a blues ballad, but the 1908 version isn't blues but a traditional Anglo-American "vulgar ballad." (In other words, country-folk.) Some fragments of a "Casey Jones" blues survived into the 1920s (and later), eventually harmonized and recorded as a blues by Mississippi John Hurt in 1928. Whether there was one song or two, neither hit like Seibert and Newton's version, which they published in 1909, and which spawned at least forty variants of its own in the next ten years. It also touched off a storm of curiosity -- who was Casey Jones, and did he really die like that?

Was he John Luther "Cayce" Jones, who died near Canton, Mississippi in 1900? Or Peter Martin "K.C." Jones, killed in Mammoth Springs, Arkansas in 1902? Or Harrison "Stacey" Jones, who fatally crashed on the Northern Pacific near Billings, Montana in 1899? Or perhaps Cassidy Jones, killed on John Henry's B&O near Cumberland, Maryland in 1895? Others plumped for Casey Shannon (died on a switch engine in Marshfield, Oregon), David Casey Jones (killed near Mammoth Springs, Tennessee), James A. Michaels (a candidate suggested by a hobo named "Kelly the Rake"), or a purely imaginary character.

"Reports received to date indicate that Engineer Jones of the passenger train, who lost his life in the accident, was alone responsible for the accident as train No. 83 which was obstructing the main track at Vaughan sawing by train No. 26 was properly protected by flagman, who had gone back a distance of 3000 feet, where he had placed torpedoes on the rail; then continued north a further distance of 500 to 800 feet, where he stood and gave signals to train No. l; which signals, however, were apparently not observed by Engineer Jones: nor is it believed he heard the explosion of the torpedoes as his train continued toward the station at a high rate of speed, notwithstanding the fact it was moving up a grade; collision occurring at a point 210 feet north of the north passing track switch. It is also stated that Engineer Jones of train No. l failed to sound the whistle for the station when passing the whistle board."
-- A.S. Sullivan, General Superintendent, Illinois Central Railroad, formal accident report letter (May 10, 1900)

All things considered, it took remarkably little time before the truth -- or at least *a* truth -- emerged. By 1920, "Casey Jones" had been firmly identified with John Luther Jones, born in 1863, raised in Cayce (pronounced "Casey"), Kentucky, and killed in a wreck on the Illinois Central Railroad at 3:52 a.m. on April 30, 1900. He had taken over the Memphis-to-New Orleans run from a sick friend, and it had indeed been late getting into Memphis. The scheduled departure time was 11:35, but Jones didn't get the "Cannonball Express" going until 12:50. He was a "fast roller," though, and he had priority passage down the tracks, as he was carrying federal mail. He had actually made up the time by the time he got to Vaughan, a Mississippi whistle-stop 175 miles south of Memphis. Here, two southbound freight trains were having trouble squeezing onto the siding to let the "Cannonball Express" past, and if there were signals (a flagman and two torpedo explosions), Jones didn't see them in time. His last words were "Jump, Sim!" before he plowed into the caboose of southbound freight No. 83. Sim Webb, Jones' mulatto fireman, jumped and lived to tell the tale. Most likely, Jones' reflexes had started braking as soon as he saw the lights; the Express' wreck "slightly bruised" three passengers and "jarred" two, but only one person died in that crash: John Luther "Cayce" Jones, the great "fast roller."

"The railroad ran along side the bank
Casey crawled out from behind the tank
Bill said to Casey, 'You're a racing man
Get up your steam and go as fast as you can.'
Now Casey and Bill, down the Mississippi
Casey and Bill, all full of glee
Casey and Bill, down the Mississippi
Trying to break the record of the Robert E. Lee."
-- Earl McDonald, "Casey Bill" (1927)

And one hero was born in it: Casey Jones, the Brave Engineer. He became a national figure -- running his trains on the B&O, the Northern Pacific, and any other local line. (In some versions, he dies wanting to run on "the Colorado and the Santa Fe," but in others, he's on the Santa Fe line to start with.) His crash happens outside Frisco, New York, Cincinnati, and everywhere else. He joined America's growing pantheon of working-class heroes: [Paul Bunyan](#) the lumberjack, Joe Magarac the steel-worker, Gib Morgan the oilman, and [John Henry](#) the railroad driller. His powers, like theirs, became increasingly superhuman, especially his ability to run trains through floodwaters, a common motif in the various ballads and folk-songs about him. Likewise, his speed. According to Furry Lewis' 1928 "Kassie Jones," for example, Casey left Memphis at a "quarter to nine, got to Newport News, it was dinner time." There was no direct rail line from Memphis to Newport News, much less one that could be run in three and a quarter hours.

Tin Pan Alley explicitly connected Casey to fellow speed-demon Steamboat Bill, who first emerged from folklore (if he wasn't pure invention) in a 1910 hit song for the Leighton Brothers that riffed heavily on Seibert and Newton's "Casey Jones, the Brave Engineer." (The song "Steamboat Bill" inspired the cartoon "Steamboat Willie," and thus Casey Jones is in a way the father of -- or an avatar of -- America's second-greatest cartoon hero, Mickey Mouse.) In "Steamboat Bill," Bill attempts to break the record of the *Robert E. Lee,* the (historical) fastest steamboat on the Mississippi River, but his boiler bursts and he dies in the attempt. His widow reassures the children, as if presaging the train's future supremacy: "The next papa that you have will be a railroad man," again connecting Bill and Casey. This line is also a parody of a line in "Casey Jones, the Brave Engineer" in which Casey's widow assures his kids that they "got another poppa on the Salt Lake line." (John Luther's widow Janie Jones was not at all amused by this jape.) Steamboats were somehow a vital part of the myth: Collins & Harlan recorded "Casey Jones Went Down On The

Robert E. Lee" in 1912, and Earl McDonald's Original Louisville Jug Band blended the two seamlessly in 1927's "Casey Bill." In this version of the myth, Casey Jones and Steamboat Bill decide to race down the river, but die when they collide on a drawbridge. [Fear death] by water.

"Womens in Kansas, all dressed in red,
Got de news dat Casey was dead.
De womens in Jackson, all dressed in black,
Said, in fact, he was a cracker-jack."
-- blues version of the "Ballad of Casey Jones" collected by Howard Odum (1911)

And like all the knights who die by water, he is mourned by women. Odum's version above mentions women in red and black, and a flock of "womens in red" gather to mourn Casey Jones in Jesse James' 1936 piano blues, "Southern Casey Jones." The Grateful Dead weren't the first, in other words, to introduce the "lady in red" to Casey. (She also pops up as the loathsome "Lady in Red Scarlett" who marries Sir Gawain, and as the "Lady in Red" in at the death of a later American folk hero, John Dillinger.) In some versions of the ballad, Casey is himself a "rounder," a traveling adventurer with all the appetites of a mythic hero, with multiple women on the side. (In *An Officer and a Gentleman*, Lou Gossett sings one such graphic variant, indicating that Casey's prowess was not limited to engineering.) The blues term is "natural born easman," and it appears in tens of "Casey Jones" variants. In short, Casey Jones (like John the Conqueror or John Henry or Gawain) is what they delicately call a "solar hero" or a "fertility figure" or a "phallic hero." Is it just a Freudian pun, then, that has made "locomotive going into a tunnel" the great American symbol for, well, phallic heroism?

"The angels got together and they said it wasn't fair,
For Casey Jones to go around a-scabbing everywhere.
The angels' union Local Twenty-Three it sure was there,
And they promptly fired Casey down the Golden Stair."
-- Joe Hill, "Casey Jones, the Union Scab" (1911)

The "rounder" Casey Jones is one aspect of what we might consider the dark side of the legend. Like the legend itself, that dark side is rooted in history -- as we saw above, the official Illinois Central investigation blamed Jones for the crash, claiming he ignored the flagman. (Webb gave conflicting testimony.) A number of ballad versions depart from the apotheosized Jones, with Harry "Haywire" McClintock's version typical: "They flagged him down but he never looked back." In some versions of the tale, Casey Jones isn't found with his hand on the brake, but on the throttle -- as though he deliberately sped up to ram the lowly freight that had the temerity to interrupt his run. This side of the story, the irresponsible speed freak, runs from some of the earliest blues into the Grateful Dead's "high on cocaine" version.

A lecher, a speed freak, and a scab to boot? Joe Hill's Wobbly version "Casey Jones, the Union Scab" blames an incompetent, overconfident Casey for union-busting on the Southern Pacific Line, an interesting case of the IWW carrying propaganda water for the Illinois Central Railroad. (Not only did Jones never run on the S.P., he was a union man twice over, belonging to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.) At the end of Hill's version, Jones dies in a ditch, scabs on the striking angels by singing for St. Peter, and winds up shoveling coal in Hell. Jim Holbert's 1940 variant straight-out implies that, like other mythic heroes, Jones is damned for his hubris: St. Peter tells the dead Casey, "You've run your engine so brave and bold, I'll send you back to shoveling coal." This larger legend of the hubristic, swaggering Jones echoes the myth of Phaëthon, the son of Helios (or Apollo), who is killed by Zeus for driving the solar chariot too fast and erratically. Like the "dark" Casey Jones, Phaëthon ends up in a water-filled ditch (in his case, the Eridanos River), mourned by women on the banks (his sisters).

"If I can have Sim Webb, my fireman, my engine 382,
Although I'm tired and weary, I'll take her through.
Put on my whistle that come in today
Cause I mean to keep her wailing as we ride and pray."
-- version of "Casey Jones, the Brave Engineer" as re-written by Janie Jones (ca. 1928)

And mourning women by water recall other figures out of the mythic mists, such as La Llorona, or the Lamia, the child-lost child-killing spectres of the American Southwest and ancient Greece respectively. They are daughters, or cousins, or sisters, or aspects, of the great female demon Lilith, who is hidden under the word "nightjar" in some modern translations of the Bible. The most common American nightjar is, as it happens, the whippoorwill. That would be, of course, the whippoorwill that catches the souls of the Dunwich dead (for their own ride across the water), the whippoorwill that Casey Jones built his whistle to sound like, according to Fred J. Lee's 1939 biography *Casey Jones: Epic of the American Railroad.* (Steamboat Bill's steamboat is called *The Whipperwill,* while we're on the topic.) In his time, engineers had their own particular whistle -- as the ballad tells us, "they could tell by the whistle's moans/that the man at the throttle was Casey Jones." Indeed, for decades after the crash, yard workers heard Casey Jones' ghostly whistle on the site at night, a spectral call to an American Wild Hunt -- hardly surprising, given that Jones died on Walpurgisnacht, after all.

But Jones, according to the accident investigation, was using a "new whistle which had been put on the engine at Memphis; Jones stated that going into Canton it would arouse the people of the town." This isn't the only strange case of substitution -- nobody quite seems to know whether the engine he drove to his death, No. 382, was his own or that of the man he was replacing. (The records say that Jones' assigned train was No. 384.) Jones began on No. 638, which he saw on display at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, and convinced the IC to let him drive right off the lot and down to the roundhouse in Memphis. This assumption of a virgin instrument has powerful magical significance (especially so if Jones is, indeed, a "phallic hero"), made still more intriguing by the kabbalistic discovery that the word *chakkiym,* or "Magus," adds to 638. (As does *'iyr nachash,* or "serpent city," for those looking for another Lamia connection.) Jones' status as son of Helios Apollo may emerge in the kabbalistic equation of 384 with "Messiah YHWH," while the train he drove through the "undiscovered country," No. 382, equates to *bilshan* or "searcher." "Casey Jones," by the way, adds to 291, which is to say *eretz,* or land, with a strong connotation of sacred or elemental earth -- or "Ophir," the land of Solomon's gold.

"Trouble with you is
The trouble with me
Got two good eyes
But we still don't see
Come round the bend
You know it's the end
The fireman screams and
The engine just gleams."
-- Robert Hunter, "Casey Jones"

So what do we have? A solar hero, whose birthplace is unknown. He assumes the powerful virgin instrument, Magian locomotive No. 638, and rides the rails blowing his whippoorwill whistle, sacred to Lilith and all those women who wait by the water for the dead. He has some mystical power over water (and real power over steam), and a (piebald -- like Percival) companion who controls fire. His name is Earth, and his whistle harnesses the air. Eventually he becomes the anointed one, No. 384. On Walpurgisnacht, at the cusp of the new century, he changes trains to the "searcher," and installs a virgin whistle. He drives ahead into the darkness, past the flags and the fires, and hurls himself -- like the Roman general Decius Mus (whose name splinters off to become Jones' cartoon avatar?) -- through the cold iron crossroads and into Ophir, into the country of the dead. Only he dies, only he goes over the water to where the Lady in Red is waiting for her "natural born easman." His identity splinters into a dozen dead Joneses, and even into the Charontic steamboat he vaults at top speed. But he makes his leap. The son of Apollo, god of music, he lives forever in song, driving his chariot eternally across the American cantosphere.

A Mélange of Magical Creatures VIII

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

This is our eighth trip into a world of unusual creatures; as ever, all these life forms straddle the worlds of the familiar and strange.

Balloon Mouse

To the untrained eye, a sitting balloon mouse resembles any other small, brown arboreal rodent. That said, this airborn mammal is related to the flying squirrel, only the balloon mouse uses gas bags on its flanks to float and its tail to steer and propel itself. Coming from an environment where the trees are too far apart for "flying" squirrels, these rodents can travel a greater distance. Using a form of methane for lift, they can float almost indefinitely.

Encountered

"The woman climbed to the top of the tallest parapet. There, she tied the message capsule to the mouse's tail, and proceeded to throw the animal off the roof. It quickly inflated the gas bags on its flanks and drifted with the wind. Its tail weighted down, it could not maneuver. It drifted down and downwind for several hundred yards, to be collected by the recipient. It was a good plan, except when it was intercepted by a hawk."
-- Castle Guard log, 405th day of the Year of the Flaming Badger.

Balloon mice can be found in forests, hills, and places where the wind shifts often. Unfortunately, these creatures are often the victims of children throwing rocks. They are virtually helpless in the air while floating, sometimes diving at unexpected noises. Children also use this feature to try to drop them on unexpecting passers-by.

Industrial Uses

"These creatures are one of the incentives for ordinary citizens to invest in windows, or at least bug screens. No one knows when a mouse might blow into a bedroom or an attic. In particular, if someone is leveling sections of forest, there can be a flock of these rodents migrating together. I, for one, have had a bad experience with such a creature landing in the middle of a brewing postion."
-- Master Alchemist Trimsad, *Urban Hazards*

Production of methane gas can be useful as it is odorless, flammable, and sold as a "natural gas" that creates only carbon dioxide and water vapor when burned. It can be refined to form ammonia, as well as hydrogen and acetelyne for high-temperature flames. Finding humane ways to extract it is a challenge as methane is lighter than air. Enchanters have harnessed special glands to create air to lead to hotter flames.

Adventure

The heroes must build a balloon, using the balloon mouse as a model. The adventurers can start by keeping away hecklers, who wil be followed by saboteurs if the tests are successful. Phase II may involve traveling in this dirigible (lit. "steerable").

Balloon Mouse

Appearance: Large mottled brown to gray squirrel.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 2; **DX** 14; **IQ** 3; **HT** 14.
Will 10; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 11; Move 7.
SM -4 (18" long) (Inflated: -3); 2-4 lbs.
Traits: Combat Reflexes; Elastic Skin; Flight (Lighter-than-Air); Night Vision 3; Peripheral Vision; Skinny; Striker (Tail: Crushing); Temperature Tolerance 1; Wild Animal

Giant Balloon Mouse (Large as a housecat)

ST 4; **DX** 14; **IQ** 3; **HT** 15.
Will 11; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 11; Move 7.
SM -3 (2' long) (Inflated: -2); 5-10 lbs; DR 1.

Variants: There are rumors of mice that can ignite their gas with a piezo-electric effect. This surprises many predators.

Forger Fish

"We entered the basement, our stun guns at the ready. A half-dozen crooks were at work, making their phony money. Moving in unison, we caught them all by surprise. Securing the room, we then took pictures of the evidence. Everyone was surprised by the variety of tools we seized from these brazen criminals: a small smelter, samples of coins from a dozen realms, raw copper, gold, and silver, and a dozen full aquariums."
-- Lieutenant Bridghen, TAG Liaison.

In the wild, each forger fish breed has a class of "perfect" rock, be it shiny, smooth, or pitted. Then, the signature ability of this orange and gray fish is to duplicate such "perfect" rocks to make a nest, and attract a mate. They perform this by leeching the chemicals they need from the water. The most common breeds of forger fish create material from the size of a sugar cube to the size of an eyeball. The problem is that the denser the object, the longer it takes. Light metals such as copper do not take long, but gold can take a while, and a fish is likely to die of old age before it finishes magically strong metals. This goes double for those not present in the waters. A fish in a cage in a river does better than one in a tank.

Encountered

Officially, the animals can only duplicate items made from one metal, but word has spread that this may not true. These fish can be involved in incidents where false coins are too pure (for example, the human forger only left copper as a source when the government had debased the coin by 20%); in such cases, the forgeries are are often discovered quickly. Some people have used forger fish to duplicate coins and even small keys, and a few suspect these animales are somehow related to the age-old tradition of throwing coins into a fountain.

Industrial Uses

"The first discovery of these creatures dates back to when a fisherman found his catch to have two hooks in its mouth. It did not seem that odd at first, but then he realized that the two hooks were both bent in the same way, and had the same loop shape he had hammered into place with his pipe.

"He then experimented by putting the fish in a vat of water in the back, and giving it a silver ring he had found. Sure enough, after a week it started to form in the fish's mouth. He sold the duplicate at the next town fair, and continued this until the fish died a few years later. His tale at the taverns spread, and eventually another fish like it was caught by a ship's crew. Not all of them waited for the fish to die to tell the secret. Needless to say, trouble ensued."
-- *History of Magical Fish*, Chapter XXIX.

Governments can put these fish to the same use as forgers: the creation of exact duplicates of verified measures. Some organizations have had success in breeding bigger forger fish to duplicate items as large as a fist. Enchantments are not copied, nor are alchemically transmuted substances. Thus, an Atlantean civilization is safe with orichalcum coinage. More exotic elements may be toxic to the fish, but powerful organizations may not care. It might be a cheap way to clean up pollution, or mine valuable minerals, such as gold or platinum. Ultratech societies might be able to produce integrated circuits or microchips. The catch is that it requires a sample to duplicate from, and any imperfections will be carried over. Power cells form uncharged. Uses in enchantment include various duplicate spells, as well as scribing spells.

Adventure

The heroes are hired to make a duplicate of a magic ring that belongs to a certain crime boss. The plan is to replace it, and set him up to kill someone with it. There will be officers waiting to arrest him when it fails to activate. (As a high-tech variant, the ring contains a computer. Its memory will be empty.)

Forger Fish

Appearance: Small coppery-blue fish.
Category: Fish.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 2; **DX** 13; **IQ** 2; **HT** 15.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM -5 to -4 (10" to 18"); 5-10 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Aquatic; Gills; Ichythoid; Night Vision 2; Peripheral Vision; Pressure Resistance 1; Resistance to Poison +8; Sealed; Snatcher (Persistent; Requires item present to duplicate); Unusual Biochemistry; Wild Animal.

Giant Forger Fish

ST 5; **DX** 12; **IQ** 2; **HT** 16.
Will 10; Per 11; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM -3 to -2 (2' to 3') ; 20-30 lbs; DR 2.

Video Moth

"The star of stage exited the theater, with her entourage about her. Klieg lights set her name in ilumination, spotlights highlighted her form. The vibrant colors glistened in the artificial daylight, the various gems about her creating rainbows for all to see. Moths fluttered about her, capturing her meteoric rise for the quarter of an hour that she will last."
-- The XLIXth Annual Combat Art Awards.

This bright white moth has the luminescence of a fire fly, and yet is itself attracted to brighter light. The more varied the pattern, the more attractive it is. In nature, video moths are found in cold climates. They find the most dramatic light pattern, and then try to use it to attract a mate or scare predators. Landing on a natural ice crystal, they can create dramatic pictures, even to the level of holograms. They create what is translated from the native tongues as mirages. In snowy regions, these areas appear to have more snow than they actually do. It is not apparent in daylight as snow blindness limits vision.

Encountered

Soon after discovery, enchanters and hedge wizards found that these creatures can be made to witness a scene, and then that scene is stored in the creature permanently. If preserved properly when it dies, its body can the be broken up and the message released. This is typically in a powder over a crystal ball, but some wizards find tossing it in a fire is

just as effective. Video moths are a hazard to navigation in arctic climates. In nature, the scenes are selected for their vivid changes of colors.

Industrial Uses

"Ducking into a dell, we quickly released a handful of moths. Pulling white sheets over ourselves, we tried to remain motionless. We listened tensely while the enemy patrol approached. Right above us, I heard an officer warn a soldier that the gulley was full of snow from the last storm, and the sound of scooping snow. Just then, a snow ball fell on my head and stuck. I found out that we were only barely covered by the illusion."
-- Lieutenant Mawthers, First Mountain Forces

While primarily used as message recording devices, there are many ingenious applications of this technology. Some moths are trained to record one image per second, allowing for a variety of still shots. Others are trained to take them at a rate of 25 per second. High-priced brands claim higher quiality, while some cheaper brands are video only -- no sound. Video moths are instrumental in the creation of magical items to engrave pictures, as well as wizard eye and ear. Enchantment of the last may not be possible with low-quality breeds.

Adventure

Many types of covert missions can be undertaken if information can be smuggled out as powder. The adventurers may be hired to devise a fool-proof security scheme, or they might be called upon to defeat one.

Video Moth

Appearance: Snow-white moths with bioluminescent abdomens.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Luminivore.
ST -; **DX** 12; **IQ** 3; **HT** 12.
Will 8; Per 9; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -11.
Traits: Acute Hearing 1; Acute Vision 2; Chameleon 1 (Fringe); Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Eidetic Memory (Reprogrammable); Flight (Winged; Air Move 12); Night Vision 1; Reprogrammable.
Notes: Stores dozens of still images, or a few minutes' worth of video. In combat treat as Bees, except

Giant Video Moth

ST 1; **DX** 10; **IQ** 3; **HT** 14.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -6 (7" long); DR 1.
Notes: Stores hundred of still images, or an hours' worth of video.

Frag Plant

"There we were, in the fields, moving toward the enemy outpost in the night. The moonlight glinted off the crops planted in neat rows. We evaded a number of tripwires as we crossed the field, alert for ambuses from all sides and above. Curley had the sharpest eyesight, and easily found the wires. It was only after the fourth we found, near the middle of the field that we realized that the wires were attached to the plants. One false move and we could be shredded by the plants themselves."
-- Former Private Likels, now OED, *Tredroy Allied Guard*

This plant has unusually dark, thick, shiny leaves. Under this unusual texture can be found two discrete circulatory systems. Both carry nutrients throughout the plant, and experiments show that it can survive with only one. The first

benefit is a resistance to extreme temperatures. In fact, the plant gives off a lot of heat. This appears to be some kind of defense mechanism against competing plants and to repel animals. The silicates permeating the plant's leaves are very sharp, and can kill small herbivores from the inside out if eaten. They rarely get the oportunity, however, due to the nature of the plant's leaves: The dual circulatory systems form halves of a binary explosive. When bitten into, the juices mix, and the leaf explodes outward from the stalk like a fragmentation grenade (3× for internal damage, see p. 415 of the **Basic Set**). At the end of the growing season, when the leaves begin to shrivel, the stalk explodes, launching the seed pods great distances.

Encountered

Adventurers will likely encounter these plants as targets and victims. Alternatively, a plant-themed ninja or demolitions expert could be an interesting concept. Combat and birds have carried the seeds far and wide. As a defense mechanism, frag plants spread out seeds widely. Thus, a field in the wild may have many plants, but few close together.

Industrial Uses

"It happened at the stroke of noon. A clatter and the sound of horses' neighing arose from every quarter of the small town, followed by small laughter from the shadows. The wood sprites had disabled every carriage and wagon in town. The Iron War had begun."
-- Father St-Germain, *The Iron War*

Some individuals consider these plants to be an excellent addition to crop rotation as they remove sand, clay, and chalk from the soil. They consume a lot of nitrogen, however. They are best gathered using tools that cauterize as they cut.

Carefully powdered, the plant material is safe to handle, but when lit, the chemicals merge and flash-burn. Stored properly in controlled conditions, the plants can make good space heaters. Their heat resistance makes them useful for heating air to high temperatures for distribution in office and apartment buildings without the use of fossil fuels. After all this, they are most useful in a safe, powdered form. The enchantment of fire spells, as well as spells that add energy to items, are commonly enhanced with parts of this plant. Lesser known applications include the body of wood spell as well as spells to remove foreign objects from a body. If the flame is slowed, the plant might burn for hours.

Adventure

The heroes are sent to deliver a shipment of frag plants through cold weather. It is known that the internal warmth will not be enough to keep them from freezing . . . so they need to be careful with heat sources. They will find opposition in the form of several terrorist groups seeking to steal or destroy their group. At the story's climax, at least two groups will start attacking each other for the right to destroy these plants.

Frag Plant

Appearance: A plant with thick, dark leaves that are shiny.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore; Lithovore.
HT 14.
SM -3; 5 lbs; Stem: DR 2 (Sealed); Leaves: DR 1 (Sealed).
Notes: The fragmentation damage is [1d-2], with further multiples of 2× if against skin, or 3× if bitten (see p. B415).

Rock Brain

"The ninja ran along the support beam over the atrium below. Deftly, the form lept effortlessly over lanterns and vines.

Suddenly, the man in black garb stumbled, tripped, and fell. He never noticed the runes on the carved statue at the base of the last pillar glowing pink."
-- Yakizora house sentry log, Day 223, Year of the Dancing Flamingo.

More and more frequently, remote villages are discovering what appear to be strange pink fungal growths on rock formations. Oddly, these formations are normally in a small gulley that people must travel through. Since most reclusive villages are insular, there has been little communication of this special feature to outsiders. The name given this "creature" was given by the largest village that found these lobe-like patterns nearby.

Encountered

This life form is still unknown to the world in general. When dormant, it is a dark pink, often invisible on bedrock such as granite. People near to these runes observe very slight distortions of gravity. Such things are generally dismissed as the wind, or something they ate or drank. Those few who try to remove the moss often have accidents if they work alone.

Accidents can take many forms, from people tripping at the worst possible moment, giving people a jar when they might have a heart attack, possibly using telekinesis to take away a creature's ability to breathem or mentally poking animals until they go mad, it turns the PCs' dog wild or whips the horse an adventurer is riding into a frenzy.

Industrial Uses

"This is the fourth day of observing the runes of the rock. When I get closer, they glow, but there is no increase in energy drain from the environment. What is causing it? Now, I will spin it again. It seems to be linked to the disorientation I get when I touch the rock. My apprentice has left for a petri dish. While he is getting it I will begin to take samples."
-- The last journal of Gurzin the Sage

Some enterprising organizations have found special energies to excite the organisms' growth. They then harvest them to form a paste that serves as an antigravity paint (Regular or Superscience, see *Vehicles*). Extruded resins can be used in small doses to lower penalties from adaption to new gravity, and spin gravity. The military has also been working on variants to lower the effective gravity experienced by pilots, pushing off the limit of a G-induced Loss Of Consciousness (see GLOC, p. 154). If all rock brain colonies are connected, then they might serve as a framework for a communications network, perhaps without knowing its true purpose.

Adventure

There have been a string of strange murders in an alley in a small district of the PCs' town. There were no connections between the strangled victims, and nothing was stolen during the attacks. A dependent of the PCs will be asked to go through there soon. Can they solve the mystery in time? (In fact, it is an alien intelligence sent to test the reactions of beings on this plane. Whether it is of the same race as the invaders or simply some sort of minion remains to be seen.)

Rock Brain

Appearance: Pink runes on rocks that look generally like brain matter.
Category: Fungus/outsider hybrid.
Diet: Unknown.
ST -; **DX** 8†; **IQ** 9; **HT** 8.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 4; Dodge -; Move -.
Traits: Body of Shadow; Control (Gravity); Gravity Talent 4; Legless (Sessile); No Fine Manipulators (No Manipulators); Secret Communication (Home Plane Only); Telekinesis 10‡.
† Speed, telecontrol only, see *Powers,* pages 90-92.
‡ Note that ST10 is strong enough to lift a 200-lb person off the ground (see *Basic Set,* page 17).

Giant Rock Brain

ST -; **DX** 10; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10.
Will 13; Per 11; Speed 5; Dodge -; Move -.
Traits: As above, but with Gravity Talent 8 and Telekinesis 20.
Notes: This represents a large colony rock brain.

Fir Bird

*"You let it **what**?"*
"Look, it has the beak of a hawk, and is sitting in our campfire. It's not easy to shoo away something like that."
"It's making a nest of the fire logs. You don't suppose . . ."
Both turned and squinted as a loud thump heard, and they could make out a large, brown egg nestled in the embers.
*"**I** wanted to cook supper. **You** light us another fire."*
-- Expedition to the Westun Dragon, Day 16.

These orange and brown birds can be found in heavily forested areas, and dry plains. What makes them unusual is the durability of their eggs and their resistance to fire. Fir bird eggs can hibernate for centuries, and can even withstand being dropped from great heights onto solid rock. It takes a hot fire to incubate the eggs; a bonfire for six to eight hours *might* suffice. In nature, these birds live in areas that are prone to wild fires and forest fires. Thus, they lay their eggs in pine trees, one per year, or more in a dry season. Forest fires can be between 10 and 50 years apart, or further with sentient intervention. When they do occur, then there are great abundances of these creatures. Many cultures celebrate these events.

Encountered

A typical adventurer is most likely to encounter this creature as an unexpected visitor to a fire, be it out of doors or in a city. Fir birds can make good babysitters or nannies for other bird types, should a rich noble seek to raise an otherwise dangerous avian.

Industrial Uses

"It is not unknown for fir birds to adopt other avian young during rainy seasons. Some suggest this is so their kind will be protected from such predators later. On the other hand, they will quickly abandon this 'changeling' if they come across a lone baby fir bird."
-- *Birds of Prey*, Chapter XIII.

The eggs can be incubated in a common stove, as long as it is a real flame (home electric ovens are not powerful enough). The meat is spicy. Fir birds might be a good source to harvest in a desert area. Their low oxygen requirements makes them ideal candidates for early introduction to a warm world with a low partial pressure of oxygen. Fir bird feathers are fireproof, offering DR 5 versus flames (buy as Cloth armor at 5× cost, as per pages 283-284). The egg fragments are useful for the Suspended Animation enchantment as well as halting poison.

Adventure

The adventurers must gather all the fir-bird eggs that they can, and create a large bonfire. Meanwhile, conservationists and enemies will seek to quench it or fireproof the bonfire site before the conflagration begins, dousing it with water and using magical means. The next trick is to protect and feed the flames overnight, and then run when the eggs start to hatch . . .

Fir Bird

Appearance: A dusty orange bird of prey with dark brown to dark green markings.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 5; **DX** 12; **IQ** 3; **HT** 12.
Will 11; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 2 (Ground).
SM -4 (18" long) (-3 with wings unfurled); 5 lbs; DR 2 (DR 10 vs. Fire).
Traits: Acute Vision 2; Combat Reflexes; Doesn't Breathe (Only ¼ as much Oxygen); Enhanced Move 0.5 (Air Speed 18); Flight (Winged); Night Vision 1; No Fine Manipulators; Penetrating Voice; Sharp Beak; Sharp Claws; Temperature Tolerance 5 (Heat only); Wild (or Domestic) Animal. *Skills:* Brawling-13.

Giant Fir Bird

ST 8; **DX** 12; **IQ** 3; **HT** 13.
Will 11; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 3 (Ground).
SM -1 (4.5' long) (-3 with wings unfurled); 10 lbs; DR 4 (DR 20 vs. Fire).

Porcu-Pain

"The battle lines closed. There we stood, certainly less than a hundred yards from the enemy, both lines poised to strike. Our generals had met and parted, shaking heads. Suddenly, a horn sounded on the enemy's side. A battle cry went out across their lines. Raising their spears in unison, the unarmored enemy soldiers thrust them into the ground, drew what seemed to be a needle from a pouch on their waist, and jabbed it into their left arm. They screamed in unison, and charged us with unbelievebale speed."
-- Sargent Witherson, First Firemaster, on *The War of the Plains*

These procupine quills are coated in an injection poison that overloads the target's metabolism. When they detach, they continue to feed the poison for much longer than the standard duration, in addition to the normal dangers that quills present (see ***Bestiary***). What many users do not realize is that extended use presents a real danger to their life. Even the creature's blood is saturated with this serum, to which it is immune.

Encountered

Street fighters carry these quills as a boost to combat. Some riders carry them instead of spurs. The positive and negative effects are so visible that it is a banned substance in most organized competitions. Heroes may encounter fighters who are trying to get off the drug. They sometimes suffer from Indecisiveness.

Industrial Uses

"The monks squared off against the bandits. While the older disciples negotiated with the bandit leaders, the eldest monk pulled out a tea kettle and lit a fire. As negotiation worsened, the monks passed teacups around. Just as the mercenaries reached for their weapons, the enlightened sipped their tea. Then the chaos began."
-- Miquel the Gray, *Travelling with the Elightened*

If properly dosed, the serum can be of great help, improving reaction time for first aid responders. In dangerous doses, one can easily overload and die. Alchemists have long used the quills in potions of haste, regeneration, and restoration. Abuse by those with regeneration powers could result in tumors and accelerated growths.

Adventure

The heroes are facing off against a group that uses these quills to their advantage. The competition can be any type -- combat, sports, mind games -- but the result is the same. Can the adventurers out-last them, or will they succumb to the temptation to use the same drugs?

Porcu-pain

Appearance: A porcupine with slightly purple tinted quills.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 4; **DX** 10; **IQ** 3; **HT** 14.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM -2 (3' long); 20-30 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Affliction (HT; Altered Time Rate (Requires 1 HP per minute); Blood Agent; Link (Spines)); Clinging (Wood Only); Enhanced Time Sense; Night Vision 2; Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Spines (Long); Wild Animal.
Notes: See ***Bestiary*** for detailed porcupine quill rules.

Giant Porcu-pain

ST 12; **DX** 9; **IQ** 3; **HT** 15.
Will 12; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM 0 (6' long); 200 lbs; DR 10.

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not:

- Balloon mice might exist as floating creatures.
- Forger fish could electroplate items.
- Video moths could repeat flashed sequences and store messages in some kind of decipherable code.
- A frag plant *might* exist, given enough genetic diversity in the cosmos.
- Rock brains could be hallucinagens, and distort one's perception of reality.
- Fir birds could be nothing more than fire-resistant birds.
- Porcu-pain could have a stimulant that burns out the user.

* * *

Special Thanks to Gary J. Bartz for his deep wood vision, and to my parents for their encouragement and support of my crazy hobbies, and the ideas for the frag plant and porcu-pain!

Diplomacy II: Renaissance into Modernity

by Matt Riggsby

We've already seen how diplomacy in the Middle Ages was very different from the diplomatic practices of today. This article describes the development of diplomatic practice during the Renaissance, Reformation, and the edge of the modern period. These years saw the appearance of resident ambassadors, extraterritoriality, and a secular legal basis for diplomacy.

Historical Background

The major developments of this period were not solely Italian inventions, but most new institutions and practices were Italian, or at least most fully developed in Italy. In the later years of the Middle Ages a few powers (mostly Italian but the French and Holy Roman Empire got in on it as well) started placing representatives with foreign courts for longer and longer periods. Still, even years-long missions would end once there was no clear need for them (for example, if a war ended in which the two powers were allies). A number of major cities which had permanent trade colonies also had, in a way, essentially permanent representatives. By the Renaissance, several major Italian powers had merchants, along with relatives, servants, and other hangers-on, permanently stationed in foreign centers of trade. Constantinople, for example, had small suburbs specifically set aside for the Genoese, Venetians, and others. These colonies were administered by consuls elected by the residents or appointed from home. Though they were primarily internal administrators, consuls also represented their colonies to higher native authorities (for example, taking responsibility for colonists who broke local laws) and dealt with ongoing trade relations. From time to time, they might also be called on to perform small bits of lesser diplomatic business. But actual diplomats were still not permanent, and permanent representatives were still not diplomats. It took a particular set of pressures in the 1450s to push the Italians into establishing permanent diplomatic relations.

By the 15th century, Italy was dominated by five powers: Milan, Venice, Florence, the papal states, and Napoli, with second-rank states such as Genoa, Bologna, Ferrara, and Siena acting as buffers and minor allies. Though each state had its own ups and downs, they were in the long run consistently evenly matched. Moreover, the foreign policy of each slowly moved towards attempting to maintain a balance of power. If one state appeared to be getting too strong, others would unite against it. However, if any alliance appeared likely to particularly benefit any one state more than the others, allegiances would shift again to maintain the status quo.

External factors also intruded on the chaotic Italian situation. Foreign mercenaries brought rougher, more destructive tactics into the Italian wars, giving the Italians a look at what their internal conflicts might turn into. And in 1453, Constantinople fell. Though it had been generations since the remnants of the Byzantine empire had been a significant obstacle to the gathering Turkish menace, the city's fall still came as a tremendous shock to the West and left the Italians feeling exposed and vulnerable. Eager to end the constant internal fighting and worried about threats from without, Italy was ready for a long-term solution.

These conditions culminated in the Treaty of Lodi in 1454. Initially, it was simply a non-aggression and mutual defense pact between Venice and Milan, ending a conflict which had, typically, seen alliances shift in order to limit the gains of the powers which had achieved the upper hand (Florence had initially been allied with Venice, but moved its allegiance to Milan when Venice appeared likely to win too much territory). Such agreements were hardly unique, but what made the Treaty of Lodi unusual is that it was open-ended. Other states were allowed to join in the alliance, which, at the time, was a very attractive prospect. By the end of the year, every major power in Italy was a signatory, as were many minor powers. The terms of the treaty prohibited attacks on other signatories, threatening them with expulsion and promising that the "Most Holy League" which the treaty formed would come to the defense of any attacked members (or, at least, their Italian territories; no one wanted to commit to defending Venetian and Genoese territories abroad).

Of course, establishing peace was one thing; maintaining it was quite another, which is where the full-time diplomats came in. The Treaty of Lodi required that signatories consult with one another to head off -- or, failing that, put an end to -- hostilities. Since wars were always threatening, it proved effective to place resident ambassadors in one another's courts, with an ongoing brief to keep communications open and information flowing. As it happens, the treaty was adhered to irregularly from the very beginning, there was never a unified military response against Turkish raids, and the shifting alliances of the pre-treaty period simply shifted with greater agility. But the network of resident ambassadors does appear to have at least limited the number and extent of wars in Italy for 40 years, and prevented significant fighting for about three quarters of that time. Compared to the period leading up to it, that's not bad.

The fragile Italian peace collapsed in the face of foreign intervention, but the Italian diplomats who brought France and Spain down onto the peninsula in turn transmitted the new style of diplomacy. Spain, France, Germany (or, more accurately, the Holy Roman Empire, which consistently included German but at times included Burgundy, the Netherlands, and Spain), and, increasingly, England experimented with resident ambassadors and various mechanisms for their use.

The results were similar to the Italian experience: experiments with a balance of power finally upset by a new influence, in this case the bloody conflicts following on from the Protestant reformation. The idea of a unified Christendom, from which many justifications for diplomatic practice were drawn, crumbled as Protestant nations established themselves, Catholics found themselves allied with Protestants against other Catholics, and some Christian nations even allied with the Turks against their co-religionists.

As the deadliest strains of fanaticism burned themselves out, the need for diplomatic institutions remained, but their legal justifications had to change, as did the general perception of diplomats. During the Middle Ages, diplomats had peacemaking as their highest stated goal; they served not just their rulers, but Christendom as a whole. By the 17th century, it was clear to everyone that ambassadors were, first and foremost, agents of their country's interests. That principle formed not only the basis of that period's legal basis for diplomacy and the treatment of diplomats, but our own as well.

Diplomatic Practice

The forms and systems of diplomacy didn't change overnight. Permanent ambassadors developed from and existed alongside traditional single-mission ambassadors, not immediately replacing them. Special-purpose embassies were still sent for most important tasks, and for several decades were still used almost exclusively outside of Italy.

Permanent ambassadors handled more routine diplomatic tasks, but they were primarily available as conduits of information. The primary occupation of early resident ambassadors seems to have been writing letters home containing accounts of every possible item of news, history, or rumor which might possibly have some political significance, often on a *daily* basis. A diplomatic letter home contained a great deal of information, usually including:

- Date, time, and location of dispatch of the current letter
- Acknowledgement of recently received documents
- Summary of previous communications
- The diplomat's current narrative
- Copies of any interesting documents

The first three items were vital to maintaining archives and for putting incoming information into context. These masses of raw detail were accompanied on a regular basis (usually on set intervals of a few months) by summary reports, giving a broader picture of the local situation and the ambassador's efforts.

As with earlier diplomatic documents, security could be a problem. Any message sent home might be intercepted and read (Europe's first post-Roman postal system, established by Henry VIII, informally doubled as a surveillance bureau). Particularly sensitive documents, therefore, were encoded. Renaissance cryptography was primitive by modern standards, of course, but it was more sophisticated than simple substitution ciphers, the weaknesses of which were recognized early on. Diplomatic ciphers would have two or three symbols for each letter, and might be further

complicated by symbols without any meaning (to be inserted at random into messages as a way of introducing "noise" into the "signal") and symbols representing common words, such as prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns. Some diplomats might further obfuscate their messages by coming up with code names for important people and places, making it less clear what the message was about even if the cipher were broken. One Spanish ambassador charmingly used names out of chivalric mythology. Each ambassador had his own cipher, which may have made his country's diplomatic correspondence as a whole more secure; however, most people trying to break the ciphers were only interested in the letters written by one ambassador, so that made little practical difference.

The problems with such ciphers are what one might imagine. Although a few different symbols might be used in place of any given character, a lazy or hurried secretary might not use all of them, making the resulting letter as easy to decode as a simpler substitution cipher. Parts of a message might be written in plain text, making the meaning of the whole clear. And, given enough samples to work with, even these more complex ciphers could eventually be decoded.

This function, the regular gathering and provision of information on their government's behalf, went some way towards hurting the reputation of diplomats. Although they were useful for coordinating international activity, is was difficult to ignore the fact that they were essentially very polite spies. But ignore that fact rulers did; to send away ambassadors meant that their own would likely be expelled as well, and the pace of international relations and the requirements of maintaining national prestige were such that it became impossible to get along without maintaining at least a few ambassadors.

Of course, ambassadors themselves rarely engaged directly in espionage. After all, they were prominent, well-known middle-aged or elderly men whose comings and goings were widely observed, hardly attributes which make one a covert operative. First and foremost, therefore, ambassadors collected public and semi-public information which anyone living in the same circumstances might find out, the sorts of items which would appear in newspapers if such things had existed at the time. It was from ambassadors that rulers learned that armies were being raised, that the wheat was growing poorly that year, that such-and-such a princess was pregnant (possibly by a captain of the guard rather than by her husband), and that the cheesemongers were revolting.

However, an ambassador might employ (or employ people to employ) spies who more actively sought out secret information. This could mean anything from regular employment to occasional bribes to just having drinks with a disgruntled courtier or servant and letting him talk. It worked the other way as well. Rulers and other ambassadors could learn a great deal about a diplomat's homeland and diplomatic intentions by talking to him or gathering information from his staff and hangers-on. For example, we have a good deal of correspondence to Queen Elizabeth or her advisors from a dissident priest living in the French ambassador's household in the 1580s.

It doesn't appear that ambassadors engaged in what we might call covert operations. After all, they had their hands free with diplomacy and information-gathering. But they sometimes *did* talk to dissenters, rebels, and exiles to plot action. As the man on the spot, the ambassador likely had better access to important dissidents than his principal. This could be *extremely* dangerous if the ambassador were found out. No matter what legal immunities he might claim, the ambassador could face the wrath of a very angry monarch.

More publicly, ambassadors were more engaged in protecting the prestige of their countries. This tended to mean establishing relationships with the powerful. This also meant dealing with other ambassadors. To enhance his country's prestige, a diplomat might argue points of precedence to increase his personal standing and exclude others from events attended by the powerful. However, other ambassadors could also serve as important sources of information, so an ambassador might have to balance pushing ahead with antagonizing his colleagues.

Finally, up to this point, diplomats dealt with high-level international issues and actively avoided becoming entangled in the affairs of expatriates; bringing up the plight of this or that merchant or pilgrim was a distraction from the important business of land transfers and wars. Instead, the treatment of their

Presents

One almost universal diplomatic tool was the exchange of gifts. Diplomats were often sent with valuable gifts to present to the ruler they were visiting, and their own principal might expect to receive gifts in return. Gifts could be as simple as chests of gold or as exotic as giraffes

own nationals in the foreign country were dealt with by consuls and similar local officials. However, as ambassadors became residents, they started to assume a consular role as well. This was both convenient (an ambassador probably had better access to the highest levels of government than an official of a colony of foreigners) and more in keeping with an increasingly nationalist role. The wise ambassador also cultivated local expatriates as a useful source of information.

Diplomatic Organization

As the use of ambassadors became more sophisticated, so did the organization of embassies. Up to the Renaissance, a government would appoint a diplomat or a team of equal diplomats. They might bring along a few servants and retainers, but though they might enjoy some legal protection as part of the diplomats' entourage, they had no official standing or authority of their own. They were simply the diplomat's employees. Around this time, though, some countries began to appoint official secretaries. These were not just simple scribes; a diplomatic secretary had the legal and administrative background to prepare correspondence and other documents according to the increasingly elaborate forms required by the new diplomacy. Such secretaries might be thought of as being less like modern administrative assistants and more like a legal counsel who doesn't make important decisions himself but provides vital guidance on how to carry them out. The secretaries who had served diplomats up to this point (and, for quite some time, secretaries who continued to serve most diplomats outside of Italy) were personal servants, accompanying the diplomat on his travels. The new state-sponsored secretaries, however, might be held over in their assigned location for some time after an old ambassador left and a new one arrived. The secretary could then familiarize the new ambassador with the local situation, the state of various negotiations, and so on. Without the continuity of an embassy staff, most diplomats from outside of Italy were dropped into unfamiliar situations and took quite some time to come up to speed.

Some governments also began to give an official status to some of a diplomat's hangers-on, who might be used in an official capacity as couriers or temporary spokesmen. And diplomats continued to bring personal servants with them. Indeed, the minimum size of the diplomat's entourage was frequently specified in the terms of his mission. This was useful for prestige and for ensuring that the diplomat had sufficient aid on hand to run important errands without distracting him from his mission. Few diplomats would be caught with less than 10 followers and five or six horses.

Developments didn't just appear on the ambassadorial side. Several rulers developed more sophisticated chanceries to deal with diplomatic correspondence, while others developed semi-formal bodies of, for lack of a better name, analysts interested in composing some sort of coherent foreign policy (as opposed to the more common practice, dealing with foreign affairs as isolated, one-off situations). A chancery, in modern terms, is a glorified secretarial pool. The chancery employs scribes who compose letters and other official documents, and file them as necessary. This may sound trivial, but more capable bureaucracies could be a potent weapon in an age where conflicts could hinge on more than just brute force. A ruler with a better, more organized chancery can find (or, at least, order subordinates to find) trends in foreign and domestic politics, indications of possible alliances in the works, or simply a record of what he or his representatives have said before, so that consistent policies can be followed.

However, these moves were sporadic, incomplete, and often temporary. The French, for example, had a council interested in foreign affairs, but few resident ambassadors and a very disorganized chancery. The Spanish, on the other hand, had a moderately well-developed chancery and a sizable network of professional diplomats, but its foreign policy thinking, such as it was, was in the hands of a line of kings who actively worked to prevent their subordinates from gathering enough information to formulate policies.

In actual practice, diplomatic correspondence was rarely as well-organized as it should have been. At the "home office," batches of records might be left behind by a roving king, stored at inconvenient locations, or simply neglected.

and elephants, as Haroun al-Raschid once sent to Charlemagne. In diplomacy as in personal life, the presentation of a fabulous gift might display the giver's esteem for the recipient, but it also underlined the wealth and power of the giver. Gifts were often presented on a diplomat's first contact and his departure, but might be handed out on other formal occasions. Couriers might got to great lengths to determine an ambassador's standing at court or his attitude towards his host country by the size and nature of gifts.

Cardinal Richelieu, for example, at one point had to ask France's ambassadors to tell him what their instructions were, because copies of royal correspondence with them were unavailable. On the ambassadorial end, the ambassador's expected archive of records was, for all practical purposes, private property. An ambassador, on being replaced, might take his files with him or simply destroy them. On occasion, he might leave them behind for his successor. However, since there was usually a gap between one ambassador leaving and the next arriving and, outside of Italian embassies, there was rarely a permanent staff on hand to curate them, the old records were vulnerable to raids by the native ruler's agents. New ambassadors often spent months playing catch-up, and might even have to send home for copies of such fundamentally important information as current treaties.

With the shift of diplomats from traveling to resident agents, some classes of candidates for diplomatic started to drop out. With the collapse of the feudal system, heralds were already a quaint vestige of the past and were rarely taken seriously as representatives. Since diplomats traveled less, hardy warriors were in less demand as diplomats, though they might still be used in large numbers as couriers, and minor clerks to handle routine matters became less necessary. In the aftermath of the wars of religion, there was general unease with using clergy as diplomats. Diplomats were drawn from the ranks of the nobility and the upper middle classes, people of good families and sufficient wealth to support an appropriate standard of living, particularly in the face of pay which was poor, chronically late, or both.

There was also a slow shift in funding. Rulers were reasonably content to pay for traditional, limited-term diplomatic missions sent by foreign governments. It was a long-established part of what was understood to be a reciprocal obligation. However, when rulers outside of Italy started sending long-term embassies, they started doing so by unilaterally stationing them other countries who rarely reciprocated. The rulers of the foreign court were under no obligation to pay for them, and so they did not. Governments establishing permanent embassies had to pay for them themselves. Some rulers paid their diplomats infrequently if at all, which severely damaged their efforts to establish diplomatic services.

The final important shift during this period is a change in legal protection for diplomats. It was generally acknowledged that diplomats still required some kind of legal protection in order to follow their missions, just as they had in earlier periods, but it was impossible to justify it in ecumenical terms. The solution was to introduce what we'd now call extraterritoriality. During the Middle Ages, diplomats were liable under limited circumstances to the courts of the countries they visited. By the 17th century, diplomats were regarded as operating under the laws of their home countries. Diplomats were less likely to be tried by the nations they were working in (though it could happen), but could be tried at home or otherwise legally held responsible by their employers. Applying separate legal systems to people physically living in the same country is not such a novel arrangement as it might appear. Through most of the Middle Ages, clergy could only be tried in ecclesiastical churches. Likewise, in some places beyond the Christian world during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, Christians living abroad might be tried by local bishops rather than non-Christian authorities, and some later Medieval trade colonies won the right to govern their own expatriates. As those institutions were fading away, a similar principle was simply applied in a new context. It's worth noting that it was initially the ambassador himself and sometimes his staff who were regarded as operating under foreign law. However, unlike modern embassies, the physical buildings they occupied (usually rented from natives) were *not* so protected. An embassy or ambassadorial residence was protected by the same

Hostage Situation

As western diplomats started to move beyond the west, they started to encounter different diplomatic traditions. One practice, sporadically practiced in the west in the past and still in the east was the exchange of hostages. Unlike modern hostages, who are the victims of political kidnapping, these hostages were selected by their ruler for an important diplomatic duty. Rulers would send sons and daughters, siblings, and other relatives and close friends to live with the foreign ruler as a guarantee that international agreements would be kept, knowing that if the agreements were broken, the hostages would suffer for it. They were both a guarantee that and an agreement would be kept and, once they returned home, an expert on the foreign nation.

Although their movements might be restricted (if nothing else, a hostage wasn't allowed to return home unless traded for another hostage), diplomatic hostages were otherwise treated as honored guests. Indeed, the Byzantines made enthusiastic use of hostages as propaganda tools. The Byzantines realized that today's hostages were likely to be tomorrow's rulers, or at least the advisors, useful allies, and close relatives of

laws protecting any other private property, but had no special status beyond that.

Adventures in Ongoing Diplomacy

Around the Renaissance, we can start thinking about diplomacy as a profession (and therefore diplomats as a type of character) rather than something done as necessary by characters who spend most of their time doing something else. A campaign involving a resident ambassador is likely to be urban and social, with very little running through the wilderness or bashing monsters in the head. Intrigue is the order of the day, with everyone trying to figure out what everyone else is thinking. An ambassador may solidly ally himself with a particular tendency at the foreign court (for example, siding firmly with his co-religionists against a heretical faction), or he may find himself setting up a number of potential alliances with a number of groups likely to do him or his country some good (he may side with a group of his more moderate co-religionists, but quietly encourage the heretics, since if they take over, the country is likely to be busy with civil war for several years, giving the ambassador's home country a free hand in other affairs). Ambassadors have a bit of an advantage in their immunity from most prosecution, but they're not intimately connected to the local society. Ambassadors, particularly new ones sent by governments with poorly organized foreign services, have to learn a great deal about the local situation, from political groupings to common courtesies, very quickly.

tomorrow's rulers. Such hostages would be indoctrinated as much as possible with the Byzantine viewpoint and overawed by Byzantine pomp and ceremony. When they eventually returned to their homelands, they could provide ready-made allies in a foreign court.

We've already discussed the sort of person likely to be an ambassador: wealthy, sociable, and impeccably respectable. Unless the PCs are going to be noblemen and other powerful figures themselves, an ambassador might be an NPC patron employing PCs to do the scut work he doesn't have time for and the dirty work he dares not be implicated in.

That said, standard PC types might make a good group of characters to work for an ambassador. Warriors could find use as guards, trusted messengers, and all-round people to lift heavy things around the household. Stealthy and social characters are invaluable for gathering information. More academically inclined characters would be useful as private secretaries. Even holy men could find employment as resident priests; after the wars of religion had died down, diplomats won the right to bring their own clergy with them, a necessity for Catholic ambassadors in Protestant countries and vice versa.

Many of the adventure seeds in the previous articles can work with resident ambassadors, but here are some more specifically suited to permanent diplomacy.

The Man Who Came To Dinner: The country in which the ambassador is stationed is on the verge of a regional revolt. The ambassador's government believes the prospective rebels have a reasonable chance of success, so they want to get on their good side before another country can secure an alliance. As darkness falls over the capital, the ambassador's servants must smuggle the fugitive rebel leader and a couple of his men into the ambassadorial residence; the general populace is unlikely to recognize him, but it's possible that someone is watching the embassy. The ambassador is ready to begin an evening's talks with the impulsive and unsophisticated but fairly friendly rebel when there's a knock on the door. A powerful but strictly royalist courtier, with a sizable entourage in tow, has happened by to be sociable. Turning away such an important person would be foolish, so the ambassador must play host to two mutually hostile parties for the evening. The ambassador might try to stash the rebel away in a locked room for a while (the rebel leader, who is spoiling for a fight, will go if the situation is gracefully explained, but only grudgingly). However, he'll have to be on guard against the rebel's impatience getting the better of him as well as the courtier's hangers-on stumbling into the wrong room. Could the social visit be a pretense to get the courtier's men in the door?

The Purloined Letter: This adventure takes the PCs out into the field. A messenger has been sent with an important dispatch from home. It is known to carry vitally important information, so agents of several squabbling local factions (possibly including the agents of other ambassadors) have been sent to intercept it. The PCs must get to the messenger first, get the documents, and get them back to the ambassador before the other agents, some of whom would be able to temporarily detain the PCs before "misunderstandings" about their diplomatic status is sorted out, get the documents instead.

[Foreigner] Go Home!: Angry crowds chanting slogans outside of embassy buildings isn't a recent invention. They go back to the dawn of permanent diplomacy. A group of rioters upset at the ambassador's country's militarism, their religion, or just their stubborn insistence on being foreign assembles around the ambassadorial residence. Although people are unlikely to die (no weapons more formidable than torches and makeshift cudgels, and clearly more interest in throwing rotten vegetables and breaking windows than drawing blood), serious injuries are a definite danger, and a torch-wielding mob is likely to play havoc with the files and some rather expensive furniture. The ambassadorial staff must try to keep the rioters out or, failing that, protect the person of the ambassador and his diplomatic records. Unless the local authorities are openly hostile to the ambassador or his country, they'll have an interest in suppressing the riot and will send troops along when word filters through to them, but members of the ambassadorial staff might want to try to slip out past the crowd and summon the cavalry before things get really bad.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Better-than-Professional Results, At Home!

This past week I've been digitizing my music collection. This is at least the third time in my life I've done so. The first time involved a thought process along the lines of, "I'm sure 96kbps will be a high enough bit rate," while the second one involved the WMA format and a merciful hard-disk crash that annihilated all evidence of that path.

Each iteration of my CD-ripping quest is a bit different, owing to different outlooks, needs, and circumstances. While my over-600-CD library has continued to grow at a modest clip, this time the whole situation is a bit different, since I'm also assimilating the missus' CD collection . . . an extensive collection that, amazingly, only intersects with my own in three CDs (INXS' *Kick,* The Proclaimers' *Sunshine on Leith,* and Rock of the 80s (???)). So extensive is the missus' Christmas music collection that a random song selected at random has a greater chance of being a holiday tune than it does of being selected from the complete works of Peter Gabriel, They Might Be Giants, U2, or The Beatles.

Anyway, one interesting side effect of dealing with my collection is that certain CDs get special treatment. For example, some CDs include hidden tracks at the end . . . usually after an interminable period of silence. Other CDs -- most notably children's albums -- tend to combine two or more separate entities into a single track, such as the Muppet Show Soundtracks' tendency to include unrelated humorous sketch or comedy asides at the end of a song. Still CDs hide tracks in the "pregap" area (basically, you can access them by pressing "rewind" from the first track).

All of these CDs I have "fixed" according to my own specifications, either trimming the excess silence, splitting selections into multiple tracks, or recovering the otherwise unlistenable music. Still other CDs I have tweaked to my liking. For example, tracks I never wanted to listen to ever again have been deleted from their album, and "my" version of Enya's *Shepherd Moons* has both the English and Gaelic versions of "Far and Away."

And my copy of *The Very Best of the Righteous Brothers* -- quite possibly a CD whose sound inferiority is rivaled only by the number of copies in print -- has received a complete rework. The original sounded literally as if someone had hooked up a Victrola to the CD-recording machine, complete with hum, hiss, and pops, all wrapped up in an absurdly quiet package. Processing the entire CD via sound-editing software, I was able to get the noise reduced, the pops removed, and the entire thing as loud as a "regular" CD.

Anyway, what I find interesting is that the ability to handle my music collection has increased over the years, to the point where I can create something *better* than the original (at least for my purposes). This is due to a state of technology advancement that was unheard of a decade ago. Being able to hold an entire CD of data uncompressed in the memory of a desktop system? The stuff of science fiction in the late '90s.

Such is the case of games as well (especially tabletop RPGs). Advances in editing, processing, and printing technology -- combined with relative stagnation in the professional world -- has led to a situation where amateurs can produce results that are better than the professionals' efforts . . . at least for their purposes.

For example, let's say there's a deluxe downloadable character sheet for a game . . . one of those four-page versions. It would be trivial for me to print it out on nice, thick paper (say, a parchment style), hole-punch and comb-bind the edges, craft thicker outer sheets that would fold up to form pockets, include extra paper, include sheets of at-a-glance house rules, and wrap the whole thing in a cloth or suede cover, which might even include a snazzy ribbon-style bookmark. Voila! A four-page (or so) electronic character sheet becomes what might be an heirloom tomb for a would-be player.

Or if I buy an electronic adventure, I can print out multiple copies of the map for note-taking purposes. I might use image software to make a "player's version" (with false or incorrect information). I can enlarge portions for miniatures use.

In much the same way that audio-processing software has made it possible to make near-professional results in one's home -- and, indeed, results that supplant the "official" versions -- so, too, has image and printing technology gotten to the point where we can make "better" versions of professional material for our own personal uses. Some companies

even recognize this; for example, I believe Great White Games decided not to bother with a standard GM screen, instead opting for a vinyl [Customizable GM Screen](#) for their **Savage Worlds** line. Part of the rationale here is the realization that amateur results are almost better than "official" ones when it comes to game aids, since each game group will have different needs.

I suspect that this trend will continue in the future, as the tech gets better and better. Whether this marks the end of "traditional" book publication or opens up new possibilities for gamers remains to be seen. But I'm as hopeful as I've ever been . . . with the same level of optimism that I had when I said, "This'll be the last time I need to rip my music collection!" the last two times.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

The Lost Isles -- Exile: Sourcebook & Scenario 1 (for *RuneQuest*)

Published by Sceaptune Games

Written by Tim Bancroft

Cover & Illustrations by Harsh

Cartography by Halfbat

76-Page Black & White Perfect Bound Book; $14.95
80-Page Black & White 4.25 MB PDF; $14.95

With the gaming hobby being three decades old, the older gamer faces a problem -- one of time. Family commitments and job commitments means that many games have less time to play and getting everyone in a gaming group together on a regular basis can be a problem. One solution is having board and card games on hand when not everyone is able to attend as these invariably cater for a lower number of players, but apart from a GM's own campaign, roleplaying is not as readily flexible. This is certainly not the case commercially, for most scenarios on the shelves at your local games store are designed with several players in mind. This, of course, is a remnant from *Dungeons & Dragons* with its sharply delineated roles. In its current incarnation, the *d20 System* actually has a solution in Expeditious Retreat Press' "1 on 1" Adventures line, and now, so does *RuneQuest.*

New English publisher Sceaptune (correctly pronounced "Shipton," but "Skipton" is also acceptable) Games has taken advantage of the OGL for Mongoose Publishing's version of *RuneQuest* to produce its own scenarios and sourcebooks. The first of these is what it calls a "Singleton" scenario, designed to be played with the one player and the one GM, but flexible enough that it can be run with two players and a GM, or with the usual group of four to six players. As the first part of a campaign, *The Lost Isles -- Exile: Sourcebook & Scenario 1* presents a setting suitable for almost any fantasy world, complete with new cults, races, beasts, and spells, plus a two-part scenario that the character (or characters) is quietly literally dropped off at.

The setting is an archipelago thousands of miles from the mainland on the world of Lamall. Colloquially known as the "Isles of the Damned" or the Lost Isles, to the islands' Wardens they are known as the Archipelago of Justice. It is a penal colony, used by other coastal nations to incarcerate law breakers and those they find embarrassing, somewhere from where escape is made virtually impossible by the Wardens of Justice and their Guardians, the fierce dragon-like beasts they command. The Wardens are mysterious beings who use the islands as a place for the punishment of, and service by the guilty. A healthy community thrives on the islands, centered on Havens, places of safety where the Wardens' laws must be obeyed. Break them and the perpetrator is declared an outlaw, unable to enter any Haven, and can then be freely hunted and killed by anyone and his possessions taken.

The Lost Isles -- Exile cannot be played with a character created straight from the basic *RuneQuest* rulebook, unless it is a seasoned. Otherwise, to ensure that a character, referred to as the Exile, can survive the Dragon-, Drake-, and Wrymkin-infested hostile environment of the islands, he receives extra skills, skill points, Runes (integrated or not), and spells. Further, he will be aided throughout the campaign by an Accomplice, a friendly NPC controlled either by the Exile's player or another player. The five Accomplices given include a likeable Human rogue, an Elf overly protective of the natural world, a zealously Lawful Human noble, a rebelliously snotty Duck, and a heroically rebellious Dark Troll. Alternatively, the player controlling the Accomplice could just create a character of his own, using the same guidelines as for the Exile. If the campaign is to be played with just the Exile sans Accomplice, then

the player has even more points and benefits to assign. The last option is playing *The Lost Isles -- Exile* in the usual fashion with four to six player characters. In this case, each character receives just a few extra skill points. Surprisingly one option not suggested is using the given Accomplices as pre-generated player characters for this option.

The last thing that any player has to do is decide why his character finds himself on the Lost Isles. Has he been marooned and thus finds himself an accidental Exile? Or has been convicted of a crime (that he did or did not commit) and having been sentenced to serve out a term on the islands, is thus a "true" Exile? The nature of his crime can be generated or selected from the table given. Either way, the long term objective for the Exile is not only to survive, but to find the mysterious Wardens and convince them that he is worthy to leave. The only way to do that is by serving the community through great deeds . . .

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The scenario begins with the Exile washed ashore, along with his equipment. Almost immediately he encounters his soon-to-be Accomplice, being chased by a black Drake. Fortunately refuge can be found nearby in a Stonehold, a building designed to provide protection from both the islands' weather and its draconic wildlife. Once weathered, there is a Greeter ready to welcome them to the Lost Isles, inform them of the rules and point towards the nearest big island and its influential merchant. The Greeter also has the first of the scenario's several tasks, scouting out the nest of the Drake that attacked them. The others center on Stormhaven, a fallen and long-abandoned Haven, and now seemingly subject to draconic incursion. None of these tasks is particularly complex, but they do what they are designed to do. Just like the "sandbox" computer game (such as *Grand Theft Auto* or *Mercenaries*) or a MMORPG like *World of Warcraft,* this is to garner the characters favor with the factions, or this case, single faction in the setting. That faction being lawful society. This is, of course, in addition to the playing experience it is meant to give the participants, and the mechanical experience it awards the characters.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

To support the scenario, the sourcebook provides plenty of new material, all of which could easily be used in other *RuneQuest* settings. This includes the effects of Runes such as Chaos, Conflict, Dragon, Healing and Detect; and a new cult dedicated to Suberle, Goddess of the Healing Sea, as well as the basic details of two others: the mercenary guild/cult dedicated to Fulsgar, the Warrior; and Gra'al, the Dragon-god, worshipped by Wyrmkin and Dragons. There are also new spells, legendary abilities, and equipment; the latter geared towards fighting and surviving against dragons. In addition, a number of new species are described. Bar the diminutive Riverfolk, noted for their skills as sailors and traders, who are suitable as player characters, the bulk of them are draconic in nature. As you would expect, these are dangerous beasts, though lesser species like the Wyrmkin and the Vermin Drake, represent a more manageable threat.

Physically, *The Lost Isles -- Exile: Sourcebook & Scenario 1* is a clean looking book, with attractive pencil artwork and pleasingly clear cartography. Although not quite perfect, the writing is clear and concise, and it is fair to say that, over all, this is an immeasurably better looking book than Mongoose Publishing's core rulebook for *RuneQuest.*

What is so likeable about *The Lost Isles -- Exile: Sourcebook & Scenario 1* is that it makes the most of its (mostly) unique selling point, that of a scenario suitable for the one player and the one GM, but it is flexible enough to recognize and suggest other options. In fact, where other scenarios traditionally make adjustments to its opposition to present a fitting challenge to its players, *The Lost Isles -- Exile* works from the other end, adjusting its characters to fit the opposition. If the book has a problem, it is that the scenario is undeniably linear, but it does set everything up for the book's sequel, *The Lost Isles 2 -- Dryhaven.* This does mean that if the players jump the tracks and roleplay against the scenario, then both they and the GM are left high and dry. Then again, following the path set by the scenario is likely the only path to redemption.

Above all, *The Lost Isles -- Exile: Sourcebook & Scenario 1* fulfils its remit and a niche ill catered for, and does so in a fashion that is more than competent for the very first release from a new publisher. Packed with a decent amount of background and a decent scenario, *The Lost Isles -- Exile: Sourcebook & Scenario 1* is the kind of support that RuneQuest deserves and Sceaptune Games delivers to its own high standards.

--Matthew Pook

Icosahedron Adventures

The High Cost of Resurrecting

by Owen K.C. Stephens

The risk of character death and how to handle it are issues in many RPGs, but they are particularly common in **d20 System** RPGs, especially those with fantasy elements. The core fantasy **d20 System** rules offers numerous ways to for characters to die as a result of a single bad die roll, and no mechanism for a player to overcome such bad results even if failure to do so greatly reduces that player's enjoyment of the game. Of course, mechanisms to give players more control are common in expanded rules and can be borrowed from other game systems, but ultimately in anything close to the core fantasy **d20 System** rules, characters are eventually going to die. The main fix for that within the rules is to have them returned from the dead, which can be costly and time consuming, and often leaves the character that died weaker than prior to his death, making him even more likely to die in the future.

One way to handle these problems is for the GM to fudge die rolls so players don't die, or at least don't do so frequently. Ignoring questions of the appropriateness of such actions (which are largely a matter of group play style and even-handed application), this method doesn't work well for groups who want the thrill of overcoming risk. Once a group realizes the GM isn't going to let them die, the sense of accomplishment can be greatly diminished.

The following are alternatives to the standard options for fantasy **d20 System** games and death. They are designed to alter the existing cost of dying and being brought back. The focus for all is to make it faster and easier to get back to the fun part of a campaign for the players involved. Many also reduce the impact of dying, for groups happy to have old characters back and willing to hand-wave some details to do so.

The Death Par Mulligan

If dying is so common, maybe everybody deserves a mulligan, as long as they aren't dying more often that other characters. The idea of the death par mulligan is that if you die no more often than other characters, the death result is simply ignored. Instead of being dead, you're on the verge of death, or the black ray only stunned you, or you grabbed a branch at the last second.

The death par is set at the number of times everyone has died, plus one. Thus if no one has died, any character can die once and take the mulligan. If that character dies a second time before everyone has died once, the death is "real" and must be dealt with by the normal rules.

For particularly forgiving groups, the death par can be set as an average of how many times the characters have died, plus one. Thus if the wizard has died five times, the cleric not at all, the fighter twice, and the rogue once, the death par is three (5+0+2+1 = 8; 8/4 = 2, +1). The cleric can take a mulligan three times, or the fighter once or rogue twice, but the wizard is facing normal risks. Of course, if the cleric does die three times and fighter once, the death par goes up to 4.

Alternatively, a GM can set a death par for each campaign, or each adventure. Players can make decisions based on knowing theat the *Burrow of Bothered Bunnies* has a death par of 1, but the *Fane of Phobias* has a death par of five.

The death par mulligan restricts the harshest penalties of death for those who are dying more than their fellows. This allows characters to die occasionally without severe penalties, but keeps characters from feeling they can die as often as they like. It does have the side effect of giving some characters freebies -- anyone more than one below the death par can risk death and know they won't pay too great a consequence. But since that likely encourages heroic risks, groups may find it a feature rather than a bug.

Everybody Else Improves

Rather than punish the character that dies by taking away experience/ability points/money for resurrection, you can give everyone else a boost. Simply rule that each time a character dies, that character is returned to life with no penalties (hand-waving as needed), and grant everyone else a minor bonus . . . perhaps one ability score point or a few free skill points. This allows players to do better if they die less (keeping death a fate to be avoided), but doesn't weaken the character that already proved too fragile. You need to look out for many-death martyrs ("Whoops, choked on a chicken bone again. I guess everyone else gets a 23rd ability score point."), but in groups that want to keep their characters alive and don't mind others benefiting by their misfortune, the system can work well.

The Old Wound

The Old Wound rules assume that no characters actually die unless their players decide they're dead. Instead, anyone apparently killed is instead just scarred, gaining an "old wound" that has a detrimental effect (just not as detrimental as being dead). Each time the rules would normally result in character death, the player decides on a scar or weakness that is instead permanently suffered, reducing one ability score of the player's choice by one point. Such damage can only be healed by spells with the same level and cost as true resurrection, making such healing rare and expensive.

The Old Wound system mitigates the lack of fun for being dead (you can be up for the next encounter, instead of being carried around as a bulk door-stop until the party can get you raised), and reduces the game mechanical penalty (there is no gold-piece cost, and players can reduce ability scores that have less effect on their overall effectiveness than losing a level would). It also allows characters to gain the kind of permanent old wounds, from lost eyes to scars that never quite close or the feel of death that still lingers whenever they think of a necromancer's attack, that can be a boon to roleplaying and character development.

The Soda Run

If your character dies, you're probably out of the fun for a chunk of the rest of the evening. You're free to do useful things for the group (such as make a run for more soda), and sit around to make commentary, but that's about it. Now, on top of that, we're discussing what *other* penalties you should suffer?

For many game groups, the risk of death needs to be real and have consequences for the act of avoiding it to be fun. For them, choose the minimum consequence that allows everything else to be fun and move on. But for some groups, the act of playing is itself fun, even if they know there's little or no real consequence for failure. For these groups, being reduced to making the soda run for an evening is punishment enough. In this case, just don't do anything about death. Ignore it, and move on.

If the group doesn't need a framing device, don't even worry about a good in-character explanation. Heroes come back in comics often enough as it is, and resurrection magic is written into the core fantasy *d20 System* rules, so there may not be a need for anything more than a *scroll of true resurrection* in the treasure pile, or a quick visit by an angel who just says it's not the PC's time to go and restores life to the corpse. Or hand-wave the whole thing and say the character *looked* dead, but is better now.

Players could even be given the option to be effectively immortal or not, as they choose, at the beginning of a campaign. Or even the beginning of each adventure, or each game session, to match a flexible mood. If the point is for the player to have fun, why not allow them to decide what penalty they pay for failing to roll a 9 or better on a d20? Of course this approach requires agreement from the whole group, to prevent feelings of favoritism or unfair advantage. But if no one has a problem with it, you can mix and match the cost of resurrection to meet each player's balance of thrilling risk-taking and long-term character development.

Hand-Waving

A number of methods call for hand-waving, or coming up with some reason why a character isn't as dead as first glances suggest. The question of how *good* those reasons has to be is one of play style. A number of possibilities are presented below for any "I'm Not Dead Yet," scene, ranging from the fairly serious to the cinematic and the downright silly.

- An object mentioned earlier as carried by the dead character -- be it a holy book of script, a drinking flask full of hooch, or a magic bit of jewelry newly acquired -- takes the mortal blow, letting through just enough damage for the character to have been knocked out.
- A mysterious benefactor appears, raises the felled PC, and leaves without a word. (This is especially good if the GM is running out of mysterious plot hooks.)
- Death shows up and complains about its workload. Any player suggesting he could just not take the dead PC convinces Death, who leaves the once-corpse confused but alive.
- Upon examining the corpse, PCs discover it's a doppelganger. Going back an encounter or two reveals the "dead character" had been replaced by a shape-shifter prior to the deadly encounter.
- One of the dead character's magic items has an unknown second function: If its owner goes unconscious it casts an illusion showing the owner as dead, to prevent further attacks.
- The death blow came from a foe who is secretly working to aid the PCs, and thus was pulled at the last second to not be fatal.
- The dead character actually avoided the fatal attack, but in doing so slipped and fell, striking a rock hard enough to be knocked out.
- It turns out some ally of the dead character foresaw this moment, and made preparations. A one-shot item on the character's body restores him to life.
- The dead character knew how badly injured he was, and was playing possum, looking for an opportunity to either heal, or spring up and deliver an attack from surprise.
- The necromantic energy that killed the PC (for *finger of death* and similar spells) actually hit and killed a fly on the target's body. The fly died, and the leftover energy was enough to stun the character.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Designers' Notes: *GURPS Martial Arts*

by Peter Dell'Orto & Sean Punch

Appropriately enough, **GURPS Martial Arts** was written by a tag team:

Peter was the book's lead author. Sure, Sean wrote lots of material, but that was almost entirely rules text. Peter did the hard work of researching print resources, interviewing martial artists, and actually *fighting*. He also wrote up all the styles and historical material . . . which is to say, the larger part of the book.

Sean was the project's designer and editor. Ultimately, it was his job to structure a rulebook around the research. Which isn't to say that Peter didn't do *his* share of the rules brainstorming, organizing, and trimming.

We're going to tell you the book's story from *both* perspectives.

Peter Takes a Trip . . .

I came home late one night in 2003 to find an e-mail from Sean titled "Wanna write a book?" My first thought was "No! Writing a book is a lot of work!" But this wasn't just an offer to write any book. It was a chance to work with Sean on **GURPS Martial Arts** for *Fourth Edition.* I'd be the subject-matter expert and he'd provide the rules expertise. I couldn't say no. I'd been playing combat-heavy **GURPS** games since **Man to Man** and doing martial arts since junior high school. I couldn't imagine letting anyone else write it!

> *Pai Mei: It is your wish to possess this kind of power?*
> *The Bride: Yes!*
> *Pai Mei: Your training begins . . . tomorrow.*
> *-- **Kill Bill: Vol. 2***

I was living in New Jersey at the time, so I drove up to Montréal to visit Sean and draft the outline in person. It took a couple of days of systematic work, with breaks for local food and to watch an imported copy of Zhang Yimou's wuxia epic, *Hero.* The trip was dimmed by someone breaking into my car the night before I'd have left for home, forcing me to stay another day to get window repairs. (No, we didn't track the guy down and do a little reality checking on him.) But the important work was done: We'd outlined a major revision to a critical *Fourth Edition* book. It was the first step on a long journey. By the time we'd finished, I had moved to Japan and become an amateur fighter.

The Mission Statement

A crucial preliminary to writing the book was outlining our mission. Sean and I tossed around phrases like "**GURPS Magic,** but for fighters," "combat book," and "expanding the **Basic Set**" until we settled on the South Park-derived phrase "Fightin' Round the World." It was funny enough and it *did* summarize exactly what we wanted: to ensure that the book covered fighting from all over the world . . . from antiquity to modern day and beyond . . . armed and unarmed . . . from the hyper-realistic to comic-book ninjas and wuxia movies. We wanted to expand coverage of martial arts that were sadly overlooked in earlier editions of **Martial Arts** -- or that had expanded like wildfire since those were written. We also wanted to correct the perceived bias of previous editions toward barehanded martial arts from Asia, as well as the European armed-combat bias of **GURPS Swashbucklers.**

Early on, Sean decreed that techniques wouldn't be required purchases, which freed us to interpret each style's techniques list as both "recommended purchases" and "moves that gamers playing stylists should try to favor in play." I suggested that we include a paragraph of common tactics for each style in game terms, to make roleplaying a Goju Ryu karateka different from playing a Wushu practitioner or a Pankration stylist -- even if they all had the same skills. Sean thought this was a great idea, so in it went for every style! This was central to our goal of making the book a (hopefully!) complete roleplaying sourcebook for martial artists, not just a rulebook.

Reality Checking and Reliable Sources

The first two editions of **Martial Arts** were great books. Two of my favorite books, and ones that heavily influenced **GURPS.** But they were relatively old.

The explosion of the Internet in the 1990s blew the doors off a vault holding a wealth of information about the martial arts. A trend emerged toward academically rigorous works and away from books based on hearsay and odd speculation. Lots of primary source material became available. Obscure fencing manuals once published solely in their original languages and accessible only to historians were translated by enthusiastic recreationists and published. Martial-arts styles virtually unknown 20 years ago became widespread. As the subject-matter expert of our tag-team pair, researching and reality checking this material fell to me. Reality checking was the *easy* part . . .

Our biggest problem was finding reliable, academically rigorous sources. Ad copy was commonly passed off as truth, while far too many books reported second-hand information as fact. Often, an assertion would be repeated across many works . . . all of which could be traced to a single source that provided no evidence to support its claim. "Common knowledge" was rampant, much of which was rumor cloaked in the guise of fact.

These obstacles to research afflicted the martial arts of every culture. Statements like "Boxers don't close their fists" and "Knights were honorable warriors but unsophisticated hackers" were as common as "Black belts must register their hands as lethal weapons" and "Ninjas hated samurai." Then there were the claims that Western martial arts are "pragmatic" while Eastern ones are "showy." Such myths are *persistent* and highly resistant to being debunked. We needed to separate fact from fiction, to back our facts with reliable sources. **GURPS** books are held to high standards, and this one was to be no exception!

This meant lots of research. I read or reread every book on the martial arts that I could get my hands on, and then read the books in their bibliographies. I borrowed DVDs and tapes from friends, and rented movies. I even bought a few important books for Sean so that I could have a second pair of eyes looking at critical sources.

I also grilled every knowledgeable person that I could find. I talked to USMC recruits and former hand-to-hand instructors, high-ranking karateka, competitive judo practitioners, BJJ stylists, professional fighters, and more. I contacted local and not-so-local schools and asked for permission to visit. With Sean's encouragement, I posted a message on the SJ Games forums looking for style experts to question. Then I researched again to confirm or refute everything I'd seen and heard.

The same went for equipment. I had weapon owners weigh their weapons, and I weighed mine as well. We checked training gear costs by comparison shopping on the net and picking representative prices.

Interestingly, the schools tended to be dry wells. Some gave me a hard sell or flat-out ignored my requests to visit. Only two invited me in and freely answered my questions. One particular instructor in NJ, Phil Dunlap, opened his doors to me, inviting me to train at his school and ask any questions I had. He encouraged me to continue training mixed martial arts in Japan, and found me a school in my new town. This in turn led me to compete in amateur Shooto, a form of full-contact mixed martial arts. Try saying "No, thank you" to a group of enthusiastic Japanese gym buddies and you'll end up gloved-up as well! I'd like to think I'm the first **GURPS** author to score a knockout with a knee strike and call it "reality checking."

Reality checking was crucial. For both personal interest and reality-checking needs, I trained karate, two forms of mixed martial arts, muay thai, escrima, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, kendo, and more. Our pool of research experts added even more styles, providing vital feedback on styles that I couldn't try personally. We included experts and non-martial artists alike in the playtest to ensure accuracy, clarity, and ease of use. We needed to make sure that everything was

"If the masters in the old days could really jump 30 feet high," he snarled, "then why the hell did they build staircases in their houses?"

-- Pan Qingfu to Mark Salzman, **Iron and Silk**

Boss: Is that your blood?
Narrator: Some of it, yeah.

*-- **Fight Club***

accurate -- and more important, fun and playable!

In short, before we included a style, a weapon, or a technique, we insisted on checking the facts and the sources -- and if possible, reality checking it in person!

Combat Skills vs. Combat Art vs. Combat Sport

A GM who's designing a style needs to decide if it uses the basic combat skill, a Combat Art or Combat Sport variation, or some combination of the three. Sean and I had to decide this for every single style in the book. Martial skills, for game purposes, consist of three competing elements: form, distancing/timing, and power. Form is the elegance and attractiveness of the moves -- techniques with good form *look* good. Distancing is gauging where you and your weapons (hands, swords, whatever) are relative to the opponent, while timing is your ability to spot an opportunity and take advantage of it. Power is simply that -- strong techniques, delivered forcefully and efficiently to the target. Each of the three skill types emphasizes one or two of these at the cost of the rest:

> *Combat skills* emphasize power and distancing/timing at the expense of form. Any move that allows powerful strikes against a mobile, resisting foe gets used, regardless of attractiveness. Such things might not be pretty, or effective in a sporting situation, but they *work.*

> *I'm a chain belt in kung-fu!*
> *-- Billy Ray Valentine,* **Trading Places**

> *Art skills* emphasize form at the cost of power and distancing/timing. They sacrifice a lot, but form is outstanding. The moves might not work in a combat situation, but they look good -- and sometimes, especially on film or in certain competitions, that's all that matters.

> *Sport skills* emphasize distancing/timing -- and to a lesser extent, form -- over power. Because sport events generally reward proper form over injury-causing attacks, power isn't a priority. But distancing is critical if one wants to score on a resisting opponent. Some sports forms do include powerful strikes, but these generally have a very limited target set (perhaps just one area of the body) or limit scoring to only one class of strikes. How pretty it looks is secondary, although it isn't ignored; many scoring systems only reward correct technique, but you still need to hit the target!

Thus, full-contact, limited-rules bouts where knockout is a real possibility use *combat* skills. At the resolution level of **GURPS,** if you can strike, grapple, or throw a resisting opponent with limited regard for his safety, then that's indistinguishable from combat! Safety gear, immediate medical support, matched opponents, and referee stoppages -- not the underlying skill -- are what changes the contest from combat to sport.

"Why is <style> so <good/bad> in *GURPS*?"

Martial artists often have very strong opinions about specific styles -- usually their own, but also others. These range from "This is the ultimate style!" to "That style sucks!" We tried to present a fair and reasonable description and rules treatment of each martial art. **GURPS** is a game, though, so we deliberately erred on the side of combat utility and function. Even the most questionable styles might have emerged from combat arts, may purport to teach combat-effective techniques, and are likely to be depicted as extremely deadly in the martial-arts fiction that people want to emulate in an RPG!

"Why did you call it that?"

We tried to use accurate names for all styles, but we favored the names most commonly found in widely available sources to make it easy to use **Martial Arts** to adapt real and fictional material. This led to a mishmash of two different transliteration methods for Chinese, complicated by styles having different names in Cantonese and Mandarin (with different transliterations for each one . . .). Other languages presented their own unique difficulties. For this reason, we often listed alternate names as well. Our main goal was to make it easy to find more information -- to give GMs and

players the names they'd find on school signboards, book titles, and the Internet.

"Why did you cut <style>?"

Because we added so much to our edition of **Martial Arts,** a few styles presented in earlier versions didn't make it back into print. First, we cut many of the fictional martial arts, keeping only a small selection that covered a broad range of genres and play styles. It's easier for the GM to make up such styles than to research real ones, after all! Second, we cut a few historical styles. Generally, this was because we needed the space for another style that covered the same ground, geographically or otherwise -- but some were cut for being less-than-historical. The rundown:

An Ch'i -- This art was supposedly used by legendary Chinese gypsies, assassins, and proto-ninjas. It's an unverifiable style for unverifiable people. Amusingly, I own a book on the Chinese gypsies who supposedly used it . . . but even that book doesn't contain these techniques, nor does it provide any evidence beyond the author's assertions.

Kuk Sool Won -- Korean styles were possibly overrepresented in earlier books. More importantly, I had little access to solid information on this art. I *was* able to question a dedicated, willing practitioner of the widely available style of Hwa Rang Do, though, and I had numerous sources against which I could double-check his information. Thus, we chose to replace KSW with HRD.

Military Hand-to-Hand -- This became a greatly expanded section covering specific styles: the USMC's MCMAP, Israel's Krav Maga, and the combative version of Russia's Sambo. We also added a lens for converting *any* style to a military one.

Ninjutsu -- The biggest cut, but a necessary one. Ninjutsu isn't a martial-arts style. It's an occupational skill set that has a component fighting style, taijutsu, that we *did* include. The same goes for "Hashishin style" -- it's not a style, but a job for suicidal assassins who need Fanaticism and the willingness to take a few All-Out Attack maneuvers. There's no evidence that the Hashishin even trained in a dedicated system.

Police Hand-to-Hand -- This became a lens for just about any style.

Streetfighting -- This isn't a style. We replaced it with a lens for other styles and a discussion of "untrained" brawlers. This is both more accurate and easier on potential street-fightin' PCs.

Uechi Ryu -- A popular style, but . . . We needed to add Shotokan, founded by the man who brought karate to Japan. We wanted to add Kyokushin, because of its wide availability and colorful founder. We insisted on having Te, as it represented the root from which all karate sprung. Karate was overrepresented, so something had to go.

Wudong -- Wudong is a *region,* not a specific style. The Wudong family of martial arts consists of the Taoist styles, also known as the "internal" styles: T'ai Chi Chuan, Pa Kua Chuan, and Hsing I Chuan. We couldn't find verifiable sources on any style called "Wudong."

None of the above styles made it past the initial discussions, so they weren't converted to *Fourth Edition.* Don't look for them in the outtakes below!

. . . and Sean Snips

A consequence of all this research and double-checking was that we had to snip some first-draft text that was merely "nice to have" in order to accommodate playtester recommendations for material that was *necessary.* Even with cuts, though, we were running long . . . until SJ Games decided that **Martial Arts** would have 256 pages instead of 240. This greatly reduced the number of necessary outtakes. There were still a few, however, as well as many rough write-ups proposed during the playtest that we lacked

It's not daily increase but daily decrease -- hack away the

the time to properly test, or that overlapped existing material.

The remainder of this article is a mixture of things that had to come out and items that didn't quite make it in. Fair warning: we *didn't* spend much time playtesting rules that wouldn't fit. Anything involving game mechanics might need a little adjustment to be balanced in play!

Chapter 1 -- History

We made a concerted effort not to hack on this chapter. The styles in Chapter 5 were so heavily dependent on laying a solid historical groundwork that every word cut here meant adding a word in 10 places later in the book -- a false economy if there ever was one. The biographies, however, were mostly for color . . . so with great reluctance, we took a famous American fighter out of contention.

Martin "Farmer" Burns (1861-1937)

Martin Burns earned his nickname when he wrestled in a $25-prize challenge match in Chicago in 1889. His overalls and obvious rural upbringing marked him as someone from the sticks, hence the moniker. Burns wrestled two matches, winning both despite being outweighed by his professional opponents.

Burns continued to wrestle for the rest of his adult life, fighting an estimated 6,000 matches and losing only seven. He weighed a relatively modest 175 lbs. yet had a 20" neck. Pure muscle, Burns credited his development to a youth spent at hard labor and wrestling practice. He later came into demand as a trainer, and taught champion wrestlers such as Frank Gotch.

In the early 20th century, Burns published a mail-order fitness manual that he sold for the then-tremendous sum of $35. It covered weightlifting, calisthenics, and self-defense using wrestling and jujutsu. It also described the "deep breathing" that he believed was so critical. These breathing exercises and the benefits Burns claimed for them were almost indistinguishable from Chinese *qi gong*. Unlike jujutsu, qi gong was unknown in the West. Burns' explanations didn't mention *chi,* but rather the invigorating and strengthening effects of deep breathing!

Chapter 2 -- Characters

When it came to bulking up during the playtest, this was the only chapter that seriously challenged Chapter 4. At the request of the testers, we added a lot of notes on advantages and how to use them in ***Martial Arts*** campaigns, as well as several perks. Not everything made it in, though, and a few items had to come out to make room. The largest outtake was one of our sample NPCs.

João Dias (150 points)

João spent his childhood in a half-dozen Brazilian cities, dragged around by his mother, Ana, as she searched for "something better" -- which, as far as João could make out, meant "somewhere his father wasn't." Eventually, Ana got the cash to take her boy and move to the United States. Unfortunately, the money ran out shortly thereafter.

João's teenage years went by in a half-dozen *American* cities in which being a poor immigrant was grounds for prejudice and violence. Los Angeles was the low point -- Ana found work, but the gangs found João. He spent over two years not exactly on the street but not exactly doing anything with his

life.

The day João's best friend, Roque, was shot by a fellow gang member was the day he vowed to get out of the life. As luck would have it, his roots provided the means: a Brazilian Jiu-jitsu school owner saw a bit of himself in João and decided to get him off the street. João trained with the dedication of a madman, and learned more about his culture during his training than he ever did busing between cities in Brazil.

Today, João is a serious contender. He's fast, hard to catch, and *excellent* at grappling. He has won seven local tournaments -- most by triangle choke -- and is ready to tackle a regional event. He plans to fight his way to the top through hard work, and refuses to do anything remotely questionable. His secret weapon against second thoughts is the ringing in his right ear . . . it's a constant reminder of the shot that killed Roque, and only training seems to drown it out.

João is his early 20s, and stands a fit 5'9" at 153 lbs. He was designed using the Contender template (p. 32), and practices Brazilian Jiu-jitsu (p. 167) with the "Street" lens (p. 145).

> **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 13 [30].
> Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 13 [0].
> Basic Speed 7.00 [10]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 11; Parry 12.

Social Background

> *TL:* 8 [0].
> *CF:* Latin [0]; Western [1].
> *Languages:* English (Accented) [4]; Portuguese (Native) [0].

Advantages

> Enhanced Dodge 1 [15]; Fit [5]. *Perks:* Ground Guard; Style Familiarity (Brazilian Jiu-jitsu). [2]

Disadvantages

> Obsession (Win a title and get off the street) (12) [-5]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot Kill) [-15]; Stubbornness [-5]; Workaholic [-5].

> *Quirks:* Believes that most people are lazy, not that he pushes himself hard; Curses in English around Brazilians and in Portuguese around Americans; Hates being called "Joe"; Minor Addiction (Guarana); Minor Handicap (Tinnitus in right ear). [-5]

Skills

> Brawling (E) DX [1]-13; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-10; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-10; Judo (H) DX+5 [24]-18; Knife (E) DX [1]-13; Lifting (A) HT-1 [1]-12; Running (A) HT-1 [1]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Urban Survival (A) Per+1 [4]-11; Wrestling (A) DX+2 [8]-15.

> *Techniques:* Triangle Choke (Judo) (H) [5]-18.

We also decided to cut one of our Innate Attack examples, since we felt that it was somewhat redundant with Flying

Fists (p. 45). Still, it shows up in plenty of video games, and illustrates that not all chi attacks have to be "hard," damaging abilities.

Chi Shove (-50%): Crushing Attack 1d (Blockable, -10%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Double Knockback, +20%; Low Signature, +10%; No Blunt Trauma, -20%; No Wounding, -50%; Variable, +5%) [3]. *Notes:* You can push around a distant target by miming a shove or a Judo Throw. If the victim has never witnessed this ability, he must make a Sense roll at -4 to realize that he's being attacked! (He may defend normally against later uses.) This is a standard ranged attack with Acc 3, 1/2D 10, Max 100, and RoF 1. It requires an Attack maneuver and a roll against Judo or Push to hit. On a hit, roll damage, double it, and assess knockback but no injury. *3 points.*

The playtesters proposed a *lot* of additional Style Perks, and many of them went into the book -- including Clinch (p. 51), Neck Control (p. 50), and Strongbow (p. 51). Some didn't make it in, though. In most cases, this was because the testers felt that the proposed perk was unbalanced, or at least needed more testing than we could give it. One perk lost out by only a slim margin, largely because the playtest ended before the debate as to whether it was balanced.

Focused Fury

Unlike most fighters, you can combine *Mighty Blows* (p. B357) with Committed Attack (Strong), raising the damage bonus to +1 per die or a flat +2, whichever is better -- like All-Out Attack (Strong). You can also "stack" it with All-Out Attack (Strong), improving its damage bonus to the better of +2 per die or a flat +3. Either use costs 1 FP per blow.

Chapter 3 -- Techniques

This chapter was jam-packed even in the first draft, and the few techniques that the playtesters really felt needed to be added all ended up playtested and shoehorned in. Still, there was one outtake, cut mostly because not everyone agreed that we needed it in light of *Counterattack* (p. 70), *Stop Hits* (p. 108), and *Riposte* (p. 124).

Deceptive Parry

Hard

Default: prerequisite skill Parry-4.
Prerequisite: Any unarmed or Melee Weapon skill; cannot exceed prerequisite Parry.

This technique involves a risky defensive maneuver that opens up your attacker to a counter. In effect, you start your own attack early to take advantage of your parry . . . at the risk of failing to defend! You must declare this gambit before you defend against a given opponent. It gives you -4 to all defenses against that foe. Deceptive Parry lets you buy off this penalty for Parry, but not for Block or Dodge. If you successfully parry your enemy's melee attack, he has -4 to defend against your *first* attack if he tries to parry with the weapon or limb that you just parried. This has no effect on his other defenses, including parry attempts with other weapons or limbs.

Chapter 4 -- Combat

We were strongly opposed to outtakes here. Whenever several styles in Chapter 5 required the same special combat rule, it was more efficient simply to add it once in Chapter 4 . . . so as with Chapter 1, every word cut here meant

several new words later on. Another way to put it would be to say that this part of the book represented a lot of research and rules design, and everything in it was something that we *really wanted* to include.

This was also the chapter that grew the most due to playtester-requested additions -- mostly, we agreed and added things. We decided not to include controversial items, though. The following optional rule is just one example.

Practice Makes Perfect

When rolling to hit with a technique, how you achieved your skill level is unimportant; e.g., a karateka with Karate at 18 and Jump Kick at default and one with Karate at 14 and 5 points in Jump Kick both have Jump Kick at 14. But constantly practicing one move toughens body parts and provides hard-won experience that accuracy doesn't really reflect. For every two *full* points in a technique, you get +1 on rolls to avoid any negative consequences it has (falls, self-inflicted harm, etc.), and on non-combat skill rolls required to set it up or recover from it. For instance, if you raise Flying Jump Kick from Karate-7 to Karate for 8 points, you get +4 to the DX or Jumping roll to set it up and the DX or Acrobatics roll to avoid falling if you fail. This bonus never modifies attack or defense rolls -- only incidental rolls.

Chapter 5 -- Styles

By now you're probably sensing a trend: "If the playtesters convinced us that something was necessary to make *Martial Arts* a complete work, we added it." Guilty as charged! And even with the extra 16 pages that a 256-page book gave us, we had to make space for all of this somewhere. Chapter 5 bore the brunt of the cutting simply because it was the longest chapter by far, and many of the styles it described were very similar to other styles.

Here are the missing styles in all their glory. These first two were originally part of *Stickfighting* (p. 157).

Egyptian Stickfighting

4 points

Ancient Egyptian tomb murals depict stickfighting done for the amusement of the pharaoh. They also show boys practicing stickfighting -- either as training for war or as a combat form in itself. Shields aren't in evidence, but warriors of that era would have used them in warfare.

Skills: Shield; Smallsword; Wrestling.
Techniques: Arm Lock (Wrestling); Armed Grapple (Smallsword); Disarming (Smallsword); Feint (Smallsword).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes.

Tapado

3 points

Tapado is a form of Filipino stickfighting that uses a jo-like stick wielded in two hands. Practitioners usually study it in conjunction with other Filipino martial arts.

Skills: Staff; Two-Handed Sword.
Techniques: Disarming (Staff or Two-Handed Sword); Feint (Staff or Two-Handed Sword).
Perks: Form Mastery (Staff).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Enhanced Parry (Staff).

The third and final style we removed was part of *Jujutsu* (p. 166). As a matter of trivia, it was also the original inspiration for the *Styleô* box on p. 27.

Small-Circle Jujitsu

4 points

Small-Circle Jujitsu is the style of Hawaiian judo and jujutsu master Wally Jay. It depends more on stand-up locks than on ground fighting and throws. Its name refers to the art's basic principle for manipulating an adversary's limbs or joints: the practitioner pushes the opponent with the thumb and hand while pulling with the arms, the resulting motion describing a small circle. This simultaneous push-pull action uses the victim's body to provide the leverage needed to throw him or place him in a lock.

Small-Circle Jujitsu emphasizes controlling the opponent via joint locks, finger locks, arm bars, and pain compliance. The stylist counters an assailant's strikes and grabs with locks and throws. He rarely lets go after a throw, instead holding on and following up with a painful lock. In a lethal situation, he might incapacitate his foe with chokes and damaging locks -- but the style stresses rendering the adversary helpless, not crippling him. This defensive emphasis is evident in the stylist's preferred maneuvers: Wait, All-Out Defense (Increased Parry), and Defensive Attack.

Cinematic Small-Circle Jujitsu masters have little access to chi abilities. They should have remarkably high levels of Judo, Arm Lock, and Finger Lock, however, and use the Technique Mastery perk to exceed the normal limits of those techniques!

Small-Circle Jujitsu has both combat and sport aspects. Fighters train for self-defense and uncontrolled conditions, but also learn to control or choke out an opponent safely in a dojo. Training covers reviving a partner rendered unconscious by jujitsu techniques, and many students go on to learn full-fledged first aid as well as basic CPR. Because of these factors -- and the style's emphasis on controlling an opponent with pain instead of injuring him -- Pacifism (Cannot Kill) suits many stylists.

Skills: Judo; Judo Sport; Savoir-Faire (Dojo).
Techniques: Arm Lock; Breakfall; Choke Hold; Finger Lock; Leg Lock.
Cinematic Skills: Mental Strength.
Perks: Technique Mastery (Arm Lock); Technique Mastery (Finger Lock).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Empathy.
Disadvantages: Pacifism (Cannot Kill).
Skills: First Aid; Judo Art; Karate.

> *Techniques:* Leg Grapple.

As in earlier chapters, not *every* idea that came up during the playtest made it into print. Here's a small box that didn't quite make the grade. We thought it was kind of neat, because it really suited certain kinds of martial-arts fiction. The playtesters assured us that it was also rather *obvious* . . . so we quietly set it aside for this article.

> ## Balanced Development
>
> Meditation, Philosophy, Theology, and even Mathematics are core skills for styles with a strong intellectual element. In a game that favors this angle over violence, the GM may forbid warriors to learn combat skills at a higher level than their style's more intellectual skills. In return, Mental Strength and Tactics default to such cerebral skills at no penalty -- as does the Feint technique, making wise masters as tricky as agile ones.

Chapter 6 -- Weapons and Equipment

Needless to say, given Man's gift for coming up with new and brutal ways to kill his fellow man, weapons could have filled all 256 pages by themselves. The abbreviated glossary format let us include a *lot* of weapons. Then the day after we submitted the final draft, Sean saw a picture in his local paper and realized that he had left out one of his favorites . . .

> **Haladie --** *India, Sudan.* A knife with blades above and below the grip. Treat as a LARGE KNIFE (pp. B272, B276) that lets the user choose freely between the rules for a normal grip and a Reversed Grip (p. 111), as best suits the task at hand. It cannot pummel and gives -1 to skill. $80, 1.5 lbs.

Nothing Constant but Change

I remember when *The Matrix* was released. (Writing the previous sentence strikes me as funny, but I realize it came out almost a decade ago, so anything in that time frame starts entering the foggy realms of "memory" for me . . . really, as does anything from before the previous commercial break[1].) At the time, I remember being relatively dismissive of *The Matrix* (that's what we were talking about, right?), a movie whose word-of-mouth advertising existence seemed to revolve around the shocking mystery of "What *is* the matrix?" . . . a question which turned out to be answered within the first 20 minutes of the movie. (Answer: The matrix is a computer program we're all trapped with . . . not unlike Microsoft Office.)

Worse, the revelation of the questions raised more answered than were answered. Why did the heroes ever need to re-enter the matrix, once they found The One? If the Agents were willing to modify reality to catch the rebels, why didn't they just drop an a-bomb on Neo Tokyo or wherever they were? Why were the heroes so willing to mow down so many innocent battery-humans in their quest to free humanity? Why did the computer reforge reality in the form of an era where questioning reality is practically the norm? Why not, say, Middle-Ages Europe, where everyone was too terrified to question the establishment? If the Agents were trying to find the rebels, why didn't they just do a global search for everyone in the matrix wearing a leather jacket and shades, and send a jillion agents there? You'll either mow down rebels or goths, and either one is a win.

Anyway, I remember being derided by many of my friends for my own relative lack of enthusiasm for the film. Which isn't to say I hated it . . . but for many ensorcelled by the film's charms, anything less than prostrate fawning was seen as a declaration akin to "Isn't your religion kinda fruity?"

Fortunately, the second movie was pretty much a wake-up call to the world that maybe this wasn't the greatest movie franchise of all time. (Curiously, I enjoyed the second one about as much as the first, although I haven't even gotten around to seeing the third one yet.)

Anyway, in a span of four years between the release of *Matrix* and *Matrix Reloaded,* the franchise found itself crashing and burning in a most spectacular way. I was reminded roundaboutly of this fall from grace in a comment I read in a Newsarama interview with comic-book writer Jeph Loeb about the recent funeral for Captain America. (It made major network news, so I don't think a spoiler warning is in order.) In that interview, Jeph said, "It wasn't that long ago that [Captain America's] title was instantly forgettable. But, who would have guessed two years ago that the Avengers group would eclipse the X-Men?! You'd think I was crazy if I made that statement." (Captain America was the leader of the Avengers super-team.)

Indeed, for those who work or worked at a Friendly Local Comic Shop -- which often occupies the same time-space as a Friendly Local Game Shop -- the notion that any comic series could supplant the all-powerful X-Men's numbers was one that's been ludicrous for a decade.

And, bringing it to the world of gaming, I note that nothing is permanent on a long-enough timeline.

On the retail side of things, games that seem unstoppable can eventually fade or stumble. The most quintessential example of this is the purchase of TSR, Inc. by Wizards of the Coast in 1997 (a true decade ago!), which was the nadir of a long decline for the once-mighty company. This itself was made possible by ***Magic: The Gathering's*** meteoric rise, a game that came almost out of nowhere to become the cornerstone of a new genre.

On a more personal level, I've learned first-hand that campaigns players once enjoyed can find their interest dwindle, either one bad decision, a general string of ill-enjoyed decisions, or even by other commitments from the gamers. Likewise campaigns that started out having a hard time getting gamers would eventually develop a waiting list of requests to join.

Star Wars went from being the backbone of West End Games to nothing more than a fond memory. A different little game about being a vampire went on to form the foundation of one of the largest RPG publishers. Baseball was once

America's pastime, but has since been supplanted by football.[2]

The point of all this? Simply to note that nothing is certain, and even the most unmovable rock can be whittled away by the rain and . . . um . . . rock-eating birds. If you enjoy a game that isn't popular currently, it might become so some day (perhaps partly because of an effort of yours). If you're part of a gaming group that everyone enjoys, don't take it for granted that it will always be such; take the time to maintain levels of communication with your fellow gamers to help ensure the future, and enjoy the present for the fleeting pleasure that it is. If you're trying to get a game going but you can't find the players or the interest, revisit the issue periodically; tastes might change, as may your circle of associates.

And always beware of sequels of beloved movies . . . consider spending that time instead watching a [RiffTrax](#) version of a semi-loved film instead.

* * *

Some of you might have noticed that we've run Murphy's Rules for two weeks in a row, after a week's hiatus two weeks ago. Yes, we rejiggered its release schedule for a couple of weeks in order to bring up to speed the Murphy's Rules Committee -- a team of experts whose job it is to read through, check, rephrase, and polish Murphy's Rules submissions. As a result, hopefully Murphy's Rules will contain 135% less wrongness than they have before.

So, from the bottom of my heart[3], I wish to thank Roger Burton West, Reverend P. Kitty, Franklin Cain, and Fred Brackin for their efforts. The revised submissions are already generating buzz, and artist extraordinaire Greg Hyland has also been impressed with the Committee's efforts.

(And for those of you submitting your own found Murphy's Rules, nothing's changed; keep sending 'em to murphy@sjgames.com.)

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

[1] Remember Sammy Jenkis
[2] The "people hardly ever using their feet" football, not the "hitting the ball with the foot" football.
[3] Which is, admittedly, two sizes too small.

Pyramid Review

Star Wars Miniatures: Space Battles CMG

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Rob Watkins, Ryan Miller, & Bill Slavicsek

Sculpture by Mark Goetz & Paul Hebron

Illustrated by Jeffrey Carlisle, Daniel Falconer, Langdon Foss, Matthew Hatton, Jonathon W. Hill, Warren Mahy, Christian Pearce, Chris Trevas, & Anthony Waters

Cartography by Marc Goetz

Starter Set: 10 Pre-Painted Miniatures, 10 Full Color Double Sided Stat Cards, 22 By 34-Inch Full Color Double Sided Map Sheet, Damage & Command Counter Sheet, Two Fleet Command Sheets, Play Summary & Set Checklist Sheet, 40-page full-color & 20-Sided Die; $39.99
Booster Set: Seven Pre-Painted Miniatures & Seven Full Color Stat Cards; $21.99

With all of the current Collectible Miniatures Games still stuck on the ground or at sea, it is pleasing to see one take to the stars, and the Star Wars universe, no less. Having already done ground battles with *Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm* and it many expansions, Wizards of the Coast take the same format and apply it to the spaceships and starships of the same franchise. There are certainly similarities between that game and this one, but then both are based on the *d20 System* version offer *Star Wars RPG.* What this means is that *Star Wars Miniatures: Space Battles* is both easy to learn and easy to play, and because the miniatures are based on inanimate objects rather than individuals, all of the spaceships look pretty good.

The first thing you need to know about *Star Wars Miniatures: Space Battles* is that it draws from the Classic and the Prequel trilogies for its ships, so you can pit the Millennium Falcon and a Jedi Interceptor against a Sith Infiltrator and a TIE Fighter. (Just as long as you no problem mixing the time periods, that is . . .) The second thing you need to know is that none of the ships are in scale with each other and with each figure representing a single vessel; a starfighter looks really big alongside the largest, a fleet flagship -- or the other way round, of course . . . The last thing you need to know is that this game is collectible, and comes packaged in the standard Starter and Booster set format -- both of which are difficult to actually open. The downside of this being that getting the figures that you want is either going to be very expensive unless you hit the singles market.

The *Star Wars Miniatures: Space Battles Starter Set* comes with everything necessary for a two-player game, most obviously the 10 figures divided equally between the Light Side and the Dark Side. Two miniatures are exclusive to the Starter Set, the Mon Calamari Star Defender Viscount and the Super Star Destroyer Executor. These are large models, 6¾-inches and 7¼-inches long respectively, representing each side's Flagship. The remaining eight ships are randomly determined. The ships of both sides are easily differentiated by their bases -- circular for the Light Side, octagonal for the Dark Side. Ships are divided into four categories: Class 1, Fleet Flagships like the Executor; Class 2, warships and armed transports such as the Imperial Star Destroyer; Class 3, shuttles, transports, and light warships,

such as the Millennium Falcon and Slave 1; and Class 4, starfighters such as the Y-wing. The miniatures vary in size, from an inch to three inches long. All of the miniatures are nicely detailed, decently painted, and mounted on inch-tall stands. On the base of each is marked its set icon and number, cost for fleet construction, faction, name, along with its rarity. Like the ground miniatures game, rarity is determined by size and status within the Star Wars universe -- if it is large or belongs to a named character, then it is rare.

Each ship has an associated double sided Stat Card. One side gives its information when at Full Strength, the other at Reduced Strength. Besides duplicating the information from ship's base, a Stat Card lists its weaponry; Defense values for front, rear, and sides; and two numbers for its Hull value. The lower number represents the amount of damage a ship can take before its effectiveness is reduced and the Stat Card flipped over. The higher number is the amount of damage it takes to destroy the ship. Class 4 ships do not have a Reduced Strength and are destroyed when flipped over.

Larger vessels can also have a PD or Point-Defense value (enabling them to attack adjacent starfighters), and a Command number. A player can use these to give specific orders to one class of vessel under his command each turn. For example, the "Evasive" command gives Class 4 ships or starfighters an extra defensive bonus against Point-Defense during attack runs. Many ships also have their own special abilities. The most common is "Fighter Launch," which lets larger vessels deploy starfighters; but others include "Interceptor" (a fighter can avoid intercepting fighters unless they also have the "Interceptor" ability); "Anti-fighter Targeting"; "Tractor Beams"; "Damage Reduction"; "Droid Control"; and "Long Range Bomber." These abilities simulate the feel of things seen on screen. For example, Slave 1's "Bounty Hunter" ability gives a targeting bonus against "unique" or named ships like Luke Skywalker's X-wing or the Millennium Falcon; while the Rebel Transport's "Sensor Array" awards a bonus to adjacent Class 4 ships, so it's useful to keep them close as in the evacuation sequence in *Empire Strikes Back.*

The game's other components include the large Stellar Grid, or star map, which is marked in two-inch squares and depicts deep space above a planet on both sides; a play summary and set checklist sheet; a Fleet Commander sheet for each player; and a sheet of Command and Damage counters. These do feel flimsy and the Stellar Grid has a lot of folds in it. The last item in the Starter Set is the rulebook, of which less than half is devoted to the rules, one third to describing the vessels in the base set; and rest to a glossary for the game. The rules themselves take 15 minutes to read through and are easy to understand.

A game begins with the players selecting a side, choosing their ships, and setting them up, bar starfighters, on opposing edges of the Stellar Grid. A game lasts until one side eliminates the other, and each turn has four phases: initiative, movement, combat, and damage. Following the initiative roll, the loser moves his ships first and fires last, while the winner moves his ships second and fires first. Movement is dependent upon ship class; the lighter the class, the faster and the more maneuverable it is. Class 1 ships literally lumber along in comparison to Class 3 and 4 vessels. Class 4 ships do not start play on the Stellar Grid, but form a pool of starfighters that are deployed from Class 1 and 2 ships in play. Once deployed, a starfighter can move next turn.

Combat is done weapon system by weapon system, a weapon's bonus added to a die roll to beat the target ship's Defense value for that facing. A successful hit inflicts damage equal to the weapon's damage rating, damage counters being placed beside the target ship's Stat Card. After all combat has been resolved, damage is applied to take effect simultaneously. If the number of counters beside a Stat Card equal or exceed a ship's current Hull value, it is either flipped over to its Reduced Strength or is destroyed. What this combat system ignores is range and line of sight. Every weapon in ***Star Wars Miniatures: Space Battles*** can target any vessel in play, whatever the distance and even if it is behind another ship. Class 4 ships are the exception, being able to target adjacent vessels only, and in return are the only ships that can be targeted by Point-Defense weapons.

The advanced rules cover fleet construction, using the Command Counter options, team play, and scenario creation. A single scenario, "Clash over Coruscant," is included. Using the special abilities is also classed as part of the advanced rules, but since they are there on the Stat Cards, players will want to use them anyway. Unfortunately, neither fleet construction nor playing the given scenario is possible straight out of the Starter Set, and at least two booster packs (each of which contains seven randomly determined miniatures) are required if the players are going to enough ships to create and play a fleet based on the suggested 300 points. And certainly a whole lot more are required if a player wants to customize his fleet or create scenarios.

Actually, ***Star Wars Miniatures: Space Battles*** is attractive, fun to play, and easy to play from the Starter Set. The game's most difficult aspect is the various special abilities, and they are not a challenge. What will be a challenge is getting enough figures to create fleets and scenarios, particularly if you want to concentrate on one era, and all that takes is buying more Boosters. In the long term though, the game is too simple, lacking the depth that something like ***Attack Vector,*** *[Battlestations,](#)* or *[Federation Commander](#)* definitely offer, though with accompanying complexity.

Star Wars Miniatures: Space Battles has a video game quality that will appeal to the younger player. Its simple mechanics and ship special abilities work hard to get the feel of the battles we have seen in the movies, with swirling fighters and lumbering Star Destroyers, but the numbers required do call for some investment. For the more demanding player, ***Star Wars Miniatures: Space Battles*** is a ready source of Star Wars starships for the rules of his choice.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Mysteries of Hungary (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by László Dózsa

64-page b&w softcover; $14.00

I am a complete, unabashed sucker for all things */Call of Cthulhu.* Whatever it is, I buy it, bookmark it, collect it, wear it, plaster it on my bumper, you name it. So when three new monographs went up on the Chaosium website in mid-May, I faithfully whipped out the credit card and ordered them. Upon their arrival, I immediately picked up the first one and began to read. As luck would have it, fate chose for me *Mysteries of Hungary.*

I can't begin to describe how disappointed I am . . . but I'll try. I do not believe it was written by someone who speaks or writes English. Not doesn't speak or write it well, but doesn't speak or write it *at all.* Okay, maybe not "not at all," but it clearly only barely qualifies as a second language. My guess is it was originally written in the author's native Hungarian, and then he translated it into English, using his rudimentary skills and extensive use of either a Hungarian-English dictionary or a translation program.

(Remember the Monty Python sketch with the deliberately mangled Hungarian-to-English phrasebook? The one where the Hungarian for "Cigarettes, please," is translated to "I will not buy this record, it is scratched," and "I would like some matches, too," becomes "My hovercraft is full of eels!" The author -- and I believe us readers -- may have been better served had he used that book instead of whatever he actually did take in hand to create this monograph.)

Think I'm exaggerating? Check out these sentences:

- "The abbot didn't allow to give the manuscript to the library, that's why you can find only one, later the librarian got it."
- "The signs are graved in the wall, a draw about each of them can be found in the Academy, mixed with the other artifacts, but is more simple if the searcher goes to the place copy the original."
- "The Yithians didn't use this system, because the chambers were separated, and it issued too later, when they had their resting place."

I realize I'm coming across as mean here -- I'm sure Mr. Dózsa is a big *Call of Cthulhu* fan and wanted to add something to the growing Mythos canon. And the inherent tradeoff in Chaosium's monograph series is the author(s) do nearly all the editorial, layout, and graphics work, with minimal help or input from the publisher, which allows Chaosium to affordably print the short print runs books like these require. But there's a difference between minimal help or input and *no* supervision, and I can't believe Chaosium let *Mysteries of Hungary* out the door with their name on it.

It's much more than just the author's lack of command of the language. Long before I considered writing this review, I contacted an old friend of mine who works at Chaosium about this book, and he told me that they "wrestled" with the decision whether or not to publish the book, but ultimately decided not to "discriminate against non-[E]nglish speakers." If that was the only problem, maybe -- just maybe -- I could buy that. But it isn't.

Mysteries of Hungary is also full of typographical errors, with multiple mistakes per page. There is also some special character (an accented vowel or something) that is universally converted to an underline, so that a major NPC (among others) is referred to throughout the book as "Tamás Gy_z_." In the full writeup of this same character, we get a list of his 24 spells, and his major artifact . . . but not his Cthulhu Mythos score. In another section, a description of a new

Mythos tome includes the not-so-helpful, "the following spells are available:" . . . and then lists no spells. Since the book boosts Cthulhu Mythos by 18% and has a 1D10/1D20 SAN loss for reading it, I can only assume those spells must be humdingers; if only Dózsa had remembered to put them in.

But those are the glaring omissions. What about the things he put in? Well, I can say a few nice things here. The book's organization is good; he starts with the history of Hungary, from the second-century Romans up through WWI and into the '20s and early '30s. He includes the myths and legends of the area, including the hidden burial place of Attila the Hun and a Mythos-based idea I really liked about what should happen if it is ever found and opened. The next few chapters cover the economics of the time; Budapest; specific countryside locations that may be of interest; adventure-related information (how hotels work, how to obtain a car, how to catch a train, how to bribe a cop); and Mythos activity. This last chapter was disappointingly skimpy. If you're going to bother to write a Mythos supplement about a place, wouldn't you want a lot of Mythos stuff going on? But Hungary isn't exactly a hotbed of evil, and a lot of what is there is trying hard to stay underground.

And then there's the one Mythos tie-in the author missed: the Black Stone. Taken from the Robert E. Howard story of the same name, the Black Stone is an obelisk with strange markings (now mostly weathered and chipped away, thankfully) raised up outside the town of Stregoicavar, west of Budapest. Suleiman himself wiped out the cult village that was practicing human sacrifice and other evils when he swept through the area in 1526, but the obelisk still stands. Those who gaze at is too long are driven mad. Those who sleep too close to it are visited by disturbing dreams for the rest of their lives. It's a legitimate, living breathing literary tie-in to the Cthulhu Mythos, and there are a bunch of wonderful scenario ideas you can connect to the Black Stone -- unless you don't bother to put it in your sourcebook about the Mythos in Hungary.

The book wraps up with an adventure I didn't care a lot for, as it seems the party has a very small chance of picking up the clues they need to figure things out without a deux ex NPC, and then a very small chance of surviving the encounter with the Big Beastie at the end without similar help. After that are a few pages on Hungary in gaslight and modern-day roleplaying, and a system for wizard dueling that seemed overly complicated and completely unnecessary (and didn't seem to have a whole lot to do with the Mythos, either).

Oh, and the book is remarkably art-light, even for a monograph. And it really could have used a map. A book called **Mysteries of Hungary**, that described the geography, neighbors, major cities, and dozens of locations within Hungary, really, really needed a *map of Hungary.* C'mon, Chaosium -- if the author didn't provide one, you had to step up and do it. Or send it back and tell him to.

It seemed like nobody at Chaosium actually read this manuscript before it was printed. Now I've been told that's not true, so I'm going to make another guess: The folks at Chaosium read it, but the grammar and writing was so bad, they never got into actually reading what the author was saying, and thus missed the typos, the tome without a spell list, the NPC without a Cthulhu Mythos score, etc. I know monographs are designed to be low-budget efforts, but there is no excuse for publishing something this incredibly shoddy under their corporate banner. I am totally appalled.

--Scott D. Haring

The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!

Episode 4: The Hordes of Mongolia!

by Matt Riggsby

When we [last left our heroes](), they were fighting a reanimated mummy. Khuthmet is faster than he lets on, quite durable, very strong, and very focused on killing the PCs.

Mummy to Burn Before the Trip to Ulan Bator

The reanimated Khuthmet is a mindless killing machine. He can be deceived, but he won't listen to (and probably can't understand) anyone speaking to him. He has a contraption of metal and crystal on the back of his head, the device which Dr. Z has used to reanimate him. If it is destroyed (-7 to hit, DR 4, 6 HP) or yanked out (Grapple from behind and win a contest against ST 14), Khuthmet stops moving immediately.

Khuthmet

ST 22 **DX** 12 **IQ** 10 **HT** 15

HP 27; Will 10; Per 10; FP 15; Basic Lift 97; Damage 2d/4d; Basic Speed 6.75; Basic Move 6

Advantages

Damage Resistance (2); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (Unliving; Homogenous); Night Vision (5); Resistant (Metabolic hazards) (Very Common) (Immunity)

Disadvantages

Appearance (Monstrous); Cannot Speak; Fragile (Unnatural); Slave Mentality

Skills

Axe/Mace-12; Brawling-13; Throwing-12

If the PCs didn't learn Dr. Z's destination from Miss Papillon, they'll have to dig around the Cairo underworld, break into the German consulate, or find sympathetic ears in British intelligence. Once they find out, regularly scheduled flights to India area available and charters can be arranged from there to Mongolia.

Ulan Bator is a jumble of brick and mud-walled structures. The few nods in the direction of modernity are some embassies and concrete buildings housing the government, and a primitive aerodrome at which the PCs land. There is, alas, no airship to be found there. However, anyone the PCs can get an answer out of can tell them that it was there briefly a few days earlier, then left. The aerodrome's administrator, who is equally fluent in the English language and American dollars, could be bribed to provide them with exact times of arrival and departure, but no one bothered to ask the SS zeppelin to file a flight plan. The airship simply touched down, refueled while the commander talked to a few local German diplomats and expatriates, and took off in a more or less northerly direction.

The PCs also learn that if they had arrived a little earlier, they might have talked to the men the zeppelin left behind: two Chinese men in Western clothing (the PCs might identify them as some of Dr. Z's thugs). They bought some

barrels of aviation fuel and left in a hired Fokker trimotor, heading northeast a few hours ago.

The thugs are long gone, but tracking down the diplomats and expatriates won't be hard, since there aren't many in Ulan Bator, and the job can be made easier by tracking down the workers who helped refuel the zeppelin. A few aerodrome workers, who are happy to talk to anyone willing to buy them drinks, will identify a man in a military uniform and an angry man wearing a tweed jacket and a funny-looking peaked green cap.

The man in uniform is Colonel Heinrich Urike, the prickly military attaché to German consulate. The angry man is Herr Doktor-Professor Siegmund Dorfwaller-Jennsen, an archeologist and historian working on an authoritative biography of Ghengis Khan. Urike is potentially dangerous. Reitermann briefed Urike on the peculiar circumstances under which he picked up Dr. Z, and if he spends any time with the PCs, he may suspect their true identity. If he does, he'll alert Reitermann and suggest to the local officials that the PCs are dangerous criminals.

The professor is a different story. He's upset at the SS for what he sees as a perversion of science. He'll take some coaxing to get into details, but will eventually talk to someone who he can regard as a fellow scientist. The professor, who can be found at informal gatherings of Ulan Bator's tiny community of intellectuals (engineers, missionaries, and academics of all nationalities), believes he has found nothing less than the legendary lost tomb of Ghengis Khan. And what does the SS intend to do? They intend to dig it up and give the priceless riches no doubt buried there to some mad scientist in return for a bit of technological frippery. He has no idea what it is, but, if pressed, will relate the vague impression that it's some far-fetched weapon. And they've taken his notes as well! PCs inclined to larceny can learn as much from sneaking into his home office and reading his almost obsessively detailed diary, but they'll notice that there are several obvious gaps on the professor's otherwise jumbled shelves and except for a single new journal going back only a week or two there are almost no records of a personal nature more recent than five years ago.

Asking around the aerodrome or keeping tabs on what's going on around the German embassy, the PCs can discover that the Germans are hiring trucks and buying food supplies. Though technically a secret, the locals hired to drive will let slip that they're heading to Batshireet, a town about 200 miles to the northeast; once there, they'll pick up a guide to show them to their final destination. The PCs could follow in their own vehicles, stow away, or even bribe the drivers to let them ride along. The PCs might discover the name Batshireet among Dorfwaller-Jennsen's papers, though he'd only reveal the name by mistake and would refuse to elaborate; he's more concerned with credit for his discoveries than the Furher's state secrets. Whatever they find out, it appears that whatever the Germans are up to, that's where it's happening.

The Long and Winding Road

The trip is long and difficult. The trucks are in poor repair, roads are few, authorities at checkpoints are uncooperative, and terrain forces the drivers to take a roundabout route. With stops for repairs, new tires, and asking directions, the trip takes nearly two days. The drivers pick up a guide in the nondescript town of Batshireet and head east for another day of more difficult terrain. Towards the end of the day, sharp-eyed PCs may catch glimpses between the hills of a long gray shape: the zeppelin.

And that's not the worst of it. Beyond a few hours travel from Ulan Bator, authority belongs to those strong enough to enforce it. And out here, just a few more hours away from their objective, they find one of those people with enough strength: Alexei Borovitch Koskov, terror of the plain.

Mongolian Horde Member

ST 12 **DX** 11 **IQ** 10 **HT** 12

HP 12; Will 10; Per 10; FP 12; Basic Lift 29; Damage 1d-1/1d+2; Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5

Disadvantages

Impulsiveness (12 or less)

Relevant Skills

Brawling-12; Guns/TL6 (Rifle)-12; Riding (Equines)-12; Shortsword-12; Survival (Plains)-12; Tracking-10.

Gear

Shortsword Wgt:2 swing Dam:1d+2 cut Reach:1 Parry:6
Bolt-Action Rifle, 7.62mm Dam:7d pi Acc:5 Range:1000 / 4200 RoF:1
Shots:5+1(3i) ST:10† Bulk:-5 Rcl:4 Wgt:8.9
Fur Tunic Wgt:2 Location:torso DR 1

The heroes catch glimpses of individual horsemen, even small groups, through the trip. Usually, they're just travelers or herdsmen. Sometimes, they're scouting for bandits, as is the case here. With the hills and scattered patches of trees to hide them, the supply caravan suddenly finds itself outnumbered and surrounded by forty to fifty armed men on hoses (see sidebar for stats).

Alexei's band makes a brave and threatening display, but doesn't open fire on the convoy unless fired upon, which the drivers aren't stupid enough to do. When the convoy has stopped and the drivers have had a chance to surrender -- which they do, -- Alexei comes forward, a larger, paler-skinned version of his men. He cheerfully announces that he and his band will relieve them of any valuables, giving them a lighter burden for the remainder of their journey.

The drivers are happy to escape with their lives (and the trucks; the horse-riding nomads aren't interested in them). The adventurers are likely to feel differently about it. Alexei will happily make a bargain with the PCs: their valuables in return for their lives. He's impossible to intimidate but he's got a sporting streak. He probably won't suggest it, but he'll allow PCs who win a "manly" contest against him or a champion (wrestling, drinking, riding, etc.) keep a valuable item of their choice.

However, they'll see a tremendous change in his attitude if they convince him that they're pursuing a German airship. "German? I am hate the German! Karl Marx is the German! Come, we go!" And with that, he and his men are off in a flurry of dust and enthusiastic shots into the air.

Living a Chased Life

Once started, Alexei is nearly impossible to stop. That's just fine if the heroes just want to attack the Germans, but one of the PCs might still be a hostage on board, and they might want to find out what Dr. Z's thugs are doing with a mid-size aircraft and extra fuel. If they want a chance at getting onto the airship, they'll have to hurry, racing the fragile trucks cross-country over rough hills rather than taking the easier but more roundabout route Alexei and his men are taking.

With a mad dash and a few Driving rolls, the PCs can reach the valley ahead of Alexei's horde, though they may lose a tire or two and the transmission near the end. The zeppelin is moored at the bottom of a broad valley surrounded by several low, lightly wooded hills. A number of natives are apparently being employed as diggers a bit up a hill near the zeppelin, lazily supervised by a few German officers. The PCs also see a small group of tents (lodging for the diggers) and clusters of crates and bundles (provisions and other supplies, mostly for the diggers); they do *not* see the plane chartered by Dr. Z's thugs. The hillsides around the valley have sufficient cover that stealthy PCs could get fairly close to the zeppelin or the diggings before there was a significant chance

In-Flight Entertainment

If one of the PCs was captured in the previous episode, he is greeted cheerfully on board the zeppelin by Miss Papillon, wearing a cute aviator's outfit, and then more condescendingly by Reitermann. He's then thrown in irons in the airship's small but extremely well-guarded brig for the duration of the journey. He'll find out that Dr. Z has sold the Germans an untested but allegedly functional concentrator in

of being seen, though that's as much due to an almost complete lack of vigilance. They could also ride a truck straight downhill and get there very quickly, though they'd attract a lot of attention and render the truck undriveable. Very fast PCs could make it as far as the zeppelin's gangway or into the relative cover of the diggings.

Whatever of their destination, the PCs get there around the time Alexei's band comes into sight in a gap between hills, guns blazing if not terribly well aimed. Initial German resistance is confused and chaotic. It eventually focuses on the noisier, more numerous Mongolians, though Reitermann, who happens to be in the zeppelin's control cabin, surveys the entire battlefield. Recognizing the PCs, he taunts them over the zeppelin's intercom system and orders to them to lay down their arms.

Soon, as the zeppelin's engines start up for a quick takeoff, a bright beam of light stabs up into the hills from the control cabin into the hills, burning trees and the occasional Mongolian. Dr. Z has sold the Germans a functional concentrator.

An ambush gone wrong! A fearsome weapon in the hands of a new enemy! Come back next time for another episode of The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!: Shadows in Siam!

return for buried gold and has flown on to Bangkok. The chaos caused by his companions' arrival may be enough of a distraction to the guards to allow him to escape.

Henry's America

by Paul Drye

James II fled west from the oncoming armies of the Dutch William and his English wife -- James' daughter Mary -- eventually embarking on a ship in Portsmouth bound for the American colonies. With him was his favorite John Churchill, better known on Homeline as the Duke of Marlborough. Churchill's military brilliance showed on this timeline too, as he forged the outnumbered Stuart loyalists in Virginia, Maryland and Carolina into an army. The Spanish to the south and the supporters of William and Mary in Pennsylvania and points north were defeated or cowed, and the Stuarts could take control of the southeast corner of North America.

By 1691, James was ruler of a large (if under-populated) American kingdom. Showing his typical bull-headedness he swore to return to Britain one day and reclaim his three lost thrones, but even Churchill couldn't turn a country of perhaps 100,000 citizens into a threat to the British. William and Mary, for their part, were more occupied with the machinations of Louis XIV and remained content to leave James alone on the far side of the Atlantic.

Once James was safely established in America, his young heir and namesake was brought across the Atlantic as well. The older James II died in 1703, the throne passed to his son, and that was the last peaceful transition of power in the Kingdom's history.

James III had four sons and, in an attempt to stabilize the Stuart hold on America, gave them wide holdings and powers in the nearly empty country. By his death in 1768, those lands were no longer so empty and each of the four had a power base from which to contest the succession. Three did, the fourth being the legitimate heir Robert I; the new king was, unfortunately, an imbecile and his brothers used this as a pretext to move. Robert himself was supported by other nobility interested in a weak head of state. After three years, the First Succession War ended with the second son, "Edward VII of England, Scotland, Ireland and America" assuming control.

The three surviving branches of the family -- Edward's Stuart-Carolina and his brothers' Stuart-Albemarle and Stuart-Fairfax -- have continued to contest each succession, even intermarrying in futile attempts to stave off the next conflict. The latest king is the young Henry X of the Stuart-Fairfaxes, a figurehead for his more elder relations.

Infinity in Henry's America

Homeline made contact with this timeline in local year 1888; it is now 1893. On Quantum-7, Carolina-2 (as it was named) is relatively difficult to reach, but Infinity keeps an eye on it as a possible front in the war with Centrum. This was particularly true until two years ago as the timeline was embroiled in an early World War; there were worries that Centrum would try its usual trick of backing one side in an attempt to produce a world government. However, the war ended in 1891 and Infinity's operation has shrunk considerably as their attention shifted to other candidates for trouble.

Trade and other contact with Homeline is minimal. Apart from Infinity's Centrum-related interest, Carolina-2 has no notable resources or technologies, nor is it a magical timeline. There is a little evidence that psionics may work here, but if so they are rare and weak and so no attention has been paid to it.

The Kingdom

There are seven provinces in the Kingdom. Three are roughly the same as they are on Homeline: Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina (which was never split into north and south here). To the southwest of Carolina as far as the Altamaha River is Jacobia, while the lands on the far side of the Appalachian watershed are divided into Westmarch in the north and New Dorset in the south. The country is hemmed in by sparsely populated Mexican territories to the southwest, swampy and nearly uninhabited Florida to the south and the British subsidiary nation of Middle America to the north and northwest. The Kingdom does have an outlet to the Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the River Idle (or, as it's known on Homeline, the Mobile River) thanks to a purchase of land from Spain about 50 years ago.

Each of the provinces is divided into many boroughs, which send representatives to the closest thing the kingdom has to a democratic government, the House of Burgesses. The franchise is quite restricted, only covering 15% of the male population; further, boroughs in older areas are smaller than newer ones and are tending towards becoming "rotten" -- permanently in the hands of the elite. Most of the burgesses are members of the noble class set up by James III to cement his connections to the rich and powerful of his new kingdom. The House has been growing in power over time, generally gathering more powers to itself whenever another succession war breaks out, but the king has several sources of extra-parliamentary income that let him ignore his raucous council if he thinks it's important enough.

The total population of the kingdom is about 10,000,000, but it's hard to say exactly. Stuart America has never had a formal census, and the recurring wars make it hard to get good estimates.

Carolina-2's rate of technological development has been about the same as Homeline's, meaning that the Industrial Revolution has spread to much of Northern Europe and the east coast of North America. The Kingdom of America lags behind Britain and France, and even Middle America and New England. Though there are industries in the large cities, the kingdom is geared towards agriculture and produces bulk goods hard to grow elsewhere in the developed world such as rice, tobacco, ribbon cane sugar, and cotton.

One major difference between the Kingdom and many other American Souths on other timelines is a relative lack of slavery. Whenever the Stuart monarchs got too strident in their claim to the British crowns, the British Navy would blockade the Kingdom's ports for a while and plantations dependent on export would suffer. Additionally, Stuart Catholicism and political necessity made the Kingdom legally tolerant to different religions to an extent unusual in the 18th and early 19th centuries. As a result, rather than having to rely on African slaves, cheap labor was available from Irish Catholics and Protestants from Great Austria escaping persecution.

In all, the Kingdom's slave population never exceeded 10%; pressure to segregate the races was much lower, and freedmen regularly intermarried with poor whites. In the modern, late 19th century era, Carolina-2's South is more like Homeline Brazil than it was in the period following the American Civil War. There's little legal discrimination, and Americans see a nuanced continuum of color from black to white. Socially, color is important and the new members of the middle class work hard to cover up any black ancestry, but there is little overt hatred.

Middletown

The capital of the Kingdom of America is on the same Virginian ridge as Homeline Williamsburg, though obviously that House of Orange-derived name was never destined to be applied to it on this timeline. Instead, the former settlement of "Middle Plantation," near Jamestown yet on much drier and sunnier land, became James III's seat and eventually the home of the Stuart monarchy down to this day.

The actual center of power is Huntingdon Palace, which is (to the amusement of those with historically oriented senses of humor) near the site of Homeline's College of William and Mary. It sits on the edge of a large ridge running

northwest to southeast; the main road to Jamestown -- Middletown's port -- is just to the southwest and runs directly towards the north shore of the James River three miles away. The bulk of the city itself is north of the ridge, though there are a few warehouses and shops to the south so that entire loads of goods don't have to be hauled up the ridge's relatively steep face.

Middletown is the largest city in the Kingdom, but still barely exceeds 150,000 people. In the last 50 years it's nearly doubled in size and is finally starting to look like the capital of a civilized nation. Gas lighting spread along the major streets in the 1850s, and the last dirt roads were paved in the 1870s.

The Patriotic Bands

Recently ended, the Great War pitted Britain and France against the Great Empire of Austria and their Italian allies. Naturally the Dominions of New England and Middle America sided with Britain, but eventually so did Stuart America. When Austria teetered on the edge of defeat in 1886 after a year of slashing cavalry attacks driving deep into Bavaria, the Kingdom jumped in looking for a share of the spoils. Instead, her troops were caught in another three years of war following the unleashing of Austrian poison gas at the armies and the stabilization of the front.

When the Kingdom's export trade collapsed in the aftermath of the war (much of France and Germany lacking in ready cash), plantations and mills closed or cut back and soldiers returning from Europe were unable to find work. Disaffected men with training in arms formed groups based around their former units, which were in turn scouted out by the noble families. On the death of James V in 1891, they were pulled into the new succession war. It rapidly became the worst one yet and the "Patriotic Bands" (as they came to be known) have stumbled into a position of political strength because all the contestants for the throne needed them so badly.

The Stuart-Fairfaxes control Middletown and much of Virginia, as well as the Carolina and New Dorset coasts. They're accordingly better off for cash and stick to paying regular troops. However, in the months that it took Henry X to secure Middleton he had to use the mercenaries, and now he's beholden to them for cash and titles.

The main opponent of the Stuart-Fairfaxes is "Stephen III" of the Stuart-Carolina line, who controls the interior of Carolina, Jacobia, and New Dorset; while physically larger, his area is less-populated and less-developed, and so he uses Patriotic Bands paid with spoil to raid Virginia. When that fails, he raids his own people -- it's a long-term failure as a strategy, but he hopes to overthrow Henry X before he runs out of loot.

Stuart-Albermarle's traditional base in Maryland was overrun early, but they still hold a spoiler position in the west across the Appalachians. His Patriotic Bands are less mercenary, primarily protecting the villages from which they sprang and generally expressing their dissatisfaction with the world by striking out against authority. "David III" stays ensconced in Gloucester (roughly on the site of Homeline Chattanooga) and hopes that neither of the other claimants pays him any attention until they've ripped each other apart.

Characters

King Henry X: A young man of 14, Henry has been king for two years, despite his Stuart cousins' attempts to dispute this. To most people, he's a cryptic figure controlled by the toxic figures of his mother, Charlotte of Portugal, and his chancellor George Capshaw.

Henry doesn't even want to be king, having been thrust forward as a candidate by his handlers. His life was much happier before the death of the previous monarch, when he was heir apparent to the Duchy of Fairfax. However, his father (styled "James VI") was killed early in the latest round of civil war and he was the new head of his family. Chancellor Capshaw is a political genius (if unscrupulous, and progressively more hated by the general public) and widely rumored to be Charlotte's lover, and he has used his control of Henry to propel the Stuart-Fairfaxes into visible power and himself into de facto rule. Henry remains largely cooped up in Huntingdon Palace far away from the semi-rural fields and forests of his earlier days.

He is a young, slight man of 14, with a thin-boned face and wispy blond hair. The last few years have left him with a profoundly introverted personality, though occasionally he flares up petulantly when his will is thwarted in something minor. He stutters under pressure, and is more likely to go along with anyone expressing a strong opinion that object.

Nathan MacCallum: Major MacCallum leads a Patriotic Band of minor. He was an NCO during the Great War where he served in the hills to the west of Augsburg, one of the more brutal stretches of front and one that stayed pinned in place for nearly three years. He and the core of the Gloucester 3rd Company were from the farms near the Kingdom's western border, and many of them kept in touch after the war ended. When they couldn't find jobs or found their farms foreclosed, they were fused into a mercenary band by the NCO (soon self-promoted to major) they knew from Europe.

MacCallum now serves half as an employer and half as a father figure to some 70 men (even though he's the same age as they are). He is very much the antithesis of the romantic, gentlemanly ideal of the Kingdom soldier -- utterly practical and dismissive of sentiment, even cruel if that's what it takes to keep himself and his band afloat. At first he stuck to working in the Westmarch, but as his ties to his home have eroded away he marched towards the coast and has since fought in several battles at the direction of Stuart-Carolina. He'd have no qualms about switching sides to Henry X if the young king were to pay him for it. He's descended to the point that he now worries about the day the latest succession war ends, and wonders if he wants to -- or even could -- go back to working on a farm.

The Major is a lean, wiry man about 35 years old, with a full black moustache and goatee. His hair is starting to recede slightly, not enough to really notice but giving him a high forehead and an air of intelligence -- which he earns.

If the adventurers ever fall afoul of a Patriotic Band in a way that makes an everyday grunt suspect there's something particularly odd about them, Major MacCallum is exactly the sort of person they will eventually meet as the buck is passed up the chain of command.

Rachel Gipson: A young Romani woman (or to use the more common term, a gypsy), Rachel is twice an outsider: from the majority society of British descent in the kingdom, and from her own people. Breaking away from the conservative attitudes of the Roma towards women and extended families, she "liberated" a vardos wagon and struck out on her own.

She works as a small-scale trader, carrying what goods she can in her wagon and wandering the extent of the Kingdom making enough profit to live. What keeps her afloat is her encyclopedic knowledge of the provincial highways and byways, and her ability to guess where trouble will arise -- then go in the other direction. She is also an excellent shot with her rifle and a nasty fighter up close with her knife. Other Roma have learned the hard way not to try and reclaim her and her home, and American ne'er-do-wells know she's a hard target.

Rachel is a chubby woman in her mid-20s, with brown skin and curly brown hair. She dresses in male Romani fashion -- breeches, loose shirt, and head scarf -- to the scandal of other Romani and the bemusement of other Americans.

Her role in any adventure is to be a talented local guide and outsider able to comment on the peculiar ways of the majority. Alternatively, if the GM wants to follow up on the mention of psionics earlier in this article, her ability to avoid trouble she can't beat might be more than hunches. In that case she becomes a potential object of interest to Homeline researchers.

Adventures in Henry's America

The Great Pretender: Henry X only became a candidate for king because of his father's death. A coronation for "James V" was nearly a foregone conclusion when the last king died, but he was killed himself . . . in battle while moving to take Middletown.

Now, remarkable events have occurred in the Carolina hills. Someone claiming to be James has appeared in the west of the Kingdom and is threatening the Stuart-Fairfax position. Remarkably, any investigation will suggest that he is who he claims to be. The would-be king's body was never conclusively identified, and the impostor certainly looks like him. Several important people who knew him have accepted his claims and defected.

On that basis, Infinity is worried that there may be a parachronic reason for his appearance. Centrum has used out-time doppelgangers before, though admittedly starting a civil war is not their usual modus operandi. There is also the possibility that he's been brought here by a Homeliner running a long con of some sort.

It's likeliest that the pretender is just some in-time farmer dressed up as the dead candidate, but Infinity hasn't got where it has by ignoring potential threats to the Secret. Someone is going to have to get to the bottom of this.

Laying Low: A glitch in transit has stranded the adventurers in a rural area of the Kingdom. They're dressed for success if they'd arrived at their actual destination of 1940s Cairo on Khedive, but they stand out rather well here. On the other hand, they do have weapons and equipment somewhat more advanced than Carolina-2 has to offer, even if it's not up to Homeline's cutting edge standards.

Complicating the situation is the continuing strife over Henry X's accession. The area where they've landed is flaring into violence as Stuart-Fairfax forces smash into Stuart-Albemarle partisans who've been making the surrounding hills and forests their base of operations. Both sides will view unusual folks with suspicion. The castaways will have to break their way out of the area without arousing suspicion if they want to re-establish contact with Homeline via the small Infinity safe house in Middleton -- and that's assuming they can even figure out that they've ended up on Carolina-2.

A Knight on the Town: Lee Heyworth is an Englishman from Homeline, one fascinated by lost causes like the House of Stuart and the Confederacy in the American Civil War. He's emigrated illegally to Carolina-2 in search of his ideal world, and managed to cover his tracks well enough that it took Infinity more than a year to catch up to him. Lee is no-one's fool and has managed to work up through a Patriotic Band supporting Henry X. After successfully attracting the notice of the king's regents, he has joined the court in Middleton and is living the life of a latter-day Cavalier in the Kingdom of America.

Unfortunately for those looking to apprehend him, he has the ear of those in power and has set up for a "deadman brief" of information about The Secret and Infinity's agents on the timeline. If he is arrested and spirited away from Carolina-2, it will come to the attention of the king, the court, and their police apparatus. This is a far more serious crime than mere carpet-bagging, but he's guessing Infinity will leave him alone rather than risk a security breach. It is up to agents on his case to figure out the location of the cache of info, defuse or destroy it, then move in for the kill.

To Your Health: On Homeline, DDT was discovered relatively early, then languished for 60 years until its insecticidal properties were discovered. Lambright Chemicals specializes in selling the stuff to timelines where technology is in the 1880 to 1930 range, where it can be synthesized yet is considered unimportant. They "discover" its use then patent it wherever they can, investing the profits in goods that can be shipped back to Homeline.

Their main difficulty is getting the authorities to come on board with a supposed cure that's being proposed by a previously unknown company. Certainly Lambright knows it's going to work, but it's impossible to explain how they know without giving away The Secret. To increase their chances of success, they wait until a capital city is experiencing an outbreak of typhus, dengue, or yellow fever, then put forward their solution to desperate authorities.

At base this adventure is a political one with a grim background as Middleton experiences fear and mortality while adventurers battle conservatism in an attempt to end them. Easy variations to play include machinations by Lambright Chemicals -- could they be the ones who introduced the plague in the first place? -- or Infinity moving to shut down an operation that was licensed to use something environmentally friendlier but less-profitable, but switched to DDT once Lambright thought they were away from oversight on Carolina-2.

Using Henry's America in Other Settings

The Kingdom of America turns on two real-world romantic notions: the return of the Stuart dynasty to the throne of England, and the genteel upper-class society of the pre-bellum American South. Regardless of truth, they attracted people of similar mindset for long after they ceased to be relevant. Both follow streaks of stubbornness and high-

minded political conservatism to the exclusion of comfort or expediency.

GURPS Traveller players can transplant this set-up with only a few changes, thanks to its setting's feudal government. The Third Imperium isn't long past a period of dynastic war and victorious usurpers comparable to the deposition of the Stuarts. It's 500 years in the past rather than 200, but the base **Traveller** setting is notorious for its slowly developing history. Since very little has been said about the defeated Flag Emperors, any one of them could have descendants ruling some backwater, endeavoring to keep every event following the year 620 at bay.

The various "weird western" settings, from **Deadlands** to **Aces & Eights,** could take up a version of Henry's America too. During the transplant procedure, the main difficulty encountered in most of these will be coming up with a substitute for the Revolution of 1688; an independent "Confederacy" prior to the existence of the USA throws a wrench in the works. GMs inclined towards the interesting more than the likely will want to give thought to founding a House of Lee. Robert E. had three sons, you see, which makes for an excellent graft if one can put him on a throne -- even if it's not one in name.

The Red Caps

for the *d20 System*

by David Moore

Speak of bounty hunters and you think of them: peerless trackers, tireless adversaries, savage cannibals. Fierce, cruel, and clever, the Red Caps are amongst the most feared creatures in the world. The princes of the world of Men might long ago have united to wipe them out were they not so useful; as it is, no duke or king of human lands can say he has not once called on these mercenary hunters.

History

Legend tells that in the earliest days, goblins and elves were numbered among the Fey; one Seelie House and one Unseelie House, noble, cunning and powerful. The two tribes left the Courts, however, eschewing immortality to live among Men and their ilk. Whether there is any truth in the legend -- and whether they left willingly or were exiled -- they cannot remember and the ageless Fey refuse to say.

It is true to say that they share many beliefs and practices with the Courts. The Midsummer festival, the Burning Man, the Green Witch and the Dance of the Long Night are all celebrated in some form or another among both peoples. The most notorious of their inherited revels, however, is the Sacred Hunt. Once a year, on the last new moon before Midwinter, all elves and goblins form hunting bands and go abroad; by dawn, each band must have tracked and killed one sentient and tasted his flesh. They cannot explain why they must hunt, or what would happen if it were neglected, but not one of them refuses. The courtly high elves in their forest cities conceal their shame under elaborate costumes and refuse to speak of it by daylight; goblin slaves languishing in orcish pits break their bonds to do murder in secret and return to their chains by morning.

The Red Caps *live* for the Hunt. Since time out of mind, this pack of goblins has devoted themselves to the rite, training and honing their abilities throughout the year. They wore the trophies of their hunts with pride, dying their caps with the blood of their victims. In time, their hunts ranged beyond the prescribed night; they rode abroad dozens of times a year to kill, each hunt a sacrament. Eventually, their depredations earned them the attention of the princes of Men. Two hundred and fifty years ago, the high priest of the chief God of the lands announced that the murderous band must be stopped. Several of the most powerful kings combined their efforts, sending war parties to harry the goblins to their lair. For two years they searched in vain. Finally, alarmed that their own hunting parties would be targeted by the pogrom, delegates from the high elven king and the most powerful goblin chieftain found the Red Caps' leader -- the Huntsman -- and demanded his cooperation.

With elven mediation, an amnesty was finally broached. The Sacred Hunt was a holy observance, and could not be stopped without inviting both the worldly wrath of the Elvish nations and a divine backlash the human kings were unwilling to provoke. The human priest was mollified by the promise, by the high elves, that they would build a great temple to his god in their chief city and invite him to send priests there to study and pray. In return, the Red Caps would return to following the Hunt but once a year, as did all of their kind.

This truce held until one 110 years ago, when the then-Huntsman, a canny bugbear called Tishkhan, hit on the idea of selling their services as bounty hunters. By working for human employers and accepting human gold, the Red Caps could return to their hunting with some legitimacy and make themselves wealthy from it besides. Initially wary of the mercenaries, lords and wealthy men soon found them to be true to their contracts and unnervingly effective; before long, they were well-established and earning a fierce reputation. "Only three deaths are certain," runs the saying, "old age, divine judgment, and the Red Caps."

Organization

Today, there are 80 goblins, hobgoblins, and bugbears in the Red Caps, about a fifth of them female. Many more come from warbands and slave pits across the world every year to join them, but very few survive the tests and earn admission. Most are trackers and warriors, although a few specialize in stealthy assassination, and some are skilled in magic. Particularly eerie are the *blood trackers* (see below), who have found strange insight in the flesh and blood they consume.

They only run as one group on the night of the Sacred Hunt; in general they form packs of between three and 20, according to the needs of each mission. A senior Red Cap is made *Zelvakhi* -- hunt leader -- for the pack, responsible for ensuring that the mission is fulfilled. In the extremely rare instance that a hunt is called off, it is the zelvakhi who will make the decision and accept its consequences. The title exists only as long as the individual pack, although a handful of the Huntsman's oldest and most able lieutenants are made leaders of every pack they join, and one or two lead more-or-less permanent packs with standing missions.

Aside from the zelvakhi, the only rank in the Red Caps is the Huntsman himself, whose authority is absolute. Any Red Cap can challenge him for the leadership of the band -- death is the usual price of failure -- but short of that the band's leader is the final authority. The current Huntsman is a cruel and powerful hobgoblin called Arhazag (see box), who took the role seven years ago. He is clever and ambitious, and has been pursuing the more lucrative contracts within cities over the band's traditional cross-country manhunts. Unlike his predecessors, Arhazag rarely leads packs himself, preferring to coordinate the group's actions as a whole.

The goblin hunters recognize no religious leaders: within the loose animistic goblin faith, *all* Red Caps are considered shamans due to their dedication to the ceremonial hunt. A few of them take this role further, training in the rites and ceremonies of goblin druidism, but this devotion does not guarantee deference or respect. Most Red Cap druids call on dark spirits of death and the hunt for their rituals -- such as Wolf, Snake or Winter -- although some pay honor to the fierce cannibalistic goblin ancestor Balor.

Joining the Red Caps

Entry into the Red Caps is an informal if dangerous process. First of all, the applicant has to be able to find the band, which is a challenge in itself, and ask the Huntsman to be admitted. The Huntsman will question the goblin as to why he thinks he is worthy of the honor -- bragging is allowed and expected, but a goblin who is unable to back up his claims of prowess is likely to suffer for it -- and may set the applicant tests. Finally, the goblin is sent away to be hunted by a pack formed for the purpose; if he survives until dawn, he is admitted to the band as a squire, to join packs and prove himself. After his first midwinter Sacred Hunt with the band, he is inducted as a full Red Cap, and may wear the gruesome badge from which the group receive their name.

Making a Contract

Feared and hated as they are, the Red Caps prefer to keep themselves hidden. The first obstacle to contracting their services is knowing how to reach them. One or two members of almost every goblin tribe -- not necessarily the most influential or prominent -- know how to get a message to the band, if the enquirer can talk to them safely and has something to trade for the favor. Strangely, some of the oldest elven princes and rulers also have means to contact the Huntsman, although the price in this case will most likely be much higher and the need for tact greater. In a bizarre twist, the temple of the humans' chief god in the elven capital -- consecrated to the "Hunter" aspect of the god -- is known to be able to get a message to the Huntsmen, by means of

Arhazag

The current Huntsman is cruel, ruthless and cunning. Dedicated as he is to the Hunt and the Red Caps' part in it, he also sees the band's potential to make itself -- and him -- wealthy and powerful through its dealings with the guilds and nobles of the human cities. Under his guidance, the Red Caps have been pursuing assignments in cities, getting involved with the politics of mercenary companies and underworld gangs, and increasingly taking assignments to spy on or capture targets rather than kill them, denying his hunters the kill and the feast. Some of the Red Caps resent his apparent disregard of tradition, but none have as yet

their own.

Increasingly, Arhazag has been trying to make ties in the human cities, to pick up richer contracts. The very largest cities have goblin communities -- servants, criminals, thieves and beggars -- living among them, and he has been using these channels when available. In other cities, he has made contacts within crime families and thieves' guilds. In general, the people who need to know can get a message to the Red Caps; in game terms, this may take some roleplaying and Gather Information skill rolls (Difficulty Class 15 to 30 depending on the size of the city or the channels available) but should be possible.

The Huntsman personally authorizes all contracts. If the request is acceptable, he will send word back to the client and arrange a meeting, either in person or with the zelvakhi of the pack who will take the mission, to negotiate the price. The sum varies according to the perceived risk of the mission: a Challenge Rating 1 target might cost as little as 200 gp to 300 gp, while a contract on a CR10 opponent would run to at least 5,000 gp and a CR20 target could cost 70,000 gp or more. Note that a high-profile or well-guarded target will be considered a riskier target than his personal competence might indicate. Of course, a cheaper contract might be secured if the Huntsman underestimates the target, but this is both unlikely and dangerous, since Arhazag would take a dim view of being deliberately misled as to the abilities of a contract.

The terms can also be negotiated: by preference, the target is killed and eaten and a trophy returned to the employer, but the Red Caps will retrieve a fugitive alive for a greater cost.

Red Cap Characters

By rule and tradition, all Red Caps are goblinoids: goblins, hobgoblins or bugbears. The band has been known to hire orcs, ogres and trolls for individual missions, but such outsiders are never permitted to take the tests to join, or to take part in the Sacred Hunt. All Red Caps are morally evil-aligned, although they are more or less evenly divided by ethical alignment.

The band traditionally finds strength in versatility, and its ranks include creatures with a broad range of training and resources. No particular class is required, as long as the Red Cap has useful skills for missions. Tracking, information gathering, combat and stealth are essential for bounty hunting, and most are rangers or rogues; magic is also useful, and there are several wizards and druids. Multiclassing is common. Candidates must be competent and experienced in order to be considered for entry; it is very unlikely that an applicant without at least three character levels would survive the initiation.

By the same token, there are few specific requirements regarding skills or feats, although versatility and self-sufficiency are encouraged. All Red Caps must have at least three ranks of knowledge (religion) by the end of their first year. While not required, most have the tracking feat and at least a few ranks in survival.

Blood Tracker

The dozen or so blood trackers are considered strange and grotesque even by their peers. Initiates into a secret as old as the Red Caps themselves, blood trackers gain insight by eating the flesh and blood of their victims, learning their weaknesses and gaining strength from their stolen souls. Worshippers of the goblin ancestor-god Balor, they dedicate every kill to his name and are given gifts in return.
Hit Dice:d8.

had the courage to confront him, as he is known as a doughty warrior, and his cruelty is legendary.

Although he rarely expects people to underestimate his intelligence, Arhazag plays up a bluff and direct demeanor and affects a deep ignorance and mistrust of magic of all sorts, although he is in truth politically able and well-educated. Standing nearly seven feet tall, Arhazag is a rangy, muscular hobgoblin with deep rust-colored skin, reddish-grey hair, and a narrow face marred with a poorly-healed scar -- said to be from the clawed foot of a griffon whose elvish owner he had murdered -- down the left side of his face. He favors matte black studded leather armor and boots, and carries two shortswords (one *unholy* and one *ghost touch*) at all times. He has trained as a ranger, and is dedicated to the cannibal goblin ancestor-spirit, Balor, from whom he is rumored to have gained powers as a blackguard.

Requirements

To qualify to become a blood tracker, a character must meet all the following criteria.

Race: Any goblinoid.
Alignment: Any evil.
Feats: Tracking.
Skills: Survival (10 ranks).
Special: Blood tracker initiation is only available to members of the Red Caps. In addition, applicants must have killed and eaten the flesh of a sapient for no reason other than to take this prestige class.

Class Skills

The blood tracker's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Disguise (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Knowledge (Dungeoneering) (Int), Knowledge (Geography) (Int), Knowledge (Nature) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str), and Use Rope (Dex).
Skill points gained at each level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All the following are features of the blood tracker prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Blood trackers are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, light armor, medium armor, and shields.

Table I: The Blood Tracker

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+2	+2	+0	Scent, Favored Enemy
2	+2	+3	+3	+0	Taste of Blood
3	+3	+3	+3	+1	Death Vision
4	+4	+4	+4	+1	Baneful Strike +1d6
5	+5	+4	+4	+1	Blood Trail
6	+6	+5	+5	+2	Blood Scrying
7	+7	+5	+5	+2	Baneful Strike +2d6
8	+8	+6	+6	+2	Soul Stealing

Scent (Ex): Blood trackers gain the scent ability, as per the monster special quality (see *MM,* p.314).
Favored Enemy (Ex): At first level, a blood tracker may select a type of creature from the following list: aberration, dragon, fey, giant, humanoid (choose one subtype), magical beast, monstrous humanoid, or outsider (native). Due to his extensive study of his chosen type of prey, the blood tracker gains a +2 bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot and Survival checks when using these skills against creatures of this type. He also gets a +2 bonus on weapon damage rolls against such creatures.
The bonuses from this ability stack with those from the ranger ability of the same name.
Taste of Blood (Su): From 2nd level, the blood tracker can gain information by tasting the blood of sapient beings. By tasting at least a single drop of fallen blood and concentrating for one round, he can determine the race, gender and age category of the creature who shed it. On a successful Survival (DC 20) roll, he can also detect any poisons and diseases the subject had been afflicted with, as well as the state of injury and general emotional condition the creature was in when he shed the blood.
This ability, and the blood tracker's other supernatural and spell-like powers below, can only be used on living, sapient creatures with blood and souls. It will not work on animals, constructs, elementals, oozes, plant, undead or vermin, on non-native outsiders, or on aberrations or magical beasts with Intelligence scores below 3.
Death Vision (Sp): From 3rd level, the blood tracker can experience a vision of a creature's final moments by eating his eyes. Immediately after eating the eyes, the blood tracker experiences the last (1d6 + blood tracker level) minutes of the creature's life as he saw it. The vision is limited to the creature's own senses (eg. the blood tracker sees nothing if the creature died in the dark and did not have dark vision) and is silent. While experiencing the vision, the blood

tracker is blind and concentrating as though on a spell; if the vision ends prematurely, the blood tracker is unable to resume it later.

Baneful Strike (Ex): At 4th level, the blood tracker's knowledge of his chosen prey allows him to deal particularly deadly strikes against them. When attacking his favored enemy with a light or one-handed weapon in hand-to-hand combat, the blood tracker adds 1d6 to damage; at 7th level, this damage increases to 2d6. This bonus doesn't apply to attacks of opportunity, and creatures that are immune to critical hits do not take the extra damage. The bonus applies only to the favored enemy selected as part of the blood tracker prestige class; favored enemies gained as part of prior ranger levels do not grant the bonus.

Blood Trail (Su): From 5th level, the blood tracker may locate any sapient creature whose blood he has tasted, anywhere in the world. He does not know the creature's current whereabouts, but always knows the direction of the swiftest, surest path to it and can follow it at his standard move. If the creature is dead or on another plane, he can trail it to the location where it died or left the blood tracker's current plane; he will not know that the creature is dead or offworld, only where the trail ends.

Blood Scrying (Sp): From 6th level, the blood tracker gains the ability to see and hear any sapient creature whose blood he has tasted once per day. The power functions as the fourth level druid spell *Scrying*, cast at the blood tracker's class level. Note that the blood connection automatically qualifies for the -10 "Body part" connection modifier to the target's Will save.

Soul Stealing (Su): At 8th level, blood trackers can gain some of the strength and skill of their victims by eating their vital organs. After eating the heart or other vital organ of a sapient creature with a Challenge Rating of half his character level or higher, a blood tracker gains 5 temporary hit points and a +1 to his attack bonus and all saving throws; if the victim's CR is greater than the blood tracker's level, he gains 10 temporary hit points and +2 to his rolls. These bonuses do not stack and last for a maximum of one hour.

Adventure Seeds

Target! The obvious use of the Red Caps is to make one (or all) of the PCs their target. This will immediately generate both combat and roleplaying opportunities as the party runs into the first packs, and the questions that arise -- Who hired them, and why? How can the heroes get the contract lifted? -- can prompt whole quests on their own. It's even possible that the PC is not the intended target at all, but has been mistaken for someone who looks the same, or has the same name. In this case, the players might decide that it's easier and safer to track down their real target and hand him over rather than fight the implacable goblin hunters off.

Guard Duty: Just as obviously, the PCs can be hired as bodyguards for someone who has been targeted by the hunters. This could be as simple as an honest trader or young nobleman whose death has been contracted by pragmatic rivals, or the PCs could discover that the "honest trader" is himself a criminal and murderer and that the Red Caps have been hired by lawmen whose hands are tied by corruption or jurisdictional issues.

Turning the Tables: The PCs could be sent to deliberately seek out the Red Caps; either to drive them off, or to bring them back to face justice for a killing. They'll find the goblins extremely adept at concealing themselves, and apt to start hunting the players in turn . . .

Recruitment Day: Evil and cruel, the Red Caps are intended as an enemy group, but a group interested in playing evil-aligned humanoids could derive an adventure out of the tests and ordeals required to join the pack (see *Joining the Red Caps*, above). Alternatively, a goblin PC could *feign* a sincere desire to join the pack in order to get close to a fugitive or wanted criminal who had already joined.

Pyramid Pick from the Past

The Burning Wheel Fantasy Roleplaying System - Revised [2003]

Published by [Luke Crane](#)

Written by Luke Crane with Don Corcoran, Radek Drozdalski, Ian Marshall, Thor Olavsrud, Rich Soto, and Peter Tierney

Front Cover by Kev Sather

Back Cover by Jin Kwan

Illustrated by Erica Henderson, Dan Licht, Kev Sather, and Dan Schenström

The Burning Wheel System Book 304-page softcover & *Character Burner Book* 304-page softcover; $25

First published in 2003, ***The Burning Wheel*** is a self-published indie game that focuses not on narrative structure like ***[My Life With Master](#)*** or narrative control like ***Under the Bed,*** but is instead a fully worked fantasy RPG with an emphasis on detail and roleplaying. Both simple and complex, it is a game for the more experienced player and GM, with expectations to match. Released to great acclaim, its author has not only revisited the game for a revised edition but also published supplements like the *Monster Burner* and a science fiction version, ***Burning Empires.***

The game comes in two thick volumes. The *Character Burner* lets players "burn," or create, detailed characters with a past from one of four races -- Dwarves, Elves, Men, and Orcs. ***The Burning Wheel*** *System Book* provides the rules, covering magic, combat, NPC creation, and a small bestiary. (More monsters and more detailed monsters can be found in the *Monster Burner.*) Both books are well laid out, engagingly written, and entertaining to read. Both include an index.

The four races are markedly different from each other and quite Tolkien-esque. Man has the greatest range of skills and can use sorcery; Dwarves are long-lived and clannish; Elves are immortal, which weighs upon them; and Orcs, while also immortal, are nocturnal, brutal creatures whose vicious lives are often short and injurious. Additionally, each race has an emotional state that can grant power. Mankind has Faith for Divine magic; Dwarves are subject to Greed; Elves suffer Grief, which they can stave off with Song; and Orcs smolder with Hatred, which can drive them to perform blasphemous rituals.

Character burning is a lengthy and involved process, in which the player runs his character through a series of "lifepaths," right from his origins to his current occupations. The process is a cross between ***Traveller***'s career tables and ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay***'s careers, with each lifepath aging the character, and granting resource points (spent on spells, possessions, and relationships) and statistic bonuses. The lifepaths also recommend skills and traits to buy, some of which are mandatory. Traits represent quirks, advantages, and disadvantages. Unlike other RPGs, there is no bonus to taking a negative trait; they are more roleplaying hooks born out of life experience. For example, "Tasting the Lash," common to ex-galley slaves and many Orc lifepaths, forces a character to carry out an order when whipped.

The range of lifepaths enables the burning of almost any character type, from nun and knight to plumber and village

idiot. The burning process itself is enjoyable, reminiscent of rolling up old *Traveller* characters. Determining the lifepath ends with the character's starting age, which determines the points available for both mental and physical attributes (everything being purchased after a character history has been created). A player also needs to set his character's beliefs and instincts at this time. Beliefs set player priorities -- what he wants from the game. Thus, if a knight has "I value fealty to my liege above all else," then the GM should be writing it into the game. Instincts are minor game breakers, representing what a character will always do under certain circumstances. Thus, if an instinct is to "draw a sword at the first sign of trouble" or "always agree with my superiors," then these will always take precedence. Instincts allow a player to retain some control over his character, but as with beliefs, they can land the character in hot water, too.

Mechanically, *The Burning Wheel* is a dice pool system using only six-sided dice. At its most simple, the dice are rolled and results equal to or greater than a target number are counted as successes. The target number for successes is termed a "Shade," which for most characters is Black (with a target number of four). Grey Shades need results of three or more, representing powerful aspects of the setting, like Giant strength or a potent magical item. White Shades need a two or more and are for legendary creatures like dragons. It is possible for a character to alter the Shade for a skill or statistic, but it is expensive. During a game, the Obstacle (or number of successes required) is more likely to change, with an average task only needing two successes.

Combat, or at least melee combat, is different in that it is scripted. It works in a series of Exchanges, each broken up into three volleys. Each combatant notes down what action he wants to do in each volley, and these are compared simultaneously one-by-one to determine the outcome. If a character has high enough Reflexes, he can have more actions than volleys. Having more actions is advantageous when a character wants to change an already scripted volley in reaction to an opponent because he has to forfeit an action to do so. Positioning is also important in combat because longer weapons have an advantage, although if a character can get inside an opponent's weapon, his shorter weapon can prove deadly. Trained characters have an advantage over the untrained, as they have access to a wider range of actions. Ranged attacks works slightly differently, but they still require characters to maneuver to gain an optimal shot.

Melee weapon damage depends upon an attack roll's success, but the defender actually decides where he is going to be hit, the idea being that he tries to put his best protection in the way of the blow. The attacker can counter this at the cost of a single success. Armor blocks attacks rather absorbing damage, with a protection test being required to do so; better armor has a lower Shade and more dice. Failed protection tests can damage the armor.

Once damage gets through, it is recorded on the "Physical Tolerances Grayscale," a complex-looking circle upon which each wound is marked. It is a means of recording the wound types. Each has a separate effect, either raising the Obstacle or decreasing the number of dice rolled. Wounds do not add, but their effects stack; bleeding wounds increase these effects.

The effect of the scripting and comparing actions (all of which are listed and explained) is to keep combat grittier and more chaotic, forcing a player to think about his actions rather than relying upon an exchange of dice rolls as in other games. Though this method does have a learning curve as it is not as slick as other games, it is more detailed.

Combat's concept of exchanges is also used in the Duel of Wits mechanics, new to the revised edition. Nearly identical, Duels of Wits handle verbal rather then physical arguments. Although simpler, they feel more constraining than the game's combat system.

Also new are the rules for resources, reputation, and the Circles attribute, a method of generating contacts, usually drawn from the lifepaths a character has been burned through. If a character wants power within a Circle, then he buys Affiliations with his resource points. These new rules broaden the original game's scope and make it more complete.

Experience is interesting in that it is not abstracted into points. A character has to use his skills, traits, and other attributes in order to learn from them. Conversely, if they are unused, they deteriorate. Worse, they can actually be totally lost. "Artha" or luck is rewarded for good play, and spent on the usual things. It can also be used to shift a statistic's Shade.

Physically, both volumes of *The Burning Wheel* are decently put together and the art reasonable. Where they stand

out is in the excellent set of indices that make finding everything so easy, and in the wealth of examples and advice for the GM. This comes together as a whole in an extended example of play in **The Burning Wheel** volume's final few pages.

The Burning Wheel does not come with an actual setting, but a setting is implicit in the rules. The characters created through the Character Burner are, bar the Halfling, almost out of Middle Earth, but the game as a whole could be used in any Medieval-like setting. It is easy to imagine the game being used to run a ***Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*** or ***Iron Kingdoms*** game, or the mechanics being adapted to *Dune,* ***Tékumel,*** or ***Fading Suns.*** Indeed, **The Burning Sands: Jihad** supplement is very *Dune*-like, and the recently released **Burning Empires** is reminiscent of **Fading Suns.** Of course, the rules can easily be used for the reader's own setting.

What the author is striving for with **The Burning Wheel** is a balance between detail and roleplaying. The detail is certainly present, which means a certain learning curve, but it is heavily supported with a wealth of examples and engaging writing. The roleplaying is also there, provided in the entertaining character creation process, in the flavorsome treatment of the four races, and in the social mechanics. Combined in the two volumes of **The Burning Wheel,** the result is a gritty, low fantasy RPG that, for a self-published title, is extraordinarily complete and comprehensive.

Reviewer's Note: The publisher was kind enough to send me a copy of the original version of **The Burning Wheel** to review, which unfortunately I could not get to due to time constraints. For this, I offer Mr. Crane a sincere apology. I would also like to thank him for releasing this new edition, which afforded me the opportunity to purchase it anew and give his game the fair review it deserved.

-- Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Scion: Hero

Published by [White Wolf](#)

Written & designed by Kelley Barnes-Herman, Carl Bowen, Bill Bridges, John Chambers, Ken Cliffe, Ned Coker, Conrad Hubbard, Michael Lee, Matt Milberger, Rich Thomas, Mike Todd, Aaron Voss, Justin Achilli, Alan Alexander, Peter Schaefer, James Stewart, & Andrew Watt

Edited by Carl Bowen

Art and Design by Matt Milberger, Anthony Carpenter, John Christopher, Oliver Diaz, Andrew Hepworth, Jeff Holt, Imaginary Friends Studio (with Kendrick Lim, Lan Jun Kang, Kevin Chin, Ray Toh, Yinah Goh, Derrick Chew, Djoko Santiko, and Marc Lee), Jeff Laubenstein, Brian Leblanc, Ron Lemen, Adrian Majkrazk, Pat McEvoy, Justin Norman, Ted Pendergraft, Stephanie Roberts, Klaus Scherwinski, Rich Thomas, Cathy Wilkins, and Michael Komarck

336-page b&w hardcover (with 48 color pages); $34.99

Once upon a time, White Wolf seemed content with its fabulously popular World of Darkness and the lines supporting it. Having blown that up and started a new one, it continues, by degrees, to poke its toe into new roleplaying waters. Since it depends more on *Exalted* for its rules, *Scion: Hero* doesn't seem even tangentially connected to White Wolf's more traditional gothic-punk plotlines.

Make no mistake, characters are still powerful beyond the pale but on a new playing field. They are children of the Gods - literally. They've all, at some point, enjoyed a Visitation by Mom, Dad, or a trusted agent who revealed the divine heritage (and how they came to bed the mortal parent). Depending on the pantheon, the character's old man may have been Zeus or Thor or even Set . . . or if mater was the heavenly one, the demigod might be Aphrodite's tot. They've also bequeathed a Birthright or two: Thor, for example, gave his kid a gun, the hammer of which utilizes a sliver of Mjolnir, the lucky sod. If Father was a trickster, he may have infused the character with wild levels of charisma and guile, and a sky god could imbue someone with the ability to fly or call down the winds.

What they expect in return isn't always clear, of course, and characters must contend with Fate and their own Legends. The former is the World's way (yes, it's another of those books where anything mildly important seems to be capitalized) of explaining a predestined life. Worse, those with whom the adventurer has truck become Fatebound to that person, a vicious cycle in which those in the character's social orbit play a part, becoming more tied to the destiny. Legends are the names characters make for themselves in this modern world -- personal mythologies -- and the higher that goes, the closer a person comes to apotheosis. (That's gamespeak for achieving godhood -- they call it Godhead, and for whatever reason apotheosis isn't uppercased.) Legend points charge most unique abilities.

Things start off with six pantheons: Aztec, Greek, Japanese, Egyptian, Norse, and Voodoo. Each has several Gods from whom the heroes may be descended, and the book gives an overview of the powers they may offer, the guises they might take, and the roles in which they and their offspring operate in mortal society. Not coincidentally, there's a sample Scion for each, and these make a Band suitable for the included quest:

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The adventure is the first part of a cycle in which a Band of new Scions gets its first assignment. A convocation of various Gods in Las Vegas demands security, so it brings along the freshest faces to make sure the deities aren't disturbed. Vexed by an overly curious hotel liaison and dogged by, among other things, rival Scions of opposing Gods, the team finds itself in possession of a potentially devastating relic that could alter the Overworld hierarchy.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

And what's a heroic cycle without enemies? The Gods, born of the Titans, replaced their sires as the dominant force in the universe, binding them into the Underworld in ages past. These great beings have escaped, leaving the classical afterlife kind of bollixed and the Scions at the center of their renewed war. Did the Gods have children just to create an army with which to fight their ancient foes? Or would they really let the kids become powerful enough to replace their parents?

With this book, White Wolf straddles the line between the bleak politicization of the World of Darkness and the comic-book sensibilities of ***Exalted.*** Even the artwork bears this out, with exciting action sequences showing Scions putting their elevated powers through their paces. They have the "cool" factor, mixed with the shadows-in-the-doorway sexiness of a secret history.

On the downside, the index is a bit simplistic and the "tick" system (for determining timing in combat) isn't terribly intuitive. The advice section is a bit thin, concentrating more on descriptions of Fate (but hey, it's not dry or boring) before launching into the adventure. The refreshingly conversational approach in this book's writing spills into that tale, making some of the dynamics and relationships hard to follow by the story's end, and players may feel railroaded by some events.

The book has a quick feel about it, lingering none too long on any one subject, which is good most of the time. Clearly the intention is not to fill the world with plans and schemes, and it's assumed the Storyteller has the tools needed to pull off the less-moody action. Machiavellian plots aren't the heart and soul of this world; play with the petty backstabbing of the Overworld or focus on the mortal coil as you prefer. The pantheons are concise, giving a lowdown on the Gods without making them an inseparable element. The research is impressive (would that the bibliography used to do it were included!), and the modern interpretations of the mythological essentials are clever and even witty at times. The "bestiary" (for want of a better word) capably covers most of the strange things player character going to fight with or against, ranging from mere mortals to Titanspawn to regular animals (that can be perverted into fouler things). And it all kicks off with an excellent piece of fiction by Carl Bowen.

Scion: Hero may be closer to the games most players used to enjoying, at least in terms of accessibility, but readers won't sacrifice the hallmark playability, characterizations, or depth the Wolf is known for. Look for the two companion books, ***Demigod*** and ***God,*** before year's end to see if the line's lofty goals keep up with the elevation of both the PCs and their fascinating game world.

-- Andy Vetromile

☐

Stop Right There!

Sneaks and Watchmen for *GURPS*

by Paul Stefko

This is the simple truth: combat is deadly. That's why most sane people avoid it whenever possible. This is particularly true in GURPS, which prides itself on realistic combat. If your players are smart, at some point they are going to try to accomplish their goal without being noticed. This may mean scaling a wall and crossing a castle's yard unseen, trekking through wilderness, or picking the lock on a back alley service entrance.

But, as a GM, you want to make things a little tougher for your PCs, even if they are trying to use their brains instead of just brawn. So here's a few NPCs to throw in their way when they're trying to be sneaky. Each includes options for strictly historical games, standard fantasy games and modern games.

Angus, Master of the Hounds   *46 points*

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10.
HP 11; Per 11 [5]; Will 10; FP 10.
BL 24; BS 5.25; Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Native [0].
Languages: Native (Native/Broken) [-2].

Advantages: Allies (Ben and Max) [4]; Animal Friend +2 [10]; Patron (very powerful, 6 or less) [8].

Disadvantages: Dependent (wife, 9 or less) [-4]; Duty (to Patron, nonhazardous, 12 or less) [-5]; Compulsive Gambling (9) [-7]; Status -1 [-5].

Skills: Animal Handling-12* (A) IQ [2]; Falconry-12* (A) IQ [2]; Shortsword-12 (A) DX+1 [4]; Veterinary/TL3-12* (H) IQ [4]. * Includes +2 from Animal Friend

Equipment: Baton (dmg 1d+1 cr; 1 lb.); cloth armor (torso, groin; DR 1*; 6 lbs.); leather leggings (legs; DR 1*; 2 lbs.); heavy leather sleeves (arms; DR 2; 2 lbs.).

Ben and Max, Guard Dogs

ST 10; **DX** 12; **IQ** 5; **HT** 12.
Will 10 [25]; Per 12; Dodge 10; Move 10.
SM 0. 90 lbs.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Domestic Animal; Discriminatory Smell; Quadruped; Sharp Teeth.
Skills: Brawling-14; Tracking-14.

Historical: Angus is the master of hounds for a powerful noble, responsible for training and maintaining his master's hunting dogs. At night, he lets his own large guard dogs out to patrol the castle grounds. He also deals with his master's falcons. Angus is a sullen man with a nagging but loving wife and a taste for dice games.

Fantasy: Angus can be used fairly well as presented in a fantasy campaign, although a GM might consider adding Speak with Animals (Dogs Only, -60%; Magical, -10%) [8] as a magical knack. This would raise his point total to 54 points.

Modern Horror: In a modern horror campaign, Angus is now an independent businessman running his own junkyard in the seedier section of town. He has had some limited exposure to the supernatural. Remove his Patron and Duty as well as his Falconry and Veterinary skills. Lower Animal Friend to +1 (and therefore Animal Handling to 11). Increase his literacy to Native. Shortsword becomes Guns/TL8 (Shotgun)-13. Add Merchant-11, Occultism-11, and Streetwise-10. He carries a 12-gage pump shotgun and wears a ballistic vest.

Cautus, Mage-Scout *115 points*

ST 10; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 10.
HP 10; Per 12; Will 12; HT 10.
BL 20 lbs.; BS 5.5; Move 5; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Native [0].
Languages: Native (Native) [0].

Advantages: Fit [5]; Less Sleep 2 [4]; Magery 2 (Solitary, -40%) [17]; Signature Gear (Ranger's Cloak - Hide Path item, Power 15) [12].

Disadvantages: Duty (to lord or commander, 9 or less) [-5]; Loner (6) [-10]; Poor [-15]; Sense of Duty (those in his domain) [-10].

Skills: Area Knowledge (domain)-12 (E) IQ [1]; Bow-14 (A) DX+2 [8]; Observation-12 (A) Per [2]; Stealth-12 (A) DX [2]; Survival (Woodlands)-12 (A) Per [2]; Tracking-12 (A) Per [2]; Traps/TL3-12 (A) IQ [2].

Spells (1 point in each, unless noted, for a skill level of 12, including the +2 for Magery): Find Direction; Haste-15 [8]; Keen Vision; Night Vision; Pathfinder; Quick March; Seek Earth; Seek Pass; Sense Danger; Sense Foes; Watchdog.

Equipment: short bow (dmg 1d-1 imp; 2 lbs.); cloth armor (torso, groin; DR 1*; 6 lbs.); cloth sleeves (arms; DR 1*; 2 lbs.); shoulder quiver (1 lbs.); 4 standard arrows, 8 "bodkin" arrows (1.2 lbs.)

Note: Cautus uses the suggestion on p. 131 of **GURPS Fantasy** that Signature Gear can buy magic items at 1 character point per 25 energy. If you use a different ratio, adjust Cautus's point total appropriately. Also, he uses the option from p. 26 of the **Basic Set** that allows a wanderer or Poor character (both in this case) to spend all of his starting wealth on adventuring gear.

Historical: Remove Magery, Signature Gear, and spells. Increase Observation, Stealth and Tracking to 14. This reduces his point total to 86.

Fantasy: Cautus is a ranger for a noble or organization with control over a wide-ranging woodland domain. He is tasked with patrolling this region for poachers and bandits. This lonely lifestyle suits him quite well.

Technomancer: With some minor tweaks, Cautus (now Private James Cautus) makes a fine fit for a military Technomancer campaign, especially one set during the Vietnam conflict (see e23's Funny New Guys). He is now a patrol scout for a firebase or other military outpost in a wilderness area; his Area Knowledge and Survival skills should reflect this area. Bow should be replaced with Guns/TL7 (Rifle)-15. Change Signature Gear to a frag vest of

Missile Shield, increase Duty to 15 or less, decrease Poor to Struggling, and change Sense of Duty to (Americans). Add the following skills: Cartography-12 [2]; Electronics Operation/TL7 (Comm)-12 [2]; Forward Observer/TL7-13 [4]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-14 [2] (from Rifle default). He carries a 5.56mm assault rifle and a .45 caliber auto pistol sidearm. This increases his point total to 120.

Old Luke, Drunken Master   *60 points*

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10; **IQ** 10; **HT** 9 [-10].
HP 9; Per 12 [10]; Will 10; FP 9.
BL 16 lbs.; BS 6.00 [25]; BM 6; Dodge 9 (10 when drunk); Parry 10.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Native [0].
Languages: Native (Native) [0].

Advantages: Enhanced Dodge (Only when drunk, -20%) [12]; Striking ST +3 (Only when drunk, -20%) [12]; Reputation ("crazy but harmless", everyone in the neighborhood, all the time) [5]; Trained by a Master (Only when drunk, -20%) [24].

Disadvantages: Alcoholism [-15]; Curious (12) [-5]; Dead Broke [-25]; Pacifism (Cannot Kill) [-15].

Skills: Boxing-14 (A) DX+4 [16]; Fast-Talk-12 (A) IQ+2 [8]; Scrounging-14 (A) Per+2 [4]; Wrestling-12 (A) DX+2 [8].

Techniques: Arm Lock (Wrestling)-16 [4]; Disarming (Boxing)-17 [4]; Feint (Boxing)-17 [4]; Finger Lock (Wrestling)-16 [4].

Historical: Old Luke would find a nice home in a GURPS China game. Possibly add some Philosophy and Theology skills.

Fantasy: The kung fu monk has become a staple of many fantasy games, so Luke would fit fairly easily into most campaigns. A reasonable change would be to switch his Boxing over to the Staff skill, and maybe add the Sweep technique in place of Finger Lock.

Modern Cinematic: Old Luke has been written off by society. He lives on handouts and out of dumpsters, scraping together enough each day to buy food and alcohol. The food he eats quickly, but the liquor he hordes. He has a milk crate stashed in nearly every alley. What no one knows is that when the booze takes hold of him, Old Luke is a flurry of fists. When he sticks his nose in the wrong places (something that happens with alarming frequency) he is quite adept at working his way back out.

Little Hell On The Prairie: The Bloody Benders

"The end of the Benders is not known. The earth seemed to swallow them, as it had their victims."
-- Kansas Historical Society marker on U.S. Highway 160, now missing

It is important to keep in mind at all times, while reading the following Transmission, that there is no proof whatsoever, or no solid proof anyway, of cannibalism in that isolated Kansas house. Blood there is aplenty, and missing limbs, and mutilated corpses, and vanishments and sorcery. But if there were bite marks on the flesh, they rotted away, and if there were bones split for marrow, they were burned or hastily reburied by the good Kansas people who found them. And there's no proof that it happened at all, or at least none we can find.

"In the early days, while that region was sparsely settled, this family, consisting of an old man and his wife, and a son and daughter took up their abode at the place referred to . . . There they kept a sort of wayside inn, making a business of keeping travelers over night, and we might add, to see that they never proceeded any further in the direction of their desired destination."
-- "The Old Bender Family," *Topeka Daily Capital,* January 13, 1886

In the fall of 1870, two men speaking with thick German accents arrived in southeastern Kansas, settling in Labette County where four other families of Germans -- all Spiritualists -- had staked out claims. Calling themselves John Bender and John Bender, Jr., they set up their own farm and built a combination cabin-grocery store on the Osage Trail, a major road southwest from St. Louis. They wintered over on their claim, and the next spring brought two women to join them, "Ma" Bender and Kate Bender. Although "Ma," with her herbs and boiling stew pots and "evil eye" was never popular, Kate -- a self-proclaimed healer and medium, and perhaps more significantly a stunning redhead -- soon became a fixture on the local social scene. Kate's charms, medical and otherwise, proved a strong attraction to weary travelers on the Osage Trail, many of whom stayed the night at the Benders' grocery store.

Oddly enough, the weary travelers with no family in the area, the ones carrying substantial sums of cash money, and (one imagines) the ones who expressed suspicion of the Benders' seeming prosperity in the middle of nowhere didn't leave. A canvas curtain divided the store from the Bender family living quarters; behind it, John Bender, Sr., waited with a sledgehammer, and in front of it, Kate served dinner. When one of the chosen guests sat down at the table, his attention would be on his food (or Kate's bodice) and his back would be to the curtain. One hammer-blow from John, Sr., was enough to kill some guests; those he merely stunned, Kate finished off with her carving knife. And then nobody knew what became of the bodies. This merry arrangement went on until the spring of 1873, nurturing a growing concern in the surrounding towns about the increasing number of missing wayfarers. Finally, the March disappearance of the prominent Independence physician William York (the brother of both Colonel Edward York of Fort Scott and the well-connected state senator Alexander M. York) triggered a town meeting on April 8, 1873. As respected local businessmen, the male Benders attended it. The town agreed to institute a pattern of regular searches, both of campsites and local buildings. There is no record of how the Benders voted on this measure.

"The searchers are puzzled by strange designs and figures scrawled upon the floor. In the floor beneath the dining table is found a door, which opens with a leather strap. A horrible stench drifts upward. Those who served in the late war recognize the smell of rotting blood."
-- Rick Geary, *The Saga of the Bloody Benders*

On Sunday, May 4, 1873, a neighbor of the Benders named Billy Tole discovered animals wandering loose on the Bender property. Investigation revealed that the Benders' team and wagon were gone, along with the Benders themselves. The next day, a posse went out to the Bender place and discovered a trap door in the floor of the grocery, leading down into a cellar lined with stones and choked with clotted blood. An underground passage led out to the Benders' garden and orchard, where apparently random digging uncovered either eight, nine, or eleven bodies (sources differ). Among them were the missing Dr. York, a young girl buried alive, and the mutilated corpse of a man not even thought to be missing. Curiosity-seekers quickly pulled the house to pieces, even breaking up the foundation stone, leaving only a gaping hole in the earth. Some sources put the Benders' total haul at $6,000 in cash -- plus lots of personal possessions, horses, gear, and so forth to sell at pure profit -- and the toll of the missing at 20, 35, or 40, or

even 104.

The Benders were never seen again. A wagon, shot full of holes and carrying a broken "Groceries" sign, turned up in Thayer County. A private detective uncovered word of four German-speaking people -- two men and two women -- buying tickets in nearby Thayer for the north-bound train to Humboldt. And that was it. Despite a $2,000 reward offered by the governor of Kansas -- and a tidal wave of "Bender sightings" that followed -- the Benders had vanished off the face of the earth. Their names, it transpired, weren't even Bender, and their personal relations could only be guessed at. Two women (with alibis and without prominent German accents) were arrested in Michigan and brought to Kansas for trial, but the case was dismissed before it began. A man in Mexico claimed to be John Bender, Jr., the sole survivor of his family's desperate flight over the Pacific Ocean by balloon. One theory, out of two given rather more credence, is this: the Benders made their escape by rail into the wilds of Texas, settling in an "outlaw colony" on the border of New Mexico, or even further West. The other is that the posse deputized to track their flight caught up with the Benders in Oklahoma, and gunned them down, burning Kate alive as a witch. This last theory has as its main support the peculiar silence of the posse after the fact -- although why they should be reticent, if the Benders were merely murderers, is left unspoken. Kate Bender's ghost supposedly haunts the murder site now, and her family became bogeymen to children in Iowa: "Be good or the Benders will get you!"

"Up the close and down the stair,
But and ben with Burke and Hare,
Burke's the butcher, Hare's the thief,
And Knox is the boy that buys the beef."
-- traditional Edinburgh street rhyme

That's not quite as good as their fellow murderous innkeepers William Burke and William Hare, who became the subject of four movies, a Robert Louis Stevenson novel, and of the nursery rhyme above. These two partners in crime killed (mostly by smothering) 16 tenants and transients at Hare's Edinburgh rooming house. They sold the bodies to Dr. Robert Knox for dissection, but their scheme went awry when Knox's students began to recognize their class assignments. Hare turned state's evidence on Burke, who was hung in 1829, and vanished Bender-fashion. Burke and Hare were probably not cannibals, as Dr. Knox would have noticed any missing sweetbreads from the corpses he paid good pounds sterling for. Although -- how would he complain if he did find a kidney or two gone? And I do compulsively note the rhyme's intuitive pegging of Burke as "the butcher" and the discussion of Knox' "beef." It's as though the cantosphere -- the realm of story and legend into which the Benders vanished in 1873 -- seeks to impose the pattern it discerns. Likewise, the Benders' death toll, while impressive, probably falls behind the sixty-plus of our old acquaintance H.H. Holmes, proprietor of the Englewood Castle in Chicago. Like Burke, Hare, and the Benders, Holmes committed the sin of guest-murder, but not the sin of cannibalism. That we know of -- although not all his victims were found, either, and like that of the Benders, his lair was utterly destroyed before it could be thoroughly searched.

"Several innocent innkeepers were executed for no other reason than that persons who had been thus lost were known to have lain at their houses, which occasioned a suspicion of their being murdered by them and their bodies privately buried in obscure places to prevent a discovery. . . . This on the other hand occasioned many great inconveniences to travellers, who were now in great distress for accommodation for themselves and their horses when they were disposed to refresh themselves and their horses, or put up for lodging at night."
-- "Sawney Bean," in the *Newgate Calendar*

Another bloody trail in our so far murky pattern is the tale of Sawney Beane. Beane, or "Bean," was born in East Lothian, Scotland, some time before the year 1600. (Exactly when is a fraught question.) Being of low and indolent inclinations, he ran away from home and settled in a cave near Galloway in the wilds of South Ayrshire on the west coast of Scotland. Here, he took up the practice of murdering passersby and eating them. Like Cain, he somehow found a wife, and raised up a troop of cannibal spawn unto the third generation. The Beane clan eventually numbered 48, and their victims were literally numberless. The locals could never track the killers, who moved along the shingle at low tide and hid behind their cave's submerged entrance at the high. It wasn't until the Beanes attacked a man and wife on horseback -- killing and devouring the woman before her husband's eyes -- that they were discovered, and that only because a party of fair-goers rescued the husband from their pursuit. King James VI mounted a personal attack on

the cannibal clan, discovering their cave himself and seeing to the entire family's extirpation by noose and pyre -- all but one daughter, Elspeth, who had earlier fled to Girvan. But the townsfolk of Girvan discovered her secret and hung her from the "Hairy Tree" that she had planted in the town square.

This story, historians agree, is bollocks. There are no records in any Scottish court of such a proceeding (although the legend says King James hung them without trial) or of any Scottish royal manhunt in Ayrshire (although the King may have taken credit for his sheriff's zeal). And besides, it wasn't King James VI anyhow, but King James I. (Montague Summers confidently gives the date of the Beanes' destruction as 1435.) Or still earlier, "in the time of Bruce or [Macbeth](#)," two Scottish kings not incidentally also guilty of guest-murder. But historically based truth or mere slavering folklore, Sawney Beane lives on. And the Benders, remember, were absolutely real, grounded in print and purchase in the prosaic 19th century -- until they vanished utterly. The myth these clans embody, the myth of the "murderous family," complete with underground lair, disturbing hints of incest, exceptional daughter, and predation on travelers, links Beanes and Benders, remotest Kansas and wildest Scotland, with an incarnadine thread that "not all Neptune's seas" will wash out.

"Maybe Indians. Or escaped convicts. Or mental patients, or part of a hippie killer clan, or mutants -- this is a test range, you know. They could be some sort of mutants."
-- "Bobby Carter" (Robert Houston), in *The Hills Have Eyes* by Wes Craven

And indeed, Neptune's seas wash at least one other famous cannibal family, the Laistrygones of the *Odyssey.* Descended from Poseidon, the Laistrygones lurk -- like Benders and Beanes -- "in the West, where dwells always abundant desolation," in the words of the Hellenistic poet Lycophron. (Wes Craven set his own Sawney Beane tale, *The Hills Have Eyes,* in the "abundant desolation" of the Nellis Air Force Range in Nevada.) Is it this westward -- and plural -- pull of the myth that led Tobe Hooper to transpose Wisconsin loner Ed Gein into a Texas cannibal family when he took up the tale himself in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*? And isn't it interesting, in that leather-faced context, that the word *laistrygones* means "skin-reapers" in Greek? (On the subject of human skin, William Burke's skin was used to bind a notebook for dissection students. He literally became his own legend.) Like the wild, skin-clad Beanes, Homer says the Laistrygones are "not like men but like lawless giants," and they too dine on passing strangers, in this case, Odysseus' luckless crew. John Bender Sr., you'll be interested to know, was described as "a beetle-browed giant of a man" and "wild and woolly looking." To the Greeks, the giants (and hence the Laistrygones) barked -- they, and all cannibals, were tied to the man-eating wolf. By lineage, at least, since Lykaion -- who attempted to betray his guest Zeus by feeding him a human-meat pie -- was turned into a wolf by the offended god. Thus [werewolves](#) enter our mix, via guest-violation and cannibalism, just in time for us to mention the "sudden appearance of two large and vicious-looking dogs" that frightened away a Jesuit missionary from the Benders' home, he later reported. The Benders, as far as anyone could tell, kept no dogs.

"If one assumes that cannibalism . . . is part of a larger pattern . . . then the evolutionary view is that cannibalistic behavior can be adaptive under certain conditions, as it is in the reproductive strategies of some species of beetles, bees, and other invertebrates and of various fishes, amphibians, birds, rodents, and nonhuman primates."
-- Christy G. Turner II and Jacqueline A. Turner, *Man Corn: Cannibalism and Violence in the Prehistoric American Southwest*

The Benders, if they were pulled by the same myth, went west, into the wilds of New Mexico and Arizona, from which [fractal valleys](#) the Anasazi had mysteriously disappeared themselves 600 years before. The Anasazi, as it happens, were also cannibals, who lived in extended family communities in caves and rock cellars. Like the Benders and the Beanes, their cannibalism was "exogamous," meaning it was directed at outsiders. Interestingly, the archaeological evidence seems to support the notion of the Anasazi falling under the cultural domination of a small cult of cannibal warriors around 950 A.D. A group of Laistrygones, perhaps, dog-giants in the West, in the "abundant desolation." Perhaps the Benders -- never born, never died -- went back home. As H.P. Lovecraft reminds us in "The Picture in the House," cannibalism can do that. It can prolong your life, even remove you from time, as the Beanes seem to have been removed.

Lovecraft's undying fictional ogre gains his lore from studying woodcuts and reading about the Anziques, a real, historical tribe who lived in the western Congo in the 15th and 16th century, until they, too vanished to become the

bogeymen of neighboring tribes. I'm sure any homophonous similarity between the isolated, cannibalistic Anasazi of Arizona and the isolated, cannibalistic Anziques of the Congo is pure coincidence. After all, the name "Anasazi" comes from the Navajo *anaasázi,* meaning "enemy ancestor" or "enemy ghost," while "Anzique" is a Portuguese variant on the Bantu *an-t'eke,* meaning "remote" or "distant," or perhaps on the Kikongo *nziku,* meaning "to run away." Good advice, especially when dealing with enemy ghosts in a remote or distant house.

"Sixth, he slew Damastes, whom some call Polypemon. Damastes had his dwelling beside the road, and made up two beds, one small and the other big; and offering hospitality to the passers-by, he laid the short men on the big bed and hammered them to make them fit the bed; but the tall men he laid on the little bed and sawed off the portions of the body that projected beyond it."
-- Apollodorus, *Epitome,* I:4

Lovecraft's ogre is another slight riff on the theme. He is hairy and bearded, like John Bender or the Laistrygones or Sawney Beane, but he lives alone in a lonely house off the main road, luring in a solitary traveler now and then with conversation about food. (An eerie parallel with the Little Red Riding Hood tale, it occurs to me now.) He is the inheritor of the mantle of Polyphemus, like Laistrygon a son of Neptune, the Cyclops who lives in a cave by the sea and preys on those of Odysseus' men who have escaped the Laistrygones (and the doglike, man-eating Scylla, who also lives in a sea-cave). He, too, vanishes in a sense, killed "by Nobody" as the Benders may have been. His name is eerily like Polypemon, the name given to Procrustes -- the murderous innkeeper slain by Theseus -- by Apollodorus in our quote above. *Polypemon* means "many miseries," an interesting hint that the "family" ogre and the "solitary" ogre may be the same thing after all, a mere collapse of the quantum wave function. And Procrustes is himself an interesting fellow. He's tall (we know this because Theseus cuts off his limbs in the myth), he keeps a roadhouse, and perhaps most intriguingly of all, he is, according to Ovid, the son of Poseidon (like Polyphemus, like Laistrygon) and, according to Apollodorus, the father of Theseus' other foe Sinis. Who is perhaps better known, though not much better, as Pityocamptes, the Pine-Bender. Yes, the original murderous innkeeper in all Western lore is not only first cousin to cannibals, but the father of the first Bender.

"You glimpse things out of the corner of your mind, same as you glimpse things out of the corner of your eye. You encase 'em in solid circumstance and they're not so bad. That is known as the Growth of Legend. The Folk Mind in Action. You take the Carkers and the things you don't quite see and you put 'em together. And they bite."
-- Anthony Boucher, "They Bite"

The Benders were mystics -- they said it themselves. Like all mystics, they took false names, and like all magical names, they were compelled to be true names. They were of the blood of the Bender, sons of Procrustes. (Like the Benders and the Beanes, Sinis also had an alluring daughter, who survived by seducing Theseus. They had a son. He vanished.) They spoke with the dead. They carried out their purpose in the blood-choked cave they dug below their inn, under the gaze of the primordial Indian mounds across the prairie from them. (Now called the "Bender Mounds." No, really.) And then they went into the West. Perhaps they were not actually cannibals. Perhaps they left those morsels in the cantosphere with the skin-rags they wore in Galloway. Perhaps the sterile Kansas land -- so far from their father Poseidon -- kept the song ("Burke's the butcher and Hare's the thief") at a remove. Perhaps the cold light of Ulysses S. Grant's conventional America, with its 19th century faith not yet gnawed by the terror famines coming in the Anziques' Congo Free State or Baba Yaga's Ukraine, stripped the Benders down to the bare minimum. John Bender, Sr., was a realistic ogre for newspapers and wanted posters, not a full-blown hairy, stinking, frozen wendigo. The Bender clan didn't strip the country clean, or fight to the death against the sacred king on a white horse, like the Beanes. They merely killed their guests, and threw them into the cellar, and buried them in a grove at the dark of the moon. And then they vanished. And they -- probably, most likely, realistically speaking, when all is said and done -- didn't eat human flesh. Not so we can prove, anyway.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Harry Today, Goney Tomorrow

The media machine has been in full-tilt mode for months, as the teeming millions waited in line to be the first on their block to experience the magic . . . to heed the call of wonder . . . and to expose the long-tantalizing secrets. But for everyone who couldn't afford an iPhone, hopefully something else interesting will come along to wait up 'til midnight for.

Speaking of Harry Potter, one of the interesting things about *this* round of all-encompassing hype has been that there's been an air of finality about the whole affair. Of course, this is for good reason; by all accounts, this is the last book (which makes sense, what with Harry and Voldemort falling off the edge of Reichenbach Falls[1], presumably to their deaths). And, seeing as how JK Rowling has more money lying around the house than the Queen, it's not like she needs to bring Harry back or anything, unless she's looking to expand her summer home by buying . . . France.

Anyway, part of the appeal of the series -- at least to me, as a relative outsider fan -- is that it is a "closed" series; there won't be umpteen billion sequels, each with them the possibility of sullying the previous volumes. (*Hitchhiker's Guide,* I'm looking at you.) This closure is made possible by the one-year-per-book structure of the series, which means that -- at the end of Book 7 -- he'll presumably either graduate, die, or both (unless he decides to extend his academic career by flunking out of a few courses and changing majors, a la Your Humble Editor).

A closed structure with predefined milestones is an excellent structure for many campaigns, since it gives the players something to look forward to (or at least anticipate), while also giving the GM a good number of hooks to base future episodes on. In fact, this has been a successful structure for a large number of television shows:

- *24:* Each day is going to take place over the course of a day; each season will have a "high noon" involved . . . possibly many, depending on the time zones involved.
- *Saved by the Bell:* Set in a high school with each season representing a year of school (loosely), so there are certain certainties you're going to encounter: homecomings, proms, summer vacations, college entrance exams, etc.
- *Playmakers:* This ESPN original show chronicled the adventures of a football team, with each season representing a season of the sport. (It only lasted a year, so it didn't exactly explore the concept to the fullest.)
- *The West Wing:* Again, occurring in real time with a real political landscape, so you know there's going to be a primary season, a period when Supreme Court decisions are handed down, and so on. In addition, since the show follows a president starting with Year Two of his presidency, and since you can't be elected president for more than eight years, you knew that this guy's era was destined to have a finite timeline.
- *Star Trek (The Mod Years):* A "five-year mission" implies some kind of conclusion to the mission. Again, the show's early demise kept this aspect from being more fully explored (I would've enjoyed a "Welcome Home, Heroes" season ender, m'self).

Schools provide the most obvious swipable example of a structure that can be stolen, since practically every player will have attended an educational institution of some sort. Other human-made schedules are also good, such as the "five-year mission" or a four-year election cycle. Also interesting are universal or natural schedules, such as the one-day structure of *24.*

Once you know the *type* of structure(s) you'll be using, it's relatively trivial to fill them out with specifics that the heroes can look forward to (or dread), by putting them on a calendar that the players (and heroes) know and understand.

So let's mash up a few ideas and see what results. Let's take a world that's like our own, only promising pupils are carted off and trained in paranormal research; for whatever reason, getting trained younger provides a real edge in fighting the darkness, so there's an excuse for placing tikes in mortal danger. The campaign opens up with our PCs entering their final year of school -- Veritas University -- which -- assuming a collegiate level program -- would put them in the 21-22 age range. Now, our World of Wickness also happens to be on a 10-year sinister cycle, with the evil

reaching an apex in the middle of this range and ending at the nadir. (Sort of like an El Niño of Evil.) This is on year two of its cycle, so the evil is ramping up (quite coincidentally, along the same power curve the heroes will be growing up into). Finally, let's toss in some real-world politics here; the University is funded entirely at the mercy of the government, and has been under pressure for decades to close its doors; the only thing stemming the tide is the university's president, who's up for reelection in three years. The heroes will have graduated by then, but presumably they'll still maintain some contacts to enable them to fight the good fight.

The GM declares that the focus of the campaign is to ensure the cosmos survives this current wave of evil . . . ideally with the world being a better place than it was before. Thus the campaign will last five to six years in game time (with whatever resultant compression the GM would like in game time).

Okay; let's put our pieces together:

Year One: College

- "Career Counseling"
- University programs (dances/formal affairs?)

Year Two: Post-College Training

- Teaching Assistant possibilities for incoming classes

Year Three: Reelection

- Political intrigues

Year Four: The Rise of Evil

- More opportunities for the heroes

Year Five: The Pinnacle of Evil

- The big enchilada

Year Six (?): Crawling from the Wreckage/Putting Pieces Together

Note what other patterns emerge once we engage in this thought exercise: presumably the game world saw its last apex of evil seven years previously, meaning that the world was pretty cruddy for our heroes when they were 14 or 15, and again when they were four and five . . . just the sort of thing to tie into flashbacks or origins. Likewise, this structure would be known from the beginning of the campaign by both the GM *and* the players; no one may know specifics, but the broad strokes -- "there will come political intrigues," "the world will get worse before it gets better" -- would be common knowledge. Likewise since it's set in the real world, the GM could toss in whatever other events he'd like (such as an Olympic game or two.)

Done correctly, such a campaign can provide players with loose map they can plan for accordingly, much like the real world. It's also easier to motivate players to be more daring and proactive when they know the game world won't progress on an infinite timeline. Regardless of whether or not the campaign *works,* it should at least feel a lot different than the open-ended "one year blends into the next"-style campaign.

Because eventually, even the best things come to an end . . . like the ringing of an iPhone.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] Just kidding. I haven't read any of the books, and only seen two of the movies. So I can't possibly offer any spoilers.

Icosahedron Adventures

Unusual Objects (Part One: A-D)

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Unusual items play a part in a large number of adventure stories. In many cases they're simply a McGuffin, the thing sought because the plot is about seeking a thing. Others have real power to affect the course of events, either as tools or as characters in their own right. Some willful items have at best pseudo-personalities, such as a *ring of invisibility* that slips off its owner's finger at an inopportune moment. Others are blatant unliving entities, such as sapient robots or cars that talk and hold their own opinions. As tools in RPGs, they work best when they help the GM move the course of events toward adventure, either as goals (for the PCs or their foes), or as manipulators of circumstance in their own right.

Even if they think, talk, plot, and have emotions, objects aren't the same as people, and shouldn't think the same way. A singing sword doesn't suffer hunger, exhaustion, or thirst in the same way a biological entity does. (Of course, it might thirst for blood, which is a cool personality quirk and very disturbing at the same time.) Most have no urge to procreate, little fear of aging, and no family to influence them. (An item that does have these baser drives may be set apart from other items by them.)

If they have desires at all, they are likely to be programmed (established by the biological creatures that created them), or based purely in philosophical or ethical concerns rather than biological needs. For some objects this may free them to act only for the greater good, with no distractions such as greed, avarice, gluttony, or lust. Other may become forces of pure evil, willing to take any steps to achieve whatever goals they do have. (Does either a computer or a magic ring have a soul? If not, need they fear punishment in the afterlife? If not, does that impact their morality?)

The following unusual objects are all designed to have an influence on a party of player characters, but may or may not actually talk. They can be useful as McGuffins, but also give a GM subtle ways to influence where a party goes. Indeed, such influence can be an acknowledged in-world method for giving out-of-game information. ("Guys, I don't have anything written up for the abandoned hospital. It's a great idea, I just didn't think of it. Let's say the Enigma Van broke down again, this time in front of the old high school, and you all went in looking for a phone to call help.") A total of 26 items are planned, with cross-setting notes to fit them into a broad range of genres. Only the oddest of games would include all these items, though a game that focused on these being the only 26 items of power in existence (or 26 of the 42 known to exist, or whatever numbers you find meaningful) might well work.

Amityville Doorknob

They say it came from a place long known to have been haunted. It could be the actual doorknob of a haunted house long burned to the ground, but there are other options: an ancient alien artifact, last remnant of a long-dead civilization; An old garage-door opener from a company no one has ever heard of, built in a town not on any map; a rusted key with runes of the dead and damned, rumored to come from a vampire's castle; a passkey for Human Engineering Life Laboratories that someone became attuned to another reality, rather than a mundane security system. Whatever its form or genre, the Amityville Doorknob is an object that traditionally gives you access to a portal of some kind.

When used, the doorknob can activate any door, gate, portal or opening, but not to gain access to the other side. Instead, the object creates a pathway to a reality of terrors and supernatural threats. Anyone daring to pass through this place can come out somewhere else, allowing a form of limited teleportation. However, every trip always includes an attack by terrifying creatures of horrifying visage and powers.

In a game with magic the doorknob may take its users through an actual haunted location, though the location seems

to be nothing but rooms and hallways with no end. In less mystic settings, the doorknob needs more hand-waving. It grants passage to an alien transport terminal, long since abandoned but filled with the psychic impressions of a thousand species that died in some calamity. It actually accesses the user's own innate psychic abilities to teleport, but also taps into subconscious fears that must be faced in mental conflict.

In *d20 System* game terms the doorknob is a lot like a limited *teleport circle* spell. It can only go from portal to portal. It can only go to and from locations that aren't "shielded," meaning whatever you need it to in your campaign -- the doorknob may not work with doors protected by abjuration spells, or not in intense magnetic fields, or only with doors 20 or more years old. And every time it's used, the PCs must fight a battle of their CR +1 against whatever horror-themed creatures the GM feels like throwing at them. Worse, these fights are the price of the doorknob, and have a nightmarish quality once over, rather than clean crisp memories of battle. As a result there is never treasure present, and no one gains experience points for these battles. (This is the only way to prevent some players from using the doorknob as a quick replacement for seeking adventure.)

Bloody Typhoid Mary Celeste

In principle, it sounds like a perfect mode of transportation. A massive enchanted seagoing ship named the Celestial, with phantasmal crew and colorful background. The BTMC-01X, a prototype starship with a unique jump warp engine. A massive semi truck and trailer run off some kind of nuclear power plant with no need of fuel, pure water as a by-product, and plenty of spikes to keep road raiders from claiming it as their own apocalypse APC, nose art of the Virgin Mary with machine guns and fishnets covering the cab. The BTMC is fast, tough, durable, and spacious. There are just two problems.

First, the craft is a deep, blood red color and everyone knows it. The legend of the Bloody Typhoid Mary Celeste is well known, and includes that detail about its appearance. Efforts to repaint it are overwritten by magic, or make the solar panels useless, or are pointless because the color really comes from its molecular stability field, not any pigment slapped on the hull. The ship is recognizable, and most people have heard of it.

By itself, that's not too much of a problem. After all, the BTMC has defenses strong enough to repel most attackers (especially boarders), and some level of notoriety can be good for a group of adventurous PCs. However, the second problem ties into the first. The BTMC is a well-known harbinger of disaster. According to legend, plagues follow every port it visits. Wars break out when it's seen entering a kingdom. The ether becomes violently nonconfluent when the ship orbits a planet, and other ships are lost. And, of course, the crew keeps disappearing.

You haven't seen any of those things. Or, at least, no more of them than before you found the BTMC. Oh sure, the ship was empty when you ran into it. There was no sign of the crew, just a log book that suggests the previous crew found the craft empty just as you did. And yes, things often go wrong wherever you travel to. But that's always been true. That's why you go to these places.

There are just a few things that make the BTMC's legend seem more than superstition to you. First, you sometimes go off course and arrive at places with far more trouble than the destination you wanted to head toward. This can be useful -- you've tracked down some old enemies and put right some vile wrongs as a result -- but you do wonder what force takes over the ship's navigation. To make things worse, once you show up at any location with serious trouble, you can't leave. The wind dies down. The jump warp engine has a glitch, and needs 72 hours to reboot. The unobtanium power plant overheats. Until the problem blows up beyond all repair, or you hunt down the problem and fix it, the BTMC may move you around a little, but it doesn't take you away from the troubles.

In game terms, the BTMC has two functions. First, it serves as an easy way for a GM to introduce location-based encounters to a group of adventurers. Second, it can grant boosts of luck to its crew and owners, at the price of even more trouble later on. Once per game session, any PC that owns or rides on the BTMC can re-roll any one die roll and take the better of the new or original result. However, each time this is done the GM gets a luck token, which can also be spent on a re-roll. The GM must use the token by the end of the current game session, or it is lost.

Canopic Leftovers

It'd be funny if it weren't so sad. Okay, maybe it's funny anyway. The grand architect and prophet was mummified long ago, his organs removed, burned and placed in canopic jars as was custom. When the graverobbers broke into his tomb, they took the jewel-encrusted jars and mummified remains. Since they were heavy already, the robbers eventually decided to dump out the ashes within. A gardener's pile of wood ash, to be used as fertilizer, was handy, and in went the burned remains.

The spirit of the grand architect is understandably upset, and wants its canopic jars restored to his tomb. Unfortunately, with his mummy broken apart for aphrodisiacs, the only connection the spirit has left is the product of the gardener's efforts. Food grown from that plot was enriched by the spirit's ash, and now any such food is a potential vehicle for its spirit.

The canopic leftovers may be a can of string beans not yet opened, with the label slowly turning to hieroglyphs over time (though still clearly showing the green beans). It may be a hambone from a pig fed off the farmer's grains. Anything likely to survive long enough for a spirit to inhabit it may be a vessel (unless the spirit can retard spoilage in its buffet body, in which case everything from the half-eaten rhubarb pie of Horus to the cheese of ages becomes possible). The spirit must have that physical link to communicate with the real world, and aids anyone who comes in possession of his tasty talisman as long as they promise to aid in recovery of his canopic jars, and don't try to eat him.

Though a talking fruitcake may not seem that useful, the spirit is still an architect and prophet, and knows many secrets modern man has lost. In ***d20 System*** game terms, the oracle of ort has high checks in many Knowledge skills (including arcana, architecture and engineering, dungeoneering, the plains, and religion), and can cast *augury* occasionally and *divination* rarely. More common divination spells, such as *detect magic* may be available freely (and make a good way to introduce such options into a modern horrors game with a low level of seriousness), and of course it can detect spoiled food at will. The goals of the spirit are clear enough, and it becomes a McGuffin searching for its own four McGuffins -- a recipe for many potential adventures and nemeses.

Draupnir Jr.

Odin has a ring of gold. Each ninth night, it makes eight perfect duplicates of itself. Thus, Odin always has money for a mug of ale. There, the legends end on Draupnir's qualities. As a mythic item of divine power and value, it's not unreasonable to think Draupnir has thoughts, goals, and perhaps even powers of its own. Forged as part of a wager Loki lost (and defaulted on), Draupnir is a force for law, order, and wealth.

But what about all those poor rings it makes?

There have been many Draupnir Juniors (thousands over a few years, hundreds of thousands if it's been a few centuries). Most have been melted down, and indeed form a surprising percentage of the world's gold supply. But a few remain intact, and hold within them a surprising secret. With the exception of the ability to duplicate, each little Draupnir is a duplicate of their circular sire. They, too, can think and feel, and each knows what all the others know. They are also agents for wealth and order, though they also have issues with authority as a result of their absentee prolific progenitor. Since they know what Draupnir knows, the location of that ring may be among their secrets, but if so the Juniors aren't saying. They refuse to talk about their filigree father, and get insulted if someone suggests the original would be preferable to any of them.

The same idea can apply to items for different genres. A piece of self-copying alien technology might well be code-named Draupnir, and while the original is under government lock and key, one of the hundreds of copies might find its way into the wider world. A mater-replicator gone wild might produce hundreds of knock-offs of everything from starship captains to alien probes working for space-whales. A superhero with hydra powers might find each time he's killed, two of him return to life. Whatever the cause, the Jr versions of all these are linked, driven toward a goal, and touchy about the original.

Lacking any other special ability, and ignoring the potential lore a ring forged for a Norse god might pick up, the Juniors do form a perfect communication network. Each knows not only what Draupnir knew when it made them, but what the original and all copies have learned since (or at least what their seven clutch-mates have learned, if you want to tone down the madness). Thus what you tell one Junior, they all know and can pass on to others. Since the knowledge propagation is instant among the rings, they can beat the speed of light (and cause paradoxes if they more at relativistic speeds). Since no actual transmission takes place, the communication can't be intercepted or altered. Of course, the rings only aid those who work for their ultimate goal -- a world of riches and lawful behavior.

Pyramid Review

Secrets of San Francisco: A 1920s Sourcebook for the City by the Bay (for [Call of Cthulhu](#))

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Cody Goodfellow with David Conyers, Brian M. Sammons, Elizabeth A. Wolcott, Hilary Ayer, Janice Sellers, & Badger McInnes

Cover by Paul Carrick

Illustrated by Earl Geier, Paul Carrick, Badger McInnes, & Tom Sullivan

Cartography by David Conyers & Janice Sellers

190-page perfect bound black and white book; $24.95

Secrets of San Francisco: A 1920s Sourcebook for the City by the Bay is the third in the *Secrets of . . .* supplements published for *[Call of Cthulhu.](#)* The first was *[Secrets of Japan,](#)* the second *Secrets of New York,* and the fourth will be *Secrets of Kenya.* The city of San Francisco has been visited before by *Call of Cthulhu,* most notably in the classic campaign, *Day of the Beast* (originally *The Fungi From Yuggoth*), in Games Workshop's *The Statue of the Sorcerer & The Vanishing Conjuror,* and for *Cthulhu Now* in "This Fire Shall Kill" from *[The Stars are Right!](#)* Although *Secrets of San Francisco* includes details that mark the early appearances of elements that occur in *The Stars are Right!* and the modern day campaign, *At Your Door,* the emphasis for this supplement is firmly in the 1920s.

Secrets of San Francisco details the City by the Bay, the Golden gate to the Pacific, and the inheritor to the wealth of the California Gold Rush, going into detail about its (surprisingly long) history, geography, climate, information on San Francisco city and the Greater Bay Area, transport links, museums, legends, celebrities, and things to do. It explores Chinatown, the Asian ghetto within the city; the 1906 Earthquake and the subsequent fire, the effects of which have enabled the city to both rebuild and shed its chaotic, sometimes lawless past; and its secret organizations. Some are realy (such as the Masons and the Theosophists), but others -- such as Lang-Fu's Deep One cult (more fully detailed in *Day of the Beast* and *[The Keeper's Companion](#)*) and the "Mater Tenebrarum" -- are fictitious.

The "Mater Tenebrarum" is only one of a number of elements drawn from fiction. Among the sources are authors Fritz Leiber, Clark Ashton Smith, Michael Shea, and David Conyers. Clark Ashton Smith is also one of several notable literary figures given write-ups, the others being Ambrose Bierce and Dashiell Hammett. Other well known figures described include William Randolph Hearst and [Joshua A. Norton](#), along with various more local persons.

Some of the supplement's best chapters detail Chinatown, the cosmopolitan -- even seamier -- side of San Francisco, and the Bay Area's various legends and folklore. In fact, the description of the Greater Bay Area is better and more interesting than that of the city itself. There is enough detail given on every topic without being overdone, though in places more information would have been welcome. For example, details and advice on how create and play Chinese investigators would have made for a positively intriguing addition and game given their status and history within San Francisco. The guide to San Franciscan legends and folklore takes in Drake's Treasure, the Cat People of Mount Tamaplais, and the Winchester Mystery House, while the Mythos is used to explain the tunnels under Mount Shasta and the Bay Area's long history of shipwrecks.

Throughout the book, scenario hooks suggest how the supplement's contents might be used. This is a nice touch, though not all will be to every Keeper's taste or campaign. The four scenarios, which take up half of the book, open with the short introductory adventure, "The Ferry Ride." Becalmed on the last ferry ride into San Francisco, the characters may encounter a seemingly abandoned Chinese junk. (Or not, because there is no real reason for the party to investigate the junk.) If they do, the situation presents more of an experience and a mystery with answers to be developed by the Keeper. Certainly, more information upon Chinatown would have helped towards that.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first full scenario is Elizabeth A. Wolcott's "The Westchester House" in which the investigators are hired by an eccentric heiress. Obsessed with constantly adding to her home, she wants them to look into recent psychic manifestations. Pleasingly, this scenario has a very mundane solution. It has two problems though. The first is that it is a reprint, originally appearing in *The Asylum & Other Tales,* and this is not mentioned. Second, the scenario is clearly inspired by the Winchester Mystery House, which is in San Francisco. So why not mention this? Why continue calling it the Westchester House, when it is so clearly based on such a noted local landmark?

Brain M. Sammons' "The Colour of His Eyes" is the first of two lengthy scenarios in *Secrets of San Francisco.* The bizarre death at an asylum puts the investigators on the trail of an escaped inmate, a former astronomer driven both blind and mad by his observations. More of a detailed framework than a conventional scenario, it is let down by a weak method of introducing the PCs. Having them encounter the incident at the asylum is far more effective than trying to get them involved in the situation afterwards. However, this adventure provides an interesting and entertaining take upon a well-known Mythos entity.

Although "The Colour of His Eyes" is good, the supplement's highlight is "Beyond the Edges" by David Conyers. Based on the author's short story "Vanishing Curves," the scenario begins as a missing person's case that leads them into the Tenderloin, an area of the city known for its houses of ill repute and its high number of homeless. Designed for experienced investigators, this is a challenging affair that draws upon the Bay Area's pre-colonial history and will likely drive the investigators into a homeless state before the problems it presents can be solved.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Physically, behind Paul Carrick's fine cover, *Secrets of San Francisco's* reasonable layout is let down by two factors. A series of dreadful thumbnail portraits mar the book's otherwise excellent artwork, while its maps are once again let down by inconsistent handling. This isn't the case with the period maps (though better ones could have been included of San Francisco itself, particularly street maps), but rather those created by Chaosium themselves. Although a bibliography is given, it is a pity that it lists no gaming material.

Where *Secrets of San Francisco* succeeds is in imparting a feel for the city, especially its cosmopolitan or seamier underside, but without overwhelming the Keeper with information. It also does a good job of tying the city's Mythos connections into *Call of Cthulhu* cannon. However, it does not impart a good geographical sense of the city in comparison to the Bay Area, and it leaves some areas underdeveloped, such as the chapter on Chinatown. Similarly, notes on running the material here in the game's other eras would have been welcome. Overall though, *Secrets of San Francisco: A 1920s Sourcebook for the City by the Bay* is a reasonably done supplement that does a decent job of introducing the city to *Call of Cthulhu.*

--Matthew Pook

A Mélange of Magical Creatures IX

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

Our continued exploration of the odd world takes us through fields, across planes, and under water, all the while gazing upward.

Tumblers

*"Some historians point to these round, fast-moving omnivores as the inspiration for the wheel. This is just as improbable as getting fire from dragons. Although they **did** have it first, mankind had nothing to trade for it."*
-- Talorius, *Origins of Technology*

These fast, round-bodied land animals have a dark brown rough skin. Always in motion spinning end over end, these wheelform creatures can see in all directions due to their widely-set eyes. Though rarely resting long enough to be observed, the tumbler looks like a cross between an otter and an armadillo. On four legs, they waddle uncomfortably. Their digestion system requires the spinning motion; a tumbler that is tied up will grow sick and die. Moving faster than any human, early cultures described these omnivores as messengers for the gods. Tumblers are always moving, even when asleep, stopping only to eat. As herbivores and opportunistic scavengers, they will eat almost anything smaller than they are. Fortunately, *most* tumblers are small.

Encountered

In the wild, tumblers enjoy roads, straight paths, and dry river beds. They also enjoy playing tag and other social games. Rarely caring where they wander, tumblers can end up anywhere. Usually found in groups of three to 18, the larger they are, the smaller the social groups they keep. Their squeaky yips are distorted by a doppler shift due to their rotation. This results in a machine-like whir. Many cities gamble on tumbler races, as they are much faster than dogs, although they can make some people sick from their mode of locomotion.

Industrial Uses

"Okay, true story: We were marching across the flats. Jerry here was eating a sandwich, spilling scraps of his lunch as we walked -- bad show. A few tumblers showed up to pick up the scraps. Then more showed up, and they all started to circle us, ever increasing in speed. It eventually got to the point that Karl was so nauseated that he lost his lunch."
-- Lord Everett Bronmyr, *Plains of the Amazons*

A few organizations have declared that they have successfully put tumblers on treadmills for power. Turning millstones or generators, they never seem to tire. It is difficult to stop or redirect the beasts to service (or to sabotage) bridled mechanisms, although a good lure and a roll against Animal Handling at -2 works. Some messenger companies have had success training tumblers to come when called. Unfortunately, this requires ultrasonic whistles that annoy nearby canines. Enchantment uses include items of body sense, toughness, and energy recovery.

Adventure

A horse messenger company seeks to prove that horses are better than tumblers. They believe it to the extent that they want a non-equestrian to ride their best horse and compete in a set of contests. The question is, will either party play fair? Will this bet between nobles spiral out of control between their underlings?

Tumbler

Appearance: Wheelform mammalian with rough dark skin. Its sides have short, stiff fur.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 2; DX 14; IQ 4; HT 14.
Will 10; Per 11; Speed 7; Dodge 12; Move 7.
SM -2 (1' diameter); 5 lbs; DR 1 (+DR 3 vs. Crushing).
Traits: 360° Vision; Catfall; Chummy; Combat Reflexes; Enhanced Move 2 (Ground Speed 28); Night Vision 2; Perfect Balance; Reduced Consumption (Cast-Iron Stomach); Resistance to Disease +3; Sleepwalking (6); Super Jump 2 (Bouncing); Telescopic Vision 1; Temperature Tolerance 3; Ultrasonic Speech; Vermiform; Very Fit; Wild Animal.
Skills: Body Sense-16.

Giant Tumbler

ST 4; DX 13; IQ 4; HT 15.
Will 10; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 12; Move 7/28.
SM -1 (2' diameter); 20 lbs; DR 2 (+DR 5 vs. Crushing).

Humungous Tumbler

ST 8; DX 12; IQ 6; HT 16.
Will 10; Per 13; Speed 7; Dodge 12; Move 7/28.
SM +0 (3' diameter); 40 lbs; DR 3 (+DR 7 vs. Crushing).

Gargantuan Tumbler

ST 12; DX 11; IQ 4; HT 17.
Will 10; Per 14; Speed 7; Dodge 12; Move 7/28.
SM +2 (5' diameter); 160 lbs; DR 4 (+DR 11 vs. Crushing).

Immense Tumbler

ST 16; DX 10; IQ 4; HT 18.
Will 10; Per 15; Speed 7; Dodge 12; Move 7/28.
SM +3 (8' diameter); 320 lbs; DR 5 (+DR 17 vs. Crushing).

Bloodbat

"The first recipient of a bat-borne blood transfusion accepted it last week with no signs of rejection. While that procedure was a resounding success, the patient died today when he failed to yield right of way to an elephant."
--Biotech Today, Year XXXIV of His Majesty's Reign.

The blood-bat is a strangely cuddly creature, genetically engineered from a mix of vampire bat and snake stock. It is designed as a blood cleanser, with a powerful immune system to filter blood drawn from a host before re-injecting it free of pathogens. This large bat has brown to white fur with a red raindrop pattern on its chest.

It has an instinct to keep its prey alive, by returning the previous batch of processed blood back after taking some. It can take blood from one source, clean it over a minute, and transmit most of it back to the same being, or -- if shooed away -- give it to the next after processing. If the victim seems too low on blood, the bloodbat will take blood, and put all back in.

This trait was bred into it at the Pamito clinic, and as the species was being transported between various hospitals, escapes happen. Fortunately, they are not interfertile with normal bats. Bloodbats actually contain a system not unlike a snake's, which consists of hollow fangs and a bladder for liquid.

The design also called for a kidney-like organ to filter incoming blood, storing it in the other side of the organ for reinsertion. As a side effect, the bloodbat takes foreign agents, nutrients, and specific enzymes out of the blood, rendering it neutral and easier to accept. The bat's own immune system adds antibodies and removes impurities from the blood.

Encountered

Officially, the only place where bloodbats can be encountered is in a hospital, but an unknown number have escaped to the wild over the years. These hardy animals can survive in almost any climate, and thus can be found anywhere from temperate to frigid environments. Wilderness outposts are likely to have one or two bloodbats on hand to ease blood donations, and to help victims of snake bites. Nobles might keep one around just in case a victim is poisoned. Some athletes and warriors cache blood until just before a battle to keep their edge. They say smarter warriors keep some blood for *after* the battle. Some people even feel more alert after a transfusion, since increased blood supply offers greater oxygen capacity.

Industrial Uses

"The accursed Count Vald and his cohort had swooped down on me in the dark of night, and nearly drained me dry. I don't mind saying I feared that if I died from the vampires' wounds, I might rise cursed as they, and in their thrall. As my vision faded, I saw something grey and red fly at me. The last thing I remembered was something bit me. Then morning's light awoke me. What a wonderful feeling it was to see the sun!"
-- Overheard in the tavern *The Sphinx's Tail*

Some medical corporations have found that bloodbats make excellent sources for antivenom for snake bites, as well as cures for many puzzling diseases. In addition, these bats can be used to hold blood transfusions for patients receiving operations or recovering from trauma. Peculiar enzymes enable the bats to preserve the blood almost indefinitely. As a side effect of the storage of human blood, the bats themselves have near-human blood chemistry. This is in some ways unfortunate as they now qualify as food for certain classes of undead. The upside is, of course, that fewer humans will suffer, at least until the numbers of undead grow. Magical uses include the preservation of food, the warding of vampires, healing magic, and the transmission of energy.

Adventure

The heroes are hired to capture a bloodbat that escaped from a lab. They are given a simple tracking device that will give them the direction of the bat. What their employers don't know is that there are no fewer than three other organizations after this creature; the employers also neglect to tell the PCs is that the bat was carrying a blood sample from a sick noble. One competitor wants the tissue sample, while another wants a sample of the pathogen. The third is after the bat itself.

Blood Bat

Appearance: Medium-large bats with brown to white fur with a red raindrop pattern on the chest
Category: Mammal (Or avian in some taxonomies).
Diet: Omnivore, primarily vegetarian.
ST 3-4; DX 12; IQ 4; HT 13.
Will 8; Per 10; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 6 (1-2 on the ground).
SM -4 (15" long) (SM+0 with wings unfurled); 1-2 lbs.
Traits: Combat Reflexes; Flight (Winged; Air Move 12); Peripheral Vision; Perk (Human Blood); Regeneration (Slow); Resistance to Disease +8; Resistance to Poison +8 (Natural Poisons only); Sanitized Metabolism; Scanning

Sense (Sonar); Temperature Tolerance 2; Wild Animal.
Skills: First Aid (Blood Loss)-15.
Knack: Preserve Food.

Giant Blood Bat

ST 5-8; DX 11; IQ 4; HT 14.
Will 8; Per 9; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 6 (3-4 on the ground).
SM -2 (3' tall) (SM+1 with wings unfurled); 5-10 lbs; DR 2.
Notes: HP loss is 1-2 on a bite, but should be restored in the same minute.

Chest Ghost

"The moving corpse commonly called a chest ghost is considered one of the most disturbing beasts in these parts -- a force that animate corpses. They are disgusting and unsanitary, and cannot be stopped by common wards against undead. Even if they are thwarted, there is still the problem of cleanup."
-- Knights of the Living Undead

The archetypical "chest ghost" is a limbless, floating torso from a human-sized being. It is home to an insect that fills it with lift gas and slowly devours it from the inside. Keeping the "vehicle" floating about a yard off the ground, the "pilot beetle" pokes its wings out the back and steers the form. The pilot insect seeks more carrion to feed on, and will maneuver its current host close. If the new target has more meat (and no competition), the parasite will switch hosts, the inflation process taking a day. Every day, the pilot exits to coat the body in a preservative enamel excretion.

Encountered

Chest ghosts seem to be attracted to large battles, as well as the smell of cooking meat. As can be expected, the sighting of a chest ghost is almost universally considered a bad omen. The scene is increased dramatically if the host is recognizable.

Industrial Uses

*"We were camping in the woods. Then, some weird-looking furry blobs started floating at us from over the hill. Jake said we should, put all our food up the tree, like the ranger guy showed us. We did that, and as the floating things got closer, we got the feeling that we should, you know, get **ourselves** up the tree too. We split, and could only watch as the things got close to the fire . . . Real spooky. They got no heads! Wow, bad karma, man."*
-- Sonny Tiefer, *Magic Years*

There have been few known industrial uses for these creatures. The pilot beetle's saliva can be distilled, it could make an excellent preserving agent, and the lift gas could be worth investigation, but the press on the creature is currently so poor that research is very difficult. Reclusive enchanters and alchemists are working on projects, but refuse to comment at this time. One project that was leaked is that chest ghosts can actually disassemble fresh undead, which can be applied in undead-infested areas.

Adventure

There are an unusual concentration of chest ghosts spotted in an outlying town near a swamp, and the heroes are charged with determining what causes them to all be there. In fact, a necromancer is digging up bodies, looking for one in particular.

Chest Ghost ("Vehicle")

Appearance: A limbless torso with a glossy sheen over its skin and fur.
Category: Inanimate.
Diet: N/A.
ST 3; DX 6; IQ -; HT 12; 6 HP.
Will -; Per -; Speed 3; Dodge 6; Air Move 3.
SM -1 (4' tall); 60 lbs; DR 2.
Notes: From the torso of a SM+0 creature.

Chest Ghost (Pilot Beetle)

Appearance: A largish beetle-like insect with a rusty coloration. It has large, armored wings.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Carnivore (Scavenger).
ST 2; DX 14; IQ 2; HT 14.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 11; Move 7.
SM -4 (18" long); 1-2 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Acute Sense of Smell +2; Combat Reflexes; Create (Air); Flight (Winged; Gliding; Air Move 14); Wild Animal.
Skills: Pilot (Lighter-than-air)-15.

Giant Chest Ghost ("Vehicle")

ST 6; DX 5; IQ -; HT 12; 12 HP.
Will -; Per -; Speed 4; Dodge 4; Air Move 4.
SM +0 (6' tall); 80 lbs; DR 4.
Notes: From the torso of a SM+1 creature.

Giant Chest Ghost (Pilot)

ST 4; DX 13; IQ 2; HT 15.
Will 12; Per 13; Speed 7; Dodge 11; Move 7.
SM -3 (2' long); 4-5 lbs; DR 4.

Sylvan Starfish

"It was certainly a strange evening to come out and find that every tree looked like it had been hit by an ocean wave. There were what appeared to be starfish on every tree. Very strange. On close inspection, they appeared to be crawling . . ."
-- Vil Kinza, Tree Surgeon, *First Encounters with Sylvan Starfish*

These unusual arboreal parasites resemble otherwise normal starfish that can climb trees, and even crawl around. The sylvan starfish thrives on tree sap, preferably that of deciduous trees, particularly beech wood, although it can survive on conifer sap. It can float in water or creep slowly between trees. These starfish are generally considered to be a blight in orchards.

Encountered

Adventurers will most likely encounter this creature while camping out in the woods. It likes to latch onto warm mammals for a short time to move between trees. If a first encounter with these somewhat friendly herbivores involves one dropping on a head, a Fright Check may be in order. These animals can stick to cloth almost indefinitely.

Industrial Uses

"Our wood plantation could have been in trouble after we lost the teak orchard to the flash fire of naught-six. All we had was our beech. Then, looking out to sea, we hit upon the idea of using the sylvan starfish to carry medicine to all the trees . . ."
-- Thaddius Ropp *Starfish on the Beech*

Sylvan starfish can be used to carry inoculations for plant diseases. In addition, farmers can use them to find the weakest point on a tree trunk to tap sap, such as for maple syrup, and expand on the hole they bore. Uses in enchantment vary from regeneration to clinging to sleep.

Adventure

The PCs are required to infiltrate a local group which uses tattooed sylvan starfish as living badges for their meetings. The starfish are kept in an orchard between meetings under light guard. The day before the meeting, they are gathered and kept under medium guard.

Sylvan Starfish

Appearance: A medium-sized starfish.
Category: Invertebrate (Aquatic).
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 4; DX 8; IQ 1; HT 12.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 1/2.
SM -4 (6-10"); 1-4 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Acute Sense (Vibration) +4; Chameleon 1 (Always on; Only between white and dark brown); Chummy; Clinging; Damage Tolerance (No Vitals); Extra Arms (5 total); Flexibility (Flexible); Infravision; Metabolism Control (Hibernation); Regrowth; Wild Animal.

Giant Sylvan Starfish

ST 10; DX 8; IQ 1; HT 14.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 5.25; Dodge 8; Move 1.
SM -2 (2'); 10-15 lbs; DR 2.

Slipgrass

"As outsiders, we watched the ceremony of ascension from the edge of the clearing. A large black stone block was rolled off the poles, onto the grass. Then the youth grabbed a rope, scaled the block and began to put all his strength to it. The block started, ever so slowly, to accelerate."
-- Lord Everett Bronmyr, *Skating Tribes of Zukon*

This green-blue grass seems to be covered in a near-frictionless secretion, making it hard to chew while it is green. Conversely, the roots are sticky, and can starve worms and insects. This herb grows best on hills, causing animals, and other seeds to keep going past the patches of slipgrass. It is hard to cut, as the grass blades simply bend out of the way.

Encountered

Dells tend to collect branches and other debris, and adventurers who do not pay attention. Some cultures use fields of this grass as a skating rink in off seasons. Adventurers are likely to encounter slip-oil as a "dirty trick" item or mechanical aid.

Industrial Uses

"Loose railing. Oiled stairs above. Stuffed cat. Note close to the victim's handwriting to put life savings in escrow. Hand of solitaire. This leaves me with just one question: is this the work of our man, or a copycat?"
-- Lieutenant Brickers, before his disappearance.

Pre-industrial societies have found that properly tended grass can aid in the moving and coordination of huge stone blocks. Recreational parks and commercial transportation companies can "pave" paths with slipgrass to aid in moving land barges and to portage boats. Some militaries are trying to perfect coating armor with slip oil. In this, they have had some success, as the impaling and cutting damage is changed to crushing, at the cost of double knockback. Industrial plants have had some success employing this herb to aid assembly line flow. Industrial usefulness is limited by the fact that large items resting on the lawn for more than a few days will injure the grass. Therefore, the line must either move quickly or clear itself in the middle of the day. Distilled slipgrass oil can make for a salve that minimizes contact between items. As it cannot abide heat well, it is good for cooler clockwork and steam items. In fact, pretty much any low-use temperature joint can benefit from this treatment. Wizardly uses include enchantments to make a surface repel items, as well as eliminate friction.

Adventure

The heroes are hired to oversee the planting and cultivation of a rink of slipgrass. Opposition can include local neighborhood groups, roving undead cattle, hooligans, gangs of children, and so on. The mastermind is a local entrepreneur who wanted to develop the land himself.

Slipgrass

Appearance: Slightly blue, glossy grass.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.
HT 12.

Giant Slipgrass (1 blade)

ST 8; DX 8; IQ -; HT 13.
Dodge 12.
SM -2 (3' tall); 4 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Damage Tolerance (No impaling; No Cutting; no Vitals);

Eyeshot

"The eyeshot is not the prettiest creature, but it is one of the most used by intelligence agencies of all stripes. Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but it is certainly not on the outside!"
-- Issue of *Minions Today*

An archetypical example of a lab creature gone feral, the eyeshot is a human eyeball on eight thin tentacle-like legs. Each leg ends in a small mouth, which it can use to manipulate objects and drink blood. The tentacle ends in a suction cup with a syringe-like proboscis at its center. They "attack" by jumping on a person's head, and then transmitting a horrifying picture to the victim's mind, stunning him while it taps some blood (FP). Assuming the person is still alive, the creature then will stay latched on and continue taking a small trickle. With practice, a person can use two eyeshots on the sides of his head to gain the benefits of Peripheral Vision, and with four, 360° vision (see Easy to Hit, pages 35 and 74 of the ***Basic Set***).

Encountered

These spider-like creatures are normally encountered as a spy tool, used to look around corners and see in different spectrums. Frequent users often develop different mental disadvantages, and pass along illnesses if the eyeshots are shared. Eyeshots can be used to let someone see while they wait for an eye to regenerate normally. In such cases, the eyeshot should be put on the patch so as not to disturb the patient's sense of parallax. Escaped units will record traumatizing video, and try to feed it to its victims. Reruns can be scary.

"We laughed, and concluded our deal. We failed to notice the small eye watching us from the shadows under the end table. Later, we were all shocked to encounter a strange ninja with an eyeshot on his face."
-- Tib "Hooks" McGraw

Industrial Uses

Researchers continue trying to breed variants reliably that can see in different ranges (e.g. Infrared, Ultraviolet), and these individuals are very expensive. No one yet has developed a breed that can see in one of those ranges *and* normal light. The latter could make for an excellent McGuffin in an intrigue game. These creatures were engineered not to resist spells, psionic contact, or other mind-probing to extract their visual memories. Enchantment opportunities include the preservation of the eyeshot so that it can be used without giving blood.

Adventure

The heroes are contracted to hunt down eyeshots that witnessed a meeting. The employer has tagged or otherwise acquired a lock on the roaming cameras and can supply the adventurers with an item that will let them track down one eyeshot at a time to within about 25 to 50 feet. They also will be issued a wand that lets them check one single time frame in history to confirm that it is one of the dozen they are seeking. The search leads across the city, requiring not only social engineering, but fighting off roving gangs in the dock districts and monsters in the sewers. Surely adventurers can find a bloodhound or an equivalent somewhere.

Eyeshot

Appearance: An eyeball on eight extra flexible legs. Each leg ends in a complicated suction cup so that it can drink blood.
Category: Insect/cephalopod hybrid.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 2; DX 12; IQ 3; HT 12.
Will 7; Per 7; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -9 (2.5" wide) (SM-10 curled up); 1/4 lbs.
Traits: Acute Vision +5; Appearance (Ugly); Affliction (Advantage: 360 degree vision; Accessibility: requires 4 in tandem); Clinging; Domestic Animal; Double-Jointed; Extra Arms (Eight in all; Nuisance Effect: Not when walking); Extra Legs (Eight in all); Extra Mouths (Eight in all) ; Hard of Hearing; Horizontal; Regrowth; Resist Disease +3; Restricted Diet (Blood: Super Jump 2; Walk on Liquid.

Knack: Death Vision (see p. 149 of ***Magic***).
Skills: Jumping-16; Photography-14.
Special: Roll 1d: 1-4 Normal vision; 5: Infrared; 6: Ultravision.
Notes: Death Vision save is at IQ-2.

Giant Eyeshot

ST 5; DX 10; IQ 3; HT 14.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -7 (5" wide) (-8 when curled up); 2 lbs; DR 2.
Notes: As above, but 2× blood absorption. Death Vision save is at IQ-4.

Humungous Eyeshot

ST 8; DX 8; IQ 3; HT 16.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -5 (10" wide) (-6 when curled up); 5 lbs; DR 3.
Notes: As eyeshjot, but 4× blood absorption. Death Vision save is at IQ-6.

Flame Trout

"These fish are both an angler's dream and nightmare. On one hand, they provide a lot of meat, and come pre-spiced. On the other hand, they envelop themselves in flame, likely destroying line, rod, net, and perhaps the boat. Still, the expression on the new guys' faces is priceless."
-- Anglers Today

These game fish ward off predators and leeches by encircling themselves in flames when exposed to air. In fights with other aquatic creatures, the flame trout tries to lead the opponent near the surface, and then jumps out, engulfing itself in flame. The sudden conflagration spooks most opponents. Fortunately, the flame trout is distinguishable by its grey skin with red stripes, and the black speckles on its back.

Encountered

Flame trout can be seen jumping out of the water, sheathing itself in flames, and diving at opponents. As a species of trout, they can be encountered anywhere from fresh water streams to the deep ocean, antagonizing swimmers, sailors, and fishermen almost anywhere.

Industrial Uses

*"So, the dolphin we hit held a grudge. I guess we were too busy trying to keep control of the boat that we forgot to apologize. Thus, the fins rounded together a few flame trouts, and then ran them toward us, and caused the fish to jump into our boats. The sails and rigging went up almost immediately. That's how we lost the **Esperanto.**"*
-- Overheard in the tavern *The Drunken Minnow*

Gourmets claim that the fish has a unique taste as if it possessed its own barbecue sauce. Although the practice is deemed inhumane, a few organizations have found that a simple piston system can elevate the trout out of a trough, and into the air as a heat source in fuel-starved areas. The most cruel part is that the fish need only be returned to the water for a few moments to recover their breath. Enchanters are happy use flame trout to make flame weapons and items of breath holding and jumping.

Adventure

A tall entertainer approaches the heroes with a problem. The clown is missing part of his act -- the flame trout that he juggles have were stolen last night. Prime suspects are a local gang, the Jinx, with which he had an altercation last week. Warned about the troubleshooters' approach, the gang is not helpful, and somewhat antagonistic. Several of the group seem to be sporting recent injuries. With some convincing, they will deny knowledge of the theft, happy to hear of the man's misfortune. The cause for the injuries was a skirmish by a "big" gang of toughs called the "Razors." Now that the heroes mention it, they seemed to head toward the circus, and back. in exchange for the opportunity to get a kick in at those who injured them, the Jinx will guide and accompany the adventurers to the Razor hideout. There, the Razors are very indifferent, perhaps amused or annoyed to find intruders in their lair. After some persuasion, they will admit that it "was just a job" for a local crime boss. They don't know which one, but the transaction was behind a local tavern.

Flame Trout

Appearance: A medium-sized grey-brown fish with red stripes and black speckles.
Category: Fish.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 3-5; DX 11; IQ 2; HT 12; +3 HP.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -3 (2' long); 20-30 lbs; DR 1 (ablative) (+DR5 vs. Flames).
Traits: Aquatic; Burning Attack 1d (Accessibility: Environment: Air; Always On; Aura; Melee Attack); Enhanced Move 1 (Water Move 12); Ichythoid; Peripheral Vision; Pressure Support 1; Temperature Tolerance 1 (Cold); Temperature Tolerance 5 (Heat); Wild Animal.
Skills: Breath Holding-14; Jumping-16.

Giant Flame Trout

ST 6-10; DX 10; IQ 2; HT 14; +4 HP.
Will 10; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -1 (4.5' long); 60-120 lbs; DR 2 (ablative) (+DR 10 vs. Flames).

* * *

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. Tumblers are just wheelform mammals; bloodbats could have kidneys to process the blood; chest ghosts could use lift gas and external balloons to fly; sylvan starfish could simply be oddly-shaped herbivores; slipgrass can be really slippery, but not supernaturally so; eyeshots could just a kind of spider that look like they have an eye as their body; and perhaps flame trout can naturally excrete a flammable gas and ignite it for a tiny flame effect.

* * *

Special Thanks to JL Hatlen Linnel for surviving to the last level.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Pyramid Pick from the Past

Cartagena [2000]

Published by Rio Grande Games

Designed by Leo Colovini

Six isomorphic board segments, 30 pirate pawns (six each in five colors), 103 movement cards, one boat counter, rules; boxed, full color, for two to five players; $27.95

We're drowning in an ocean of pirate-related materials these days, and it can't all be laid at the feet of Johnny Depp, curse his charismatic performances. He certainly wasn't around in 2000 when the board game *Cartagena* came out (okay, he was, but filming *Chocolat* hasn't thing one to do with the high seas), so it's just further proof that the world's love affair with all things swashbuckling is a long-standing arrangement.

The object of *Cartagena* is to be the first player to get all his pirates into the waiting escape boat.

The year is 1672 and the fortress at Cartagena, built to protect the island from the predations of seaborne marauders, now houses a number of them in its dungeon. One night, a group of these desperadoes crawl into the tunnels beneath the structure and make for the shore where a sloop awaits. Designed for two to five players, each person gets a set of six pirates, clustered at one end of the board, and a hand of cards. At the other end, the boat that stands ready to takes the brigands to freedom. In between, though, is a skanky old tunnel filled with bits of scattered junk. These pictures are actually the "spaces," and a pirate moves by playing cards that match the symbols.

There are six possible pictures, various pirate-themed items like rum bottles and a skull and crossbones, and these are staggered along the escape route. If a player plays, for example, a dagger card, he may move one pirate to the first dagger symbol in the passageway. If that space is already occupied by a piece, he can skip it and go to the next dagger emblem further down. Even if the obstructing pawn belongs to the current player he can leapfrog his way over his own crewmates, but that makes it easier still for the next person in line to go the distance as well. If a captain exhausts his hand, he may get new cards by falling back to the closest space with pieces occupying it. He gets a card for each meeple there, and he may fall back with any unit he wants, but too many pawns prevent backtracking to a space -- it may be necessary to lose even more progress to get a refill. By balancing their advancement and the loss thereof, the crews creep down the hall until someone gets all six of his pieces into the dinghy. The first to do so wins.

The board comes in sections and has symbols on both sides so the arrangement is different each time. The segments fit together nicely and allow users to control, to some extent, the size and shape of the board (in case they're playing on a card table or in a Denny's or something). The pieces are good as wooden pieces often are, though there is sometimes some fumbling with them (they're not too small, but it's tight quarters and they may fall over). The cards are small -- not unusual for a European import -- but this time that works as an advantage. There's not much they need to do save direct the movement, so having the petite ones lets all the stuff fit neatly into the undersized square box, and they're easy to cup in the hand and play.

Game play is fast. The rules state it takes about 45 minutes, but even with a full complement it can be completed in half an hour if the participants are having fun (read: "are playing it"). Before play even begins the give and take of the mechanics make themselves plain, and that the gears are already turning is plain from the look on players' faces. Oddly, the struggle isn't to be first, it's to not be last; anyone trailing behind has only his own pirates upon whom to depend for added cards.

Although a seven-year-old artifact in the gaming industry, *Cartagena* is still popular enough that it's readily available

from brick and mortar stores, the publisher, on-line auction houses, and several distribution sources. Better still, the sequel is due out any day, and chronicles what happens after the breakout as the pirates attempt to secure safe haven in their secret base of operations on the island of Tortuga. Like Depp's pirate movies this is a great way to start in on the pirate life, with a sequel waiting in the wings. Even if the follow-up isn't all it's cracked up to be, the original is smooth sailing and doesn't stem the industry's thematic tide.

--Andy Vetromile

Destiny and Fate: Limit One Per Customer

I confess a certain fascination for metagaming concepts, especially as to how they relate to character creation and PC actions. This isn't too unusual; I suspect that many people indulge this aspect of their gamerly selves, even if it seems somewhat at odds with character development or ideals. For example, if they learn that choosing the Flying Leap Advantage means the character gets +1 to all combat rolls, then it's quite possible for the player to take a Flying Leap, even if it's not in the original concept for that PC. In fact, it may even be somewhat justified; if the character concept is a buff combat mage, then the combat boost such a decision enables may be in character even if leaping wizards aren't.

But some games go beyond this minor metagaming to try to mold character actions. In many cases this is on a macro scale. For example, *Exalted* encourages players to come up with interesting ways of attacking or expressing their sword-flashing hacks upon hapless foes, rewarding such clever cleavers with bonuses to their rolls. But other games tweak this to encourage specific actions over others.

The first game I know of that made extensive use of this was *Torg,* which -- through the Approved Action line of the Drama Deck -- rewarded players with more cards if they had their characters perform certain actions. For example, if the Approved Action was "Taunt" for this round, then anyone who attempted and succeeded at some kind of Taunt roll would get another card. One of the most interesting aspects of this system -- indeed, one of the biggest points of it -- is to encourage a different flow to the action beyond the "10 ATTACK; 20 GOTO 10" rut that many games fall into.

As another ponderable I've been mulling over, what if one attempted to structure a game such that the GM attempted to influence players' actions, *without* telling them what those actions are?

The example I considered when devising this possibility was your standard dark-soul-tainted anime-type character; whenever he gives into his baser instincts -- for example, by lashing out in anger -- he might get a bonus of some sort (unknown to the player). However, this seemed too subtle or too overt; if the player knows about the bonus, then he should figure it out pretty quickly, while if he never learns about it, how would he even know? So what if, instead, the player got extra experience points for that character as a result of those actions? (Or, in games with other reward points -- such as Willpower or Hero Points -- perhaps the player gets bonuses of those instead.)

For this method to to work, I'd recommend splitting up experience point rewards to be at the end of a scene instead of at the end of an adventure; that way, it's a bit easier for the player to figure out what might be guiding the extra boost he's receiving. In mulling over this possibility, I've considered that each character might have some kind of destiny or fate, which the character isn't obliged to follow but which will provide a cosmic "boost" if guided down toward.

In fact, a game like *In Nomine* which has both Destiny *and* Fate -- where Destiny is the greatest good the character could achieve while Fate is the grandest evil -- would be incredibly well-suited for such a system, since it would provide two possible action paths which could guide a PC.

Likewise these bonuses should require escalation in deed and understanding as the character progresses, such that doing the same thing multiple times doesn't provide any bonus. For example, if a character is Destined to save the world from the machinations of Lord Valtimore, then maybe he gets extra experience the first time he defeats one of Valtimore's mooks; future encounters with those mooks wouldn't provide an experience bonus (or, in systems with larger numbers of experience points -- such as the *d20 System* -- smaller bonuses for future deeds), but if the player defeats one of Valtimore's more powerful lieutenants, then that should provide another bonus.

This idea is similar to those found in other games -- most notably *World of Darkness'* Natures, Virtues, and Vices -- but differs somewhat owing to the unknown-to-the-player nature of the condition that provides the power-up.

So let's envision a fantasy campaign where we ruthlessly swipe the *In Nomine* idea of Destiny and Fate, and come up with some characters along with sample Destinies and Fates.

Apprentice wizard, with familiar that the player quite enjoys

Destiny: Protector of the Animal Kingdom (bonuses for defending animals, defeating enemies intent on harming enemies, and so on, perhaps with an ultimate Destiny of defeating some great threat to all of nature)
Fate: A reclusive nature seeks to push the wizard along a Fate where the character hides from all contact with the physical world; bonuses would come from cutting off contact with humanity, making plans that separate the wizard from the rest of the world, and so on.

Con Man, rogue trader with a gray morality

Destiny: Unknown to the rogue, he's actually a noble; his Destiny pushes him toward reunification with his lost kingdom. Likewise acting nobly -- commanding others, resolving disputes among those of lesser standing, engaging in battles of wits -- would warrant a boost.
Fate: A streak of mammon running through his soul drives him toward ultimate acts of greed; getting "big scores" provides bonuses, as do acts of betrayal for personal gain.

Warrior, wanderer exploring the earth, looking for his fortune

Destiny: To be the father of a great hero; bonuses would include finding, wooing, protecting, and providing for the Destined mother, as well as raising, protecting, and training the offspring
Fate: To become a ruthless conquerer of a neighboring kingdom; bonuses would stem from treating the denizens of that kingdom with contempt (or worse), plotting to strike against that kingdom or its interests (especially if done with a cruel bent)

Priest, diplomatic adventurer sort

Destiny: In fact, the priest's religious order is irredeemably corrupt; the priest's Destiny is to discover, overthrow, and reforge the order, either by destroying all its corruption or by becoming the head of a new splinter religion
Fate: To become a high-level official within the priest's religious order, ultimately becoming a pawn for some great evil

Part of the appeal of this technique is that, by sorting out Destinies and Fates ahead of time, the GM can make the campaign seem like it has a larger structure from the very first adventure. In addition, it could provide situations where the player performs actions that advance him along *both* his Destiny and Fate at the same time. For example, if our apprentice wizard from above were to forsake saving endangered humans in order to save a family of endangered birds would be both defending animals *and* cutting himself off from humanity . . . double-score!

Of course, there are a few obvious problems with this idea. Primary among these is, what if the players' ideas of what their characters' Destinies and/or Fates are varies wildly with what the GM picks for them? (Answer: I dunno. Before I sprang this on a group of players, I'd probably try to make sure they were okay with experimentation in general, and ideally I'd have them come up with character histories that provided enough hooks that I could hopefully make an educated guess. Then, if I chose something wildly inappropriate *and* unenjoyed for a player, I'd work with him to see if I couldn't tweak or modify their Destinies or Fates to better suit their visions.) Also problematic is the potential imbalance provided by unbalanced experience-point rewards, especially once a player figures out what his Destiny (or Fate) is and acts along its guidance for the bonuses. Such inequities usually aren't a problem in games I run, but they might be problematic for some groups. Finally, I note that these rewards should be provided in such a way that the Destinies or Fates are neither too obscure nor too obvious to determine; in much the same way that Luke Skywalker's own journey took him strangely afield of where he thought he would end up, so too should the Destinies try to be those things that are subtle but obvious, in retrospect.

Even given these problems, I suspect that many players have visions of there being Destinies and Fates for their characters, and providing an in-game mechanism for players (and PCs) to try to determine what the stars have planned for them could well provide a campaign that is memorably different. Of course, whether it will be Destined to be a fondly remembered campaign or Fated to crash and burn remains a mystery hidden in the stars . . .

--Steven Marsh

The Omniscient Eye

How Long Can I Live in an Airtight Box?

If characters are trapped in an airtight chamber (say, two cubic yards per person . . . an airlock, or a van trapped underwater), and breathing normally, how long do they have before the oxygen runs out and/or the carbon dioxide buildup becomes a problem? Which will affect them first, and how?

While the answer to this question relies heavily on underlying assumptions as to what kind of metabolism the characters have, the Omniscient Eye will try to address the question in as broad a fashion as possible.

Ambient air at sea-level and room temperature is a mixture of gases. On Earth, it contains 78.1% nitrogen, 20.9% oxygen (around 270 grams oxygen per cubic meter), 0.9% argon, 0.03% carbon dioxide, and 0.04% other gases.

Partial pressure is a good way to express the oxygen (and carbon dioxide) content of air since it can be used regardless of the total atmospheric pressure. While under 1 atmosphere pressure (101.3 kPa, the air pressure at sea level) 20.9% oxygen equals 21 kPa; under lower pressure the relative amount of oxygen could be the partial pressure is much lower. For example at 50kPa air pressure the relative amount of oxygen could be still 20.9% but the partial pressure (and therefore the amount of available oxygen in the same volume) is just around 10kPa. Most people will lose consciousness in a few minutes at oxygen levels of around 10kPa, equivalent to about 20,000 feet altitude.

All aerobic organisms need oxygen in order to keep their metabolism going. Oxygen is introduced into the circulatory system via the lungs and then transported (bound to heme proteins) into all other organs. Our organs need different amounts of oxygen in order to function. Most oxygen is taken up by the heart muscle followed by other muscles (especially under work), the kidneys, the brain and in a lower amount in all other organs. The oxygen in our body is, among other things, used to break down metabolites (macronutrients like carbohydrates, fat and proteins) in order to produce chemical energy (in the form of ATP) which is necessary in almost every physiological process.

An oxygen partial pressure of 16kPa is generally considered the minimum safe working level of oxygen; below this, hypoxia starts to set in. The exact effects of hypoxia are variable and depend on factors like pre-conditioning, health status, fitness, genetics, activity and active body mass (see the sidebar on animals for representative figures). The numbers given in this discussion are therefore heavily rounded to represent average values for gaming.

Effects Of Hypoxia

21kPa O$_2$: No symptoms

16kPa O$_2$: Faster and deeper breathing due to shortage of oxygen

12-14kPa O$_2$: Respiratory volume and frequency is increased further.
Accelerated pulse. Problems maintaining full concentration on a task at hand. 50% worsening in reaction time.

11kPa O$_2$: Breathing rate increased by 65%, severe symptoms: weakness, light-headedness, confusion, lethargy, slurred speech, degraded color vision.

Isn't That A Radio Station?

For those not familiar with the units used in this article, the Pa (Pascal) is a standard measure of pressure, the equivalent of one newton per square meter (kPa, of course, is kiloPascals). Rather than a cookie in this context, the newton is a unit of force, specifically the amount of force necessary to accelerate 1 kilogram with an acceleration of one meter/second^2. In American units, a Pascal is equivalent to a mere 0.00232 ounces per square inch, and a pressure of 101.3 kPa is about 14.7 pounds per square inch.

10-6kPa O_2: Gasping for air. Feelings of nausea; precise muscle movements become impossible. Characters may lose the ability to speak, hear or see. Permanent brain damage and loss of consciousness are very likely. Probable death if exposed more than a few minutes without pre-conditioning.

Lower than 6kPa: Convulsions, coma and certain death (but see discussion on hibernation below).

Extremely fit people acclimatized to low-oxygen conditions can sometimes cope well beyond the 10kPa threshold. Although the 7kPa level at the peak of Mount Everest was once considered suicidal, Reinhold Messner and several other mountaineers have managed to complete the climb without supplemental oxygen. (But probably not without harm; subsequent research suggests that this is likely to cause subtle long-term brain damage even among those who remain consciousness.)

Extreme cold can cause a hibernation-like condition that drastically reduces oxygen consumption; stowaways in aircraft wheel wells have survived altitudes as high as 39,000 feet (oxygen pressure approximately 5kPa), and there are several documented cases of people surviving as much as an hour with no air at all after falling into freezing water. However, recovery after these conditions is only possible with medical assistance, and far from guaranteed; death or brain damage are likely.

For an example calculation we will use 10kPa oxygen as our threshold. This translates to around 130 grams O_2 per cubic meter; in other words, each cubic meter of fresh air gives us 140 grams (270-130) before we run into trouble. A more general formula is given below.

A 70-kilogram adult consumes roughly 0.3 grams O_2 per minute while sleeping, around 0.6-0.8 grams/minute during light activity, and around 4 grams/minute for short periods during peak exercise, assuming average fitness. A top endurance athlete might be able to use as much as 8 grams/minute.

If we forget about CO_2 toxicity for the moment, for an ordinary person working his hardest to escape and consuming 4 grams/minute, a cubic meter of air will last around 35 minutes (140/4). In practice, fatigue and falling oxygen levels make it unlikely that he'll sustain that level of activity for the full time; 45 minutes to an hour would be a more realistic estimate. Asleep, he might expect a bit over 9 hours; in practice, it's likely to be a bit less, because falling oxygen levels mean he needs to breathe faster, requiring more effort and more oxygen consumption than ordinary sleep. Here's a general formula to calculate oxygen depletion time under other circumstances:

$Po1$ = initial partial pressure of oxygen, in pascals. In normal air at sea level, this will be 21,000Pa (21kPa); otherwise, calculate as total air pressure multiplied by atmospheric % oxygen.

$Po2$ = lowest tolerable pressure of oxygen, in pascals (7-10 kPa for humans, taking unconsciousness as our threshold).

V = total volume of airspace, in cubic meters.

C = oxygen consumption rate (around 0.3 to 8 grams/minute for a single human).

T = absolute temperature, in degrees Kelvin.

R = universal gas constant = 8.31 $Pa \times m^3/(Kelvin \times mol)$.

M = weight of oxygen (32 grams/mol).

Total moles oxygen present (initially)	=	$Po1 \times V/(R \times T)$
Total moles oxygen present (at exhaustion)	=	$Po2 \times V/(R \times T)$
Moles oxygen available for consumption	=	$(Po1-Po2)V/(R \times T)$
Weight oxygen available for consumption	=	$(Po1-Po2)MV/(R \times T)$
Survival time	=	$(Po1-Po2) \times M \times V/(R \times T \times C)$

Another concern is the rising concentration of carbon dioxide. The metabolization of macronutrients also leads to the

production of CO_2. A high concentration of dissolved CO_2 in the blood (hypercapnia) would change the body's pH value which, in time, would significantly reduce or even shut down the activity of enzymes. To prevent this from happening CO_2 is exhaled and thereby eliminated from the body.

The amount of CO_2 produced per O_2 consumed depends on the type of food that is metabolized. This ratio is called the respiratory quotient (RQ). Carbohydrates have a RQ of 1, this means one molecule of CO_2 is produced per molecule of O_2 consumed in order to metabolize these substrates. Proteins have a RQ of 0.8 to 0.9 and the oxidation of most fats produces 0.7 CO_2 molecules per O_2 molecule consumed.

Since nutrition varies greatly and most diets are composed of food mixtures rather than single groups of macronutrients, human RQ is usually in the range 0.8 to 0.9. Note that CO_2 molecules are 37% heavier than oxygen, so the weight of CO_2 exhaled is more than that of oxygen consumed. But partial pressure of a gas depends on its concentration (number of molecules per unit volume), not molecular weight; consuming enough oxygen to reduce partial pressure by 10kPa would only raise partial pressure of CO_2 by 8-9kPa (10kPa × RQ), even though the carbon dioxide weighs more than the oxygen consumed.

CO_2 Toxicity

Smaller than 0.1kPa CO_2: no symptoms.

0.1kPa: Carbon dioxide starts to cause discomfort.

0.2-0.5kPa CO_2: lung ventilation increases, breathing becomes harder. Nausea and headaches are likely.

1kPa CO_2: symptoms similar to alcohol intoxication begin to emerge. Characters get fatigued and have a hard time breathing.

2kPa CO_2: lung ventilation is increased by 50%, headaches and metabolic acidosis (which changes the pH value in all bodily tissues) are common after exposure of a few hours. Symptoms of metabolic acidosis are headaches, lack of energy, sleepiness, fast and shallow breathing, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration and loss of appetite. These symptoms take a few days up to a week to fully go away.

3kPa CO_2: lung ventilation increased by 100%. Characters get dizzy and nauseated. Strong headaches, vision starts to blur. Heavy panting after exertion, characters are likely to pass out.

5-10kPa CO_2: Heavy panting, completely exhausted merely from respiration; close to unconsciousness, severe headaches. Prolonged exposure will result in irreversible damage to health and is likely to result in death.

10-15kPa CO_2: Severe headaches, rapid exhaustion, respiratory paralysis and death within a few minutes.

Higher than 15kPa CO_2: instant coma, convulsions and certain death within less than one minute of exposure.

This set of formulas outlines CO_2 survival time:

Pc1 = initial partial pressure of CO_2 (in pascals; effectively zero for fresh air).
Pc2 = highest tolerable CO_2 pressure (in pascals; as per data above, 5-10kPa is probably a reasonable cutoff).
V = total volume of airspace (m^3).
C = oxygen consumption rate (grams/minute).
T = absolute temperature (Kelvins).
R = 8.31 $Pa×m^3$/(Kelvin×mol).

M = weight of oxygen (32 grams/mol).
RQ = respiratory quotient (0.9 is a reasonable approximation.)

Total moles CO_2 present (initially)	$= Pc1 \times V/(R \times T)$
Total moles CO_2 present (at exhaustion)	$= Pc2 \times V/(R \times T)$
Moles CO_2 generated in this time	$= (Pc2-Pc1) \times V/(R \times T)$
Moles O_2 consumed in this time	$= (Pc2-Pc1) \times V/R \times T \times RQ)$
Weight O_2 consumed in this time	$= (Pc2-Pc1) \times V \times M/(R \times T \times RQ)$
Survival time	$= (Pc2-Pc1) \times V \times M/(R \times T \times RQ \times C)$

Assuming Pc2 as 5kPa, C as 4 grams/minute, and leaving other variables at default values, CO_2 survival time for a $1m^3$ airspace works out at around twenty minutes. In an airtight room, the rate at which CO_2 pressure rises is equal to RQ multiplied by the rate at which O_2 pressure falls; in the time that O_2 pressure falls from 21kPa to 10kPa (unconsciousness), a drop of 11kPa, the CO_2 pressure has risen to 9-10kPa (11kPa multiplied by RQ), quickly fatal. From those numbers, we can guess that CO_2 toxicity is slightly more important than O_2 depletion.

Unfortunately, the effects of O_2 depletion and CO_2 production are synergistic. As CO_2 builds up, the blood becomes more acidic. The body responds by breathing faster, trying to remove CO_2 dissolved in the blood. But faster breathing means more muscular effort, causing a vicious cycle where oxygen depletion and CO_2 build-up accelerate as the oxygen supply is slowly diminished. For characters who are already working hard to escape, this doesn't make too much difference; for people keeping as still as possible and waiting for rescue, it might be reasonable to reduce calculated CO_2 survival time by a fudge factor of 25%.

Furthermore, acidosis reduces haemoglobin's affinity for oxygen, exacerbating the effects of a poor oxygen supply. This is most important when CO_2 and O_2 survival times are similar; in that situation, raise the lowest tolerable oxygen pressure (Po2) by 2kPa or so and recalculate. (The Omniscient Eye's attempts to obtain more accurate data have been thwarted by a shortage of volunteers.)

Various factors will affect this process. Carbon dioxide dissolves in water, far more easily than oxygen; for characters trapped in an air pocket underwater, the effects of CO_2 buildup can probably be ignored, leaving only oxygen depletion to worry about. CO_2 scrubbing technology can achieve the same end.

So what happens if you're not at sea level? Compressing air raises gas pressures accordingly; if you take a $1m^3$ diving bell 10 meters underwater (ambient pressure = 2 atmospheres), the airspace will compress to $0.5m^3$ and the oxygen pressure will increase to 42kPa. If you run this through the formula above, you'll find that this actually increases O_2 time by around 50%; there isn't any more oxygen than there was before, but compressing it means we can use more of it before reaching a dangerously low concentration. On the other hand, rate of CO_2 production is unaffected, and since the airspace is halved, CO_2 pressures will rise twice as fast. If it weren't for the water, our CO_2 survival time would be halved. In general, at pressures greater than 1 atmosphere, your main problem will be CO_2 unless you have plenty of water or some form of "scrubbing" technology. At pressures lower than one atmosphere--perhaps your spacecraft got holed, and you lost most of your air--the situation is reversed. CO_2 builds up at the same rate as before, but starting levels of oxygen are lower, so oxygen depletion becomes more of a problem.

All else being equal, larger creatures have slower metabolisms. While they consume more oxygen (and generate more CO_2) than their smaller counterparts, it's less in proportion to their body mass; 50kg of Chihuahuas will consume air faster than a 50kg Rottweiler. Oxygen consumption mostly goes to "burning" food, so you can estimate a creature's

oxygen requirements by looking at how much it eats and comparing that to a human living on similar food. Reptiles use much less oxygen than mammals of comparable size, and birds use more.

Creatures with faster metabolisms also tend to be less tolerant of poor air quality (higher Po2 and lower Pc2); this is the basis for the old "canary in the coal mine" trick. Animals that live at high altitudes or hold their breath for extended periods (whales, penguins etc) often have lower consumption rates than would be expected for their size; hibernation drastically reduces oxygen demand along with the need for food.

Burning wood consumes roughly its own weight in oxygen, with an effective RQ close to 1.0; paraffin or gasoline consumes roughly 3.5 grams of oxygen for each gram of fuel consumed (effective RQ 0.67). A midsized candle, burning 5 grams paraffin per hour, uses almost as much oxygen as a sleeping adult; a flaming torch will use up far more, but in a confined space the smoke may well be a bigger problem. As oxygen levels drop, you'll have more trouble keeping those flames alight. And if you do, you may end up producing carbon monoxide, which only adds to your troubles.

For your convenience, then, we present a reference table telling you how long you've got to live if you're trapped in a confined space (assuming maximum activity, with death due to CO_2 toxicity):

Description	Volume [m^3]	Survival Time
trunk of an average car	0.6	12min
garbage skip	1.0	20min
interior of an average car	4	1.4h
small room in a flat	10	3.4h
Interior of a cargo truck	20	6.8h
40' shipping container	70	23h
Large swimming pool	100	34h

Under light activity multiply these values by 5 and if the characters are sleeping they will last approximately 8 times longer. For every character beyond one divide the survival time by the number of characters. All this assumes that the space is completely airtight; even very small openings will change things considerably.

--*Geoffrey Brent & Markus Muellner*

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!

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Supers*

by William H. Stoddard

GURPS Supers is designed to work with *GURPS Powers* the way *GURPS Fantasy* works with *GURPS Magic.* One book defines a range of capabilities that characters can acquire; the other analyzes a genre where those capabilities are useful, and suggests ways to run campaigns in that genre. *GURPS Fantasy* focused on historical high fantasy and quest stories; *GURPS Supers* focuses on four-color adventures and battles with supervillains.

But making this focus work was a bit of a challenge. Even with all the new options in *GURPS Powers,* its basically realistic approach to exotic and supernatural abilities wasn't an easy fit to the sheer scale of high-end supers—not without spending tens or hundreds of thousands of points in creating them! In fact, the playtesters' reaction to the first draft focused mainly on its not being "super" enough—for example, on its super-strong characters not being able to fight tanks, let alone battleships. After long debate, and many queries to *GURPS* line editor Sean Punch, we came up with a set of additional rules that brought higher power levels within reach. Many of these rules take off from the Super-Effort option for Lifting ST in *GURPS Powers,* offering the same option for Binding, Compartmentalized Mind, Duplication, Striking ST, Telekinesis, and various other abilities. Another set, inspired by the Quick Gadgeteering rules, defines ways for characters to achieve one-time super-feats in emergencies. These and other new rules produce a version of *GURPS* where things work the way they do in superhero comics.

As a test of concept, I decided to build a template that *could* go up against tanks: The Archetype, inspired by Superman, Captain Marvel, and the many heroes modeled on them. The design came out to 2,000 points, so I took that as the high end of the power spectrum for templates, and built lesser templates on 1,000, 500, or 250 points, to cover a range of power levels. Since I had to verify how such a character's abilities would play out against a tank, I included the analysis in Chapter 7, and I turned it into a new opening vignette for that chapter, a fight between Stalina, the Woman of Steel, and a German tank force during World War II.

So, as an example of character creation in *GURPS Supers,* here's a full character writeup for Stalina!

ST 33/320 [100];† **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 20 [100].

Damage 3d+2/6d (33d/35d with Super-Effort); BL 218 lbs. (10 tons with Super-Effort); HP 33 [0]; Will 20 [30]; Per14 [0]; FP 40 [60].

Basic Speed 10.00 [0];‡ Basic Move 20 [0];** Dodge 14.††

6'2"; 180 lbs. (SM 0).

Social Background

TL:6.

CF:Russian/Soviet [0].

Languages:French (Accented) [4]; German (Broken) [2]; Russian (Native) [0].

Advantages

Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Charisma 1 [5]; Damage Reduction (100) (Super, -10%) [270]; Damage Resistance 100 (Super, -10%) [450]; Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Storage ¥25, -50%; Super, -10%) [8]; Flight (Cannot Hover, -15%; Super, -10%) [30]; Legal Immunity [5]; Longevity [2]; Nictitating Membrane 15 (Super, -10%) [14]; Regeneration (Slow; Super, -10%) [9]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8; Super, -10%) [14]; Sealed (Super, -10%) [14]; ST+13/+300 (Super, -10%; Super-Effort, +300%) [507]; Status 2 [10]; Temperature Tolerance 16 [16]; Very Fit [15].

Perk: No Visible Damage [1]; Penetrating Voice [1]; Striking Surface [1].

Powers

Speed (Super, -10%); Speed Talent 1 [5].

- *Hyper-Reflexes:* Basic Speed+1.5 (Speed Power, -10%) [27] + Enhanced Time Sense (Speed Power, -10%) [41].
- *Super-Flying:* Enhanced Move 4 (Air Speed 320; Speed Power, -10%) [72].
- *Super-Speed:* Basic Move +10 (Speed Power, -10%) [45].

Disadvantages

Clueless [-10]; Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]; Duty (Red Army) (15) [-15]; Hard of Hearing [-10]; Sense of Duty (The Russian people) [-10]; Truthfulness (12) [-5]; Workaholic [-5].

Quirks: Genuinely likes and trust Joseph Stalin; Humble; Loves march music; Quotes Communist Party catch phrases. [-4]

Skills

Aerobatics-15 [8]; Area Knowledge (European Russia)-15 [2]; Brawling-16 [4]; Current Affairs (Headline News)-14 [1]; Engineer (Combat)-12 [1]; Flight-21 [4]; Forced Entry-16 [4]; Games (Chess)-12 [1]; Housekeeping-12 [1]; Leadership-14 [1];‡‡ Mathematics (Applied)-12 [1]; Military Science-13 [2]; Observation-15 [4]; Philosophy (Marxist-Leninist)-14 [4]; Running-21 [4]; Singing-20 [1]; Soldier-11 [1].

Techniques: Human Missile (Aerobatics)-15 [4].

† Includes +13/+300 points of super-strength bought as an advantage. ‡ Includes +1.50 Basic Speed from Speed Power. ** Includes +10 Basic Move from Speed Power. †† Includes +1 from Enhanced Time Sense. ‡‡ Includes +1 from Charisma.

When the Tunguska explosion took place in 1908, the young naturalist Semyon Alexeievitch Vlasov was close enough, and dedicated enough to the progress of science, to travel to its center—where he found a sphere of a mysterious alloy holding a female infant, apparently human. He raised her as his adopted daughter, Alissa Semyonova Vlasova, keeping her origins secret. Unfortunately, after the Revolution, no secrets were safe. Alissa matured slowly, and was still seemingly a young child, though already inhumanly strong, when Joseph Stalin learned of her, and saw her as a potential weapon. The child grew up on an isolated base in the far north, raised by scientific researchers and military trainers. She had no normal human contacts after her father's "accidental" death in 1922, other than Stalin himself, who deliberately played a paternal role in his visits to her. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, he asked her to fight for her country and the Revolution, and she agreed, naming herself after him. Her existence was kept secret as long as possible, but in 1943, as the war turns against the invaders, Stalin has decided to send her into action openly as a propaganda move. The Russian government was unaware that German intelligence has already learned of her existence, and German technology has designed weapons intended to counteract her powers.

Stalina's battle with a German tank force in **GURPS Supers** takes place at this point in her life.

* * *

Once I was satisfied with the new version of the Archetype template, I rebuilt the other templates on 250, 500, or 1,000 points, keeping the Archetype at the top of the spectrum at 2,000 points, and adding a new template, the Weatherworker. But to make room, I decided to cut one version of the Mesmerist template, as being a bit too far from classic comics heroes: the hero whose theme was social influence. I also cut the powers that supported that template. For GMs who want to explore characters along the lines of the Envoy in the *Wild Cards* universe, here are versions of both.

Influence

Sources: Biological, Divine, Magical, Moral, Mutant, Psionic, Savant, Spirit, Super, or Weird Science.

Focus: Social interaction with your own species.

This power enables you to get other people to do what you want. It may be based on subtle modulations of your voice, on pheromones, or even on the sheer animal magnetism of your presence. In any case, it requires face-to-face contact to establish the initial relationship; you can't reach out over a distance and snare people you've never met - though you may be able to reach people who are already bonded to you. Abilities of this power that directly affect other people should be Sense-Based.

Charisma   *5 points/level*

Influence Abilities

Allies (recruited as groups from passersby), with Environmental, Minion, and Summonable; Cultural Adaptability; Empathy or Sensitive; Elastic Skin, with Glamour; Fashion Sense; Gizmos (borrowed from passersby), with Environmental; Illusion, with Mental; Indomitable; Invisibility, in the Deception variant; Legal Immunity; Mind Probe, usually with Onset; Mind Reading, usually with Onset; Modular Abilities, Social only; Security Clearance; Social Chameleon; and Terror.

Physical attacks are always inappropriate. You "attack" people with Afflictions that cause incapacitation, irritation, mental disadvantages, or DX, IQ, Per, or Will penalties, or with Rapier Wit. Afflictions must be Based on Will. Some versions of this power, especially those based on animal magnetism or other mysterious forces, allow Leech, usually against FP or IQ.

Mesmerist   *500 points*

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 16 [100]; **HT** 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 16 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: A total of 10 points from Acute Detection [2/level], Animal Empathy [5], Fit [5], Reawakened [10], Sensitive [5], Single-Minded [5], Special Rapport [5], or Voice [10].

Powers: Influence (Influence Power, -10%); Charisma 3 [15].

- *Identity Theft:* Elastic Skin (Glamour, -25%; Influence Power, -10%) [13] + Mimicry (Glamour, -25%; Influence Power, -10%) [7]
- *Persuasive Inquiry:* Mind Reading (Exposure Time, 1 minute, -30%; Hearing-Based, -10%; Hearing-Based (Reversed), -10%; Influence Power, -10%) [12] + Mind Probe (Exposure Time, 1 minute, -30%; Hearing-Based, -10%; Hearing-Based (Reversed), -10%; Influence Power, -10%) [8].
- *Power of Suggestion:* Mind Control (Extended Duration, x30, +60%; Hearing-Based, -10%; Independent, +70%; Influence Power, -10%) [105].
- *Recruitment:* Allies (21-50, 25% point total, 15 or less; Environmental, in crowds or populated areas, -20%; Influence Power, -10%; Minions, +50%; Onset, 1 hour, -20%; Summonable, +100%) [60].
- *Social Blending:* Cultural Adaptability (Influence Power, -10%) [9] + Honest Face [1] + Social Chameleon [5].
- *Venomous Tongue:* Rapier Wit [5].

Two of the following abilities:

- *Emotional Induction:* Mind Control (Area Effect, 4 yards, +100%; Emotion Control, -50%; Influence Power, -10%; Vision-Based, -20%) [60].
- *Entrancement:* Affliction 4 (Based on Will, +20%; Contact Agent, -30%; Incapacitation: Ecstacy, +100%; Influence Power, -10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%) [60].
- *Frightfulness:* Terror -9 (Accessibility, -10%; Influence Power, -10%; Nuisance Effect, Obvious as cause of panic, -5%) [60].
- *Inconspicuousness:* Invisibility to Electromagnetic Vision (Can Carry Objects, Heavy encumbrance, +10%; Glamour, -25%; Influence Power, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [60].
- *Reprogramming:* Mind Control (Conditioning Only, -50%; Exposure Time, 1 day, -50%; Extended Duration, Permanent, +150%; Hearing-Based, -20%; Influence Power, -10%) [60].

Disadvantages: A total of -30 points from Charitable [-15*], Chummy [-5] or Gregarious [-10], Loner [-5*], Pacifism [Varies], Supersensitive [-15], or Xenophilia [-10*].

Wildcard Skills: Fake! or Psychology! (VH) IQ [24]-16.

Ordinary Skills: Any three of Autohypnosis (H) Will-1 [2]-15, Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-12, Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-15, Expert Skill (Psionics) (H) IQ-1 [2]-15, Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-10, Observation (A) Per [2]-15, Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2]-17, Sex Appeal (A) HT [2]-11, Shadowing (A) IQ [2]-16, and Urban Survival (A) Per [2]-16.

*Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

In this design, the limitation "Hearing-Based" applies to powers for which the mesmerist has to talk with the subject. The limitation "Hearing-Based (Reversed)" applies to powers where the subject has to answer by speaking, rather than having his mind read. "Exposure Time" involves situations where the mesmerist has to interact with the subject for a minute, an hour, or a day before the power takes effect: for Persuasive Inquiry, the mesmerist has to chat with the subject for a couple of minutes to start getting answers to his questions, while Reprogramming takes a full eight-hour day of intense interaction.

* * *

Another topic that got cut in final edit was an idea that Brian Rogers suggested during the playtest: the concept of flux levels.

There's a long-established distinction in **GURPS** between traits of characters, which cost points and travel about with the character from setting to setting, though their application may change in different worlds (for example, Magery 0 costs 5 points where the setting has Very High Mana, Normal Mana, or No Mana), and traits of worlds (such as mana level or gravitational field), which are external to the character and don't cost points. In one case, a rule may apply to one character, but not to a different character in the same world; in the other, it may apply to all characters in one world, but not to the same characters in a different world. But there seems to be a third basis for deciding whether to apply a rule: play style. If a campaign is in cinematic style, or four-color style, the GM will apply different rules, such as making wildcard skills available or allowing characters to turn injuries into flesh wounds; but those rules will pervade the entire campaign - characters who enter a different world won't suddenly find their wildcard skills not working. So **GURPS Supers** treats style as a third factor, distinct from both characters and setting.

Brian suggested that some GMs might want to run campaigns where different styles applied in different parts of the campaign world. He suggested defining a quality called flux, which altered the superheroic nature of a setting in the same way that mana alters the fantastic nature of a setting. In a no-flux area, for example, wildcard skills wouldn't work; no one would have superpowers; and none of the cinematic options for combat, gadgeteering, or other activities would be available. In a normal-flux area, things would work the way they do in four-color comics. In a very-high-flux area, everyone would have at least minor superpowers, and would have nearly unlimited fatigue points to power high-end uses of those powers. In comics terms, this would define a spectrum from the noir near-realism of *Sin City* to the wide-open humor of *Normalman.* A GM could say that his entire campaign had low, normal, or high flux, but he could also have different flux levels in different places.

In some campaigns, the players would be aware of the different flux levels, but the characters wouldn't. When the heroic Archetype visited the grim streets of the Nightstalker's city, he could lift a compact car, but not a skyscraper, and wouldn't try; and if he hit normal people with his full strength, they would end up in the hospital or the morgue. When the Nightstalker went to the Archetype's brightly lit city, he could be smashed through a wall and come back to trade punches, and he wouldn't say, "Wow, if I were back home, that would have turned me into a thin smear on the bricks." Changing the setting or the choice of focal hero would change the style to match.

In other campaigns, traveling to a different dimension, or even a different city on Earth, would change the flux level, and the adventurers, or even ordinary people, would be aware of the difference. (The concept of "axiom levels" in the game *TORG* worked along roughly similar lines, though with four variables rather than one.) Ordinary people might travel to superheroic cities, gain superpowers, have adventures, and then have to decide whether to go back to their normal lives. Superheroes and supervillains might agree to meet in no-flux sites where they couldn't use their powers against each other, letting them negotiate peacefully. Corporations might seek out promising young researchers to attend schools in normal-flux areas where they could learn wildcard skills, and then move them into laboratories where they could do gadgeteering or even quick gadgeteering. A campaign run with these rules would have a somewhat postmodern feel, with characters being consciously aware of the narrative conventions of the worlds they inhabited.

Handling this sort of mixture demands a lot of judgment calls; it's much trickier than running a campaign with one style, whether realistic, cinematic, or four-color. And the concept of "flux" doesn't have as many literary or folkloric precedents as the concept of "mana." For both reasons, we decided not to make flux levels part of the standard rules of *GURPS.* But it s an ingenious idea, for which Brian Rogers deserves recognition, and I offer it here to any GM who feels experimental.

Zagadka

by Stephen Dedman

Zagadka is a world similar to Homeline in many ways, but with slightly different natural laws -- or at least, loopholes in the laws that were first discovered and exploited in the early 20th century. It is named after one of the aliases of the individual who made the greatest difference to the world: Glakuna Innokentyovich Kandelaki, also known as Zagadka (Enigma), also known as Stalin (Man of Steel).

World Name and Current Year: Zagadka, 1999

On June 30, 1908, a massive explosion flattened trees in Tunguska, Siberia. The airburst was generally thought to be the result of an asteroid breaking up approximately six kilometers above the ground, though no debris was ever recovered from the center of the blast zone. Pieces did, however, fall at various places in the Soviet Union: one started a fire in a Siberian prison camp, killing several inmates, and a coffin-sized lump of an unknown metal was discovered the next day in Gori, Georgia. When the local kulak, Innokentiy Ivanovich Kandelaki, investigated, he found a baby boy inside, wrapped in a red blanket. When no-one in Gori claimed the infant, Kandelaki's childless wife adopted him, naming him Glakuna after her father.

By 1913, young Kandelaki's feats of strength and endurance had earned him the nickname Stalin (Man of Steel) and the OGPU codename Zagadka (Enigma). In 1921, he and his father were involved in a riot in Tblisi, at which a high-ranking commissar who had come to address the crowd, Josef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, was killed.

After an investigation cleared him, Kandelaki was sent to Dinamo to train in athletics and boxing and to be studied by scientists. In 1936, he became a Soviet hero and earned the undying hatred of Adolf Hitler when he triumphed at the Berlin Olympics. After this, he rose through the ranks of the Red Army, but the extent of his powers did not become widely known until Axis forces invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 and Captain Kandelaki was seen single-handedly destroying German panzer batallions. He then led a successful Soviet invasion of Germany. By November, Italy and Japan had also surrendered to the USSR.

Kandelaki was made mayor of Berlin after the Soviet invasion, but by this time he had inspired other countries to begin their own programs to create super-soldiers and other weapons. In 1954, after a mysterious explosion in the Pacific, a 150-foot-tall dinosaur-like creature who exhaled radioactive plasma emerged from the Pacific Ocean and attacked Japanese fishing boats. When it headed for the Kuril Islands, Colonel Kandelaki attacked it, but proved vulnerable to the creature's chemical-loaded breath, and was swallowed alive. The creature soon died, supposedly from internal injuries; Japanese scientists are rumored to have recovered Kandelaki's body from its corpse, but it was never returned to the Soviet Union.

Without Kandelaki to rely on, Soviet control of Western Europe diminished gradually between 1954 and 1991, and the political map of Zagadka in 1999 is almost identical to that of Homeline at the same time (except for the non-existence of Israel). The main difference between the two is the prevalence of metahuman, tech-assisted, or otherwise superpowered individuals on Zagadka -- possibly as many as one in 100,000 people, or more than 60 million on the planet! While none of these are as powerful as the legendary Stalin or his nemesis Daikaiju, the existence of Zagadka is of great interest and some concern to Infinity.

Another puzzle is that many things known to have happened on Zagadka since 1941 defy the laws of physics (as they are understood on both Homeline and Zagadka). Whether Zagadkan metahumans will retain the same powers if they are taken to other parallels, no-one in Infinity Tower will say. There is no evidence that anyone from Centrum or Reich-5 has discovered Zagadka -- yet.

While most individuals with unusual abilities are law-abiding, others have gone rogue. Many from the former Soviet Union, in particular, have become mercenaries or criminals. Some metahumans have also become prominent in politics, particularly in former Soviet republics, and the governor of California is rumored to have been created by a

special breeding project. Even in Zagadka, however, most power still comes from inheritance, nepotism, a large bank balance, or the barrel of a gun.

In some other countriess, metahumans are either conscripted or suppressed; many who cannot flee, or disguise themselves effectively, do their best to keep their abilities a secret. In many cities on Zagadka, however, freelance metahumans are feted as celebrities, and they are particularly visible in New York (where many act as bodyguards for UN delegates), Stalingrad (formerly Minsk, renamed in 1954), Tokyo, Los Angeles, and Mumbai.

Some Zagadkan scientists believe that the 1908 and 1954 explosions were actually banestorms, or triggered banestorms, and that Stalin and Daikaiju are themselves outtimers. These have formed an international group known as the Ring of Saturn (after the Roman God of Time), who investigate anything suggestive of an intrusion from other worlds. Infinity operatives visiting Zagadka have had frequent run-ins with the Ring, and have had to go to great lengths to preserve the Secret. The Ring includes a number of metahumans and others with special abilities: this group is informally known as the Cassini Division.

Zagadka can be used as a setting for a Supers campaign: if so, GMs may decide that physics and biology there are more suited to four-color comics or a cinematic version of reality than to the world we know. Knockback may be increased, NPCs may be hard to kill but more likely to fail HT rolls to stay conscious, etc.

Current Affairs: With the collapse of communism, the United States is the world's only remaining military and economic superpower, though China, Russia, India, Britain, and several former Soviet Republics have nuclear weapons. While there are currently no wars between nations, metahuman forces and experimental ultra-tech weapons are in use in conflicts in Peru, the Balkans, Chechnya, several African countries, and parts of India.

Divergence Point: June 30, 1908. First known appearance of Kandelaki/Stalin.

Major Civilizations: Western (multipolar), Chinese (empire), Orthodox (empire with rivals), Indic (empire).

Great Powers: United States (representative democracy, CR3), People's Republic of China (dictatorship, CR5), United Kingdom (representative democracy with constitutional monarchy, CR 3), India (representative democracy, CR 4),

Russian Republic (Oligarchy, CR 4), Switzerland (representative democracy, CR 4).

TL: Zagadkan technology is TL8 with some ultra-tech anachronisms.

Mana Level: Low

Quantum: 7

Infinity Class: R

Centrum Zone: Orange

Eric Carter, codename Major Dare   *700 points*

Eric Carter is a USMC super-soldier, the result of 1950s experiment in eugenics, biochemistry and controlled mutation, enhanced by life-long training and some surgical procedures. Carter is the first real long-term success of Project Lifeforce, and the prototype for and leader of a platoon of elite special forces, the new Marine Raiders. To reduce the chances of any of the Raiders going rogue, however, the surgeons built in a fail-safe: implants that will release a biotoxin into their brains if they miss a quarterly medical check. Carter is not aware of this, though he has been told that his experimental implants require regular maintenance.

Carter was told that his father, a USMC sniper, died in the Korean War, and his mother in childbirth: his foster parents were an army doctor and a child psychologist. He spent much of his youth in military academies, enlisted in the

Marines at 17, served in Vietnam until after the evacuation of Saigon, then commenced Special Forces training. After serving as a scout sniper in Operation Urgent Fury, he was sent to college to study languages and military history, then to OCS. In 1990, he was assigned to the 3rd FAST (Fleet Antiterrorist Security Team) Company as CO of a rapid response team specializing in hostage rescue, and combat against metahuman and ultra-tech threats.

Major Dare has been trained since birth to serve in his nation's military, and is ready to give his life to protect his country. However, he is neither suicidal nor a warmonger; he believes that a soldier's job is to keep bloodshed to a minimum, and that the best way to avoid dying in vain is to avoid dying. The troops under Major Dare's command have similar attributes and abilities, except for lower levels of Military rank and leadership skill. As most large nations on Zagadka have their own super-soldier programs, the PCs may encounter similarly powerful individuals almost anywhere.

Ht 6'3", Wt 210 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 44.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, chestnut hair, gray eyes; a broad-shouldered athletic-looking man with a crewcut and a slightly crooked nose.

Languages: English (native) [0], Vietnamese (accented) [4], Spanish (accented) [4], Russian (accented) [4]. TL: 8. Cultural Familiarity: Western. [12 points]

Attributes: ST 18 [80]; DX 16 [120]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 20 [100]. [340 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d+2/3d; BL 65; HP 20 [10]; Will 14 [10]; Per 16 [20]; FP 16 [20]; Basic Speed 10 [20]; Basic Move 10 [0]. [100 points]

Advantages and Perks: Ambidexterity [5], Blood Type AB+ (universal recipient) [1], Combat Reflexes [15], Deep Sleeper [1], Fearlessness/3 [6], Filter Lungs [5], Very Fit [15], High Pain Threshold [10], Infravision [10], Less Sleep 4 [6], Penetrating Voice [1], Peripheral Vision [15], Rank (Military) 6 [30], Rapid Healing [5], Radiation Tolerance [5], Reduced Consumption 3 (Cast-Iron Stomach) [3], Temperature Tolerance 2 [2]. [135 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Chauvinistic [-1], Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10], Dependency (Rare, Seasonally) [-10], Duty (15) [-15], Fanaticism, Extreme (Patriot) [-15], Sense of Duty (Patriot) [-10], Sterile [0]. [-61 points]

Wildcard Skills: Gun! (VH) DX [60]-18; Drive! DX [24]-16. [84 points]

Skills and Techniques: Administration (A) IQ [2]-12; Armoury/TL7 (Small Arms) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Boating/TL8 (Large Powerboat) (A) DX [4]-16; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-17; Breath Control (H) HT-2 [1]-18; Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-12; Climbing (A) DX [4]-16; Crewman/TL8 (Submariner) (E) IQ [1]-12; Current Affairs/TL8 (Politics) (E) IQ [1]-12; Detect Lies (H) (A) Per-2 [1]-18; Disarming (Judo) (H) Judo+1 [2]-17; Elbow Strike (A) Brawling-1 [1]-15; Explosives/TL8 (EOD) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-12; Garrote (E) DX [1]-16; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-19; History (20th Century Military)(H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-12; Judo (H) DX+1 [8]-17; Leadership (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Lifting (A) HT [2]-20; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-15; Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX+1 [4]-17, (Knife) (E) DX [1]-16, (Spear) (A) DX-1 [1]-15; Piloting/TL8 (Helicopter) (A) DX [2]-16; Riding (Equine) (A) DX-1 [1]-15; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ [1]-12; Scaling (H) Climbing-2 [2]-14; Scuba/TL8 (A) IQ [2]-12; Soldier (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Stealth (A) DX [2]-16; Survival (Desert) (A) Per [2]-16; Swimming (E) HT [1]-20; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-13; Throwing (A) DX [2]-16. [90 points]

Special Gear: TL9 Auto Pistol, 9mm, with select switch for full autofire (RoF 15), and 25mm Grenade Launcher.

Raider Knife (Fine Large Knife with Brass knuckle hilt; memory metal folding blade extends to Good quality shortsword with saw back. Sheathed, usable as baton, or extends for use as Light Club; may also be fitted to rifle as bayonet. Sheath contains mini-flashlight, lighter, compass, and mirrors (for signaling or use as periscope); sheath and knife together usable as wire-cutter. Knife 2 lbs, Sheath 1 lb.

1d+1 assorted 25mm grenades.

TL9 Ballistic Suit, assault boots, ballistic gloves, TL9 Ballistic Helmet with Visor (DR 18/15).

Standard gear: 2 clips and silencer for pistol; small folding knife; EOD multi-tool; web gear; satellite phone with GPS; personal basics. Off-duty, wears jacket (modified for concealed carry: gives Holdout +2), tactical pants, and reinforced boots.

Hugh Tran (Tran Qui Huy), codename Janus, aka Remplacant   *300 points*

Tran Qui Huy came from his native Vietnam to Australia as a baby in 1976, and had never intended or expected to become a cop. His ambition was to be an actor, but despite his excellent memory and a talent for mimicry, including an ability to pick up new skills as though by osmosis, his Eurasian appearance limited the roles offered to him. Despite this, he eked out a living, mostly as a voice actor, until his girlfriend became pregnant and he decided to get a real job. Hearing that the police were looking for immigrants fluent in foreign languages, he joined up.

Tran had knowingly encountered a few metahumans, and become accustomed to a vague tingling sensation when near them. He felt the same sensation one day when walking through a parking lot outside a mall, and noticed a man removing items from a parked car. The man ran as he approached; Tran caught him, and the man's fingerprints and DNA were found to match those of the "locked door rapist," a metahuman able to phase through transparent solids while naked.

Acting on a hunch, Tran privately approached a specialist in metahuman genetics, saying that he thought he might have an instinct for identifying non-obvious metahumans. The geneticist discovered that Tran could, indeed, pick metahumans out of a crowd reliably enough to be of interest to the Ring of Saturn's scientists.

Tran continued to work as a cop in Sydney, often going undercover to investigate drug dealers, people smugglers, and the sex industry. His life took a drastic turn when a drug lab exploded and he received third-degree burns over much of his body. The Ring came to his rescue by replacing his melted skin with an experimental synthetic intended for androids. For a while, it seemed that his body was rejecting the transplants, but the doctors discovered that the color changes were not a sign of infection, but a response to Tran's body temperature and emotional state.

After extensive experimentation and training, Tran learned to control his metabolism well enough that he could disguise his features and even camouflage himself. The scientists discovered that his chameleon-like talents went even further: though he had been unconscious of this, Tran also had a near-telepathic ability to mimic the skills of people he observed, as well as their voices and appearances. He was given the code-name Janus, which he dislikes: on the occasions when he works with other metahuman teams, he calls himself Remplacant (French for 'stand-in'). His metahuman friends call him Remy.

Officially, Tran works for the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (INICRI) as an interpreter. In reality, most of his time is spent undercover, investigating organizations suspected of illegally using (or creating) metahumans.

Tran's abilities will not enable him to detect ultra-tech devices such as parachronic conveyors, but he has tracked down world-jumpers and snatchers, and infiltrated the lower levels of a crosstime Triad. Heroes from Infinity may find him a useful, if wary, ally against common foes.

Ht 5'9", Wt 130 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 23.

Appearance: When not in disguise, a handsome, lightly built man with a fair complexion, black hair in a Clooney cut, almond-shaped hazel eyes, and an honest face.

Languages: Vietnamese (native) [0], English (native) [4], French (accented) [2], Cantonese (accented) [2], Khmer (Accented) [2], Arabic (Accented) [2]. TL: 8. Cultural Familiarity: Western. [14 points]

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 12 [20]. [130 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 14 [5]; Per 15 [10]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]. [15 points]

Advantages and Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1], Ambidexterity [5], Chameleon 2 [10], Detect Metahumans (Occasional) [10], Eidetic Memory [5], Elastic Skin [20], Empathy (Sensitive) [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Language Talent [10], Legal Enforcement Powers [10], Metabolism Control 1 [5], Night Vision 3 [3], Penetrating Voice [1], Smooth Operator 1 [15], Voice [10], Wild Talent 2 (Special Enhancement: Retention, +25%. Limitation: Activation Number 8, -15%) [17]. [137 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1], Code of Honor (Professional) [-10], Curious [-2], Dependents, generic (two daughters, two ex-wives, mother; all Loved Ones, >75 points, appear on 9-) [-20], Duty [-5], Enemies (Triad, Medium-Sized Group, 6-) [-10], Insomniac [-10] Imaginative [-1], Lecherousness (15) [-7], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10], Responsive [-1], Unusual Biochemistry [-5]. [-82 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [2]-11, Acting (A) IQ+2 [4]-15†, Arm Lock (A) Judo+1 [1]-13, Camouflage (E) IQ+1 [2]-14, Current Affairs (Headline News) (E) IQ [1]-13, Detect Lies (H) Per+1 [4]-16†, Diplomacy (H) IQ+2 [2]-15*†, Disguise/TL8 (A) IQ+1 [4]-14, Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX [2]-12, Expert Skill (Conspiracy Theory) (H) IQ-2 [1]-11, Fast Talk (A) IQ+2 [2]-15*†, First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-13, Forensics/TL (A) IQ-2 [1]-11, Group Performance (Directing) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+2 [4]-14, Holdout (A) IQ+1 [4]-14, Intelligence Analysis (H) IQ-2 [1]-11, Intimidation (A) IQ [1]-13†, Judo (H) DX [4]-12, Karate (H) DX-1 [2]-11, Law (Australian criminal) (H) IQ [4]-13, Linguistics (H) IQ-2 [1]-11, Lip Reading (A) Per-1 [1]-14, Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX [2]-12, (Main Gauche) (A) DX-1 [1]-11, Rapier (A) DX-1 [1]-11, Mimicry (H) IQ+2 [2]-15*, Motion Picture Camera (A) Photography-1 [2]-11, Observation (A) Per [2]-15, Photography/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Professional Skill (Bartender) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Research (A) IQ+1 [4]-14, Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+3 [1]-16*†, Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (E) IQ+3 [1]-16*†, Scrounging (E) Per [1]-15, Sex Appeal (A) HT+3 [4]-16*†, Shadowing (A) IQ [2]-13, Singing (E) HT [1]-14*, Speed-Reading (A) IQ-1 [1]-12, Stage Combat (A) DX-1 [1]-11, Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-13, Streetwise (A) IQ+2 [4]-15†, Swimming (E) HT [1]-12. [88 points]

* +2 for Voice

† +1 for Smooth Operator

Gear: Usually TL8 Holdout Pistol, .380, in ankle holster holster; TL8 ballistic vest; boots; cell phone, reversible ordinary clothing (one side black or dark gray), as appropriate to the role he's playing.

Adventure Seeds

No Way In: After blundering into a White Star safehouse on Zagadka, Lieutenant McKenzie, a former Marine Raider, has joined ISWAT rather than be sent to Coventry or have his memory erased. A month later, however, he begins to weaken, and Infinity's doctors discover the implant leaching biotoxin into his body. They send the PCs to Zagadka to try to find a cure for the toxin -- which means breaking into the Zagadka Pentagon's classified R&D files.

Going Native: A PC visiting Zagadka discovers that he has latent metahuman abilities. Unfortunately, they're Invisibility (Always On, Medium Encumbrance), Ultrahearing [0] and Ultrasonic Speech [0]: he can not be seen, nor converse normally. Whether this proves to be an advantage or a nuisance depends on the nature of the mission and the PCs' ingenuity.

The Monrovia Effect: When the second civil war breaks out in Liberia, the PCs are sent to rescue Infinity researchers stranded in Monrovia. There are metahumans fighting on all sides, and Major Dare and a squad of Marine Raiders are defending the US embassy. The researchers (one too badly wounded to walk) are hiding in a besieged hotel, along with several nosy journalists: the challenge for the PCs will be to get them to safety without endangering the Secret.

Ticket to Ride: When a bunch of wealthy sex tourists from Homeline are arrested in Zagadka, the Ring becomes suspicious by some of the gear they're carrying, and Remplacant replaces him in the group. The PCs are tipped off that one of the group is a fake, but have to identify which one before they return to the conveyor -- and without revealing the Secret.

Desert Storm *(GURPS Space)***:** The PCs' ship is engulfed by a banestorm and crash-lands on Zagadka, in the desert in Iran. The PCs have to defend the ship from Iranian forces, including metahumans, until the engineer can get the ship off the ground -- or decide to destroy it to prevent its technology falling into the wrong hands, then escape as best they can. If they want to get home again, they may need to wait for another banestorm -- or generate one.

Triad, You Might Like It *(GURPS Supers)***:** Remplacant leads a small group of metahumans (including the PCs) into the lair of a crosstime Triad. When the fight turns against them, the Triad bosses flee into their parachronic conveyor. The PCs barge in just before the conveyor door shuts, and are transported to another timeline with the bosses -- a timeline where their exotic or supernatural advantages and powers no longer work.

If the PCs can defeat the gangsters without using any superpowers, they should be able to convince one of them to take them back to Zagadka. If not, they'll be dumped somewhere dangerous, or at best unpleasant.

The Planning, the Cut Scene, the Plan

Capers in RPGs

by Brian Rogers

"Ever notice how planning scenes in heist movies tend to jump straight to the plan without ever showing the hours of thinking, debating, etc. that went into creating the plan?" This is true, and it poses a problem when trying to run a caper in an RPG. There are some players who enjoy the complexities of advance planning, but many more just want to get to the exciting part. So what could one do in game to better emulate heist films and other capers in a game setting . . . other than hours of tedious planning that would certainly hit the cutting room floor?

To start, let's break the caper into segments to see how to tackle each, with an example.

1) Define the Objective

What are the PCs trying to do? In some cases this is obvious, in others it will be directed by the PCs' patrons, but it is important to identify this as being something different than the strategy. The objective of *the Sting* is to get revenge on the mob boss Lonnegan for killing a popular grifter. Now, our PCs are grifters themselves, so it's only logical that they would turn to an elaborate money con, but they might also have tried to con Lonnegan into revealing himself to the Feds. The *Mission Impossible* team is told to get a scientist out of a foreign power, but their employers don't say *how* . . . just *what.* GMs can somewhat control the situation by defining the Objective but leaving the strategy up to the PCs.

In my prospectus for *Sterling's Game* I pitched a caper where the objective was stealing money during the transition from the Pound to the Euro. Originally that was the objective. If during PC creation one or more players decide that their PCs are looking to get even with the shady MP who individually betrayed them, framing or embarrassing him with the money theft becomes a profitable strategy to attain this new goal. Let's run with that.

2) Define the Strategy

No surprise, this is how you're going to accomplish your Objective. It's easiest for the GM to define this as well, as it limits PC options to a manageable level. Still, in games where the GM is comfortable winging things or has lots of detail, he can leave this to the players. A PC-selected Strategy should be one of a few "best ways" to reach the Objective, and the PCs can be active doing research to identify their choices. Such research should either have the stealth-driven tension or be handled by quick research rolls. Either way lays out two to four of the target's vulnerabilities -- taking as writ that the PCs are more skilled at this than the players so inherently bad ideas are discarded before they even hit the table. The degree of success determines the difficulty of a *good* plan due to quality/quantity of information and degree of target awareness -- it will not indicate the PCs have developed an entirely inoperative plan, as that runs counter to genre.

One Strategic aspect to consider is a deadline. The grifting of Lonnegan didn't have one, and the PCs could take their time and control the planning. *Ocean's 11* had one -- in order to maximize the take they had to rob the casino on fight night. Strategies without a deadline have less tension, which might make the players more comfortable but also might make the game drag or let players indulge in over-complication. It's probably best that about half of the good Strategies have deadlines, so the players have a real choice on the issue, but the GM can dodge it by setting the Strategy up front.

The premise of *Sterling's Game* is the currency conversion theft, so that has to be the Strategy. If this hadn't been decided, research would show that their enemy MP has some secretive but dangerous ties to the mob (so they might be able to turn the mob against him or somehow expose him) and that his wife has heavily invested in Renaissance art that they could steal. The currency change is the most lucrative option, but it is also the one with the hard deadline.

3) Recruit Your Principals

Sometimes this happens first, or after the Objective has been stated, but it needs to be done early. With a GM-stated Strategy one PC could be the leader who developed the Objective and who then recruits the rest of the team. If the Players develop the Strategy they could do so out of character and ascribe this plan to the leader, or set the recruiting after the Objective but before they look for a Strategy. Of course, in ongoing games recruitment might not be an issue, but not only are these scenes classic to the genre but they also provide snippets of spotlight time in the ensemble cast. One thing to remember is that all the recruits must provide some tactical advantage to the plan. This may be designing PCs around the caper or designing the caper around the PCs, but everyone should have something to do.

The players in *Sterling's Game* decide to let the titular character claim the Objective and Strategy and play out Sterling recruiting the team after that (even though the players all had a voice). Sterling's player builds him as a grifter who knows everybody. The other players go for a femme fatale hacker (okay, clearly fiction), an aging pickpocket made unrecognizable to the man who betrayed him after his time in jail and a former spy whose status as an MI-6 double was compromised by the MP as part of a political move, nearly getting the spy killed.

4) Identify Obstacles

Capers have a lot of moving parts, both to capture the mood and befuddle the target. To make this easier, break the caper down into discrete obstacles and plan how to attain each. The GM should have obstacles for the chosen Strategy, but PC strengths might suggest others (if you have a hacker you need a computer problem). Depending on the Objective, Strategy, and deadline the PCs might need to tackle all obstacles in rapid succession or might be able to overcome some in advance, worming their way in before the big play. The first obstacle is usually a deeper reconnaissance to identify other obstacles (this might have been covered in Strategy selection). The degree of success lists later obstacles so they can plan for them -- bad luck will result in unexpected obstacles that will force the PCs to adapt the plan while it's in motion. (if you're running a *Mission Impossible*-style series of capers consider running each in two sessions -- one planning and recon, the other the day of the event -- to keep the feel.)

To keep things simple, I'll set the obstacles for *Sterling's Game* as the initial reconnaissance (with some computer work, some tailing the MP and some questioning contacts), setting up a false bank account tied to the MP as a holding shell for the money; getting the MP's security codes as their door into the conversion system; entering the secure banking facility on the day of the currency conversion; hacking the computer system at that time; getting out safely. The first two must be done in advance while the last three are done on the big day; getting the security codes might be a "do before" or a "day of" event.

5) Develop Tactics

Now the PCs have to figure out how to get over each identified obstacle. Here's where the players may have the urge to overcomplicate, but by breaking it down into discrete objectives we can keep things moving. Each PC will have skills that are a crucial Tactic for at least one obstacle. Tactics can require the distraction of multiple moving parts, but should only be distracting to the target - not too complicated for the players to follow.

Many players will, at this point, either try to build too many counter contingencies (until they declare it too complex to be workable) or assume that the target already knows they've been targeted. The GM should not hesitate to provide some certainty to the PCs ("No, you are certain that there is no one who might see you open that door at that time.") to mitigate this. The goals should be to control the target's perception movements (and Psychology rolls should let the PCs accurately guess the target's reactions) and play to the heroes strengths. Capers with initial planning parts give the players a chance to stretch their wings and get used to the genre conventions before the big night.

Sterling's Game's first post-recon Obstacle is setting up the implicating shell account. To do so the PCs will need to get and plant financial data on the MP's locked off home computer, and his home has a state of the art key card security system to both his house (remember the Renaissance art collection?) and his study. Plus, he and/or his wife are home

much of the time. The party has to find a time the house is empty and get the MP's key card at that time (his wife's card won't open the study, but a bad recon might not tell them that) to do the hacking. It seems complicated, but this is pretty standard for a caper.

Posing as another Renaissance art dealer Sterling invites the wife out to lunch on a day when the MP is giving a policy speech. That empties the house, and plays to Sterling's con man strength. The pickpocket does a brush pass on the MP as he enters the parliament chamber to secure the key, playing to the pickpocket's strength and giving them some security on the MP's location. The pickpocket rushes the key back to the house, which the hacker uses to get in to the computer and begin her work, again playing to her strength. When the MP heads home the pickpocket has to return the key card before he hits his front door. This plan includes three of the four PCs, leaves the 4th as a back up, plays to the party strengths and is really not that complicated and only has 1 moving part: getting the key there and back.

Now, the players may decide to add more steps to improve their sense of security -- the spy might be dressed in clothes that match Sterling and the hacker could quickly dress to match the wife's clothes so an outside observer would see the homeowner and the man who met her for lunch re-entering the house -- but they aren't really necessary. The GM ratchets up the tension with unforeseen problems -- it takes longer than expected for the hacker to get into security forcing Sterling to keep the wife occupied longer, someone is with the MP when he returns to make the return pass harder to do -- but cut scenes will also work to raise tension even if everything goes flawlessly as Sterling is forced to keep chatting with the wife as the hacker keeps working as the pickpocket and spy watch the MP's speech and then keep watch for his approach.

The heroes could also try some other way, like a nighttime sneak into the study through the windows, but the initial tactics should always play to the PCs' strengths, and those that don't should involve a higher degree of risk. The caper is one of the genres where combat is a very bad tactic because it is so uncontrolled.

6) Get Tricky

Another big problem with translating capers to gaming is that the movie is built for the audience to guess what tricks the heroes have while in a game the players have to develop those tricks. Although some systems allow PCs to edit the flow of events with metagaming techniques ("I spend a hero point and recognize the mob goon as a guy I knew in the clink!"), many don't, and some players derive more satisfaction if they "play the cards as dealt". In those cases players should keep an eye out for things they can improvise off of later, and try to arrange one PC to act as a potential distraction for others. The PCs can also set general purpose distractions that they can make use of later (i.e. setting a bomb on the generator).

In the above example, Sterling put an ace up their sleeve with his new connection to the MP's wife. He can use her to ingratiate himself later, distract her husband, or have another PC drop his name to her (though that's a stretch). If the players had really planned ahead, the spy might have taken his time in the house to set a radio-detonated smoke bomb somewhere -- if anyone needs to distract the MP at any point later they can signal for the bomb to blow and the security system will alert the MP immediately that his house is on fire. They don't know why they'd need that yet, but sometimes it helps to load a revolver and put in on the mantel in act one . . . just in case.

7) Introducing yourself

A classic Tactic is meeting the target (or otherwise making the target aware that something is going on) in a way that his responses play into your plan. Doing so requires making some good reconnaissance and psychology checks to find out what the target has done in the past and what he is likely to do in the future, followed up by bluff or acting rolls to set the scene, but it is one of the best ways to subvert an otherwise insurmountable obstacle. If there's no way you can get through that door without the target's complicity, give the target a reason to put you on the other side of the door. In the caper genre these reactions are pretty reliable -- reliable enough that whole capers are built around themselves so the players shouldn't hesitate to try them.

Bad luck for Sterling: The invitations to the gala bash above the computer center to celebrate the currency conversion

have proven too complex to forge without a sample (bad roll on the spy's part) but the team still needs at least one. Sterling makes use of his earlier meeting with the MP's wife to introduce himself to the MP. He knows the MP is both jealously possessive and manipulative of his wife, and he surmises that the MP might invite him to the party to show the wife that she has no secrets from him. Sterling's psychology and bluff rolls are successful and the MP graciously hands over an invitation to the party. Sure, he's now suspicious of Sterling, but for all the wrong reasons, and is unaware that copies of the invitation will also let in the spy and the hacker.

In Conclusion

As the caper builds to climax expect more simultaneous obstacles to ratchet up the complexity. The players should remember that the NPCs only know what they could have discovered rather than what the GM knows. This should cut down on the urge to over-complicate. The caper is a genre where the PCs are an active force vs. an unaware target, and an unaware target will usually take what they see at face value. If everything goes to plan, the targets never even hear you say "Shall we dance?"

* * *

*Thanks to the people of **Alarums & Excursions** for their help with this article.*

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Pyramid Review

Red Hand of Doom (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Richard Baker & James Jacobs

Cover by David Hudnut

Illustrated by Wayne England, Randy Gallegos, Des Hanley, Ralph Horsley, Howard Lyon, Lucio Parillo, Eric Polak, Scott Roller, Francis Tsai, Franz Vohwinkel, & Eva Widermann

Cartography by Mike Schley

128-page full-color softcover; $24.95

The appearance of ***Red Hand of Doom*** is interesting in that it runs against two trends. The first is that it is from Wizards of the Coast, who have a policy of leaving scenarios to third party publishers. Second is that it is a "modern" fantasy scenario, that is, it is not an exercise in nostalgia for ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, First Edition.*** Further, it is more a "mini" campaign and not a scenario, which makes it "official"; the nearest that the latest version of ***Dungeons & Dragons*** has previously gotten to an official campaign is Paizo Publishing's ***Shackled City Adventure Path,*** which collected the campaign run in *Dungeon* magazine.

Designed for a party of 6th to 12th level characters, ***Red Hand of Doom*** pits them into a desperate race against time in an attempt to slow a goblinoid horde rampaging through a previously quiet backwater. It is generic, designed to be slotted into almost any campaign setting. Suggestions for placing the campaign's self-contained locale include the ***Forgotten Realms, [Ebberon](#),*** and ***Greyhawk*** worlds. It is also designed to be played using just the three core books, but many of the campaign's NPCs make use of various other official supplements, including ***Complete Divine, Draconomicon, Frostburn, Complete Adventurer, Complete Arcane,*** and the ***Monster Manual II.*** All these supplements are entirely optional, and the various abilities taken from those books are explained in the NPC write-ups where they appear.

That said, two supplements are of particular importance to ***Red Hand of Doom.*** One is ***[Heroes of Battle,](#)*** useful because the adventure does involves several large battles. The other is the ***Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures Rules,*** the use of which enables several of the adventure's encounters and skirmishes to be played out using miniatures. To facilitate this, the book includes a double-sided full color map sheet that gives three different battle maps. The DM is under no obligation to use either the ***Miniatures Rules*** or the battle maps, although they do help to bring certain locations alive. Other than this, the adventure is self-contained.

The setting for ***Red Hand of Doom*** is the Elsir Vale, a quiet frontier region once the centre of the fallen kingdom of Rhestilor. Now it is only important for the Dawn Way, an ancient Dwarf trade road. East of the vale lies the Wyrmsmoke Mountains, home to numerous goblinoid tribes who have been no more threat than the occasional raid. Now the Vale faces a threat form the mountains, the like of which it has never seen.

Located deep within the Wyrmsmoke Mountains is ancient and evil temple, the Fane of Tiamat. Cleared out long ago

by adventurers from Rhestalor, it has been recently re-established by a half-dragon hobgoblin warrior, who has taken up worship of the Queen of Evil Dragons. In the decades since, Azarr Kul has not only converted the local goblinoid tribes, but also gathered around him powerful allies, including his own dragon father! Now High Wyrmlord Azarr Kul plans to lead his horde out of the mountains and conquer the lands beyond as Harg Kulkor, or "Land of the Dragon."

Following their first encounter with a hobgoblin ambush, each further encounter with members of the horde reveals more information about their plans, yet it is only a matter of time for the player characters. Not only do the characters have to convey the severity of the threat to the local inhabitants but also render aid to them. Initially this is not by actively defending them, but in determining what the horde is up to, and in gaining allies for both the party and the locals. Additionally, the character's actions cannot stop the horde though, only delay it. Their efforts will be crucial in the routing of the horde, and this will provide the opportunity to make an assault on the Fane of Tiamat itself in the adventure's final chapter.

If all this sounds familiar . . . well, it is. Certainly the idea of having a town facing a threat that cannot initially be stopped, only delayed, is not new; for example, it appeared in Atlas Games' excellent **_Splintered Peace._** As such, a writer has to do something a little different to make the formula feel fresh. To be honest, the authors never try to achieve this, bar the suggestion that parts of the adventure can be run with miniatures.

So what then is the appeal of **_Red Hand of Doom?_** Simply put, it is well executed with plenty of advice to handle both the adventure's set pieces and various random events. Actually, most of these come about as a result of player actions, the worst of which detail the horde's response to the party's actions. Eventually they send out a squad to kill the player characters, although capture is also a possibility. In addition, space is given for the authors to dispense advice to the DM and to explain how a particular encounter is supposed to work.

Physically, **_Red Hand of Doom_** is very nicely put together, with some excellent illustrations (particularly the monsters) and very pretty maps. That said, some of the illustrations are a little gruesome, including a warrior's arm melting from the effect of a dragon's acid breath, and city defenders being roasted by a dragon's fire breath.

This is a tough adventure, intentionally so, and it does not get any tougher than in the final assault on the Fane of Tiamat. Here it gives the players the opportunity to almost face one of **_Dungeons & Dragons'_** old-school foes. Remember in the First Edition of **_Advanced Dungeons & Dragons_** how you were nothing until you had beaten Lloth, Queen of Spiders; Asmodeus; or Orcus? **_Red Hand of Doom_** has an aspect of that, but feels a little more like the original Dragonlance scenarios in the party facing ever more powerful and varied wyrmlords. It is a thorough modern scenario as written, providing the detail to cover most eventualities.

To be fair, then, **_Red Hand of Doom_** has a little of the Old School to it, but not too much. It is a big, bad adventure that is heavy on combat, which should provide some very tough encounters. Its more modern feel, though, shows in the degree of detail and the wealth of advice, both of which can only help the DM make **_Red Hand of Doom_** a memorable adventure.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Citadels (With Dark City Expansion)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Bruno Faidutti

52 District Cards, 8 Noble Cards, 8 bonus Quick-Reference Cards, 35 Plastic Gold Coin Discs, 1 Wooden Crown Token, Eight-Page Full Color Letter-Sized Rulebook, plus Dark City Expansion (14 District Cards & 10 Noble); $25

Designed by Bruno Faidutti, co-designer on the highly regarded *[Shadows Over Camelot,](#)* *Citadels* is a card game of city building in which the players must enlist the help of the Nobility. Each Noble grants the player a special power, but since each player can gain the aid of only one Noble at a time, he must be careful to enlist the help of the right one at the right time. The goal is to have the most valuable, and thus highest scoring, city by the time any player's city contains eight districts.

At the heart of *Citadels* are the District and Noble cards. The Noble cards are numbered from one to eight and are marked with a color. Most of them are a neutral gray, while others are yellow, red, blue, or green (associated with the Royal, Military, Religious, or Trade portfolios, respectively). Every Noble card has a special ability. For example, the Warlord card can destroy a building in a rival's city by paying the cost to build it minus one, while the Priest provides protection from the Warlord. Each District card represents a place, such as a Treasury or a Poor House, and is marked with a monetary cost from one to six, usually equal to the Victory Points it grants at the end of the game. Some also grant abilities, such as the Park, which permits its owner to draw a card if he has none at the end of his turn.

Districts are purchased with gold, represented by the thick, whorled coin-shaped plastic discs. The yellow-colored wooden Crown token, slightly larger than the coins, is used to indicate the player who chooses the Nobles first each turn. The full color rulebook describes how the game is set up and played for combinations of two to nine players. The last four pages are devoted to a detailed explanation of how the Nobles' powers work. All of *Citadels'* components are of decent quality and the game is nicely packaged and presented, the latest edition being compact enough to be extremely portable. The deck comes with a bonus eight cards with the turn steps on one side (Take an Action, Build, and Special power), and the victory point rules on another (four bonus points to the first player to reach eight districts, three for having districts of all five colors at the end, and so on). The latest edition of the game comes with the *Dark City* Expansion included. This adds an extra 14 District cards and 10 new Nobles to call on, although only nine can be in play at a time.

Setup starts with each player receiving two gold coins and four District Cards. The player to go first is randomly determined, as it is an important position. He holds the Crown token.

The round begins with the first player choosing one of the Nobles to help him. He puts the card face-down in front of him, and passes the rest face-down to the next player clockwise. The final player then has a choice of two cards, and puts the last face-down in the center, not to be used. The rules clearly explain how to keep the distribution fair for two to eight players, eight requiring the expansion. Excess cards are removed at the beginning of each round, to increase the uncertainty of who has what. With three or fewer players, each player receives two Nobles, with the extra card discarded from the "hand" as it is passed around the second time.

Then someone calls out the numbers in order ("Is there a number one?"). The player with that card flips it over, and begins their turn with "Take an Action," either taking two gold from the bank, or drawing two cards, looking at them, and putting one of the two drawn at the bottom of the deck.

Then, *most* Nobles can then permit their players to build one district from their hand by paying the gold cost to the bank. When a player takes a turn with the aid of one of the four colored nobles, he can claim an extra gold piece for every district in his city that bears the noble's color. These colors associate the nobles with similarly marked districts and certain special powers (although the purple neutral buildings do not produce gold).

Finally, once at any time in the player's turn, he may use the special ability granted by the Noble. For example, one of the Merchant powers is to gain one extra gold for each green district in his city; a player with two green districts could choose to claim two gold at the beginning of his turn to help build a large district, or wait until near the end of his turn after having built a third green district in order to collect three.

The "end of turn" is an important designation. It is the point at which a player can no longer call upon his Noble's powers, build Districts, and so on. At this moment, the abilities of some purple districts activate, and some Noble powers (such as the Tax Collector from **Dark City**) take effect. Then the turn is over, and the next number is called. The game ends at the end of the round in which someone possesses eight districts, if even for a moment. That player gets a bonus four victory points. Anyone else who finished eight districts at some point after him gets two bonus points. Any players who ended the game with at least one district of each of the five colors gets a bonus three points. The victor is the one with the most points in all. Scores will likely vary from 20 to 35, even through some buildings are worth up to 9 points on their own.

Strategy can vary, as it may be possible to build eight cheap buildings costing one gold each, but that entire city could be out-classed by a single 9-point building (such as a Beautified Dragon Gate). The choice of Noble can be important, as it is based on what other players expect you to choose. The powers and turn order are also a factor, as the lowered number cards act first in each round. Some powers involve stealing the gold, or turn from another *Noble,* by number, not player. Thus, a player with three yellow districts is likely to choose the King, and is thus is a prime target for powers. Other powers target players, such as the Magician's ability to permit the player to exchange hands with another specific player. The Purple districts do not have a "patron" that will give income for them (such as the green districts and the Merchant), instead, they are very expensive and valuable at four to eight points each, and half of them provide some extra ability. For example, the Park permits a player to draw a card if he has none at the end of his turn.

The Noble cards must be shuffled every round, and thus seem to wear out very quickly, making a combination light-dark game trickier, unless card protectors are used to protect the cards.

The **Dark City** expansion used to be separate but is now included in the box. It adds 10 new Noble cards (1-8 and two 9s) as well as 14 new purple districts. All **Dark City** cards are marked with a star for easy retrieval later.

Thus, one can intermix the Nobles between the two sets, or play with all new people. The Dark City Nobles are much more interactive than the previous bunch. Before, only half the Nobles interacted with others: two with players, and two with Nobles. Now, almost everyone does. Before, the King could virtually sit on his Crown, going first every turn until other players had him assassinated and robbed (in that order), forcing him to capitulate. Now, the holder of the Emperor card must move the crown to another player that is not him.

The new purple districts add new powers, such as a Lighthouse that, as it is placed in their city, allows the player to look through the deck and pick any district. Likewise, the Bell Tower optionally changes the end condition to seven districts instead of eight.

Citadels is good for a modest pastime. It plays smoothly, and a person is never stuck with cards. Instead, they can easily be stolen, and there will be chances to give them away or trade. This game is fun for all ages, and can keep players coming back again again, though care must be taken to protect the condition of the Noble cards so they don't wear out. It's a fun game that is easy to learn yet difficult to master. The option of up to 18 different Nobles means that there are up to 512 different combinations to start with, more than enough to change the challenges in each game, which should keep the gameplay fresh after hundreds of matches.

--Eric Funk

* * *

Thanks to Matthew Pook and Stephanie Keith for being Noble.

Same Idea, Different Results

Eagle-eyed perusers of the contents beneath this week's table of contents might notice a somewhat similar thread connecting two articles. In fact, anyone who's actually read the two articles and didn't suffer a soap-opera-esque bout of amnesia in between will note that they share a pretty big similarity: the creation of a super-powered alien who crash-landed on Earth as a baby in the 1908 Tunguska explosion, becoming the first Soviet super-hero.

Now, if I'd already run one of the articles previously, then I might well have told the other, "Sorry; we've already run an article like that." But the fact that they were both sitting in my slushpile made me think it was some kind of kismet, so I thought it'd be interesting to run them both. After all, they have enough similarities to be useful to each other (in particular, the stats from William Stoddard's article can be dropped whole-cloth into Stephen Dedman's Infinite World with hardly a name change), while being different enough to not be in direct competition.

And it gives me fodder for a column, which is always a good thing.

There's fertile ground in starting out with the same kernel of an idea, but taking it your own way. For example, if I were to tell two authors to come up with something along the lines of, "Write an adventure that starts at the bottom of a dungeon, and works up toward a climax at an inn" (a reversal), I'm pretty sure I'd get two greatly different results . . . especially if I picked two folks whose style varies considerably. (Such thought games are similarly played in the Iron Ref competitions we've held previously, where authors are given the same plot "ingredients" and end up with results where the ingredients can barely be found.) There's even a rich heritage in the literary world, with Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and the ancestors of the modern vampire tale evolving out of Lord Byron's horror-writing challenge in the winter of the Year Without a Summer.

And, of course, it's a rich idea for gaming.

If you think about it, these similarities are the backbone of every class, race, or "splat" book. After all, players are given base assumptions about these groups -- elves are distant nature-lovers; Nosferatu are hideous monsters; thieves are shifty-eyed tricksters who steal anything that isn't nailed down -- and need to come up with an interesting character that is true to those assumptions but (ideally) allows room for the PC to grow and become distinctive. So, for example, one player might craft a Nosferatu who is hideous because he has almost no features on his face . . . his visage is a featureless slate with two pupil-size black holes where the eyes would be, which leak a brown-black viscous material that streaks down the face. Another player might craft a Nosferatu who draws more on the spiritual-mental aspects of hideousness, and have his character be utterly plain-looking but radiate an aura that reminds anyone looking at him of the most foul, degenerate, evil person they know (a childhood abuser, a nightmare face created during a fever dream, or maybe Don Knotts).

Or perhaps one player's pickpocket is attempting to steal enough to purchase his family back from slavery, while another player's thief has a fanatical antagonism toward secrets, and thus steals from others only that which is necessary to reveal things they have been keeping discreet.

In addition, similar starting points can be a great way to encourage party unity or starting plots, all the while providing enough room for diversity in its members. For example, in a supers campaign the GM might issue a mandate that says all characters had their parents or other loved ones killed on July 13th, and this loss is what pushed them to a life of crimefighting. Or perhaps each player has been told that they must find some way to represent their own color of the rainbow (the "red" character is a former Soviet official; the "orange" character is the daughter of a citrus farmer; the "yellow" character suffers from chronic cowardice, and so on). While the energy may vary from group to group, I know that among the players I generally attract there would be incredibly creative ways to remain within the boundaries. ("My character is an AI given an animate body, who was disconnected from the world he knew -- including his simulated family -- on July 13th . . .")

I've written before about how there are no new ideas. But human minds are designed to devise links between possibly disparate elements, and ideas that don't seem like they should be new can be given the breath of life by the simple fact

that different folks are poking them. Rather than attempting to make sure that every element of your creation is totally new and unique, perhaps you might try starting out with elements that you *know* aren't original. From those similar acorns might sprout unique oaks.

Of course, those oaks might have gotten destroyed in the 1908 Tunguska explosion . . .

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Anima: Shadow of Omega

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Carlos B. Garcia

Art & graphic design by Wen Yu Li, Salvador Espin, Raul Rossell, Luis NCT, S. Melero, Sergio Almagro, Carlos B. Garcia, & David Ardila

Edited by Jose M. Rey, Edge Entertainment Translated by Brant McFarland & James Torr 110 cards, five colored counters, two six-sided dice, rules; full-color boxed set; $19.95

With a title like *Anima: Shadow of Omega,* little doubt is left who the villain of the piece is. Omega is a powerful being, and not one inclined to use that might for the betterment of anyone who isn't Omega. He was long ago imprisoned by a group of other gifted beings working in concert. They placed him in the Tower at the End of the World, and left him chained where he supposedly could do no harm. That sort of thing never works out. Each time he relieves himself of a shackle, Omega shakes the planet's foundations and causes upheavals only heroes can meet.

The object of *Anima* -- designed for two to five players -- is to be the first to complete the Final Mission.

Players begin with a Character, a colored counter, two Missions, and a handful of Advantage cards. Advantages provide Skills, Organizations, and other weird effects to assist on one's journey (or to hinder a rival). Characters are rated for their Combat and Speed, and they may have a Special Ability or be rated for Skills. If someone hasn't the matching symbol, they cannot use that suit of Skill cards. The Character or party with the highest total Speed goes first in every phase, and other players follow in descending order.

A number of Areas are turned upright so there's someplace to begin exploring. On his turn a player's party explores the available Areas to boost their membership or uncover valuable aids to their quest. New places have hidden dangers, so a Preliminary Encounter card precedes initial expeditions. Each site has an Area Level from one to three, and Encounter cards drawn there that exceed this are discarded (so everyone can balance risk and reward). In a fight, party members combine their Combat scores and a six-sided die while their foe does the same. Winning means survival (or, against another party, spoils from their hand), while losing ends the turn or even kills a member of the troupe, if the loss is egregious.

The colored counters show which Area a team occupies so others can target or trade with them. Location is important because each Mission card names an Area the party must visit. If it hasn't shown up, they must Seek New Horizons to uncover it. The number of Areas in play is limited, so the landscape changes as players compete. The journey's results come from the card's chart: Encounters, the completion of a Mission, or special rules (perhaps a scholar offers new Advantages, or a Character dies) are all possibilities.

Mission cards have encounters printed on them, usually great villains or creatures to be defeated. Only after a player completes one of his two Basic Missions can he move to the Final Mission, but since success with these freshman cards gives the party a permanent boost there's an advantage to performing both before graduating to the finale. The Final Mission involves combating Omega or his minions and sabotaging his power, and the first to complete it wins.

The card game is a precursor to an upcoming roleplaying game, *Anima: Beyond Fantasy* (there's also a miniatures game in development), and already the anime element is evident. The artwork ranges from . . . let's call it "intriguingly

compact" . . . to sharply drawn portraits that look like cels right off a film thread. The amount of information presented on each is impressive, allowing the game more depth and direction.

Because the cards are so tightly interconnected, there's plenty of card recycling. Discards can be pulled back in by those players at the bottom of the roster; if they couldn't, it would be too easy for, say, an important Area to come and go before its Mission benefit was reaped. This also keeps weakened players from falling too far behind through evil maneuvering by their opposition. Card play is fast . . . almost too fast. Game play stumbles a bit as it walks a line between uncomplicated, snappy action and clunky, too-easy reversals that make one's best-laid plans hit-or-miss. Clever optional rules allow further customization.

The simple but important layers in the rules are a marvel of brevity, and Fantasy Flight's estimate of 20-30 minutes per player is, if anything, highballing it. It's a colorful set, and even the short introductory paragraph leaves one wanting to know more about the RPG. The names and effects of various cards, if they're a real reflection of the tie-ins to come, evoke enough imagery and style that *Anima: Shadow of Omega* is just the first of a successful troika of games.

--Andy Vetromile

The First Rule of Sandbox: We Don't Talk About Sandbox

"I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself king of infinite space . . ."
Hamlet, Act II, Scene 2

There's a tendency in RPGs to want to make the scope of available world space as large as possible, presumably in an attempt to craft as large a canvas as possible for would-be explorers of that background.

But there's fertile ground to be had in keeping a campaign limited to a smaller scope . . . keeping them in the "sandbox," so to speak. *Babylon 9* and *Deep Space Five*[1] both explored this, as have such masterpieces of western civilization as *The Prisoner* and *Gilligan's Island* . It's also a hit in the RPG world with settings such as **Over the Edge** and . . . um . . . **GURPS Prisoner.**

I've written [previously](#) about the technique of limiting access to different areas of a game world, in an effort to keep the campaign from getting out of control. This time around, I'm going to give you some specifics as to *how*.

Understand the Scope of Your Sandbox. In other words, what are the boundaries that the players are not expected to go beyond . . . at least for a while? For *Deep Space Nine,* for example, this sandbox initially consists of the space station, the planet Bajor, the wormhole, and what's in the immediate vicinity of the opposite of the wormhole. Likewise, in most **Vampire: The Masquerade** games, the sandbox is presumed never to extend beyond the outskirts of the city.

Knowing the scope doesn't mean that this will never be breached. (That determination will come later.) Rather, it's important to have the initial boundaries firmly in mind, so everyone's expectations are met. While it may seem like an obvious question, it's easy to overlook; for example, one could envision an RPG based on a *Deep Space Nine*-esque space-station-orbiting-planet scenario, and never take into account that the heroes might want to visit the planet.

Know When the Sandbox Will Be Breached. In other words, when will they will escape the limited environment? The question needs to be firmly defined according to the scope (as determined above), and the answer to this will dictate the course of the entire campaign. Possible answers include:

- Never
- Never, except maybe as the series completion (*Cube, The Prisoner*). (In this case, it's likely the point of the series is to escape from the sandbox.)
- Hardly ever, except as a special event (*Quantum Leap*[2], *Gilligan's Island* TV series)
- Occasionally, once the formula is established *(Deep Space Nine)*
- Frequently; the sandbox exists more as a base of operations (Superman and Batman comic series)

In the case of *Deep Space Nine,* I'm guessing that the answer was calculated by the series creators' to be along the lines of, "Not for a season or two, but then we'll open it up a bit."

Know Where Your Plots Are Coming From. This is probably the most important rule, since it's the meat and potatoes of any adventure. Basically, in your limited environment, it's important to know from what vector complications are going to be arriving, and fleshing out that aspect as much as possible. Thus in a campaign set on a space station with limited resources where everyone has their own agendas (good day, *Sunshine*) would require complications to come in the form of the personalities and desires of the others aboard . . . after all, [everyone wants something.](#)

In *Gilligan's Island,* there were two general avenues for new adventures: a complication seeks to disrupt the status quo -- usually in the form of something arriving from off-island -- and the various personalities of the castaways interact in

ways that result in them ending up *not* leaving the island. In this case, the prospective GM would be well-served in coming up with a list of plots, while the players would be advised to make sure they develop and play their characters for maximum (amusing) plot conflict potential.

In *The Prisoner,* plots came in the form of the PC attempting to escape and/or thwart the plots of the warders to break him. (Interestingly, one of the main plot thrusts recommended by **GURPS Prisoner** is in suspicion and conflict between PCs . . . necessary because party dynamics weren't a part of the original formula.) In this case, the GM would need to have a strong understanding of the capabilities and limitations of both the PCs and the warders, as well as a good understanding of the environment.

So, to make up our own example, I could envision a campaign built around the premise of *Ghostbusters* meets *Die Hard,* with the heroes serving as ghost-hunters charged with keeping a massive office building -- with lots various businesses, big and small -- safe from paranormal infestations (forbidden to leave by contract, pact, or choice). Conflict would come from the various weirdness paying a visit, of course, but also from interactions with the various companies within the complex. One company might want to use the latest supernatural oddity to lash out at a rival, another might be trying to keep the ghost of a murdered employee from revealing secrets to the PCs, and so on.

With this campaign, the GM would need to have a good idea of the layout of the building (number of floors, approximate size, etc.), the heroes' headquarters (no doubt an office in the building), the most prominent businesses, the general scope of the spectral threats the heroes will face, and so on.

Be Creative. Think of things that you might not have thought of before. Include mysteries that you don't necessarily have solutions for.

So, as an example, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (a show that could be re-envisioned in a more restricted format) introduced the idea of a bar and a barber shop. Neither one was exactly obvious to have aboard a spaceship, but neither one was antithetical to the idea, either.

To adapt this to our example, let's say the ghost-office campaign has a snack/vending section. And let's say that the person who's responsible for restocking the machines (and there will be someone responsible) has an interesting back story . . . maybe a tough-as-nails attitude and an artificial limb. Why's he got either? Who knows! Sort it out later. (My guess? He was a former office-ghost hunter, and took this job to keep an eye on future holders of the title.)

As another example for our campaign, maybe there are rumors of a 31st floor (the mysteries of the 13th floor were solved years ago). However, all efforts to go to that floor have so far proven abortive (the elevator doesn't go there, stairwell doors don't open on that floor, attempts at climbing outside the building and back in result in the wrong floor being picked, and so on). Why is this happening? Who knows? However, since you're designing a closed system, it's better to add things you don't quite understand than to make things too tidy and not leave yourself any future plot possibilities later.

Be Adaptable. It's entirely possible that the sandbox idea will need to be rethought or buried after a few adventures, if it proves to be unworkable or too limiting. One way to avoid this step is to try to come up with as many ideas as you can that remain true to the ideals of the sandbox. If you can come up with a good number -- say, at least half the number of adventures as you expect the campaign to last for the first six months or so -- then you can feel pretty secure in your ability to utilize the sandbox (even if you don't end up using all those ideas).[3]

Regardless, you can always give more freedom later. For example, if our office/ghost campaign feels too limited for the players, you might have them expand early on to having a city-wide mandate that permits them to do their ghost-hunting . . . which would vary the available locales considerably.

The limited sandbox can be one of the most fun styles of campaign to run, and players often love them; they're easy to visualize, and a pitch of "You're all super-heroes forced to remain on a cruise ship!" sparks certain emotions more than "You're all super-heroes working in a city." With some simple consideration and brainstorming, you can find it's pretty darn freeing to be trapped.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] That's a . . . I say, that's a joke, son. A joke.

[2] In the case of *Quantum Leap,* the "sandbox" is the premise of "limited to travel within one's own body, within one's own lifetime."

[3] As I understand it, this is the exact technique that ended up being utilized by Sherwood Schwartz, when he came up with the *Gilligan's Island* idea. His bosses told him that it sounded unworkable, but if he could come up with at least a dozen ideas, they'd let him proceed. He did so, and many of those ended up being used in the series' lifetime.

Mercenary Code Monkeys

Computer Hacking in *Feng Shui*

by Brian Rogers

As a game, **Feng Shui** emulates the world of Action Movies. In it kung-fu kicks fly, guns are drawn, cars scream down crowded alleys . . . and Techies work on their computers? With the ubiquity of computer technology in the last decade, it's impossible to do any sort of modern or futuristic game without taking computers and their interconnectivity into account. The *Mission Impossible* movie franchise now blends the old cerebral show with action movie ethos, but even in a world where the secretive double-crossing IMF agents engage in motorcycle chases and martial arts duels one of the returning cast is a computer geek.

One main problem with this is, well, watching someone program a computer is boring. There's only so much you can do with camera angles and tense music before the audience realizes that it's a guy, sitting in a chair, bathing in the light of a cathode ray tube. Hence, the paradox: your players -- especially anyone playing a Techie or contemporary Scrappy Kid -- are going to expect to make use of the computers (especially in an investigative style game), but you don't want to drag the game down with extended keyboard clattering.

Fortunately, the big brains in Hollywood have already developed solutions to this problem. Okay, they're solutions that feel something like chewing tin foil for anyone with actual programming experience, but since **Feng Shui's** highly stylized granularity already tramples over serious martial artists, gun nuts and auto aficionados, what's one more group?

The Hollywood Operating System (or HOS) is the default platform for contemporary **Feng Shui** adventures: it somehow incorporates lots of funky graphics, scrolling text, pop-up windows for security programs, and the like, without compromising the computer speed in the slightest. The basic security programs not only require passwords but also navigation around onscreen obstacles. Why? Because obviously no teenage hacker would have the hand-eye coordination to maneuver an icon through a virtual maze, so the world's computers are safe . . .

Computer Hacking, in an action movie context, is paced in the same fashion as an assassination: some prep work, some sneaking to the target's location, a fight, and then trying to escape without being detected. The prep work can be glossed over with a montage of the hacker looking at engineering schematics, picking up new programs from connections and wiring new hardware into his computer; it's enough to know that work is being done, and that the Hacker looks cool doing it.

The sneaking in can be handled just like any other stealth sequence, with the Hacker's Fix-it or Info/computers filling in for Evasion when it comes to not being detected. Depending on how much time you want to spend on the scene it will be either a single roll or a sequence of increasingly difficult intruder-detection programs. Unless everyone wants to spend a lot of time watching the Hacker roll dice, three detection programs should be the limit, with each roll being 3-4 points more difficult than the last. The usual starting difficulty is 8-10, so that the baseline Scrappy Kid still has even odds of Hacking into school computers. With 4 point jumps over 3 rolls, it takes a skilled Techie to reliably make the difficulty 18 required for a major corporate database. A failure at this stage means you can't go any farther, a botch means that the target system can quickly backtrack your location.

Once you get to where the data is, you have to kill it. The act of removing the data is treated as a fight scene, with the added problem of a time limit: the viewing or downloading of data is sure to set off security, so the Hacker has to kill, or more precisely disable or subvert, the final layer of security in two sequences (this number is kept low to keep the other players from getting bored). Fix-it and Info/Computers also double as the combat skill in these fights.

The HOS generated environment works great for computer combat sequences. Mook Security software exists as pop-up windows (so if your attack roll isn't high enough to take one out, it pops back up!), and overall the screen is much

more visually interesting than lines of code. Most of the security programs of the HOS are Mook level, with Action Values of 8-12. Well defended sites will have several (3-5) parallel security programs. Security programs don't damage the hacker with a hit, but they do slow him down - each successful hit costs the Hacker 1 shot. Even a highly skilled Hacker can be mobbed by security programs, and even if he never gets hit, he can run out of time.

Assuming time does run out, the Hacker has been detected. Access to the desired data is shut off, and the Hacker gets nothing of value. Many Hackers will maintain the data download as a continuous action while fighting the last round of security, noted as a little red process bar on the bottom of the screen. While this does slow the hacker down in the fight, doing so gives him something for his troubles - somewhere between 25% and 75% of the target data, as determined by the GM.

Once the Hacker has been detected or decides it's time to leave, it's time for the final check: Did the target manage to locate my position? This is generally a single roll. If the Hacker has been undetected to this point, it's against the lowest security difficulty so far encountered. If the Hacker has been detected, it's against the highest (or the lowest +3, whichever is higher). On a success, the target either does not detect or is unable to trace your exit. On a marginal failure, they have traced you to your immediate neighborhood. On a major failure, say, 5 points or more, they have your exact address. On a Botch, they detected you when you entered and have already called the police. Better hope your friends have been loading their guns while watching you play at the computer . . .

Of course, once the PCs get involved in the Secret War, the information on the Internet is small potatoes. They'll want to hit the Innernet (where the Ascended keep their high security information) and its 2056 analogue. To do that, they'll have to avoid getting HOS:Ed. The Encrypted version of the Hollywood Operating System is much like the conventional version, but much more dangerous. Assume that any HOS:E difficulties are 3 points higher than the standard versions and the reaction speed of the defense is one sequence rather than two. Plus, HOS:E sites are the ones most likely to scramble physical response teams when their defenses are breached: all the threats of summoning security if the intrusion is detected get carried to your home, and the Ascended and Architects both have the resources to get highly armed and dangerous people to your supposedly safe computer in much less time than you'd like to think.

New Computer Shticks

Code Monkey (Prerequisite = Fix-it or Info/Computers 12+): You have a +2 on any roll that involves coding, hacking or otherwise programming computers. Plus, computer programs of all sorts count as "tools" for you, so you can produce the appropriate programs when needed with a Fix-it roll. (Alternately, you can use Info/Computers to produce programming tools, but this doesn't let you produce more conventional equipment with the Info skill. You still need Fix-it for that!)

This shtick exists so that the Code Monkey can have code-breakers, identity theft software or anything else that suddenly becomes necessary in the course of the adventure conveniently on hand without having a long list of programs cluttering up the character sheet. The +2 bonus covers most of the computer combat functions, meaning the Code Monkey always has generic offensive and defensive programs at the ready. I mean, who wouldn't?

Arcanowave Uplink: Recently the Architects have discovered a way to modify natural chi flows with a slight carrier Arcanowave, letting them use Chi for wireless data transmission. This device lets you "log on" to that carrier Arcanowave. Outside of 2056 you can use it for telepathic contact with anyone with an AI/O port, though the contact will be slow and unclear unless the recipient is either has a Cerebral Grepper (making the A-UP an ideal way to command Abominations from a safe distance) or is also wearing an A-UP. Inside of 2056 you can also access the network, letting you use all of the hacking tropes you'd like. This is a seashell-like device that you put over your head, controlled by voice and eye movement. Icky Virtual Reality, Batman! Of course, at a mutation point per sequence, you better know where you want to get to and what you want to do when you're there.

Chi Avatar: This is a superior version of the Arcanowave Uplink: one where you can project your actual chi-based consciousness into the worldwide Chi flow, crossing Netrunning with Astral projection. You can now directly project your consciousness into the network, letting you also use Fu powers, sorcery and other chi-based abilities in the carrier Arcanowave network environment (or within your Magic/3 in meters from a suitably Arcanowave connection point,

such as any computer connected to the carrier Arcanowave or any living Arcanowave adept creature). Again, this gives 1 mutation point per sequence, but it can be worth it if you're prepared.

Help from on High

A Monotheistic Power System for *GURPS*

by Reverend P. Kitty

RPGs have traditionally featured priests and clerics who wield the powers of one God among a pantheon of many. A follower of Ignit, the God of Fire, may be able to summon a pillar of fire from the heavens, while one who worships Brooke, the Goddess of Rivers, can quell storms and guarantee safe passage.

For many gaming groups, this approach seems sensible for a polytheistic setting, but isn't right for settings in which there is only one true God. In settings with the Abrahamic God (of the Jews, Muslims, and Christians), this is sometimes out of a wish not to offend. However, the holy texts of these religions clearly support the existence of pious men who can call upon their god for miracles. A more pragmatic concern is one of power and balance -- with the gods in a polytheistic setting having clearly defined spheres of influence, it can seem unfair to let a priest in a monotheistic setting have access to a deity who covers *all* spheres of influence.

The key is to maintain balance. A god with far-reaching influence will cost more as a Patron than a more narrowly defined one. In addition, while the gods of a polytheistic universe are often very active and interventionist, it is more traditional for the god of a monotheistic universe to take more of a "hands off" approach, preferring to let us stand or fall on our own merits. Miracles will thus tend to be subtle or on a small scale, which prevents them from unbalancing the game.

The following system is influenced equally by the Good Power in **GURPS Powers,** Divine Favor from **GURPS** *Third Edition,* and the system for *Blessed* characters in **Deadlands.** Divine Favor is based on *Patron (True God; Highly Accessible; Special Abilities; Minimal Intervention; Pact)*, with the new Frequency values interpolated and the cost rounded off. The Learned Prayers are, of course, Alternative Abilities to Divine Favor, with the prerequisite level set to ensure the prayer is always the less expensive ability.

Power and Prayer

Only the pious and faithful can hope to successfully call upon a monotheistic god for miracles on a regular basis. In game terms, the character must have Vows or Disciplines of Faith worth at least -10 points, after which he can purchase the Divine Favor advantage. A character with both traits is known as a *paragon,* a person deeply connected with his faith. Clerical Investment and Religious Rank are optional in most settings -- one does not have to be a priest to be a paragon. (The GM may change this, of course, and may also set additional prerequisites or an Unusual Background for being a paragon.)

Divine Favor: Variable

You can reliably get God's attention to ask for miracles. Only a truly holy person (-10 points or more in appropriate disadvantages) may take this advantage. The cost depends on your attention roll; see the table below. It requires at least 1d6 seconds of prayer (the GM rolls in secret). Praying for at least five minutes adds +1 to the attention (not reaction) roll; praying for two hours or more adds +2.

Attention Roll Table

Roll	Cost	Roll	Cost
4	15	11	90
5	20	12	110

6	25	13	130
7	35	14	150
8	45	15	170
9	55	16	200
10	70		

At the end of the prayer, the GM makes an attention roll to see if the deity acknowledged your request. If so, the GM then makes a reaction roll modified *only* by previous requests that day, the circumstances, and your recent behavior -- standard reaction modifiers do *not* apply! The circumstances modifier could be as high as +2 for a situation in which multiple people may die and you have tried all other options or as low as -4 if the request is one of convenience instead of need. Your behavior can provide up to +1 if you have been 100% faithful to your religion, truly living up to the name "paragon," or as low as -6 for recent sins and other acts against your faith.

On a roll of **Very Good** or better, the god sends an undeniable miracle -- a quake may swallow your enemies, a spring may bubble up from nowhere to slake your thirst, or a dead friend may be brought back to life. A **Good** reaction causes a more subtle miracle, similar to the effects of Serendipity, such as a wound not being as bad as it looks or an enemy's gun jamming. On a **Neutral** reaction, you receive a minor blessing, in the form of a bonus to a roll (or a reroll) or a minor beneficial coincidence. Nothing happens on a **Poor** reaction. On a **Bad** reaction, the deity makes his displeasure known in a non-harmful way (an ominous thunderclap is traditional), you cannot make further requests or use any learned prayers (see below) for the rest of the day, and any negative modifiers for your behavior are *doubled* for the next 1d6 days. A **Very Bad** or worse reaction is similar to a Bad one but also results in the god smiting you in some manner best left up to the GM's imagination.

Regardless of the reaction rolled, if your prayer is acknowledged, all further prayers that day are at -1 to both the attention roll *and* the reaction roll. Note that if nothing happens, the GM does not tell you whether it was the attention roll or reaction roll failing. Among other things, this means a failed prayer will always require at least six seconds of praying before you know it had no result.

Miracles and Learned Prayers

A paragon can pray for whatever help his god is willing to send him, or he can ask for a specific miracle. A list of sample miracles is provided below, along with the minimum reaction required for the miracle to be granted. The predictability and control of asking for a specific miracle is offset by the "all or nothing" aspect -- if you achieve the minimum reaction (or better), you get the miracle. If not, you don't.

A few miracles offer an *enhanced* version. The paragon need not specifically request the enhanced version; he will be granted it with a sufficiently high reaction roll.

The miracles below can also be *learned.* This represents the paragon being granted a special prayer which is a "hotline" to one particular miracle. Once learned, the miracle can be invoked without making an attention *or* reaction roll -- the paragon simply wills it to be (taking one second of concentration) and it is! Note that the power is never truly in the paragon's hands, however. God can remove it in an instant, and will do so on any Bad or worse reaction roll, or if the paragon breaks the Vows or Disciplines of Faith which represent his piety.

Each example below includes a *Learned Prayer Cost,* which is how many character points it costs the paragon to buy the miracle as a learned prayer, as well as a *Learned Prerequisite* which is the level of Divine Favor that *must* be purchased before the learned prayer can be purchased. If the paragon is using a learned prayer, ignore the *Minimum Reaction,* as there is no reaction roll involved.

Blessing

Minimum Reaction: Neutral
Learned Prayer Cost: 3 points

Learned Prerequisite: Divine Favor 4

This miracle may be prayed for *before* making any appropriate roll (page 66 of the ***Basic Set***); roll three times and take the best roll. If this is a learned prayer, it may be used every half-hour of game time. Otherwise, it applies to one roll.

Statistics: Ridiculous Luck (Active, -40%; Pact, -10%)

Protection from Evil

Minimum Reaction: Neutral or Good
Learned Prayer Cost: 3 or 5 points
Learned Prerequisite: Divine Favor 4 or 6

For as long as you brandish a holy symbol in front of you or otherwise assert your faith, you can prevent any malign supernatural entity from approaching within one yard. If you are granted the enhanced version of this miracle, roll a Quick Contest of Will; if you succeed, they cannot come closer than your margin of victory (in yards).

Statistics: True Faith or True Faith (Turning, +65%)

Sermonize

Minimum Reaction: Neutral
Learned Prayer Cost: 4 points
Learned Prerequisite: Divine Favor 5

Your reaction rolls, influence rolls, and Leadership and Public Speaking rolls are all at a +5 bonus, as long as you are open and honest with your words. This miracle lasts until you lie or hide the truth.

Statistics: Charisma 5 (Cannot Lie, -10%; Pact, -10%)

Sense Evil

Minimum Reaction: Good
Learned Prayer Cost: 7 points
Learned Prerequisite: Divine Favor 7

This prayer grants you knowledge of where all nearby evil beings are. It will only detect those with evil supernatural abilities or those who are (in the GM's opinion) completely devoted to or taken over by evil (though without distinguishing between the two). Range varies from a few miles to a few hundred miles depending on where the worst evil is.

Statistics: Detect (Truly Evil Beings; Cannot Analyze, -20%; Cosmic, No Die Roll Required, +100%; Long-Range 1, +50%; Pact, -10%; Precise, +100%)

Smite

Minimum Reaction: Good or Very Good
Learned Prayer Cost: 8 or 16 points
Learned Prerequisite: Divine Favor 8 or 11

When this miracle is invoked, every malign supernatural being within four yards immediately takes 2d-1 damage. They will see the attack clearly, while normal people will see nothing. If this is a Learned Prayer, it can be used repeatedly; otherwise, roll 1d+1 to see how many seconds the paragon retains this ability. The enhanced version of this miracle is identical, but does double damage.

Statistics: Burning Attack 2d-1 (Accessibility, Malign Supernatural Beings Only, -50%; Affects Insubstantial, +20%; Area Effect, 4 yards, +100%; Cosmic, Irresistible Attack, +300%; Low Signature, +10%; Pact, -10%) or Burning Attack 4d-2 (Same Modifiers)

See Evil

Minimum Reaction: Very Good
Learned Prayer Cost: 11 points
Learned Prerequisite: Divine Favor 9

You are granted the ability to single out "evil" people in a crowd. Anyone truly wicked and sinful to the core will register to you, as will anyone possessed or under the influence of evil supernatural forces. By making an IQ roll, you can gauge just how much evil lies in anyone's heart. This miracle lasts long enough for you to size up those around you (GM's option.)

Statistics: Detect (Evil; Cosmic, No Die Roll Required, +100%; Pact, -10%; Vision-Based, Reversed, -20%)

Faith Healing

Minimum Reaction: Very Good
Learned Prayer Cost: 13 points
Learned Prerequisite: Divine Favor 10

Divine power channels through your hands, healing whoever you touch. The strain costs you 1 FP for every 2 HP healed and can even repair crippled limbs. See page 59 of the **Basic Set** for healing diseases; you can cure any disease with a penalty of up to your IQ-3. The miracle will stay with you long enough for you to heal whoever you need to or until you fall unconscious.

Statistics: Healing (Cosmic, No Die Roll Required, +100%; Faith Healing, +20%; Pact, -10%)

Holy Glory

Minimum Reaction: Very Good
Learned Prayer Cost: 22 points
Learned Prerequisite: Divine Favor 12

Invoking this miracle causes everyone who can see you, human, demon, or otherwise, to immediately roll against unmodified Will or against a 13, *whichever is lower.* All evil supernatural beings who fail must roll on the *Fright Check Table,* while all humans must roll on the *Awe Check Table* (**GURPS Powers,** page 85). Fearlessness, Unfazeable, etc., have no effect, but anyone who resists is immune for an hour.

Statistics: Awe (Cannot choose version of Terror, -30%; Cosmic, Irresistible Attack, +300%; Pact, -10%)

This list is far from exhaustive! GMs are encouraged to create their own miracles. One way to do so is to make note of any improvised miracles -- the kind the GM comes up with on the fly when the paragon successfully prays for nonspecific help. If the gaming group finds one of these miracles enjoyable enough that it keeps coming up in play, the GM should write it down using the above examples as guidelines, and let the paragon add it as a learned prayer.

Above all, have fun. The tone of the divine help should fit the flavor of the campaign, from subtle and realistic to over the top and campy. These rules will let you build everything from a beleaguered but faithful local priest dealing with spiritual evil to a superprophet who parts the central city river on his way to fight crime. As long as the campaign's deity approves, it's all right either way.

The Seven Mysteries of the Magus Bruno Alamarach

for *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

One of the traditional approaches to magic in film and literature is the magician who spends years learning his craft. Magic is usually rare and often secret. Each spell can take months or even years to master. Once the spells are learned, they can be used as often as the magician wishes, but learning them in the first place often requires one to gain access to a book of spells, more commonly known as a grimoire.

In *GURPS,* one way to model this is to treat each spell as an advantage, requiring Magical, -10%, and sometimes combining one or more of the following: Requires Material Components, -10%, Requires Gestures, -10%, and Requires Incantations, -10%. (See *GURPS Powers,* page 116, for details.) Some spells may also require one or more levels of Takes Extra Time for long incantations and some level of the Maximum Duration limitation for advantages that would normally last as long as the character wanted (e.g., Flight).

Generally, whenever an advantage represents a spell that has to be learned, characters must have Magery 0 or better to use it outside of a high mana or very high mana zone. According to *GURPS Powers,* page 131, where such advantages require rolls to determine success or a degree of success (e.g., Afflictions), those rolls will be at -5 in low mana zones, but, in all zones where there is any mana at all, levels of Magery above 0 will increase the likelihood of success. (These rules may or may not apply to creatures with innate magical abilities like vampires and fairies; they are, after all, not using magic as much as they are simply being magical. A detailed discussion of such creatures is, however, beyond the scope of this article.)

It is sometimes assumed that campaign worlds where magic is rare and perhaps secret are probably low mana ones, but this does not have to be the case. If Magery is an extremely rare trait, and if it takes years of study even for those gifted with Magery to learn spells, most people probably never meet someone who is capable of using magic. If obviously magical beasts like dragons are also rare, and perhaps careful to keep out of sight (and to make sure the few people who do meet up with them either have no proof or simply do not make it back alive to tell the tale), then it would be natural for most people to assume magic is simply superstition, even if the local mana level is normal, high, or very high. It would be entirely possible to design a campaign world where magic is rare and almost unknown, but extremely potent.

Often, a grimoire may only contain a relatively small number of spells. Much of it may consist of discussions of thaumatology, occultism, alchemy, and other topics, and gaining access to such books of magic would justify gaining expertise in magic-related skills.

Frequently, the grimoire itself is not necessary to cast a spell once it has been learned; once its contents have been mastered, the book may be passed on to a new student or a new group of students.

Naturally, all this makes such books of magic appropriate as quest objects around which a GM could build a long and detailed campaign before one or more of the characters even learns magic (and sometimes before the characters even know that magic even exists in their world). An example of this kind of adventure appears the film *The Ninth Gate.*

In general, assuming one works at it eight hours a day, a month of study with a teacher will yield about one character point; with self-study, it requires about two months to gain one character point. Thus, a spell represented by a 9-point advantage will usually take between nine and 18 months of study to master.

It is a 0-point feature of these advantages that one must first gain possession of a good copy of the grimoire, written in the original language, and know that language at the native level, to learn these spells properly. Magical incantation is so dependent on the interactions between the nuances of language, the will and personality of the magician, and the

ebb and flow of the magical energies of the universe for any lesser arrangement to be efficacious. Even the shapes of the letters and the position of words on a page may be crucial. Thus, translations are generally useless for actually learning spells (although they are usually adequate as philosophical treatises and for learning skills like Occultism).

Imperfect copies in the original language -- including those "corrected" by helpful editors -- are sometimes still useful to magicians; they will often contain sufficiently good sections to allow someone to learn one or more spells. The GM should roll once for each spell in any particular imperfect copy of a grimoire, after determining if it is a "fair" or "poor" copy of the book; with a fair copy, on 9-, the spell can be learned and used; with a poor copy, the roll is 6-. On a successful Thaumatology roll, the magician who owns the grimoire can tell if a spell will work before he dedicates months to learning it. If he fails, he will not be able to tell, and must simply spend the time to learn the spell and hope that it will actually work once he masters it. The GM is free to determine whether mass-produced copies are good, fair, poor, or useless.

There is no reason why this approach to magic cannot be used in conjunction with the standard spellcasting system described in *Magic,* but it is not balanced with it; in some cases, standard spells will be able to replicate the effects of a grimoire spell for fewer points; in others cases, the grimoire spell will be far cheaper. As a result, it may be easier for a GM to simply use one or the other rather than using both at the same time in a campaign world.

A Grimoire of the Air

One grimoire is *The Seven Mysteries of the Magus Bruno Alamarach.* Alamarach was fascinated with the properties of air and its magical potential. He carefully recorded his achievements and then made two additional copies of his work. Eleven imperfect -- some fair and some poor -- copies also exist. A good copy of the grimoire is worth at least one million dollars; even an imperfect copy is likely to be worth one or two hundred thousand dollars.

It is a thin volume, less than 100 pages, and it only contains seven spells. Not surprisingly, they will only function in the presence of some kind of air, not in space or underwater. (It is left to the individual GM to handle any bizarre special circumstances, such as a voyage to Titan, where the air consists of a lethally cold mixture of nitrogen and methane.) Of course, even with the grimoire, actually learning the spells will take months or years, but the powers granted by the Magus are impressive.

It is assumed that the grimoire is written in Latin, but this can be altered to another language if that would be more suitable for a specific campaign world. The spells are listed in the order in which Alamarach came to master them; none are prerequisites for any of the others and they may be learned in any order. No material components are required for the spells -- the components used are air and sound and vibration -- but mages casting them must have their hands free and be able to speak.

Obviously, the time involved to normally learn these spells makes it problematic for a player character to learn from the grimoire during an adventure. In addition, the value of the grimoire makes it difficult for someone to own a copy without having high levels of Wealth. However, one does not need to own the grimoire to have gained access to it and have studied it, so player characters might know some or even all of the spells; if they have paid the points for the abilities, one may assume they had the opportunity to study and master these occult mysteries. (In fact, if a character had only mastered one or two spells and then lost access to the grimoire, regaining that access or gaining access to another copy would provide a potent motive for that character.) Whether such abilities requires an Unusual Background advantage depends entirely on the specific campaign and the individual GM.

It would also be possible for the character to learn from the grimoire over the course of a campaign if the campaign itself took place over a long period of time. Months or even years might pass between individual adventures. During this time, a mage might learn a new spell. (A variation on this approach would be if the mage was played by someone who could only join the gaming group on a sporadic basis, perhaps because of work or family responsibilities. When the player could not make it to the game, it could be explained by saying his or her mage was busy studying a new spell. If a sufficient amount of game time had passed when the player was able to join the group again, the mage could return to the campaign knowing the new spell.)

For GMs seeking adventure seeds, one may assume that of the three good copies of the grimoire, one is in a restricted rare books collection of a university library and impossible to access for a long enough period to learn the spells unless one was an employee trusted with rare documents (or unless one simply stole it), another is in the hands of a wealthy private collector (who may or may not know exactly what he has in his possession), and one is missing and presumed lost. However, if the third good copy had actually survived and its location became known, it would immediately result in interested parties trying to get their hands on it. Even a poor copy of the grimoire, which could allow someone to learn one or two spells, would be a prize for which men and women might be willing to lie, steal, or even kill.

The Seven Mysteries

This section includes descriptions of the seven spells and their write-ups as **GURPS** *Fourth Edition* abilities.

The Incantation of the Spirit of the Air

This is perhaps the most difficult of the spells. No matter how well one learns it, there is always the small possibility of failure. At the same time, it was the foundation for the other spells, for it was only when Alamarach was able to commune with the airy spirits that he was able to penetrate the mysteries of their realm. It takes a minute of continuous incantations and gestures to summon an elemental spirit who will remain for an hour to serve the magician in any manner that it can, acting as a spy or a servant, answering questions about the airy outer realms, and so on. It does not mind helping a human wise enough to summon it, but there are limits; it will balk at requests that might put it in danger, it will not be as helpful to those who treat it rudely, and, after an hour, when the spell breaks, the spirit will return to its native realm and it cannot be called again for the remainder of the day.

The Incantation of the Spirit of the Air: Ally (75% value of character, Summonable, +100%; Magical, -10%; Requires incantation, -10%; Requires gestures, -10%; Maximum duration, up to an hour, -10%; Only when there is air, -10%; Appears on 15-) [14]

(Normally, the length of the incantation would provide a Takes Extra Time limitation, but according to page 41 of *Powers,* time-related limitations are not appropriate for Allies, so the minute-long incantation is treated as a special effect of the ability.)

The Incantation of Armor

This spell summons the air to surround the person casting it with a protective barrier of wind. This is, not surprisingly, somewhat inconvenient and noisy (especially if one is in an office full of loose papers) but quite effective at turning aside almost anything less powerful than a rifle bullet.

The Incantation of Armor: DR 10 (Force field, +20%; Magical, -10%, Only when there is air, -10%; Requires incantation, -10%; Requires gestures, -10%; Maximum duration, Up to one minute, -65%; Nuisance effect, surrounds user with noisy winds, -5%) [10]

The Incantation of Lifting Winds

This spell, which requires an eight-second incantation, allows one to fly, lifted into the air and then directed through it by powerful gusts. The winds are not so powerful as to qualify as a nuisance effect. The spell lasts for up to an hour. A person casting the spell can lower themselves back to the ground at will; the winds simply slowly diminish until the person has safely landed.

The Incantation of Lifting Winds: Flight (Magical, -10%; Requires incantation, -10%; Requires gestures, -10%; Takes extra time 3, eight seconds, -30%; Only when there is air, -10%; Maximum duration, Up to one hour, -10%) [8]

The Incantation of Burning Air

The fourth spell in the grimoire is perhaps the most dangerous, both to the enemies of the magician casting it and to the magician himself. It summons a bolt of lightning, which flies from his extended hand to strike down his foes. However, it is no light matter to channel such lethal energies. Each use of the spell costs the spellcaster two HP. In addition, the abilities to summon and cast a bolt of lightning does not automatically grant the ability to aim it; the magician must learn, separately, the Innate Attack (Beam) skill.

The Incantation of Burning Air: Burning Attack 6d (Surge, +20%; Magical, -10%; Requires incantation, -10%; Requires gestures, -10%; Only when there is air, -10%; Costs two HP per use, -20%) [18]

The Incantation of Kind and Cruel Air

One of the most powerful spells in the grimoire, and the one with the longest and most complex incantation, this ability lets one influence winds, air temperature, and precipitation for a radius of three tenths of a mile. A mage casting this spell could summon or dispel fog, winds, storms, and so on.

The Incantation of Kind and Cruel Air: Control Weather 3 (Natural Phenomenon, +100%; Magical, -10%; Requires incantation, -10%; Requires gestures, -10%, Takes extra time 8, 256 seconds, -80%; Only when there is air, -10%; Maximum duration, Up to 30 minutes, -25%) [33]

The Incantation of Airy Voices

This spells allows one to listen to distant sounds. After casting the spell, the mage can listen to things as far as a thousand yards away as if he was standing next to it. For gathering information for and about both friends and enemies, this is an invaluable ability.

The Incantation of Airy Voices: Clairsentience (Clairaudience, -30%; Increased range, x100, +60%; Magical, -10%; Only when there is air, -10%; Requires incantation, -10%; Requires gestures, -10%; Maximum duration, Up to 10 minutes, -50%; Takes extra time 3, eight seconds, -30%) [10].

The Incantation of Airy Form

The last spell in the grimoire is perhaps its most remarkable miracle, and one that often takes years to master: the ability for a being of flesh and blood to become like unto air itself. For an hour, the magician can float as an airy form, almost totally immune from injury, able to fly, and so on.

The Incantation of Airy Form: Alternate Form (Body of Air, Magical, -10%, Requires incantation, -10%; Requires gestures, -10%; Only when there is air, -10%; Maximum duration, up to one hour, -10%) [44]

(The Body of Air meta-trait is described on page 262 of the *Basic Set.*)

An Incomplete History of Alamarach and His Book

Bruno Alamarach was a 15th-century alchemist and sorcerer. Little is known about his life; some of the information that is available seems at odds with other historical facts, suggesting that certain details mentioned here could be anything from legends and folklore to the lingering aftershocks of a reality quake.

His origins are obscure. He appears to have been the son of a minor nobleman, born in the 1430s, and sent to Paris for a university education when he was about 15. The few letters mentioning him during this period (none of his letters seem to have survived) describe him of being of a scholarly bent -- one letter claimed that he had mastered not only Latin but several other languages even before he had arrived at the university -- but also handsome and not averse to either drink or the company of young women.

He graduated and for the next 30 years moved around Europe, studying and earning a living as a court astrologer,

physician, and alchemist. As best as scholars can tell, most of his grimoire was written in the late 1470s, while he was living in Rome; there is some indication that two young men lived with him, the three of them studying medicine and other subjects together. One letter from a nobleman treated by Alamarach mentions the two men as being rather sinister and wolfish in appearance, but adds they were excellent doctors despite this; beyond this, almost nothing is known of the men who may have helped author the *Seven Mysteries.*

Sometime around 1481, Alamarach appears to have moved to England; he is mentioned as having one assistant at this time, one Carlos de Seville. It is unknown if de Seville was one of his assistants in Rome; de Seville is one of those figures in the history of magic who is mentioned by various persons, frequently with loathing, but about whom almost nothing is actually known. There are hints that Alamarach may have found employment in the court of Richard III. After this, he disappears again, and nothing else is known about him with any certainty. In 1492, an alchemist named Amlarka is mentioned as living in Jerusalem, predicting the discovery of new worlds across the sea, but scholars are divided on whether this was Alamarach. Even so, the mention of airy spirits guiding his prophecies lends some credence to the possibility that Alamarach spent part of his later years in the Holy Land. There is also a grave in a small town outside Berlin, with a marker dated 1507 that simply reads Alamarcke.

At no time did Alamarach formally announce to the world that he had written a book of magic and made three copies of it; that sort of behavior got people burned at the stake in those days. In fact, the forbidden nature of the book has led to many details of its textual history being so obscure that there is little hope of the entire story ever being known. The existence of three perfect copies (and 11 imperfect ones, most apparently written by de Seville after he and Alamarach had a falling out, and the rest written by one Eduardo de Lisbon, who worked with de Seville in the early 1500s) has been deduced only by careful textual scholarship in the 20th and 21st centuries.

No mention of the book appears until 1527, when it is received a playful mention in a letter from Thomas More to Henry VIII; there are hints that Alamarach made a gift of one copy to Richard III and it fell into Tudor hands after Henry VII seized power. The Tudors knew about it, possibly had possession of one copy during the reign of Elizabeth I, and then possibly lost it to French or Spanish spies sometime around 1584.

One copy is mentioned in a coded letter from the Count of Zaragoza in 1622 and in another letter in 1628. Zaragoza seems to have been trying to teach himself the spells and may have had some success; certainly he drew enough attention to himself to be imprisoned by the Inquisition in 1631 and burned at the stake in 1633. It is uncertain whether his arrest was arranged by the French and Italian cardinals with whom he had sparred while serving the Spanish king as a diplomat (and, most likely, a spy).

The suggestion that pirate queen Black Annie O'Hara learned at least two spells from one of the imperfect copies and used magic to sink British and French ships in the 1670s is viewed as suspect, but the legend made its way into popular songs from the period.

There are mentions in letters by Mather in the 1690s of a second book, the "Latter Mysteries," in which Alamarach had turned his attentions to the element of Water, but there seems to have been only one copy of it and it does not appear to have survived -- Mather refers to it as a "lost book." Of course, he may have been mistaken about the book, or perhaps deliberately obscuring its whereabouts.

There are rumors that, in the 18th Century, Benjamin Franklin or Joseph Priestley may have owned one of the perfect copies (or one of the imperfect ones). There are letters in the archives of the British government suggesting that a British noble - - the letter is in code and it is impossible to tell for certain whether or not it was Lord North -- was very interested in gaining possession of the book. Whether they did or not is unknown.

By the Victorian period, the book was no longer considered anything more than a curiosity, and it is mentioned several times in personal catalogues between 1840 and 1900. The two copies mentioned by Graf Berlinker were certainly both imperfect ones. By 1920, one copy appears to have made its way into a university library in Austria, but was stolen before the Nazis could retrieve it and deliver it to Hitler. No one knows who was behind the theft, but the difficulties faced by the Nazis in their invasion of Russia because of bad weather suggests that Stalin might have had a hand in the operation.

The activities of two groups in Nevada and Colorado associated with mystic and radical survivalist Paul Zoefield in the 1960s and 1970s suggests that Zoefield at least read parts of it and perhaps even owned a copy. More than 20 years later, his daughter Chloe continues his work (Zoefield, who loved taking long hikes in the wilderness by himself, was reported missing in 2001 and is presumed dead; foul play is not suspected). She now runs a commune in northern Arizona dedicated to living close to both nature and the mystical forces of the universe.

If Zoefield did possess a copy of the grimoire, it is entirely possible that his daughter now owns it. In fact, it is possible that this is the long lost third perfect copy. Most likely, the only way to find out would be to visit the commune. How Chloe Zoefield will respond to this is left to the individual GM; she may be a powerful magician as she has certainly had years to study the spells if the rumors about the book are true.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Gatsby and the Great Race (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by **Chaosium, Inc.**

Written by Paul Fricker with Rik Kershaw-Moore & Mike Mason

Cover by Paul Fricker

Illustrated by Paul Fricker

120-page b&w tapebound book; $20

> If you are going to attend a convention in the near future and sign up to play any *Call of Cthulhu* scenario entitled "Hesitation," "Repetition," "Deviation," or "Machination," do not read this review. It will greatly reduce your enjoyment of either of those four scenarios, each of which offers an atmospheric and unnerving -- if not scary -- playing experience.

Gatsby and the Great Race is a wonderful title for a scenario for *Call of Cthulhu.* Not quite on a par with *On the Trail of the Loathsome Slime,* but not far off. It is pity, then, that this Miskatonic University Library Association monograph does not involve the Gatsby of F. Scott Fitzgerald fame. Similarly it does not involve the Great Race. Think what an interesting scenario that would be if it did? Nevertheless, the scenario does involve someone called Gatsby, does involve a race, which, if not great, is at least memorable, and is written for *Call of Cthulhu.*

So what then, is Gatsby and the Great Race? It is a *Call of Cthulhu* scenario set in the 1920s that could be run in the United States or Great Britain. Designed for an optimum number of six investigators plus Keeper, it comes with pre-generated characters and is designed to be played in a single session. Players take the roles of couples, friends, and acquaintances invited to attend a weekend party given by a mutual friend, Julian Gatsby -- the Gatsby of the title.

Unfortunately Julian has fallen on hard times, but has recently hit upon a scheme to restore his family's fortunes. Time travel. Using an artifact and a ritual he plans to travel back in time, place a bet on the winning horse in a race with long odds, then return to collect his winnings. Naturally things go awry, during the ritual the artifact is broken, rending the veil between worlds and casting the pieces across four almost identical parallels, and catching the party goers in rather short time loop.

In order to escape this time loop, the party goers must reassemble the artifact, but this requires traveling between the four now very close parallels. Not by means of physically traveling from one parallel to another, but by mental transference. At the beginning of each time loop the characters can jump to into the bodies of their parallel selves, and once there they find not only a world, or at least a version of Gatsby's mansion, slightly different to their own, but a whole new body too. This is done via a snapshot of the mansion frozen in time between the worlds, and this leaves the transferee open to possession by avatars of the Outer Gods. It is also possible for the partygoers to contact their parallel selves, this being done by a séance.

Initially, the characters are merely enjoying a party, but as time loops, they go beyond mere interaction and learning of

each other's quirks and secrets. Memories of events in previous time loops linger and even trickle through, eating at the Sanity of both characters and the NPCs. This can even be of injury and death as the characters are restored to health or life at the beginning of the next loop. Bringing the four parts of the artifact together does not end the scenario though. Rather it initiates a period of chaos that lasts as long as the current time loop has left, and it is during this time that the characters again fall open to possession.

As a one-shot scenario *Gatsby and the Great Race* is a decent affair that is a variation upon an old theme, that of one or more locked rooms frozen in time. Yet to be honest, the scenario is not outstanding enough to run on its own, except as a rehearsal for the monograph's main purpose, which is to be run at conventions, which explains its full title, *Gatsby and the Great Race: One Night of Horror for Many Players.*

[SPOILER ALERT!]

In order to get the utmost out of *Gatsby and the Great Race,* you will need five copies of the monograph, 32 players, several blindfolds, and a German castle. Actually, you can get away with not having the latter, but the scenario has been run at the Tentacles convention, which takes place in a German castle. In its place, you instead need four or five rooms, and a connecting corridor. The players are divided into four groups, each with a Keeper, and each playing in one of the rooms. The remaining four Keepers help control the flow of events over the course of the scenario and what happens in the corridor and the fifth room. It can be run with fewer players and fewer groups, but with four groups it is easier to organize and run.

In the single one-shot version of the scenario, the characters as a group travel mentally from one parallel to the next. In the full version, each of the groups plays a different version of the party-goers in the four parallels. Instead of each group as a whole being transferring to the next parallel, only one character is transferred at a time. This is done by physically taking the character's player out of one group, blindfolding him, and while in this nervous state allow him to interact with the space between the worlds and its denizens, before moving him into the next room and group. Over the course of the scenario, several of the players will be moved between the rooms in this fashion.

The differences between each parallel are made obvious because although the transferred character has the same name as the character he replaces, the photograph of the character on the table that everyone can see differs from the one on his investigator sheet. To that end, half of the monograph is devoted to just the investigator sheets for the four groups. The point of transferring the player through the in-between space of the corridor and into another version of the game he is playing is to create an unsettling atmosphere.

Only when the artifact has been restored and the scenario ended will the participants have a chance to understand what has gone on. In fact, they are encouraged to get together after the scenario has ended and discuss their experiences. Only then might the players grasp the full scope of *Gatsby and the Great Race.*

If run, it is best to disguise the fact that each of the four games is more or less the same. This is done by giving a separate title for each group, the suggested titles being "Hesitation," "Repetition," "Deviation," and "Machination," as run at Continuum. Certainly the first three titles are as much a reference to the long running British Radio 4 series, *Just A Minute,* in which the aim is to speak on a subject for 60 seconds without hesitation, repetition, or deviation. Machination is not part of the radio series -- well not much anyway -- but all four titles certainly are appropriate for *Gatsby and the Great Race.*

[END SPOILER ALERT]

This being a Miskatonic University Library Association monograph, its production values have been left up to the author. They are surprisingly good for *Gatsby and the Great Race,* and it is clear that the author (who as a potter has created some very nice Cthulhu-themed ceramics) has had some help to make it as presentable as it is. The Keeper(s) will still need to make a close read of the scenario as although its concept is simple, it is not easy to run as he has (they have) to run the characters through the four parallels. Understandably, this difficulty escalates as the extra groups added to get the greater effect of the scenario's scope. If the scenario has a downside, it is that it uses very little of the Mythos, but this also means that it could be run using any other game system.

In one way, I am very sorry to have read and reviewed this monograph. I still want to play *Gatsby and the Great Race,* but its full effect will be greatly diminished because I know its secrets. Then again, I would not want to run the scenario for a single group as I do not think that it is as interesting as other one-shots available for *Call of Cthulhu.*

Ultimately, what sets *Gatsby and the Great Race* apart from other scenarios is purely its staging. It is this that makes the most of the scenario's events, allowing them to be played out as much as is possible given the roleplaying format. Although it has high demands, if carefully handled, *Gatsby and the Great Race: One Night of Horror for Many Players* should deliver a very memorable playing experience.

--Matthew Pook

A Certain Sinking Feeling

"Captain, you are very young and inexperienced, but you will learn that there were some matters that both nations have agreed to not discuss, and one of these is . . . our K-129 loss."
-- reported 1987 remark of Soviet Adm. Piotr Navoytsev to USN Capt. Peter Huchthausen, former U.S. naval attaché in Moscow

Let us go down to the sea in boats. Not ships; submarines are "boats." And don't you forget it. Also, don't forget to check the hydrogen vents on the batteries, or the seals on the nuclear missile hatches, or the attitude of your dive planes, or whether you're trespassing on the subaqueous turf of the Gill-Men. Or else the devils will drag you under, and your wreckage will scatter the silt until the end of life on the surface. It's all happening, as the talking crab says before he rips your periscope out, and the water comes smashing in at 1,000 pounds of pressure per square inch, under the sea.

"K-129 had broken into two major pieces, probably on impact since the sections were so close together. The forward section was approximately 136 feet in length . . . the interior of the recovered section appeared much like an archaeological site with everything compacted into a dense mass. . . . [T]he recovered section was radioactively contaminated with what turned out to be weapons grade plutonium. This would certainly indicate that some sort of catastrophic event took place."
-- unnamed Lockheed engineer, describing the *K-129* wreckage

On February 24, 1968, the Golf II-class Soviet Navy diesel-electric submarine *K-129* left Kamchatka on a seemingly hasty patrol mission. He (Soviet subs take the masculine gender) had only had eight weeks of refit and repair time since the previous 70-day patrol in the punishing North Pacific. Under the command of Captain First Rank Vladimir Ivanovich Kobzar, the *K-129* set sail with a strangely over-stocked crew of 98 (rather than the normal 83), 40% of whom were new to the boat. It reached the deep water of the North Pacific, dived, surfaced, and reported in by radio. And that was (almost) the last anyone heard from *K-129*.

When the boat failed to check in, the Soviet Pacific Fleet became concerned, then panicked. Starting on March 8, an increasingly frenetic stream of ships, submarines, and aircraft began to quarter the North Pacific looking for the missing sub -- and for its three nuclear ballistic missiles. American subs harvested a rich crop of intelligence intercepts, and while checking those search patterns against submarine sonar net (SOSUS) recordings, U.S. Navy Special Projects Office chief scientist John P. Craven decided the key find was a "pop" that didn't sound like an explosion, but didn't sound like anything else. It happened on March 7, 1968, and the submarine *USS Halibut* was sent to the sound's likely origin point to look for the downed Golf II.

"There was a hole blown nearly 10 feet wide, just behind the Golf's conning tower. There must have been an explosion, probably on the surface, given the quiet recorded by SOSUS, and it probably came from hydrogen buildup . . ."
-- Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew, *Blind Man's Bluff: The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage*

Craven's math was correct: In August of 1968 the *Halibut* found *K-129* broken in two but otherwise surprisingly intact on the ocean floor. *Halibut* took 22,000 pictures of the wreck, and sent them to Washington for analysis. The initial Navy estimate was that hydrogen gas, produced during the charging of the Golf II's 450-ton lead-acid battery, caught fire on the surface during venting, blew a hole in the sail, and a panicky dive finished the sub off. The eventual Soviet theory, on the other hand, was that the American submarine *USS Swordfish* collided with *K-129* and knocked it into a dive below crush depth. (Prior to the declassification of SOSUS, this was also how the Soviets thought the Americans found the *K-129* wreck when the Red Navy couldn't.) *Swordfish* did enter Yokosuka on May 17, 1978 with "cosmetic" damage to its sail, but non-Russian sub experts generally agree that the thin sail of the *Swordfish* couldn't have torn such a hole in the steel hull of the Golf.

Another, rather more plausible, possibility is a leak in a missile tube hatch seal that allowed seawater to enter the tube. If the missile propellant also leaked, the two fluids could combust explosively, detonating first the propellant, then the

arming explosives, and finally the missile detonator. This is what happened to the *K-219* on October 3, 1986, and would have been even more likely on the more-primitive *K-129*. The *Halibut* pictures apparently show one tube blown out, with no sign of its missile, another compelling argument in the "leaky tube" case.

"The discovery of a high probability that the Soviet submarine was some kind of rogue, and that at the outset the Soviets had no idea that its loss was not just an accident, was made to order for Kissinger. Moreover, our disclosure to the Soviets of what we had learned about their submarine would likely raise an unanswerable question in Brezhnev's mind . . ."
-- John P. Craven, *The Silent War: The Cold War Battle Beneath the Sea*

But Craven toyed with, and in *Red Star Rogue* Kenneth Sewell and Clint Richmond pursue, the theory that the missile tube was opened for another reason. Sewell and Richmond believe that the *K-129* was hijacked by KGB forces loyal to Party ideologist Suslov and new-fledged KGB head Yuri Andropov. Their plan was to launch a nuclear attack on Pearl Harbor that the increasingly paranoid and Vietnam-obsessed Lyndon Johnson would blame on China, triggering a nuclear exchange between the Soviet Union's two rival superpowers. While Sewell and Richmond take their theory well beneath its own crush depth, one can't help but admire the Clancy-ish nature of this potential alternate history. Within the silt cloud that Sewell and Richmond stir up, though, is an interesting nugget, to wit: Around March 15, the University of Hawaii research vessel *RV Teritu* discovered a radioactive oil slick north of Hawaii. Where and when, exactly, remain mysteries, as the *Teritu's* log has gone unaccountably missing -- along with, come to mention it, the crew roster of the *K-129*. But any plausible reconstruction puts the sinking site around 350 miles closer to Hawaii than the *K-129's* official patrol zone, and a considerable distance from the CIA's carefully leaked coordinates for the wreck.

"Give them my assurance that I will do my utmost to help them in their mission, and anytime they don't receive the cooperation they think they ought to, be in touch with me and I'll see that they get it."
-- Howard Hughes memo to Hughes Tool Company CEO Raymond Holliday, on the CIA's Project JENNIFER (August, 1970)

And what, exactly, is the CIA doing leaking coordinates of a derelict submarine? Isn't that the Navy's job? Well, that's what the Navy thought, but CIA Director Richard Helms spotted a chance for bureaucratic turf-building that would take some of the luster off the Navy's great intel coup. The Navy just wanted to use deep diving suits, mini-subs, and cutting torches to explore the *K-129,* salvage its missiles, lift its cipher machines and code books, and get out again. But the CIA came up with a grandiose plan to build an immense sea-going crane ship that would lower a giant claw 16,000 feet to the bottom of the Pacific, grab ahold of the wrecked sub, and fish it up from the ocean floor to rest in a sub-sized "moon pool" amidships. And who better to subcontract the construction out to than super-patriot (and pliable drug-addicted madman) Howard Hughes? The cover story was that Hughes intended to jump-start the entirely theoretical industry of sea-bed mining.

The CIA code-named the operation Project JENNIFER, and Hughes' prime contractor, Global Maritime, laid the keel of the 63,000-ton, 619-foot *GloMar II* (later the *Glomar Explorer* or the *Hughes Glomar Explorer*) in November of 1972. By spring of 1974, the ship was ready, and operations began on July 4. On August 12 (or 7), 1974, the ship's claw (known as "Clementine") snapped while lifting the *K-129,* sending the entire stern (including the code books and cipher machines) tumbling down to the bottom where the fragments buried themselves deep in the silt. Project JENNIFER was a $350-million boondoggle that didn't even stay secret until the *Glomar Explorer* returned to port. On June 5, 1974, unknown professional burglars broke into Hughes' corporate offices in Los Angeles and stole most of his files, including a memo detailing the CIA role in funding the *Glomar Explorer* and the JENNIFER mission outline; Jack Anderson broke the story a year later.

"But no one gives an answer, not even one goodbye
The silence of their sinking is all that they reply
Some have chosen to decay and others chose to die
But I'm not dying, no I'm not dying
Tell me I'm not dying
The Captain will not say how long we must remain
The phantom ship forever sails the sea

It's all the same."
-- Phil Ochs, "The *Scorpion* Departs But Never Returns"

But why all the fuss over *K-129?* It wasn't the only submarine to vanish in 1968. The *USS Scorpion,* a top-of-the-line nuclear submarine returning from a Mediterranean deployment, went down on May 22 about 400 miles southwest of the Azores. It was lost for almost five months until John P. Craven (and the *USNS Mizar*) discovered it. It, too, went down under murky circumstances: theories include accidentally torpedoing itself, a battery explosion, or a Soviet retaliatory strike for the loss of *K-129.* And it gets still creepier. Two other submarines, both like the *Scorpion* on Mediterranean deployments, vanished in 1968 -- only two days apart. The Israeli submarine *INS Dakar* sank on January 25, 1968 and stayed lost for 31 years until turning up off the coast of Crete. And the French submarine *Minerve* left the port of Toulon on January 27, 1968 and was never seen again.

"Perhaps stories of turtle-backed objects of large size relate to submersible vessels. If there were no submersible vessels of this earth, in the year 1883, we think of submersibles from somewhere else. Why they should be so secretive, we can't much inquire into now, because we are so much concerned with other concealments and suppressions. . . . There have been suggestions of an occult control upon the minds of the inhabitants of this earth. Let anybody who does not like the idea that his mind may be most subtly controlled, without his knowledge of it, think back to what propagandists did with his beliefs in the years 1914-1918. Also he need not think so far back as that."
-- Charles Fort, *Lo!*

Fed by CIA spin, conspiracy theories abound about *K-129* and the *Glomar Explorer.* Some (including the indefatigable Sewell and Richmond) say that the "breakup" story is a cover, and that Clementine salvaged the whole Golf II intact, code-books and all. Or maybe it was a diversion entirely? In *Underwater and Underground Bases,* Richard Sauder makes a great deal of Navy plans for, well, underwater and underground bases drilled and dug into the seamount, and notes that the whereabouts of the *Glomar Challenger* (a slightly less flamboyant vessel) are unknown during the summer of 1974. My favorite is the theory that Project JENNIFER was a Rainbow or Moon Dust op, the recovery of a UFO downed (according to solemn, if anonymous, report) by a U.S. Navy destroyer in June 1973 near Hawaii. Cue radioactive "oil" spill.

Such a UFO would be, technically, an Unidentified Submarine Object, a USO. Reports of such things (or combo craft that emerge from, or dive into, the sea) go back to the 19th century at least: crewmen on the brig *Victoria* saw three bright, luminous objects trailing streamers (or fins) emerge from the Mediterranean near Malta on June 18, 1845. (Another witness saw the same USO in Antalya, Turkey -- just north of where the *Dakar* eventually turned up.) A lot (18 reports between 1879 and 1962) of glowing undersea wheels (in fine Ezekiel style) tend to appear in Nommo country, roughly the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Siam. Other cases include a red glow that flew over Dong Hoi in Vietnam in 1909 (the French submarine *Phenix* sank in nearby waters on June 15, 1939), the yellow glows and sonar contacts that led a 30-ship NATO fleet on a futile search in Norway's Sognefjord in 1972 (not unreasonably far from where *K-278* sank on April 7, 1989), and the USO that delivered the amphibian aliens from the planet Iarga to their pseudonymous Dutch contactee in July 1967.

Perhaps more relevantly to our search, sailors and marines on board the *USS Monrovia* sighted a glowing orange oval under the ocean near the Azores the day after the *Scorpion* disappeared. It moved with the ship and blanked out compass, radar, and radio. And a different sort of connection surfaces when we learn that Bob Lazar's famous UFO fuel "[Element 115](#)" can be extracted from "magnetite" nodules (code-named "LODESTAR") found in deep ocean trenches, and at entrances to the Hollow Earth. Is there any connection to the actual *manganese* nodules on the seabed that the CIA and Hughes perhaps not-incidentally used as the cover story for Project JENNIFER? Who can say?

"In the vastness of the oceans there is not just room for all manner of enormities but -- at least according to the new maps of these vast areas -- what might be called an open invitation for residence upon their bottoms for all manner of 'things.'"
-- Ivan Sanderson, *Invisible Residents*

But if the LODESTAR magnetites are as excellent as all that, doesn't it seem reasonable that Someone, or Something, doesn't want us down there harvesting them? The rumored existence of underwater OINTs (Other Intelligences) goes

back as far as mermaids, of course, in which connection it's interesting to note that a fake mermaid is called a "Jenny Hanniver." And a fake deep-sea (anti-mermaid?) operation is called "JENNIFER," by sheer coincidence. The Deep Ones seem to come in waves: our four subs lost to the wrath of Dagon in 1968, three in three weeks in prewar 1939 (although the *USS Squalus* and the *HMS Thetis* were both eventually raised again), two in the spring of 1970 (*K-8,* like *Scorpion* leaving the Mediterranean; and *Eurydice,* like *Minerve* sunk off Toulon). But they also pick off targets of opportunity (or dangerous threats), like the *USS Thresher,* sunk on April 10, 1963, 220 miles off of -- Cape Cod. Or should I say, off of Innsmouth? (The *Thresher* vanished for some 14 months before its wreckage reappeared.) Although the Deep Ones guard Y'ha-Nthlei and the Bermuda Triangle (and the Dragon's Triangle that swallowed the *K-129*?), they flourish in the ruins of Mu in the South Pacific, where the *USNS Eltanin* photographed an underwater antenna on August 29, 1964. Killjoy oceanologists later explained away the image as a Cladorizha sponge. Unless They grow their antennas in a spongiform shape -- or bred Cladorizhae to send psychic signals.

"I know the actual truth about the submarines Thresher *and* Scorpion, *and I know what happened to them and why. The story, if it could be told, would make cold chills run up and down your spine, but the time is not yet. There are many things which could be told, but, well, these books circulate everywhere . . . and there are many people who should not be aware that certain people know what is really going on . . . The mystery of the* Thresher *and* Scorpion *is a stranger thing than you would ever believe."*
-- T. Lobsang Rampa, *Feeding the Flame*

Since 1900, over 250 submarines have sunk or vanished due to "accident or error," and there have been over 1,400 lost subs ascribed to "enemy action." In no case do the investigating parties have much incentive to tell the truth -- and if the Truth is Down There, then maybe that's reasonable. Subs disappear, and then the wreckage -- or some wreckage, anyway -- is "found" months or years later. Covert salvage, disguised by overt salvage, pulls up the LODESTAR cores or the Atlantean sea-charts to the Inner Earth. (Or, as researcher William R. Lyne would have it, to recover Nazi anti-gravity technology smuggled out on U-boats and sunk in the last days of WWII.) The ufologist "Branton" claims that both the *Thresher* and the *Scorpion* -- first-rank nuclear attack submarines -- were sent into the flooded ocean tunnels beneath the American West, to fight the aliens from below and break on through to the other side. Perhaps the whole Cold War submarine contest was nothing but a giant JENNIFER-Hanniver, a coverup sewn together below which the Rainbow warriors could run silent and dead to the world.

The Omniscient Eye

Can I Find Treasure Under a Big, Red X?

What's the deal with treasure maps (pirate or otherwise)? They're omnipresent in pirate-y lore, but several minutes of searching has shown almost squat for Real World precedent. Did pirates (or anyone else) ever actually use treasure maps? If so, why? If there were treasure maps, did others ever find or acquire these maps? (If so, what's the biggest haul that a map-finder found?) Finally, is there any scoop that we would-be real-worlders can use to make treasure maps more believable in our games (whether or not such maps actually existed)?

Buried treasure. The leprechaun's pot of gold. Doubloons and pieces of eight and treasure galore. The treasure map is a staple of the adventure narrative. It provides motivation, instructions and a natural plot hook. The only problem is that, despite all expectations to the contrary, there is only one verified occasion when a pirate buried his treasure in hope of returning to it one day.

In June 1699, the Scottish privateer (or pirate, depending on who you believe) Captain William Kidd landed on Gardiner's Island, a small island at the eastern end of Long Island. Knowing that he was a wanted man and on his way to Boston to clear his name, he buried gold, silver bars, gems and valuables worth approximately $30,000 on the island. It did not stay safe for long. The Governor of New York ordered the island's owner to recover the treasure and ship it to England for Kidd's trial. The trial was politically motivated and on May 23, 1701, Kidd was hanged at Wapping in London having been found guilty of murder and five counts of piracy.

But treasure maps were not only the preserve of pirates. Treasure hunts have taken place for thousands of years and still take place today. "Treasure maps" per se may be rare or non-existent, but a collection of documents and clues that lead to fabulous wealth and could certainly be termed a treasure hunt are very much a reality throughout history.The answer to the question about treasure maps can be split into two parts: Was treasure buried; and were maps or clues left to the whereabouts of the treasure?

Buried Treasure

Buried treasure can be divided into four categories:

1. Hoards buried for safekeeping
2. Wealth buried with an important personage, also known as votive hoards
3. Ill-gotten gains hidden, typically to be recovered after pressure from the relevant authorities has passed
4. Treasure lost in an accident, in particular in storms at sea.

An additional category includes entire lost (or mythical) cities. Examples include Troy, Machu Picchu, Atlantis and even the Valley of the Kings in Egypt.

Hoards Buried for Safekeeping

For most of history, wealthy individuals had to look after their money themselves. Although banks have been around since the 12th century, they could (and did) fail. Banks make their money by providing useful services to depositors who place their money in the bank's vaults (possibly paying interest, but both very early and very recent bankers might just provide safekeeping and easy transfers of large sums) and then lending that same money to borrowers who pay a higher rate of interest. Because most of the money at any bank is on loan at any one time, banks rarely have enough liquid finances to satisfy the demand if a high proportion of depositors ask to withdraw their money all at once. If this

happens (known as a "run" on the bank), the bank could go bust, leaving their depositors with only a fraction of their original capital. And that's just for the wealthy; members of the poor and middle classes didn't have enough spare cash to make it worth their while to deposit it or for bankers to deal with such trifling sums. For this reason, many individuals would keep their wealth hidden at home, and at times of civil unrest, war, or invasion they would bury it to hide it from looters.

In modern times, a number of these hoards have been found. A prime example was the Cuerdale Hoard which was found on 15th May 1840 at a bend in the River Ribble in Lancashire. Local tradition had long held that anyone who stood on the South bank of the river at Walton le Dale and looked up river toward Ribchester would be within sight of the richest treasure in England. Many searched but it was a group of workmen repairing the river bank in 1840 who discovered over 8,500 silver coins and valuables in a lead-lined chest. The British Museum speculates that the coins were buried by the Vikings after they were expelled from Dublin in 902 and were traveling back along an overland route to York, the Viking capital.

Other similar finds include the Hoxne Hoard in Suffolk, the Canoscio Hoard in Umbria, the Mildenhall Hoard in Suffolk and the Harrogate Hoard which was found in early 2007 and announced on 19th July, with an estimated modern day value of $1.5 million. The hoards contain many coins which give archeologists detailed information on the likely date of the burial. Many of the hoards that have been found can be dated to the late Roman and Viking periods in British history ranging from the fourth to the tenth centuries, and typically correlate with periods of violent upheaval or civil unrest. Similar finds have been made across Europe, often correlated with times of significant unrest; for example, the Roman side of the Danube saw many coin hoards hidden in the face of Ostrogothic invasion.

Burial Goods and Votive Hoards

Many societies throughout history have interred valuables with their deceased, whether as a sign of status, to help them in the afterlife or for other spiritual reasons. Such deposits provide some of the most spectacular hidden treasures which have come down to us. Perhaps the most famous example is the tomb of King Tutankhamen, found by Howard Carter in 1922 after decades of patient research and excavation. At the Anglo-Saxon burial grounds at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk important people, including probably King Raedwald of the East Angles, were buried in 20 barrows alongside grave goods that included jewellery, weapons, valuables, and an entire Anglo-Saxon longship that measured 90 feet in length and 14 feet in the beam. In China, historians had long known of accounts of jade burial suits, believed by the Chinese to prevent the decay of the body. It was not until 1968 that archeologists discovered proof of their existence during building works in Hebei, a province of China approximately 100 miles outside Beijing. The bodies of Liu Sheng, a prince of the Han dynasty who died in 113 BC, and his wife Dou Wan were encased in a jade suit that consisted of 2,498 plates of solid jade connected with two and a half pounds of gold wires. At least two more graves containing jade suits have subsequently been found, and archeologists now speculate that jade suits may have been relatively common but subject to depredation at the hands of grave robbers.

Grave robbers were and continue to be a genuine historical threat. With such wealth buried with the dead, searching for tombs and plundering them was a remunerative pursuit. In the 16th century, a robber pit was dug in the apparent centre of Sutton Hoo; it was only the fact that agricultural activity had altered the shape of the primary mound that saved the votive hoard. The pit was off-center and missed the real treasure by a narrow margin. In Italy, tomb raiders known as "tombaroli" have been looting Roman ruins for decades, often operating in broad daylight by posing as construction workers complete with bulldozers and cranes. And of course, much pillaging was conducted as the spoils of war as European countries carved out their global empires, perhaps most famously the Elgin marbles, which were hacked of the Parthenon and transported to Britain by Thomas Bruce, Seventh Earl of Elgin, in 1806. Even now, searching for lost tombs is a lucrative profession in a number of antiquities-rich countries.

Ill-Gotten Gains

A criminal on the run with the authorities closing in has a strong incentive to hide the money. Modern criminals launder it (see "Where's the Nearest Money Laundromat?"). Historical criminals buried it. Although Captain Kidd is the only pirate known to have buried his wealth, other examples include train robbers in the Old West. Myths and

legends have grown up around certain areas believed to contain significant wealth. The Money Pit on Oak Island in Nova Scotia is a good example. People have been digging for buried valuables since 1795 in over 13 different attempts to get at the buried valuables. No one even seems clear on what is buried here, although the clear assumption is that is valuable: millions of dollars and at least six lives have been lost in the search. For further details, look no further than [Suppressed Transmission](#).

Treasures Lost

Valuables are heavy. Gold and silver mined in far-flung lands needed to be transported across oceans and manufactured valuables of great beauty and enormous value were sent between states and wealthy individuals. Before the railroads, the sea was the only way to move them. But the sea is fickle and demanding. Not only were there pirate raids to contend with, but storms and navigational errors could lead a ship to founder without trace. The Genovese steamship *Polluce* sank in 1841 near the island of Elba off the west coast of Italy, possibly after an attack by Neapolitan pirates. In 2007, a vessel codenamed the "Black Swan" was found in Mediterranean waters near Spain and coins and valuables worth approximately $500 million were recovered.

The sea is a fertile ground for this type of search because valuables are likely to have lain undisturbed for centuries, rather than discovered by farmers with a plough in agricultural lands or by dilligent archaeologists. However, since lost ships were usually lost in storms or sunk by pirates during periods with poor navigational equipment, records of the exact location where they foundered are sketchy and making a search for a wreck is an expensive and frequently frustrating task. For that reason, although there are reasonably good records of the *approximate* position of most valuable historical shipwrecks, treasure hunters tend to restrict their searches to shallow waters.

Treasure "Maps"

The discovery of buried treasure is often down to as much luck as judgment. It is a key theme that local legends often contains tales of untold wealth (like the Cuerdale myth), perhaps combined with intimations of a dark fate befalling any who disturbed the treasure -- the supposed curse of the Valley of the Kings springs to mind. That has never stopped adventurers from looking.

Leaving aside mere serendipity, there are clear examples of treasure hunts taking place throughout history, even if a treasure map per se did not exist. In the case of the sunken Black Swan, a NASDAQ-listed company called Odyssey Marine Exploration found it. Using teams of historians and archeologists they scoured the archives for the likely location of the vessel when it sank. Once they had narrowed down the area, they switched to a high-tech sonar search of the sea bed to map out potential search sites combined with a magnetic anomaly detector to find cannon and other metal objects. The Black Swan is not their only success, and the company is billed as an exploration investment similar to companies that seek out precious metals or oil.

The story of the *Polluce* is straight out of an adventure. In the late 1990s, a French historian identified the location from documents uncovered in state archives. He sold the information to a group of English adventurers who decided to dive on the expected location of the wreck without permission from the Italian authorities. In 2000, they found the wreck, removing 2,000 coins and a few jewels. The Italians discovered the theft, alerted the British police and when the coins came up for sale in a London auction house, the police seized them all. A second recovery attempt, authorized by the Italians, is now underway.

Similarly, investigators from Rome trying to trace a priceless collection of antique manuscripts and books that were looted by the Nazis from the synagogue in Rome in 1943 have stated that they believe that they are closing in the final location. Some of the volumes were returned shortly after the war, but 7,000 items are still missing. The current belief is that they are lost in a former Soviet military archive and the Italians are working with the Russions to locate them.

The sources of information on buried treasure are legion and in the absence of a map, there are alternatives. Local folklore may contain hints that there is something worth investigating, although the real meaning has frequently been obscured by the passage of time. A treasure hunt could involve a painstaking search through the libraries, archives and

knowledge depositories of the world. And nor does treasure need to be gold. Value can be found in many places: in recovering ancient knowledge, recovering a religious symbol or reliquary of particular significance (the hand of John the Baptist recently resurfaced in Montenegro having been lost when the Knights of St John, otherwise known as the Hospitallers, abandoned Malta in 1798), or in the proof of a historical fact, particularly when this fact supports the nationalistic or political objectives of a government or ideology.

Even if the location of a treasure hoard is accurately identified, there is no guarantee that the valuables remain in place. Many graves have been looted over the centuries, and some were even looted by the workers who constructed the tomb in the first place. It would be entirely possible for a painstaking treasure hunt to lead to the correct place, only for the investigators to discover that someone has beaten them to the punch. The number of known occasions when a pirate buried his treasure in order to return for it at a later date is precisely one. But treasure maps and treasure hunts have been with us forever. All that has changed is that the technology is better.

References

- The Cuerdale Hoard --
  http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/explore/online_tours/europe/the_vikings/the_cuerdale_hoard.aspx
- Odyssey Marine Exploration -- http://www.shipwreck.net

--Nicholas Lovell

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!

You Need a Metaphor Like a Literary-Word List Needs Metaphors

The ships hung in the sky in much the same way that bricks don't.
--Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

The metaphor is one of the most powerful concepts in humanity's universe. It enables us to perceive the imperceptible, understand the incomprehensible, and explain the unexplainable. (And, yes, I know the title is a simile. Don't confuse me with facts.)

In fact, metaphors are some of the earliest learning concepts we possess. It is through metaphor we realize that there is a link between the number of apples when we combine a pile of two apples and one of three apples, and the equation *x = 2+3*.

And it's useful in gaming. One of the earliest, most vivid ideas I remember about metaphors in an RPG world is in the original **Star Wars RPG,** which gave a transcript of a GM trying to dissuade the PCs' vessel from attacking a Star Destroyer: "Here's their ship [draws a large triangle covering most of a piece of paper], and here's your ship [puts a tiny dot on the outside of the triangle]."

Metaphors were also utilized by our long-running **Vampire: The Dark Ages** campaign, giving everyone a handle on some of the more abstract concepts and making sure everyone was on the same page. For example, when describing a werewolf's Rage, he once offered a metaphor that went along the lines of: "Imagine that, for as long as you can remember, you've been kicked, prodded, poked, and antagonized by a small child that you're not allowed to touch. And this child is creative, so he keeps coming up with new and different ways of annoying you, so it's not like you can just ignore him. Now imagine that giving into temptation and lashing out at this child doesn't make the child go away, but instead gives him even *more* ideas for how to tick you off, at least in the short term. Now imagine that you're reliant on this child and his techniques for powering most of your special abilities. That's Rage."

Likewise when I ran an **Aberrant** campaign, I gave what I thought were a couple of good examples as to what it felt like to have the more abstract mega-attributes -- versions of the regular attributes that are entirely beyond those capable of normal humans. "Mega-Wits doesn't mean that you're smarter, but that you're faster at sorting out the options you *do* have. It's like playing a [timed game of chess](#) against a grandmaster where you have an hour for each move and he only has a minute; if you're a lousy chess player, even having an hour between moves won't be a huge advantage. To envision Mega-Appearance, think of the most beautiful or handsome celebrity you know. Now, that celebrity is certain to have photos taken of him when he doesn't look particularly appealing; maybe he's walking hungover on the beach after eating a big meal, or maybe he just woke up. Now, someone with the Mega-Appearance attribute doesn't have those photos; they simply don't exist. If he were photographed when he just woke up, he'd have cute kitten-y eyes or some other appealing aspect."

Of course, the real core books for the **World of Darkness** line are chock-full of metaphors of their own. And the reason is simple: Not only do metaphors do a good job of conveying the nuts-and-bolts, they also do a good job at giving an idea of how it *feels.* For example, saying that a campaign's new super-jet is "20 times faster than flying coach on a 747, but only 1/20th as comfortable" should cause all players to wince at the prospect.

Likewise a metaphor can provide a means of differentiating between otherwise similar worlds or ideas. For example, if I give my players a campaign prospectus that says, "In this world, magic is rare but powerful, and wizards can accomplish great feats with sufficient research," that doesn't give a lot of indication as to what magic is *like* in that world. Compare that with the following excerpts from possible campaigns, all of which utilize a metaphor to give an idea about what the underlying essence of magic:

- In this campaign, performing magic is like a doing a moderately challenging calculus exam, except that for every answer you get wrong, a piece of your soul dies. It's not difficult if you pay attention and are meticulous, but

eventually those slight miscalculations will doom you to eternal torment.

- For this series, calling upon the powers of magic is like calling up a cold, distant, mildly frightening uncle for a sum of money. It will probably involve research (to find the right spell or phone number), it may involve bargaining, and results can vary anywhere from a gift to a loan that must be repaid in kind or favor later, to "no." Regardless, each such call carries with it the risk of learning more about your family or heritage than you wanted to know.
- In this world, using magic is like passing gas. It's something just about everyone can do, but no one *wants* to do; it's hard to do on command; the results vary from day to day; and even if you're successful, you haven't done anything you're particularly proud of.

In all three, magic is probably rare in the world, but the reason behind that rarity varies . . . and that's hopefully conveyed by the metaphor.

Metaphor can also be useful to players trying to give an idea as to what a character's powers or limitations are like. For example, a character with flight might describe it as "being carried by an invisible hand, complete with the uncertainty, the uneasy freedom of the legs and arms, and the uncomfortable pressure on the chest." Or a character with danger sense might describe it as feeling to him "exactly like the harsh ringing of the old rotary phone . . . especially the way it sounded the day it rang with news of my father's death." And this use of metaphor enables vary different effects from otherwise identical powers; the phone-ringing danger sense would seem quite different than one which felt like a sense of unnatural calm and peace. (Coming up with a good metaphor could also lead to interesting plot possibilities; for example, the peace-and-calm danger sense might mean that the character tries to get into increasingly dangerous situations, in an effort to feel that euphoric calm.)

Whether giving information, providing an emotional guide, or delivering dramatic effect, the metaphor is an amazingly efficient -- if somewhat imprecise -- means of evoking player response.

--Steven Marsh

-18

Into the Réduit Schweiz

by Paul Drye

Reich-1's Third World War is dominated by the vast spaces across which Germany and the United States are battling; even the nominal flashpoint in the British Isles is dwarfed by the armor battles in Siberia and the naval blockade from Murmansk to Gibraltar. Fortunately neither side has yet developed nuclear weapons, but apart from that the war is as bad as it could be in many parts of the world. The battle for Switzerland is tiny by comparison, but it's a place where Infinity is making its presence known on the timeline. Pushed back into the mountainous and fortified Réduit Schweiz, the Swiss armed forces have been taking a stand for almost a year, hoping against hope that they can make the cost of occupation too high for the Nazis to keep up, or at least hold out until the Americans come.

The Réduit Schweiz

Since the end of the beginning of the Second World War (which on this timeline ended with a post-Dunkirk Anglo-German armistice), the Swiss strategy has been to fortify the Alps to protect the upper river valleys of the Rhône, the Limmat, the Aar, and the Reuss where they flow through their most rugged terrain. The defenders had more than a decade with which to work between the armistice and the start of the Third World War in 1950, and then the German invasion in 1952 after Britain was occupied. Despite this time and effort, there was simply no way that the populous lowlands of Switzerland could be defended; the Réduit is about pulling back into impossible terrain and defending it until the Germans go away. The tricky question is what would make the Nazis want to do so. Unless the Swiss can keep some offensive pressure on them, the Germans can just ignore the Réduit and carry on their occupation forever, or until some outside factor comes into play. Unfortunately, coming out of their holes to apply that pressure puts the Swiss Armed Forces up against the full might of the Third Reich.

Their problem is compounded by a lack of economic resources. The Réduit has only one town with more than 20,000 people, and the rest are almost entirely less than half that size. The war's disruption makes it hard to be sure, but there may be less than 250,000 Free Swiss civilians out of a pre-war population of 4.6 million; on top of that about the same number of Swiss soldiers have retreated to the Réduit.

Within the Réduit, the Swiss have constructed a series of fortresses to act as centers of resistance, laid down mines and reconstructed roads to prevent armor attacks, and placed innumerable camouflaged pillboxes along routes that could be used by infantry. The stronghold's towns are protected by anti-aircraft artillery, and there are two aerodromes based around cave systems that protect the Swiss Armed Forces' American-built P-80s -- their air arm is purely fighters as not even the Swiss are suicidal enough to try strategic bombing on Germany from their position. There are even a few Swiss torpedo boats on Lakes Lucerne and Thun, though they venture out only in desperate situations (such as when the Germans attempted an amphibious assault on the lakeside town of Stans in the spring).

Visitors to the Réduit will, at first, find it almost stereotypically Swiss. The river valleys house numerous villages and

small farms, while mountains surround them on either side. However, closer examination makes it apparent that things are less pleasant. The region was dependent on trade with the rest of Switzerland, barely able to feed itself, and with the comparatively huge number of soldiers requiring some supplement to their canned foods and powdered milk, the civilian population is starting to feel the pinch. Similarly, technological items like trains and radios are beginning to wear out, with civilians again having to do without so as to support the war.

Thun

The original plans for the Réduit didn't include this city, but of all of Switzerland's important centers it was closest to being within its borders. With the breathing space brought by the Anglo-German armistice and the Nazis swallowing and pacifying Russia, the Swiss decided to extend their fortress building just a little bit out into the Swiss lowlands. Despite the extra defensive difficulties it would bring, the city's small industries and its military college (the largest in the country) were considered worth the effort. It is by far the largest town within the Réduit.

By the time of the German invasion, Thun was quite possibly the most heavily defended city in Europe. The approaches to it are relatively narrow, as the city is nestled in the foothills of the Alps and the point where the river Aare leaves Lake Thun and flows in the direction of Bern. As well as the usual anti-aircraft batteries and pillboxes, two enormous berms have been set up to the north of the city to act as nearly indestructible city walls; the "city gate" is literally a tunnel through them more than 100 feet long as the crow flies and 175 in actual length because of the hairpin bend in its middle. The river itself is heavily mined -- the Swiss have left no channel for their own ships to go north in favor of making it impossible for the Germans to come south. Similarly, more than three miles of track just north of Thun were torn up by the retreating Swiss in order to make it that much more difficult for the Nazis to approach. Even the graded bed was disrupted with explosives. The tracks continue south of Thun to the heart of the Réduit along the western shore of the lake, and are a major factor in the Swiss defense of the city. Many of Thun's citizens have put in time repairing damage to their part of the railroad after German bombing runs.

The city is roughly circular, tucked within a bend of the river. Two streets make "spokes" by running from the small river island of Bälliz (where the town's market is found): The Allmendstrasse in the north, and the Frutigenstrasse in the south. The latter branches off a third spoke, the east-west Hohmadstrasse at the town hospital (now flooded with casualties). In the south of the town, an airfield has been built in the Schadaupark along the north shore of the lake, but it is mostly used for reconnaissance planes. The Swiss armed force's jets are far too vulnerable to land here except in emergencies. The town castle, Schloss Schadau, is on the eastern edge of this, and is used as the headquarters of the local garrison.

As important as it is to the Swiss war effort, Thun is too exposed for the Swiss High Command. They are in Gampel instead, a town on the far, Italian side of the Alps that is that much harder for the Germans to bomb. From there they can pass through the Lötschberg Tunnel to the northern side of the Alps and visit Thun as needed, as well as other important fronts in the north. While the need for extra distance is understandable, the people of Thun do have a bit of resentment about this, and feel like they've been left out in the wind.

(Not So) Secret

As Homeline began to suspect that Reich-5 had developed parachronic capabilities, they became worried that the Nazis there might want to ally with victorious Nazi Empires elsewhere. Infinity has started working to prevent them from teaming up with known Nazi timelines, where possible using the most obvious strategy: If they cause the downfall of a Third Reich on another timeline it can't become an ally. On Reich-1, the war for world domination is still in the balance, and a little judicious help might tip things. This aid is going primarily to the American/Commonwealth alliance, but Switzerland is home to a fight in the heart of the Reich that might be a spoiler for the Germans if the Americans invade.

The plan was to provide intelligence to the Swiss in their mountain zone, enough to make their pinpricks against the occupation forces down in the lowlands a little more sting. Unfortunately, the Secret has leaked on into the Swiss officer ranks, and Infinity has found itself drawn into the conflict far more than they would like solely to protect

parachronic knowledge from reaching the Germans.

The source of the leak is an unsolved mystery, though Infinity is convinced it was deliberate. Someone told the Swiss commander-in-chief (General Henri Guisan, detailed below) about parachronics, Homeline, Infinity, and Coventry. The general then arranged for a "dead man's dossier" among himself and his leading subordinates, so that if he disappears, or something goes suspiciously wrong in the Réduit, the information will be leaked to his army at large. If Switzerland then falls to the Germans, it will be impossible to prevent the Third Reich from discovering the Secret from prisoners.

Similarly, if Infinity refuses to co-operate with his requests for help, he will leak the information in the same way; the general's plan is to blackmail Infinity into helping him. For now, the Secret is relatively safe -- Guisan has kept his circle small so that Homeline will not simply decide the situation is uncontainable and cut their losses. He wants the strange visitors motivated to give the Réduit's forces supplies and military help. He likewise avoids asking for too much.

Infinity Operations in the Réduit Schweiz

The patrol has two main tasks in Reich-1's Europe. First, they work to meet enough of General Guisan's demands that the Secret remains safe while also trying to minimize how much interference that is. Ideally, their involvement would drop to zero. Second, they try to find out who leaked the existence of Homeline to the Swiss, and figure out which natives know about it. Ultimately they would like to identify everyone with the knowledge, so they can be captured simultaneously and sent to Coventry. Those heading the investigation know they have their work cut out for them, and that's even before they have to hide their work from a disapproving Swiss high command while also having to rely on the Réduit as a base.

The former goal has Infinity agents running small-unit military operations designed to hurt the Nazi occupiers. Bern, for example, is only 15 miles from the border of the Réduit, and is often a target of raids. Similarly, the General has asked for and received quite a bit of military equipment (ammunition and parts for repairs, as well as food).

Characters

General Henri Guisan: The man on the spot for the Swiss Army is a French-speaking Protestant from Mézières near Lake Neuchatel. In 1939 he was selected to be the General of the Swiss Armed Forces, and he was responsible for formalizing the réduit concept and getting it built and manned over the next ten years.

The General is a thin, of average height, and has thin white hair that comes to a cowlick high in the center of his forehead. He has a toothbrush moustache, also white, but is otherwise clean-shaven. He is 76 years old and until the start of the latest war looked younger; now he looks his age.

He is a desperate man. His goal is to never surrender, but he worries about the war ending another way; his forces could eventually erode into nothingness due to lack of supplies. Since discovering the existence of Homeline, he's taken it as a godsend that will prevent this from happening. He avoids using the connection when he can, for fear that he will come to rely on it only to have it disappear. On the other hand, he doesn't have many other options.

Robin Leadford: Leadford is a spy without a home office; he was with the British Special Operations Executive based out of Switzerland who was stranded after the Germans invaded across the Pas de Calais and took the United Kingdom. Other men in the SOE have managed to establish links with Commonwealth nations, but Leadford had to flee east from his post in France and Switzerland's land-locked position left him no obvious route to get back in touch.

He's signed up with the Swiss Armed Forces since, for lack of anything better to do. While officially only a soldier, he hasn't lost his intelligence training. Groups trying to maintain secrecy about some missions while also working overtly in the Réduit run the risk of being uncovered if they tickle his old instincts. This is made likelier as he's the one who will be assigned as a liaison between English-speaking Homeliners and the Swiss (he knows French extremely well,

and rapidly learned Schweizerdeutsch after making it across the border into Geneva).

Leadford has a broad, guileless face marred by a nose that's been flattened and bent a bit to a left after a close-up bit of wrestling with a German commando several months ago. He has sandy blond hair, and dark brown eyes, and is clean-shaven.

Frederick Kurtenbach: The man to see when first posted to Thun, Kurtenbach is the publisher of the *Thuner Zeitung,* the local newspaper. Though reduced to a single sheet printed on both sides due to paper shortages, it is still printed every day and used to keep the people of the town informed. Kartenbach is fanatical about his self-imposed mission to do this. He knows everything to know about what's going on in Thun, or if he doesn't he can direct you to someone who does.

When he isn't in his printing room or offices getting the next edition ready, he can be found in the Alte Brauhaus -- a smoky pub in the Bälliz district of town. There he smokes his pipe and downs the local fruity beer while thinking of ways to help the war effort. Journalistic integrity isn't high on his list of priorities. He considers himself a Swiss patriot, and is willing to do quite a lot to help the Swiss Armed Forces.

Kurtenbach looks vaguely like Teddy Roosevelt, with his stocky build, walrus moustache, and glasses. He wears a tradesman's short-sleeved white shirt and dark pants, and his left hand is stained with ink. The right is stained with both ink and tobacco.

Adventures in the Réduit Schweiz

Things That Glow Bump In The Night: Forced to hide in a small, out-of-the-way shelter by a Nazi patrol, the team finds themselves in a place apparently unused since the war started. If you need a hideout, it's kind of nice: water, some canned goods, cots, some struggling batteries to dimly power the electric lights. There are also some intensely radioactive crates marked with the sun symbol of the Imperial Japanese. In some nearby filing cabinets are shipping manifests from Fukuoka to Salonika and scientific papers -- most in Japanese, some in English -- belonging to Dr. Yoshio Nishina. The refugees have stumbled across the uranium of the Japanese nuclear program, lost when the United States smashed Japan flat in the Pacific War. As the Empire collapsed, it was spirited out of the Home Islands and placed in hiding in Switzerland, apparently by someone imagining a comeback after the occupation ended.

The characters have two issues to handle: simply getting through the night without receiving a couple of hundred rems of radiation or being shot by the SS outside, then figuring out what to do with the uranium. Though not fully enriched (otherwise it would have been used to make a bomb) it's still dangerous. In the hands of the Swiss, it could be a weapon of sorts; in the hands of the Germans it advances their nuclear weapon program by a fair bit.

I Hate Myself: General Guisan (or, if Infinity's uncovered one, another Swiss with knowledge of the Secret) has been kidnapped by Reich-1's Otto Skorzeny and a band of SS Commandos. They don't know what they've got, thinking they've "just" absconded with the head of the Swiss Resistance, and are headed to the Nazi-controlled lowlands and then Germany proper. ISWAT got wind of the operation just in time to send some agents, at the direction of Infinity's copy of Skorzeny, and the outtimers have orders to end the escapade before the Secret is extracted from the captive general. If they get the chance to put down Reich-1's Skorzeny like a dog, so much the better.

This One You Can Feel Good About: General Guisan has been punctilious about asking for favors only on behalf of his forces. However, he has finally brought himself to ask for some personal help. He is married, and his wife is in hiding in the Canton of Vaud north of Lake Geneva. The plan was to bring her with him when the German invasion came, but this was foiled by the speed with which the Wehrmacht overran the Swiss Lowlands. The backup plan was to have her assume a new identity and go into hiding. Now the general has received word that this worked. Possibly in response to his own near-kidnapping outlined in the previous seed, he wants a return commando raid aimed at extracting his wife.

If the mission succeeds, a GM who has previously painted Infinity in the right shades of gray will have one possible twist to throw at the commando team. Now that Mrs. Guisan is in Infinity's possession, she could make an interesting

bargaining chip with the General. If the setting has been too "white," this couldn't happen, while if too "black" the players might be inclined to go along. In the middle, though, they have an interesting moral dilemma if ordered to hand her over to Homeline.

You Know That I Know That You Know: The Swiss Armed Forces have an interesting problem to deal with while fighting the Reich: its three main languages are the languages of its enemy and the enemy's two (reluctant) allies. They've been forced to set up an elaborate system of personal vouching to ensure that no moles implanted themselves into the Réduit in the chaotic days as lowland Switzerland fell, or came with the soldiers who filtered through German lines in the days to follow. It's unhealthy to not know the name of, say, the prettiest widow in one's supposed home village.

While on a mission, the team is given accommodations in a large, isolated strongpoint. Typically undermanned, the Swiss have assigned a small group (coincidentally about the same size as that of the outtimers) so there will be enough unused bunks that it will served as a good base of operations. However, the adventurers have had the bad luck to walk into a new wrinkle on German infiltration of the Réduit.

The current occupants of the strongpoint are Nazis who have killed the legitimate Swiss soldiers and taken their identities. From this position, they intend to act as a small fifth column. The arrival of the outtime group has made them extremely wary. Their plan is to act as the people they are replacing as long as it takes for them to murder their guests. Not being Swiss, however, they will make subtle mistakes -- what they are depends on the skills of their opponents, but could be dialect differences, cultural quirks, or military knowledge -- that betray their true allegiance. At this point the situation becomes one of two heavily armed sets of people, neither of which knows how much the other suspects, living in a concrete bunker the size of a small apartment.

Using the Réduit Schweiz in Other Settings

The réduit maps strangely well onto fantasy games, though the strangeness evaporates when one remembers that they're largely based on Tolkien's ideas and -- his protestations to the contrary -- there's a strong whiff of World War II to his most famous work. For story purposes, Nazis and orcs have become largely interchangeable as the former fade in memory. The situation in Reich-1's Switzerland maps onto a wave of evil humanoids surrounding a mountain kingdom, the Corps becomes magically mobile dungeon-delvers, and the Secret becomes anything the adventurers want kept away from the orcs and about which the besieged kingdom knows but could not care less.

Pulp and WWII campaigns suffer from the annoying fact that the Nazis never did invade Switzerland, though there is another possibility to use. Yugoslavia has similar terrain, and if one squints at it the right way the Partisan areas in Bosnia resemble the Réduit Schweiz; the role of Infinity can be filled by the British SOE. There are also some lesser similarities between the strategic position of the réduit and the early stages of the Siege of Madrid during the Spanish Civil War.

Pyramid Review

Ingenious: Travel Edition

Published by Fantasy Flight Games

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Graphic design by Fine Tuning/Michaela Schelk, Stuttgart, & Scott Nicely

U.S. version developed by Christian T. Petersen

Plastic playing board, 57 tiles, 12 scoring pegs in six colors, cloth bag, & rulebook; full-color boxed set; $17.95

It's summertime, and the living is easy. 'tis the season, and there's plenty of traveling to do: to game conventions for the lucky ones, or to the in-laws' house for the less fortunate. What makes motorvating and high gas prices bearable in either case is a good book for the beach, some rockin' tunes, and a compact version of a favored game. Yes, they still make those, and the *Ingenious: Travel Edition* is ready for the road.

Most things about the original *Ingenious* game remain the same. Points are scored by placing tiles printed with colored symbols into rows on a limited play area; the longer the row, the more points it's worth. Separate point totals are marked for six such symbols and only the lowest of these scores counts for the purpose of winning, so keeping any one score from lagging behind the others is the key to winning.

Since Fantasy Flight Games is trying to shove a lot into a little package, there must obviously be changes. Foremost among them, this is only a two-player game. This allows them to dispense with the two extra hex rings and make a tighter board. Instead of the plastic racks for displaying and selecting your tiles, there are small indentations in the board itself shaped to allow the tiles to sit in them. They slip into the slots and are tilted at a slight angle, enough that the players can see their selection without slouching in their chairs, but not so much that the other player gets a gawk.

There's no room for the scoring boards, either. These, too, are incorporated into the playing surface. The scoring tracks start at either end of the board, next to the respective player, and they meet in the middle at 18 (the highest score; a player who gets one of his colors here gets to call "Ingenious" and take a second move). There are 12 small plastic pegs, two for each color, and holes in the scoring track to accept them. A row of numbers along the edge tells players what the current scores are.

The components are paramount when you're trying to fit fun in a box, and the *Travel Edition* pulls it off pretty well. Since it's only for two players there are fewer tiles, but the good news is the set still comes with one of those dandy little cloth sacks from which to draw them. (Truth be told, these sacks are better than the original game's sacks.) The scoring tracks are the most disappointing feature: The plastic base for all the action is a uniform gray, and the numbers are just raised figures on that surface. The designers sprang for the expense of coloring the "starting line" so it was obvious what peg went where, but no effort was made to tint the numbers. Just to make that a bit more irksome, all the pictures provided of the board show idealized computerized illustrations in which the holes are sharply enumerated. But for something this unremarkable in presentation, it must be said it's still fairly easy to see whose score sits where. Nonetheless, only the even numbers through 18 are raised thus (add the odd numbers and the script used would have to have been smaller still).

Stability is another issue, and itÕs all good news. The pegs and the tiles (both those in their slots and those that have

been played) sit still. Tilting the board is still an issue -- nothing clicks or locks into place here, so gravity is no one's friend -- but several solid bumps and smacks of the table did not dislodge a single thing. In spite of the reduced scale, picking things up is no worry save for the pegs (there are some things that simply cannot be deftly snagged).

The whole shebang fits into a sturdy box no more than eight inches square and less than an inch and a half deep (and it actually fits properly . . . another claim the original couldn't make). Play remains quick, with games lasting only 20 to 30 minutes depending on the caution of the individual gamer and the consideration he gives to his moves. Using the tinier pieces doesn't slow things up much if at all, and unless the participants are going four-wheeling on a rocky mountain road or bouncing up and down on turbulence or heavy waves, this thing's got game. Calling this the ***Ingenious: Travel Edition*** is right on both counts.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Hollow Earth Expedition: Pulp Adventure Roleplaying

Published by Exile Game Studio

Written & Designed by Jeff Combos with Bruce Baugh, Brannon Boren, Patrick Bradley, Eric Cagle, Jason Carl, Jim Cook, Chris Goe, Tyler Running Deer, & Steve Winter, plus Ed Matuskey, Melissa McNally, & M. Sechin Tower

Cover by Stephen Daniele

Illustrated by Stephen Daniele, Mike May, Mark Selander, & Jeff Slemons

Cartography by Stephen Daniele

258-page b&w hardcover with color inserts; $39.99

With four genre RPGs new in 2006, it is a good time for the Pulp gamer. *Hollow Earth Expedition* is one such new RPG, which -- instead of encompassing the entire Pulp genre -- concentrates upon a single theme. Where other games cover every Pulp aspect and archetype, bringing together costumed adventurers, men of science, private eyes, barnstorming aviators, and big game hunters in a mix never destined to gel, *Hollow Earth Expedition* takes only those suited to the one Pulp sub-genre: that of the lost world.

Inspired by Jules Verne, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and even a little Doug McClure, this RPG explores a lost world of 1936, right inside our planet. The Hollow Earth is accessed only from certain secret points -- at the North and South Poles, the Bermuda Triangle, and even on Mysterious Island. Once inside, the adventurers discover a world still home to dinosaurs, 18th-century pirates, Amazon warrior women, ape men, and the vestiges of Atlantis. The Nazis (of course) directed by the Thule Society want the secrets the Hollow Earth; the ancient Terra Arcanum wants to keep both Hollow Earth and its secrets from becoming known on the surface world; while both British and American intelligence want to keep the Nazis in check; and the Royal Geographical Society wants to explore this new unknown. The characters can become involved in these feuds and conspiracies, hunt big game, explore, shoot a movie, and even discover the secrets within in this RPG of high adventure.

From the outset this is an attractive-looking book, starting with the alternate world map circa 1936 showing the various entrances to the Hollow World. Indeed, the map was enough of a hook (particularly its inclusion of Mysterious Island) that Jason, a gaming friend who avidly peruses my new gaming and reviewing purchases, wanted to play the game; after looking through the rest of the book, he wanted to buy a copy. It is cleanly laid out with excellent artwork both pencils and color; the color is used to illustrate the character archetypes in a nicely judged lurid fashion, while pencils are used everywhere else. These depict the Hollow Earth's ruins, peoples, mega-flora, and mega-fauna, plus various scenes of high action, including Pterosaurs attacking a balloon, a lone hunter facing down a Tyrannosaurus Rex, and Nazis looting a ruined city.

Character generation involves dividing 15 points between six attributes and another 15 between skills. The range for both attributes and skills is one to five, two being the human average, but can go higher for exceptional men and women, and some non-human species and creatures. Optionally, a character can take a skill specialization, which costs

just half a point, so a character starts with two. The skills list is relatively short, expanding with the inclusion of specializations. One curious omission is the Archaeology skill, but this is easily added.

Characters also have either a single Resource, such as Allies, Fame, or Mentor, which can be lost during play, or a Talent, like Dual Wield, Iron Jaw, or Total Recall, innate abilities that cannot be lost. Some Talents have more than one level, others are available only during character generation, and many are combat or action orientated. Also optional, is taking a Flaw such as Disfigured, Lame, or Obsession, which grants the character an extra Style Point. Finally, Previous Experience grants the character some Experience Points to spend immediately on attributes, skills, Resources, or Talents.

Alternatively, a player could take a ready-to-play archetype. These include the Imperiled Starlet (where better to make that authentic jungle movie with realistic creatures?), the Big Game Hunter, the Mad Scientist, the Occult Investigator, the Fortune Hunter, the Jungle Missionary, the Dying Moneyman, and the Snooty Professor. These suggest that characters arer focused toward their role rather than being generalists, and this is borne out in the few points available for skills, and also in the mechanics.

One of the first steps necessary is choosing a Motivation, intended to be a character's primary goal or driving force. Ten are given, all tied into the included archetypes, but a player is free to choose or create his own. Both Motivations and Flaws are really roleplaying tags, and roleplaying either will gain a player further Style Points. A character begins with five, plus one for any Flaw, and they can be spent to gain extra dice, to temporarily boost a Talent, or to reduce damage taken.

Mechanically, Hollow Earth Expedition uses the "Ubiquity System," which uses dice pools derived from attributes and skills to roll successes, these being even results on the dice. It can use any type or mix of dice, but the publisher also makes available a Ubiquity Dice set for the game. These are eight-sided dice effectively rolled as one, two, and three-sided dice. Their aim is to reduce the number of dice rolled; for example, instead of rolling 6d6, a player could roll 3d2 or 2d3, the number rolled being the actual number of successes. That said, it is just as easy to roll ordinary six-sided dice. Overall, the "Ubiquity System" feels like the Storyteller system for the new ***World of Darkness,*** but simplified and easier to run.

One interesting mechanic that handily speeds play is "Taking the Average," which is similar to the ***d20 System's*** "Take 10." Because there is a 50/50 chance of a success on any dice roll, a player can calculate the average number of successes ahead of time. This average represents the degree of skill possessed by a character has without making much of an effort. If the number of successes is equal to that required for a task, no roll is needed.

The setting is supported with plenty of material. This starts with the opening journal entries telling of a 19th-century balloon flight to the North Pole that goes awry. It provides a handy description should a GM have his players enter the Hollow Earth that way. A gazetteer provides an excellent overview of the surface world of 1936, from culture to politics to its many nations to its prices, although it should be familiar to any Pulp gamer. If there is one aspect not fully detailed here, it is that of Pulp or weird science. Just five items are given, but at least they can be used by the characters, unlike in other Pulp RPGs.

The Hollow Earth itself is described in some detail. From Hollow Earth theory and getting into this unknown world to its time dilation effect (how else could dinosaurs survive inside to this present day?) and the difficulty of telling time, the basics cover everything a GM needs to know. Its many denizens, from cargo cults to lizard men are given full write-ups, as are the many beasts to be found within. Secrets are hinted at, particularly of Atlantis' heritage, but also those of Surface world organizations that take an interest in the Hollow Earth. A nice touch in the write-up of these organizations' leading figures is indication of their Mentor rank, which is the Resource level a character must buy to have one of them as his Mentor. What this volume manages to do is give the GM enough information to run a game without feeling the he is still lacking, despite the fact that the Hollow World's exact geographical and political details have not been tied down. Essentially, he is being given room to make the Hollow Earth his own, the source material providing both things to put there and a font of ideas.

The game is rounded out with a starting scenario, which sends the characters on an US government sponsored expedition to foil a Nazi plan to locate Ultima Thule. Naturally, it has the characters aboard a dirigible flying into the

Hollow Earth where they discover secrets and a lost explorer. Although feeling as if it pitches the characters into the setting too early, it touches upon the setting's core ingredients and should be good fun. Finally there is a decent bibliography and a useful glossary.

More specifically for the GM though, is the Gamesmastering chapter. It covers not only the genre's conventions, such as the cliffhanger, but also several particular to **Hollow Earth Expedition,** such as being able to get in easily (but not out), a reliance on brains over guns, mixing science and magic, and character separation as a storytelling device. Much thought is given to campaign structure, both long and short, and there are plenty of tips for evoking a better atmosphere. This is an excellent essay on how to run a Pulp action game tailored to a lost world setting, and worth reading by any Pulp game GM.

There is a great deal to like about **Hollow Earth Expedition.** The mechanics feel slick if not overly original; the setting is evocative while leaving room for the GM to make it his own; and it is an attractive looking volume. Further the writing is evocative, dripping with ideas, and is written with brio. For an initial release from a new publisher, **Hollow Earth Expedition: Pulp Adventure Roleplaying** more than succeeds at presenting a very playable entry in the Pulp genre.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!

Episode 5: Shadows in Siam!

by Matt Riggsby

When we last left our heroes, they were in the middle of a fight between a Nazi zeppelin and a Russian-led Mongolian horde. The concentrator mounted in the control cabin is deadly, but not very accurate, so it will ultimately create more chaos than actual damage. The Germans are ill-organized, so PCs can, with a good sprint, get into the zeppelin, or at least grab one of the mooring ropes and climb up.

Once aboard, PCs can fight their way up to the bridge and duke it out with Reitermann and his officers. Given a chance for conversation, one mentions that Dr. Z has left for Bangkok to meet with jewelers. However, they don't intend to let the heroes get away. This may lead to dangling from ropes far above the ground, running down gangways while the zeppelin begins to burn, struggling for parachutes, or escaping by the biplane mounted near the back of the gondola. Particularly able and lucky PCs might even be able to take control of the zeppelin temporarily and recover the concentrator, though they'll face serious problems if they try to keep it once they return to civilization.

Living a Chased Life

When the fight is over, the PCs will be Alexi's dearest friends for fighting the Germans. If the PCs haven't hijacked the zeppelin, the Mongolians can provide an escort back to Ulan Bator, where they can start arranging transportation. Alternatively, Irkutsk, a few days travel overland to the north, is a stopover for regular service to Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, whence the PCs can arrange transport to Bangkok.

Once they reach Bangkok and start searching the jewelry district, they'll hear reports of Dr. Z searching jewelers' inventories for any large, flawless gems. They also get Vision rolls to recognize some of Dr. Z's thugs from Anytown, USA. Dr. Z, whom no one has seen the day the PCs start looking for him, has already gotten most of what he's after, but his men are still picking things up. If they're lucky, they'll see Dr. Z's men in the company of Japanese military officers, and if they're very lucky (say, a critical success on a Streetwise roll), they'll also learn that Dr. Z bought a range of electrical and fine metalworking supplies to be shipped to the port town of Trat.

The heroes may also spot Dr. Z if they pick up a newspaper. Perhaps while reading a paper over breakfast some morning, a PC (on a Vision roll) spots a picture of Colonel Pibul, the prime minister, delivering an address. Dr. Z is visible in a crowd of dignitaries behind him. If they bother reading the article, it concerns a visit by a delegation of Japanese diplomatic officials and military officers. Any journalists or minor government officials they approach won't know who Dr. Z is, but can say that the Japanese had been in town and doing little more than sightseeing and hanging out at a local night club before disappearing into 24-hour negotiations just a few days ago. Their business appears to be done, and they're now preparing to return home.

The PCs should not be surprised to discover that there's a club in town called Seven Happiness (yes, that's where the Japanese dignitaries were going), and should they visit, they will be even less surprised to find Miss Papillon

Stats!

The concentrator has these stats:

Dmg: 6dx5(10) burn ex[3d]; Acc 1; Range 800/2000; Weight 60; RoF 1.

It's poorly assembled, and its Acc could be improved several points with a purpose-built mounting. Moreover, it uses Gunner/TL6 (Beams) skill, which hasn't been invented yet, so gunners are at default. It requires considerable power input, like a large vehicular power plant.

For generic soldiers, use these stats:

ST 10; **DX** 11; **IQ** 11; **HT** 11. Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 11; Per 11; FP 11. Basic Speed 5.5; Basic Move 5; Block 0; Dodge 8.

performing. To her credit, if the PCs reveal themselves, she won't be a bit surprised to find them alive.

During their investigations, the PCs must step carefully, since a bunch of Westerners asking around the notoriously secretive gem trade are likely to attract attention. In addition to any influence skill rolls they make to locate Dr. Z, or at least learn his business, the PCs must make similar rolls to convince the people they talk to not to say too much about them. If they fail, word of their survival and pursuit will come as a nasty surprise to the doctor, who will dispatch assassins to finish them off. Dr. Z's style in this runs towards lone gunmen or small bodies of martial artists (he gets a much better class of them here; use the thugs from Part 1 and increase their Karate skill to 13 or 14). The PCs still have a reasonable chance of fending off attacks, but it will become an issue if they're discovered.

Dr. Z, Where Art Thee?

The message they will eventually get, if they're good enough at interrogating their sources, is that they've missed Dr. Z yet again. He's left Bangkok just ahead of them with extensive and expensive technical supplies; the Japanese are buying up electrical parts as well. They can reasonably suspect (and Miss Papillon can confirm) that Dr. Z has, at the very least, sold the Japanese plans for a concentrator, if not a functional model. Dr. Z is clearly up to something big, but only his own people know just what he's doing and where.

With one exception: Miss Papillon. Her relationship with Dr. Z is not looking so lucrative now that she knows what he's doing with his gems. Her contact among the PCs can talk her into helping, but her price is that they take her along when they follow Dr. Z. If they agree, she fills them in: Dr. Z has retreated to a secret island base in the South Pacific to build an array of fiendish devices. With the technology he has sold to the Germans and Japanese, he believes that they will start a global war and defeat their western enemies. However, they will soon turn on one another and destroy the empires they have built. When that happens, Dr. Z will emerge from his lair with a full range of terrible weapons. The death ray on the zeppelin is just one possibility. Concentrators could provide anti-gravity, warship-destroying lightning projectors, and other devices which would make Dr. Z unstoppable against the reduced forces of the rest of the world.

So, then, if our heroes are to save the world (and at the moment, they're the only ones in a position to do so), Dr. Z needs to be stopped, but so does the Japanese military delegation. Fortunately, both tasks take them in the same direction. If the PCs scramble, they can get tickets on the east-bound train the Japanese will be taking to return home across Cambodia and Vietnam. The same train takes will take them through the town of Sa Kaeo where they can hire transport to Trat.

Trained Adventurers

The train leaves Bangkok in the late afternoon, heading into the eastern hills to arrive at Sa Kaeo the next morning. The PCs can get accommodations of any class, though even the best is a bit cramped by Western standards. The Japanese have taken exclusive control of the first several cars in the train. They've put a freight car in the very front, which presumably contains the supplies they've acquired. Behind it is a passenger car containing soldiers, clerks, and junior diplomatic delegates. That car is connected to a more luxurious passenger car for the senior delegates, and that in turn to the rest of the train, starting with a publicly available first-class lounge car.

The more luxurious passenger car is partitioned into eight small compartments (with a narrow hallway down the length

Skills

Climbing-10; Driving/TL6 (Automobile)-10; Driving/TL6 (Halftrack)-10; Gunner/TL6 (Machine Gun)-11; Guns/TL6 (Light Machine Gun)-12; Guns/TL6 (Pistol)-12; Guns/TL6 (Rifle)-13 (DX+2); Guns/TL6 (Submachine Gun)-12; Soldier/TL6-12; Swimming-11 (HT+0).

Ranged Weapons

Auto Pistol 9mm (TL 6)
Dam:2d+2 pi Acc:2 Range:150 / 1850 RoF:3 Shots:8+1(3) ST:9 Bulk:-2 Rcl:2 Wgt:2.4
Self-Loading Rifle 7.62mm
Dam:7d pi Acc:5 Range:1000 / 4200 RoF:3 Shots:8(3) ST:10 Bulk:-5 Rcl:3 Wgt:10

German airshipmen have Airshipman/TL6-12 and Brawling-12. Japanese soldiers have Karate-12; some may have Broadsword-12.

of the left side) providing a modicum of privacy for the occupants, minimal toilet facilities, and built-in couches which convert into comfortable beds. The other passenger car contains rows of double seats on either side of a central aisle; the seats convert into upper and lower bunks for sleeping (any old movie with Pullman cars, such as *Some Like It Hot*, can provide a useful model). The Japanese delegation consists of about twenty-two soldiers, fifteen clerks and junior officials, and seven officers and senior officials.

Most of the clerks and off-duty soldiers spend the trip sleeping. The senior officials stay up most of the night drinking and congratulating themselves at a table they monopolize in the lounge car, making a point of freezing out anyone else who might try to talk to them, though Miss Papillon might be talked into providing a distraction (and, if need be, drinking them under the table; a PC femme fatale could attempt the same thing with a reasonable chance of success).

The door from the first-class lounge is guarded by two alert soldiers carrying sidearms. The door from the Pullman car is guarded by a pair of possibly dozing soldiers, these carrying rifles. If the PCs can slip into the senior delegates' car, they'll find conditions conducive to stealth. No one will come down the hallway for several minutes at a time, the sound of the nearby engine provides a -1 penalty to Hearing rolls, and anyone in an occupied room is likely to be sound asleep. Anyone coming off the roof will even discover that most windows have obligingly been left slightly ajar for much-needed ventilation. A search of the senior delegates' compartments turns up any number of papers detailing diplomatic protocols, joint military exercises, tariff issues, and the like (useless to anyone who doesn't speak Japanese, deadly dull to anyone who does). It will not, however, turn up recognizable documents concerning the concentrator. Everything of any strategic importance is in the baggage car.

There are six soldiers, with rifles *and* a few grenades, in the lightly-packed freight car, and they've got a machine gun set up near one of the side doors, although it isn't constantly manned. They're supposed to be in pairs distributed through the car, but some might gather to play cards. If any PCs are ambitious enough to check, they'll discover that it's possible to climb onto the roof of the train and, once there, make it nearly up to the front of the freight car without being seen. If the guards in the baggage car see anyone who isn't supposed to be there, they'll shoot first and ask questions later.

Any shooting will awake the soldiers in the Pullman car. If there's extended gunplay, an unlucky shot might (which is to say, will) punch through the wood of the car's forward wall and strike the engineer or the train's controls, or at least damage the brakes; any explosion is likely to do the same. And, of course, this happens just as the train is starting down a slope to a broad curve taking the train along a cliff overlooking a stream in a deep ravine. If the train can't be stopped or at least slowed significantly, it will jump the track and dive into the valley below.

A runaway train! A headlong rush towards a fatal crash! How will our heroes escape? Come back next time for the final episode of The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!: Headhunters of the Pacific!

Pyramid Review

Gene Pool: The DNA Card Game

Designed & Published by [Mark Goadrich](#)

12 Base Pair cards, 14 Gene Research cards, 2 Player Reference cards, 7 by 11-Inch Full Color Double Sided Rules leaflet; $9

With the PDF format providing the perfect avenue to self-publishing, even for some board and card games, it is a little odd to come across a self-published card game . . . especially as one as nicely put together as Mark Goadrich's *Gene Pool: The DNA Card Game.*

This is a two-player card game in which the players take the roles of genetic engineers working with the building blocks of life to fight rare genetic diseases such as Osteogenesis Imperfecta (Brittle Bone Disease) and Huntington's Disease. They compete to repair gene sequences of varying length and complexity by manipulating the Base Pairs within the sequence. As rivals, what is at stake after years of research is the ultimate in recognition, a Nobel Prize for either Medicine or Physiology.

The game consists of 28 cards and a double-sided rules sheet, all in full color. The rules are clearly written and easy to understand, and play is eased by the inclusion of a pair of Player Reference Cards. The remaining 26 cards are of two types, each further divided into two types. The 12 Base Pair cards are marked with the four chemicals that make up the building blocks of life: Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine, and Thymine. Six cards are marked A/T and six are marked G/C. These cards can be read along the top and the bottom of each card. The Gene Research cards are divided by the length of time it takes to find a cure described on each card, either one or two years. Besides describing each disease, each card gives a link to its support site. At the top of each Gene Research card is a string letters, corresponding to a gene sequence. Thus for Cystic Fibrosis, the sequence of the letters is "AGTT."

Set-up for Gene Pool is simple. The Gene Research cards are separated and shuffled into two piles face down corresponding to year length. Each player selects one as his initial project. He also receives one A/T and one G/C card. One more Base Pair card of each type is placed face up beside the Gene Research cards. The remaining six are laid out face up. This is the gene sequence manipulated by both players to correspond to the letters on their Gene Research cards. There must always be six Base Pairs in the sequence.

On his turn, a player performs a single action, ensures that six Base Pair cards remain in the sequence, claims for any completed Gene Research cards, and if he has no Gene Research card in his hand, draws a new one of either length. For his single action, a player has six options. He can Insert a Base Pair from his hand between two cards in the sequence, but must remove a card from the end of the sequence onto its appropriate pile. He can Delete a Base Pair from between two cards in the sequence, before adding a Base Pair from his hand to either end of the sequence. He can Mutate a Base Pair in the sequence, discarding and replacing it with one from his hand. He can Invert one or more adjacent Base Pairs in the sequence, rotating them as a whole group. If this directly counters the other player's Inversion, he must discard a Base Pair from his hand. Finally, he can either draw a new Gene Research card (up to a maximum of two in his hand) or a new Base Pair card.

If after a player's action, the letters on the gene sequence match those on his Gene Research card, he has succeeded in repairing those genes and helped find a cure for that disease. Thus if a player has manipulated the sequence to read "AGTT," matching that for Cystic Fibrosis, he has completed the research project into that disease. The sequence can be read left to right or right to left along either the top or bottom of the sequence. For each completed Gene Research card, a player earns either one or two years of successful research. The first player to complete nine years worth of research wins both the game and the Nobel Prize.

It all sounds so simple, and it is. Yet *Gene Pool* is also infuriating to play because as you manipulate the cards to achieve the sequence on a Gene Research card, your efforts are countered and altered by your opponent, who of course, is trying to do the same with a different Gene Research card. This is made all the more difficult because of the way in which the letters/Base Pairs are paired on the cards. For example, to get the sequence "AGTT," a player needs one G/C card and three A/T cards. There are no other types of Base Pair.

The Gene Research cards are also nicely balanced. There are just six worth two years each, and eight worth a single year. The single year cards are easier to complete, but it is not possible to score nine years without completing Gene Research cards of both lengths. In our games, it usually came down to just a single Gene Research card apiece that would win either player the game. Initial playing time was 30 minutes, but practice easily halved this.

The first player I tried this game with is the equivalent of a high school science teacher, and in terms of educational application, he was most impressed with *Gene Pool.* As an educational tool, he found the basic idea sound and wanted a copy to have in the classroom. In particular, he was taken by the disease descriptions on each of the Gene Research cards and knew that he could use then as part of a lesson plan. Further, he wanted to show the game to a friend who is a genetics researcher.

Both of us were impressed by the simple game play that was both fun and felt like you were really manipulating gene sequences. Of course, what we were really doing was recognizing and manipulating patterns. And like anything else, this got easier with practice.

The bad news is that *Gene Pool: The DNA Card Game* is out of print. The publisher only made available a limited edition print run of 200 copies. I can only hope that Mark Goadrich finds a home for his design. It merits consideration by any number of publishers, because it comes complete and needs no further development. *Gene Pool: The DNA Card Game* is cleverly designed, enjoyable to play, and a good two-player card game.

--Matthew Pook

A Melange of Magical Creatures X

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

"X" marks the spot for this, the tenth installment of oddball creatures, suitable out of the box of a fantasy campaign, or tweakable for inclusion in a myriad of other settings.

Plastic Guard Dog Golems - Wild Dolems

"Among the oddest magical creatures to escape to the wild were a pack of canine-shaped golems. Designed and built by a hobbyist who was experimenting on getting a more playful (if less intelligent) golem, they display an unusual degree of cooperation and independent thought. They listen."
-- Sage Camius, *Golems and You*

These dog golems, or dolems, appear to be medium to large-sized canines with a glossy, flowing coat. Despite the fact that they do not represent life as we know it, they do meet the basic criteria: they consume magical energy, and somehow reproduce. While at first glance, these caninoids appear to be ordinary dogs, a telltale lack of apertures or details in the eyes, nose, and ears reveals their nature. The color of wild dolems range from a light gray to a pitch black.

Encountered

Heroes are most likely to encounter them as pets of the wealthy, or while wandering different ruins. In the wild, they are likely to come to the aid of humanoids, should they hear cries of alarm or fear. If it is a case of humanoids fighting humanoids, then a GM should make Reaction Rolls for both parties. If one roll is 6 more than their opponent the dolems will intervene. Otherwise, the dolems will hold off until combat is over, and then the effects of the Reaction Rolls will take place.

A GM is encouraged to make a Reaction roll with the animals. A roll of 19+ means that the dolem automatically impresses upon one of the PCs, if it has no current master. It is a Contest of Will at -5 to impress one's will upon a creature. The roll is at an additional -10 if they currently have a master.

Industrial Uses

*"So there we were, locked in combat with the duke's men, just for carrying a tree we had felled on **our** lord's land. A glancing blow had felled our tracker, Deborah. Just then, combat stilled for a moment, as a chorus of barking was heard nearby. As half the combatants worried about who was coming, everyone was surprised to see a pack of dogs circle the combat, but not approach. Combat picked up, and a kick roused Deborah d'Forrester. Knifing one of the mercenaries, the tracker rose to a crouch. Recognizing the canines as dolems, she called out to them. Her animal magnetism did something, as they closed in and helped us win the day! The pack still follows her to this day."*
-- Kanih, Sentinel of the West Wood

Many organizations have found uses for dolems as guard dogs that do not need to eat, sleep, or breathe. Unfortunately for them, dolems are too playful to make effective border guards. These canines seem to have a minor aversion to permanently harming people. They can grapple, and (if trained) cause pain. Enchanters have found some use in melting down the "corpses" of dogs and forging a single man-sized golem. Research continues into how they reproduce. It is suspected that a mated pair of canines performs the equivalent of a Slow and Sure enchantment ritual on the "unborn" pup, for 65 days, the minimum cost of a smaller golem (130 energy, page 59 of ***Magic***).

Adventure

The adventurers happen to impress upon a free dog or two. An honest man seeks to purchase them to help protect his cattle. The problem is that the man has a weak will, and cannot impress himself on them, no matter how hard he tries. What will the heroes do to try to aid the process? Perhaps the heroes could get someone to cast spells to increase the man's will and lower the PCs' for a few minutes. If that does not work, could the hero be brought to the point of death so that the dogs become masterless for a few critical moments? And if this crazy scheme is tried, what enemies will be waiting for the opportunity while the PCs' defenses are down?

Wild Dolems

Appearance: Medium-sized canine of various pedigrees, with a silky, glossy coat.
Category: Golem.
Diet: Manavore (Ambient).
ST 8 to 10; **DX** 11; **IQ** 4; **HT** 13.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -1 to +0 (4.5' to 6') (1 to 2 hexes); 100-200 lbs; DR 2 (+DR4 vs. fire).
Traits: Claws (Blunt); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Domestic Animal; Dependency (FP; Mana: In Low Mana, cannot recover above 1/3 FP); Injury Tolerance (Homogenous); Night Vision; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents); Sealed; Sleepy (100% (over 7/8); No Mana Zone Only -80%); Teeth (Sharp); Weak Bite.

Note: Different materials will affect the statistics of a dolem. As presented, the dolems can swim, retaining air. If made of a denser material, such as gold, they would quickly sink.

Giant Wild Dolems

ST 15-20; **DX** 8; **IQ** 4; **HT** 16.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM +0 to +1 (6' to 9') (2 hexes to 6 hexes); 200-300 lbs; DR 5 (+DR7 vs. fire).
Traits: As above, plus Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground Move 9).

Variant: What happens when the dolem "parents" roll a "critical failure" or "critical success" is up to the GM, whether it be an insane, large, and aggressive golem, or a hole in space/time.

Combat Symbiont

"For centuries, the secret nature of this controversial creature has been known to no fewer than two dozen secret agencies and societies, from the peaceful Shan-Yo-Shin monks to the bloodthirsty Crimnerin berserkers. Each sect discovered that burning certain herbs in the right order will attract and pacify the fertile adult insect, and when the mother insect is pressed against the subject's body, inject it with an egg."
-- Insect Warriors, Insect Warfare Book IL

This biomod is actually the side effect of the chrysalis stage of a large winged insect. The side-effects are actually part of its life cycle, designed to enhance a mammalian life form while the young is vulnerable. A host's skin is toughened, his reflexes heightened, and combat injury is healed quickly. In the wild, natural creatures can sense the approach of an adult insect, and will react accordingly. Humans no longer have these instincts, but can take advantage of the boost in ability the incubation brings. In *GURPS* terms, the temporary advantages gained are Damage Resistance 1 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3], High Pain Threshold [10], Combat Reflexes [15], and Regeneration (Slow) [10] for a total of 38 points. (The number of points is fewer if the PC already possesses any of these traits; as presented, these advantages follow the Affliction rules in the *Basic Set* that only traits missing are added. A generous GM might make the process *additive.* Thus someone who already possesses Regeneration (Slow) might temporarily be blessed with Regeneration (Regular), and someone with Combat Reflexes gains the benefits of Enhanced Time Sense. In English, this means that

the host gets a lot tougher to protect the larva.)

To perform the safest implantation requires a successful roll against Physician-3, Physiology, or Animal Handling (Combat Symbiont). A failure still results in a successful implantation, except that the damages inflicted when exiting and recovery times are doubled. A failure is easily visible on medical examination rolls afterward. On a critical failure, it is not obviously in the wrong place, but the values will be tripled. A critical failure's flaw is detectable on a critical success on an appropriate medical roll. Any of these causes 1HP of damage.

The victim and the symbiont must compete in a Quick Contest of **HT** every 20-HT days (minimum 1). If the victim wins, the symbiont loses 1 point of HT. If the symbiont wins, it steals one HP from its host. Regeneration does not recover this. On a tie, there is no effect this week. If the creature's **HT** is reduced to 0, it dies. If it has absorbed HP equal to its original **HT** score (normally 10), it will begin to hatch, taking one week to do so. Animals seem to be able to sense when the symbiont is about to hatch. Starting a week before the event, the victim gains a cumulative -1 to reaction rolls toward animals each day. These penalties are gone 1d hours after the creature leaves. When the egg hatches, it leaves painfully (1 damage, plus 1d FP damage, and 1d "stunning" damage that lasts for 2d seconds.) Furthermore, the victim's pain receptors are heightened for 20-HT days (effectively Low Pain Threshold, or canceling the High Pain Threshold advantage, if the victim had possessed it). To curb eager players (or PCs), a GM should enforce the Healing Fright Check rules from *Powers,* p. 194. Gaining mental disadvantages might also curb use. Heroes who change their mind can have a surgeon remove the creature, but this process causes 3d damage to the patient, less the degree of success of the surgeon. If the surgeon has a diagnosis on hand that shows the location and internal linkage of the creature to remove (such as X-ray or vision spell), then the damage is roll reduced to 2d, less the degree of success. Extra time can be taken in the process, unless it is in he final day of hatching, of course. Lost HP is recovered normally.

Encountered

This is another creature that adventurers may first meet in combat, likely encountering host bodies. Alternatively, the heroes could be the natural victims of the creature in the wild. Either way, they will have the difficult decision to make as to whether to continue to make use of this amplification of abilities. Another way inject this creature into a campaign is to bring in an NPC that needs counseling and support to recover from an addiction to the high the symbionts bring.

Industrial Uses

"Yez, it iz meszy, but vhat biomods come vithout a price?"
-- Mme. Ethervocce, Clinique Noire

These creatures have seen some use in protecting work- and war-horses, but the animals are skittish when the adult creatures are around. Some dictatorial organizations have started to treat all soldiers with this treatment up until they are not augmented at all. Comparing the soldier's performance before and after injection finds performance goals. This is a double incentive for most soldiers to train hard. Popular enchantment uses include booster items and animal wards. Competitive research is likely taking place in keeping the larvae dormant as long as possible without draining HP (or slowing the drain as to be unnoticeable). If such drugs are available, then PCs should have to pay for such advantages, with a limitation -10%, Biological.

Adventure

The adventurers awaken one morning, perhaps in town, and find themselves bitten. The heroes encounter some woodcutters who also found themselves drugged to sleep. These men have no signs of attack, however. The heroes soon find that their moves are being watched from afar. From town to town, there are similar men in gray. If cornered somehow, or a PC hits the one-week countdown, the mysterious men will confess to interest in the symbionts, and offer to take them off the heroes' hands, and pay for the creatures. They do not know their patron, nor who actually implanted the creatures in the PCs.

Unborn Burst Bug

Appearance: An egg or cocoon.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Carnivore (Host).
ST -; **DX** -; **IQ** 1; **HT** 10.
Will 10; Per -; Speed -; Dodge -; Move -.
SM -6 (6"-7"); 1 lb; DR 2; 1 HP.

Hatchling Burst Bug

Appearance: A cross between a winged ant and a mosquito.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 2; **DX** 12; **IQ** 2; **HT** 12.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 5; Dodge 10; Move 5.
SM -5 (10" long) (-4 with wings unfurled); 2 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Attack (Single Attack: Bite; Armor Piercing (2); Link); Enhanced Move 1 (Air Move 20); Flight (Winged; Air Move 10); Frightens Animals; Sealed; Teeth (Impaling); Weak Bite; Wild Animal; *Skills:* Animal Handling (Combat Symbiont)-12.

Adult Burst Bug

ST 3; **DX** 11; **IQ** 3; **HT** 13.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6 (Air Move 24).
SM -4 (18" long) (-3 with wings unfurled); 3 lbs; DR 2.

Fire Blossom

"The Yosird Alchemist's Guild is first credited with the discovery of the effects of evoking all of a fire blossom's heat at once. Great study was made with the retroscope to piece together what happened and to studiously copy their notes from the crater that was once the site of their guild house and lab."
-- *Flowers of War,* Book II

These heavy plants grow low to the ground and their dark bloom has almost-black petals arrayed radially outward. The blossom and petals radiate almost no light, making it difficult to judge a person's distance from a group of them. While this plant absorbs most of the radiation the environment gives out, it emits heat. This makes it very visible to infrared, and causes weaker nearby plants to wilt. Despite these dramatic effects, it is the mundane qualities of the fire blossom that get the most attention. The roots and stem of the fire blossom are very thick, naturally flame resistant (Highly Resistant 20, page 433 of the ***Basic Set***) and are able to support a lot of weight and sheer stress before breaking. This makes the fire blossom useful in the fight against erosion.

Encountered

These plants like to grow in temperate climates where there is slightly sandy soil. The overall growth of the plant is proportional to the amount of sunlight it receives. Naturalists who have studied fire blossoms may know them as plants to camp near on cold nights.

Industrial Uses

"Hey dude, do you have unsightly tree stumps or fish in your yard? Blast'em out of there! It's flower power, man!"

-- Slogan of the Daisy Demolition Company

The incredibly tough fibers in the plant's growths are used to temper many other papers and filter products. The stalks make for excellent crossbow bolt shafts. Some military researchers are trying to harness the light-absorbing (or perhaps perception-distorting) properties for a stealth system. It was noted that enough stalks in the same area can cause paper to ignite! There is some research into using the plants to heat boilers, although it is difficult to give them enough sunlight to keep alive. While analysts are mainly looking into the enchantment of spells of darkness and protection from sunburn, others are dabbling in the effects of transmutation and fusion. A use for fireblossom byproducts might be to construct paper balloons from them . . .

Adventure

As a reward, the heroes are given a milk-run mission to transport a cart of young fire blossoms to a border lord's castle and attend a banquet celebrating the lord's achievements. While at the ball, they overhear a plot to steal the shipment and kill all the plants to turn them into crossbow bolts and magic wands.

Fire Blossom

Appearance: Fat plants, low to the ground with dark, almost black leaves. The flowers are pitch black, not unlike a carnation, with a small yellow patch in the center.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.
HT 10; 1 HP.
SM -3 (2' tall); 5 lbs; DR 2 (DR vs. Fire).
Notable Characteristics: Environmental Control (Heat; Always On); Temperature Tolerance 1 (Cold); Temperature Tolerance 40 (Heat);

Giant Fire Blossom

HT 12; 4 HP.
SM -1 (4.5' tall); 20 lbs; DR 4 (DR 10 vs. Fire).
Notable Characteristics: As above, but the Environmental Control trait has the Extended Range 2 enhancement.

Fanbird

"These big geese make for good eating. I have had to let more than one man go for claiming that the engines were bad, just to get a good meal out of it."
-- Captain Argin of the fan-cutter *Mar-Turin*

These goose-like flightless birds have large blunt beaks. Although they usually possess gray plumage, they can come in a rainbow of colors. What makes these birds stand out is their ability to actively flap for hours at a time. It is believed that this is a defense against predators, and it aids to draw insects toward itself. With its goose-like instinct, when one fanbird starts fanning, the rest of its flock moves in sequence. The rest of the flock then helps, frightening off predators with debris, or fanning prey into the other birds' mouths.

Encountered

Fan-bird wings are a favorite menu item in businesses and industry as one wing can feed a whole family, and is low in fat. Small and medium towns will likely find these birds more energy efficient than magical enchantment for air movement. Rural bicycle messengers have found some success in keeping one fanbird on a rear basket as a supplemental engine. A power-assisted departure certainly gives the impression of speed.

Industrial Uses

"These fanbirds never worked a day in their life. Now you don't have to, either! De-Luxx Fried Fowl brings you hot wings right to your door!*

* Some restrictions apply. Not available in some areas. Check flyer for details."
-- Billboard in the *Worik* bazaar.

Some enterprising companies have sought to employ fan birds as an alternative to sails on boats. Air flow is critical in mines and industrial plants; these birds can serve that purpose well, as they suffer fewer ill effects of industrial pollution than those humans and animals employed at such facilities. Fanbirds open enchantment possibilities throughout most of the air college, but items that work with air golems and items that increase stamina are also aided. Finally, birds that have worked less have more fat on them and thus are perceived as more tasty.

Adventure

The adventurers are hired to lead a flock of fanbirds to a stalled ship. When they get there, they are ambushed by pirates who seek to steal all the birds and use them for food.

Fanbird

Appearance: A heavy, goose-like bird with small legs and a large, blunt beak.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Carnivore (Insectivore).
ST 5; **DX** 12; **IQ** 4; **HT** 16.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 4/7* (Water 3/6*).
SM -2 (3' tall) (SM+0 wings unfurled); 20-30 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Amphibious; Extra FP 3 (Only to power Knack; Can only be depleted by knack); Filter Lungs; Flight (Winged; Gliding*; Air Move 14); Knack (Air Jet, Self-Power 1); Pressure Support 1; Temperature Tolerance 2; Domestic Animal; Very Fat.
* Full move requires flapping wings.
** Can fly in gravities under 0.4G

Giant Fanbird

ST 10; **DX** 11; **IQ** 4; **HT** 16.
Will 13; Per 11; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Move 5/7* (Water Move 4/7*).
SM +0 (6' tall) (+1 with wings unfurled); 40-60 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: As above, but the Energy bank is 10 FP, and Knack is self-power 3.

Housegoat

"I was warned that the coastal dwellers of this low-lying country were unusual. I recall my first visit to 'the pond,' a residential quarter composed of dozens of floating homes lashed together. The sparkling walls of the dwellings glistened in the sun. There appeared to be one or two drifting, about to collide with the shore. I hope to never forget that sense of amazement when it stepped up the ramp onto shore."
-- Alinus the Bard, *My Winter in Ilisgrad*

This creature appears to be a cross between a gargantuan goat, turtle, and snail. Found in almost any color, housegoats range from two yards in length to about 10 or 20 yards after about fifty years of age. As far as anyone knows, none have ever died of old age; they just grow larger. Those left to graze tend to be luminous, even mother-of-pearl. Company-grown housegoats are often black or white, depending on the climate. Different hormones cause different color hair and chitin to grow. If fed the same diet throughout its life, a housegoat would take on a deep, complete

color. Fed a slowly changing regime of a rainbow of colors, it will be reflected in its skin and shell. At the rate they move, they can slowly strain the water for food, or graze on grass. By spraying different hormones on the shell, growth can be inhibited to ensure floors remain floors, and walls caused to grow faster.

Encountered

Housegoat pods can form floating cities, so people might live their entire lives without ever seeing the living side of one of their "buildings," or setting foot on solid ground. These creatures are also popular wandering homes for hermits and recluses. Various militaries are also trying to use these gentle giants as outposts to monitor borders. It might also make for a floating lighthouse by a shoal or reef.

Industrial Uses

*"There is **nothing** as spectacular as the Winter Palace of the Eternal Emperor of Rinshalnd. This magnificent creature is over 14 centuries old, a gift from the 43rd King of Atlantica. The opalescent palace on its back towers over 10 stories in the air. What a sight, folks. It is said that this shining jewel can be seen from a hundred miles away, over the horizon. For that reason, it is usually escorted by two battleships. Today, on this momentous occasion, I spot four cruisers alongside the palace."*
-- Lady Jeria, to her public journal, *On the Royal Jubilee*

Commercial interests have found uses for these creatures as floating platforms. Those corporations that can plan long far enough ahead tailor these creatures to their own goals. Various interest groups link pods of creatures to form floating or roaming cities. Housegoats might make for powerful land fortresses in low-tech battles. The amphibious nature of the beast makes them equally useful when attacking by sea. Enchanters are giddy with this long-term investment. If the entire non-living shell is enchanted with a spell, and it lasts as the creature grows, the entire shell still remains enchanted with the same spells. The ethical problem remains that these ancient, majestic creatures do not seem to die of old age.

Adventure

The house goat the PCs are on has been hijacked. Who is controlling the beast? How can they afford the energy to affect a creature this large? Where are they headed? Will they wait to find out? If the housegoat is already heading out to sea, can the adventurers call for help?

Housegoat (Typical 50-100 year old, depending on diet)

Appearance: A large mammal-reptile with a shell on its back.
Category: Hybrid (Mammal-reptile-mollusk).
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 100; **DX** 8; **IQ** 5; **HT** 12.
Will 12; Per 8; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5 (Water Move 1).
SM +5 (35-45' long); 50 tons; DR 10 (DR20 shell).
Traits: Amphibious; Appearance +2 (Awe); Domestic Animal; Horizontal; Night Vision 4; Peripheral Vision; Scanning Sense (Sonar); Sealed; Temperature Tolerance 3; Unaging (Nuisance effect: grows larger); Very Fit; Weak Bite.
Skills: Survival (Plains)-12; Survival (Open Ocean)-12.

Newborn Housegoat

ST 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 4; **HT** 10.
Will 10; Per 7; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 1.
SM +2 (15' long, 4 hexes); 500 lbs; DR 2 (DR 5 shell).

Gongbird

"Arriving at the inn late in the evening, I was awakened just before dawn by a cacophony of gongs and cymbals. Opening the window and squinting into the twilight, I was surprised to see a flock of parrots with cymbals on their chests. Banging their armored discs with their beaks, the birds made a great ruckus. At this, my hopes of a good night's sleep flew the coop. The birds are back in town."
-- The Bard Izind, *My Stay in Westdover*

This parrot-like bird has a light, strong, porous armor plate on its chest. The popularity of the gongbird waxes and wanes among music-lovers and pet connoisseurs. For centuries, orders of monks trained these birds to ring on command, or even to follow a tune. They beat on their armored chest with their beak, and the resonance sounds like a gong. The sound scares pests, and warns off predators. It also seems to be a form of communication with others of its species. Finally, predators leaping at a gongbird hope to avoid encountering the armor plate on the bird's chest. Adolescent gongbirds train themselves by diving headlong at each other. The defender must dodge entirely, or else try to interpose its armor plate square at the attacker. The latter, of course, results in a noisy display.

Encountered

Some zoos and traveling merchants have taken on a variety of these birds to for a musical composition. Whether part of an all animal show, or supplementing live players, the main complication that orchestrators encounter is that the creature's sounds grow deeper as the birds grow. Thus, the birds are normally trained for what ranges their parents played. This is always somewhat of a risk. Oddly enough, some rich merchants use these birds for a specialist form of target practice. The target shooting is only for experts, as a shot must be directly in the center of the gong or the bird could be injured (the Torso hit location on a winged quadruped is at no penalty; see page 552). As guard animals, they can be trained to sound whenever anyone approaches.

Industrial Uses

"The procession of the archcardinal marched by the eager crowds. Whenever someone riding was waving at the crowds, they cheered back. Between carts, there were musicians. The most unusual were those striking the chests of perched birds. It sounded like a deep gong. I wonder how they train them to sit so still? Perhaps they're stuffed." -- *Parade of the Firebrands*

Some farmers have been training these birds to scare crows and other pests from their orchards. Gongbirds make adequate guard animals, greeting any newcomer, be it friend or foe, with a particular sound. Music critics see bells, hubcaps, and alchemical devices in their future. Gongbirds can simplify the manufacture of magical alarm clocks and sentry items.

Adventure: For a Song

The Heroes are sent to find a bird with one key characteristic: it must make a particular note, and be able to do so for years to come. Complications in finding this elusive adult bird can include competition, chases, theft, and even chasing the bird from rooftop to rooftop.

Gongbird

Appearance: A brightly colored bird that superficially resembles a parrot, but has an armored plate on its chest.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 4; **DX** 13; **IQ** 4; **HT** 15.
Will 10; Per 11; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Block 10; Move 3.
SM -3 (2' long) (-2 with wings unfurled); 6-8 lbs; DR 5 (torso, front only).

Traits: Flight (Winged; Air Move 14); Night Vision 1; Peripheral Vision; Piercing Cry; Stun (Link; Environment: Air); Wild (or Domestic) Animal.
Skills: Shield-14.

Giant Gongbird

ST 8; **DX** 12; **IQ** 4; **HT** 15.
Will 11; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Block 11; Move 4.
SM -2 (3' long) (-1 with wings unfurled); 4-6 lbs; DR 2 (DR 10 torso, front only).

Humungous Gongbird

ST 12; **DX** 10; **IQ** 4; **HT** 15.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 7; Dodge 10; Block 12; Move 5.
SM -1 (4.5' long) (+0 with wings unfurled); 4-6 lbs; DR 4 (DR20 torso, front only).

Glare Bug

"We were lost in the dark; our lantern had gone out. Just then, Ray spotted a glowing object moving quickly toward us. Grabbing a net, he tossed it across the path, ensnaring the object. It was revealed to be a luminescent blue beetle. The net started smoking and was becoming brittle. Jan was wearing the thickest gloves, so she grabbed the beetle, and shoved it through the open lid of an empty bull's eye lantern. A bright blue light shone out the lens, brighter than torchlight. The mission was a success, but Jan's hands needed healing from the frost burns."
-- Autobiography of Lord Daryn, *Adventuring Years*

These insects are often mistaken for a will-o-wisp, they use the light like an angler fish to attract prey insects. Similar in appearance to a large, blue firefly, these insects glow bright blue. If these creatures are kept in a box, they will lower its temperature by a number of degrees. Their body is so cold that the damage they inflict through contact is called Cold Fire. Inflicts the same damage with the same mechanics as flame, but it is cold burning.

Encountered

Nocturnal, glare bugs are a common sight around campfires and electric lights. They consume insects that are attracted to the light. They can be a nuisance for travelers, as well as people who collect moths. On the other hand, the glare bugs can be useful when they double as a light and an insect devourer.

Industrial Uses

*"Under the cover of darkness, two thieves entered the museum through the skylight. At the appointed time, the leader turned to the other and nodded, making a fishing signal with her hands. This was the signal to release a 'red herring' -- a glare bug. Once out of the bag, it composed itself, fluttered its wings, and immediately flew off toward the jewelry display, while the criminals closed in on their goal. This, of course, messed up **our** heist, already in progress."*
-- Franklin "Hacksaw" Murzin, *When Heists Collide*

The food service industry has found a few niches for this creature. Some applications include freeze-drying food, and cooling heat exchangers. While alive, these creatures can work as powerful headlights, area lighting, and semaphores. "Spent" bugs can go to feed large spiders and snakes. Giant versions are useful as powerful light sources for headlights and ships. Cold flames are not contagious, simply chilling the materials affected. Militaries seem to like the idea of a cold light that does not show up on infrared detectors. Enchanters have had success in making items to duplicate a stealth light, while researchers are furiously trying to figure out how to replicate the "cold fire" effect. The military are trying to figure out how to make cold fire weapons, as the fire cannot spread at room temperature. There has been some progress made on the construction of primitive thermopiles using the thermoelectric effect.

Adventure

The heroes are hired in an unofficial capacity by a captain of an eleven border guard. It seems that orcish patrols are normally easily spotted by their huge torches and bonfires. Recently, however, some forces have been able to sneak up on his patrols and eliminate them. If pressured, he will admit that he is beginning to fear treachery in his midst. The truth is that an orc shaman is collecting and distributing glare bugs for the nearby raiders to use, for a heavy price. The success is being made known, and the price for the bugs is skyrocketing, especially as supplies grow thin. The orcs like to eat the bugs after the patrol.

Glare Bug

Appearance: A large, blue, glowing firefly.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Carnivore (Insectivore).
ST 3; **DX** 10; **IQ** 2; **HT** 14.
Will 11; Per 9; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM -4 (16" long); 2 lbs; DR 2 (ablative).
Traits: Affliction 1 (HT; Vision; Daze; Sense-based); Burning Attack 1 (Emanation; Always On; Cold; Living Creatures Only); Claws (Sharp); Combat Reflexes; Environmental Control 1 (Cool Only; Always On); Faz Sense (1 foot); Feature: Flashlight; Flight (Winged; Air Move 12); Peripheral Vision; Quirk (Phobia (Fire: *Pyrophobia*)); Teeth (Sharp); Wild Animal

Giant Glare Bug

ST 6; **DX** 9; **IQ** 2; **HT** 15.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM -2 (3' long); 6 lbs; DR 10 (ablative).
Traits: As above, but Faz Sense (1 yard)

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not: Dolems could be robots gone loose; Combat Symbionts are simply painful, short-lived biomods; Fire Blossoms are plants that give off heat; Fanbirds can be heavy birds with powerful wings; Housegoats are meta-engineering incarnate; Gongbirds are not that unusual, with armor plates; Glare Bugs could exist as large fireflies, even if they could not emit flames, much less cold flames.

Pyramid Links

- "Combat Golems in *GURPS Technomancer*" by Hans-Christian Vortisch
- "Golem Construction System for *GURPS*" by Steven E. Ehrbar
- "Saroo" by Matt Riggsby

* * *

Not Steven's Gen Con Report

This would ordinarily be the week where I'd issue my post-Gen-Con report. Unfortunately, my Gen-Con report is going to be a bit sparse, for a list of reasons.

1) I seem to be suffering from some kind of physical ailment that entails the contents of my insides to seek the porcelain comfort of the external world, so things are somewhat a fevered blur at present.

2) My current Day Job schedule is Thursday through Sunday, which of course aligns perfectly with the current machinations of Gen Con, and so for the second year in a row I find myself little represented at the event despite living in the same city as it; in fact, my attendance record has gotten *much worse* since moving here. My efforts at getting North America's largest gaming convention to change its schedule have come to naught so far, so I'm once again wistfully longing for a real Day Job.

3) Nevertheless, I pressed ahead and took Sunday off. Sadly, the exhibit hall -- my own personal preference -- was only open from 10:00 a.m. through 4:00 p.m., leaving me six hours to navigate 14.3 square parsecs of exhibits.

4) My back-of-the-envelope plan was to try to cover as much material as I could, by spending five minutes at each gaming booth that seemed to be offering new material. Sixty minutes divided by five minutes times six hours equals 72 exhibits . . . enough to cover almost one full row.

5) Sadly, I failed to take fully into account the penchant for game developers to talk about their own products, even when asked for the "five-minute spiel." I had also not developed a means of saying, "Time's up!" or other means of indicating that I needed to move on. I was at the point where I was considering a punch in the stomach to distract my interviewees.

6) However, although I'm sure it would be effective at distracting those I was talking to, I wasn't sure my stomach could handle my punching it for every booth.

7) I also forgot to bring a backpack or other means of carrying more than two fliers and a matchbook. Unfortunately, most booths had interesting folders, pamphlets, promo items, and so on. Four booths later, my own private juggling festival was dealt a fatal blow by the acquisition of an interesting-looking review copy (a full review of which will appear in the next few weeks). At that moment, I couldn't move easily because of the excess stuff; even if I did find someone to talk to, I wouldn't be able to take notes, acquire fliers, or do anything reporterly.

8) Did I mention I was there on a Press Pass as a reporter?

9) And so, almost one hour into the con, I'd visited five booths, was completely unable to move, and waited pitifully for my wife to find me, all the while crying like Travis in *Old Yeller.*

10) . . . on the inside.

11) My wife did, indeed, find me, and I loaded her up with the stuff I had already acquired. I also took the sack that she had thoughtfully brought.

12) . . . for herself.

13) And so, leaving my now-laden wife with our 10-month-old child in the middle of the exhibit hall alleyway, I continued on my investigatory way.

14) Ten minutes later, I ran into a dear friend of mine (as well as part of my wedding party) who I hadn't seen in over a year. We decide to do lunch together.

15) The restaurant we chose was quite busy.

16) Stars expelled their last photons in the time it took to order and consume my turkey burger.

17) "Brief lunch" + "convention crowd" = "two hours"

18) And so, fully invigorated and refreshed, I was ready to begin my convention reporting.

19) Sadly, it was now 2:00 p.m.

20) Anyway, I proceeded to peruse the hall using my Jedi senses to find the most interesting and noteworthy exhibits.

21) Amazingly, this technique seems not to have been the worst idea I had.

22) Coming to the convention late provides a very different view of the whole thing. For example, I noted nothing earth-shatteringly new in the world of RPGs. (Some neat supplements, yes, but nothing new-game-wise.) However, I really don't know if this is because there wasn't anything neat/new/nifty, or rather if it's because there *was* something that fit the bill, but has now sold out. (As a mini-example of the latter, I note that the final issues of *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines were available for sale from Paizo's booth, but sold out early Friday morning.) It's an interesting conundrum, because I'm sure there are a large number of "pretty-big-but-not-so-big-they-can-devote-four-plus-days-to-gaming" gaming fans who only come for the weekend, or even Friday through Sunday. If the Next Big Thing arrives and sells out before those would-be consumers even learns of its existence, how big of a lost opportunity does that present to that consumer?

Still, practically every booth I spoke with had nothing but high praise for the event, and if selling out of the Next New Hotness is the biggest obstacle a booth has . . . well, I suppose those are the kind of problems you *want* to have.

Unlike the problems you *don't* want to have, like not being able to attend the full four days of the gargantuan gaming convention that's a 20-minute drive from your front door. Or having one's innards violently decide they wish to be outards.

Hopefully I'll have a better report next week . . . at least, as better as I can make it, having only spent four hours at the event itself.

--Steven Marsh

GURPS Accelerator

The Modular Magician

by Matt Riggsby

The blessing and the curse of *GURPS Magic,* as with any other large catalog, is its size and scope. It contains spells covering a vast range of effects and power levels, letting you build mages who can do as little as produce an annoying noise or as much as level a city with an earthquake. The problem, if you're a beginning player, is that it can be difficult not just to find the spells you really want to be able to cast, but also to figure out what prerequisites you need in order to cast them. The spell prerequisite charts are one useful tool for figuring that out. This article presents another shortcut: spell "modules."

The modules presented here are lenses which can be applied to just about any character or template capable of casting spells. They contain pre-selected batches of spells grouped according to a functional theme, giving the magician basic ability in a particular area: healing, fighting, and so on. In addition to a few major "effective" spells, they contain a complete chain of prerequisites, so the character can be fitted out with a given set of spells and be ready to go.

The module cost assumes that all spells are bought at IQ + Magery - 2, or 1 point for each Hard spell and 2 for each Very Hard spell, indicated in the spell list with a (vh). For example, a character with IQ 12 and Magery 1 would, paying the listed cost for the lens, have skill-11 with all of the spells. Double the cost to buy a lens at IQ + Magery - 1 or multiply by 4 to buy it at IQ + Magery; after that, add another +4 points per spell.

> ### What You Already Know
>
> This article assumes that you already have a vague idea of how *GURPS'* basic magic system works and are looking to start buying spells but don't know where to begin. If you don't, go read chapter 5 in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* or chapter 1 in *GURPS Magic* first.

Basic Modules

In the interests of keeping costs low, these lenses do *not* provide comprehensive ability in any area. For example, the Utility lens doesn't include Manastone; although the ability to make one's own magical "batteries" is immensely useful, the spell requires a lot of largely unrelated prerequisites. Most of theses lenses, unless otherwise noted, won't make a character a master wizard, but if you say to yourself, "I don't want my character to be completely helpless in a fight/in the wilderness/if I need to run away," they'll give your magician something he can use.

Basic Fire (6 points)

This lens, containing a number of fire-related spells intended for offensive use, lets a magician stand in the back of a group and hurl destructive spells, usually past a line of warriors protecting him. It requires at least Magery 1, and remember to buy Innate Attack skills so that you can actually hit things with the Fireball and Flame Jet spells. The big spells here are Fireball (which will damage one target), Explosive Fireball (takes lots of energy, but damages an area), and Flame Jet (good for close-in combat). The others manipulate fire in less spectacular ways, which is good for starting campfires or making your way out of burning buildings.

    Ignite Fire
    Create Fire
    Shape Fire
    Fireball
    Explosive Fireball
    Flame Jet

Basic Air (7 points)

Similar to Basic Fire, this lens provides a slightly different flavor of offensive capability. In addition to direct damage-dealing with Lightning, the lens provides spells to push around or otherwise interfere with opponents, using Air Jet and Windstorm. It requires Magery 1 and, like the Basic Fire lens, be sure to buy Innate Attack skills.

    Air Jet
    Create Air
    Lightning
    Purify Air
    Shape Air
    Wind
    Windstorm

Beastmaster (8 points)

This lens lets the magician communicate with and, if need be, control animals. The important spells here are Beast Summoning, which will call the nearest animal of a given type to the caster, (Animal) Control, which can let the caster control a nearby animal, and Beast Speech, which allows communication with animals. For (Animal) Control, the magician must specialize in one of five categories of animals (see Magic p. 29 for details). However, a magician may learn different variants as separate spells. To learn all five variants, increase the cost of the lens to 12 points and take (Animal) Control five times.

    Beast-Soother
    (Animal) Control
    Persuasion
    Rider
    Sense Emotion
    Sense Foes
    Beast Summoning
    Beast Speech

Buffing (16 points)

This lens doesn't do much on its own, but it allows the magician to increase his physical abilities or those of his companions. Might, Grace, and Vigor raise ST, DX, and HT and extended period, while the Boost spells, which are much cheaper to cast, raise their respective attributes for a single die-roll. The lens also includes a few sense-boosting spells, Haste and Great Haste (which increase the subject's move), and a few prerequisites which can be used offensively. It requires at least IQ 12 and Magery 1.

    Boost Dexterity
    Boost Health
    Boost Strength
    Clumsiness
    Grace
    Great Haste (vh)
    Haste
    Itch
    Keen Hearing
    Keen Vision
    Lend Energy
    Lend Vitality
    Might

Spasm
Vigor

Craft (18 points)

This lens gives the magician spells which let him repair and even create mundane objects, with illusion and basic elemental skills as a useful side-effect. It requires at least Magery 2. The most powerful spell here is probably Create Object, which you can use to create a short-lived mundane object, but Repair is a great help in fixing things.

Complex Illusion
Create Earth
Create Object (vh)
Earth to Stone
Find Weakness
Ignite Fire
Perfect Illusion
Purify Air
Rejoin
Repair
Restore
Seek Earth
Seek Water
Shape Earth
Simple Illusion
Sound
Weaken

Defense (10 points)

This lens provides a range of physical defenses. Missile Shield and Reverse Missiles eat a lot of energy, but they're excellent for defending against archers and gunmen, while Shield, Armor, and Iron Arm are good against melee attacks. This lens requires at least Magery 2 and DX 11.

Apportation
Armor
Iron Arm
Itch
Missile Shield
Pain
Resist Pain
Reverse Missiles
Shield
Spasm

Druid (12 points)

This lens allows the caster to deal with manipulate plants in a number of ways. A magician with these spells may not be terribly useful in the city, but hard to beat in the wilderness. Some of the more useful spells here are Animate Plant, Plant Speech, and Tangle Growth. It requires at least Magery 1.

Animate Plant
Bless Plants
Forest Warning

Heal Plant
Hide Path
Identify Plant
Plant Growth
Plant Sense
Plant Speech
Seek Plant
Shape Plant
Tangle Growth

Healing (5 points)

This lens provides spells appropriate for basic field medicine, patching up mundane wounds, though not stopping poisons or regenerating lost limbs. It's a good idea for every adventurer to invest in First Aid spell, but since a magician with these spells is likely to be a group's de facto medic, it's probably an even better idea to buy that skill along with this lens. It requires at least Magery 1.

Lend Energy
Lend Vitality
Healing
Major Healing (vh)

Information-Gathering (12 points)

This lens lets the magician gather basic but important information about his surroundings. Requires at least IQ 12 and Magery 1. The Sense spells are good for instant spot-checks of the environment, while Seeker is good for a more concerted search for a known object.

Aura
Detect Magic
Pathfinder
See Secrets
Seek Earth
Seek Water
Seeker
Sense Danger
Sense Emotion
Sense Foes
Sense Life
Sense Observation

Logistics (11 points)

This lens might seem tedious, but it allows the magician to sustain a small group of adventurers in the absence of a ready supply of provisions and help them get to their destination quickly. It requires at least Magery 1.

Cook
Create Fire
Create Food
Create Water
Haste
Ignite Fire
Purify Water

Quick March
Seek Food
Seek Water
Test Food

Stealth (9 points)

This lens contain spells which help the caster move around undetected. Blur and Mage-Stealth are good for moving around undetected, while Silence and Hide are good for remaining stationary.

Blur
Continual Light
Darkness
Hide
Hush
Light
Mage-Stealth
Silence
Sound

Utilities (5 points)

This lens provides a number of unrelated but exceedingly useful simple spells which no magician should be without. It requires at least Magery 1.

Apportation
Continual Light
Lend Energy
Light
Recovery Energy

Master Modules

These lenses provide more comprehensive abilities in their areas. Between the cost of the spells in the lens, prerequisite lenses, and required levels of IQ and Magery, these lenses represent a major specialization for most characters.

Great Healing (22 points)

This lens contains spells which will cure disease, wounds of any magnitude, and just about anything else short of death. It requires IQ 12, Magery 3, and the Healing lens.

Cure Disease
Daze
Foolishness
Great Healing (vh)
Healing Slumber
Itch
Keen Vision
Neutralize Poison
Regeneration (vh)
Relieve Sickness
Remove Contagion

Resist Disease
Restoration (vh)
Restore Sight
Restore Speech
Sleep
Spasm
Stop Paralysis
Strike Dumb

Fire Mage (14 points)

This lens gives the magician broad powers over heat and fire. It's largely geared toward combat, allowing the caster to add a touch of fire to melee, missile weapon, and bare hand attacks, but provides some protection as well. It requires Magery 2 and the Basic Fire lens.

Burning Touch
Cold
Create Air
Essential Flame
Extinguish Fire
Fireproof
Flaming Armor
Flaming Missiles
Flaming Weapon
Fire Cloud
Heat
Purify Air
Resist Fire
Shape Air

Seer (11 points)

This lens gives the caster the ability to look into the past and future, and delve deeply into the nature of magic. If using a crystal ball is inappropriate to the campaign, there are a number of other Divination variants, each of which has its own special prerequisites. This lens requires the Information-Gathering lens.

Analyze Magic
Ancient History
Apportation
Divination (Crystal-Gazing)
Earth Vision
History
Identify Spell
Keen Vision
Shape Earth
Trace
Wizard Eye

Shaper and Creator (20 points)

This lens gives the caster considerable powers over physical matter, allowing him to create and shape raw matter, and even create magical servants. It requires at least IQ 12, Magery 3, and the Craft lens.

Create Animal
Create Mount
Create Plant
Create Servant
Create Warrior
Create Water
Heal Plant
Identify Plant
Perfect Illusion
Plant Growth
Purify Water
Reshape
Seek Plant
Shape Metal
Shape Stone
Shape Water
Shatter (vh)
Transform Object (vh)

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Yippie Kiai AH! Alternate Martial Arts

"A campaign's location and period largely determine the available martial arts. . . . This consideration needn't be rigid, though -- a globetrotting game can include styles from all over, a time-travel game can feature the styles of any period, and the Infinite Worlds setting knows no limits!"
-- Peter Dell'Orto and Sean Punch, **GURPS Martial Arts,** Third Edition

Oh, the satisfying "whack" of a new **GURPS** hardback hitting the table. Can even the "thwotch" of a mook's skull being stove in with the shin of a master compete with it? That is the question that Peter and Sean address in the brand new **GURPS Martial Arts,** and who better? Which leaves me to address the question I always address on such occasions, namely, what about the "glurgle-urgle-urble" of boiling brandied awesome, the "skreeeonk" of history being twisted aside, or the "cruncha-cruncha" of sheer nutty goodness? We have one of each in the three campaign frames that follow, so break the tiresome pine boards of normalcy, and kick up your heels with me.

"The first of these was Spartacus, a Thracian of Nomadic stock, possessed not only of great courage and strength, but also in sagacity and culture superior to his fortune, and more Hellenic than Thracian. It is said that when he was first brought to Rome to be sold, a serpent was seen coiled about his face as he slept, and his wife, who was of the same tribe as Spartacus, a prophetess, and subject to visitations of the Dionysiac frenzy, declared it the sign of a great and formidable power which would attend him to a fortunate issue."
-- Plutarch, *Life of Crassus,* 8:2-3

It was centuries ago that the Master of the Gladiatorial Arts founded the Temple of Spartacus, high in the remote mountains of the Alps. He had fled the arena, they say, because his teacher had been killed by an evil official, or because his sister had been violated. But all knew that he brought the pure *Ars Draconis,* the Art of the Dragon, with him, or within him. He trained pupils to master the *pneuma serpens,* the "dragon breath" that powers all attainment, and their gifts grew mighty. But the Master did not hold all the keys to the Art, and other schools grew up: the Crane and Monkey schools (*scholus grus* and *schola simia*) of Mercury, the Mantis school (*schola mantodea*) of Vesta, the Tiger school (*scholus tigris*) of Mars, and even the Drunken school (*schola ebria*) of Bacchus. Inevitably they taught their secrets for pay or preferment; inevitably they became vain and arrogant and clashed in duels and tournaments all across the Empire. Commodus was not the first Emperor to proclaim the *Propugnatorus Ultimus* in the Colosseum, but he was the first to open it not merely to Roman schools but to Greek pankrationists, Egyptian stick-fighters, Indian wrestlers, and even practitioners of bando from the Golden Chersonese. The Ars Draconis became confused, and the Spartacus Temple withdrew from the land. Now, under the Severan dynasty, the Empire falters, as Elagabalan eunuchs channel the dark flows of Cybele for their own martial arts, dependent on corrupt, poisoned *pneuma.* Perhaps the Aegis of Heaven has fallen from the Emperor's shoulders -- or perhaps the 36 Masters of Spartacus Temple can restore the dragon energies to the Eternal City!

This **GURPS Martial Arts-Imperial Rome** campaign frame is a quick gladius stab at a wuxia Rome. (Consider my dog-Latin the equivalent of muddy Shaw Brothers subtitles.) It's about as historically vague as most wuxia films are -- the Emperor is (probably) good, but evil officials have choked the land with taxes and imposts. Foreigners strut around, terrorizing farmers and overconfident in their own martial arts. (These parts aren't even that inaccurate.) With Cybele-worship, you can even have evil eunuchs with mysterious death-touch powers! Add a few tournaments, de-emphasize sword-play (or emphasize it, for a weird *Swordsman II* kind of feel), and emphasize that every martial artist knows each other ("I've heard of you -- your *cunctor furialis* is pretty good") and of the legendary mountain Temple of Spartacus, and you have a recipe for Romanizing anything from *Dragon Inn* to *Curse of the Golden Flower.*

"And they came gotten up as they are gotten up up there; they wear something like an ornamented jacket, doublet, or long blouse, which they tie at their middle, their waist; there they place a katana of metal, which counts as their swords. . . . They seem bold, not gentle and meek people, going about like eagles."
-- Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, *Annals of His Time,* December 16, 1610

It began with Cosmas and Christopher, two Christian Japanese swordsmen who sailed first with a Spanish galleon and then with the English sea dog Thomas Cavendish, who captured their *Santa Ana.* They were at loose ends when

Cavendish returned to England, and picked up a few shillings here and there demonstrating Japanese sword-fighting on stage, becoming very popular after Marlowe's *Fideioxi, The Tyrant of Xipan* featured them in a starring role. (Shakespeare's company used kendo-trained English actors for his own later *Tragedie of Minamotus.*) Other swordsmen (beached crewmen from un-captured galleons) played similar roles in the plays of Lope de Vega and his contemporaries, and likewise trained Spanish actors -- and eventually bravos and the wilder hidalgos -- in kendo and kenjutsu, along with judo and other dramatic stage combat arts. Meanwhile, the 1610-1611 embassy of Tanaka Shosuke to New Spain and of Hasekura Tsunenaga to Madrid and Rome in 1614-1617 further familiarized Europe and Japan with each other, as did the myriad of trade and pilgrimage voyages in their wake. Jesuit missions worked hard to spread Christianity in Japan, converting a number of samurai families as well as commoners and the poor. But the Tokugawa saw the rise of Christianity as a threat, and promulgated strict anti-Christian edicts.

Finally, in 1635, Tokugawa Iemitsu ordered Japan closed to Christians, sending a wave of refugees to Mexico and Spain. Samurai on the losing side of the Shimabara Rebellion of 1637, the Keian Uprising of 1651, and other political struggles fled to Europe, as did the 800 ronin of Sado Island and the rebellious Date family. Most of the samurai became members of the Spanish royal guard, granted estates either in the New World or seized from Protestant rebels in Germany. A few (those who converted to Protestantism, and most of those who remained Shinto or Buddhist) settled in London or Holland, mostly working as Masters of Defence until Charles II recruited his own Japanese Guards. Only Spain's rival France declines to form such units, hoping that its Musketeers are the equal of any exiled samurai.

Excitingly enough, Cosmas and Christopher, Tanaka Shosuke, and Hasekura Tsunenaga are all real historical characters. (The Christian penetration of Japan (and the persecuting backlash) were likewise historical.) I've vastly inflated their influence on European culture, obviously, modeling it after the "Japanoiserie" fad that blew through Europe and America in the late 19th century -- in our history, a fad that produced, among other things, "baritsu." Transposing it to the early modern era produces a truly awesome **GURPS Martial Arts-Swashbucklers** crossover campaign setting. PCs might be ninja warriors sent by the shogun to kill prominent opponents of the regime, Dutch or Spanish pirates raiding Japanese coasts (or Okinawa . . .) to succor persecuted Christians, French musketeers battling Hapsburg samurai in Germany or Belgium, or samurai nobles building their own New Nihon on the northern edge of New Spain.

"Houdini is doomed, doomed! A terrible future awaits him. He has done untold harm. It will not be long first. . . . In the fearful crisis which is soon to come, America in her sore need will find that she has here a sure and well tested bridge to that spirit world . . . They will play a great part in the crisis and it is then that they will fully come into their own."
-- the spirit 'Pheneas,' as channeled through Lady Jean Conan Doyle, September 1926

Perhaps it all began with Houdini's impulsive trip to the Far East in 1901-1904, following his successful tour of Europe. Here (according to his later stage banter, at any rate) he learned wing chun from Chan Wah-Shun, hung gar kung fu from Wong Fei-Hung, karate from Anko Itosu, and aikijutsu from Takeda Sokaku, blending them all with boxing and escapological breath control to form his own style, hou din do. He added board-breaking, fire-walking, the "Japanese Bullet Dodge," and occasional "against all comers" one-round bouts to his stage act, becoming the father of American martial arts. He plowed his stage, film, and dojo profits into a full-throated campaign against Spiritualist frauds, enlisting the popular author H.P. Lovecraft as a ghost-writer and amanuensis. He was easily the most popular entertainer in America when he died mysteriously on Halloween night, 1926.

As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote in a letter to a friend, Houdini's death "was most certainly decreed from the Other Side." He had been killed with the *dim mak,* the fearsome Death Touch mastered only by the greatest Manchu practitioners. Houdini had revealed too many of the secrets of the Nine Unknowns -- not just the trickery of the Spiritualists, but the techniques of the Black Ocean Masters. Those who attained the highest degree of hou din do learned the truth: There are, indeed spirits and powers in the world, and they are inimical to life. The Spiritualists and many of the rising martial arts societies in the East were puppets -- or allies -- of the Outer Ones, and used vile necromancies to empower their disciples. They have their "sure and well tested bridge" to America in bootleggers' smugglers' runs and secret Lemurian pathways alike. Only the principles of hou din do, the true kung fu knowledge, can keep America, and the world, safe from the powers of the dead and the never-alive. Can you escape the fate that

killed Houdini?

This **GURPS Martial Arts-Spirits-Cliffhangers** campaign frame begins by recasting Houdini as Bruce Lee, and running from there. (Treat hou din do as a dodge-heavy version of jeet kune do with dollops of the "ultimate style.") The setting is a secret wainscot world of high-powered chi fighting and death-magic, where Fu Manchu meets Golden Harvest, complete with the occasional tommy-gun duel and the lurking Lovecraft Mythos in the background if you like. PCs can be plucky Midwestern youths from a Houdini Fan Club fighting increasingly terrifying foes in their idyllic hometown, a squad of "Un-hittables" putting down the tongs and the Outfit in Chicago or L.A., globetrotting adventurers battling the local necromantic martial arts masters in the jungles of Brazil or the slums of Bangkok, or a touring group of professional "Houdinists" who, lucha-style, solve eerie crimes and debunk Spiritualists in between bouts of martial arts and fine dining.

Pyramid Review

Coloretto

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Michael Schacht

90 cards (five scoring reference, five brown row, three green row, one last round, 10 +2, three jokers, & 63 color -- nine cards in seven colors), & rules; full-color boxed set; $11.95

Rio Grande Games' new entry into trick-taking card games puts players in the role of someone sitting at a desk in the tropics collecting lizards. Okay, so *Coloretto* probably doesn't have the most compelling back story for a game, but that doesn't mean the game itself isn't an agreeable pastime. And who doesn't like a good lizard?

The object of *Coloretto* is to score the most points for a lizard collection.

In the regular game, three to five players place as many row cards on the table as there are participants. Everyone starts with a scoring reference card and one playing card of a different color and the rest are shuffled together. There are three kinds of card: those with a picture of a chameleon (these come in seven colors), those marked with a "+2," and the three wild "jokers" (the same as the lizard cards, but with a rainbow arrangement of the colors). Fifteen of these are placed facedown on the table, a "last round" card is set on top of that small portion, and the rest of the cards placed on top of that (all to keep anyone from counting cards).

Each turn a player either draws a card or takes a row. If he draws, he places the card by one of the row cards. There's a limit of three cards per row card, and if those are all full he has to take one. When he takes a row card he gets everything played on it, and arranges them by color in front of him. Ideally he wants exactly three colors, but it seldom works out so. Once everyone has gotten a row and laid out their colors, rows are returned to the center of the table and the process starts again. When the "last round" card shows itself, that round is over and the colored cards tallied.

The reference card describes scoring. The more cards a player has in a single color, the more that suit is worth: one brown card, for example, scores one point, while two are worth three points . . . up to 21 points for six cards. This is where those jokers come into play. The chameleons can be counted as any hue, boosting the count on that color. The +2 cards add two to the score. Now the bad news. Only three colors may count toward the total, and anything beyond that lowers one's score. The reference card's scoring pattern still holds, but now one card of a fourth color subtracts one point from the score, two matched cards subtract three . . .

Those sums are written down, and another round begins. Whoever has the highest score at the end of four go-rounds wins. Once used to these mechanics, the players can get really nasty by playing with the other side of the summary score card. On the "gray" side the score goes up sharply at first, then drops quickly if there are too *many* cards of one color in front of someone. For a two-player game there's a separate set of three row cards; unlike the uniform three-card limit on all the brown rows, the greens each list their own limit -- one, two, or three cards (once both players have chosen their row card, the third is discarded).

The best feature of these components is that everything is done in simple terms: color recognition, rainbow splashes, adding +2. Easy cards usually equal easy play, and the rules fit on a simple strip of paper. All four rounds only take about half an hour to play, even with all five seats occupied.

Being forced into this kind of card management is pleasantly perplexing. No one completely controls which cards end up on which rows, and second-guessing the opposition or trying to force them into a play is engrossing. Ignoring the

game's profound metaphor, the rules to **Coloretto** stack nicely atop one other, creating an interesting and uncertain game that gives enough command to maintain some direction over the action but not enough to give the smart player or the intuitive one an edge on each other. If the card game shows itself to be engaging enough, it has a thematic board game sequel, **Zooloretto,** though that one has players building a zoo and represents a more concrete setting that proponents of this one's ambiguity may find off-putting. For fans of trick-taking games and aficionados of collecting a menagerie of color-changing lizards, this game is worth adding to the collection.

--Andy Vetromile

Icosahedron Adventures

Unusual Objects (Part Two: E-H)

by Owen K.C. Stephens

We continue our tour through items designed to guide, change, spur, or even create campaigns and adventures. Loosely designed for *d20 System* games, the core ideas can be adapted to other systems.

Enigma Van

The Enigma Van is a vehicle that find secrets and clues, aiding its passengers in the solving of mysteries. In a modern setting, it's most likely to be a van, but could also be a ship (the *Riddleboat*), plane *(Puzzle Prop),* or even a submarine *(Dilemma Diver).* In a more primitive setting it may be a wagon *(Conundrum Conestoga),* chariot *(Quandary Quadriga)* or even just part of a saddle (the Clue Cantle is stretching things, but the principle is the same). In more advanced settings, it could easily be a starship *(Curiosity Cruiser),* teleporter *(Predicament Portal),* or antigravity sled (Secrets Sleigh).

The original source of the Enigma Van is long since lost, but its more recent history can be well documented. Small bands of friends, often older teens or young adults, find themselves in possession of the vehicle and use it to travel from adventure to adventure. Most of their exploits are centered on some mystery or secret, which takes courage and cunning to unravel. While the group's jaunts seem random at first glance, a careful study of after-action reports shows the Enigma Van is responsible for finding many of their cases, and often uncovers critical clues during each investigation. If the van breaks down in a town, the town is haunted. If it needs a specific machined part, the nearest machinist able to make it is being threatened by a masked criminal. If its fuel gage gets stuck and it runs out of gas, the station on the horizon is base of a group of smugglers.

The use of the Enigma Van as a plot device, to start adventures or move along an adventure that has bogged down, is obvious. To reward a group of heroes for putting up with the vehicle, it also has script immunity from casual damage. Unless it advances the plot, the Enigma Van is never so badly damaged it cannot continue to move, and if the plot does require it to be defunct for a time it can always be repaired. Additionally, a group's ownership of the van gives them a moderate bonus (+2) to all Gather Information and Research checks (as well as any other skills designed to represent investigation, depending on the game system).

If the game includes an action point or hero point mechanic, spending a point allows a group to bypass the current stage of the investigation and go to the next planned encounter. (In games lacking such a mechanic, simply allow the group to use the ability once per adventure.) This bypass should be a result of dumb luck, preferably based on actions of the Enigma Van, but the GM should do whatever makes the most sense in context of the adventure. Of course the more often the heroes use the van's probability manipulation to solve a case, the higher the chance someone will notice their meddling is preternaturally enhanced. And how will the PCs solve the mystery of who stole the Enigma Van?

Freakshow Ticket

This item works best is a modern setting, though it can be adapted to any genre that included roaming carnivals that take tickets. If moved to a more medieval background it can be changed to a writ of passage for the Freak Court, or a title or patent of bloodline announcing the bearer as a member of the Family deFreak. In futuristic settings it can just be a piece of mysterious metal or textile or unknown origin.

The bearer of the Freakshow ticket has access to a hidden realm, existing in parallel with the known world but hidden from it. This world may be the ethereal plane, or the dreamlands, or just an alternate reality (possible one caused by

any number of Suppressed Transmission articles). The tone of the item is intended to be more Pan's Labyrinth than Oz, but a GM can make it match whatever weird travel needs his campaign calls for.

While holding the ticket in hand, the bearer can see and interact with this otherwise invisible, intangible world. The drawback to this is that one hand must always be occupied with the ticket (unless some creative player character glues it to the inside of a glove, or takes other unusual measures to leave the hand free). The advantage is that if the bearer gets into trouble in the hidden world, he has but to drop the ticket to return to normal reality (though he may return in the middle of a ladies' locker room, or a prison exercise yard).

Additionally, the ticket can be torn into multiple pieces, to give others the ability to see and interact with the hidden world. However, only the largest ticket piece is reusable. Any smaller piece torn off disappears after the traveler returns to the "real" world, and the largest piece regrows that much surface area. And, of course, the smaller a piece is the harder it is to hold onto during action scenes. Indeed, while the largest piece sticks with its bearer until willfully dropped, smaller pieces require a Reflex save or concentration check to be retained any time the bearer takes damage or makes a Strength or Dexterity-based skill check. (The DC of the save or check is 15 + the number of pieces torn off the ticket.)

Of course, such a portable portal to parallel worlds is much sought by the powerful and devious from both worlds. It may have powers the current bearer is unaware of (perhaps given access to dozens of worlds if used properly), or it may be the key to the paranormal lock that keeps the worlds separate. Until the current owner figures out who wants it and why, neither world is safe if the ticket is lost.

Grid's Hairpin

Designed as an overlooked item of Norse mythology, Grid's Hairpin is unlikely to have an equivalent in magic-free settings (though it could perfectly well show up in modern fantasy). A magic hairpin forged and owned by the same giantess who gave Thor his girdle and gloves, Grid Hairpin (or the Gridharnal) makes the wearer's hair indestructible. Not just tough, but literally impervious to damage from any form. (According to legend, the last known owner was the Princess Gothel, who apparently came to a bad end.)

For a person of typical hair length, Gridharnal is largely just a helmet of some value (increase armor bonus to AC/defense by +1, grants +1 energy resistance to all damage types). However, if the hair is grown long it can become greater defense, to a maximum of the value of an indestructible suit of plate mail (+8 armor bonus to AC, 3 points of DR, 5 points energy resistance vs all energy types) for an individual wrapped in a body-suit of their own hair. However, Girdharnal only works with the living hair of its wearer, so this benefit is much more likely to apply to a horse or other animal companion than a human.

The generally modest benefit more humans gain from the hairpin is less relevent to its overall importance than who created Girdharnal and how. It is made of the same iron as Thor's girdle and gloves, and thus may hold the secret of allowing mortals to forge such items for themselves. Whether it is sought by dwarven forge masters or Nazi war-mongers, once its location is known there will be those who want it out of proportion to its individual value.

Historic Artifact

It may be the Tunisian Hawk, or the mock-up of the Tunisian Hawk used to shoot the famous movie of the same name. Or it could be the Shaft of Destiny (all that's left of the Spear of Destiny), Bacon's first draft of Love's Labor Won, or the last copy of Action/Adventure Comics #1. It may even just be a briefcase no one can open, a lottery ticket with no indication of what lottery it's for, or a beat-up car due for repossession. It is the MacGuffin. Its form is irrelevant. It's the thing everyone wants, either just for financial value, or for no reason whatever.

In fact, the Historic Artifact does have one power: It's desirable. It can be anything appropriate to the campaign, from a pop cap to a shiny pebble. Anyone who sees it has a chance of wanting it. Normally a DC 0 Will save is made (meaning failure only occurs on a natural roll of "1") when a character is first exposed to the item, but even that means

about 5% of the people who see it decide they'd like to own it. Many of those people will offer to buy it, and simply be disappointed if they can't. Other will go to any lengths to acquire it. And right now, the player characters have it.

Game mechanically, you want it because it gives you (and your allies) bonuses to wealth and experience. The bonus need not be large (+10% exp, +10% to all treasure rolls, or +10% to the value to treasure received), but it should be enough to make players want to keep the artifact despite offer to buy it and attempts to steal it. Of course the thing may have sentimental value, as a father's last gift or a god's holy symbol. But it serves no other purpose than to cause trouble by tempting people with its existence, and as a result players must be rewarded for keeping it.

The Omniscient Eye

How Much of a Hassle Is It to Wrastle the Vassals in the Castle?

We all know that castles were used as a basis for military power in the Middle Ages in Western Europe. But what sort of garrisons did they have?

Taking the British Isles and France in late 1200s as an example, could you tell me if the garrison was just the lord of the manor and his vassal knights carrying out their feudal obligation, or were there men at arms and archers stationed there permanently? If so, how many of them were there on average and how were they armed and armored?
--Alistair Dunbar

A good castle, well situated, strongly built, and fully supplied, was the ultimate Medieval weapon. Before the development of gunpowder, a small castle could hold off surprisingly large and powerful armies. But to paraphrase a modern idea, walls don't defend people; people defend people. Without soldiers actively defending the walls, a castle was just a pile of rocks. Let's look at who they were and how they did it.

Size Isn't Everything

Of course, the size of a garrison varied considerably with the size of the castle, the wealth and power of the owner, conditions of war and peace, and the specific tactical and political conditions of the castle in question. For example, when it was initially built in 1284, Caernarvon Castle, on the northwest coast of Wales, had a permanent complement of 40 men. These were mostly men-at-arms, but it included a few specialists: a smith, a carpenter, and a craftsman for siege engines. At the same time, Conway Castle, a somewhat smaller castle some miles along the northern Welsh coast from Caernarvon, had a garrison of 30, of whom 10 were not men-at-arms. These included a chaplain, a mason, a smith, janitors, and a few others. By the beginning of the next century, Caernarvon's garrison had grown to 100 men (20 men-at-arms and 80 archers) while Conway's had grown to 75 (15 men-at-arms and 60 archers). At that time, Harlech Castle, another Welsh castle similar in design to Conway, had 40 men (10 men-at-arms and 30 archers), while Beaumaris Castle, a relatively large fortification, had 155 fighting men (15 men-at-arms and 140 archers).

That may not be the entirety of the fighting force, though. A gray area here is the possibility of "semi-combatants," people closely assisting the troops but not necessarily participating in the fighting themselves and rarely accounted for in official records. For example, the basic later Medieval and Renaissance fighting unit was called a lance. It evolved considerably through time, but at this point a lance consisted simply of one or two men-at-arms and another man (or, often, boy, such as a knight's page or squire) looking after additional horses and equipment. The third person could step forward quickly and provide the fighting men with a fresh horse to replace a tired one, a new lance to replace a broken one, and so on. Such people would certainly be present, but their numbers would almost never be specified. One man-at-arms might have no assistants, while another could have two or three. Likewise, crossbowmen were sometimes accompanied by one or two loaders who would stand behind the archer to cock and reload additional weapons, vastly increasing the archer's rate of fire. These support troops would not be as well armed or well trained as their principals, but they would probably fight (if not very effectively) in an emergency, so adventurers scoping out a castle might want to count them as part of the castle's troop strength.

> ### Ground Plans
>
> To give an idea of the size and layout of the castles mentioned in this section, here are some scale plans.
>
> - Beaumaris Castle
> - Caernarvon Castle
> - Conway Castle
> - Harlech Castle

Moreover, we can't take those raw numbers as representative of what you'd find at any given fortification at any given time. The castles and their garrisons were established in response to a specific threat. King Edward I spent a lot of time and money in the late 13th and early 14th centuries building castles and setting up garrisons in northern Wales to subdue a rebellious population. Two of them, Caernarvon and Beaumaris, were intended as important administrative centers. All four of the castles we've mentioned here so far are on the large side (Beaumaris covers nearly an acre of land) and represent something close to the final evolution of the European castle before the appearance of gunpowder artillery changed the equation. They were also built and staffed if not for a war footing, then at least with the expectation that they would be overseeing potentially hostile territory.

During wartime, such castles might have had more troops on hand, with the exact number depending very much on strategy, tactics, and resources available. In the early 1200s, Dover Castle was defended by at least several hundred men when it was attacked by the French despite having a regular garrison of probably less than 10 knights. However, if not directly threatened in wartime, such castles might have *fewer* defenders, as troops who might usually defend it were moved to more vulnerable locations.

Middle-rank noblemen wouldn't have many vassals in their castles most of the time. In the first half of the Middle Ages, knights regularly provided their lords with short terms of service. One to three months a year was common, but subject to considerable individual variation. One knight was required to come to war with a haunch of venison, which he would eat during his service; when the venison was finished, so was he. If no war was in the offing, the knight provided castle service, acting as a guard in his master's stronghold. Through the course of the 12th and 13th centuries, however, service gave way to the new institution of scutage, paying a fee in lieu of actual service. This was convenient both for the knight, who didn't have to spend a quarter of the year working for somebody else, and the lord, who could do something useful with the money if there wasn't a war on. By the end of the 13th century, scutage had entirely replaced personal service in a number of regions in England. Scutage was known on the continent as well, and while it was slower to take root and followed a somewhat different trajectory, the French (and Germans and Spanish) were also well on their way to replacing personal service with monetary payments. Any guards in such places, therefore, wouldn't be knights discharging their feudal obligations. Rather, they'd probably be professional men-at-arms or poor knights working for hire.

Kings and the top-ranked noblemen would be a partial exception to this rule, for political rather than military reasons. Feudal dependents would naturally be attracted to centers of power, since that's where they'd need to be to increase their own power and influence. Many of the troops on hand in a royal or other powerful nobleman's castle would be hired men-at-arms, but they'd also have a number of lesser noblemen around of their own free will, acting as bureaucrats or simply courtiers.

A knight or other minor nobleman is unlikely to support any full-time troops, as such. Such a lordling likely had his hands full (and pockets empty) just supporting himself, his close relatives, and personal servants and retainers. However, though they may not have been maintained in the capacity of fighting men, many of the residents of a castle would nevertheless have been capable of fighting. The very smallest of "castles," which would be simply three- or four-story towers or just houses made of stone, might have, depending on time of day and familial structure, five or six people capable of fighting, but with precious little regularity in their ability and equipment. For example, such a small manor house could house a knight or bailiff, an early teenage son, and a couple of elderly servants or relatives from the previous generation, providing warm bodies but vanishingly little fighting ability. On the other hand, it might house a few sons almost old enough to leave home as men-at-arms and with knightly training fresh in their minds, and a brother or two in the prime of life, providing a lot more fighting ability despite no difference in numbers.

One must also consider the general needs of the region the castle is in. For example, Salisbury Castle, southwest of London, was at one point the seat of the Earl of Salisbury, and for a considerable period thereafter the headquarters of the sheriff. From the 12th through the 14th centuries, it was regularly garrisoned, initially by knights (apparently between 20 and 30) and later by a mix of men-at-arms and archers. By the late 14th century, though, while the garrisons in the king's Welsh castles were being increased, the Salisbury garrison vanished, and funding for maintaining the fortifications evaporated. The castle wasn't abandoned (not immediately, anyway; it was eventually declared uninhabitable and demolished during the reign of Henry VIII), but it did stop being used as a military facility. Rather, it was used as a jail and administrative office by the sheriff. No doubt he maintained a staff which included

some men capable of fighting, but they weren't necessarily professional fighting men. The southeast of England had become relatively peaceful by that time, so the need to maintain troops and active defenses had passed. Similarly peaceful areas in other periods would see similar drops in garrison size.

Hello To Arms

So much for the men. Now what are they using? In the period in question, most of the troops would have had mail of greater or lesser quality. Better-equipped men would have had their mail reinforced by small metal plates, probably around the knees, shoulders, or hands; full plate armor is only starting to emerge during this time. However, it's not impossible for someone to have somewhat better plate coverage or to be wearing an early brigandine (metal plates sewn into a leather or cloth coat). Poorer troops would have to make do with leather or thick cloth. Helmets would probably be simple metal skullcaps (or similar small helmets, perhaps with nose guards) and/or mail coifs, with a sprinkling of barrel-shaped, completely enclosed helms. Like heavy plate armor, elaborate helmet designs are only starting to emerge.

So far as weapons are concerned, nearly everyone would have a sword. However, they wouldn't come into play immediately; the whole point of being in a castle is to keep your enemies out of range for hand-to-hand combat. Men-at-arms were men equipped and trained as if they were knights, which, in fact, many of them were. They would be primarily equipped as heavy cavalry. In addition to superior armor, they'd have horses and long, heavy lances. Neither would be particularly useful defending the wall of the castle, but a mobile force could be very important in interfering with an enemy's siege works. They might also be equipped with a variety of pole arms to push away ladders and otherwise keep enemies from storming the walls. When push came to shove, though, the primary weapon of non-archers would be rocks. Heavy stones are cheap, easy to use, easy to stockpile, and quite effective when dropped on attackers from a great height.

In some English castles, the archers would be using longbows. However, for the most part through western Europe, they'd be using crossbows, which had become the primary battlefield missile weapon during the previous century. Smaller regular bows, perhaps commoners' hunting bows pressed into service, might be used by particularly poorly equipped, ad-hoc archers (though members of the nobility would often hunt with crossbows themselves).

Though some siege engines placed on top of towers might have been in use, defensive siege weapons weren't as diverse as those for offense. There's little point, for example, in a defensive battering ram or mobile siege tower, and larger siege engines such as trebuchets require a great deal of room, something notably lacking in the smaller castles and freestanding manors occupied by lesser noblemen. The siege engineers with which some garrisons were equipped were more concerned with repairing walls, installing temporary galleries from which missiles could be better dropped on attackers, and countering an enemy's miners. Nevertheless, some castles would have the parts for rock- or dart-firing artillery in a storeroom, ready for quick assembly if a large enough force threatened the castle. Placement atop the castle's towers would give them an almost unrestricted arc of fire and usually superior range as a consequence of increased height.

So what does this mean to the average adventurer, then? Assuming a world which looks like our later Middle Ages, large castles will have substantial garrisons of troops working for hire (though they may be knights and minor noblemen working for someone with whom they also have feudal ties rather than pure mercenaries). Up to 150 men, weighted heavily towards archers, would be reasonable for a very large castle on the order of a royal palace in somewhat hostile territory, probably with a matching number of support troops who might provide additional resistance as a last resort but who aren't terribly skilled or well-equipped. Higher-ranked noblemen in more modest castles will still have some soldiers on hand, probably working for hire, with the number in direct proportion to their wealth and social standing. At the bottom of the scale, the manors of individual knights and other minor noblemen won't have professional defenders, but they probably will have a handful of well-armed and reasonably competent residents anyway.

--*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 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!

First Cousin of Stupervillians!

Yet More Nuisances for Supers Games

by J. Edward Tremlett

Welcome back to Stupervillians, where we explore the world of inept, loser supervillians: special guest stars whose powers are overshadowed by their ineptness, disorganization, or stupidity. In previous episodes we've looked at [individual nemeses](#) and [Terrible Team-Ups](#). And this time, we will investigate the Weird Menace.

What's that, you ask? There are strange and baffling things that defy easy explanation. Puzzling dangers that come from nowhere, strike without warning and vanish just as quickly, leaving our heroes to pick up the mess and wonder aloud "what the hell was that?" Such eldritch encounters can only be described as Weird Menace, and that is our focus, this episode.

As always, these strange things have notes on powers, strengths and weaknesses (if applicable) and are listed in increasing order of power. Stat guidelines go Poor – Average – Medium – Impressive – Powerful - Way-Powerful. Just add game mechanics and your own setting, stir, and bake at "weird" for an hour.

The Beer Fairy (The Inhuman Cost of Downsizing)

"Hey! How about a can of The City's Best, ya stupid %^&?"*

Let me tell you a secret: The Tooth Fairy is real.

Got that? Well, here's another: there isn't *one* Tooth Fairy. There's a whole army of them out there. And while we're spilling the beans, you should know that they don't take teeth for money so much as they arrange for teeth to fall out, and parents to hand over money, when the child needs the cash the most. It's Karma, baby.

But the spirit world is ultimately ruled by the physical, for good and bad. So with a downturned world economy, and less pocket money to go around, the number of tooth fairy visits has become sadly numbered. And the Karma Department can't afford to have workers sitting around, can it?

So some Tooth Fairies had to be let go. Most were quietly rehired somewhere else. But some were flat-out thrown out, such as Fairy #999: a hard-drinking slob who sometimes "delivered" money to the wrong houses, and "took" teeth from winos, pensioners, and grizzly bears. And since it's almost impossible to fire a Fairy for mere incompetence, his superiors leapt at the chance to be rid of him.

What does an out of work, alcoholic Tooth Fairy do? In this case, steal cheap beer from liquor stores, get ripped, and make a general drunken nuisance of himself. That wouldn't be so bad, but he also persuades folks to "party" with him, as he's lonely and in need of cheer. And when he's really good and blasted he teleports clothing from the cute ones, just to get the good times going.

So, remember that multi-sorority strip tease that broke out at City University last year for no reason whatsoever? That was him. Remember when the late night shift at the 5th Precinct had a boozer with the drunk tank inmates, liberated a van, and all played chicken on the freeway? Him again.

He claims its all in good fun really. He thinks it's all a funny game. Maybe if he has a moment of clarity, sobers up, and gets another job, he'll stop his shenanigans. Until then, avoid drinking any floating cans of beer, and try to resist any spontaneous urges take off your costume.

Powers: Tooth Fairies have Average powers of persuasion, telekinesis and apparition, as well as Impressive invisibility, flight and teleportation.

Tooth Fairy #999: Unemployed and Loving It

Stats: Average Body; Average Mind; Poor Spirit

Appearance: Short and elfin, with pink, translucent wings and wispy, white hair down to his shoulders. His eyes are bloodshot from over-intoxication, and he looks tired and run down.

Costume: None. He used to have an official Tooth Fairy costume and wand, but they took them away when they fired him. Now he wears a stinky, old "Guns & Roses" t-shirt he apparated off of some bum. It comes down to his feet, like a bathrobe.

thE boinG (Annoying Enigmatic Force)

"boinGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGG.."
*"Oh no . . . not **again!**"*

They say thE boinG is a ghost. They say it's a mad scientist's dying curse. They say it's some anonymous supervillain's idea of a joke, or a trick of the mind.

They say lots, but no one knows. All they know is that thE boinG is a massive pain in the rear.

The story goes back to the 1940s. An evil Nazi genius named Dr. Von Bongg held The City in a grip of terror. After suffering several distractions from his henchmen, the Liberty Brigade finally learned of his secret headquarters. They launched an all-out surprise attack, just as he was about to unleash a strange, new weapon for his German allies.

Unfortunately, the Brigade got there too late, and the device went off with an odd "boinGGGGGGGGG" noise. But Von Bongg alone bore the full brunt of its force, and vanished, atomized. The machine melted into slag, defying scientific analysis.

Ever since then, various heroes of The City have been victimized by a strange occurrence. Ever so often, one hero -- and one hero alone -- will hear the same strange "boinGGGGGGGG" noise that Dr. Von Bongg's device made when it went off. And for the next 18 days, almost everything that can go wrong for the hero *will*.

Powers: Anyone targeted by thE boinG is doomed to suffer indignities, embarrassments, surreal hassles, and the brunt of others' stupid mistakes. The effects are never lethal or dangerous -- merely annoying and frustrating, with the occasional moment of comedy.

Heroes with some kind of luck-manipulating powers might be able to soften the blow a bit, but even they must patiently ride out the 18 days of bad fortune.

Stats: None. Anyone pitting their luck manipulation against the thE boinG, either for themselves or someone else's behalf, is up against an Impressive ability to make things go wrong.

Appearance: "boinGGGGGGGG"

The Ichthyarchy (Strange Invaders)

"Um, why is there a giant school of fish floating down Bank Street?"

There are many different directions that life on Earth could have gone. Some are tragic.

In one version of our world's story, the water level was so high that land species never evolved. Over the centuries, an intelligent aquatic race evolved, developing strange, water-manipulating technologies as they ascended. Within an aeon, they went from simple-minded schools of hunter-gatherers to great, swarming empires ensconced in cities of coral and solidified water. Who knows what they may have done if given time?

Unfortunately, they killed themselves. Some strange invention -- perhaps for war, perhaps for peace -- shattered their minds, and left them dead, one and all. Worse than that, it put their Earth out of phase with their universe, dooming it to wander aimlessly through the dimensions.

Bits and pieces of this alternate world appear from time to time, here and there, in varying states of molecular cohesion. Sometimes enormous, ethereal jellyfish are seen in the sky, and mistaken for flying saucers. Sometimes schools of fish materialize in midair and plummet to their deaths -- creating the "fishfalls" Charles Fort was so fond of.

But every so often, when the galactic tides and forces are in perfect alignment, larger pieces of the doomed world overlap our own, creating strange "borderlands." Sometimes our planet's cities play host to a multitude of displaced sea creatures, suddenly able to swim in our air as though it were water. And sometimes our cities are turned into great, coral necropoli, and its inhabitants are able to breathe -- but not swim in -- the water that's suddenly surrounded them.

On such occasions, both Earths' inhabitants are still not able to fully affect one another. But neither side really understands that. Many a pedestrian has been chased to the point of cardiac arrest by a school of hungry sharks, or driven mad by the sight of things undreamed of.

Fortunately, such overlaps eventually end themselves in exactly nine hours. And in that time there's more than enough horror and danger to keep a city's heroes occupied.

Powers: None to speak of, but the creatures' phasing in and out makes them hard to damage or drive off. It also makes it hard for them to do any actual damage. Most of their threat comes from the confusion and insanity their appearance causes.

When a "borderland" manifests, the area seems enveloped in a giant wave of water. The barrier between worlds is Way-Powerful, so only the mightiest of entities have a chance to enter or leave an affected area. There might be a way to speed up the time it lasts, too, but that would require more knowledge of the alternate Earth, and what happened to it.

Stats: The underwater denizens of this world mostly mirror our own, but there are genuine sea monsters to be found. Some are dinosaurs that never died out, some are creatures we have yet to discover (or their descendants), and some are strange beasts the now-dead race bred for labor, sport and war. The Body of such colossal entities goes from Medium to Powerful, but none of them have a Mind or Spirit higher than Poor.

Appearance: Everything from common fish, right out of a Mutual Geographic special, to massive, monstrous things that would have given H.P. Lovecraft the willies.

#9 (Little Shop of Changes)

*"A pair of pants, you ask? Why yes, we have a pair of pants, one just for you. We also have a pair of eyes, perhaps more befitting your soul. Or a pair of wings, so as to fly away? Or how about a **paradise,** where you could walk silken beaches barefoot and see the days slip by into inconsequential strings of sea and sky, Sun and Moon? It's all waiting for you, behind the changing room door just take hold of the knob and turn, and go on in and **paradise."***

Every so often, The City plays host to a truly weird store. The sort of place where everyone truly gets what they want, or deserve. It might cost you everything you don't know you have, and it just might bring you your heart's secret desire.

But don't try to get a refund, because #9 is never there when you go back.

The store sneaks through cities. One day the vacant storefront for rent will be painted day-glo orange and green with a big, red "#9" over the door. It will have flashy-dressed dummies in the front windows, with a promise of "PRAXIS" on signs behind the glass. And when you walk in The Beatles' "Revolution 9" will be playing, ever so softly, from speakers you can't see. Over and over, like clockwork.

Inside the smallish, gaudy boutique there is row upon row of outrageous clothing no one in their right mind would wear. There are smiling and attentive -- but very non-verbal -- employees dressed in sloppy, moth-eaten suits and skirts. And running them all is a tall man in an equally-dilapidated suit. He eats shiny, green apples, one after the other.

Not the owner, nor the manager, he insists: just the Keeper. Keeper of what? The keys! he announces, producing a ring from his coat with a flourish (and a few flapping moths). The keys are to the changing room, where he tries his best to usher all customers, with or without something to try on. Praxis must be experienced!

And inside the changing room is what?

Well, for example . . . Mildred Purgle was 47, overweight, divorced, and recently fired when she came across #9. The Keeper got her into the changing room with some outrageous, paisley miniskirt that couldn't have possibly fit. When she woke up she was at the quirky antiques store her long-dead crazy, spinster aunt had owned when Mildred was a child. When Mildred looked in the mirror behind the register she discovered that she *was* her beloved aunt, somehow returned to the world along with that wonderful, long-gone store.

And no one -- not even her ex-husband -- had any idea who this "Mildred" person was.

There are scores of "Mildreds" out there, and so its legend grows. But no one can prove any of it. Because #9 is never there when you go back . . .

Powers: The Keeper has an Impressive persuasive technique: a pointed temptation towards something the target really wants, even if he doesn't know it. The store's ability to rewrite reality to conform to that desire is Way Powerful.

What's more, only the person who goes through the changing booth door knows that they've been altered. Everyone else thinks this is the way it's always been because it is, now. And the only way to get changed back is to find #9 again, and go back through the door.

#9: Praxis in Action

Stats: Impressive Body; Impressive Mind; Impressive Spirit. The store and its Keeper are one and the same: if one is damaged, so is the other. It prefers to vanish before serious damage is done, leaving behind an empty store and bewildered super-heroes.

All the menial workers in the store have Average Body and Mind and Poor Spirit. If attacked they break apart, revealing themselves as animated showroom dummies full of bright green goo that smells like apples.

Appearance: The Keeper looks like a tall, bedraggled refugee from the swinging side of the late 1960s. His clothes are loud and moth-eaten, his hair seems molded about his head and his long mustache has enough wax to make a candle from. There's something of a sad, knowing smirk in his eyes, which makes his velvet voice seem dangerous, and yet strangely inviting.

Costume: "I wear no mask."

The Sinister Bag (Parasitic Monster from Beyond the Unknown!)

"Well, who are you supposed to be, friend? The Unknown Bank Robber . . ."
Sound of The Negation Man being knocked into orbit

The Sinister Bag, as it's come to be known, is one of the odder entities to threaten The City, as well as the world. The Liberty Brigade had a run in with it in the 1930s, and the Liberty League has had several encounters since then. And in all those epic fights, no one has ever gotten any sense of motive or aim in its rampages. This may be because The Sinister Bag never talks.

And that may be because no one cut a hole for a mouth in the bag.

The story always goes exactly the same. Some ordinary citizen feeling down on his luck, put-upon, and desperate for an escape comes home to find a plain paper bag on his bed. The bag has two eye-holes cut into it, as though someone wanted to make it into a mask of sorts. And he feels a strange compulsion to pick it up and put it on.

If he throws it away, it re-appears the next day. It will re-appear a total of nine times before disappearing for good, at least for that mortal. And he'll never get another chance, either.

But if that mortal should put the bag on his head, for whatever reason, the bag takes him over: body, mind, and soul. And, blessed with super strength, the host goes on a destructive rampage of massive proportions: the sort of rampage that requires several first-tier super-heroes to stop. The last time the Bag came to Earth, it took all of the Liberty League, including their reserves, to contain the threat, and even then they had no idea how they fought it off.

Oddly enough, in all the times The Sinister Bag has manifested, it has never once killed or caused someone to die . . . not even in the heat of battle, or busting buildings wide open. It's as if it knows exactly how much damage an opponent can take, and only does that much, and no more. (It's almost as if it were just play-fighting to let off steam . . .)

Powers: In addition to the attack and defense that his Powerful Body provides, the Bag regenerates damage to its host so well that it's often healed completely a split-second after the blow hits. It can't fly, per se, but can leap long distances, and can hold its breath for extended periods of time.

The Sinister Bag has only one weakness, but it's a doozy: someone has to get close enough to physically yank the bag off the head of whomever it's attached itself to. That, in itself, is a great feat, as getting too close to the head is asking to be pile-driven into the ground, or near-Earth orbit. But one good tug and it comes off as easy as a cheap Halloween mask.

However, what's truly extraordinary is that *no one* -- not even people who've fought and vanquished the Bag before -- can remember that particular weakness. Once the Bag is removed, it vanishes, and everyone stands around unaware of what's just happened. So when it comes back, no one can truly remember how they defeated it last time, "knowing" only that they had to sock the hell out of its host for what seemed like hours before it just gave up and left.

As for the mortal it selected, he doesn't remember any of what happened after putting on the bag. But each and every one goes right back to their miserable life, no better or worse off for having been possessed.

The Sinister Bag: Unknown Trans-cosmic Entity; Indeterminable in Earth Years; ???

Stats: Powerful Body; Average Mental (Defends and Attacks as though Powerful); Powerful Spirit

Appearance: It looks like an ordinary, plain paper bag that someone cut holes into. Once it's on someone's head, the "eyes" behind the holes are dark orbs that reflect no light, show no pity or fear, and seem to be the embodiment of timeless, alien rage.

Costume: None to speak of, unless its appearance as a paper bag is some kind of disguise.

Appendix Z

What Else Is in the Cards?

by Nikola Vrtis

In the "What a Card" article, GMs and players were offered a way to find inspiration in a deck of cards. This article adds two more tables to help users include additional details in their quick character descriptions. They can be employed in conjunction with those presented in "What a Card," or they can stand alone.

Note that the names listed in this article were chosen for their gender neutrality and commonness in the modern era. GMs should adjust this table to reflect popular names in their own worlds, or even add columns for separate male and female names. One place that GMs can visit for tables of most common first names and surnames for the United States according to the 1990 census is Mongabay.

To use the tables, shuffle a deck of poker-style playing cards (without jokers). Next, deal three cards. Using the first card, consult the first two charts to reveal the character's hair and eye color. Then, refer to the third chart to learn the name, using the second card to find the first name and the third card to determine the last name.

The same selection of cards can also be used with the "What a Card" tables to specify the adventurer's gender and significant physical and mental characteristics. See that article for details on how to go about getting that information.

Example: The three of diamonds, three of spades, and ten of hearts are dealt. According to the first chart, the character has blond hair, while the second chart reveals that he has blue eyes. His name is Tracy Green. (His gender and key characteristics were suggested in the "What a Card" example.)

If the suit of the first card is . . .	the character has . . .
Diamonds	blond hair
Hearts	red hair
Spades	black hair
Clubs	brown hair

If the rank of the first card is . . .	the character has . . .
2-4	blue eyes
5-7	green eyes
8-10	black eyes
J-K	brown eyes
A	something exotic (different colored eyes, albino, etc.)

Diamonds

Face	First Name	Last Name
King	Alex	Anderson
Queen	Avery	Avila
Jack	Bailey	Barr
10	Blair	Berg
9	Britt	Carter
8	Brook	Chan
7	Carey	Cruz

6	Carmen	Day
5	Casey	Diaz
4	Dana	Ellis
3	Dominique	Estes
2	Drew	Evans
A	Erin	Flores

Hearts

Face	First Name	Last Name
King	Gale	Fuller
Queen	Glen	Garcia
Jack	Ira	Gray
10	Jaden	Green
9	Jamie	Hayes
8	Jerry	Hill
7	Jessie	Hughes
6	Jody	Ingram
5	Jordan	Johnson
4	Kris	Jones
3	Lane	Kim
2	Lau	Klein
A	Lee	Lee

Clubs

Face	First Name	Last Name
King	Lin	Lopez
Queen	Loren	Mason
Jack	Mason	Moore
10	Meryl	Myers
9	Morgan	Nelson
8	Noel	Nguyen
7	Pat	Ortiz
6	Reese	Owens
5	Regan	Parker
4	Riley	Perez
3	Robin	Quinn
2	Ru	Ramos
A	Sacha	Reed

Spades

Face	First Name	Last Name
King	Sage	Reyes
Queen	Sandy	Smith
Jack	Shannon	Soto
10	Shay	Taylor
9	Shelby	Tran
8	Sidney	Underwood
7	Skye	Vargas

6	Taylor	Vaughn
5	Terry	White
4	Tory	Wilson
3	Tracy	Yates
2	Val	Young
A	Whitney	Zimmerman

Pyramid Review

Bull in a China Shop

Published by Playroom Entertainment

Designed by Michael Schacht

Art & graphics by Steve Nazar, Elisa Anya Jaeger, & Jessica R.E. Bethke

99 cards (30 Bull Cards, 40 China Cards, 10 Starting Cards, 10 Money Cards, five Pass Cards, four Score Cards), score pad, rulebooks in English, Spanish, & French; full-color, boxed, three to five players, 30 minutes playing time; $10

It's an old simile, and a scenario not likely to happen, but when you have a colorful phrase like ***Bull in a China Shop*** you do the English language a disservice if you don't get at least a little mileage out of it.

The object of the game is to have the highest score from your fine china.

Game play involves collecting sets of valuable china, all the while trying to avoid the attentions of a bull conveniently but inexplicably loose in town. Everyone starts with a couple of pieces in their assortment and some seed money in the form of a Money Card. It uses two decks, one for the Bull Cards and one for the China Cards, and a row of five cards is dealt from each.

On his turn, a player either pays a Money Card to add one of the China Cards to his set, or takes a Bull Card. If he takes a Bull Card he gets a Money Card for his troubles. He also gets a one-ton bull rampaging through his shop (that's the "troubles" part). The shards on the card have colored bull heads in different sizes that determine which suits of china are trashed in the ensuing chaos. A Bull Card with one red bull head and two blue heads takes out one red and two blue pieces of pottery, for instance, and one large green head destroys all the green items. Most gray cards let the player choose his losses, but a few list point values and take those specific numbers out of play. No one may have more than two Money Cards at a time, so a full wallet means he must take china, and no money means you have to take the bull by the horns.

Stuck in the china deck at regular intervals are four Score Cards, and if one of these sits atop the draw pile when either row is exhausted, the shop owners must do some accounting before refilling that row. There are four ways to gain points, and each player must choose for himself a different one each time. The player may count his highest card in each color, the lowest in each, everything in one color, or all cards currently in his collection. Once a method has been used that player may not repeat it. After the last Score Card has been dealt with, all four subtotals are added up and the high score wins.

Speaking of scores, chalk up another one to simplicity. The bull portraits are pleasant, the china competently rendered with a computer, and the rest of the card sets informative without being busy (though telling buyers a large bull head always appears alone on a card would have cleared the difference up). A small pad for scoring is also included, listing the scoring methods. The pad has about 50 sheets, but each accommodates the scores for two players (the backs are blank, so if the issue is convenience that space is just as serviceable).

The game's German title references elephants, not bulls, apparently the same saying but from other regions. Such provenance may be why Playroom Entertainment this time provides the rules in Spanish, French, and English but, oddly, not German. Also worth noting is the rules are in pamphlets this time, a separate one for each language instead

of the usual all-in-one booklet with staples. Perhaps it's a cost-saving measure, though the booklets got mangled a bit drooping between the top and bottom of the setup box.

This has more card types than usually come out of Playroom's playpen, but they're necessary and after the first game their functions become clear. The system works out precisely but it's still unpredictable. There are 10 cards between each Score Card, but that doesn't always mean two rows of china before scoring occurs because refilling the bulls may force an early (and empty-handed) round. A turn in which one gains no points at all can be devastating and a player might never recover from it, but the game also allows players to interfere with one or more rivals' actions if they just use their noodle. Someone could win simply by making everyone else's total as bad as theirs.

Bull in a China Shop is a game in need of somewhat closer attention from its participants than others from this company, but its effects and game play are also much more manageable, making it a fine occupation for those looking for the energy of the head-to-head competitive element.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Cold City: A Game of Hidden Agendas, Trust, And Monster Hunting

Published by [Contested Ground Studios](#)

Designed & Written by Malcolm Craig with Steve Dempsey

Cover by Paul Bourne

Illustrated by Stuart Beel

128-page b&w digest-sized softcover; $23

Although ***Cold City: A Game of Hidden Agendas, Trust, And Monster Hunting*** -- like the publisher's better known *a|state* -- is another city-based RPG, it is a much smaller, less commercial affair. Indeed, it could be seen as a bridge between the mainstream commercial type of RPG and the independent self-published title that explores and pushes at the RPG format's boundaries. For while the theme is purely commercial, the mechanics do owe something to the indie game, but not too much, and it is written with less of an author's voice than in many indie titles.

The theme is simple: Agents from the four occupying powers hunt monsters in an Underground War in post-war Berlin. Can once-great allies learn to look beyond the national stereotype and learn to trust their colleagues? The indie-style mechanics show in the handling of this "trust" element, and in the slight degree of narrative control that the players can gain during play.

The year is 1950 and with the Cold War hardly settled in, the former allies in war must work together again. Abominations born of Nazi science and experimentation, and things not born of this Earth, but of occult research, still haunt, lurk, and stalk the ruins, streets, and tunnels of a Berlin being rebuilt following its wartime aerial pounding. "Alternatives," warped humans and animals; "Incursors" torn through time and space by fantastic technology; and the dead, returned to harass the Red Army until they drop. To deal with these threats, the four governing powers -- France, Great Britain, the U.S.S.R., and the United States -- have established the highly secret Reserve Police Agency or RPA. Its task is not only to investigate and eliminate these remnants of twisted science, but prevent it becoming public knowledge.

The players take the roles of RPA agents sent out on various missions. The game is best played with four characters, one from each nationality, though the option to play a German national allows a fifth player. Each has a reason to be in the RPA. It might be a simple assignment, but or that the agent has had an encounter with something outré. Nor need the character be military, ex-military, or a spy, although many RPA agents are. A civilian or female character is perfectly acceptable if a player can justify their assignment to the RPA.

Each character is lightly defined with three statistics -- Action, Reason, and Influence -- rated between one and five, with two being the average, plus three positive and two negative traits. A Trait is a cross between advantage or disadvantage and a broad skill. For example, "Keeps his cool in the face of danger" or "Hates the political machinations that his masters play." He has a Draw (or reason for being in the RPA), and two agendas.

One is a national agenda, similar to that of his country. France wants to destroy all abominations and prevent any from reaching French soil; Germany wants to redeem herself by destroying all signs of Nazi science; cash-strapped Great Britain wants to shut the RPA down; and the USA wants to turn the new technology to military ends, as does the U.S.S.R. The other is a personal or Hidden Agenda. For example: "Uncover any black market rackets in the RPA" or

"Keep secret the Communist loyalties I have held since my days at Cambridge."

Players must also determine the degree of trust held between the agents. The character sheet has space to record the trust an agent holds in his colleagues and an explanation why, and also to record the trust they have in him. Rated from zero (no) to five or more (absolute) trust, initially a character only has enough to assign one or two points to his colleagues. Of course, when combined with the initially stereotypical beliefs held about each nationality, some colleagues will be favored over others. Similarly, the initial reasons for an agent's trust or distrust in another should be heavily influenced by these stereotypes.

Mechanically, **Cold City** is light, employing pools of 10-sided dice to resolve conflicts where dice rolling only would drive the story forward. Before any conflict, the stakes and what the desired outcome is must be agreed upon. The pool is constructed from an appropriate core statistic, dice being added for suitable traits, agendas, and then trust values from another character. So for example, US Army Captain Delvecchio wants some information from a British Army racketeer after his German colleague, Horst, has already tried. Delvecchio starts out with Influence 3, adds a die for his "Bureaucracy is a pain in the ass" trait, and then plays the national stereotype card in pointing out that Germans are bureaucratic, thus gaining two more for the Trust 2 Horst has in him. This gives him a total pool of 6. The GM will roll for the racketeer, who has two dice, plus one for Horst's failed attempt.

Both dice rolls are compared and any matching numbers between the two pools are discarded. Of the remainder, the pool with more dice higher than the other succeeds and gives successes. Which means better results. Further, the winner gains the stakes set out prior to the conflict being rolled for, which in this case would be to getting the racketeer to talk. Stakes become really important when two or more characters desire opposing outcomes because the winner narrates the outcome.

In addition, a conflict's outcome can have consequences that will directly affect a character through his stats. If a positive outcome, one of a character's negative traits can become positive, a new trait gained, or a core statistic can be temporarily increased. If negative, the reverse happens, and if two statistics should be reduced to zero, an agent is on the way out.

Similarly a conflict's outcome can change the trust levels between agents, either improving it by one, or decreasing it by any amount. How much depends upon the actions of the agents and how the players feel about those actions. These changes only become apparent during subsequent scenes when the agents call upon the trust of others to succeed in a conflict. The change in trust between the agents models their changing attitudes towards each other after being put in dangerous situations and seeing them as more than a stereotype.

Yet trust works the other way and can be used to betray, usually when an agent feels that his hidden agenda is more important. When such a situation arises, the trust that the agents have in the betrayer adds to his dice pool.

The game is supported with a set of ready-to-play agents, a description of post war Berlin, a list of contemporary weapons, and several monsters. There is also a bibliography that includes links to several websites. And Steve Dempsey adds the introductory scenario, "Prisoner #8," in addition to the book's trio of adventure seeds. To be honest, I have not read either the scenario or the seeds, as I really really want to play the game. In my defense, I do expect the scenario to be good, having gamed with Steve before.

In addition, numerous supplements will be useful to the **Cold City** GM. **Delta Green** and its companion volume, **_Delta Green: Countdown,_** should inspirational, or at least a darned good read. **Tour of Darkness** for **_Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds_** could take the game to post war Indochina, while any **GURPS World War II** title could add detail or color. In particular, Ken Hite's **GURPS World War II: Weird War II** is a veritable smorgasbord of ideas and suggestions, and that is before you get to the delights of his Suppressed Transmission.

Initially **Cold City** was slightly disappointing because it was not pulpy enough. Actually, on the surface, it *is* pulpy enough, but the game is meant to be more than just monster bashing. The GM advice suggests giving missions depth and even a moral dimension that in exploring should reflect the agents and their decisions. The multi-national nature of the RPA and the Cold War gives the setting inherent tensions and rivalries, even paranoia, which comes to the fore with the trust rules that intentionally start with misunderstood stereotypes. Both GM and players should be using the

characters' agendas and trust levels to drive the game as much as resolving conflicts.

As a game, **Cold City** grabbed my attention immediately; I wanted to play it after finishing reading it. It is not perfect, the GM advice is a little light and the mechanics underwritten and slightly awkward, but it even has an immediacy in that having read it through once I was not only ready to play, I was even ready to run it. Everything is easy about this game: the mechanics which drive the roleplaying; the roleplay because the characters begin as stereotypes and then mature; and above all, the hook. **Cold City: A Game of Hidden Agendas, Trust, And Monster Hunting** is a game that begs to be played, and makes it all too easy.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Snow Crash, Sans Snow

Yesterday afternoon I decided to accompany my coworkers at my Day Job to lunch. This is somewhat rare; usually I'm one of those guys content to sit in the break room, munching my leftovers or sammiches. But I figured I'd be social for a change. We didn't end up taking my car because apparently the seat adjustment is as complicated as transforming my Chevy Cavalier while removing a bra one-handed; instead, my coworker was the driver, and we all piled into his car.

Anyway, long story short, within five minutes of our leaving work to go eat, we were in a car accident. No one was hurt (as near as I can tell), but neither car was remotely drivable, and the wheels on our vehicle were turned sideways like *Back to the Future II.*

So that's why I'm punting on my GenCon mini-report for another week.

It was my first accident (at least, the first one with a vehicle going over five miles an hour), and it shook me up more than I was expecting. I'm presuming my muscles are undergoing a level of tightness and ache that is the reason why you're not supposed to frighten meat-mammals before you kill them for food. So, 90 minutes later, we were back at work . . . shaken and still hungry.

All things considered, I consider us having gotten off very lucky, given the number of people who are seriously hurt or worse in accidents every year. Even so, since it was my first accident (and since I knew I'd have a column due a handful of hours later), I've been taking a more analytical aspect of the whole incident.

What's struck me most about the accident is that how much comes down to a matter of seconds. A couple of seconds in either direction -- if I'd stopped to pick up a penny on the way out the door, or if we'd sprinted to the car -- and we wouldn't have gotten hit. (We hadn't hit any traffic lights up to the point of impact, so I feel fairly justified in saying that.) By the same token, I'm amazed that it literally took a second of impact to change the course of the rest of my day. If anyone had been seriously injured, it would have changed things even longer. And, of course, the worst outcomes can change whole lifetimes . . . or cut them too short.

In a perverse way, I find these random events to be fascinating; on a macro scale you can predict them (number of accidents in a city per year, divided by number of days, etc.), but on the micro scale it's highly unlikely to achieve any degree of certainty when dealing with these events. So, for us gamers -- or those with looming column deadlines -- the question arises . . . how do you work things like this in?

Unfortunately, there usually isn't much of a good way to determine in a roleplaying game when such an event will happen, without GM fiat: "Okay; you got a critical failure on your driving roll, so . . ." There also often isn't a way to incorporate it in that truly spontaneous random way that can throw the entire campaign for a loop (which can be a good thing, depending on your style); I suspect many GMs -- myself included -- are reluctant to disrupt an otherwise orderly game with something bizarrely random.

Speaking of bizarrely random -- and I'm spoiling a movie from the last millennium, so skip this paragraph if you don't want to read about *Magnolia* -- one of the most striking things about *Magnolia* is its (in)famous "rain of frogs" event. From a narrative standpoint, it comes out of left field, but it completely encompasses all other action in the film, sending it diverging to something completely different.

So, if I'm a GM who wants to incorporate a specific random scene in such a way that it feels (and ideally is) truly random, how could I do that?

Well, if I were feeling experimental, and my players were willing, I'd be tempted to use a deck of cards. For example, say I've decided that a super-hero's dear frail Aunt Shall is destined to have a heart attack sometime soon. I decide on a card that encompasses this possibility -- say, the Queen of Spades -- and, at the beginning of each scene I draw a card. If it's the Queen of Spades, the event happens that scene; otherwise, I draw another card from the deck next scene, keeping aside the cards already drawn. If I wanted to go for the truly shock-value aspect of "such-and-such happens

right now," I could draw that card at a specific time (say, five minutes into each scene), or at a specific event (say, the third die roll in each scene). Then I don't even need to worry about incorporating the timing of the event; the second I draw that card, the event happens.

Unlike rolling dice, a deck of cards "remembers"; presuming you don't reshuffle, those 52 possibilities get whittled down to 51 as soon as a card is drawn . . . or down to 0, if the anticipated possibility is the one drawn. That makes them very intriguing to me as a GM; if I'm assuming a one-deal event, and I don't reshuffle between adventures, then I know that my scripted surprise event will happen sometime between 1 and 52 scenes from now.

The beauty of this, in my mind, is that it forces a spontaneity that can be as pre-planned as the GM wants (if he wanted Aunt Shall to have a heart attack earlier, he could declare any Queen to serve the purpose).

This technique could be used for rarer, extended events. For example, let's say that the heroes have a demon trapped in a glass jar in their basement, and it *really* wants to escape, and when it does, all hell is gonna break loose (literally). So let's say that the GM has decided this is going to happen a fairly long time in the future, but he doesn't have a firm time in mind; ideally, it will happen during the middle of another adventure, to force the heroes into crisis-control mode rather than "deal with a problem while it's still small" mode. So he picks a card that will serve as the trigger . . . say, the Six of Diamonds. But he decides that it will happen the sixth time he draws that card. So, every scene, he draws a card; once he gets the Six of Diamonds, he reshuffles the deck and starts over, until the sixth time. That means that the event *will* happen; it could be as quickly as the sixth scene (if he draws that Six on the first draw all six times) but no later than the 312th scene from that moment.

As a final note about this technique, I also note that it's possible to use the same deck concurrently, provided each event has its own card. Thus the demon could be threatening to escape at the same time that Aunt Shall's ticker is about to conk out. In fact, with enough random events in the cards (so to speak), it's possible for one event to happen right after the other, forcing the heroes to drive all over town in an effort to put out various fires.

As for me, I think I'm going to do as little driving as possible for the next few days. Just in case.

--Steven Marsh

Wildfires!

for the *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

Fires happen all the time in fantasy campaigns: wizards blow things up, archers dip their arrows in flaming pitch, and dragons breathe the stuff all over the place. But what happens when things get out of hand?

Starting the Fire

The majority of spellcasters give little thought to the consequences of their pyrotechnics, an oversight that can have deadly consequences under the right conditions. Whenever an area effect spell that inflicts fire or lightning damage strikes suitable terrain, consider the possibility of starting a fire. Light undergrowth actually has the highest likelihood of being set ablaze because it is often very dry and prolific enough to fuel the flames.

Terrain Type	Likelihood of Wildfire
Light Undergrowth	15%
Heavy Undergrowth	10%
Typical Trees	5%

There are also modifiers for the climate of the terrain. Cold climates are less likely to start fires than warmer climates, and more arid climes are conducive to fires than moister ones.

Climate Type	Likelihood of Wildfire
Cold	-5%
Warm	+5%
Marsh	-10%
Desert	+10%

Once a fire erupts, it spreads in the direction of the wind. To determine the direction the fire takes, roll 1d8. This determines the direction of the fire, with 1 being straight at the character and 2 through 8 counting clockwise around the source of the fire. The direction of the fire generally moves in the direction of the wind, but that might change depending on the wind's severity.

Wind Force	Roll for Direction Change
Light	Every hour
Moderate	Every 10 minutes
Strong	Every minute
Severe	Every round

The leading edge of a fire moves at the speed of the wind that drives it. Depending on the severity of the weather, it can move at a leisurely pace or flash past the fastest characters, trapping them.

Wind Force	Wildfire Speed
Light	60 feet/round
Moderate	120 feet/round
Strong	180 feet/round
Severe	240 feet/round

Once a particular portion of terrain is ablaze, it remains so for 2d4×10 minutes before dying to a smoking smolder.

Once a wildfire has erupted, it transforms the surrounding terrain into an inferno. For purposes of determining the effects and strength of the wildfire, its effective character level is equivalent to that of the caster or creature that started it. Thus, a wildfire ignited by a 15th-level sorcerer with an errant fireball spell is considered 15th-level for determining all effects.

Dangers of Wildfires

Extreme Heat

Breathing the air of a wildfire causes the character to take 1d6 points of damage per round (no save). In addition, the character must make a Fortitude save every 5 rounds (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. A character that holds his breath can avoid the lethal damage, but not the nonlethal damage. Those wearing heavy clothing or any sort of armor take a -4 penalty on their saving throws. In addition, those wearing metal armor or coming into contact with very hot metal take fire damage. On the first round, it suffers 1 point of fire damage, 1d4 points on the second round, and 2d4 points of damage for every round thereafter. A character takes full damage if his armor is affected or if he is holding, touching, wearing, or carrying metal weighing one-fifth of his weight. The creature takes minimum damage if it's not wearing metal armor and the metal that it's carrying weighs less than one-fifth of its weight.

Catching on Fire

Characters engulfed in a wildfire are at risk of catching on fire for every minute they are within the leading edge of the fire. Characters at risk of catching fire are allowed a DC 15 Reflex save. If failed, the character's clothes or hair catch fire and he takes 1d6 points of damage immediately. In each subsequent round, the burning character must make another Reflex saving throw. Failure means he takes another 1d6 points of damage that round. Success means that the fire has gone out.

A character on fire may automatically extinguish the flames by jumping into enough water to douse himself. If no body of water is at hand, rolling on the ground or smothering the fire with cloaks or the like permits the character another save with a +4 bonus.

Those unlucky enough to have their clothes or equipment catch fire must make DC 15 Reflex saves for each item. Flammable items that fail take the same amount of damage as the character.

Smoke Inhalation

Wildfires naturally produce a great deal of smoke. A character who breathes heavy smoke must make a Fortitude save each round (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or spend that round choking and coughing. A character who chokes for 2 consecutive rounds takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. Also, smoke obscures vision, providing concealment to characters within it (20% miss chance on a successful attack). Wildfire Terrain

Terrain Features	Category of Wildfire			
	Light	Moderate	Strong	Severe
Firestorm	5%	10%	15%	20%
Fire Tornado	1%	2%	3%	4%
Crowning Wildfire	10%	20%	30%	40%
Crawling Wildfire	10%	20%	30%	40%
Jumping Wildfire	20%	30%	40%	50%
Burning Debris	20%	30%	40%	50%
Fire Gout	5%	10%	15%	20%
Fire Gate	--	--	--	1%

Firestorm

Firestorms occur when conditions become so hot due to the burning gases that all flammable material in the area ignites simultaneously. The effect is a firestorm spell as cast by the wildfire's equivalent level that lasts for 2d4×10 minutes.

Fire Gate

The wildfire becomes so hot that it opens a temporary gate to the elemental plane of Fire. The gate lasts only for 2d4 rounds. Fire creatures are likely to come through the gate, including azer, fire elementals, efreeti, fire giants, hell hounds, magmin, fire mephits, magma mephitis, steam mephitis, pyrohydras, rasts, salamanders, red dragons, and thoseua.

While within 100 feet of the fire gate, spells and spell-like abilities with the fire descriptor are both maximized and enlarged (as if the Maximize Spell and Enlarge Spell had been used on them, but the spells don't require higher-level slots). Spells and spell-like abilities that are already maximized or enlarged are unaffected by this benefit. Spells and spell-like abilities that use or create water (including spells of the Water domain and spells that summon water elementals or outsiders with the water subtype) are impeded. Fire Tornado

Whipped about by the superheated air of a wildfire, fire tornados spring out of the wildfire like devious imps. All ranged attacks are impossible (even with siege weapons), as are Listen checks. Large-sized or smaller creatures must make a Fort save (DC 30) or be sucked towards the fire tornado. Creatures on the ground are knocked prone and dragged 1d4×10 feet towards the fire tornado, taking 1d4 points of nonlethal damage per 10 feet. Flying creatures are blown 2d6×10 feet towards the fire tornado and take 2d6 points of nonlethal damage due to battering and buffeting. Huge creatures must make a Fort save (DC 30) or be knocked down. Huge creatures are knocked prone by the force of the wind. Huge flying creatures are instead blown 1d6×10 feet towards the fire tornado. Gargantuan or larger creatures must make a Fort save (DC 30) or be checked. Checked creatures are unable to move away from the fire tornado against the force of the wind. Checked flying creatures are blown 1d6×5 feet towards the fire tornado.

Those who come in contact with the actual funnel cloud of the fire tornado are picked up and whirled around for 1d10 rounds, taking 6d6 points of bludgeoning damage and 6d6 points of fire damage per round, before being violently expelled (falling damage may apply). While a fire tornado's rotational speed can be as great as 300 mph, the funnel itself moves forward at an average of 30 mph (roughly 250 feet per round).

Crowning Wildfire

Crowning wildfires leap across the tops of overhead terrain. This means that the fire may not actually cause heat damage but instead move over and past the characters. Crowning terrain burns from the top down instead of the bottom up, inflicting the equivalent of smoke inhalation damage (see above) without any smoke as the oxygen is sucked upwards. Encountering crowning wildfire requires a direction roll to determine where it will spread next.

Crawling Wildfire

Crawling wildfires are the usual means in which wildfires spread, burning scrub and brush. It has all the heat and smoke effects of a usual wildfire. Encountering crawling wildfire requires a direction roll to determine where it will spread next.

Jumping Wildfire

Jumping wildfires are the most dangerous. Burnt embers sail through the air ahead of the leading edge of the wildfire, igniting another fire. Treat the effect just as a splash weapon with the character at the center to determine where the fire springs up. 1d8 spotting wildfires can appear in this fashion, spread out amongst the available characters to determine where the fires appear.

Burning Debris

Burning debris falls due to the strong drafts created by a wildfire as well as the weakened structure of burnt trees. Characters must make a Reflex save (DC 15) or be knocked prone by the debris, suffering 2d6 points of bludgeoning damage and 1d6 points of fire damage. If the character fails the Reflex save by 5 or more, he is considered pinned and takes an additional 1d6 points of fire damage a round.

Characters who aren't buried can dig out their friends. In 1 minute, using only his hands, a character can clear debris equal to five times his heavy load limit. The amount of wood that fills a 5-foot-by-5-foot area weighs 1,500 pounds. Armed with an appropriate tool, such as a pick, crowbar, or shovel, a digger can clear loose debris twice as quickly as by hand. A buried character can free himself with a DC 25 Strength check.

Fire Gout

Sometimes wildfires find particularly flammable materials; other times the winds hit the wildfire just right. Whatever the case, the fire blasts instantaneously across an area where the characters are standing. The flame deals 1d4+1 point per effective level of the wildfire in a 10-foot wide line that is as long as the wildfire's speed (see above).

Prevention

Spotting a Wildfire

A wildfire can be spotted from as far away as 2d6×100 feet by a character that makes a Spot check, treating the fire as a Colossal creature (reducing the DC by 16). If all characters fail their Spot checks, the fire moves closer to them. They automatically see it when it closes to half the original distance. Characters who are blinded or otherwise unable to make Spot checks can feel the heat of the fire (and thus automatically "spot" it) when it is 100 feet away.

Controlling the Wildfire

Spells that affect the wind can help control the path of a wildfire, including: control weather, control wind, gust of wind, wind wall. These spells can move the fire in another direction or be used to create conditions such that the fire goes out.

Dousing the Wildfire

The following cold and water spells instantly put out a fire in there area of effect: cone of cold, control weather, create water, freezing sphere, ice storm, quench, sleet storm. Note that this does not necessarily extinguish a wildfire completely.

Firebreaks

The following spells can create firebreaks, or gaps in combustible material that prevent the wildfire from spreading: *animate plants, diminish plants, earthquake, move earth, repel metal or stone, soften earth and stone, stone shape, transmute rock to mud.* These spells do not prevent jumping wildfires, which can only be protected against by a combination of both a firebreak and magical wind.

Wildfires in Fantasy

Most medieval and even Renaissance-era cultures simply do not have the means to combat a wildfire. After the first few minutes, a wildfire rapidly spreads out of control, burning a huge swath of vegetation in the direction of the

prevailing winds. If characters are present at the beginning of a wildfire, they have little time before it spreads beyond their ability to stop it.

Beyond attempting to directly quench the fire or prevent its spread, most locals will simply gather as much of their valuables as they can and flee for their lives. Animals will certainly follow suit and instinctively know how to survive wildfires that occur naturally due to lightning storms.

On the other hand, some creatures intentionally set wildfires as part of their tactics. Certainly, red dragons and fire giants will begin blazing infernos to give them an advantage before beginning a raid. Some beings, like magmin, mephitis, and salamanders, are merely capricious and enjoy the effects of a wildfire. Still others can't help but set the place on fire merely by showing up, like fire elementals.

Of all the creatures most likely to work with characters to stop wildfires, treants are the prime candidates. They use their animate trees ability to create a firebreak, commanding the animated trees to shore up dirt while other trees move away from the conflagration. The problem is that treants move very slowly and wildfires move very fast, making it nearly impossible for treants to effectively stop a wildfire without the help of druidic magic.

Druids are not necessarily implacable enemies of wildfires and may even see them as beneficial. Wildfires can clear out unwelcome visitors as well as spark regeneration in barren areas; indeed, wildfires are an important part of the lifecycle of many forests. To prevent wildfires from raging out of control, druids might create controlled fires, intentionally burning off the debris that helps wildfires spread.

As you can see, wildfires are serious business. The next time a spellcaster decides to blow up the surrounding terrain around a group of hobgoblins, he might think twice before reaching for his trusty fireball.

Sylvania Unbound

Tree-Spirits as Characters in *GURPS*

by William J. Keith

Following the trail blazed by the Omniscient Eye and the Suppressed Transmission, this article provides one possible *GURPS* template for a race of sentient trees. Rooted in distant soil, the wandering spirits from this sylvan race awaken their inner magic and send their minds exploring, learning, and talking with the legged creatures of their world. Whether the tree-race is a secretive enemy of the unrooted meat-things, or an ally of man that patiently drinks sunlight and contemplates human history as it rushes by, using the description below will allow trees at moderate point levels as PCs, villains, supporters, or many other useful and interesting NPC niches.

Sentient Tree template

Racial (-208 points): This is the base racial template.

Attributes: **ST** 0 [-100]; **DX** 0 [-200]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0]

Secondary Attributes: Dmg 0d/0d (1d-1/1d+1 with TK), BL 0 lbs (20 lbs with TK), HP 20 (Size, -30%) [28], Will 11, Per 11, FP 10, Basic Speed 2.5, Basic Move 0 [0], SM +3

Social Attributes: Treetongue (Native/None) [-3], TL0 [-15 in a generally-TL3 world]

Advantages: 360 Degree Vision (Magical, -10%) [23]; Deep Sleeper [1]; DR 2 (Semi-Ablative, -20%) [8], Doesn't Breathe [20], Doesn't Eat or Drink [10], Extended Lifespan 3 [8], Injury Tolerance (Homogeneous, No Eyes, No Head, No Neck) [57]; Resistant (environmental syndromes) [15]; Sanitized Metabolism [1]; Subsonic Hearing (also normal human range; Magical, -10%) [5]; Telekinesis 10 (Magical, -10%) [45]; Telecommunication (Telesend) (Magical, -10%; Racial, -20%; Broadcast, +50%) [36]; Temperature Tolerance 4 (15 to 110 degrees) [4]

Disadvantages: Cannot speak (Mute) [-25]; Dead Broke [-25]; Dependency (fertile soil and sunlight, very common, daily) [-15]; Fragile (Combustible) [-5]; No Legs (Sessile) [-50], No Manipulators [-30], No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5], Numb [-20], Phobia (Fire) (12) [-5]; Vulnerability (Fire (Common), x2) [-30]

Features: Affected by Plant spells (though not Animate Plant); awake for 2/3 of the year and hibernate in winter; subject to diseases and poisons, albeit mostly *different* from those of humans; Taboo Traits: Fixed ST and DX [0]

Skills: Brawling-10 (DX/E) DX+10 [39]

Variants: The Size Modifier, Temperature Tolerance, and Extended Lifespan are all selected for typical oaks or pines found in temperate environments. GMs may prefer that tree PCs sleep daily rather than yearly; this may lead to difficulties re-establishing contact with a party on occasion (a difficulty alleviated if the entire group are trees), but will allow the PC to be active in winter. Substituting Innate Attack (TK), a new innate attack specialty, for Brawling will reduce basic damage, but will allow mage PCs to buy spell-attack skills from their racial default instead of from 0. An intriguing line of cultural development could use this as the base skill for a martial art (Tree Kei?) that makes good use of the fighter's bodiless state, complete with holds, throws, and even a related Trained by a Master advantage and exotic techniques like Power Blow and Pressure Points.

As this template stands, a sentient race of trees is more capable of self-defense than a mere plant but can still see much use in human allies. . . or minions. For a number of possible settings with different relationships between man and tree, see the Suppressed Transmission article mentioned earlier.

Adventuring Tree (+258 points, for a total cost of 50 points)

A number of sentient trees choose to interact with the walking creatures. Those that do not already express Magery naturally undergo a regimen of training to hone their species' innate powers of vision, first awakening their native senses' underlying magical talent and then focusing it into the ability to project their viewpoint completely away from their body. They stretch their species' mental communication to enable contact with other sentients. The training takes a very long time, but trees have the years to spend. (It's possible for mage-trees to interact with humans without learning a projection ability, through spells like Dream-Sending or Communication, but this interaction is necessarily limited by the number of spells they can cast and maintain.)

Once the training is complete, their options are open. They learn a local species' language, and usually how to read and write in it, as well as a regional Cultural Familiarity. Some even acquire material possessions, usually held in legal trust or as letters of credit. Add the following traits to the racial template:

CF: Add one foreign cultural familiarity [1]

Language: Add one language, spoken and written [6]

TL: Increase to campaign normal [15 for a TL3 campaign]

Advantages: Buy off the Racial limitation to Telesend [6]; add Magery 1 [15]; and Warp (Magical, -10%; Projection (affect substantial) -0%; Blind, +50%; No Strain, +25%; Reliable 10, +50%) [215]

Magery is Magical Talent, and affects the IQ roll to move the projected viewpoint; in the normal run of things, a sentient tree initially makes a projection at some penalty for a long distance projection done blind, and then moves in short-distance hops to points within its projected arc of vision. Theoretically, this requires many IQ rolls, but a character with IQ 11 and Magery 1 is rolling against a 17 with a single second of concentration to move 10 yards in a direction he can see, and the No Strain enhancement means only a bit of wandering even on a critical failure, so as a practical matter moving around at walking speed can be safely assumed. Note that the tree's senses, as well as its projection, are subject to magical shielding: Scryguard, Scryfool, Astral Block, and the like all resist its abilities.

Trees who wish to become skilled mages must overcome the limitations of their inability to gesture and speak. Some first seek a means to possess bodies -- willing or not. Others turn to a tradition of tree lore kept by the mystics of their kind. These trees turn *themselves* into symbol tokens. The gnarled, ancient priests of the runes carve the eldritch letters into their very trunks, and the recipients study diligently the Symbol Drawing and rune-skills needed to activate their powers.

Use the Ogham alphabet, with runes purchased by character points: in a low-magic campaign, these cost 4 for Easy runes, 12 for Average, and 24 for Hard. Campaigns with more common enchantments will decrease these values. Each prominently carved rune also counts as an Unnatural Feature for a tree. As usual, 5 Unnatural Features is the maximum, but only nonadventuring trees will likely be such generalists in these difficult studies -- however, such hermits are probably masters of many strange lores indeed. With divinatory, communicative and manipulative spells, they might well exert influence on cultures both rooted and mobile.

* * *

A sentient tree can function in a number of capacities given its ability to sense and act -- invisibly, inaudibly, and intangibly, without endangering its physical body any more than the dangers a normal tree faces -- at a remote location anywhere on the world. With a 50-point template, 50 points remain for customization for a 100-point character. Some possible adventuring tree characters, and the epithets their countrymen have given them:

Awan, Who Delights in Paper   *100 points*

To the Adventuring Tree template, add:

Attributes: **IQ** 13 [40]

Advantages: Comfortable [35]; Ally ("marker" manservant; 0-25 points, constantly) [4]; Reputation ("that intriguing spirit with the eye for trade," +1, everyone in the city, all the time) [5]

Disadvantages: Honesty (6) [-20]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Xenophilia (12) [-10]; Pacifism (Self-Defense Only) [-15]; Likes to hover invisibly over crowded bazaars or bars [-1]; Responsive [-1]

Skills: Connoisseur (Literature)-13 [2], Games (Chess)-13 [1], Law (local business law)-12 [2], Literature-13 [4], Merchant-14 [4], Politics-13 [2], Savoir-Faire-14 [2], Search-12 [1]

Equipment (no "settled" assets): Cash and credit at local banks, $500; shares of a local import/export firm, $1000; a small office for private discussions and mailing address, $250 and a small monthly rent paid from his earnings; $250 worth of rare and antique books, for reading as well as trade, kept in his office.

Awan deeply enjoys interacting with the nuances of human society and began exploring the world when he was younger. For years, he traded on his reconnaissance abilities with adventuring bands, earning a little money in letters of credit that he occasionally used through attorney intermediaries. Having earned some disapproval for poking behind one too many locked doors, he has publicly done penance and is now known for his ethical standards. Looking for a bigger challenge than invisibly scouting old ruins, he's recently decided to take on serious commerce and politics, seeing if he can ultimately gain legal ownership of the land on which he resides. He is just starting to be a political force in the nearby city. His fellows find Awan's desire for cash and real estate quite odd, despite Awan's attempts to explain the advantages of having humans agree one owns the land one lives on.

The manservant varies, but is generally a local teenager who cleans up nicely, will be on call 24/7 for a Struggling wage, and can keep quiet while Awan does the talking. Most of the time, his or her purpose is simply to prominently display Awan's sigil and alert people that Awan is near. (He could carry it himself, but he finds that people react better when they're given warning before the obvious magic starts in.)

Awan works best in a world where sentient trees are at least not completely unknown to humans, so that foresters know to avoid a tree that pushes them away and whispers to them; that way, "Who Delights in Paper" doesn't become a rather disturbing epithet. Adventurers might have need of one of Awan's old books, could use him as a local business or high society contact, or might have adventured with him as a scout in his early days (decrease his Wealth to Poor, remove Honesty, remove Law, Merchant and Savoir-Faire skills, and add 4 points to Innate Attack, 1 point to Search, and 1 point in Professional skill (Mercenary scout)). A higher-point version could have Merchant Rank or even an elected office, display more political savvy, be richer, and have a wider knowledge of rare and curious tomes.

Errad, Who Eats Darkness   *100 points*

To the Adventuring Tree template, add:

Attributes: **IQ** 12 [20]

Secondary Attributes: FP 12 [6]

Advantages: Muin (Food) [4]; Straif (Weaken) [12]; Uath (Body) [24]

Disadvantages: Careful [-1]; Chronic Pain (Severe, 9 or less) [-10*]; Obsession (destroy the ruling family of the Duchy of Melhanne) [-10], Secret (physical location; possible death) [-30]; Uncongenial [-1]; Unnatural Features (3 prominent carved runes) [-3]

* Muin, carved as the bramble rune, occasionally flares up where it is cut on Errad. For color's sake, it is suggested that

the rhythm of rolls be yearly instead of daily, with the interval being not 2 hours (1/12 of a day), but one month (1/12 of a year). During these painful weeks, Errad hunkers down, biding his time.

Magic: Symbol Drawing (Ogham)-14 [12], Muin (Food)-14 [4], Straif (Weaken)-14* [4], Uath (Body)-14 [12]

* Includes +1 since Errad is a blackthorn.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Duchy of Melhanne)-12 [1], Current Affairs/ TL3 (Regional, Duchy of Melhanne)-12 [1], Farming/TL0-11 [1], Poisons/ TL3-12 [4]

Decades ago the forest in which Errad lived was deliberately burned; the Duchy was soon to be obliged to turn it over to border rivals due to developments at court, and rather than let their foes have use of its bounty, the Duke ordered it torched. Errad lost family as well as acres of carefully-tended landscape and human serfs he had watched over from afar; he survived thanks to his native telekinesis and a nearby spring. Wrathful, he sought out shunned hermits of the rune-lore willing to teach him the killing magics of poison and rot. Now he harasses the Duchy from afar and has sworn to eliminate his tormentor's entire extensive family, which is gaining a reputation for mysterious illnesses and disastrous accidents. The latest Duke (Errad has already assassinated two) has employed mages to seek his family's unseen foe, so Errad must act cautiously: if his Secret is revealed, he will gain an implacable and powerful Enemy.

Errad, with this or any similar foul obsession, is almost certainly going to enter play as a nearly undetectable villain, to be hunted by specialized mages and stories of dangerous depths of the once-burned forest. Such a plot works in a campaign where the trees have kept themselves distant from humans, and at most only a few forest folk know certain trees are to be left alone. A higher-point version of Errad may have received Muin carved as the vine-rune, Control, as well, giving him a wide variety of dangerous spells.

Tyrol, Who Jokes   *100 points*

To the Adventuring Tree template, add:

Attributes: **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 9 [-10]

Secondary Attributes: HP 13 [-9]

Advantages: Ailm (Create) [24]; Ailm (Sound) [4]; Beth (Image) [12]

Disadvantages: Curious (6) [-10]; Dreamer [-1]; Imaginative [-1]; Impulsiveness (15) [-5]; Habit ("Pfft, it's just money. What do we need that stuff for?") [-1]; Sense of Duty (Adventuring companions) [-5]; Trickster (6) [-30]; Unnatural Features (3 prominently carved runes) [-3]

Magic: Symbol Drawing-15 [16], Ailm (Create)-15* [12], Ailm (Sound)-15 [8], Beth (Image)-15 [12]

* Includes +1 since Tyrol is a fir.

Skills: Artist (Illusion)-13 [8], Fast-Talk-11 [1], Intimidation-11 [1], Mimicry-10 [1], Musical Instrument (Illusion-based "synth")-12 [4], Performance-12 [2]

Tyrol is barely an adult as trees go, and is even a little bodily fragile due to growing up in some poor soil. Still, that hardly matters as she wanders mentally. She has a quick wit and a deep curiosity about the world of fast-living, mobile humans. Things really *happen* out there!

She makes a useful addition to an adventuring party, being a specialized illusionist with a legitimate job -- performing artist -- and a number of support skills. She can conjure up entire backgrounds, casts, and symphonies from empty air, maintaining a complex illusion, usually a singer or an actor, indefinitely as long as she is not "heckled" (deliberately disbelieved). She also has a yen for tweaking the noses of over-serious humans with a well-placed illusion, which has

gotten her and her friends into trouble more than once.

Tyrol is by far best off in a campaign where sentient trees are a known race, though as a mysterious wandering spirit she might gain interesting notoriety. A higher-point Tyrol has grown up a bit, increased her performance skills, settled down a little, and would certainly like to bring her HT and HP closer to racial norm, possibly through careful self-horticulture.

The Labyrinth of Five Essences

An Adventure for *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

Character development. Social interaction. Grand strategy. Internal conflict. These are all well and good, but sometimes you just need to kill things and take their stuff. This adventure is appropriate for a small number of modestly powerful characters (say, four to six characters built on 100-150 points).

In this adventure, the heroes become aware that an important magical artifact is at the center of the ruins of a stronghold built by a now-defunct magical brotherhood. That artifact is behind a series of magical barriers. The barriers can be deactivated by gathering talismans, one for each of the brotherhood's mystical "essences," contained in their respective chambers, and inserting them into niches in a series of pillars around the protected zone. When all five are in place, the barriers will drop and anyone can enter or exit the area at will. To reactivate the barriers, the talismans must all be removed from the niches, though the PCs may not know that. Once they're through the barriers, they can retrieve the artifact, but they have to face a ferocious demon first.

The Labyrinth

The Labyrinth of Five Essences was constructed by a mystical brotherhood devoted to the study of certain magical forces. They devoted themselves to the study of shadow, stone, water, wind, and wood. The labyrinth was built as a combined refuge, treasury, and safe place for research. Long ago, it became the site of a battle between a demonic army and the wizards of the brotherhood. The fight destroyed the stronghold which once stood over the labyrinth, wiped out the brotherhood, and eliminated most of the attacking demons. The most notable survivor was the ferocious demon prince who led the army. He was lured into a trap and confined. By the time the battle was over, anyone who knew how to release him had either fled or died. And so he has been waiting there for countless years.

In the intervening centuries, it has decayed somewhat. Some of the finest treasures were carried off by the last remaining members of the brotherhood or their servants, others were destroyed, and yet more have crumbled away. Of what remained, some have been taken away by animals fascinated by shiny objects and others looted by members of the occasional band of orcs or goblins which have found temporary shelter there. Still, a few durable valuables remain in the darkness, and several powerful artifacts can still be found at the center of the labyrinth. Unfortunately for prospective treasure hunters, the center of the labyrinth is where the demon is confined . . .

1. Chamber of Shadow

This chamber and its surroundings are in constant darkness. Lights burn less brightly, or the light is simply swallowed up around the room. The outermost shaded two rings of hexes around the chamber impose a -3 darkness penalty, the next two rings -6 and the chamber itself -9; lights provide only half of their usual bonus against darkness. The blind bear sleeps in this chamber. Unless the PCs are completely silent as they approach, he'll be awake and grumpy. He's also wearing the talisman for this chamber on a chain around his neck.

The room also contains the scattered pieces of a suit of armor: chain arms and legs and a well-decorated breastplate. It provides no more protection than

The Map

The numbers here refer to locations on [the map](#). The pages can be printed out (it'll take a lot of ink on a color printer, but it'll be worth it), taped together, and used as a tactical map with miniatures, Cardboard Heroes, or whatever markers you desire. The map includes art kindly provided by

regular armor and is not magical, but the sculpted, gold-chased breastplate would sell for $3,000.

2. Chamber of Stone

The corridors around this chamber are littered with stones, half as tall as they are wide on the map. None of the passages are completely blocked, but getting around requires some climbing, and sprinting is impossible. The chamber is inhabited by three small earth elementals, each of which has a swarm of fire bees living in them. The stone talisman floats on the surface of a pit of lava in the center of the room. Even a slight touch does 1d6 burning damage, and falling or stepping into it does 6d6 burning damage/turn.

Sharp-eyed adventurers may notice that some of the rocks in the chamber contain opals. On a successful roll on an appropriate skill, such as Jeweler or Prospector, characters may recover 1d6 opals (doubled for a critical success) of 1d6 carats each (roll size separately for each opal).

3. Chamber of Water

The floor of the water-covered area drops of sharply, 3 feet per hex away from the water's edge, down to a depth of 21 feet. The talisman is at the bottom of the center of the chamber, on a necklace pinned to the floor by a large knife made out of transparent glassy material. The knife provides no magical bonuses, but it performs as though it were a Fine quality metal knife; the unusual weapon would be worth at least $1000. The chamber is also occupied by six leech snakes.

4. Chamber of Wind

This chamber and its surroundings are filled with a howling whirlwind (blowing clockwise, should it come to matter). Hearing rolls are at -3 in any hex adjacent to the clouded area on the map, -6 within the area, and -9 in the chamber itself. Anyone in the chamber must roll against ST each turn to avoid being knocked over. The room also has two flickering columns of lightning (the blue symbols on the map). Anyone passing through either hex must Dodge or take 2d burning damage; metal armor provides no protection.

The talisman for this chamber is being tossed around with an effective Move of 8. Any character facing the talisman can attempt to catch it (roll vs. DX-3) at it passes through his hex (or vice versa). The room is occupied by four air elementals who will use their Air Jets to knock other characters down or into the lightning columns, or just keep the talisman out of their hands. The room contains nothing resembling treasure.

5. Chamber of Wood

Despite being deep underground, this chamber and its surroundings are filled with plant life, from tangles of vines and high grasses to a tree in the chamber itself. Each turn a character moves through the overgrown area, roll 1d6. On a 6 (or on a 4, 5, or 6 within the chamber itself), he steps into a patch of trapper vines somewhere along his path. The talisman in this chamber is embedded in the old tree growing in the center of the chamber. It has to be cut out to be recovered; the tree will do its best to prevent that.

Scattered through the plants, characters may find the pages of a "book," with dense text engraved on thin sheets of bronze. The entire text contains complete instructions on how to cast five spells (these should be spells which are typically rare or restricted in the campaign; if there are no such spells, it may teach five unusual skills, such Enthrallment or cinematic martial arts skills and maneuvers). It could be a valuable resource for PCs to learn rare skills, or at least be a salable object worth several thousand $. However, the entire text, made up of sheets nearly a tenth of an inch thick, weighs about 450 pounds.

6. Orcish Lair

A group of orcs has temporarily set up a refuge in a section of the northeast section of the labyrinth, reaching it through a hidden, natural fissure in the earth and a collapsed section of ceiling. There are about twelve orcs in the band, adjusted to the size and power of the PC group; at any given time, just under half of them will be asleep (unless awoken and sent out to fight the heroes) and at least two will be wandering the maze, picking over the ruins for lost treasure but not having a great time of it. The orcs have been using their corner of the labyrinth as a hideout for several weeks and have settled in fairly well. They know the labyrinth reasonably well, and they learned enough not to enter any of the chambers (there used to be twenty orcs). If they become aware of the PCs, they'll attempt to surround them and, as is appropriate for this kind of adventure, try to kill them and take their stuff.

The orcs have few possessions beyond their weapons and some unpleasant but technically edible provisions. Most of the orcs have coins and small trinkets with a total value of $2d6×5 each, while the leader has goods with a value of $3d6×10. Ironically, since they have no mages with them, they've overlooked an actual treasure. PCs may find a small and somewhat tarnished but nicely decorated tin box tossed into a corner. It has a false bottom, which reveals a cubic foot of space created by Hideaway and enchanted with the Preserve spell. In addition to the innate value of the item, it contains a pair of healing potion and several ounces of spices with a value of $2500.

Wandering Monsters

The corridors of the labyrinth aren't packed with critters with nothing better to do than fight with wandering adventurers. However, there are a few treasure-hunting orcs on hand who might stumble over the PCs and vice versa. Assuming the orcs haven't already been found and defeated, roll 1d6 every half hour of in-game time. On a 6, a pair of orcs have come close enough to see or hear the PCs. The orcs will, by preference, get close enough to see how formidable they appear and then retreat to get their companions. If they can't get away, they'll fight to the death.

7. The floor is unstable in this section, undermined by subsurface erosion over the centuries. Every character who walks through must roll 13 or less on 3d6. On a failed roll, a section of floor collapses and, if the PC fails a DX or Acrobatics roll, he falls 6 feet onto a hard surface, leaving an open pit in the floor. Once the PCs have been through the area, assume that the un-collapsed sections of floor will continue to hold weight.

8. There is nothing in this section; the number is here simply to distract players looking at the map.

9. This section of corridor is also unstable, as per #7.

10. This section of corridor is crawling with shock worms. There are at least 20 (no more than one per hex). They're disinclined to fight, but PCs who step on them inadvertently will be shocked.

11. There's nothing here, either.

12. The Prison

The central circle is very well protected, with the equivalent of Utter Dome and Pentagram (enchanted with a skill of 25, in case anyone tries to challenge it). The artifact the heroes have come for is inside the barrier, as is demon prince, and he's *very* grumpy. The demon prince is armed with a pair of enchanted Fine thrusting broadswords. One is enchanted with Flaming Weapon and has Armor Devisor 2, the other is enchanted with Icy Weapon and can effect insubstantial objects. His first impulse is to kill anyone he sees and he will fight to the death if it comes to that. If the PCs flee, he'll escape the labyrinth and lay waste to the countryside. If that happens, people in the effected region may or may not know that the PCs are responsible, but one hopes that they'd have the decency to feel guilty about it.

The Monsters

Air Elementals

ST 6; **DX** 12; **IQ** 8; **HT** 8
HP 8; Will 8; Per 8; FP 8; Basic Lift 7.2; Damage 1d-4/1d-3; Basic Speed 6; Basic Move 6; Air Move 12

Advantages: Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Flight (Lighter Than Air); Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse)

Disadvantages: Callous; No Fine Manipulators; No Legs (Aerial); Vulnerability (Vacuum and wind-based attacks) (Occasional) (x2)

Skills: Innate Attack (Beam)-13

Spells: Air Jet-15

The Blind Bear

ST 25; **DX** 10; **IQ** 4; **HT** 13
HP 25; Will 11; Per 10; FP 13; Basic Lift 125; Damage 2d+2/5d-1; Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5

Advantages: Claws (Sharp Claws); Damage Resistance (3); Discriminatory Smell; Sonar; Teeth (Sharp Teeth)

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12 or less); Bestial; Blindness; Cannot Speak; Hidebound

Skills: Blind Fighting-14; Brawling-12; Stealth-14; Tracking-13

Earth Elementals

ST 13; **DX** 8; **IQ** 6: **HT** 13
HP 13; Will 6; Per 6; FP 13; Basic Lift 34; Damage 1d/2d-1; Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5

Advantages: Damage Resistance (2); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous); Pressure Support (3); Vacuum Support

Skills: Brawling-12

The Demon Prince

ST 18; **DX** 13; **IQ** 14; **HT** 14.
HP 26; Will 14; Per 14; FP 14; Basic Lift 65; Damage 2d-1/3d+2; Basic Speed 6.75; Basic Move 6; Aerial Move 12; Block 7; Dodge 5; Parry 8.

Advantages: Claws (Sharp Claws); Damage Resistance (3); Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Extra Arms (2); Extra Attack (1); Flight (Winged); High Pain Threshold; Immunity (All Mind Control); Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Magery 0; Night Vision (5); Status (Demonic) 4; Striking ST (2); Teeth (Sharp Teeth)

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous); Bloodlust (12 or less); Bully (12 or less); Callous; Fragile (Unnatural); Lifebane; On the Edge (15 or less): Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) (Prevents direct harm of truly good or holy folks); Sadism (12 or less); Selfish (12 or less); Social Stigma (Monster)

Skills: Acting-13; Brawling-15; Broadsword-16; Fast-Talk-15; Hidden Lore (Demon Lore)-13; Intimidation-18; Leadership-15; Shield-14; Stealth-13

The demon prince started out unpleasant, and having been trapped in a small room for centuries, his mood has not improved. He speaks several demonic languages which are still current, but the only human tongues he knows are several centuries out of date. He may be able to communicate with linguistically skilled adventurers, but he's probably

disinclined to do so.

The demon prince is wearing full plate armor (90 lbs.) and is carrying a medium shield and two broadswords, for light encumbrance.

Fire Bees

See here for stats for fire bees.

Leech Snakes

Leech snakes are dangerous aquatic parasites which drink their victims' blood. Treat them as rattlesnakes (p. B458), but instead of a toxin follow-up, they automatically latch onto any living target after any attack which penetrates DR and do 1 HP of damage every subsequent turn. A leech snake can be ripped off (treat as breaking free of a grapple), but the target takes an additional HP of damage if successful.

The Old Tree

ST 22; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 12
HP 40; Will 10; Per 10; FP 12; Basic Lift 146; Damage 2d/4d; Basic Speed 5.75; Move 0.

Advantages: Claws (Blunt Claws); Damage Resistance (4) (Semi-Ablative); Doesn't Breathe; Extra Arms (3); Injury Tolerance (Homogenous); Lifting ST (5)

Disadvantages: No Legs (Sessile); Numb

Skills: Brawling-15

Orcs

For orcs, use the templates here. Most are armed with broadswords and axes in equal proportions, carry small shields, and wear leather armor. The leader has a sword, chainmail, a medium shield, and a pot helm.

Shock Worms

The stats for shock worms can be found here. The shock worms in the labyrinth are all regular sized.

Trapper Vines

Trapper vines are animate plants which entangle their prey, kill them, and live off of the nutrients their bodies provide. When someone steps into a hex of trapper vines, the vines will attempt to grab the character (treat as a Binding attack), pull him down (treat as a Takedown), and fully immobilize him (treat as a Binding attack with the Engulfing attack). An immobilized target then suffers the effects of suffocation. Trapper vines have a ST of 1 per vine; most hexes contain 1d6+6 vines, but those in the Chamber of Wood contain 2d6+8.

Pyramid Pick

Numbers League

Published by [Bent Castle Workshops](#)

Game designed by Ben Crenshaw & Chris Pallace

Graphic design by Ben Crenshaw

Characters & illustrations by Chris Pallace

Rules & translations by Tina & Chris Pallace, Janet & Ben Crenshaw, Emily Durstewitz, Anne & Rien Visser, Ricardo Arguello, & Word Magic

120 cards (25 heads, 25 bodies, 25 legs, 24 double-sided villains, & 21 devices), four miniature *Numbers League* pads; full color, boxed, for two to four players, 30 minutes to play; $19.95

Now is the time for heroes. Infinity City is under siege by several supervillains, and they need to be brought to justice. Who will answer the clarion call? The ***Numbers League*** is ready for their "adventures in addiplication."

The object of the game is to collect the most points worth of supervillains.

The villains spread throughout the city, though they're pretty orderly folks who do so in a six-by-four grid pattern. They're even in numerical order, if the heroes want to make things easy on themselves. Players get a hand of cards from the play deck, and three more are played into the sidekick beside the rogues' gallery. The rest form the Hall of Heroes (the draw deck, in plainer terms).

A player's turn consists of the action, capture, and energize phases. (Just to kill the suspense, the energize phase means to refill one's hand; the others are more involved.) Everyone gets two plays during their action phase, and this is how heroes are born. They never do things by half, they do them by thirds. To be a functional member of the team, he (or she, or it) needs legs, a body, and a head; devices can make them into more capable crime fighters. If the hand isn't sufficient, cards can also be traded one-for-one with the three sidekick cards, or one may return to headquarters and trade any number of cards in the Hall of Heroes. In the latter case, the hero forfeits his capture phase.

During the capture phase, villains are rounded up and packed off to jail. Each card in a hero has a number, and every criminal has a weakness number. Capturing it requires matching that number, so apprehending the villain with a vulnerability to 12 takes a hero whose total is 12, or two heroes built on six points apiece, or any other combination. The devices can be activated to adjust this further; the little robotic buddy at ×2 turns one "six" character into victory. Anyone can make use of the sidekick in a fight to bolster his ranks, so long as he's currently a complete three-piece partner. If he's just a couple of legs cards and a device he's no good until someone trades out parts with him. With this many variables, there's no way to accurately predict an opponent's plans and little direct inter-player rivalry.

The game can be played at two levels, hero and superhero, with cards identified by yellow or green dots respectively. Once the group graduates, cards can be mixed and the other half of the double-sided villains may be employed, adding variety and some tougher math. Now no total, even negative numbers, is useless. When the last baddie has been packed into the paddy wagon, everyone scores their captures. Villains are worth one to three points each, a number separate from their weakness. This plus the number of devices used throughout the game give the final totals, and the

highest is the winner.

Some of the artwork is a masterpiece of gender ambiguity (getting all three segments to work together without having a woman's head on a man's body is tough), but even if it falls short it's not always that noticeable. The pictures on both the play and villain cards are just too darn colorful and endlessly creative. The vast array of super-stuff shows a wondrous penchant for funny-book features and foes . . . if Bent Castle Workshops came out with a comic book based on this property tomorrow, it would come as a surprise to no one.

Any parents who haven't dealt with negative numbers since junior high might want to bone up before their kids have to school them. The mechanics may just boil down to math, but the interconnected play works in such elegant ways (note one's score is higher if one opts for variables like equipping one's hero with a device) it's hard to remind oneself that this is an instructional exercise. Many games make the educational claim, noting the opportunities for color recognition or memorization skills or whatnot, but few can say they took leisure activities and arithmetic and, adding two and two together, got a game that's so involving there's virtually no difference in the challenge offered to kids and adults.

Sometimes choices become too diverse to recall at a glance which heroes add up to what, so keeping a pencil and paper handy is a useful workaround to prevent recounting one's team members for the umpteenth time. The game actually comes with four tiny pads bearing the game's logo at the top (the rules say pencils are included, though the claim appears only there, but the plastic tray does have space for storing utensils).

Just to pack the learning to maximum density, the rules are also provided in German, French, and Spanish (and these aren't photocopies with new text -- the graphic background design differs for each language). Adding optional rules and play aids for teachers at the website shows Bent Castle is serious about their dedication to the learning experience *Numbers League* provides. The publishers have more than done their job; now it's time for gamers to stand up and be counted.

--Andy Vetromile

Is Gaming on the Right Trek?

Many many moons ago, my group of friends managed to get together for the ***How to Host a Mystery Star Trek: The Next Generation*** edition. This wasn't a non-trivial proposition, as some of those who ended up participating had passing interest (at best) in *Star Trek,* or had passing interest (at best) in gaming. (I've [mentioned before](#) that I believe the ***How to Host a Murder*** series to be a clear and obvious relative of tabletop gaming; the biggest difference is that it's at least somewhat likely to get one's grandma involved in a murder-mystery party compared to a rousing game of ***Underground.***)

Now, for those who haven't played this particular story -- and I'm sure that's about 99.8% of you -- let me tell you about what I *expected* it to be.

In my mind's eye, the game should have revolved around the crew of the *NCC1701-D* trying to work together to solve a mystery, akin to those episodes where folks are standing around the holodeck or sitting around the table of the Ready Room, figuring stuff out.

In reality, the game did *not* provide that experience. Oh, sure, the players were ostensibly dressed as Captain Picard, Data, Troi, and the rest, and that's what the nametags said. But the game instead revolved around a plot contrivance that relied on all members of the show to act like they hated and distrusted each other, and should actively withhold information from the rest of the crew. (For those curious, I seem to recall that the whole plot revolved around nanites -- this was the '90s, remember; everything had nanites -- that made people paranoid and distrustful.)

In other words, not only did players have to roleplay the characters of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* television show, they had to roleplay them acting like versions of themselves they'd never seen before!

Frankly, the strength of this concept is amazing. I would look forward to playing a Conan game where I play someone named Conan who's actually a waiter at a swanky fantasy restaurant. Or a Superman video game where the titular hero doesn't get to act like Superman, but instead has to fly through endless rings, one touch of which results in instant death. (No wait; they'd [never try that](#) . . .)

Matters were made worse by the fact that the *Star Trek* mystery was so challenging and obtuse (at least, for the 90% of us who had never participated in one of these games before), that even if we *had* cooperated, sat down, exchanged booklets, and actively worked together, there's still not a very good chance that we would've figured it out. (I don't know if I'm giving a SPOILER here, but I seem to recall that a major plot point centered around whether or not an orb --yes, really, a plot-device orb -- was going Weeble Worble Weeble Worble or if it was rather going Warble Weeble Warble Weeble.)

Although the notion of "Why are we playing?" has been discussed here [before](#), I expect the battle to really heat up over the next half-decade or so . . . and how the industry as a whole and its fans react to that question will shape things from here on out. For example, the upcoming ***Dungeons & Dragons Henceforth Edition*** seems to be taking the tack that gamers are playing in an effort to recreate a fast-paced tabletop wargame experience with minis and other goodies, either in person or virtually, creating an environment akin to ***World of Warcraft*** only without kick-butt graphics. Other games have been going in other directions, delivering faster play, more intense roleplaying, more diverse genres, and so on. Still other games (such as ***Battlestations***) seem to be going in the direction of "boardgame that can involve roleplaying."

There are two broad directions that I can see products going here, and it'll be interesting to see how it shakes out. On the one hand, RPG-like games could provide an experience that is up to the players to taylor to their own tastes. This is what they've done for years already, and it's worked okay; whether folks want to play ***Hero System*** like a tactical miniatures game akin to ***Car Wars*** or a dice-only-when-necessary roleplaying experience, they're certainly able to do so if they want. On the other hand, it seems just as likely that games will attempt to reign in player freedom and present a more "official" version of their view of what their games should be played like. While this may seem draconian ("Who're they to dictate how I play my games?") in reality this is how games have traditionally been played

for thousands of years. For example, there's a generally accepted idea of what Chess or cricket or **Boggle** or **Magic: The Gathering** will play like; while people can play with other rules or ideas -- "We're playing **Scrabble,** but with all vowels counting as any vowels!" -- it's almost universally accepted that such folks aren't playing a "true" version of the game. (Even in games with lots of variants there are those who insist on a "pure" form of a game; for example, among diehard poker players, mention of any games involving wildcards will elicit rolled eyes.)

As such, it's at least feasible that, at some point, the idea of playing a game of **World of Darkness** will have a structure akin to other games, perhaps with a set time length, goal structure, or storyline. Whether audiences will accept or even welcome such structure depends on a lot of factors, most notably on whether they give enough of an audience what they want (for example, if folks want to pretend to be members of the *Enterprise,* let them do it!) as well as how much fun it is to play, regardless of audience desire (there's not a lot of outside-the-box player freedom in **World of Warcraft,** but Blizzard seems to be doing okay for themselves.)

And hopefully and of these future mutant games will be more fun to play than our *Star Trek* mystery.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Battlestations Supplement #1: Galactic Civil War

Published by [Gorilla Games](#)

Written by Jeff Siadek

Cover by A.D. Hamilton with Patrick Morgan & Mario Zavala

Illustrated by A.D. Hamilton

96-page b&w softcovers & 30 double-sided full-color fighter/mine markers; $24.95

It's **war!!**

Actually it is civil war, and on a galactic scale. As hinted at in the end of *Battlestations,* the sci-fi board game from Gorilla Games that combined frantic roleplaying and personal action with ship-to-ship combat, trouble is brewing in the Universal Republic. Not that war is unknown within the Universal Republic, but in an age when cheap cloning means that lives are disposable, such conflicts tend to be petty and last only until one side decides that it can no longer afford to replace both lost clones and lost ships.

This war is not petty. The very future of the Universal Republic is at stake. Best described as a benign dictatorship, it is happy to monitor these small wars, all while imposing a sizable tax burden that funds the massive fleets of the U.R.E.F. -- or Universal Republic Expeditionary Force -- that are tasked to prevent them from escalating. Of course, the Universal Republic has its detractors and dissenters, but their protests are to no avail. So what happens when a whole race objects?

The Whistlers are a newly discovered species, balls of feathery appendages capable of "puffing" across open spaces, who were readily and happily admitted to the Universal Republic. Unfortunately the newly arrived and accepting Whistler senator represents only a minority on his home world. When the Whistler leader finally appeared, it politely declined to join the Universal Republic. Therein lies the rub; once offered, an invitation cannot be refused. In the ensuing constitutional crisis, the Whistler refusal galvanized the dissenters into action as they reclaimed the sovereignty of their worlds and seceded from the Universal Republic. In response the loyalist forces of the U.R.E.F. are moving to put down this rebellion that threatens both the very nature of the Universal Republic and its tax revenues.

Battlestations Supplement #1: Galactic Civil War enables the players to decide the future of the Universal Republic. It includes a new species, new equipment, and new rules for both shipboard and ship-to- ship action. All are supported with new Ship Modules and new counters. Two thirds of the supplement is devoted to a complete campaign, comprised of 36 individual missions. By winning each mission, the players can influence various factors that will determine the outcome of the war and thus the Universal Republic's future.

The new additions can be divided between the personal and the ship related. Characters can now perform the coup de grâce, quick draw, and grappling maneuvers, and possess new special abilities, most of which revolve around the supplement's new fighter rules and Ship Modules. A character can now be an Ace Fighter Pilot (+1 to advanced fighter maneuver rolls), a Fighter Jock (roll to avoid damage done to his fighter), or Wingman (participate in any dogfight within a hex and help determine which fighter takes damage). A ship's stores can be filled with new, interesting, and probably more lethal equipment. Guns can be upgraded to heavy status and fitted with bipods and scopes, but pride of

place goes to every character's friend, Power Armor. Both bulky and clumsy, it is also very tough, a stable weapons platform, and can be upgraded with several different functions. Although an easy process, in keeping with the game's offbeat nature, any upgrade attempt runs the risk of destroying the armor.

In addition to detailing the new species -- the Whistlers -- the standard layout is given for all of their ships, allowing them to be added to a game. The home worlds of each of the Universal Republic's major species are also given a one-page description. These are not only informative, but in-keeping with *Battlestations'* light background.

The first of the supplement's three new Ship Modules is the plainest, the Cargo Bay. This is a general purpose space in which various items can be stored or installed. These include Power Armor suits, Mine Sweepers, Targeting Computers, spare Fighters, and Capacitors that enhance other Modules on the ship. Like other Ship Modules, the Mine Layer needs an operator, someone with the Engineering skill, who can then lay up to six mines per round. A Mine attacks any vessel that passes through its hex, and come in three other flavors besides the standard explosive version.

Finally, the last new Ship Module is the Fighter Bay, capable of carrying and launching a single fighter. Ships can carry more fighters, two per Cargo Bay. Once launched a fighter can attack other ships or engage in dogfights with other fighters. Weak, but maneuverable, a fighter can also board or ram an enemy vessel, pick up anyone floating in space, and even be grabbed by a ship's tractor beam. Although not made explicitly clear, a fighter carries a crew of two. One should be a pilot with that skill, the other the copilot with the Engineering skill to conduct in-flight repairs. Just as with all ships in *Battlestations,* each species builds its fighters with a different benefit. For example, Whistler fighters make for excellent dogfighters, whilst Zoallan fighters are armored. Fighters can of course be upgraded.

However, at the supplement's heart is the Galactic Civil War campaign. It is designed to be flexible in almost every way possible, enabling the GM to tailor the campaign to his players. To start with, it can be played from either side -- as freedom fighters railing against the oppressive tax regime of the Universal Republic, or as loyalist Republicans suppressing a rebellion. There is even an option for the players to play against each other, one side controlling the secessionists, the other the loyalists. Tables allow for the random determination of enemy strength as well as any plot twists and personalities involved in a particular mission. Essentially, the plot twists -- such as Sabotage and 'Bot Revolt -- and the personalities are a handicapping method, enabling the GM to balance a mission against more capable player characters. The personalities also add a roleplaying element to the campaign.

Although each mission has its own objective, such as capturing escaping prisoners or preventing enemy investigation of a super nova, it also has a campaign objective, the modification of a Campaign Indicator. These come in four flavors -- economic, military, political, and scientific. At campaign start each possesses a value of zero. Successfully complete a mission and its associated Campaign Indicator is raised by one, fail and the enemy's is raised by one. When an Indicator reaches three, it provides a bonus for that side. For example, the bonus for the Military Indicator adds to requisition rolls after a mission, but for the other side, all equipment is upgraded. Once a Campaign Indicator is raised to five, its associated victory scenario can be played and the final outcome of the campaign determined. The GM should not necessarily be informing his players as to the value of the enemy's Indicators, but he should at least be hinting at it, so that the players can react and not be totally surprised. Several suggestions are made as to possible sequels to the campaign, including turning pirate, going into the private sector as merchantmen, or being sent off on deep space exploration. None of the supplements detailing these campaigns are yet available.

Finally, appendices provide surprisingly slight errata for the core game, suggestions as to which of the core game's missions make suitable additions to the Galactic Civil War campaign, four ready-to- play characters, and a short piece of fiction. Physically, the supplement matches the quality of the core game, with decent writing, fun art, and a combined index/glossary that puts many other RPGs to shame. It does mean that the new counters and stand-ups for the game are too ordinary.

There is a lot to like in *Battlestations Supplement #1: Galactic Civil War.* On one level it provides more options for the players. Certainly any Marine player will want to get his hands on the Power Armor and go metal claw to organic appendage with the enemy. Plus anyone wanting to be a Pilot aboard vessel with that role already filled can instead become a budding fighter jock, engaging in dogfights and strafing runs on the enemy vessels that the GM has laid out on the table. But really what a group should get the most out of this book is the campaign itself, which offers many,

many sessions of play, and even then it is unlikely that all of its missions will be used up, offering further replay value. ***Battlestations Supplement #1: Galactic Civil War*** is excellent support for ***Battlestations,*** giving something to fight with, someone to fight, and most importantly, something to fight for!

--Matthew Pook

The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!

Episode 6: Headhunters of the Pacific!

by Matt Riggsby

When we [last left our heroes](), they were hurtling towards a cliff in a runaway train while fending off Japanese soldiers in an attempt to destroy duplicate plans for Dr. Z's concentrator. The first order of business is probably to stop the train. Mechanically inclined characters can probably succeed with a desperate attempt to jury-rig brake controls which can bring the train to a halt just in time, but they'll have to do it leaning upside-down out of the freight car, probably with angry Japanese soldiers shooting at them from the Pullman car immediately behind and possible crawling towards them atop the train in order to attack from the other side. Of course, they'll also have to fight off the remaining Japanese once they've stopped the train. However, if they've taken control of the freight car, the machine gun (treat as the TL6 7.62 LMG on p. 281 of the *Basic Set,* with plenty of ammunition) should help immensely.

Failing that, the PCs *could* foil the Japanese by jumping off and attempting a soft landing (using improvised parachutes made from a bale of silk bought by one of the Japanese officials? Spotting a muddy pool before the train gets going too fast?), and letting the train and its cargo plunge into the gorge below. However, there are other passengers farther back on the train, so letting them die would hardly be heroic. Perhaps derailing the train -- making it jump the tracks, and plow through the jungle on either side -- would (unrealistically but appropriately for the genre) result in any number of injuries but no fatalities.

After Cliff-Hanging

However they resolve the struggle, they end up not too far away from Sa Kaeo. The trip to Trat is another one to four days away, depending on whether they can hire a car (very expensive), stow away on a truck (cheap, but with a danger of getting kicked off), or hitch a ride with a friendly peddler and his water buffalo (cheap *and* safe, but requires some influence rolls).

Arriving at Trat, Miss Papillon tells the PCs they must get a ship to take them to Dr. Z's headquarters on Skeleton Island, chartering one from among the many small tramp freighters in the harbor. Her advice is *not* to tell the ship-owner where they're going; they'll refuse to take anyone. Their best bet is to hire a ship for Borneo, and either get their own small boat they can take to their final destination or make sure their course takes them in the vicinity of Skeleton Island and jump ship when they get close. Miss Papillon doesn't know the exact coordinates of the island, but can get a skilled navigator close enough to find it. If the PCs were foolish enough not to bring Miss Papillon along, they may be able to find out where Dr. Z's ship was headed, but it'll take a lot of work and a large stack of bribes. Moreover, they won't know anything about the layout of Dr. Z's hideout, which Miss Papillon has visited.

The Road to Skeleton Island

Sailors speak of Skeleton Island, northwest of Borneo, in hushed tones. Its name comes from a notorious tribe of headhunters, who strung the bones of their victims up along the shores of the island as a threat to visitors. Rumors abound about the deadly cannibals, who use poisoned darts and shamans' curses to confuse and capture visitors. Those few who know that Dr. Z has taken up residence on the island believe that he has convinced them to leave his laboratory alone. Miss Papillon has never seen any natives and, for her part, isn't even sure they still exist. She wouldn't be at all surprised if Dr. Z used his electronically controlled baboons (yet another of his fiendish experiments) to wipe them out.

The island, covered entirely in thick jungle growth, is shaped like a broad-brimmed hat cut in half. The outline is semi-circular and the terrain mostly flat, but with a half-domed hill rising near the center of the "cut" side, falling off

suddenly in steep, rocky cliffs. The water-side approach to the cliffs has a maze of underwater mines which will sink any ship not piloted by someone who knows the way in, and the narrow, rocky shore on that side is watched by hidden sentries. Survivors of a sinking ship will be intercepted and captured. Do remember, and possibly remind your players, that capture is not the end of the world for adventurers, though it may be useful to have at least one or two PCs escape Dr. Z's clutches.

Miss Papillon doesn't recommend an approach from that direction, and heroes who aren't good climbers would probably agree. An easier approach would be to pull up on the semi-circular section of the shore and make their way through the jungle to the dome, under which Dr. Z has his hidden base.

As they approach the hill, PCs face two obstacles. The first is the headhunters, who do exist (despite what Miss Papillon thinks). Their initial approach is as quiet as possible to attack with poisoned darts. If possible, they'll pick off stragglers and quietly drag them away to their village. Once they're discovered, they attack in a screaming horde. Their goal is to take prisoners to turn over to Dr. Z, who has convinced them that he's a god (captured PCs will awake not long after capture and may have a chance to talk to the headhunters or even escape). However, they can be frightened off with a sufficiently flashy display of technology and pyrotechnics.

The next challenge is the baboons. They're another experiment of Dr. Z's, chemically and surgically modified for ferocity. They're also implanted (rather obviously) with transmitters allowing Dr. Z to track them on a radar screen in his hideout. The baboons are fierce and can scare off casual trespassers (like the headhunters), but determined PCs can make their way through. However, if the PCs stay in one place too long trying to kill the baboons instead of pushing their way through, Dr. Z will send some guards down to see why so many baboons are congregating in one place.

The Doctor Is In

Dr. Z's hideout is well-hidden from a distance, but if the PCs climb the hill, they'll find chimneys, small radio towers, and other signs of habitation, including hatches into the underground lair. His island hideout is much like his hideout under Anywhere, USA: tunnels containing barracks, storerooms, and laboratories. However, it's far larger and better equipped, with better lighting, wider hallways, and more facilities (a kitchen and mess room, surgical theaters, and so on). Snooping PCs may run across more of Dr. Z's superscience achievements, such as documentation of the volcanic power plant which powers the facility, radio-controlled guided rockets, super-radar which produces television-like images, and some clumsy, approximately human-shaped robots. The hideout is also well-staffed and regularly patrolled (where ever Dr. Z happens to be will be particularly busy), so the odds of intruders being discovered are about the same as in the hideout under Anywhere, USA.

During all of this, it's possible that some of the heroes will be captured. If so, they'll be brought in chains to Dr. Z, who is once more surprised at their persistence and ability to survive. This time, he's determined to see them dead, but not before one last monologue about his evil plans: Dr. Z is preparing to accelerate the start of his global war. He has constructed a radium-powered submarine capable of circling the globe without refueling and mounted a death-ray concentrator, like the one he sold to the Nazis, on it. Soon, he'll attack unsuspecting naval vessels in tense and sensitive areas of the globe. The

incidents will increase international tensions, leading inevitably to massive conflict. He has also completed a concentrator-based defense system which will create a vast network of lightning around the island, detonating incoming explosive shells before they reach the island and shorting out electrical systems in any vehicle which approaches too closely. Even if the PCs sent for help (which, if they had contacts in some major nation's military, is possible), it will do no good. With his gloating out of the way, he puts the captives into another deathtrap, but this time, he stays on hand with a number of guards to make sure that this time, they don't escape.

Once More, With Killings

Sooner or later, any free PCs will be spotted or make themselves known, and prisoners will have a final chance to escape. Dr. Z has no intention of backing down or escaping, so this is the final showdown. Though they may not adopt much more sensible tactics, guards will start shooting to kill, and anyone who previously enjoyed any kind of "plot protection" (Dr. Z, Miss Papillon, and the PCs themselves) is fair game. Although the PCs are greatly outnumbered, they've got some things they can turn to their advantage:

- A skillful social character might turn the natives against their fearsome oppressor.
- The volcanic power plant is unstable if not properly tended and could be made to explode, though the PCs had best make themselves scarce before it goes off.
- There's a lot of ordnance around the hideout (guided rockets, experimental guns, etc.). Perhaps he's even got an ultrasonic gadget which attracts enraged baboons.

The last battle is likely to be very noisy and very destructive, and the unstable nature of the volcanic power plant puts a definite time limit on hanging around the island. The heroes need to make sure they've got Dr. Z definitively dealt with or risk global war, but they won't have any time after it's all over to loot his lair once they've finished him off. That'll be a problem for one recurring character: When it becomes clear that things are falling apart, Miss Papillon's greed gets the better of her, and she runs off to find Dr. Z's cache of gems. If the heroes want to keep her around or take her with them if they leave the island in a hurry, they'll have to knock her out or tie her up.

With any luck, the fight will end either with the PCs going out in a blaze of glory or escaping in the nick of time (in a headhunter's canoe or the radium-powered sub) while a volcano erupts behind them. They're unlikely to get out with many souvenirs, but they'll have avenged their friend . . . probably. If the PCs don't have time to confirm that they've killed Dr. Z, it's possible that he'll survive and make his own escape (the same could be true of Reitermann in episode 4). And if Miss Papillon gets away from them, she might surface again. But if they persevere to the end, they will at least have defeated . . .

The Terrifying Plot of Dr. Z!

Baboon

ST 9 **DX** 14 **IQ** 6 **HT** 11

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9; Will 6; Per 6; FP 11. Basic Speed 6.25; Basic Move 8; Block 0; Dodge 9; Parry 0.

Advantages

Brachiator; Sharp Claws; Sharp Teeth.

Disadvantages

Berserk (12 or less).

Skills

Climbing-15.

Pyramid Review

Monster Mayhem

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Designed by Ken Cliffe

Art & layout by Richard Thomas, Steve Ellis, & Mike Chaney

Full-color boxed game with game board, five monster figurines (mummy, poltergeist, vampire, werewolf, zombie), five monster reference sheets, five craving point markers, 30 victim chits, 30 victim cards, 20 hex tiles, 50 event cards, 36 escape cards, five six-sided dice; $44.99

The blood is the life, or so says Bram Stoker's *Dracula.* What do they know? If you're a werewolf, it's more likely a nice bone to gnaw on, while a ghost . . . heck, who knows what they (un)live on. To codify it all, White Wolf has produced a new board game, ***Monster Mayhem,*** to clear up these little questions.

The object is to have the most Craving Points at the end of the fifth turn.

The game is played on a hex-based map of the city, with movable location markers for customizing the layout. The game supports two to five players, and each player takes a monster: Werewolf, Vampire, Zombie, Poltergeist, or Mummy. A monster begins with Event Cards, Craving Points, and three victims singled out from the herd for his feeding pleasure. They can employ a special ability (most seem to focus on controlling unwieldy victims), and may fall prey to their weakness; the Werewolf, for example, may become so incensed that he savages his target without reaping a proper reward. Once everyone has their starting position (the Zombie begins in the Graveyard, the Vampire in the Old Manor . . .), Initiative is rolled and the hunt begins.

The mechanics resolve most actions by rolling six-sided dice equal to a trait and taking the highest result. For instance, the Vampire's Stalking is 2, so he rolls two dice to get his movement points. Only one die is used when determining Initiative, but most rolls can be improved by spending Craving Points for extra dice.

A turn has two steps, running and hunting. Victims do most of the former; their Escape Cards show a number against a colored backdrop, and they flee that many spaces in that color-coded direction. Everyone moves their first victim, then their second, and so on until they've scattered throughout the city.

Then comes the chase. When a monster lands on a victim's space, he tries to feast. Each creature wants something different -- Organs, Blood, Bones, Spirit, or Brains -- and victims resist with that same stat, rolling dice equal to the trait. The high roll wins. Failure sends the prey fleeing again (though they may bounce into another monster or escape the game entirely through a Safe Haven like the Police Station), whereas success kills the target and adds their trait to the victor's Craving track, with a bonus if it's that monster's own victim and not just some target of opportunity. If nothing presents itself, violence against a fellow creature of the night might help. The loser suffers a deduction of points, which could take a successful player out of the lead. Wise use of interconnected Subways, Hunting Grounds, and Lairs (the monster's own or someone else's) can grant quick movement or the restoration (or theft) of Craving Points and Event Cards.

The components are what one would expect from White Wolf (and the price tag). Everything is colorful and creepy -- at least in a *Mad Magazine* sort of way -- and the artwork is well painted. The Victim Cards are without complaint, but

the Victim Chits, at reduced size, are not as easy to pick out. The name is also printed on a red ring around the edge to assist. The markers used to indicate a monster's Craving Point level and the current turn are terrible; they're incredibly tiny, and easy to lose with even a little carelessness. The best parts are the individual characters. The figures are a simple but pleasant bits of sculpting (with varying success -- hunched werewolf yea, too-busy poltergeist nay), and the reference sheets could stop a bullet.

There are issues to be considered. Game setup can take a while (matching one of the published maps and agreeing on an original arrangement are both time-consuming); there's a high element of luck; several small "Oh, by the way" rules lie in wait; and while it keeps things orderly, doing everything in rounds feels a little awkward when, say, only two of the five monsters have the last three victims.

Beyond that, it's a simple but tight game. The victims run low right about the fifth round, almost forcing monsters to turn on each other eventually (and optional rules may replenish the supply). The Event Cards can be both burden and boon to any player but no one's going to win on the basis of a single play, so they're a useful tool that doesn't trump skill or short-term planning (the only kind open to any monster). Craving Points (an odd thing to call them since one builds them up by sating one's appetites) are a great equalizer in most cases, and balancing their expenditure against saving them toward victory is another good tactical wrinkle. The titular protagonists are evenly weighted; those bad at hunting also have wimpy rewards to reap, but they're also the ones that excel at beating up other monsters, giving the whole thing an equitable ecosystem.

The quick turnaround on *Monster Mayhem's* playing time (about 45 minutes a game) means numerous games can happen in a few hours, and while a bit pricey for the variety of action offered, the nicely brokered advantages and disadvantages make an even-tempered game.

--Andy Vetromile

Staying Outside Your Window

Reining in Super-Heroic Ultra Tech

by Brian Rogers

In the article "Retro Techno" we discussed ways to curb the Internet's effect on hyper-tech proliferation in supers games. After all, the world of the major comic books is almost always superficially the world you see out your window . . . or when using Windows. Neutering the instantaneous information transfer of the net might be one solution of keeping ultra tech from making the comic book world deviate from that, it is not the only one. So what other ways do we have to keep ultra tech in line?

Repair, Yes; Build No

One way to keep high technology in line is to stress that it is the output of many predecessor systems. Yes, with the right parts a moderately skilled person can repair a computer or even build one from scratch, but someone had to build those parts, and the parts needed to make those parts, and so on. This puts a practical limit on how far ahead of the curve an inventor can be without a lot of time, a huge bankroll, a large support structure or some combination of the three.

This explains why alien tech doesn't proliferate on Earth: while the moderately skilled can possibly repair glitches or modify it with other alien parts, the predecessor tech is just not available. It also explains why someone with a gunsmith's shop wouldn't be able to replicate a government super-agent blaster. This is a good explanation for people being able to keep ultra-tech working, and for agents to be able to repair it in the field while keeping it rare and hard to reproduce.

But it doesn't solve all our problems: in the comics lone inventors are able to build something one or two generations ahead of the curve in their basements, so predecessor systems have to be at least somewhat accessible. We might not see someone making Iron Man's armor in the school engineering lab, but he can probably make a bulky repulsor-ray cannon to threaten Speedball or Spider-Man. And if someone can build one of those easily, why isn't that level of tech available?

You Aren't Looking in the Right Place

Other complaints about the supers environment include how the devastation from super-battles gets repaired overnight. Or that comic book heroes are so isolationist when there are catastrophes across the world they could be dealing with. Or that more people aren't killed in massive supers battles. Why do we assume that these points are illogical while looking for where the ultra tech went? These enigmas obviously have the same source.

Posit: A Soviet genius code named Architect developed ultra-tech building materials and logistical structures just after WWII. Not only did this let Stalin quickly rebuild the damage done to his country's infrastructure (with some neat designs), but the Soviet Construction Directorate became an idea propaganda tool in a world as catastrophe-filled as the averages Supers setting. India has an earthquake? The SCD has people on the ground in days, and new buildings up in a month. The West was forced to follow suit, pouring money into replicating the Soviet designs. This was a huge advantage during the giant monster attacks of the 1950s, the alien invasions of the 1970s, and the great quake that all but destroyed LA in the 1980s. High-speed, crisis-resistant building material is a natural place for ultra-tech development, and the visible impact on the viewpoint Supers is negligible.

Then there is treating those wounded in supers battles or crises. We gather that -- based on super-soldier serums in the 1940s and cybernetics in the 1960s -- funds not going to construction are going to medicine. The human genome was

cracked in the 1960s, just by hard work and a few super brains with lots of computer time.

What does this mean? Not all injuries are curable (a bullet through the brain is as fatal there as it is here) but advanced medical technology means that normally fatal trauma cases can be dealt with in a supers environment. Prosthetic limbs will be orders of magnitude better, but likely only the very wealthy will be able to afford full cyber-wear, if only because of the cost of the batteries (see below). It also means that the US had a stem cell debate in the 1970s when the pendulum was swinging towards the pro-choice camp and stem cell therapy is now used worldwide, for good or ill.

They Don't Want It to Exist

There are plenty of people who have reason to keep the status quo, for the purposes of safety, money, or control. Why don't the batteries used to power cybernetics give us electric cars? We already have a vast infrastructure in place for gasoline-powered vehicles -- who wants to make the investments to replace that, while fighting big oil as it attempts to legislate in additional auto-battery safety standards? What's better for the shareholders: spending a fortune to retool the plants to make electric cars that might not even have an infrastructure to support them or do some extra advertising about the horsepower, speed, and cost advantages the old models have? Sure, you'll regret it in the long run, but who in the stock market looks long term?

Major, rapid changes in technology will only occur when no one expects it to happen (such as the Internet . . . and some entrenched media powers are still fighting that), when government backs it (as with the anti-Soviet construction example or the space program), or when everyone wants the benefits (which is why medical science is always advancing). Even then, the invisible hand of the market changes the balance; medical advancement is focused on high profit drugs rather than antibiotics, advanced procedures instead of preventative care. If you're wondering why some tech doesn't exist in a supers world, follow the money.

Or follow the control. For example, we might have a much better space program today if the government didn't exercise such control over it. Without the hurdles of regulation some billionaire inventor might have gotten Mars Direct off the ground in 1990 (or sooner, if some super-genius had put together that or a better plan in 1980) and we'd have Mars bases by now. However, even with billionaire techies and super-geniuses, government regulation and entrenched interests could slow development to a crawl.

*Maybe There's Little Flow Through

To be honest, most people won't see the effects of hyper-tech. Access to energy rifles rather than slugthrowers isn't going to affect daily life, and if ultra-tech has been around for a little while there's probably already been a boomlet that has everyone evened out with better weapons and armor. It's the tipping point where everyone in the world has access to the technology -- where smart paper puts book stores out of business -- that is the important dividing line for supers. Knowing that the tech exists won't change the world, but everyone having it will.

Not Everyone Has What It Takes

A common stance taken by those writing about supers (even if it doesn't appear much *in* comics) is that part of a super's powers is the ability to activate his own ultra-tech (as in *Wild Cards*), or that only people with some special trait can invent ultra-tech (i.e., being a Spark). As with other logical structures using it will make the GM's life easier, but it will reduce some of the free wheeling aspects of the supers world.

Rather than a genetic barrier, comics seem to combine aptitude, training, and equipment access as the bar for ultra-tech creation. With a moderate level of all three, anyone can maintain existing tech (the trick with alien gear is getting the right equipment). An inventor's ability improves the more he has access to any of those three, but there are limits. Better technology costs either money or time to recreate precursor engineering; Aptitude is something you're born with, so getting more of it is not an option; Training is easy until the point where it matches your aptitude, but past that it gets labor intensive to improve, and isn't as broad as general aptitude (scientific aptitude might be a Bang skill in

GURPS *Fourth Edition* which inventors then improve in specialized areas).

This gives us several classes of characters: the Nick Furys with moderate training to maintain their advanced tech; the Peter Parkers with mid-level aptitude but limited training and resources; the Tony Starks with mid-level aptitude, advanced training, and resources who can invent ultra tech within several fields; the Kitty Prydes with huge aptitude, some advanced resources, but next to no training; and the Reed Richards with immense aptitude, broad training, and the best in high tech, who can invent ultra-tech in several fields.

Infantiano's Syndrome

Then there are the victims of a form of autism first identified by Julius Infantiano in the 1980s. Similar to [Asperger Syndrome](#), those with this problem have an incredible ability to focus on a single topic, sometimes to the deficit of their well being.

IS patients lock onto a problem in adolescence or early adulthood and obsess over it until they have mastered it (which they will never believe they have; there is always one more puzzle in their minds). This will often lead IS sufferers with minimal aptitude to attain great training within specific fields, such as refrigeration or sonic vibration. Given any resources they build upon conventional tech on their own path of precursor equipment until they produce ultra tech to support their obsessive quest. They are not doing anything superhuman, but their individualized precursor technology appears incomprehensible to people with more conventional training.

Socially, IS victims are prickly and difficult to get along with -- they generally see those who do not share their obsession as "fools," and they don't suffer fools. They also make grudges quickly and hold them forever, keeping a catalogue of those who have wronged them. Unfortunately, these social traits don't appear until early adulthood, so IS sufferers aren't identified as being "mad" until they reach university. Unable to hold down jobs they will often turn to crime. Dr. Infantiano has been trying for years to find a way to treat this condition, and persists in the face of partial deafness, freezer burn, arachnid toxins, chemically induced baldness, and other patient-generated ailments. Almost like he was obsessed . . .

Much as we like to think that the wave of technological progress is unstoppable, some inventions will wait years or decades before the right circumstances prove their value, and it is possible to hold your supers game inside that moment of calm. While one of the joys of running an game means you can deviate from the source material -- if your players want to change the world with their cheap hand-held teleporters than you have the option to let them -- there are ways you cant try, like King Canute, hold back the tide . . . at least until the campaign is over.

* * *

Thanks to Joshua Kronengold and the people of **A&E** *for their help with this article.*

Fists of Infinity

Martial Arts and the Infinity Patrol

by Phil Masters

GURPS Infinite Worlds came out long before *GURPS Martial Arts,* and isn't primarily concerned with matters of low-tech combat. As such, the question of martial arts in Infinity Patrol games hasn't been addressed very much. However, now that both books are out, it's possible to look at the options.

Homeline is similar to our present-day Earth in many ways, which means it must have as full a collection of martial arts being studied and used as we have. In fact, there are probably a lot more. Since crosstime travel was developed, explorers, tourists, and entrepreneurs have visited dozens of timelines, and it's a fair bet that some of them took at least a passing interest in the martial arts. Even if they don't get much chance to study with local teachers, these people will have visited exhibitions, gladiatorial arenas, and battlefields, and even if they weren't expert observers, they can have come back with secretly shot videos for Homeline experts to analyze at leisure. Visits to echoes and close parallels could resolve any number of detailed arguments about "lost" historical techniques and even generate some footage of legendary masters in action, while similar trips to more divergent timelines could generate fascinating data on subtly divergent developments in the arts, and even whole new arts from cultures which didn't exist in our past. For example, there are the infamous *Si Lei Li* developed by the Irish Triads of Ming-3 (see *GURPS Alternate Earths 2*), the authentically oriental Baritsu of Sherlock-1, or the intricately brutal Savate variants of Bonaparte-4.

Naturally, as soon as these styles were reasonably documented, people would come along and try to recreate them on Homeline, albeit often in more or less sanitised "sport" forms where the originals were unrestrained killing arts. In any case, crosstime travelers can encounter any number of fighting arts on other timelines. Hence, there are numerous possibilities for incorporating martial arts action into Infinite Worlds games, from bruising encounters with unexpectedly skillful local thugs or duelists during undercover missions, through the inclusion of extraordinary "cinematic" fighters in ISWAT teams, to complete campaigns of martial arts crosstime tourism or research, with PC fighters seeking to learn the fighting secrets of a hundred worlds without attracting either the anger or the curiosity of the local experts who they necessarily have to meet.

However, this article deals with a particular aspect of this subject which can be brought into almost any Infinite Worlds game, and which can add color and detail to such games without overcomplicating things too much; the study of martial arts within the Infinity Patrol. What follows is designed to remain consistent with everything in *GURPS Infinite Worlds,* while permitting some interesting expansions.

The Basics

Although the Patrol isn't particularly obsessed with martial arts, it teaches its cadets some useful fighting skills, and it's certainly not without a few remarkably competent martial artists. To start with, its agents all had lives before they were recruited; some were cops or soldiers, while others were exactly the sort of people to make a study of some martial art as a serious hobby (and in quite a lot of cases, these were those "out-time" arts which have been recreated on Homeline). Hence, a Patrol member may know almost any art in addition to the standard "template" training -- and sensible patrol officers track the known special abilities of their agents, and sometimes try to assign people to tasks for which they're especially well suited. Furthermore, the Patrol can generally afford to hire the best instructors and experts to teach its recruits, and in the case of basic close combat training, that means some very good fighters, usually with police or special forces backgrounds. Hence, the Academy staff include a handful of people who can be really quite seriously dangerous in a brawl, and who pass a fraction of their skills onto new agents.

Prior and Basic Training

All I-Cops and Scouts receive intensive and *efficient* training in unarmed combat, represented by Karate skill; the Scouts, who are more likely to spend time undercover on low-tech worlds but who are initially selected slightly more for smarts over physical abilities than the I-Cops, receive more instruction. But in both cases, this is severely un-artistic stuff, partly intended to make them adequately dangerous in a pretty basic sort of way on those hopefully rare occasions on which they have to fight unarmed, and partly just to instil a degree of aggression and confidence. In addition, I-Cops are trained with the police-style baton, with the logical justification that they're cops and may have to function as such, using a training regime that conveniently also enables them to handle the sort of generic shortsword which visitors can often take to low-tech timelines as part of a local-style costume. Likewise, the Scouts, who as travelers and explorers are rarely without a standard survival knife, are trained in knife fighting.

None of this amounts to a style, though standard Infinity close- combat training is arguably analogous to a style with one of the lenses from pp. 144-5 of **Martial Arts** -- especially the Self-Defense lens. Most students *don't* acquire a Style Familiarity perk, but GMs who want to introduce this concept and emphasize the standardized nature of Patrol training can permit instructors and advanced students to acquire this perk for "Patrol Training." This gives a Claim to Hospitality of sorts among the instructors at the Patrol Academy (who'll remember a keen student), and grants the bonus to defend against feints and Deceptive Attack when fighting anyone who learned his combat skills there.

Also, cadets who take a special interest in combat skills, and who can somehow find the time (perhaps treating this as their Academy sport of choice) can usually persuade an instructor to teach them a style in addition to their basic training. This often means a Military Hand-to-Hand variant (see **GURPS Martial Arts,** pp. 182-5), but some of the instructors are dedicated students of other arts themselves, and in any case it's easier to claim a martial art as a competitive sport if it has some sort of appropriate rules and at least optional constraints, so students can also pick up various other arts if they wish -- though advancing very far in such things, in the limited free time available to a Patrol cadet, requires exceptional dedication and some natural talent.

And optionally, a GM can assume that the skills included in the Patrol templates reflects initial training towards a rather simple but effective martial art, pulled together by the Academy instructors to meet the requirements they'd been given and consolidated to make teaching easier. The full version of this art is as follows:

Infinity Patrol Martial Arts Program *3 points*

"IP-MAP" (still an unofficial name, but increasingly widely known, and naturally pronounced "ipp-map" by any ex-US Marine instructors or agents) may be taught to students who show particular aptitude or enthusiasm in their basic combat classes. It's based on the skills which all agents learn, with a focus on techniques which are especially useful to field agents (close-quarters fighting in all situations and directions, weapon retention) and to those functioning as *cops* or needing to take prisoners (basic control-and-restraint methods). It adds options and Style Adaptations which many of the instructors are able and willing to pass on -- a mixture of close-quarters grappling methods, military-style fight-ending tricks, and less brutal police-style techniques. Users may also draw on contemporary police training for use of the side-handled baton. Anyone who acquires the associated Style Familiarity perk can apply it in combat against any product of the Patrol's standard training courses, as discussed above.

Even as an advanced, optional course, this is uncomplicated stuff, with no great associated mystique; while there are some colorful legends about Patrol fighting skills developing on Homeline, they're (supposedly) associated with a handful of freelance crosstime agents and strike teams, not the newest products of the Academy. On the other hand, it does permit quite a lot of cross-training! The Optional Traits given below are things *especially* closely associated with IP-MAP training, but it would be perfectly reasonable to add anything in the core I-Cop and Scout templates, or the Academy, Special Operations, or Search and Rescue Division Skills lists, to this section.

Skills: Karate; Knife *or* Shortsword.

Techniques: Back Kick; Back Strike (Karate, Knife, or Shortsword); Disarming (Shortsword); Ground Fighting (Karate); Handcuffing; Knee Strike; Low Fighting (Karate); Retain Weapon (Pistol or Shortsword).

Perks: Armor Familiarity (Karate); Ground Guard; Style Adaptation (Boxing, Dagger Fighting, Krav Maga, Kyokushin Karate, or MCMAP); Suit Familiarity (Vacc Suit).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Fit or Very Fit.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Patrol); Overconfidence; Workaholic.

Skills: Whichever of Knife or Shortsword wasn't taken as a mandatory skill; Boxing; Brawling; Fast-Draw (Knife, Pistol, Sword, or Tonfa); Liquid Projector (Sprayer); Tonfa; Wrestling.

Techniques: Arm or Wrist Lock (Wrestling); Breakfall; Retain Weapon (Rifle); Stamp Kick; Uppercut.

Optional Further Developments

Despite some rivalries (not always friendly, but never actually *lethal*) and some highly technical debates about comparative fighting styles, the close combat instructors at the Patrol Academy have built a fair degree of camaraderie and mutual respect, mostly based on being similar people stuck on an Ice Age world with a few hundred students to knock into shape. Naturally enough, they sometimes exchange ideas about their skills and compare experiences.

This has put these people on the way to synthesizing a comprehensive if bluntly straightforward fighting style. While this is still developing, a number of senior Patrol officers are actively encouraging the idea, and advocating that time should be allotted to teaching the style to some current field agents. In particular, some Special Operations actions might go off better as subtle "commando raids" rather than head-on assaults, for which purpose close combat skills are useful, while members of several other divisions, notably Nexus Oversight, Search and Rescue, and Survey, have also expressed an interest. Investigation, Infiltration, and Extraction would definitely also be potential users. The "art" under development will probably take something like the following form:

Infinity Patrol "Commando" Program   *6 points*

This style owes something to virtually every military style known to Homeline, and a bit to various advanced police training courses. Like most modern military styles, it concentrates on putting the opponent out of action as quickly as possible, with little regard for delicacy; however, because of its origins, it offers a *lot* of options -- possibly making it more complex and harder to teach than the Patrol really needs. The police training influence and the emphasis on taking prisoners shows up in some of the "softer" elements and the choice of optional weapons. Some people might call it over-refined for what it's meant to do, but others would call it impressively comprehensive. The art's creators assumed that users would usually be wearing high-tech armor, and so felt that no special attention to defense was necessary; fighters will often opt for All- Out or Committed Attacks, unless they can see that their opponents are as well equipped as themselves.

While this is a new, functional style with no body of legends, the Academy instructors have acquired a little mystique of their own, and anyone who learns it is going to be a tough member of an elite organization; there are a number of cinematic options listed below, and credible masters should also have good ST, DX, and HT.

Skills: Judo; Karate; Knife; Stealth; Wrestling.

Techniques: Arm or Wrist Lock (Judo); Breakfall; Choke Hold; Disarming (Judo); Ground Fighting (Karate); Handcuffing; Retain Weapon (Knife, Pistol, or Rifle); Stamp Kick; Targeted Attack (Knife Thrust/Neck); Targeted Attack (Knife Thrust/Vitals); Targeted Attack (Stamp Kick/Skull).

Cinematic Skills: Mental Strength; Power Blow; Pressure Points.

Cinematic Techniques: Binding; Lethal Kick; Lethal Strike.

Perks: Armor Familiarity (Judo or Karate); Ground Guard; Style Familiarity (IP-MAP); Suit Familiarity (Vacc Suit); Sure-Footed (Uneven).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Fit; High Pain Threshold; Patrol Rank.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust; Code of Honor (Patrol); Fanaticism (The Secret); Overconfidence; Sense of Duty (Patrol or Homeline).

Skills: Boxing; Brawling; Guns/TL9 (Pistol); Intimidation; Liquid Projector (Sprayer); Spear; Tonfa; Shortsword.

Proposed Variations

All of the above ideas are essentially unofficial or semi-official extensions of the Academy's basic training program. But the Patrol itself is seriously looking to go further.

The standard training regime is occasionally subject to review, ironically with a view to making it either more restrained and discreet or broader and probably more deadly. The contradiction arises from the ambiguous nature of Infinity's mission.

On the one hand, I-Cops especially tend to function as *cops,* arresting suspects and dealing with minor infractions of rules around Infinity installations. While they have to deal with far more than a regular police share of violent and dangerous offenders, there are a lot of cases where they have to restrain rather than cripple, for good legal, PR, and moral reasons. Even field agents -- I-Cops or Scouts -- on other timelines often have a bias in favor of minimum force, looking to capture opponents for interrogation or deal with merely inquisitive or misplaced locals without a bloodbath. This has led to several suggestions that the Academy should teach "softer" fighting styles, focusing on grappling and efficient defense rather than aggression; in *GURPS* terms, Judo or maybe Wrestling rather than Karate, and maybe specific Techniques such as Arm or Wrist Lock. The Academy instructors would certainly be capable of teaching such a revised curriculum, but have their own cultural bias which says that a good offense is the best defense, and are cautious about the danger of producing mediocre all-rounders rather than effective straightforward fighters. Still, there may be moves in that direction in the future, possibly leading to some future agents learning, say, styles such as Aikijutsu or Judo with the Police lens (*GURPS Martial Arts,* pp. 144-5) applied instead of the current template-standard Karate skill.

And on the other hand, there is a perceived growing need

Infinity's Enemies and the Martial Arts

Infinity's primary enemy across the Infinite Worlds has rather less interest in the martial arts than Infinity itself. Centrum is notoriously technocratic and rather prosaic by nature; doubtless that timeline and those which it now controls produced their share of martial arts in the past, but they appear mostly to have been smothered by the Centrum cultural hegemony. Ordinary Centrum agents can be effective enough in close combat, but they prefer to achieve this by using appropriate weapons and very basic brawling methods -- and the occasional cybernetic implant. However, Infinity agents who hope to take advantage of this by turning every encounter with Centrum into a fistfight will sooner or later suffer a painful reminder that those weapons *are* better than unarmed combat, all else being equal, and Centrum agents know how to use them. Furthermore, it's not impossible for an individual citizen of Centrum to pick up the equivalent of at least basic military/commando training; an Unattached agent especially might pursue this, for himself or as part of a project to give Interworld additional weapons for use against Infinity. Individual Centrans who've spent extended periods on low-tech timelines may also pick up local fighting styles for self-defense, as part of their cover story, or even out of simple curiosity.

Similarly, the troopers of SS Raven Division see themselves as high- tech soldiers, not "martial artists," the peculiarities of their service notwithstanding; most are competent bar-room brawlers but no more. Their timeline's SS has some elite commandos with quite deadly personal combat training, but these valued specimens don't get assigned to Burgundy. However, that said, Reich-5's Germany enthusiastically preserves much of the

for Patrol agents to function as *soldiers.* Centrum has long been a ruthless enough opponent for any tastes; now, with Armanen Order Nazis loose on multiple timelines, a number of Patrol high-ups and Interworld Council politicians are muttering about the gloves being off, and looking for an increasingly militaristic regime at the Academy. This isn't moving very fast as yet -- in truth, the Academy produces pretty good soldiers as it is, and an outright crosstime war on any front would mean the involvement of contingents from national militaries rather than the militarization of the Patrol -- but the politics of the debate could, say, lead to the formalization and more widespread teaching of the IP-MAP style (above).

The Infinite Art

But all of this is rather elementary stuff. What is sometimes pointed out, at least in TV dramas and movies featuring square-jawed Infinity Patrolmen or suave crosstime spies, is that some *interesting* Patrol missions can call for really advanced knowledge of some kind of martial arts, armed as well as unarmed. Agents on many timelines have to dress as natives, which can sometimes mean no visible anachronistic firearms but maybe a functional sword or knife; they may also have a very special need for capture-for-interrogation techniques. And somehow, the heroes of those dramas are forever having to pass as knights, hoplites, duelists, samurai, or greenwood- dwelling Merry Men; this may or may not be typical of real Patrol missions, but it's widely seen as a possibility. Certainly, knowing how to handle local weapons with some conviction is a useful trick for any agent.

paraphernalia of traditional German militarism, including Schläger dueling and a certain amount of boxing and suchlike; the stereotypical university-educated Gestapo Amt Z agent knows how to use a broadsword or his fists, and some of these individuals, along with some Raven Division officers and their personal bodyguards and sidekicks, may demonstrate unexpected competence in hand-to-hand combat.

Lastly, the Cabal are a group of scholarly wizards at heart, not "vulgar brawlers"; they also display a peculiar disdain for *oriental* mysticism, including most theories about focused chi and suchlike. Apparently, their own concept of magic is explicitly European in its origins, and many of them are downright chauvinistic about it. All of that said, though, some of them seem to associate disciplines of the mind with disciplines of the body -- like many religious traditions, they may see physical fitness as a prerequisite for effective extended meditation -- and the classical European Hermetic tradition has some association with refined fencing styles such as La Verdadera Destreza (*GURPS Martial Arts,* p. 158). Thus, a few Cabalists are deft swordsmen, and most can deliver a quick dagger-thrust or staff-blow when the need arises. Some of them also employ guards or assistants whose job is to handle low-tech combat, and they're usually very good at it. More to the point, though, certain spells can make the scrawniest Hermetic wizard deadly at close quarters, at least until he wears himself out.

Whether or not this really has led to the secret development of a specialized, ultra-flexible Patrol martial art is up to the GM and may depend on the grittiness level of the campaign, but the following can represent what such an art *might* look like.

"Infinity-Fu"   *11 points*

The key features of this training regime are versatility and sophistication. It applies the most advanced fighting techniques known to Homeline to a wide range of weapons and situations, and teaches the student to use anything in his environment to win the fight. Some agents are also said to have studied exotic combat styles on other timelines. In a game where Patrol agents achieve near-mythic status, they'll also look *good* in combat -- but very cool. The stereotypical Patrol super-agent is an analytical fighter -- essentially a scientific fencer, whatever weapon he's using -- but with a talent for humiliating clumsier foes. Even if it isn't available to the Patrol, this style might suit ISWAT agents whose extraordinary status derives from highly advanced martial arts training.

"Infinity-Fu" (an unofficial name, obviously) is a rather cinematic concept by definition, and so it naturally offers a variety of cinematic options. Despite that name, these tend to be a matter of formidable, uncanny skill rather than use of *chi* or other outright mystical concepts. ISWAT at least may include martial artists who *do* use "chi powers," but they should use another appropriate cinematic art.

Skills: Acrobatics; Boxing; Expert Skill (Hoplology); Judo; Karate; Knife; Main-Gauche; Rapier; Smallsword; Staff.

Techniques: Acrobatic Stand; Back Kick; Back Strike (Rapier); Back Strike (Staff); Bind Weapon (Main-Gauche); Bind Weapon (Rapier); Breakfall; Counterattack (Rapier); Disarming (Rapier); Elbow Strike (Karate); Evade; Feint (Any); Kicking; Quick Mount; Retain Weapon (Any); Spinning Strike (Rapier); Sweep (Staff).

Cinematic Skills: Mental Strength; Pressure Points; Sensitivity; Throwing Art.

Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack (Karate); Grand Disarm; Pole-Vault Kick; Pressure-Point Strike; Roll with Blow; Whirlwind Attack.

Perks: Acrobatic Kicks; Armor Familiarity (Rapier); Form Mastery (Spear); Ground Guard; Improvised Weapons (Any); Off-Hand Weapon Training (Any); Quick-Sheathe (Any); Quick-Swap (Knife); Suit Familiarity (Vacc Suit); Sure-Footed (Slippery or Uneven); Technique Adaptation (Any); Weapon Adaptation (Broadsword to Rapier); Weapon Adaptation (Polearm to Staff); Weapon Adaptation (Shortsword to Knife); Weapon Adaptation (Shortsword to Smallsword).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Charisma; Combat Reflexes; Cultural Adaptability; Enhanced Block (Shield); Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Parry (All); Fearlessness.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Patrol); Overconfidence; Secret (Out-Time Super-Agent).

Skills: Armoury/TL4 (Melee Weapons); Axe/Mace; Broadsword; Crossbow; Fast-Draw (Knife or Sword); Cloak; History (Martial Arts of any one region or culture); Saber; Shield; Shortsword; Sleight of Hand; Stealth; Thrown Weapon (Knife).

Perks: Grip Mastery (Katana); Naval Training; Style Adaptation (Any); Style Familiarity (Any).

Pyramid Review

Cold Space

Published by Flying Mice Games

Written by Clash Bowley & Albert Bailey

Illustrated by Clash Bowley

178-page b&w softcover; $21.99
186-page full-color PDF; $10

At its heart, *Cold Space* explores a simple question: "What would happen if interplanetary -- then interstellar, travel became possible at the dawn of the Cold War?" In answering this, what *Cold Space* does is present an age, beginning in 1949 and ending in 1989, the beginning and the end of the Cold War, altered by the discovery of the contra-gravity drive. Adopted not only by the superpowers of the USA and the USSR, but by many other nations, this device not only enabled them to establish colonies first throughout the Solar System, and then beyond. By the 1960s interstellar travel was cheap, and getting to the Moon was as easy as taking a bus. Yet as mankind spread to the stars, it carried his politics with him. The worlds within and beyond the Solar System become a broader battleground for the dark nasty wars of propaganda and proxy fought between East and West, red and blue, Stars 'n' Stripes and Hammer and Sickle.

The new technology dominated this battleground. At first quite literally, with anti-gravity gunships dominating the skies above Korea, and later, Vietnam. But the Swiss team developing the new physics theorized that it could be used to lift bodies beyond the Earth. The USA adapted one of the first nuclear submarines, intending to get her to the Moon. This became a race when the Soviets stole the technology and built their own vessel. The USS Starfish landed on the Moon in October, 1951. Unfortunately, the Russian W-137, a converted Whisky-class submarine had already been there an hour. The race escalated, when newly formed United States Rocket Corps sent the Flying Fish on a slingshot course around Jupiter bound for Alpha Centauri where her crew would found the Roosevelt colony. The Soviets followed suit, sending the Kosmos to Barnard's Star. Over the decades the space race and the colonies became not only an extended battleground, but a means of escape. Fallen governments on Earth, such as those of South Vietnam and the Shah of Iran re-established themselves off-world. To date, only one alien species has been discovered, the pre-sapient ape-like natives of Tau Ceti. The United Nations has declared them a protected species, this after the Bolivian colonists were found to have exploited them.

Cold Space is written to be played in four different periods of the Cold War, "Beginning," "Early," "Middle," and "Late." Each offers differing campaign and character types. For example, the Vietnam War, running subsidized supply vessels, science and exploration, espionage, and civil rights during the "Early" period of 1955 to 1965. These though are undeveloped suggestions and the GM will need to extract the background to more specific events from the background, such as the Polish Mars colony's bid for freedom in 1976 or the hunt for Refuge, the Soviet Politburo's last home following the collapse of the USSR.

Characters can be generated by rolling two six-sided dice four times for five characteristics, and percentile dice for a character's IQ rating, Luck points, and starting Cash. Alternatively, using the Directed Method these attributes can be purchased using two different pools, one for the stats rated between two and twelve, and another for the percentile-based stats. Skills are acquired by putting the character though education, from junior high to graduate school, and then into employment. There is a table for each type of school and employment, a player checking to see if his character's IQ and Cash meets the entry requirements. If so, then he rolls or selects a skill for each year in the school or career from its accompanying table. The idea with the generation system is that after initial creation, a player can

easily push the character along to play during a later stage in his life. Certainly the process enables this easily, but although it feels almost *Traveller*-esque, the process feels all too flat, colorless, and complex given the end result.

Surprisingly, there is a third and quicker method, but this is kept in a separate section. Following a nicely done method of creating NPCs, there is an option for taking a template and modifying it. Both this option and the guidelines for creating NPCs handle character creation almost instantly, very much at odds with either the standard Random or Directed methods.

Mechanically, Cold Space uses the Flying Mouse Games house system, the "StarCluster 2" engine. This is a simple percentile system. An attribute check is the attributed multiplied by a difficulty factor to give a percentile under which the player must roll. A skill roll is made against a base of 40% plus 5% per skill level and any attribute and situation bonuses. Combat works in a similar fashion, but with one interesting aspect -- a character can trade percentile points between his initiative, to-hit, and damage rolls, granting him a wider range of options. For example, initiative points can be traded to improve aim or better react to an opponent's actions.

Space combat lends itself to the abstracted narrative format pioneered by FASA's *Star Trek Role Playing Game,* each player taking a role aboard ship and making the appropriate rolls for that position. Thus Radio Communications Control handles internal communication, co-coordinating all actions; Radar acquires the targets for each weapon; the Gunners pull the triggers; Pilot handles ship maneuvering; Maintenance handles damage control; Engineering carries out repairs; and Security counters boarding attempts. Although potentially dramatic, it can also be cumbersome with lots of dice rolls.

Beyond the history, the game is supported with a little more background. In the back of the book is a travel log written by a Time magazine journalist, which takes us to many of the major colonies, giving a thumbnail description of each. It includes maps of the worlds visited, but the descriptions feel all too brief. Two nice touches are use of newspaper articles to get across events of the time and song lyrics by well-known musicians. Two actual ships are described in detail, the Grumman Atom Cat and its successor, the Consolidated Vultee Catalina II, both receiving a page that adds some necessary color to the game's ships.

Physically, **Cold Space** is reasonably well written and illustrated with a series of quite effective blurred photographs. The layout though, is very pedestrian, and it is a pity that the newspaper articles could not been made to look like the real thing as this would helped lift the book above the leaden layout. The character sheet is not only pedestrian, but also ugly. Fortunately, there is a decent index.

Originally released as a PDF, the electronic version differs in several ways. One, it is slightly cheaper. Two, it is in color, improving the book's art by clarifying both illustrations and cartography. Three, it comes with a file that can be read by NBOS' AstroSynthesis program that depicts a sphere around the Earth some 20 light years in radius. This is a nice tool, but not immediately useful and a more obvious interface would really have helped. Plus, it really does not help with the distance and travel time problem.

Unfortunately, Cold Space suffers from a number of problems, all of them stemming from a lack of development. The mechanics are often explained poorly, being either garbled or underwritten. In other places they are near obtuse, specifically the rules for interplanetary and interstellar travel. Employing an arcane formula to determine travel time, the rules are moot given the lack of interstellar distances. Character generation is spread over several sections and is too lengthy a process given the end result. It is also only really applies to American characters. The GM advice is also scant.

Worse still, the very thing that underpins the game's core concept is woefully underwritten. The very technology that triggers the re-writing of the Cold War is never given the treatment it deserves. Mere ordinary equipment, from weapons to tool kits to space suits is relegated to a generic list, the only recognizable item being a gyrojet pistol. Beyond two vessels, the actual space ships are only described in terms of their manufacturers, ship name, type, size, fuel type, and tonnage, crew number, and when first available. And nothing more. What do these ships look like? What sets one model apart from another? What armament do they carry? And why, if this is a game set during the Cold War, is not one single Soviet vessel described?

The truth is, I did want to like this game. I do like the premise. It is something that I would want to play. Unfortunately, the game never quite lives up to, or supports its premise. Almost everything else is a disappointment after reading through the background and if I were to run or play this game, it would be with another set of mechanics. Even then, **Cold Space** is an expensive buy for just the background and that is if you buy the PDF version which has the benefit of color and an extra or two. Underdeveloped and underwritten, the retro-future depicted in **Cold Space** deserves better.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

[Irregular Webcomic](#)

Grand Canyon Sweetness: The Kinkaid Enigma (Part One)

"I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall be complete,
The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains jagged and broken.
I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate those of the earth,
There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate the theory of the earth."
-- Walt Whitman, "The Song of the Rolling Earth"

It's not the deepest, or the longest, but the Canyon of the Colorado River in northern Arizona is certainly the Grandest. The Anasazi liked it well enough to build their first pueblos there around 500 A.D. -- and hated it enough to vanish 700 years later. Coronado's lieutenant Garcia Lopez de Cardenas found it in 1540 while looking for the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola, but he turned around and went back, leaving the Canyon alone for three more centuries until the Americans started extending their grids and rules into it. So far, the Americans haven't vanished. Rather the opposite; the Canyon attracts five million eager tourists every year. But despite hosting scenery-starved hordes, the Grand Canyon still hoards some of its secrets. The Canyon's 277-mile length was not even fully mapped until 1971, and even today, some of the 1,900 square miles of arroyos, mesas, crevasses, and caves in the Canyon's immediate drainage area have only been charted from the air. It has killed at least 600 people since the 1870s. And in 1909, either nothing happened except a slow news day, or . . . well, we'll let the newspapers tell it.

"The latest news of the progress of the explorations of what is now regarded by scientists as not only the oldest archaeological discovery in the United States, but one of the most valuable in the world, which was mentioned some time ago in the Gazette, *was brought to the city yesterday by G. E. Kinkaid, the explorer who found the great underground citadel of the Grand Canyon during a trip from Green River, Wyoming, down the Colorado, in a wooden boat, to Yuma, several months ago."*
-- "Explorations in Grand Canyon," *Arizona Gazette* (April 5, 1909)

Those are the first words of a singular news story published in the *Arizona Gazette* with no byline. In prose alternately methodical and breathless, it tells of G.E. Kinkaid's descent of the Colorado and his discovery of a cavern entrance about two-thirds of the way (2,000 feet) up the cliff at a location that can be guesstimated as Marble Canyon, around river mile 56 in modern map-talk. Inside was a full-on temple complex, complete with two massive chambers, radiating passageways, idols, a crypt of bark-wrapped mummies, stone tablets bearing mysterious hieroglyphics (including a depiction of an animal "of prehistoric type"), vases, copper tools and weapons refined with "the lost art of hardening this metal, which has been sought by chemists for centuries without result." That wasn't the only alchemical wonder; there was also a "gray metal" similar to platinum "which puzzles the scientists, for its identity has not been established." And in a final delightfully random note, "strewn promiscuously over the floor everywhere are what people call 'cats eyes,' a yellow stone of no great value. Each one is engraved with [a] head of the Malay type." And that was the last the *Arizona Gazette,* or anyone else, heard from G.E. Kinkaid.

"The Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology has searched its files without finding any mention of a Professor Jordan, Kincaid, or a lost Egyptian civilization in Arizona."
-- Smithsonian Institution form letter

Kinkaid (or Kincaid, as his name is usually spelled by post-hoc researchers) claimed to have been the first white man born in Idaho (a provable lie) and to have been in the employ of the "Smithsonian Institute" for the last thirty years. He had, according to the article at any rate, already removed some of the relics and sent them to Washington from Yuma, with the apparent result that "Professor S.A. Jordan" came west to pursue "the most thorough explorations," including stringing electrical wires throughout the complex to make mapping and study more convenient. Almost needless to say, the Smithsonian disavows any knowledge of this discovery, of Kincaid, or of "Professor Jordan." One senses that the Smithsonian, in common with most hidebound and reactionary slaves to conventional fact and logic, would tell you to look at the date of the paper and see if maybe somebody's April Fool story ran on a slow news day.

But to accept that kind of thinking is to surrender to the great Smithsonian cover-up. The Smithsonian has a deserved reputation for "losing" finds in its vast basements, although the rumors of curators dumping anomalous artifacts out at sea are probably just that. At least one researcher has located a Professor "S.A. Jord*o*n" (apparently a European field archaeologist), in a Smithsonian publication no less! And it's certainly interesting that the person who founded the Smithsonian Bureau of Ethnology (which would surely have been involved in the Kinkaid-Jordan Expedition) was the first man to descend the Grand Canyon, the one-armed martinet John Wesley Powell.

Powell launched his expedition with nine men in May of 1869. (One of them, George Bradley, declared that he would "explore the River Styx" if need be to get out of the Army.) Three of his men (two brothers Howland, and one William Dunn of murky background) left the expedition in August of 1869, and were reported killed by the Shivwit Indians. Powell, intriguingly, accepted the Shivwits' tale of mistaken identity. William Hawkins, a scout accompanying Powell's expedition, noted that "the account in [Powell's] Report which accuses them of cowardice is entirely wrong, and that it was made to cover up the real causes of their leaving." Powell's Report is also missing a day (June 18-19, 1869), recording events a day after their occurrence.

Before and after the expedition, Powell displayed a constant interest in Indian legends, lore, and gods, the more esoteric and obscure the better. In 1875, he hired one Clarence Dutton to map the Canyon; Dutton dipped into the wide well of myth for intriguing place-names such as Isis Temple, Diana Temple, and Holy Grail Temple. Powell headed not only the Bureau of Ethnology but also the U.S. Geological Survey, and became one of the 33 founders of the National Geographic Society in 1888. Later in life, he wrote a work of philosophy "treating of matter, motion, and consciousness as related to the external universe or the field of fact," which very few of his contemporaries understood. He died in Maine, as far from the Canyon as he could get.

"After investigation by a number of scientists, first announcement was made here today of the excavation near Tucson of cast lead swords, crosses and other objects bearing Latin and Hebrew inscriptions which, taken at their face value, are held to mean that Roman Jews crossed the Atlantic in the Dark Ages, penetrated to Arizona and founded a kingdom which lasted from about 700 A.D. to 900 A.D. . . . The combination of Christian cross, Moslem crescent, Hebraic seven-branched candlestick and Freemasonry emblems has imposed a heavy tax on the credulity of investigators, but their appearance of having been covered and embedded in stone by natural processes has puzzled skilled archaeologists. Some have arrived at the opinion that, whatever their origin, the objects lay for centuries in the earth where they were found."
-- Puzzling "Relics" Dug Up In Arizona Stir Scientists, *New York Times* (December 13, 1925)

Another great rannygazoo of a controversy, one that made it into many more papers than the *Arizona Gazette,* also concerned Arizona archaeology. To wit, the discovery, beginning in September of 1924, of thirty or so artifacts on Silverbell Road near Tuscon. Most of the pieces were lead, including swords, arrow heads, and spear shafts. Crosses and plates inscribed with Latin told the tale of the Roman consuls Actius and Theodore, carried on the sea to the city of Calalus. They "won over" Toltezus (the Toltecs?) and Silvanus (the woodland tribes?) and brought reinforcements from Rhodes. Theodore (a Christian name matching the crosses) was succeeded by Iacobus, Israel, and Benjamin, but there were plenty of Jewish emblems in the finds as well. The whole megillah was dated "880 Anno Domini," however, to throw the whole question open again. Interestingly enough, if the chronicle on the plates can be trusted, the Romans must have left Europe in around 750 A.D., which is just when the seven bishops were (according to Coronado's favorite legend) supposed to have fled suddenly-Moorish Spain and founded seven golden cities in Cibola far to the west.

It would be easy to dismiss the Tuscon trove as Glozel-style forgeries, and many experts did, especially East Coast experts at the Smithsonian (them again!) and New York's Museum of the American Indian. They pointed out that all of the Latin texts came from standard works such as Virgil's *Georgics,* two commonly available Latin grammars, and the back of a dictionary, *Rouf's Standard Dictionary of Facts*. (All the text except "Seine," which would have been the "Sequana" to Latin-speakers, and "A.D.," which apparently wasn't used in the West when the putative Roman Jews left Europe.) Likewise, they noted that lead is a terrible material for swords and spears, no matter how desperate your clan of Roman Jews might be. Prime candidates for the forgeries included local Masons, Lost-Tribe-seeking Mormons, and (best of all) the classically-educated Mexican sculptor and lead-worker Timotio Odohui, who lived on Silverbell Road in the 1880s, and who was fingered by another Mexican gentleman of the area as the forger after the

kerfuffle blew up. But all that said, the artifacts had been unmistakably found covered in caliche, a lime deposit that (normally) takes centuries to build up. At least one top-flight archaeologist, Byron Cummings of the Arizona State Museum, vouched for their authenticity. But if genuine, the artifacts' "Romans" seem almost as ecumenical as Dutton's map of the Canyon, which includes The Tabernacle, Roma Shrine, Solomon Temple, and Lancelot Point. Or as transnational as the Canyon Temple find, with its hieroglyphics and mummies, "possibly from Egypt, tracing back to Rameses" and its worship that "most resembles the ancient people of Thibet."

"The Great Canyon beyond the Eastern Sea [the poem called Ts'ang Shan Wu says that in the east there is a stream flowing in a bottomless ravine. It is supposed to be this canyon. The 'Dissipation of Sorrows' calls it Kiang Shan's Great Canyon] is Shao Hao's Country. [The emperor Shao Hao, of the "Golden Heaven" family, gave it this designation.] Shao Hao's Descendant, the emperor Chuen Suh [of whom no further description is given], left there his lute and lyre. [It says that his lute and lyre are in this canyon.] It has a beautiful mountain, from which there flows a delightful spring, producing a charming gulf."
-- Liu Hsiang, *Shan Hai Ching* or *Classic of Mountains and Seas,* Book XIV [brackets are 4th century A.D. notes in a later text]

The idol in the 1909 Temple was "sitting cross-legged, with a lotus flower or lily in each hand." Although that pose also recalls, among others, the Egyptian god Bes, the *Gazette* and Kinkaid felt that it "most resembles Buddha." (Just in case, though, Dutton named various Canyon landmarks not just Buddha Temple but Zoroaster Temple, Manu Temple, Deva Temple, Confucius Temple, Brahma Temple, and Krishna Temple.) The mummies in the crypt were wrapped in bark-paper, a Chinese technique (although Chinese mummies are either lacquered or dried out naturally, like the Anasazi mummies found in Arizona). Buddha and bark can both thus be chalked up to a Chinese visit to Arizona, or somewhere "20,000 *li* across the sea to the east," by the Buddhist missionary Hui Shen in 499 A.D., beating the Roman Jews by 250 years or so.

"Fusang," the land Hui Shen visited according to the 7th-century *Liang Shu,* encompassed a country, the Kingdom of Women, where the people ate beans and lived in round clay houses. A very nice coincidence with the proto-pueblos of the proto-Anasazi. (The Hopi are matrilineal, to boot.) Admittedly, Fusang also had horses, which Arizona didn't between the Clovis Point and Coronado. (But it didn't have iron, which the Indians also didn't.) And weirdly enough, the description of Fusang doesn't mention a canyon -- but the *Shan Hai Ching,* the *Classic of Mountains and Seas,* does so in fairly unmistakable, if still murky, terms. For instance, the "emperor Shao Hao" mentioned above is ahistorical, although his name can be translated as the "son of the sun." (Elsewhere, the *Shan Hai Ching* calls the "Great Canyon" the "Valley of the Manifestation of the Dawn" or the "Birthplace of the Sun.") And the book itself is mysterious; sadly, nobody quite knows where the *Shan Hai Ching* came from. Its first known editor, Liu Hsiang, was a scholar of the Han Dynasty, but the book likely predates him by at least 200 years. During this era, ca. 380-250 B.C., Ssu-ma Chien states that a number of expeditions left China to sail east in search of the mountains of paradise. At least one expedition, that of Hsu Fu in 219 B.C., never returned. (What, exactly, is Chinese for the Seven Cities of Cibola?) Part of the *Shan Hai Ching* may have originated in the 13th century B.C. And if the chronicle was actually set down by its legendary author, the Emperor Yu, it predates not just Liu Hsiang, but the Buddha -- Canyon idol or no Canyon idol -- by as many as 1500 years.

In Part Two, we go further back and farther in.

My GenCon Report: Part I of Howevermany

And so, many weeks later, my GenCon report surfaces, washing ashore like . . . oh, something that would wash ashore.

Sadly, another minor flu-like illness has again surfaced in my life as well; I suspect this comes with fatherhood, since my traditionally healthy household has been infiltrated by a stranger who collaborates with others, trading biowarfare agents with other pint-sized generals, and returning home with his ill-gotten goods for getting ill, drooling and inserting objects into his mouth all the while.

Green Ronin Games had about a jillion new books. They had new material for *Mutants & Masterminds,* including *Hero High* and the setting book and an adventure for *Paragons* (the former book, I should note, includes a contribution from me); new goodness for Freeport in the form of the *Pirate's Guide to Freeport* and the *True20 Freeport Companion,* a couple of new *Bleeding Edge* adventures, and *Faery's Tale Deluxe.* Oh, and they also had a neat book called *The 100 Best,* containing 100 industry luminaries discussing 100 games (one game per pro) that they think is . . . well, "The best." It's a neat conversation-starter book -- the kind that's common in the comics world but less so in the gaming arena -- and it's already generated some comment on various blogs. According to the booth bunnies at the Green Ronin book (okay . . . it was Steve Kenson), this book sold a *lot* better than they were expecting, which warms the cockles of my heart.

Also of note from Green Ronin was their announcement about a *Mutants & Masterminds*-powered version of the *Wild Cards* license, due at a GenCon near you (well, me) in 2008. That one should be neat (I'm a long-time *Wild Cards* fan, having been inspired to pick up both the series and *GURPS* by holding a copy of *GURPS Wild Cards* in my hands in the late 1980s), although my pulse is ridiculously off the book-readers of the world to know how much buzz or interest there is; upon hearing of the license, I headed over to Amazon and noted that a good number of the books seem out of print or hard to get.

Goodman Games had one of those games I mentioned a month ago, a cool little number that was sold out by the time I got there. In this case, it was #50 of their *Dungeon Crawl Classics* line, *Vault of the Iron Overlord,* written by none other than Monte Cook. The coolness of this adventure is that the whole thing takes place on a map that consists of those concentric circle things held together by a paper fastener (a professional binding job, not one of those "bendy metal jobs" you get yourself); as explained by the good man Goodman himself, the heroes need to manipulate the maze to get it into position. It inspired the same kind of, "Oh, neat!" reaction to a map that may have first registered decades earlier upon gazing at the castle maps with the original *Ravenloft* adventure. (Although this adventure sold out very early in the con, they were smart and kept a copy aside to show folks like me.) I can't say if it was any good or not (although it was written by Cook, so my money's on "yes,"), but if unique *d20 System* adventures are your cup of tea, you may want to check it out.

Goodman Games also let me in on a little behind-the-scenes "secret": Their annual dungeon-crawl tournament -- which started out at 114 competitors vying for the title -- was apparently the closest that they'd ever seen; apparently, any misstep by the folks in the top ranks -- one more trap, one more hit point lost, one more critter killed -- would've resulted in a shifting of position. It sounds like everyone involved had a good time, and I consoled myself in my own dungeoneering skills: I'm one of the bottom-ranked folks who makes the top 90% of contestants possible.

I stopped by the bustling Paizo Games booth, trying to see how they were doing. My original notes to myself includes a phrase along the lines of, "Sadly, they weren't able to spare anyone to talk with me because they were too busy ringing up scads of customers," but before I wandered off Phil Lacefield Jr. was able to spare a few minutes with me. Their big news -- the beginning of the *Pathfinder* monthly "not a magazine" series of adventures for the *d20 System* -- had been exceeding their exceptional expectations. Oh, and they sold out of the last issues of *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines by Friday (meaning I now need to scour the local bookstores to find 'em). They were also doing gangbuster business with their *GameMastery* line of goodies -- adventures and supplemental material -- and, in general, looked like they were having a grand show.

At some point in all this, I had it reemphasized how much diversity there was in the *d20 System* world; the offerings

from Green Ronin, Goodman Games, and Paizo were all exceptionally different, but they were all tapping into different segments of that game's market. The creativity and variation shown by these three publishers (let alone the dozens of other top-notch houses) exceeded even the most vibrant era of TSR's own diversity, when ***Spelljammer, Ravenloft, Dark Sun,*** and ***Planescape*** all duked it out on store shelves. I know that if I had a ***d20 System*** gaming group together, my wind would be whirling with possibilities at the same time my wallet would be groaning with dread. And it made me wonder what would happen if other companies were somehow a bit freer in letting others play in their games' sandboxes . . . although I suspect that [Sturgeon's Law](#) would uphold for the output of such ruminations.

I have more notes here, but my first round of "the Big Guys I Got to Talk to" took more than I was expecting, so I'll probably continue my never-ending ruminations on the Big Con, using it as a springboard for whatever other grandiose thoughts spring to mind. Presuming, of course, that my throat doesn't keep feeling as rough as a cat's tongue come next week.

--Steven Marsh

Erebos

by Paul Drye

Some timelines are difficult to decipher. It's not that they're apparent impossibilities like, for example, Brekilien or Madland. Instead they diverged in human prehistory and have no historical inertia forcing them in a particular direction. With no common cultures, and languages as distantly related to Homeline's as English is to Aleut, it's very hard to pin down how one of these worlds progressed . . . especially if historical record-keeping is spotty. On the other hand, to some extent it doesn't matter how a world has diverged, but instead what it's diverged to. A world with the same physical laws as Homeline but utterly differently in history often produces valuable exports and opportunities for research.

Erebos is one of these. While its history is murky, Infinity's explorers have reached the preliminary conclusion that writing was invented quite soon after agriculture here, rather than lagging until the fourth millennium B.C. as it did on Homeline. With a 5,000 year head start, Erebos reached industrial, information, and biotechnological revolutions long before most timelines made it past ancient empires. From there they seem to have developed nanotechnology, and eventually made it to a difficult-to-understand melding of bio- and nanotechnology that turned the planet into a virtual Eden.

Somehow, though, the "Edenites" regressed and lost control of their world. The tamed Earth was unstable and soon entered a greenhouse phase that increased temperatures more than 50 degrees Fahrenheit. The poles became tropical, while the rest of the planet was rendered uninhabitable by anything except bacteria. The uncivilized remnant humans tried establishing themselves further and further away from the equator, following the rapidly speciating life forms their own ancestors had developed (and possibly aiding the new biosphere's progress with the little knowledge of their advanced civilization that remained). Eventually the southern societies went extinct as they hit the water barrier between South America and Antarctica -- South Africa and Australia already being too hot. The northern fragment, though, managed to gain a foothold in the steamy-but-habitable lands of the Arctic Circle.

It's been approximately 2,500 years since then (give or take five hundred years) and the Erebans have started to climb back up the ladder of technology. Steamships are plying trade lanes across the pole, the Arctic Ocean now being an oversized analog for the Mediterranean. Homeline's astronomical observations suggest that the current year is 1855.

Living with the Midnight Sun

The inhabited part of Erebos is north of the line where July's average temperature is less than 110° Fahrenheit. This is approximately the Arctic Circle, with large bulges outward into the Bering Sea and the North Atlantic south of Greenland and Iceland. The climate is fairly uniform across the whole area, with not even the northernmost land dropping below 85° in summer.

Winters are relatively harsh because of the Arctic's months of darkness -- land above latitude 80 sees no sun for four months. As well as dropping average temperatures by as much as 40 degrees (Northern Greenland averages 55° Fahrenheit and has a frost every few decades), the long nights shut down life and long-distance travel when they happens, rather like an actual snowy winter. In the northernmost lands, vitamin D deficiency is a problem for the inhabitants too.

Prevailing winds are to the south as cold air moves that way, displacing hot air north at altitude. It's much easier to sail parallel to a line of latitude (essentially, along the coast instead of across the open ocean). Similarly, the Earth's rotation bends the winds a little to the west, so it is also a little easier to sail clockwise around the ocean -- looking down from above the north pole -- than counterclockwise. In this case, though, it's feasible to wait for a more favorable breeze if one wants to tack a sail craft to the east. The north wind, however, is essentially constant, and it's only since the introduction of steam-powered craft that getting from Northern Canada to Siberia directly became easy.

The People of Erebos

Ereban legends talk of people made radically different from the human norm. Some were four-legged and stupid, used for beasts of burden. Some were reduced to nothing more than tons of brain tissue encased in enormous plastic silos. While these examples and many others are gone (assuming they ever were more than legends), and most people in modern-day Erebos are substantially similar to Homeline humans, there are other types that have managed to survive the fall of the civilization that created them.

The minims are humans of unusual size, about the size of a spider monkey. While not nearly as smart as standard humans, they're certainly smarter than chimpanzees, and have ousted rats from many of their urban environmental niches. Infinity agents have told of disconcerting nights spent listening to minims talking to each other under the floorboards. Occasionally, a genius of the species re-invents the spear and the locals will be forced to fumigate the dock district for fear of an uprising that will cost them warehouses full of food.

Far rarer than minims but better integrated into Ereban society, farseers were designed for purposes unknown. Whatever those were, though, with their large eyes and acute eyesight farseers carved a modern-day niche for themselves as lookouts on Ereban ships. Their guild is partly a source of pilots for mainstream humans, and partly a bloodline matching agency to prevent interbreeding in their small and often-sterile population.

The Lands of Erebos

Ethukut: Greenland lives up to its name on Erebos, and is home to the most important country in the timeline. Ethukut is based around the island's inland sea, where the ground has been pressed below sea level by the now-vanished ice. Rich in resources, separated from the country of Atis by the Kennedy Channel, and otherwise well away from any other land, Ethukut is a bit like medieval China: big, isolated, and not very interested in the world outside its border.

That said, also much like old China the rest of the world is profoundly interested in it as a source of trading riches. To the extent that they can get the Ethukutians to open up their ports, other nations sell them goods in exchange for spices and hand-crafted goods. Until recently, this trade was unimportant to Ethukut's overall economy, but they've fallen behind Atis technologically and have started importing some industrial items.

Infinity enters the picture because there's been a recent fad back home for Ethukutian textiles. Homeliners arrange for cargos of early industrial items to be shipped in to Erebos (usually through Murmansk, or Churchill in Manitoba), after which they're steamed to Ethukut. As always, there's a need to police the trade, protecting the outtime traders and watching for illegal activity.

Syelehann: As mentioned previously, most people on this timeline are standard-issue humans. Syelehann, contiguous with the islands of Homeline's Franz Josef Land, is the sole nation of note that has variant humans in the majority. Syelehannians are tall and pasty, sensitive even to the dim light of the arctic but well-adapted to the months of dark so

near the pole. In particular, they can produce vitamin D from food sources, and so don't need nearly as much exposure to the sun as humans that need ultraviolet for the job. Unfortunately, the best sources of precursors to the vitamin are morally unpalatable to regular humans. The lower classes let grains pick up fungal infections and the inevitable ergotic hallucinations that implies. The upper classes are even worse, eating raw skin to get at the precursors in animals. The very rich are loathe to use animals for religious reasons, and so engage in cannibalism. This willingness makes them profoundly unpopular in the rest of the world.

That religion also makes the Syelehannians as antipathetic towards outsiders as outsiders are to them. It's a complex of body and behavior taboos that make them wrap up in heavy black cloaks, hats, and other clothes, and disdain music, loud voices, and eating and drinking with others. The first Infinity agent to make contact with Syelehann (or at least the first one to make contact and not be eaten) called them "Puritan vampires."

Despite their urge towards isolation, Syelehann is one of Erebos' maritime powers. Their home archipelago is small and not particularly rich, so they've been forced to turn to the sea for trade. As Syelehann does have plentiful supplies of coal their steamships are found in many ports, where they have their own enclaves and traffic in slaves when they can or other goods when they can't.

Atis: Not so much a country as a region, Atis encompasses the Canadian Arctic archipelago as well as northern Hudson's Bay. Once an empire that controlled the entire pole, that's five hundred years past and Atis is now a squabbling collection of small states united only by language. Despite the constant low-level wars, the need for ocean trade and the constant competition have done them some good: Atisian city states are the most technologically advanced places on the planet.

Paradoxically, this level of achievement makes Atis the least-interesting of Erebos' major nations to Homeline traders. What its citizens do best is make things which are well behind the technological standards of outtime visitors, so there's no market for them. On the other hand, claiming to be from Atis is the standard technique for Homeliners in other Ereban countries. With dozens of Atisian cultures and accents with which to blend in, some of them quite obscure, no one in the rest of the world can be sure that the strange visitors aren't what they say they are.

K'i: The islands of Svalbard are home to the K'inanae, a troublesome hill people who've occasionally fallen to outside invaders but always managed to regain their independence. They're free in the present day, but it may change in future as the islands have some of the richest mines in the high Arctic, including coal pits that have become strategically important on Erebos during the last fifty years.

The K'inanae are noted for their men's elaborate facial hair (though weirdly, they can't grow moustaches and so tend to look leonine), and their billowing shirts, Phrygian caps, and colorful sarongs. Many are miners, working blisteringly steamy tunnels far below the surface; others are engineers. Steam power may not have been invented here, but there are many engines pumping the mines or raising cars of rock.

K'i itself is hilly and windy, as the arctic breeze can career across open ocean for hundreds and thousands of miles, gathering strength before finally hitting the coast as rampant storms. The east of the island is treeless because of this, while the west is more pleasant and forested. However, the west is also where the coal seams sometime run to the surface, and in places empty stone scars have replaced the woods.

Eastern Siberia: There was only one place on Erebos where jungles could migrate all the way north as the climate heated up (the Mediterranean, Himalayas and the isthmus of Panama getting in the way for most). The forests of southeast Asia faced several mid-sized highlands along the way, but managed to re-grow themselves successively further and further to the northeast until they reached the open lands north of Manchuria. There they looped back to the west and eventually spread as far as the Urals. The Lena and the Yenisei Rivers, both substantially similar to Homeline's despite 10,000 years of differing history, were transformed into analogs of the Congo River.

The area between the two river mouths, dominated by the rugged Central Siberian Traps, is the "heart of darkness" of this underexplored timeline. It's just about the most inhospitable place where humans can conceivably survive on Erebos, and traveling there is very chancy. Homeliners will often go, however, as its jungles contain wild samples of the Edenites' lost biotechnology, such as the species of tree discovered five years ago that has useful amounts of

ribavirin (used by Infinity against yellow and hemorrhagic fevers) in its leaves. Based out of the under-civilized and otherwise uninteresting coastal state of Gyudlay (on the Taimyr peninsula), several outtime missions set off each year. Most suffer fatalities at the hands, hooves, teeth, and other parts of the jungle's outsized fauna and aggressive natives.

Infinity and Erebos

Erebos is on Quantum 3, and so is safe from influence by Centrum. As it has both natives and desirable products, Infinity has classified it as a Protectorate timeline, open for trade and research but not for colonization. However, the Protectorate was reduced to only the northern hemisphere four years ago, when the United States applied to UNIC for a status change to the timeline. With their blessing, it was opened for settlement as long as the Americans stay away from the inhabited north.

Though far more ecologically impoverished than the north, Erebos' Antarctica has many small Edenite animals like birds, and plants like grasses and flowers. In return for the smaller chance of finding useful biotech as compared to Erebos' Central Siberia, it's much tamer, even pleasant, and entirely uninhabited by native humans. Further, as interesting items are found up north, they can likely be grown down south as well. Based around the small settlement of New Florida, there are already plantations of the ribavirin-laden "fever trees," and the colony's backers think the potential for profit is very high.

Besides the colony, Erebos is mostly visited for trade, picking up the aforementioned unusual animal and plant products. Infinity's main base is in Thras, a mildly important Atisian city of 50,000 people on the southern coast of Baffin Island. There is also some medical research being run out of Thras because of a new theory about the Gotha virus: though not directly related to Erebos, some think it may be based on a similar mix of biotechnology and nanomachines. While this is not a wildly popular supposition, the Gotha virus has been so relentlessly mysterious that Infinity is willing to throw some resources at the work in the hopes of some insight.

Characters

Gjalkila Apauh: Master of the *Njeshtje Zgjekoh* (or, as Infinity's local agents have taken to calling it, "the good ship Unpronounceable"), a steamship in the Arctic tramp trade based out of Wzarni on Wrangel Island. The concept of a captain never being gainsaid on his ship is foreign to Erebos, so Apauh is a master of crew politics; he largely gets what he wants out of his men and women by playing their desires and fears off of each other. When that fails, he'll resort to bribery or petty violence. In the end, he's a useful contact for outtimers looking to travel around Erebos, as he can set his own itinerary if they can pay him to care about theirs.

The captain knows that the travelers from "elsewhere" are up to something, though he doesn't even have a glimmer of just how strange they are. In any case, he simply doesn't care and views Infinity's secrecy needs as just another business opportunity. To be honest, he even enjoys the skullduggery.

Maakiawaro: His name is a pseudonym, in the style of K'inanae who devote themselves to a cause. His means "the abolitionist," and that's what his life is all about. Sold into slavery as a teenager, he spent a year living in fear on Syelehann before managing to steal a small boat and escape back to K'i. The kind of determination that let him row the 400 miles from one island to the other is still with him, driven by fear and hatred of the Syelehanni that's difficult to fathom.

He's moderately rich now, entirely because he thinks he needs to be to continue his crusade and nothing was going to stand in his way until he was. He spends as much time as he can trying to convert others to his viewpoint that the slave trade needs to be ended and, then, Syelehann invaded or the island blockaded until its inhabitants starve to death. He's not an easy companion.

What he is, for Infinity agents, is an occasionally useful cover. He pays for agents to perform missions related to his cause; they give Homeliners an excuse to move around and an entré to the sketchy underworld of Erebos.

Adventures

Can't Follow the Drinkin' Gourd: Agents tracing criminal activity elsewhere in the multiverse find evidence of human trafficking pointing to Erebos. Someone associated with the American colony has been engaging in some trade with Syelehann, shipping slaves down south and using them for labor on distant agricultural projects. While they're technically manumitted and paid -- the most important law about-time employing an intelligent creature that's been a slave -- they're essentially prisoners, so isolated from their homes they can't possibly leave. Whoever is doing this knows they're well on the wrong side of the law and is hiding their activities . . . but now the investigators have noticed.

The complication is that these people were likely to be food if not purchased. Even if the current batch are freed, the economic incentive to buy and free more of them into what is, after all, at least some kind of life goes out the window. Hundreds, maybe thousands who might have lived will die.

The Feejee Mermaid: A strange and twisted creature mounted and displayed on the wall of an Ereban dockside tavern turns out, on examination by a Homeline biologist, to be the cadaver of a once-living thing. Investigation of local stories will suggest that it's one of a race of humans, now degenerate, that claims to be the original Edenites. There aren't many left, and they live far to the south around one of the islands in the blazingly hot and largely inaccessible Aleutians. Legend has it that they live their youth as relatively normal but amphibious humans, then enter a sessile existence anchored to the sea floor where the heat is not so much an issue. Whether or not they're the Edenites, this kind of modification to the human form is so radical it's worth investigating; agents who can breathe underwater would be very useful on several timelines.

Security Concerns: The problem with getting to Eastern Siberia on Erebos is that so little overlaps between it and Homeline's civilizations. Until now transitions to Erebos had to take place in European Russia or Canada. Long sea voyages to the Taimyr Peninsula then ensued, followed by even more arduous battles down the region's rivers. Infinity (at the urging of Russia, perhaps stung by the American colony) has decided to cut out the middle men and set up a parachronic gateway directly into the heart of Erebos' most dangerous and interesting jungle. The chosen site is the town of Mirnyy in Central Siberia, which has a small airport and is on the large Vilyuy River that runs through similar beds on both Homeline and Erebos.

The trouble is that the destination, while now much easier to reach, is going to be difficult to hold. The temperature often exceeds 120 Fahrenheit, the trees and other vegetation are machete-dulling thick, and the wildlife and subhumans are deadly. No-one is going to live on the far end permanently, but someone is going to need to secure the perimeter. Guess who?

Using Erebos in Other Settings

Erebos is, in many ways, a pulpy setting in the key of Poe, or at least the bastard child of Poe and Olaf Stapledon. Strange tropical lands at (or in) the pole are commonplace to American fiction in the decades surrounding 1900. For GMs, the issue then becomes one of accenting the tones he needs for his campaign, heading in one of more of super-scientific, hard-boiled action, or horrific directions.

It's not very far from there to an Erebos suitable for fantasy campaigns. Most worlds haven't got anything canonical at their poles, so it's not overly difficult to plop this version of Earth's arctic down after a few judicious changes are made to the coatlines. The steam ships will need to go, but they're only a grace note. Those who think they'll miss them can rely on the redefinition of technology as magic and replace coal with imps or djinns; that's what's going to need to be done to the biotech of the East Siberian jungle anyway.

A science fictional setting needs a fallen civilization before Erebos works. However, it doesn't need to be a human one as assumed here. If *Traveller's* First Imperium or the like isn't available, the Edenites can just as easily be a lost alien civilization, and the various types of Ereban humans successor races on a strange alien world.

With a bit more work, Erebos can even be used in a superhero setting. Antarctica or someplace similar is home to a Burroughs-like lost world in many heroic universes, so why not yours? Whip up a "dimensional barrier" the heroes can cross south of the 80th parallel and you're ready to roll. What? You didn't think Amundsen actually made it to the pole, did you?

The Omniscient Eye

Do I Need Pirate Insurance in Space?

I'm in a science fiction campaign where the PCs are merchant adventurers. In this campaign, they often have to fight off pirates and deal with destinations in or near war zones. Realistically, will they have to have insurance on their ship if they want to do business outside of the black market? Do they need separate insurance on their shipments? What's their choice of destinations going to do to their insurance rates?

Whether the ship needs insurance will depend on the type of trading she's engaged in, but almost certainly she will. *Traveller* and its imitators have led many gamers to consider speculative cargo as a major mercantile activity, but in the real world it represents a very small fraction of cargo traffic; the vast bulk of cargo is sent with the full knowledge of the eventual recipient, at standard freight rates. With this in mind, no reputable factor will consign his cargo to an uninsured ship. If he did so, depending on the conditions of the contract, he might find himself liable in the case not only of piracy or shipwreck but of misconduct by the ship's crew. Even a ship carrying illegal goods needs a public reason for going somewhere, and that reason is usually a legitimate cargo.

Since modern cargo ships rarely if ever have owners aboard, those owners want to make sure that the substantial investment they have made is protected. The crew may be swapped as needed, but a ship is an asset that, even if she is entirely typical of her class, cannot usually be replaced quickly (and most freight is booked several months in advance). Historically, rather than skimp on insurance, shady owners have tended to insure a ship for *more* than she is worth, hoping that an accident will occur (or in some cases making sure that it does) so that she can be replaced with a better one.

This is a special and extreme case of what is technically known as moral hazard: the knowledge that an insurance policy has been taken out can influence the behavior of the policy-holders. For example, an owner may call on his crew to push on even through severe weather, in the knowledge that whether or not the ship makes it *he* will not be worse off.

Insurance is, of course, expensive. The simplest calculation multiplies the insured sum by the estimated probability of the insurable event: if one trip in a hundred sees a ship lost to pirates, the basic price of insurance against piracy for one trip will be 1% of the value of the ship and her cargo. There might also be partial-loss scenarios (a pirate attack is beaten off, but consequential fire damages some of the cargo), and their probability and loss rates would be factored into the basic premium. Even this is only to insure against a single event; more comprehensive insurance will look at all the risks that are being covered, adding together all the premia.

Of course, these odds cannot be calculated precisely, and insurance companies are in business to make a profit; the actual premium is likely to be anywhere from 20% to 60% higher than this amount. Factors that modify this percentage are the inverse likelihood of the event (the more rarely it happens, the harder it is to estimate the probability accurately; also, the higher the variance in the insurer's outgoings, which means there must be more profit to satisfy risk-averse investors); the scale of the insurance (there will be a smaller percentage premium charged for insuring an entire fleet than for insuring a single ship); and the liquidity of the insurance market (if only one insurer deals in a particular sort of risk, then as in any other monopoly he can charge more or less whatever he likes, while a competitive market can reduce the margin).

The primary skill of insurers lies in estimation of risk. Once in a while, an insurer will get this substantially wrong: If his premium is too high, he loses business to his competition or strangles a particular industry. If it is too low, he may well do very well for a while, but be bankrupted when several big claims come in quick succession.

While house and car insurance for individuals varies hugely in price based on the usual location of the insured item,

maritime insurance pays rather less attention to this. Normal insurance covers a ship (and sometimes a set maximum value of cargo) for all normal hazards -- storms, collisions, and so on -- anywhere in the world, as long as she stays out of certain designated "war risks areas." These areas now include places such as the Malacca Straits that are considered to have a particularly high risk of piracy; they are designated by the Joint War Committee at Lloyd's of London.

One might think that no insured ship would go into those war zones, but this is not the case; War Risks Insurance is a very great expense, in part because it is very difficult to estimate the likelihood of losing a ship when conditions change so quickly, but it *will* be bought, and where there exists a demand for insurance there will arise people prepared to sell it. Oil supertankers have continued to traverse the Shatt al'Arab and other hazardous waterways even during recent hostilities in the region; they remain helpless against even the lightest of naval vessels, but demand for oil is such that almost any premium will be paid. Risks that are similarly excluded from standard policies, such as terrorism, piracy and dock strikes, can all be insured against, as long as the ship-owner is prepared to pay the premium.

In the modern, liquid, shipping market, he probably is. There will always be competition from other ships that *are* insured; they will charge more than the hypothetical uninsured carrier for transport, but they will guarantee that nobody loses his shirt if things do go wrong.

Cargo coverage will probably be a separate contract (or several separate contracts, if war risks are also involved). The cargo insurance will compensate the owner for losses other than those that can be recovered from the carrier's insurance. The "time element" component of a cargo policy compensates for losses incurred by late delivery. Cost calculations are on the same basis as for the ship's own insurance, but the policy will normally be purchased by the cargo's owner; as far as ship-owning traders are concerned, this cost is simply a reason for them to be paid less than they'd like for the job.

Just who that owner is at a particular time can sometimes be a tricky question: ownership of cargo can change hands at any point between the time it leaves the seller's premises and the time it enters the buyer's, and this will be specified in the freight contract. Most commonly, it is formally transferred just after the goods have been imported into the destination country. This becomes particularly relevant when one party has to file for bankruptcy while goods are in transit; while the cargo insurance contracts are in theory normally transferred with ownership, there may sometimes be two separate policies that apply at different stages of the shipping process. With the right contracts, the question of *exactly* when during shipping the cargo was damaged or lost can be a matter on which large sums of money will hinge.

Historically, some recognizable form of shipping insurance has been available as long as money and shipping have existed; the Code of Hammurabi allowed merchants to pay a premium against the loans they took out to pay for shipping, in return for a promise to cancel the loan if the shipment were stolen. Insurance contracts with independent existence (separate from the shipping investment) seem to have arisen in 14th-century Genoa; these allowed for a broadening of risk by getting more people involved on the paying-out side, lessening the potential liability to each.

Lloyd's Coffee House in London started as a place to exchange shipping news, and rapidly became a market for insurance. It is important to bear in mind that Lloyd's has never been in itself an insurance company: it is simply a venue where multiple backers can meet to pool and spread risk. In spite of this (indeed, perhaps because of its neutral position), the spin-off organization Lloyd's Register became instrumental in the publication of lists of ships, including their rating as insurance risks; a ship with both hull and equipment in prime condition would be rated "A1", and thus a better risk than one in poorer condition. (Of course, the master and the crew would not be included in this evaluation, and would be subject to change.)

Ultimately, it depends on the resources of its investors, not its own assets, to pay out on its policies. Lloyd's still acts on an unlimited-liability basis (i.e. it can call on its members to pay well beyond what they may have been expecting), making it one of the most sound of all insurers, where more

What Shape of Universe?

One of the principal reasons for the shift from the 14th-century risk-spreading model to the modern insurance system, and indeed the shift from speculative trade to contract freight, is the existence of communications that are faster and more reliable than cargo ships. Some science fiction

conventional companies can be bankrupted by an excess of claims (as nearly happened to several after the New Orleans flooding in 2005). One prevention strategy against this is reinsurance: once an insurer has written a suitably large number of policies, he can package and pass on the collective risk, effectively buying insurance against having to pay out on many of the policies at once.

A sufficiently large owner may of course not bother with insurance at all; the British Crown does not insure its properties, because it has sufficient monetary reserves to pay for any possible damage. In the case of shipping, the possibility of substantial third-party damage claims has made this an unfeasible option (and keeping a large cash reserve is in any case frowned on by modern business practice).

What could modify all of this in a science-fictional setting? Firstly, an illiquid shipping market: If there are some destinations that are simply too dangerous to be served by normal commercial shipping, there will be no way for the few risk-takers who are prepared to try to get through to get insurance for their attempts. In terms of the pirate-merchant ecosystem this is not a state sustainable in the long term, though; many pirates cannot live off the few cargoes that are still put through the dangerous area, and eventually some of them will have to go elsewhere. While it lasts, a sensible shipper may well want his cargo treated as speculative: he will sell it to the ship-owner or crew, and if they survive they will reap the profits when they sell it at the destination.

Secondly, the entire current insurance system rests on the relatively modern concept of limited liability. It was still common practice until about the 18th century for a shipper's backers to expect to pay all losses out of their own pockets; shipping is a sufficiently uncertain business that setting insurance premiums is particularly hard, compared with more conventional domestic and commercial policies. Furthermore, it is subject to domain risks: a sufficiently large storm, for example, can damage many ships at once, leading to a run on and possible ruin of the insurers. (If it can be predicted that such things will sometimes happen, they are likely to show up as policy exclusions.) It seems quite plausible that a different society might take the Babylonian approach and simply regard shipping losses as part of the cost of doing business, to be borne by the investors in a project rather than by insurers.

When insurance is unavailable or too expensive, there may be some less formal alternatives to guard against the risk of losses to piracy and war. These could include things like:

- pooling risks (which can be thought of as a kind of insurance, and is the historical origin of the more formal sort): whoever is bearing the risk of loss can band together and each bear a little of the common risk. For example, they may each pay premia to a pool, and then the pool pays for any losses; additional losses over the pool premia are probably going to come out of everyone's pocket. A few losses will affect everyone moderately instead of a few of them badly . . . though if a large event affects many of the insured ships at once, everyone's still out of pocket.
- arming (and armoring) vessels and/or stationing armed guards on board (with the cost that there is less cargo space and greater expense, and an increased likelihood of major loss of life if the crews do have to fight).
- banding together into convoys, which are protected by ships and mercenary marines (with attendant costs of more restricted schedules and the expense of the protection).

It may be that -- even where insurance is available -- risks are such that an insurer may insist on such additional protection as a condition of the policy (in the same way that they insist on door locks or security systems), or even charge enough to pay for some themselves, in order to reduce the risk.

--Roger Burton West

universes, notably *Traveller,* do not have such communications; someone arranging for a cargo to be shipped cannot be sure that it is wanted at the other end, that the recipient is solvent, or indeed that a war has not broken out since the contracts were signed.

Messages carried by courier ships can make up much of the difference, particularly in a setting with mature computing and substantial shipping traffic where such messages are likely to be very cheap, but the possibility of sudden and extreme changes should still not be ruled out. This may well account for an unduly large amount of speculative trade, or insurance practices unconventional to the modern mindset, as the GM sees fit.

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!

Pyramid Review

The Shadow of Yesterday (Revised)

Published by Anvilwerks

Written by Clinton R. Nixon

Cover by James V. West

Illustrated by Andrew Navaro, Jennifer Rodgers, Keith Senkowski, & James V. West

220-page undersized b&w softcover; $24

Near is a world recovering from a disaster. Centuries ago it was dominated by the Empire of Maldor, known for its cultural diversity and universal tongue. A century (or is it three? The book is unsure) ago, the "Sky Fire" fell, shattering Near, causing years of darkness, and placing a moon in the sky where there had been none. Without the universal language's unifying factor, new nations have arisen along cultural lines and rivalries, leading to war, famine, and enslavement. Primarily, this is over valuable resources such as the metals needed to create weaponry, but the ownership of the ruined cities of Maldor and the ancient secrets they hide, are reason enough.

Near is not without faith nor religion, but there are no gods. Most religions concern themselves with the "Sky Fire's" true nature. Nor do monsters exist in the traditional fantasy gaming sense. Instead the focus is upon Near's four races. Humans are known for their emotions, primarily fear and aggression mitigated by love and passion. Near has several different human cultures, each very different, and whilst you can draw analogies with our own history, they definitely lean more to weird rather than Tolkien-esque fantasy. The five cultures are not just different in terms of society, but also in terms of secret abilities that a player character can learn. Maldor remains, but with the Emperor long gone, it is ruled by feuding nobles who each claim royal blood, with the lower classes caught up in the feuding and fighting for day-to day survival. Maldor was also home to the Three-Corner Academy, a great school of magic. The Zaru are a slave people under the yoke of the Ammeni. Once rich farmers, the Zaru understand Zu, the language of creation which can give them great power. The pacifist Zaru see themselves as caretakers of Zu, not wanting to misuse it even though it could win them their freedom. The Ammeni are divided into rival merchant houses, whose decadent ruling class is known for their use of drugs, poisons, and assassination. The Khale live in deep forests, a tribal people who revere nature and have knowledge of the "Green World," travel routes inside the forest's giant trees. The Qek are the most primitive of the human cultures, jungle dwellers often able to contact the spirits of both the living and the dead.

In comparison, Elves are aloof loners, unaging and immortal and very much concerned with the self. Capable of powerful magics, Elvish attitudes mean that they are either revered or mistrusted. Goblins are the most hated species on Near, often regarded as debased creatures. Doglike and warty, their mentality and physiology is capable of adapting to any environment, the poly-sexual Goblins suffer from an addictive personality, either to a substance or behaviour. There are connections between the three races, but these are part of the game's secrets. The world's newest species are the Ratkin, who are often thought to be thieves. Actually very loyal to their friends, Ratkin have a unique attitude to personal property and are happy to borrow their friend's. Ratkin are most often found in the dead cities of Maldor.

This is the setting for *The Shadow of Yesterday,* a post apocalyptic RPG of low, but pulp fantasy. The creation of Clinton R. Nixon, responsible for the well-received *Donjon,* it is sketched in broad detail, enough to gain the feel and substance of Near, but with plenty of room to add your own detail. Indeed, the author actively encourages this, the aim

being to create a world to explore and adventure in that the GM makes his own as much as it is the author's. Originally published in 2004, the **Revised Edition** has moved from linear mechanics to using **Fudge** dice. The first edition is available to download for free from the publisher's website.

Characters are defined by three pools, rated from one to 10 -- Vigor, Instinct, and Reason -- which are refreshed through physical exertion, social pleasure, and intellectual stimulation respectively. Associated with each pool are various abilities or skills. Three are innate and reactive, and protect the character: Endure (Vigor), React (Instinct), and Resist (Reason). Others, a player is free to select. Abilities are rated from Unskilled (0) through Competent (1), Adept (2), and Master (3) to Grand Master (4). In addition, a character possesses Secrets, special abilities fuelled by points from an appropriate pool. He also has one or more Keys, each a goal, emotional tie, or vow, which is both a roleplaying hook and a means of gaining Experience Points. For example, a character with the Key of Bloodlust gains 1XP every time he defeats someone in combat and 3XP if the defeated is his equal or tougher. A player can create his own Key or select from the book's long list. Interestingly, a Key can be changed under the right circumstances and with a little roleplaying in a Buyoff process. In relinquishing one Key, a player gains enough points to buy another and is encouraged to do so, allowing his character to change and grow. As to the Experience Points gained from a Key in play, it is up to the player to remind the GM rather than have him just hand them out.

To create a character, a species (and culture, if human) is selected, and 11 points are divided between the three pools, no more than seven points per pool. One innate ability is set at Adept level, one at Competent, and the last at Unskilled. Three other abilities are selected at Competent level, and one at Adept. Finally, one Key and one Secret are chosen in addition to any species compulsory ones. Overall, not a difficult process, but it requires some thought. Especially the choice of Key, as this determines the primary method of advancement.

Mechanically, **The Shadow of Yesterday** uses **Fudge** dice. A simple ability check involves rolling three dice and adding it to ability level. This gives a success level, which can never be less than zero. Bonus dice to the check can be drawn from the appropriate pool or granted by another player as a gift if the task is dangerous or fraught. Every player begins a session with a number of gift dice equal to the number of players. Bonus dice actually remove any minuses rolled from a check, whilst penalties remove pluses. An ability check actually involves four steps: Intention, Initiation, Execution, and Effect. It sounds more complex than it really is, but the aim is clarify the check's purpose, necessary because the simple check handles the one task in that roll. Win a chess game, slight a rival, or defeat an enemy in a duel, the outcome of these is handled with the one simple roll.

This allows for quick and easy play, but can be too broad an effect. It means, for example, that a player character can be summarily defeated by an enemy, which might be unfair. In that instance, any player can call a halt and resort to Bringing Down the Pain. This can only be initiated by a player, not by the Story Guide, although he can request it of a player. On the downside, this could derail the Story Guide's game, so some trust is required on both sides. In this mode, a task becomes a series of simple checks giving a more detailed step-by-step outcome. The obvious effect of Bringing Down the Pain is that it enables a player to focus upon an event important to him, whether winning a debate, breaking into a castle, or surviving a brawl. This is highlighted by it being the only way that a Story Guide character can be permanently hurt or defeated. Like the core ability check it handles mental, physical, and social tasks with ease, including harm; plus it enables a game to avoid becoming bogged down in unnecessary detail unless a player wants it to. Of course, its outcome can really hurt a player character, so knowing when to resort to Bringing Down the Pain is a learning process.

Physically, **The Shadow of Yesterday** feels like an independent game, but is well put together and some of the artwork is quite good. A nice touch is that each race and culture has a different art style. Also, the examples are very useful, especially for Bring Down the Pain. Although lacking an index, the content pages do a good job, and actual content is neatly organised.

Most games have the GM retain narrative control, more experimental titles hand it over to the players. **The Shadow of Yesterday** finds a point between the two, with player control over how Experience Points are earned, when to focus upon a particular event, and when to award bonus dice. The rules are simple mechanically, but handle some complex ideas. The setting has familiar elements, but feels very different, the rules ably supporting the differences. Overall, **The Shadow of Yesterday** is an accomplished low fantasy, intriguing in terms of both rules and setting, with room still for

the participants' input into both.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Dunwich Horror (Expansion for Arkham Horror)

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed & developed by Richard Launius, Kevin Wilson, & Greg Benage

Edited by James D. Torr

Artwork by the Call of Cthulhu CCG artists

Cover illustration by Henning Ludvigsen

Graphic design by Scott Nicely

Full-color boxed set with rulebook, expansion game board, eight investigator sheets, markers, & plastic stands, 152 investigator cards, four Ancient Ones, 180 Ancient One cards, 28 monster markers, three Dunwich Horror tokens, four gate markers, & seven rubble markers; $39.95

Arkham can't catch a break, constantly under siege as it is by the horrifying Mythos. The good news: This boxed set, ***Dunwich Horror Expansion,*** is technically another town. The bad news: It, too, was part of Lovecraft's body of work, and he didn't write about idyllic vacation spots. Things Man Was Not Meant to Know are now Things We Didn't Want to See Cross the County Line, and players must deal with events in both locales. Misery shared . . .

There's a new map for the new town, a smaller one that lines up with the main one from the core game, and trains allow investigators to travel between the two. It has its own set of cards for the additional locations including two new dimensions full of mind-stopping weirdness. While the Ancient One is still a looming threat and the game objectives remain the same, this small berg has its own problems, what with Wilbur Whateley's roommate threatening to totter about town stepping on things.

Vortices have opened up about the area, places the investigators cannot go (a good thing, in this case). If monsters stumble into that space, the nexus sucks them up. This keeps the board from getting busy, but every disappearance adds a counter to the Dunwich monster's track. If it fills up, the creature rises and must be put down according to stats drawn from a small deck. He's not as tough as an Ancient One, but he's worse than the average counters wandering Arkham and he raises the terror level every time he moves.

This set doesn't just add a new board, characters, Ancient Ones, and plotlines; it throws several wrenches into the works. Instead of simply going to the hospital or asylum when injured or unstable, an investigator may suffer a specific malady from an Injury or Madness card, pumping flavor and mechanics into the recovery process. Some creatures actively stalk the heroes, elder signs may now burst under dimensional pressure, and Tasks and Missions are shuffled into the Item decks. With these, visiting various locations around town (and sacrificing Items or Allies) draws big rewards . . . like winning the game immediately. Yes, that powerful, and requiring that much effort. And they may be needed, given the deadliness of these new trappings.

There are only so many ways to say Fantasy Flight puts out one heck of a fine product with only top-quality pieces, so

suffice it to say it's good work from markers to board. The artwork was culled from the ***[Call of Cthulhu Collectible Card Game](#)*** and serves just as well here as there . . . even better when some of the pieces have a larger canvas upon which to stretch their tentacles. Like other supplements in the line, the pieces all have a small symbol in the corner so the sets can be separated later.

The game does a lot of housecleaning, too. The original ***Arkham Horror*** board was dark and hard to read, so when they reissued it Fantasy Flight went with more of a wan yellow. The new board segment is the same suffused color. The rule book has information on combining the products; errata and Q&A for both; and an index that makes finding salient points between the two sets much easier. Not only are there corrections for the basic game, replacement cards are provided with the altered text and values printed on them.

If there are too many more supplements for this game, people are going to have to move house just to play. ***Dunwich Horror*** is the first with such extensive component add-ons, though, so while the decks bloat they mostly grow up, not out. It doesn't so much change the way the game is played as add potential threats that split the party's concentration. Learning certain patterns or investigator combos in the original made it easier to anticipate gate appearances and monster effects, but now there are two systems working in tandem to vex anyone who thinks they know all the tricks (along with those merciful new ways to win).

Players can pick and choose the options they'll employ from the ***Dunwich Horror Expansion,*** and that's a wise idea. Using all of it can be a little overwhelming even for veteran investigators (and solo play . . . pfft, good luck), so increasing the bad guys' chances by degrees is like a dial they can set as their skills demand it. The time required gets reset as well, so players are back to over two hours playing time. Not everything here is mandatory, but if the game seemed tough before it's going to regain that nightmare feel. Strange to say, with these Old Ones, ***Arkham Horror*** feels new again.

--Andy Vetromile

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Dungeon, Dragon, Castle, Bookshop

At the end of the classic Nintendo video game *Super Mario Bros. 3,* having traversed eight worlds trying to rescue Princess Toadstool (just like he was trying to do in the first volume of the series), Mario is greeted by a classic line of text: "Thank you Mario! But our princess is in another castle. Just kidding." And then the figure you're talking to reveals herself to be, in fact, Princess Toadstool. Happy music, closing credits roll.

To explain the joke for those who didn't live the experience the first time, the original *Super Mario Bros.* has the player traversing eight worlds, each with four levels, with the last level being a difficult castle. At the end of the first seven of those castles, one of the Princess' retainers is there, saying, "Thank you Mario! But our princess is in another castle." The game continues, on to the next world, 'til the game is completed (or, as was probably more common, you were defeated and had to start all over again.)

But that "Thank you Mario!" was withheld in the third game of the series until that last level. So the player, who -- by this point -- has been playing for probably hours and hours straight (remember that this game was before save games became commonplace) sees a message that he will immediately associate with the need to begin the process again . . . possibly seven more times. And then it's revealed to be a joke.

Now, I was using a hint book when I played it the first time, so I wasn't fooled ("I'm on the last page; there can't be more game!"), but I wonder how many kids got that game as soon as it came out, devoted however many hours to get to the end, and burst into tears of frustration at the prospect of *continuing* to play.

To be honest, that entire anecdote was mere side-track prelude to my true anecdote.

Anyway, I was reminded of this tale this week when I decided to go on my own personal quest. See, writing my column last week reminded me that I meant to track down the last issues of *Dragon* and *Dungeon* since I'd missed purchasing them at GenCon. In fact, due to illness, work, deadlines, and the demands of vocal offspring, the whole thing had slipped my mind until I was recounting my GenCon experiences.

My delay made my stomach sink; I realized that the final issues had been shipped to distributors weeks ago, and -- if I was to have any chance at getting them -- I would need to act *fast*.

Anyway, three days later, I finally got enough time aside to go on my quest. (I'm learning that "fast" has a different meaning when you have kids.) I don't bother trying to track down any Friendly Local Game Shops, since the nearest ones were a good half-hour away at best. (My reluctance to start a game-related search at a game shop is probably fodder for another column . . .) No, instead I checked out the Periodical racks of my local bookseller; I have a Borders less than five minutes from my house, and if you squint and look at it at just the right angle, it almost resembles an actual bookstore. So I checked it out, and scoured the magazine section. Nothing.

I asked for help from a clerk . . . a decision that will no doubt strike many of you as a futile gesture. Many of you would be absolutely correct. After 15 minutes of inquiry, I was able to get a half-hearted notice that, indeed, the shop probably did stock the two magazines in question. They weren't sure when the new issues were coming in. ("Don't hold your breath" was my internal annotation.)

Anyway, having struck out completely, I realized that they probably *did* have the magazines, but were sold out. This renewed my efforts to try *another* shop. Fortunately, we have a Barnes & Noble about 15 minutes away from us. Amazingly, this one had the *Dragon* but not the *Dungeon.* I realized that I was on the right track, and knew that time was of the essence if I was going to have any shot at buying it. The Barnes & Noble had two copies of the magazine in question, and -- collector that I am -- I picked up both of them. Then I noticed that the cost was $12 per issue. I put one back.

About 20 minutes away from the Barnes & Noble is a Waldenbooks, a shop that, if you quint and look at it from just the right angle, almost resembles a Borders. They didn't have anything. About 20 minutes from *that* store, I stopped at

the biggest Barnes & Noble that I've seen in town -- a shop that, to this point, had escaped my radar -- and searched their magazines. They had the *Dragon* (which I already had).

Finally, we found ourselves on the side of town with a Borders next to the game shop (which is located inside a mall). I stopped in there, and -- to my amazement -- there was one copy each of the *Dragon* and *Dungeon* left. I snatched up the single issue I needed, and darted for the door, pausing only to pay. (That one was $12 as well . . . meaning that, were I to have followed through on my original plan to buy two of each, I would've spent almost $50 to buy support material for a game I have never played.)

And so, two and a half hours later, I returned home, having successfully completed my quest that I had originally assumed would take about 10 minutes.

Anyway, I've written [before](#) about how it can be very useful to have motivation be as small as possible for the adventure to proceed. By the same token, it can be useful for a GM to have the *progression* of an adventure be as small as possible to ensure continued advancement. In my own quest, if the second bookshop hadn't had either magazine, I probably would've given up and gone home. If the fifth bookshop and the game shop hadn't had the *Dungeon* issue, I would've gone home partially successful. I achieved *just* enough success to keep me going.

Finding that sweet spot of advancement in an RPG is a challenge; if there's too little forward progress, the players will justifiably grow bored and probably stop showing up. But if it's too fast, then the GM makes more work for himself, needing to continue coming up with additional steps down the road which may hasten the campaign's conclusion (or, at least, getting it closer to a point where it'll jump the shark). Even worse, the GM might provide too much forward momentum initially, only to try to rein in the campaign later . . . which can lead to frustration to players who are used to more rapid progression.

As a thought exercise, think of which television series have advanced too quickly for your tastes -- shows that revealed their secrets too quickly, and perhaps found themselves needing to "backpedal" or come up with other contrivances. Or think of those shows that revealed themselves too slowly (*Twin Peaks* springs to mind for me), probably resulting in their cancelation. *The X-Files* is almost certainly a show that can be used as an example of something about revelatory pacing.

Regardless, rest confident knowing that, if you go to enough castles, your princess will eventually be there. The only question is: Will you care when you find her?

--Steven Marsh

GURPS Accelerator

Basic Armed Combat Options

by Matt Riggsby

Obviously, one of the things you want to do in combat is to hurt your opponent. However, it's equally important, if not more so, not to get hurt yourself. *GURPS* provides a number of options to help you do both, going beyond the basics of just hacking away at your enemy. This article provides a brief beginner's guide to what they are and when to use them, with particular attention to armed melee combat rather than unarmed or missile combat. This article is limited to the most versatile maneuvers in the Basic Set, so it should be applicable across the widest possible range of campaigns and situations. *GURPS Martial Arts* provides a wide range of other options, but we won't be getting in to those here.

Hurting Your Opponent

> ### What You Already Know
>
> This article assumes a general knowledge of how combat works in *GURPS* (for example, what a to-hit roll is and what active defenses are), but not a complete command of the full range of combat rules in the Basic Set.

In *GURPS,* the best defense really is a good offense. Hurting your opponent isn't good for you just because it gets your opponent closer to zero hit points. Shock penalties and the special effects of hitting specific locations can also translate a successful attack into an opening you can use for your *next* attack. In order to hurt your opponent, you must make your attack roll, make sure your opponent doesn't make his defense roll, and do enough damage to overcome his DR. One of the best ways to take care of the first two is to *take your time*. Two valuable maneuvers don't have the slightest chance of hurting an opponent, but will help hurt him on a later turn: Evaluate and Feint. Evaluate can give you a bonus of up to +3 to hit your opponent, and Feint can reduce your opponent's active defense. If you're facing a relatively weak opponent, you can probably afford to simply attack every turn. However, if you're evenly matched, you can trade immediate effect for a better chance of success on later attacks.

Even without Evaluate, Feint is a very good option for anyone with higher skill than their opponent. Taking two turns to Feint and then Attack a low-skill mook will often net you a greater chance of landing a telling stroke against him than attacking for two consecutive turns. However, since Feints tend to amplify skill differences, it's not so effective against opponents who are more skilled than you are. But keep in mind that you can increase your Feint as a technique based on your weapon skill. If you've got a limited number of points to spend on combat skills, you might buy a moderate weapon skill and an improved Feint. You may not be as good an all-around fighter, but you'll get through your opponent's defenses more often than you might otherwise.

The drawback with Evaluate is that using it requires that you have time. Using it effectively requires that your own defenses are reasonably good and that you're not facing multiple dangerous opponents. However, if you're facing multiple opponents or an opponent with better skill, superior armor, or greater strength, you may get hurt faster than whoever is at the business end of your own weapon. You may need to use some less ideal options if you're pressed for time. The choices here are Deceptive Attack, Rapid Strike, and All-Out Attack. The problem with the first two is that they're relatively weak attacks, providing substantial penalties to your to-hit roll, while the problem with AoA is that it gives you a good attack at the price of leaving you with no defense.

Still, circumstances may lead you to use them. Use Deceptive Attack when you've got skill to burn but you can't get through your opponent's active defenses. Likewise, use Rapid Strike when you've got a very good chance to hit but need to do damage faster. Use AoA when you really want to hit your opponent *right now*. Though it leaves you open to attack, it can be very much worth the risk if you can end the fight in a single turn. It's also versatile. You've got a choice of a bonus to hit (good if your skill is low), extra damage (good if your opponent has heavy armor), reducing your opponent's defenses via the Feint and Attack option (good if your opponent has good active defenses), or an extra

attack (a good all-around option, particularly if your opponent is facing multiple enemies himself and can't exploit the weaknesses of all of them). As with regular attacks, they're all more effective when backed up by Evaluate and Feint. You might, for example, Evaluate your opponent for several turns, use the bonus on a more effective Feint, then use Deceptive Attack to further reduce his defenses or All-Out Attack to hit him with a pair of blows and put him down in a single turn.

One defensive option will help you hurt your opponent is to wear heavy armor. If you've got DR 3 or better, bare-handed attackers can hurt themselves when they hit you. You still don't want to get hit, of course, but it can be comforting to know that if the Bruce Lee wannabe manages to get through your dodge or parry, he might hurt himself on your mail shirt.

If you've got good skill but are facing an opponent with lots of DR and hit points, remember that you don't have to take him down to 0 hit points in order to win the fight. It requires more skill, but if you can do enough damage to specific hit locations to disable a limb, you make him a lot less effective. Disabling a weapon-side hand or arm reduces an opponent's ability to attack, while disabling a foot or leg essentially immobilizes most opponents and gives you as much room as you need to maneuver. Leg/foot attacks can be particularly effective because, in addition to slowing an opponent and therefore hurting his Dodge score, it gives you the option of running away if you still can't beat him. You might also target a lightly armored location (extremities typically have lower DR than the torso) in hopes of incurring some shock penalties, then follow that up the next turn with some flavor of All-Out Attack when your opponent is less likely to be able to take advantage of your lack of defenses.

Finally, if it appears that you can't get through your opponent's armor, consider non-lethal attacks, where high DR doesn't come into play: Disarming and Sweep. Both, if you can pull them off, put your opponent at a considerable disadvantage and are particularly useful if you need to keep your enemies alive. Like a Feint, both maneuvers requires a contest of skill, putting the more skilled fighter at a distinct advantage. Sweep has the additional issue of being available only with long weapons like spears and polearms. If you're armed with an axe or sword, you won't be able to attempt it.

Not Getting Hit

Now that you can hurt your opponent, you need to be sure you don't get hurt by him first. In **GURPS,** a warrior doesn't survive fights by being able to take a lot of damage; he survives by never having to take damage at all. Putting aside tactical considerations (like ambushing your enemies and getting in the first good hit) and superior equipment (if you do get hit, it's nice to have DR to soak up the damage), he does that by having good active defenses.

The basic defensive option is the Retreat, which grants a bonus to any active defense. Terrain permitting, you can do this pretty much automatically when fighting a single opponent. However, you can only Retreat once per turn, so use it carefully if you're facing multiple opponents. You may choose to stand your ground against a smaller, more lightly armed opponent who is likely to do minimal damage and back off from a bigger one who can do a lot of damage in a single hit. Retreat gives an improved bonus to fencing weapons, which makes them a good defensive weapons for many purposes, but don't forget that lighweight fencing weapons have a good chance of breaking if they're used to parry large, heavy weapons like battleaxes and two-handed swords.

If you've got Acrobatics skill, you can attempt an Acrobatic Dodge. This is a bit trickier. Unlike Retreat, which automatically gives you a bonus, Acrobatic Dodge involves a skill roll, so you can fail, and if you do, you get a *penalty.* Therefore, you probably shouldn't attempt it if your skill is very low. And like Retreat, you can only do it once per turn, so again, if you're facing multiple opponents, use it judiciously.

Just as there are attacks which limit you, there is a limiting defense: All-Out Defense. All-Out Defense is the way to go if you've just been badly wounded and are suffering from shock penalties. If you're already suffering skill penalties, your attack is unlikely to succeed, so you may as well bolster your defenses until next turn. If you're a less skilled fighter in a multi-person combat, you may also want to use it to stall for time while your companions deal with other opponents; in a few turns, they may be able to come help you out.

that shock penalties will negate his bonuses, or you may continue to Evaluate, counting on your own defenses to hold off his next attack and building up a greater bonus to use against him.

So what do you do if all else fails and you've got lower strength, less skill, and weaker armor than your opponent? Take the *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* option: run away. Turning around and running in the opposite direction is often a bad idea, since it takes more of your movement and presents your largely defenseless back to your opponent for an essentially free hit. Instead, try to keep your facing as much as possible. If you need to run away and the terrain permits, try to just turn a bit to one side and run that way. That forces your opponent to waste more of *his* movement in turning, giving you what is surely a badly needed head start. If you've got a very high DX or the terrain is very constricted, you may even consider Evading *through* the hex your opponent occupies. It's very risky, but if you can pull it off, your opponent will have to do a 180-degree turn to pursue you.

Buying Skills

Of course, if you're going to attack or defend successfully, you need the right skills. If you're building a character who is likely to be in a lot of fights, even if he's not primarily a warrior, make sure that his primary weapon skill is not less than 14. Although 12 is the nominal standard for professional competence in a skill, 14 takes a fighter up to an important statistical point. Not only is he likely to hit his target most of the time (about 90%), he can absorb modest penalties while keeping a reasonable chance to hit. Most importantly, though, his basic parry reaches 10, which means that he can successfully parry about half the time even without using up his limited additional defensive options. With a shield, he'll successfully defend well over half the time.

A number of useful maneuvers are available as techniques, most notably for our purposes Feint, Disarming, and Sweep. Feint is, in the final analysis, probably the most cost-effective maneuver, since you'll need to use it more often in most settings, particularly monster-rich fantasy settings. The others are useful in some circumstance, certainly, but Feint can be used against any opponent who might defend himself, whereas Disarming can't be used against unarmed martial artists and monsters who don't use weapons, and Sweep is limited to certain weapons and gives your opponent a choice between stats, giving him a better chance of finding one which is greater than your effective skill.

If you've got a low weapon skill, you may be tempted to buy up a number of techniques to take the edge off of your lack of offensive ability. However, if you find yourself looking at buying more than two or three techniques, strongly consider just buying up your underlying skill instead. The special abilities are nice, certainly, but since they're governed by the underlying skill, it's more cost-effective to buy "in bulk" rather than one at a time. Buying a level of the underlying skill will often cost fewer points than buying up each of four or more techniques, *and* it will give you better to-hit and defense rolls.

Another skill to strongly consider is Acrobatics. It may seem not very cost-effective if you're just buying it to use Acrobatic Dodge, particularly if you've got a low DX. However, given the skill's other uses, Acrobatics skill is a very good all-around investment for an adventurer (for example, to reduce falling damage and recovering from attempts to knock you over), so if at all possible, buy it up to at least skill-12, if not higher.

Extra Effort

You can generally assume that all of the options above are available unless your GM says otherwise, but the rules here are specifically noted as optional, so be sure to check with your GM before you attempt to use them. If the Extra Effort

rules are allowed in combat, warriors can burn fatigue for extra effect. There's Feverish Defense for a better defense, Flurry of Blows to buy extra attacks, and Mighty Blows for extra damage. One use of Extra Effort which *isn't* marked specifically as being optional is increasing your Move. If you're not a great warrior, remember that you can use Extra Effort to help you run away, or to close with distant enemies more quickly. You may also want to invest in the Breath Control skill or even the Fit or Very Fit advantages to help you get your fatigue back faster.

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Spaceships*

GURPS Spaceships is the first book in a planned eight-book PDF series. It focuses on spacecraft design, space operations, and space travel, with the intent of producing a player-and-GM friendly set of game mechanics to support *GURPS Space* that provides an alternative to the more complex *GURPS* Vehicles Design System and modular design systems.

The first book on spaceships was actually twice as long as it was originally planned . . . but even so, a few sections were omitted for reasons of space, and some of these are presented below. (Others were moved to later books in the series, which will include both additional rules and plenty of sample spacecraft and discussion of different spacecraft classes.)

Reaction Drives: Behind the Numbers

The reaction drives in *GURPS Spaceships* are rated for their acceleration in gravities (G) per engine and their delta-V in miles per second (mps) per tank of reaction mass installed. Here's how these numbers were derived from real or speculative spacecraft engines.

Acceleration (G): This is equal to 5% of the thrust-to-weight ratio of the engine. For example, if an advanced nuclear rocket engine is able to produce a thrust of two pounds for every pound that it weighs (a thrust to weight ratio of 2:1), its acceleration per engine system in *GURPS Spaceships* would be $0.05 \times 2 = 0.1$G. Sticklers for realism can include the weight of heat radiators and other important components, not just the engine itself. Delta-V per tank of reaction of mass (mps): This is derived from the specific impulse (traditionally abbreviated Isp) of the engine, a measure of space drive efficiency. To get delta-V in mps per tank of reaction mass divide specific impulse by 3,000 (or alternatively, divide the exhaust velocity in meters per second by 29,400). For example, if a speculative nuclear rocket engine is known to have Isp 900, it would be rated for 900/3,000 = 0.3 mps of delta-V per tank. (Alternatively, use exhaust velocity/29,400).

Ares-Class Battle Cruiser (TL10^)

"Manufactured in the Deimos navy yards, these sleek, wedge-shaped vessels were the pride of the Free Martian Navy. In the dark days after the Terran star fleet was lost at Second Jupiter, they carried the fight to the enemy systems, harassing convoys and outpost star bases. Their design harkened back to old wet navy battleships, with a powerful all-beam armament of varying sizes, including a large tertiary battery for defense against small craft. However, they suffered at long ranges against missile firing ships."
-- Red Star Fleet: History of the Third Space War

This warship was originally supposed to appear in the sample spacecraft, but was cut to save space. It's an example of a limited superscience design: a very heavy cruiser-sized vessel is intended to kill destroyers and cruisers, and to raid commerce. Built with a SM+12 streamlined hull, it masses 100,000 tons and is about 1,000 feet long.

Front Hull

[1-3]   Nanocomposite Armor (total dDR 210).
[4-5!]   Major Batteries (each with a fixed mount 30GJ UV laser).*
[6]   Tactical Array (comm/sensor 13).*
[core]   Control Room (Complexity 10 computer network, basic array with comm/sensor 11, 20 control stations).*

Central Hull

[1-2] Nanocomposite Armor (total dDR 140).

[3] Defensive ECM.*

[4!] Secondary Battery (10 turrets, with 300 MJ rapid fire particle beams).*

[5] Habitat (310 cabins, two briefing rooms, three labs, eight offices, four minifac fabricators, a 30-bed sickbay, and 1,200 tons cargo).*

[6!!] Super Stardrive Engine (FTL-2)*.

Rear Hull

[1] Nanocomposite Armor (dDR 70).

[2-3] Fusion Torch Engines (0.5G acceleration each).*

[4!] Major Battery (turret with rapid fire 3GJ UV laser).*

[5-6] Fuel Tanks (total of 10,000 tons hydrogen, total 30 mps delta-V reserve).

[core] Antimatter Reactor (four Power Points).*

* 10 workspaces per system.
! high-energy system.
!! high-energy system requiring 1-2 Power Points.

Ares is designed with artificial gravity. Her basic complement are 190 crew: 20 control crew, 10 turret gunners, 10 clerks, six scientists, 120 technicians, and three medics.

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
Piloting/TL10 (High Performance Spacecraft)												
10^	Ares-class Battle Cruiser	300	-2/5	13	1G/30 mps	100,000	1,262	+12	620ASV	210/140/70	2×	$18.864B

Top air speed is 2,500 mph.

Drive Hazards

Antimatter plasma rockets and torches, fusion rockets and torches, super fusion torches, and all fusion pulse drives produce plenty of heat and hard radiation behind the spacecraft! Although the drives can be operated safely, environmentally conscious authorities are very likely restrict their operation near populated orbits or habitable worlds. This could either result in a total ban from use in inhabited areas, or it might just limit them to operations in out-of-the-way deserts, oceans, or high orbit. These drives may be LC2.

Antimatter pion and antimatter pion torch engines, and (probably) total conversion and super conversion torches will produce directional and highly lethal energy beams. Their danger zone may extend for hundreds or even thousands of miles behind the vessel! Such engines are likely to banned from operation anywhere near a settled planet's space. Space ports may be placed on distant asteroids, or ships may require the equivalent of tug boats to boost them out far enough that they can safely use drives. LC1.

Nuclear saltwater rockets and external pulsed plasma engines produce continuous or pulsed nuclear explosions outside the ship. If you take off from the ground with one of these drives, you'll be leaving behind a big radioactive crater . . . As above, but even more stringent restrictions: LC0!

Ramscoops generate magnetic fields at lethal intensities in front of the vessel, likely covering hundreds or thousands of miles. They're also LC0.

Space drives not listed above aren't free of hazard, but if properly operated aren't likely to raise the hackles of local spaceport authorities. However, there may be specific regulations ("make sure a mass driver uses very fine dust!") but these are likely to apply to any spaceship operations. Superscience reactionless drives and stardrive engines may be

perfectly safe or have nasty side effects, at the GM's discretion.

The space combat maneuvers required to actually use high-energy reaction drives as weapon are covered in future volumes of the series.

Spacecraft Systems Optional Rules

A number of rules tweaks and options were developed late in the design process . . . some, like Cosmic Systems or water reaction mass, made it into the book; others came a bit too late to fit into the actual manuscript.

Ramscoops: Magsail Braking

If a ramscoop operating in interstellar space is activated at speeds above magsail velocitity (about 375 mps) but below minimum the ramscoop velocity (about 1,800 mps) it functions as a magsail (*GURPS Spaceships,* p. 25) to decelerate the spacecraft. Thus, a ramscoop-equipped ship can use its field to (slowly) decelerate from high sublight speeds without using reaction mass.

Handling of Multi-Stage Spacecraft

The rules allow a multi-stage spacecraft's lower stages may be controlled from a Control Room in a smaller upper stage. However, it should also suffer a Handling penalty since the attitude thrusters, etc., are also less massive. (This was ignored in the basic rules, since most multi-stage spacecraft don't maneuver much until they've ejected all their lower stages, instead usually just boosting in one particular direction!) To determine the penalty, find the SM of the stage containing the control room. Compare that to the SM of the lowest stage it's still attached to. This gives the Hnd penalty.

Example: A SM+8 spacecraft is a four-stage rocket. The last stage, with the Control Room, is a SM+5 spacecraft. While all four stages are attached, the spacecraft will suffer a -3 to Handling.

Phased Arrays

Advanced laser weapons may incorporate phased array optics, allowing a flat laser emitter composed of numerous cells that can project either a single powerful beam or multiple smaller beams, of variable intensity.

Any major battery equipped with a fixed mount laser or ultraviolet laser may be designated a phased array. Phased arrays batteries appear two TLs later than usual (TL11 for laser and TL12 for ultraviolet lasers) and cannot be combined with the improved, rapid fire, or very rapid fire options. A phased array laser or UV laser has the option of firing as a rapid fire weapon at one-tenth output or as a very rapid fire weapon at 1/100 output. In addition, a phased array can, if it does not fire, perform the active sensor (ladar) or laser communicator functions (only) of an equivalent SM tactical array.

Small Upper Stage [Front] (TL7)

This is similar to an Upper Stage, but it takes up two systems in the front hull, rather than an entire six-system front section. The upper stage spacecraft will be two SMs smaller; for example, a SM+10 spacecraft has a SM+8 spacecraft as its small upper stage.

(If a hit location roll indicates either of these two systems was struck, instead roll hit location and apply damage to the front hull of the upper stage spacecraft). Otherwise, use the normal rules for upper stages.

Notes for Deck Plans

GMs may wish to create deck plans for spaceships and space stations that follow the general design layout, with front, central, and rear sections divided into individual systems. Since spacecraft designs are based on their mass, the actual size of any system will vary somewhat due to differences in density. The table below shows the number of one-yard hexes per system:

Deck Plans Table

Hull	Armor	Other Systems
SM+5	neg.	2-3
SM+6	neg.	3-5
SM+7	0-2	6-15
SM+8	2-5	16-50
SM+9	6-15	51-150
SM+10	16-50	151-500
SM+11	51-50	501-1,500
SM+12	151-500	1,501-5,000
SM+13	501-1,500	5,001-15,000
SM+14	1,501-5,000	15,001-50,000
SM+15	5,001-15,000	50,001-150,000

Armor is "solid" spaceship hull. Cargo holds, fuel tanks, hangar bays, and open space systems will be 90% or more empty spaces, while habitats, and passenger seating will be 70-80% devoted to open space for the interiors of cabins, rooms, or corridors; the rest will be machinery. Factories will likely be about 50% machinery and 50% open space for assembly lines, etc. Most other systems will be 90% or more filled with machinery, with any remaining space devoted to rooms for workspaces, corridors, or ducts. One exception to the above are control room systems, in which (on larger vessels) most of the mass is distributed over the hull. A control room will generally take up at 3-5 hexes per control station; the rest of the mass is normally devoted to thruster and antenna systems outside the hull.

Drop Capsules

These tiny spacecraft are normally carried in hangar bays, though they may also replace 32cm or larger missiles and be carried in missile launchers. They are smaller than standard craft and have only attitude thrusters, but can reenter atmosphere as per Soft Landing System. See *GURPS Ultra- Tech* (p. 232) for detailed descriptions of their capabilities.

Life Pod (TL9): Four-person escape capsule with 90 man-days life support.

Drop Capsule (TL10): A basic landing capsule; not reusable; it breaks open a mile up to allow occupants (or packages) to descend via parachute, parawing, grav belt, etc.

Stealth Capsule (TL10): As above, but packed with countermeasures with a stealth hull. Either treat as if it had three Defensive ECM systems, or use the more detailed rules in Ultra-Tech. LC2.

Drop Capsules Table

TL	Vehicle	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt	Load	SM	Occ.	dDR	Cost
9	Life Pod	5	-5/1	13	0.1G/0.3 mps	1	0.5	+2	4SV	2/10/2	$100K
10	Drop Capsule	5	--	13	--	1	0.5	+2	2SV	2/10/2	$10K
10	Stealth Capsule	5	--	13	--	1	0.3	+2	1SV	2/10/2	$50K

Grand Canyon Sweetness: The Kinkaid Enigma (Part Two)

"According to the story related to the Gazette *by Mr. Kinkaid, the archaeologists of the Smithsonian Institute, which is financing the expeditions, have made discoveries which almost conclusively prove that the race which inhabited this mysterious cavern, hewn in solid rock by human hands, was of oriental origin, possibly from Egypt, tracing back to Ramses. If their theories are borne out by the translation of the tablets engraved with hieroglyphics, the mystery of the prehistoric peoples of North America, their ancient arts, who they were and whence they came, will be solved. Egypt and the Nile, and Arizona and the Colorado will be linked by a historical chain running back to ages which staggers the wildest fancy of the fictionist."*
-- "Explorations in Grand Canyon," *Arizona Gazette* (April 5, 1909)

Welcome back to that Grandest of Canyons, and to our own descent of the rapids of weirdness that foam through it. Last time, we set up our base camp at a Temple discovered (if it was discovered) by one G.E. Kinkaid (if there was a G.E. Kinkaid) in 1909. Full of mummies and mystery, it won our hearts from the first. So what was the Temple, if there was a Temple and not just an April Fools' Day story that ran late? Well, it might have been an Anasazi ruin, seeing as they lived in the Canyon, and had temples and mummies. But that's kind of a cop-out, even if the Anasazi did, er, cop out. Like Coronado, we've looked for our Golden City of Cibola where we could. We've followed the twists of our mystery stream past Roman Jews in Tuscon and Chinese Buddhists in Fusang, and pored over the potpourri of myth and lore that the Smithsonian's hand-picked cartographer, Clarence Dutton, poured out on the Canyon's maps. But we're no closer to finding the head of this metaphorical stream than ever.

"He said there is a mountain inside the Grand Canyon called the Temple of Isis. . . . He told me that he and his friend went into this area. They were both expert mountain climbers trained in survival. He says that as he and his teammate approached the mountain, they found an actual stone pyramid made by human hands not far from the mountain. It was large enough to be impressive to these two researchers. To reach the Isis Temple, they had to climb a rock face that went straight up about 800 feet. . . . According to the article in the Arizona Gazette *there were 32 large doorways entering the temple high above ground level. My friend said that they were still there, but looked like someone had attempted to destroy them. They picked one of the "doorways" that looked in the best condition and climbed up to it. When they reached it, they found that the opening went into the mountain about 40 feet, where rubble blocked their way. However, above this doorway was a perfectly round cutout about six feet in diameter and several inches deep that had been created by human hands. Human beings had definitely been there. . . . "*
-- Drunvalo Melchizedek, *Ancient Secret of the Flower of Life, Vol II*

So where, or rather when, were we? Oh yes, the second millennium B.C., and the "time of Rameses" the *Arizona Gazette* plumped for. Which is to say, ancient Egypt, much like Arizona in being dry, hot, and strewn with enigmatic mummies and temples. (Nothing loth, Dutton not only spangled the map of the Canyon with Isis Temple, but with Osiris Temple, Tower of Set, Tower of Ra, Horus Temple, and Cheops Pyramid.) The Egyptologist Farouk el-Baz has proposed that the Pyramids of Giza (roughly contemporary with the Emperor Yu) might have been modeled on three hills in the Kharg Oasis west of Luxor. A similar triplicity occurs in the heart of the (Canyon-adjacent) Hopi Indian country, as the three mesas of Tuuwanasavi (the sacred heart of Hopi geography) eerily mirror Mts. Humphreys, Agassiz, and Fremont. And of course both the Pyramids and the Three Mesas match Orion's triple-starred belt in fine spooky fettle.

In *The Orion Zone,* Gary David also notes that the word *kachina,* the intercessor-gods of the Hopi, begins with *ka,* the Egyptian soul (which went, of course, into the western desert upon death), and that (to his satisfaction at least) *kachina* seems to be a borrowed word in Hopi, Zuni, and Keresan alike. Meanwhile, excitable epigrapher Barry Fell has discovered (again, to his satisfaction, at least) Libyan script on rocks in Big Bend National Park and in "Anubis Cave" (complete with jackal-god) in the Oklahoma Panhandle. (Another place Coronado went looking for Cibola, interestingly enough.) Best of all, Fell identifies the Zuni language as a dialect of ancient Libyan, and buttresses it with Herodotos' description of the language of a tribe in extreme western Libya as "unlike that of any other people."

Herodotos calls that tribe the Troglodytes, the "dwellers in holes." And where did the Zuni and Anasazi dwell in Herodotos' time? In holes in the ground, or properly "pit-houses." Herodotos' Troglodytes eat snakes (as do Pueblo Indians even now), and dwell at the Fountain of the Sun (which Pliny puts "far to the west"), an intriguing match for the "Birthplace of the Sun" in the *Shan Hai Ching,* no? No? What if I told you that a later chronicle of Fusang says that the women of "a nearby country" took serpents for husbands, and lived in holes? That last brings us back to our hole-dwelling Libyan Troglodytes, and the women of the Hopi certainly take Snake Clansmen for husbands. So from Libyan Troglodytes to Egyptian cavern-carvers is just a hop and a skip.

"A retired Ohio doctor has discovered relics of an ancient civilization, whose men were 8 or 9 feet tall, in the Colorado desert near the Arizona-Nevada-California line, an associate said today. Howard E. Hill of Los Angeles, speaking before the Transportation Club, disclosed that several well-preserved mummies were taken yesterday from caverns in an area roughly 180 miles square, extending through much of southern Nevada from Death Valley, Calif. across the Colorado River into Arizona."
-- "Trace of Giants Found in Desert," *San Diego Union* (August 5, 1947)

Much like the hop and a skip from the Grand Canyon to Death Valley, where another news squib informs us of another revolutionary archaeological discovery that somehow went nowhere, after going underground. The "retired Ohio doctor" was one F. Bruce Russell, who claimed in 1946 to have fallen (in 1931) through the floor of a mineshaft somewhere on the eastern side of Death Valley and discovered a complex of 32 caverns running from Death Valley into (you guessed it) the Grand Canyon. Inside were the standard hieroglyphics (including "devices and markings similar to those now used by the Masonic order"), mummies (like Kinkaid's mummies, all male), depictions of prehistoric animals (plus the bones of "elephants and tigers"), and two or three enigmas. Not only were the mummies giants (well, giant*ish*), but they wore gray clothing "taken from an animal unknown today." Not quite the alchemically-hardened copper of the Kinkaid find, but still, pretty neat.

Even more intriguing are the odd parallels between Russell's story and one published by Death Valley local historian Bourke Lee in his 1932 book *Death Valley Men.* Some time in the 1920s, it seems, one Fred White also fell through a mineshaft, this time on the western edge of Death Valley, in the Panamint Mountains. He also found a vast complex of temples, palaces, and suchlike, full of mummies, weapons, "jeweled aprons" (Masonic devices, anyone?), and a 90-foot idol, all surrounded by heaps of gold, to boot. (In a lovely touch, the complex was apparently lit by gaslights.) Enormous "windows" set into the high mountainside looked down onto Death Valley, and White believed the complex' builders "used to land their boats there." White recruited some partners, and like Kinkaid informed the "Smithsonian Institute" of his findings. But by the time Washington sent two scientists out to investigate, a great storm had shifted all the landmarks around, and White couldn't lead them to it. They went back East, and White and his two partners vanished in Death Valley, searching for their lost city.

Could Russell have read Lee's book and picked up the story to feed to his own prospective partners in "Amazing Explorations, Inc."? Well, he apparently had to fool not just the *San Diego Union* and the credulous Hill but an archaeologist of some local repute, Dr. Daniel Bovee. (Admittedly, since Bovee apparently dated the find to 78,000 B.C., he may not have been so hard to deceive.) But if it was all a scam to bilk money from his partners, Russell worked harder at it than most, right up until he, just like White, disappeared in Death Valley. His car was found weeks later with a burst radiator; Russell's suitcase was in the back seat, but the "artifacts" from the find had also disappeared with him. Where did they go? Or just as interestingly, where did they come from? Well, according to the unimpeachable *San Diego Union,* the hieroglyphs Russell found in Death Valley "bear a resemblance to what is known of those from the lost continent of Atlantis." Now, we're getting somewhere.

"Which Jared came forth with his brother and their families, with some others and their families, from the great tower, at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people, and swore in his wrath that they should be scattered upon all the face of the earth; and according to the word of the Lord the people were scattered. . . . And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord, and the Lord had compassion upon Jared; therefore he did not confound the language of Jared; and Jared and his brother were not confounded. . . . And it came to pass that the Lord did hear the brother of Jared, and had compassion upon him, and said unto him: . . . [T]hou shalt go at the head of them down into the valley which is northward."
-- *Book of Mormon,* Ether 1:33-42

It has doubtless occurred to us all that the multicultural relics in the 1909 Temple might be not from a blend like Tibetan Chinese or Roman Jews or Libyan Egyptians but from a civilization that predates all others. From [Atlantis](), perhaps? Sure, if you want to call the miraculous copper in the Temple orichalcum. From Sipapu, the legendary cave world of the Hopi ancestors? Sure, and maybe the Temple is Palatkwapi, the lost Red City of the Hopi. But in the mythic American West, the go-to culture that comes from a time before "multi" is the Jaredites, straight out of the *Book of Mormon.* The Canyon's first scientific explorer, John Wesley Powell, had a Mormon translator and factotum, Jacob Hamblin, who had already scouted the Canyon in 1858. Hamblin was also the guy who told Powell that the Indians, rather than the Sons of Dan, had killed Powell's three men. But wait, you remind me - didn't the Indians confess? Indeed they did, and the guy who translated their "confession" was none other than the singularly informative Jacob Hamblin. All this comes in mighty handy if his secret masters actually had the Howlands and Dunn whacked to hide the Lost Cavern of the Jaredites, hmmm?

So, the Jaredites. The Jaredites are the descendants and hangers-on of Jared, a patriarch who lived in Babel as Nimrod built his famous Tower. I'm quite fond of the speculation that the Mormon "Jared" is the same as the Biblical "Jerah," who is one of the begats in Genesis 10 whose line just winks out with no closure. Better still, in the time of Jerah's father Joktan, "the earth was divided." Sounds like discovering America, or even God creating a giant Canyon with the last of the Flood water, to me. (And for bonus points, "Joktan" is awful close to "Yucatan.") But anyhow, Jared wanted no part of the upcoming confusion of speech, and so he and his lit out for the territory, specifically, North America. The line of Jared, sad to say, did not rightly prosper. There was a plague of serpents, and lots of struggles over kingship and what-not, and then one Akish wrecked everything by forming "a secret combination" using "the oaths which were given by them of old who also sought power, which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning."

"It is only within the last few years that most people have stopped thinking of the West as a new land. I suppose the idea gained ground because our own especial civilisation happens to be new there; but nowadays explorers are digging beneath the surface and bringing up whole chapters of life that rose and fell among these plains and mountains before recorded history began. . . . We hear rumours of still older things, too . . ."
-- H.P. Lovecraft and Zealia Bishop, "The Mound"

And just how far back is "the beginning," anyhow? One very strange detail where the Kinkaid narrative echoes the Death Valley story is Kinkaid's discovery of "steps leading from [the] entrance some thirty yards to what was, at the time the cavern was inhabited, the level of the river." And said level of said river is now something like 1,900 feet below those steps, the same distance the floor of Death Valley lies below Fred White's putative Panamint mountainside "windows." In the immortal words of Bugs Bunny, "Watch that last step: it's a doozy!" The canyon itself is no more than 2 million years old, so applying a rule of thumb estimate to erosion time -- the canyon is only 45% eroded when the Temple Builders are working -- we get a date for the Temple of 1.1 million years ago. Now, of course, if we accept conventional, hidebound geology, it seems that most of the canyon's erosion took place in the first 800,000 years of its existence, which (after applying the same metric) gives us 1.64 million years ago as an outside limit for the Temple's construction.

There is an out, however, or sort of one, short of embracing creationism. (A book for sale in the Grand Canyon Park Center gift shop gives the Canyon's formation date as 2348 B.C. Or thereabouts.) The Canyon has flooded a number of times since its carving, as volcanoes dumped lava across the Colorado, damming the flow of the water. The largest of these volcanic dams, "Prospect Dam," is the one that would have raised the water level to roughly the 2,000-foot mark noted by Kinkaid; geological tests (40Ar/39Ar and 3He) place Prospect Dam at between half a million and 395,000 years old. This is still far back in [deep time](), where our prehistoric civilizations dwell. Intriguingly, around 5.5 million years ago, the Nile was also a deep, winding canyon very similar to the Grand Canyon now. When the Mediterranean Sea level temporarily fell during the Miocene closure of Gibraltar, the Nile carved out a canyon 8,200 feet deep from Aswan to the future Delta. Another strange and weirdly significant-seeming link between Egypt and the Grand Canyon.

"One thing I have not spoken of, may be of interest. There is one chamber of the passageway to which is not ventilated, and when we approached it a deadly, snaky smell struck us. Our light would not penetrate the gloom, and until stronger ones are available we will not know what the chamber contains. . . . The whole underground installation

gives one of shaky nerves the creeps. The gloom is like a weight on one's shoulders, and our flashlights and candles only make the darkness blacker. Imagination can revel in conjectures and ungodly daydreams back through the ages that have elapsed till the mind reels dizzily in space."
-- "Explorations in Grand Canyon," *Arizona Gazette* (April 5, 1909)

So do we really want to get to the bottom of the Kinkaid enigma? If the fate of Russell, and White, and Kinkaid, and Powell's three men, and the Anasazi don't deter us, maybe a couple of other tales might. Glen and Bessie Hyde vanished from a Grand Canyon boating excursion in November 1928, their boat turning up dry, fully loaded, and afloat 70 miles downstream from the last photograph in their camera. And Buzz Holmstrom, who in 1937 became the first man to descend the Colorado River solo ("talking to his friend, the moon" the while) died mysteriously on May 18, 1946, on the banks of the Grande Ronde River in Oregon. What connects the Pacific Northwest and the Grand Canyon? Well, Lemurians, sure. But also UFOs. Sure, we all know about Ken Arnold and his "flying saucer" encounter over Washington state on June 24, 1947. Sure, it might be a coincidence that Kinkaid said he was "looking for mineral" in the Canyon, and that Arnold encountered his UFOs over Mineral, Washington. But that same week on June 26 and June 30, 1947, two witnesses -- a doctor and a Navy pilot -- saw UFOs over the Grand Canyon. Dr. Leon Oetinger saw a "silver ball" fall directly toward the Canyon and swoosh to the horizon, and Lt. William McGinty saw two gray disks land just a few miles south of the Canyon. We also have the Kingman, Arizona UFO crash in 1953, on a line between the Canyon and Death Valley -- where there was an airship sighting in 1905, right about when Kinkaid would have been first uncovering his Temple.

Let's stir into this brew the odd similarities between Kinkaid, White, and Russell's stories. Kinkaid and White, intriguingly, are both reported to have dealt with the "Smithsonian Institute." Not, I point out, the Smithsonian Institu*tion,* which employed, among other people, John Wesley Powell. The same Powell who avidly studied myth and metaphysics, who left a triple sacrifice on the Canyon's rim, who insisted on naming "Bright Angel Creek" himself while starving (or sorcerously fasting?), who on August 14, 1869, heard the same aerial artillery that Lewis and Clark encountered at Great Falls, Montana, on another mysterious mission on another river. What did Powell hear, and what Bright Angel did he see, left over from settlements a million years old? Whatever it was, it was enough to activate the "Smithsonian Institute," a secret bureau within an unclassifiable collection, to bargain with the prehuman inhabitants of Sipapu, or K'n-yan, with the Reptoids who drove the Jaredites south into Mexico, who terrified the Anasazi into cannibalism and exodus, who married the queens of the Kingdom of Women, who built the house that Kinkaid found. What did "the Institute" get? Orichalcum for future UFO hulls? An army of giant, red-headed mummies? The secret of Lemurian gaslight? Maybe just the real map to the Canyon, to the twists and tunnels that take us from the Tower of Babel to the Tower of Ra, to the true dragon lines in America's bisociated backyard, to the Golden Cities of Cibola and the Valley of the Manifestation of the Dawn.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Icosahedron Adventures

Unusual Objects (Part Three: I-L)

by Owen K.C. Stephens

We continue our tour through items designed to guide, change, spur, or even create campaigns and adventures. Loosely designed for *d20 System* games, the core ideas can be adapted to other systems.

Icabod's Head

Like many myths, the *Legend of Sleepy Hallow* turns out to be more truth than fiction. A schoolteacher, Icabod Crane, did battle with a cranially challenged ghoul. The legend suggests Icabod panicked in his final confrontation, but the sad truth is he lost his head.

As it happens, the Hessian soldier who became the Headless Horseman is not a random undead, but instead the product of a specific ritual dating back to the time of the Templars. A head is severed and made into an idol (always named Baphomet), and the body becomes a servant of the creator's vengeance. Icabod was a coward but also a scholar, and discovered how to destroy the vile Horseman. In retribution, he was killed by the cult that controlled the Horseman, and made to replace it. In a ritual not found in any grimoire, Icabod's head was imbued with genies of knowledge, while his body became a gaunt killer with a burlap sack for a face. Once controlled by the cult that created them, these undead items have long since become independent.

In a game without the *Legend of Sleepy Hallow,* a similar legend can be created. The important aspects are a headless foe that terrorizes and seems to defeat a cowardly and scholarly everyman figure. In truth, the everyman wins but pays a terrible price for victory. An elven jester who taunted a headless ogre, an Arthurian squire haunted by a flying witch-head, or a long-gone race of alien roach-men who really can survive for centuries after being beheaded could all substitute for Mr. Crane.

As a result of the ritual, Icabod's head is a kind of oracle, a font of useful knowledge. In a high-magic game it can cast divination spells (*speak with dead* and *augury* being the most obvious, with perhaps *divination* on a less frequent basis). In lower-magic settings is is simply a sage of esoteric knowledge (either having ranks in many Knowledge skills itself, or granting a noteworthy +5 bonus to the Knowledge checks of whoever possesses it). In non-magic settings the head is either a psychic focus with knowledge stored in long-dead mental synapses, or a useless relic (hunted by those who -believe- it has magic powers).

There are two drawbacks to having Icabod's head (in campaigns where it has real power). First, Icabod remains a coward. He can do nothing more than talk (and perhaps bite), but is in mortal fear of any serious danger. Icabod is convinced he is damned for having been turned into a foul thing of magic, and his only chance of escaping eternal damnation is to never die. Thus, he strenuously argues against any course of action that might lead to his destruction, often so loudly as to make the danger worse.

Second, the Burlap Bandit seeks to reclaim its lost head. A tall, rawboned figure with a sack-head (featuring a jagged tear for a mouth and dark stains in the fabric for eyes), the Bandit wants its head back. However, Icabod is deathly afraid of his body, and wants nothing to do with it. Further, as long as one of the two exist, the other cannot be permanently destroyed. Owners of Icabod's head may defeat the Burlap bandit, but unless they kill Icabod as well, the sack-headed horror will regrow and come after them again -- each time stronger than in its last incarnation.

Jericho Trumpet

While the Ark is long gone, a few artifacts associated with it still exist. Most powerful of these is the last of the Seven Trumpets of Jericho. Played by priests that marched around the city for seven days, the trumpets are the heralds of divine retribution. Lost after the death of Joshua, often damaged and re-forged, the trumpets are spied throughout history though often not recognized. Items as diverse as the horn or Roland and the cornet of Sgt. Pepper are just forms of the Trumpets of Jericho. Though only one trumpet remains in usable form, legend claims the other six will be remade in time to be played by seven angels to mark the Rapture.

Rather than a magic item, the Trumpet could be an alien sonic weapon, a rift in space-time that warps structures around it, or a mundane musical instrument that happens to summon a supernatural force. It is sought by warriors, wizards, historians, Nazis and fringe religious groups hoping to sound the horn and end the world now.

The true power of the Trumpet is modest. Structures near it are weakened when it is played while being moved around them. A complete circuit of the structure is necessary; simply playing inside a building does nothing. If the conditions are met, the structure is weakened by 15% (reducing its defenses, but not its actual stability -- it removes hardness and damage reduction, but not hit points). The Trumpet also extends any sound-based morale effect out to the range it can be heard (normally a mile radius). It can be played only once a day, though for any duration.

If the Trumpet is damaged, it can be recreated from even the smallest scrap of its mass. This requires a master craftsman, but any such crafter recognizes the value of a remnant of the Trumpet instinctively. If two scraps remain, once one is reforged the other becomes useless dross.

Finally, the Trumpet knows its own. When played in the presence of any holy object, from a fragment of another Trumpet to a saint's bones or even Excalibur, the Trumpet's sound reverberates off the other holy objects, making them vibrate and (oddly) glow. Those who seek the Trumpet do so less for what it can accomplish itself, than for what it can be used to find.

Killer's Blade

Be it a mad slasher's machete, a cult leader's sacrificial obsidian knife or an assassin's stiletto, it is a blade that has been used to kill dozens -- or even hundreds -- or times. Death has soaked into the blade and marked it as a murderer's weapon. It may be the razor of Sweeney Todd, the axe of Lizzie Borden (or her family's real killer), or the laser-sword of the Dark Invader. It doesn't matter if it is imbued with the blood curse of its victims, psychically imprinted with the pain of those it has snuffed out, or magically enchanted through necromancy.

The blade kills with ease, but not without cost. Any attack made with it is a critical hit, but an attack roll, is made normally. If the d20 roll does not indicate a critical threat, the attack takes points of non-lethal damage equal to the roll needed for a threat minus the attack roll made. Any threat automatically confirms as a critical hit. At the end of any combat when the user of the knife has non-lethal damage on him, he must make a Will saving throw equal to 10 + non-lethal damage taken. On a failed save, the attacker permanently loses one point of Wisdom, and the blade's threat range increases by one when he uses it.

The blade qualifies as an artifact, showing none of its vile power to mundane investigation or standard spells and psychic divinations. Scholarly research turns up the details (DC 30 Knowledge check, with a retry allowed at +1 for each month of research or new library of occult lore accessed), but normally isn't undertaken until someone has killed with the blade. By then the curse has manifested; the new owner cannot make attacks with any other weapon, or any spell or martial art. They must either find a way to rid themselves of the blade (which changes ownership only with the current user's death), or live a life of non-violence, or risk becoming inhuman.

If the Wisdom of the blade's owner ever drops below 8, he becomes a psychopathic murderer. Each day a Will save must be made (DC 10 + number of days since an innocent victim has been murdered). On a failed save, the blade's owner must seek an innocent victim and murder them, making all effort not to be caught. If the Wisdom of the blade's owner drops below 5, he become a ghoul, vampire, or similar undead horror, dedicated to complex and horrific murders. Sadly, such creatures are resistant to damage from most everything but their own blades, which often starts the cycle over again.

Escaping the curse of the blade is difficult. If every murder that has ever been committed with it is solved, the blade disintegrates. Each time even a single murder is solved, it loses power for a week (though its power is restored if it is used in an attack). If its owner commits suicide, its power is broken (unless he is later restored to life). If an older killer's blade is found, it can break a younger version (though doing so counts as a murder).

Lembas Recipe

Elven waybread: The smallest portion can feed a man for a day, and it doesn't spoil even over the course of months. Sadly, the secret of its manufacture is long since lost, save for a single copy. Found in a faded tome (*The Joy of Alchemy*), the last copy of the recipe is a crucial element in an upcoming event. Nations may be going to war and need a way to feed their armies. Or the Great Depression may have made the possibility of food that never spoils too attractive to ignore. Of a mission to Mars may need a way to cram a lot of food into a small mass footprint. Indeed, the entire space race may hinge on saving fuel while feeding cosmonauts.

The book has been ignored for centuries. It is rife with rituals to turn gold into lead, keep a Jabberwock at bay, and remove the water from saltwater through distillation. Many copies have been burned, others used to keep tables level in damp climates. Only one copy remains, but no one knows where it is. There exists only a description, thus:

"Four hands tall, and two wide, though not big hands. Perhaps the hands of a large child, or small adult. Really, more like three hands tall, with a few extra thumbs tacked on. Thick enough to make a scrivener cry, but of sturdy paper unlike to tear easily. Also, the paper is not good for spitballs, as attested by one Master Jim Fortigew. The cover is red, except where it isn't. Mostly that's the gold lettering, in ancient Greek but badly spelled, and where someone stained it black with spilled coffee. There's a blue ribbon as a bookmark, which has a sigil of a pen, and embroidery of a kitten. Or maybe a puppy-it isn't good embroidery. The book does not burn or mildew, as it is the first and perfect form of its kind, the master book from which all others of this volume were copied. Also, if chocolate is placed upon the book, it fades away. The book likes chocolate.

"As a magic tome all these details are subject to chance. Except the part about chocolate."

The book is, indeed, fond of chocolate. It's fond of all good foods, in fact, and is imbued with the spirits of pixie cooks and their brownie brownies. It had recipes for anything edible, and ways to make many inedible things eatable. It has been owned by monks and chocolateers alike, and was once carried across the world in a glass elevator. Anyone owning it, treating it well, and generally being nice to others, gains many advantages. First, they never need for food or water. In any situation, the book provides a recipe for making a feast, even in a barren room. Second, it prevents the owner from dying, instead taking any lethal blow itself. It is a moody book, and subject to pouting or changing food tastes to brussel sprouts when annoyed, but basically a good sort of artifact.

But it lives, indestructible, only so long as it holds the secret of elven waybread. That is its last Great Secret, and if it gets out the book dies. The book is now on the run, looking for a plump child or desperate cook to hide it from the corporate spies who wish to make Larry's Unleavened Lembas the "it" food of the next century. The book can chance appearance, move a bit, and smell a rat a mile away, but to survive it needs help. Also, it can't resist chocolate, a sure-fire way to seek it out from lesser books.

IronPunk

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

"IronPunk" describes an alternate Rome in which the secret of Water has been unlocked. It permits near-instantaneous communications and incredible steam weapons. In this *GURPS Infinite Worlds* setting, the Roman Empire must contend with the Chinese, the Persians, and the South African Nok for international acclaim.

This setting is a somewhat corrupt Roman Empire that still has some local officials who care, and the higher nobles are generally concerned with keeping their holdings intact. Water on this world possesses slightly different electrical and acoustic properties. This applies equally to imported water, but not to any water removed from this world.

Name: Santorini-2, 89 AD

Current Affairs

The Roman Empire is becoming decadent, and is having trouble expanding further away from the Mediterranean. Seceding Atlantian forces from Santorini are helping the Britons repel the Roman occupants. A Persian Empire includes Arabic territory and India. China is colonizing Oceania. The Nok civilization is uniting Southern Africa. Together, these groups have formed tenuous relationships and have yet to discover the Americas.

Divergence Point: 1,500 BC -- The catastrophic eruption of the Mediterranean volcano of [Santorini](#) has not yet occurred. The magma chamber below the cone continues to fill to the point that the island is hundreds of feet above its Homeline level.

Major Civilizations? Western (Empire With Rivals), Tau (empire), Persian (multipolar), Zulu (empire).

Great Powers

Roman Empire (Representative dictatorship, CR4); Chinese Empire (CR5); Persian League (feudal, CR5), Nok (theocracy, CR3).

Worldline Data

TL 2+4

Infinity Rating: o10, except within 20 miles of the Mediterranean, and 500 miles of Santorini. There it is Z4.

Centrum Rating: Yellow.

Timeline

*(see **GURPS Imperial Rome,** pages 45-55, 62 for more)*

753 BC   Rome Founded
324 BC   Death(?) of Alexander the Great (see ***GURPS BioTech 4e***, pp. 217-224.
290 BC   Greece invaded
70 BC   Spartacus' rebellion
30 BC   Egypt joins the Roman Empire
43 AD   Rome invades Britain
64   Rome burns
79   Mt. Vesuvius erupts. Pliny the Elder observes closely using an environment suit, and lives to write about it.
89   Today. Roman Empire spans the Mediterranean ([Map](#)); see ***GURPS Imperial Rome***, p. 25)
Future (Homeline)

97   Chinese planning to send ambassadors to Rome
142   Adrian's Wall built in Britain
166   Roman ambassadors reach China

Roman Empire

Today

The age of [Bronze](#) is over. Rome has conquered the Mediterranean civilizations of Greece, Egypt, and Atlantis with an iron fist. Now decades later, its fist has already begun to rust. On Homeline, it would be centuries before it finally collapses. Here, everything is more fluid.

Poseidon's Gift

At the founding of Rome, the new Emperor made a peace treaty with Atlantis. During the temporary alliance, a golden age of prosperity swept the Mediterranean. A united task force kept pirates down, allowing trade to flourish. At this time, Roman agents acquired samples of advanced "technology" that allowed the Atlanteans to communicate over long distances and to be masters of the sea itself, which they called "Poseidon's Gift." The treaty ended soon after, beginning with the Siege of Santorini. The islanders' mastery has allowed them to hold out for decades against a half-hearted blockade. Any normal invasion force has been successfully repelled. The secrets of the technology used in the defense of Atlantis were called "Neptune's Gift" and shrouded in mystery. Each implementation was shrouded in respect and ritual. The Romans have taken a generally industrial view regarding the research and distribution of the technology.

To Be Roman

Roman citizens can vote, become politicians, and enjoy free protection in court. Those who embrace Roman citizenship are given the best education and the best opportunity for advancement, socially. Roman officers must be born Roman citizens. Within Rome are many provinces, which can be referred to by their old names (see ***GURPS Imperial Rome***, p. 8), although this is officially discouraged.

Greece

While officially part of the Roman Empire, Greece has only maintained any identity thanks to its compatibility with the Roman belief system. As a cultural center, it brings science, sports, theater, and philosophy, even if the best of each are shipped off to Rome. Many Greek citizens of the Roman Empire have made significant contributions such as

[Hero of Alexandria](#) (see Famous People, below). In Homeline, he *actually* invented a plethora of water-devices in the early first century, including steam generators (see *Hellenistic Influence, **GURPS Imperial Rome,*** pages 48 & 68).

Egypt

The newest large member (it says "ally") of the Roman Empire, Egypt brings many technological advances, particularly in the use of bound spirits. These *Animus Incolo* (Spirit Resident) are tireless warriors. They allowed Egypt to hold on longer than most, but the country fell in the end, as all the major cities are situated on the Nile, and the Roman forces merely sailed their warships along it. Egyptian spirit technology focused on acquiring servants to continue to serve. Nobles and kings were preserved for the "next" thing. This tradition continues with the noble houses, although the Royal house was obliterated during an uprising to help quell further rebellion. Roman officials installed a new system of government that was more responsible. Pharaohs were cloned to perpetuate the bloodline of the gods. A few pharaoh "cultists" survived the conquest, and plot to restore the rightful pharaohs to the throne (see ***GURPS Egypt*** and ***GURPS Imperial Rome,*** page 67).

Atlantis

For centuries, Atlantean culture was the most advanced civilization in the world. Its rulers became passive and resisted change. Thus, they met each challenge with supreme confidence in their abilities. Their greatest challenge was the occasional pirate fleet . . . until the Roman empire came. At first there was the occasional merchant ship, and then a Roman officer tried to annex the land in the name of his Emperor. After a fierce battle, a treaty was reached (see above). This lasted for a few years before it, too, fell through. While its naval force survives in legend, the kingdom of the sea itself is fading.

Labeled rebels by the Roman government, most Atlantean citizens have left the island of Santorini. Those who remain can tap into Roman hydrophones and intercept plans. Providing aid to the Britons to help them resist the Roman incursions has incited Roman generals, causing fleets to generally be divided between the siege of Santorini and reinforcing elements in the North Sea. This has helped divert Roman attention to the Scandinavian "barbarians" who raid the coasts of the North Sea. A war fleet is gathering at Rome to prepare to crush the Atlantean rebellion once and for all (see ***GURPS Atlantis***).

Persia

The Parthanian age of the [Persian Empire](#) is progressing well. Persia has expanded further East than in Homeline, having conquered India a century ago. Employing spirit "djinn" warriors permitted the sultans an advantage against the advanced metal of the Indians (see technology, below). India is known for its high-carbon steel, called *wootz*. Merchants and government officials jealously guard its origins. Persia is known for its generally conservative, yet diverse culture. Its elaborate tea houses and gardens are famous for their exquisite culinary delights. Rugs are considered part of architecture and are very profitable.

The Persians rebuilt the east-west Egyptian [Suez Canal](#) in 250BC, as in Homeline, and continued to maintain it on this world. The Persian government makes a tidy profit on the tolls from merchant and military ships passing through. The Persian government offers a subsidy for merchants buying or selling goods from its holdings, and for Persian merchants. These benefits are cumulative (see ***GURPS Arabian Nights***).

Asia

China's celestial bureaucracy communicates through water. The Chinese bureaucracy started in the [Qin Dynasty](#) in 500BC to maintain the irrigation and canals. The first Emperor also considered mercury to be the ultimate water, and became exceedingly eccentric as he experimented with it. The arrays of rice paddies can form part of a distributed telescope, even if it was originally designed to map the passage of celestial beings as they journey from cloud to cloud.

Today, the [Han Dynasty](#) is in full swing. The Chinese inventor [Zhang Heng](#) found new ways to harness water power (see Famous People, below). His contemporaries invented paper and basic steel earlier that century. On Homeline, Roman ambassadors did not officially arrive until 166 AD, but here are expected to undertake the journey "very soon." Likewise, the Chinese government can transmit basic intents to the Romans, but sees the need to send visitors (see *GURPS China*).

South Africa

The Nok and Bantu civilizations rise with steel in Southern Africa. The Nok people believe in animism, that all things have spirits. Thus, water is alive and listens to man as this is the "Age of Water." The prior two ages were the Age of Earth followed by the Age of Air. The Age of Fire is to come. The Nok build the fastest river boats, able to move with unbelievable speed.

These people possess a generally tribal organization, and a head man informally leads with councils for any day-to-day planning. A priest, or "shaman," makes executive decisions and provides strong suggestions for the councils. These proud people shun the elaborate, advanced weapons of the Romans and Chinese, favoring muscle wielded and fired tools. Their AIs are given animal forms, and are regularly allowed to roam free.

Fringes

Away from sources of water, many rebels can resist the roman legions who depend on water for their greatest strengths. In particular, the desert skirmishers ambush caravans with their "djinn" armies obtained from Persian contacts. The Celts and their druids form a great defense against the under-funded Romans deployed to Britain (see *GURPS Celtic Myth*).

Technology

Travel Civilian travel consists mainly of "aquamobiles" that travel the rivers and seas quickly. These boats use steam engines to drive impellers. The basic idea for the impeller was stolen from Egyptian toruses designed to pump water to large reservoirs for crops and drinking water. These huge rings can move boats!

Ferries carry loads of personal craft around the Atlantic shores. Today, most aqueducts near Mediterranean cities are clogged with aqua-cars. Most commercial aqua-cars are not rated for the ocean, and must stay in the Mediterranean Sea. The north-south [Suez Canal](#) is under construction to permit the Roman Navy access to the Persian Gulf and passage to the Far East without the inconvenience of the Nile and Persian Customs officers. Single-expansion steam trains ply rails laid between major centers. They can only run for short durations due to inefficient designs, but handle most inland freight and passenger service. Mining on Santorini-2 is much safer and efficient than during its equivalent time period on Homeline. Workers employ water drills and steam engines to pump air and water, as well as steam trains connect cities, and motors pull carts for mining operations.

Weapons

The Roman military acquired the new Emperor-approved "steam power" technology and immediately tried to apply it to all sectors of battle. "Steam cannons" are fast-loading siege engines such as catapults and trebuchets. Super-heated steam in the form of "liquid fire" can scorch targets at modest distances (flamers). These weapons are large and bulky, and can only be mounted on a large ship or fortification. The minimum size appears to be 10 tons. A few "gunboat" frigates exist, built around such weapons. Most are deployed to the North Sea to fight the Norse. There is also a new kind of self-propelled siege engine. These armored steam-powered devices bring devastating weapons, immune to hand-held weapons. They are called "tanks" as the original frames were designed to hold water. Specialists from Athens are renowned as the experts in Greek Fire.

Communication

The hydrophone is a water-based communication device present in most homes in the civilized world. The "hydro phonic communicator" or "hydrophone" (or phone) is revolutionizing business. In existence for almost 50 years now, it was developed accidentally as scientists Hero of Alexandria and Zhang Heng were experimenting with sending high-powered signals into the sea, and happened to pick up each other's messages. This works as long as the source and destination have a continuous water connection between them, be it a cloud, or water table. Businesses have linked together Chinese Babbage engines across hydrophones, permitting the near instantaneous transmission of records. Cutting-edge data storage consists of wax cylinders to recall missives (see Data Disks, *Steampunk,* page 62). This is encouraged by the bold marketing plan of Chinese entrepreneurs. Taking an initial loss, they marketed cheap, small Babbage engines for home use. Arriving with very simplified use interfaces, the machines come with wax cylinders containing accounting and Go. Today, the product of China's International Babbage Machines have become the standard, and the Roman and Persian corporations are struggling to keep up.

Uninvented Inventions

In a cinematic situation, a GM may permit devices that perform any or all of the following functions: Water Breathing (held backward, can also serve for a water-based creature to breathe air); Free Action (bands repelling water from limbs, but not the torso); Water Vision; and Sonar Vision.

The 'Net Today

A vast set of interconnected networks span the Empire. The "global net" is a water-based meta-connection; rivers and wells are sink points to connect the cities. Those using the 'net "weave" connections using a grid of copper wire dipped into the water. The user enters a trance-like state, and must practice to keep a meditative trance balancing somewhere between sleep and consciousness. This delicate balancing act is part of "surfing." Aqueducts not only provide drinking water and roadways, but lines of communication as well.

Roman generals see Atlanteans as enemies who now come from the ocean, and can eavesdrop in the "net." Professional dream weavers send coded data across to others, so cryptology is important. Standard operating procedure for Roman groups, be they civilian or military, is to dig a well as quickly as possible when arriving at a new location, permitting power and communications. To poison the well is to outright deny the opposition connections and potable water.

Medicine *Aqua vitae,* the waters of life, is the "science" of balancing the body's humors. Some advanced medical ideas are present, mainly regarding disease, infection, poisons, and blood types. GMs are recommended to permit basic herbalistic potions in the area of healing only (see **GURPS Magic** *Fourth Edition*, page 210). See also the Alexander Athanatos setting in **GURPS Bio-Tech**, pages 217-224, and Kenneth Hite's "Alternate Biotechs."

Zoomorph adaptations are popular among street fighters, warriors, and gladiators. As per the quoted article and the **Ultra-Tech** *First Edition* suggestion on p. 65age obvious modifications should come at normal character point cost, but 1/5 the **GURPS** $ cost, if they don't logically already do so. Thus buying a prehensile tail won't have a discount, but intending to buy Perfect Balance, but having to gain a tail, would. In addition, citizens who can withstand extreme temperatures can work with fewer supplies and rations. If they can ignore the hardships of blistering heat, freezing cold, or parching desert, all the better. Almost any template from Transhuman Space can be used, except those designed for zero gravity. In any case, "artificial" biological beings are not treated any different that any other kind of slave in that culture.

The Nok and common Roman citizens use zoomorphing modifications freely. The Chinese and noble Romans use "seamless" genetic improvements whenever possible. The Persians are moderate in their approach, but encourage genefixing and repairing any "negative" trait. Minotaur modifications are popular among Roman street fighters, gladiators, bouncers, and other guards. The strength, height, muscle mass, and stamina all tell tales of the upgrades. Runners may get cheetah legs, and so on. The Persians are generally practical, choosing abilities to survive. That said,

popular culture continually talks of legends of spider-legged, wall-walking Persian assassins. Chinese often pick a [zodiac](#) animal, either theirs or one that they idolize.

Non-Human Life

The Egyptians, Middle East, and Far East all had the secrets of binding spirit intelligences to statues to "create" this sort of life before the Romans acquired it. They are called *Animus Incolo* (Spirit Resident) and are generally divided into two categories.

The Dreamforged

The loyal, pragmatic servants are not very creative, and tend to follow orders to the letter, even if they are impossible. It is called a Non-seaforged *Animus Incolo* (NAI), and is restricted in its actions. The Nok do not make Dreamforged, and consider Seaforged to be full citizens if they prove themselves (see below). The Chinese do not make Seaforged, only Dreamforged.

The Seaforged

The wild spirits from the water make better creative thinkers, but are unpredictable. Some tend to philosophize while others revel in kills. There are few that take any sort of middle ground, but few mentalities are alike. In **GURPS** terms, each has around -20 points or more in mental disadvantages, and a Reputation (Unstable). A Seaforged *Animus Incolo* (SAI) is a slave by default, and most possess the disadvantage of Social Stigma (Property). The exception is the Nok people who only create SAIs. Those individuals that cooperate can gain membership in a tribe on their own merit.

There is a middle variant of complexity that is called Lesser seaforged *Animus Incolo* (LAI), they are considered to be merely very complexly instructed NAIs.

AIs can hop between prepared vessels in ST seconds. If it is already inhabited, the attacker must *win* a contest of ST. These animated statues can wear armor, if the forms are human. To respect Poseidon, the Seaforged are given full status as slaves. A few have earned their freedom. [Talos](#) was an Egyptian-made warrior given to the lord of Crete.

Home and Garden

Aquaculture is not as popular as merchants would like it to be, despite campaigning. The current fad is to eat normal crops given extra water and grown quickly. Today, aquaculture crops go mainly to feed cattle, freeing up more fields to grow crops for human consumption. Variety of aquaculture crops seems to be the leading problem.

Roman citizens in "civilized" areas can expect a variety of water-based conveniences. These range from water-cooled storage rooms to hot-and-cold running water, including [hypocausts](#). Lead has been proven to be anti-life, so commercial and military interest enjoy iron, normally forged in, or coated with, rust-resistant alloys. Civilians contend with copper and tin. Other conveniences include elevators, plumbing, and advanced sewage systems.

Weapons of War

The "water cannon" is a normal siege engine with a steam-powered reload mechanism. Purchase as 2× cost, taking an additional equal volume somewhere nearby for the power plant. Multiply the RoF by 100, to a maximum of RoF 1. Minimum Mass 10 tons.

The Flamer is a particle cannon. Buy as a Flamer, with RoF 1/10, minimum mass 10 tons. Flamethrowers are standard issue using Greek fire (see **GURPS Low-Tech,** pp. 92,113).

The Sonic Stunner is minimum 10 lbs; generally built into a metal staff, these devices can be wielded as such without

penalty or harm. A Ready maneuver is required to change between purposes.

Famous People

In science, Ptolemy works on water-powered rockets to the stars while the Greek cartographer Strabo works to expand his map of the known world. Hero of Alexandria explores atomic theory, and begins work on hot air balloons. Of Greek birth, and a Roman citizen, Hero advanced the Roman water power industry by leaps and bounds. He is the renowned expert on the captured Atlantean secrets.

Pliny the Elder is the leading Roman researcher. An officer in the army, he is always on the move, and is a voracious writer. He documents his journeys and writes extensive treatises on all aspects of natural science in the known world. Pliny the Elder is the foremost Roman authority on the workings of the formerly Greek biotechnology and captured Egyptian technologies. Together, Pliny and Hero have been compared to Leonardo da Vinci of their world. Pliny is the explorer, the naturalist.

Currently, the details behind certain aspects of Roman military technology, including high-powered weapons, are classified. Most other areas of science, nature, and history are published for all Roman citizens to read and aspire to. Pliny's textbooks on the fundamentals of modern science are required reading. The Chinese inventor and noble Zhang Heng made similar advances for his people. In addition, he pioneered a primitive water-powered Babbage engine to meet the demands of the bureaucracy.

Adventure Seeds

Rust to Rust: Rebels are rumored to possess a new water-based, super rust weapon that can corrode any metal but gold. Against iron, it is said to be devastating. The range is between ten and one hundred yards. The rumor is that the rebels are based around an oasis, but the PCs receive a tip that they are moving. There is a reward for hard information regarding the weapon, more for obtaining a sample, and even more for the entire group.

Island Retreat: Although some Atlanteans are escaping to the Canary Islands, most have escaped to South America. The Atlanteans are retreating from their island to an underwater base in an unknown location believed to be in the Atlantic Ocean. Many parties would pay well to know exactly where they went. If the Atlanteans did not reveal all their secrets, what else did they know? Flight? The secret of creating underwater domes?

Seekers: Pliny the Elder needs a few good men to gather technology samples outside of military channels, due to expedience. The heroes are to capture a large Seaforged djinni loose in the wastes and forests. What makes it special is its built-in ranged weapon . . .

Problem Clearing: The north-south Suez Canal project is being dug using Roman and local Egyptian slaves. The project is being dogged by raiders. The heroes are to help. Which side they help depends on who the heroes are . . .

Contact: Local philosophers believe that Poseidon's Gift involves spirits that inhabit the waters of this world. In particular, the South African shamans hold that all things possess spirits. The heroes are to find emperical evidence one way or the other.

Additional References

GURPS Sources

- *GURPS Imperial Rome*
- *GURPS Biotech,* Alexander Athanatos, pp. 217-224
- *GURPS Fantasy,* Roma Arcana, pp. 195-232.

Pyramid

- "[Alternate Biotechs](#)" by Kenneth Hite
- "[Reign of Soul](#)"
- "[Bronzepunk](#)" (TL0+n)
- "[Immacula Colony](#)" by by Chad Underkoffler
- [Low-Tech Higher Education](#) by Matt Riggsby

Wikipedia

- [Iron-Age](#)
- [Antikythera Mechanism](#)
- [Santorini](#)
- [Zhang Heng](#) (Chinese inventor)
- [Hero of Alexandria](#) (Greek Inventor)

Additional Links

- [Map of Roman Conquest in the First Century](#)
- [Timeline of the first century](#)
- [Meaning of "tank"](#)

* * *

Special Thanks to Stephanie Keith for flying the ocean.

Pyramid Review

Heaven & Earth, Third Edition

Published by Abstract Nova Entertainment LLC

Written by Lee Foster, Michelle Lyons, James Maliszewski, John. R. Phythyon, Jr., & Lucien Soulban with Rob Boyle, Danny Budge, & Jeff Mackintosh

Cover by Ed Northcott

Illustrated by Cliff Kurowski & Ed Northcott

128-page b&w softcover; $24.95

Welcome to Potters Lake, a quiet Midwest town. Home to the Catholic college of St. Anslem, the USAF training facility at Powell AFB, and Southey's Paper Mill, which made its millions from paper sanitary products, nothing ever really happens here. All right so some of the customs are quaint, like the exuberant Fourth of July celebrations that also mark the town's official founding; the Great Tomato Festival that takes place before Halloween every year, the celebrations of which last week; the rivalry to out-do the other of the Sheriff's Department and Fire Department balls; the utter seriousness with which Little League is held . . .

Scratch beneath the surface of life in the Kansas town and more than its fair share of oddities remain unanswered. Were they to admit it, every household has suffered from a haunting . . . Memorial Hospital's morgue is rumored to be haunted by a unicycling clown . . . Why does the current owner of Cain House boarding house keep it open when nobody stays? Could it be because the previous owner killed seven people and buried them in the basement? Is the old Hollyvale Cemetery really one of the seven portals to Hell, or is that just student rumor? Another rumor suggests that the infamous Men in Black have been known to visit households and take the inhabitants away, just as Powell AFB is rumored to be the headquarters for Project: Bluebook. The surrounding woods have a bad reputation backed up with regular disappearances and talk of strange monoliths, claw-like trees, and lost sand dunes.

Some, all, and more of these and other rumors are true, or at least have a basis in fact. For Potter's Lake really is a place with secrets, conspiracies, and cabals, which are ripe for uncovering whether the player characters are merely passing through, just moved there, or have lived there all of their lives. Of course, with so many secrets, conspiracies, and cabals, it seems an awful lot for one small town. But there is a reason for this. A damned good reason. Which could have come across as crass and poorly handled, but thankfully this is not the case. Pleasingly, where other RPGs might keep a GM in the dark as its revelations, *Heaven & Earth* does not shy away from revealing all of the setting's secrets.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The simple truth is that the Apocalypse is almost upon us. In the war between God and Lucifer, humanity is merely a method of tallying the final score. After that, we have no future. Fortunately, we have a champion in Christ, who has rebelled and now walks the Earth in an attempt to save us. Potter's Lake is important because it happens to be a tainted slice of Eden and contains the means for humanity to stand up to both God and Lucifer. Eden's proximity has drawn angels, demons, and other supernatural entities to Potter's Lake, unhinging reality and attracting magicians, psychics, and ghosts to the town.

Character generation for *Heaven & Earth* is an easy process with an emphasis upon the ordinary person. Fourteen points are divided between six attributes each rated between one and five with two being average. Nine points are spent on an occupation and its rating. The occupations cost from one to five points and represent a package of skills that a character either has or has not. Thus the one-point Librarian occupation just offers the Research skill, whereas five-point Lawyer gives the research, etiquette, fast-talk, law, and oration skills. The ratings -- Rookie, Professional, or Veteran cost between one and three points, and apply to all of the skills within an occupation. Any leftover points can be spent on another occupation or on extracurricular skills, increasing attributes, and buying more Destiny Points, which are used to allow a skill check to be re-rolled or to even turn a failure into an automatic success. Each character normally begins the game with a single Destiny Point. A player is encouraged to select a few hobby skills that on occasion might provide a bonus.

Mechanically the game is equally as simple. Add the value of the attribute and skill rating to a die roll to beat a target of nine. The difficulty of a task is measured by the die type rolled. The smaller the die, the more difficult the task. Combat uses the same mechanics with a few minor tweaks, and is intentionally lethal. All characters can take same amount of lethal (10 points) and non-lethal or blunt damage (20 points). With even the smallest of pistols and rifles doing a ten-sided die's worth of damage, it is possible to kill a character with a single shot. This lethality is compounded with the slow healing rates -- weeks for blunt damage and months for lethal. Combat is not as clear as it should be, and a GM will have to read closely to work out how a character's Defence Value works.

Designed for quick play and character generation, *Heaven & Earth's* mechanics are over in 20 pages. They do have a player ask the typical questions about his character, but the focus is very much the character's occupation. This is because it indicates a lifestyle and connections, offers roleplaying opportunities, plus it speeds the character generation process. Given the revelatory nature of the game, one curious omission from the mechanics is a means of handling both mental shock and a character's mental status. Easy enough to import from another game though, but I suspect that players are meant to roleplay this.

Angels, demons, and other supernatural entities are handled in the same fashion, powerful, but kept off-screen working from behind the scenes. Magic and psychic abilities are also treated similarly, being difficult to work and learn. It is suggested that no player character begin the game as a psychic or magician.

The GM's advice is decent, pointing particularly towards a televisual format and structure, but better when discussing what could happen at game's end when all is revealed. A challenge in itself, how a GM handles this could make or break a game, possibly ruining what could be a long game. Certainly more advice on this would be welcome, and a whole supplement could be devoted to this denouement. The game is supported with a tightly plotted scenario designed with four players in mind.

Physically, *Heaven & Earth* opts for simplicity and clarity with a uniform feel to the art that hints at Potter's Lake's quiet weirdness. Although the book lacks an index, it neatly organizes everything into chapters, so for example, the NPCs are found in one, secret societies in another, and so on, that it is rarely a problem. The lack of stats for NPCs is another omission, but these can easily be created by the GM. The lack of stats for the supernatural creatures is more intentional, indicating at their inhuman, powerful, almost unfathomable nature which a GM should hint at, rather than expose.

Heaven & Earth is a game of discovery and revelation that provides the GM with everything that he needs, though Abstract Nova will publish further information. It rewards long-term play, with the many NPCs, locations, and mysteries all forming a ready source of scenario ideas. The game's mechanics are good, but since they are not integral and it is the setting that is important, a GM could substitute any game from *GURPS* or *In Nomine* to *[Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game](#)* or *[the World of Darkness Roleplaying Game.](#)* Likewise, Potter's Lake could easily be slotted into any horror game, but to relegate the town to mere sideshow would be to miss the point.

Small town weirdness is a well-trodden genre, especially in *Heaven & Earth's* suggested television format, and the game is perfectly set-up for that. Even given the gargantuan nature of Potter's Lake's secrets, everything is nicely kept

low key, letting the players focus on what are very ordinary characters and the GM on the oddness and the mood of the town. Handled with care and **Heaven & Earth** deserves renewal giving time for its secrets to be revealed, explored, and understood.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

GameMastery Map Packs

Published by [Paizo Publishing](#)

Cartography by Corey Macourek

18 8"×5" map sections, sandwiched between ad sheets; $12.95 (Haunted Mansion, Fortress, Dungeon Chambers, Countryside, or City); $9.95 (Village or Graveyard)

Everyone wants in on the game-map market these days. Some are reusable, some redrawable, some flippable, and some interchangeable. It's Paizo Publishing's turn at bat, and *GameMastery Map Packs* boast geomorphic maps at affordable prices. Here are some generic notes, followed by a few specifics about particular sets, then some more generalization.

Each set contains 18 map pieces, 8"×5", for five square feet per package (though none are just one big map). A grid is superimposed over each panel to aid in moving miniatures. Glare from overhead lights can hamper visibility, so indirect lighting is a plus in the game room. The advertising insert briefly names each supplement's content.

At this point there's a handy selection of sites and scenes in the line. *Haunted Mansion* doesn't have Eddie Murphy, but it's still pretty scary. Too dark to appreciate the detail in many cases, actually, but mood is established with fine points like creepy nursery dolls and a grand entry hall worthy of the term "mansion." More location-specific items (like cribs) could better solidify each place's identity, but overall these well-appointed rooms represent one of the most tightly focused sets.

The *Village's* sites, as in the majority of these sets, are easy to assemble and understand through graphics alone (and not just by process of elimination, though some packets rely on that). Oddly the tavern lacks a fireplace, but minutiae like rats and papers mean attention to detail is not an issue. The roster is filled out by markets, magic shops, shrines, and even a gallows.

All things dead color the *Graveyard,* including graves; large, chambered structures; and some withered trees for atmosphere. The *Fortress* is a little from columns A and B, quality-wise: It takes a moment to realize the "drawbridge/moat/gatehouse" arrows aren't two color codes, they're hued to stand out against separate background colors. They're one set of connections. The drawbridge panel is printed or cut off-kilter and doesn't line up well with the other five sections (at least not in the set under review). One last oddity is an "extra" portrait: a table at the bottom of a stairwell. It's still an 18-panel package but this scene is unidentified. Still, "more" is better, yes?

Another dense entry is *Dungeon Chambers.* It's a uniformly dark look at a castle's underbelly, with little swords and skulls scattered about its dank corridors, and it maintains the motif admirably throughout. Strange that *Countryside* is also tightly woven, with toll- and rope-bridge segments that pair up (save for an off-center river bank). Then again, it has another tavern that takes up six segments (though it, too, lacks a fireplace -- those are only found in long-abandoned shrines and temples, apparently). Presumably the "ambush" uses the walled roadside, but one could argue that and the ruins are interchangeable, so it's hard to say which is which.

The *City* does nice work with its alley; it looks vicious and useful. The wizards' guild is a confusing mess, unfortunately, and possibly incomplete, with arrows and designs at odd angles. There's a magic shop, but the village has one of those too if that's the deciding factor in a purchase. Either the smithy isn't "finished" or else it's intended to be simple sections and not a complete structure.

With a map set, graphics are king, and sharp was the eye that produced these. Even in those rare moments where a site's identity isn't clear, the elements of the illustration are clear (though the fighter's guild wooden men look like ceiling fans). No credits are offered, but the website singles out cartographer Corey Macourek. (The cover illustrations are diverse, so while nice, the person -- people? -- responsible are anyone's guess.) Users can just about make out spare change on the desk's edge, it's often that specific. Still, none are so busy as to distract the viewer from appreciating the big picture. The pieces aren't thick, just stiff, so they may glide across a smooth table under a fan. The small faded arrows in the corners and edges help adjoin maps when arranged properly, but these aren't used in the cemetery, country, or city sets (and are applied haphazardly in the dungeon pack).

More description on the ad coversheets would be welcome (labeling the maps themselves might kill the mood). They recently jacked up some of the *GameMastery Map Pack* prices a nickel, so some are now at $12.99. These still aren't as cheap as the maps of Wizards of the Coast, which gives a better quality component, but for those wanting sharper focus within their tiles the subject matter remains suitably broad and widely applicable, and pieces can be easily cannibalized between inexpensive supplements.

--Andy Vetromile

Good Enough, Smart Enough, Liked by People

How much of an obligation does the GM have to make the players and/or the PCs feel special?

This was a question that sprang to mind this week as I wrote my review of *Pathfinder #1*. After all, in a high-fantasy world, there's a large number of people at most "levels" of power, except for the upper-most echelons, and it's something of a mood breaker to stop the Ravager of Worlds only to learn that there's a dozen other parties out there doing things that are at least as meaningful.

To a certain extent this is governed by the [power level](#) of the campaign. After all, if you're no more special than the rest of the world, then it doesn't stand to reason that you're going to *be* more special than anyone else. (Of course, such a premise is also perfect for the "everyman rises to the level of challenge" that's so popular.) Conversely, if you're only one of a thousand people on Earth with super-powers, then you're going to be pretty special by default.

But there are a few other factors that can affect this feeling of uniqueness among the heroes. Here are three that sprang to mind after some consideration.

Scope and Isolation: The smaller the scope, the easier it is to stand out. As an example, running a campaign set aboard a space station with only 1,000 people means that if you prove yourself better than 10 others, you've elevated your standing to at least the 2nd percentile.

Moderately realistic fantasy worlds tend to have limited communications, which -- even in epic settings -- allows for heroes to feel pretty special. For example, let's say that you stop the Ravager of Worlds, and there's a half-dozen other groups out there doing the same thing. Well, the existence of those other groups doesn't matter if you don't know about them, and if their exploits are months away from your ears because of the size of the world, then it's easy to continue feeling like you're a big deal. This is the tack taken by the old ***Earthdawn*** setting, which is a world shaking off the dust after burying itself in hiding for an extended period.

This is even true with relatively low power levels, if the scope is small enough. For example, saving an isolated village from a weak dungeon threat still makes you the greatest hero that berg has ever known, even if you would have a hard time standing toe to toe with a sickly orc.

Ease of Communication: This is another aspect of "scope" above, but probably warrants its own bullet point. Obviously, the easier it is to communicate *in a timely fashion,* the harder it is to feel truly special. This "timely fashion" clause is important, because it's still possible for easy communication to result in feeling special, since there can be that feeling of bobbing around in a larger sea: "Well, I just heard that Lothan the Mighty killed the Soul-Blighter, but that happened months ago; no one's heard from him since, so he might be dead. Of course, we've been adventuring for months now ourselves, so no one knows about us. Maybe we're dead. What's in these trail rations, anyway?"

Sci-fi settings with communication that's no faster than courier communiques *(**Traveller, Fading Suns**)* are especially easy to establish this; although it's possible to cover ridiculously large distances, the difficulty in doing so reliably makes it possible for someone to carve out a large reputation (and for the GM to make the players feel special), yet having evidence that either disproves that *or* spreads their influence to be fleeting. (As a good example of this, consider Han Solo from *Star Wars.* I always got the impression that among certain circles he had a tremendous reputation, but among even larger groups -- say, former Jedi generals and wamprat-shooters -- he was unheard of.)

On the other hand, settings with instant communication tend to make even the most skilled of PCs feel small compared to the backdrop of the larger world. ***Shadowrun,*** for example, strikes me as a setting where it's always possible to determine your current ranking in the grand scheme of things . . . and that rank will probably be low enough to feel invisible or high enough to be a target.

Publicity (or Lack Thereof): Of course, there's also a gulf between feeling special as a character and feeling special

as a *player*. It's one thing if the townspeople are hoisting you up on their shoulders, singing your praises in the streets for killing the Ravager of Worlds. It's another thing if the heroes defeat the Ravager of Worlds, then realize they must keep their deeds secret because the ritual that allows its summoning is fairly easy, and they don't want anyone else to get any ideas for trying to bring home their own Ravager.

Many settings -- such as **World of Darkness, Men in Black,** and **Black Ops** (hmm, is there a trend here?) -- tend to work well by having the heroes sense of importance be internal ones. This can be a great technique in game worlds with trivial fast communication; even if the secrets of the heroes' exploits could be spread far and wide, the need to keep it under wraps can counteract that ease. (In fact, the mere act of holding a secret tends to make one feel important; after all, if it's a secret then it must be something people would care about, right?)

Of course, not all players have the same need for their characters to feel important. But for many players, the need to feel that they're doing something interesting or special can be important; after all, if the heroes' deeds could be accomplished by dozens of other folks, what's the point of their involvement? But keeping in mind the various factors that can inhibit this sense of importance -- along with the elements that can mitigate those elements -- can go a long way toward making it easy to stay the center of the spotlight.

Unless, of course, the spotlight must remain dimmed . . . because the heroes are *that* important.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Pathfinder #1: Rise of the Runelords Chapter 1: Burnt Offerings (for *d20 System*)

Published by [Paizo Publishing](#)

Written by James Jacobs, Wolfgang Baur, Erik Mona, Richard Pett, & F. Wesley Schneider

96-page b&w and color softcover; $19.99

Pathfinder: Rise of the Runelords Player's Guide

Written by F. Wesley Schneider

$10.00 for a pack of five copies, or [Free PDF](#)

Envision an amalgam of the continuing adventure serials from the last few years *Dragon* Magazine combined with articles from *Dungeon,* only envision that all those articles are in support of the adventure. Now, envision this amalgam coming out once a month, only it's not a magazine. For those of you familiar with Paizo's treatment of *Dungeon* and *Dragon,* what you have pictured in your mind's eye is probably pretty close to what *Pathfinder* is.

If you're not familiar with those periodicals (or even if you are), let's back up a bit. *Pathfinder* is the evolution of Paizo's former magazine efforts, coming about when Wizards of the Coast decided not to renew their relationship with Paizo (probably because, in hindsight, of developments with *Dungeons & Dragons Fourth Edition*). Each installment of *Pathfinder* contains a meaty adventure which is part of a series; each series is designed to take a player from 1st to 15th level (or more), after which Paizo assumes that you'll retire those characters and start out with new 1st-level heroes in a new series.

In addition to this adventure, each issue contains articles that support this adventure, either directly (such as write-ups of new monsters or parts of the game world) or indirectly (such as background organizations or ancient history). All this is packaged in a perfect-bound stiff-backed full-color softcover, which -- along with its lack of advertising -- makes it clear that this isn't intended to be a magazine, despite its monthly release schedule.

As planned, all *Pathfinder* campaigns will run for six months, and *Pathfinder #1* begins the first six-part series *Rise of the Runelords* with the adventure "Burnt Offerings." At over half the page count, this adventure is by far the largest part of the volume, and it's also the best (which is a good thing since it's presumably the main draw). Heroes begin as citizens or visitors in the sleepy coastal town of Sandpoint, and get drawn into adventure by a seemingly random act of violence that leads (naturally) to a larger web of adventure.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The main adversaries of "Burnt Offerings" are goblins, a threat that ranks right below dust bunnies in the minds of many gamers. Nevertheless, the adventure -- as well as some of the supplemental material -- goes a long way toward elevating goblins into a larger, more dangerous threat, not by making them more *powerful,* but rather by emphasizing the aspects of their humanoid nature that make them effective and dangerous. They have an alien outlook, their insatiable appetites make them suicidally ruthless, and their seemingly comical nature can emphasize the horrors they

can evoke. For example, one encounter early on has the heroes investigating a mother's tearful recounting of her son and his fear of a "goblin in the closet"; the parents ignored him, with horrific results.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The adventure elevates over several parts, ramping up in difficulty before the climactic ending . . . which, of course, reveals that there is more to the tale.

Without going too much into detail, the adventure avoids many of the pitfalls that other **d20 System** publishers have stumbled into. The adventure is designed to be undertaken in smaller chunks, and each section is easily digestible for players and GMs. In addition, these chunks all vary in their locale, objective, and mood; "Burnt Offerings" moves from urban encounters to a rescue effort in an interesting building to a classic dungeon crawl. The adventure also avoids much of the "led by a rope" feel of lesser tales; most objectives have several means of accomplishment, and some parts are entirely optional (and, indeed, are almost assumed that the heroes *won't* discover). In addition, there are many situations where actual roleplaying is more effective than swinging a sword, and in some cases it's the *only* solution, such as the thorny encounter with the shopkeep's daughter who wants to get one of the heroes alone . . .

The adventure makes good use of the Sandpoint locale; the city felt like a paddleball paddle, serving as the catalyst to send the heroes out and draw them back in, providing more motivation to venture out, and so on. The richness of this locale stems from both the adventure and the second major section of the book, which describes Sandpoint and its inhabitants in detail. This section is not designed to be memorized so much as provide instant spots for adventurers to seek subplots, supplies, or information. Although not provided stats, all the major inhabitants of the town are given names, brief histories, goals, motivations, and outlooks. One of the nice things about the background of Sandpoint is that it felt like a living city, with several major (and dozens of minor) events forming the town's history; most of these defining incidents have little or nothing do with the ongoing adventure, but rather provide context for Sandpoint's collective psyche -- how does a formerly sleepy town rebuild after a fire and a mass murderer? This development helps the town feel like a living, breathing locale rather than a pit stop for restocking heroes.

The next section details Thassilon, the former wondrous empire whose collapse ages ago forms the backdrop against which the adventure unfolds. (Short version: Mighty empire succumbs to sin, collapses on itself.) Although only eight pages, it nevertheless felt overly long, especially given that almost none of the information therein has any direct bearing on the adventure. Sure, there's a lot of background given about the "runelords" of the series title, but it remains to be seen how much of that info the players will ever know . . . especially since so much of that lore seems lost to the sands of time. As a litmus test, how much one gets out of this section will depend on how one feels about various bits of background information presented in *The Lord of the Rings;* if you're the sort of person who loved pouring over the pages and pages of history about how the ring came into being and how its evil eons ago almost brought about the end of time, then you may enjoy this section. If you're the sort who's satisfied with "there's an evil powerful ring that must be destroyed," then you can probably skip the Thassilon section. Nevertheless, it's at least satisfying to know that the world's creators have put considerable thought into the setting's back story, and the richness of this thought does lead to a consistent feeling in the campaign, even if the information itself isn't too interesting in its relevancy.

Most noteworthy about this section are sidebars that detail the remaining five parts of the adventure, giving the broad strokes of each subsequent installment. Although it feels a little wrong to read such "spoilers" ahead of time, it also goes a long way toward defusing criticism that the book doesn't give suitable information for how the series is going to end. It also enables GMs to foreshadow future events and make the whole feel more cohesive; for example, one future part involves the betrayal of someone who the heroes will possibly have befriended in the first adventure, and having this information ahead of time lets the GM plant the seeds much more effectively.

Next is "The Pathfinder's Journal," which details the Pathfinders organization. Yes, it turns out that "Pathfinders" isn't just the name of the book series, it's an actual group that heroes can join. This section tells about the Pathfinders' history, their (loose) organization, and their goals and accomplishments. The pathfinders exist to spread lore of their deeds, so those who would be members need to take notes and record their lore. As an out-of-game-world construct, it seems that the purpose of this group is to provide a means for heroes to enter their tales into the "public record," so that players participating in multiple *Pathfinder* series can chuckle at seeing their previous characters' exploits become

part of the world's history. It's not a bad idea, but it also makes the world feel very large; it's hard to maintain the illusion that the PCs might rise to be the greatest heroes of the land when there's an index of "previous greatest heroes." This section is also black and white, unlike the rest of the beautiful full-color supplement, which makes for a somewhat jarring disconnect.

The next section is the Bestiary, containing six critters who make their debut in the adventure. They're all solid entries, and each is given a full page or two. Without giving too much about them, almost all of them veer more toward the horrific than the goofy (perhaps the goblin snake -- a snake with the head of a you-guessed-it -- being the exception), and they, combined with the campaign advice about goblins earlier in the book, go a long way toward keeping jaded players on their toes.

The book wraps up with a few filler pages, consisting of four suitable-for-PC characters, a "coming next month" page (with the OGL), and an ad for future *Pathfinder* installments.

* * *

Taking a step aside for a moment, let us turn our attention to the ***Rise of the Runelords Player's Guide.*** This full-color supplement, intended (obviously) for players but also GMs, gives a would-be player everything they need to know about the setting. It gives insight into the world of Varisia, the part of the world that the *Rise of the Runelords* takes place.

The sections are typical of those seen in many setting books, with information on the races, classes, and gear of the world. The races and classes section aren't entirely inspiring . . . which is good, in a way, since it seems that Paizo is targeting those whose tastes in ***d20 System*** fare runes more traditional; options that deviated too sharply from what's expected probably would be more trouble than it's worth. More interesting is the gear, which lists 12 pieces of new and nontraditional equipment; this gear goes a long way toward making Varisian characters feel different from their standard-dungeon-crawl counterparts. However, most of the items almost exude *too* much flavor, and it seems unlikely that most players would choose more than a couple of them at most. (Again, this isn't necessarily a bad thing, since there are only 12 items to begin with.) All of the equipment is also illustrated, which goes a long way toward establishing that exotic flavor.

A brief history of Varisia is also presented, along with six feats unique to the land. At least a few of these are pretty interesting, and players looking to immerse themselves fully into the story-arc experience and make a character truly unique to the land would do well to consider using at least one of their slots on these new feats. A two-page description of Sandpoint is provided, giving the briefest of overviews that enables a player to get up to speed on the land. The guide is wrapped up with full-color maps of Varisia and Sandpoint on the inside covers. The Sandpoint map is the same one from *Pathfinder #1,* including the numbers; although it disrupts the aesthetics of the map a bit (especially since there's no corresponding key in this book), but again this isn't necessarily a bad thing since most gamers going through the *Rise of the Runelords* campaign

These ***Player's Guides*** (Paizo has released them previously for the Adventure Path series from *Dungeon*) are a great idea, and serve to bring players up to speed quickly and easily. Also, regardless of the form the gaming group chooses, Paizo offers two nice "services" with this product; one can either purchase a five-pack for $10.00 (and a 16-page full-color supplement for $2.00 apiece is a steal), or one can download the book [free](#). In fact, downloading that book is probably a good idea for anyone on the fence about jumping on the *Pathfinder* bandwagon, since that book does a good job of establishing the tone and feel of the series.

* * *

The first two *Pathfinder* products are not entirely without defect. For one thing, *Pathfinder #1* show signs of lackluster editing, especially in the first sections. This is most likely due to the rush to get the product ready for GenCon, and there isn't anything that is a "dealbreaker" as far as errors go, but it's still somewhat distracting if one is sensitive to that sort of thing. For another, the price might be a fairly large chunk for many gamers; to get the "full story" one is committing to six books in a cycle, which -- at $19.99 -- adds up fast, especially if a fair bit of the book is only intended for one use. Of course, that's probably over 300 pages of adventure, and almost as much again in

supplemental material for that adventure, over the course of the six months. Finally, the pace of release might prove challenging for many gaming groups; this first book looked to have at least four gaming sessions of adventure, which -- assuming a weekly meeting schedule -- means that folks interested in keeping up with the *Pathfinder* series will have some constant but intense gaming sessions. The *Pathfinder* series is a bold experiment, and it will be interesting to see how it pans out. They seem to be attempting to create their own "Forgotten Realms"-style campaign setting in a very different format, and developing that world through adventures and articles is certainly more interesting than trying to get a sense for the land by reading the dry almanac-style supplements And for those who love the old *Dungeon* and *Dragon* material, this line looks to promise similar material from much of the same creative team, with the added bonus that all the pieces are designed to fit together as a cohesive whole. For those who enjoy the idea of flavorful but accessible **d20 System** fantasy adventure, *Pathfinder #1* and the **Rise of the Runelords Player's Guide** form a promising beginning to what will hopefully be the stuff of legends.

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Alquimia de Barrio

for *GURPS Technomancer*

by Paul Stefko

In the world of **GURPS Technomancer,** while the business of alchemy is dominated by huge pharmachemical companies like Hermes Technology, small businesses still have a place locally. In ethnic communities, small towns, and especially among the criminal element, private alchemists maintain a healthy if diminishing trade.

In El Paso, Texas, one such small alchemist is Alejandro Espanoza, founder and proprietor of Alquimia de Barrio ("neighborhood alchemy"). Alquimia be Barrio opened 23 years ago, and business was good for quite a while. Eventually, though, many of Espanoza's staple elixirs began showing up on shelves at pharmacies and chain stores at vastly lower prices.

Mr. Espanoza has turned to other sources of income to supplement his dying business, leading him into the arms of the Juarez Cartel, who badly needed someone to brew combat elixirs for their enforcers. Now Alquimia de Barrio could easily become the location of adventure as PCs (be they law enforcement of criminals -- Cartel or otherwise) stumble across the shop in the course of other pursuits.

Setting

Exterior: Alquimia de Barrio is located in a three-story brick building with an adjacent alley. Walls are 6 inches of brick over 8 inches of reinforced concrete (DR 16*, 67 HP and DR 96*, 80 HP respectively).

Windows and Doors: The building has two exterior doors -- the public entrance in the front and a service door on the side of the building. The public entrance is plate glass (DR 1, 3 HP), as are the display windows. Both door and windows are mounted with 1/2-inch steel bars (DR 11, 22 HP). The service door opens from the business office into the alley; it is 2 inch-thick steel (DR 112, 75 HP). Both doors and all windows are fitted with high-quality locks (-4 to Lockpicking to open) and alarms (-2 to Electronics Operation (Security) to disable).

The Shop: The front room of the shop is taken up primarily with shelves displaying product. The shelves themselves are heavy wooden bookcases (DR 2*, 29 hp) standing about 4 feet high and lined with racks for potion or injection vials and aerosols or with stacks of boxes and tins for powders and ointments. A shop counter with register and small displays blocks off the rear of the shop, and a wooden door leads to the office.

Alquimia de Barrio commonly stocks the following elixirs (in most applicable forms, except pastilles, inhalers, and smokes):

Birth Control† $75*
Fire Resistance $435
Hair Growth† $175
Hair Removal† $95
Healing $65*
Health $865*
Hearing $260*
Keen Sight $440*
Magic Resistance‡ $1,610
Pain Resistance $465*
Self-Love $550*
Sleep $185*

Sunblock† $85
Tooth Care† $85
True Sight‡ $865
Water Breathing‡ $880
Universal Antidote $385*

* These elixirs are covered by most medical insurance programs (typically by prescription), subsidizing up to 80% of the cost to the consumer.
† *GURPS Technomancer*, p. 49-50.
‡ These elixirs are available but only in small numbers. Alejandro will have 1d-2 of each in stock at any given time.

The Office: A door at the rear of the shop leads to a small business office dominated by a large oak desk (DR 2*, 29 hp) and several filing cabinets (DR 7, 30 hp). An exterior door leads to the alley (see above). An interior door leads to stairs going down to the basement.

The desk is dominated by a rather outdated personal computer (-2 to Computer Operation rolls, but +2 to rolls to circumvent the limited security installed). Alejandro keeps his financial records and invoices on the system, but he also keeps a second set of ledgers in a false bottom in the large desk drawer (Lockpicking-1 to unlock the drawer, Search-1 to locate the compartment).

One of the filing cabinets is actually a disguised safe in which Alejandro locks the shop's earnings as well as his store of illegal elixirs. The safe is extremely high quality (-6 to Lockpicking) and was procured with the aid of the Cartel.

The Basement: The basement houses a well-stocked alchemy lab (+1 to Alchemy skill) with enough room for up to three alchemists to run concurrent projects. The walls here are 2 feet of reinforced concrete (DR 288*, 115 HP) to contain possible explosions.

One of the sections is curtained off with flowered bedsheets hung on a clothesline. This is where Ana-Maria works when she's home, and she's insisted on privacy when she's working on "hobby projects."

The Apartments: The floors above the shop are accessed via a stairwell above the alleyway exit. The second floor is a large, three- bedroom apartment inhabited by Alejandro Espenoza and his children. A boarded-up fireplace holds a mantletop shrine to the Virgin and a gilt-framed picture of Rosa, the late Mrs. Espanoza, who died 8 years ago of magic-resistant breast cancer.

The third floor is split into two single-bedroom apartments. Currently, one apartment is rented to a young married couple with a 5- month-old daughter. The other apartment is vacant; a sign in the stairwell window lists a phone number for prospective tenants.

Alejandro has not secured the top floors as well as he has the shop. The windows have simple locks (+2 to Lockpicking) and no alarms.

The Barrio: The surrounding neighborhood is run-down but generally friendly. Several restaurants and grocers cater to a nearly all- Hispanic population. Alejandro makes weekly money deliveries to a bank a block away; he wears his tactical vest under a long coat on such occasions.

Characters

Alejandro Espenoza   *150 points*

As a young boy, Alejandro Espenoza became fascinated with magic. Living in El Paso, only two obstacles really blocked Alejandro's entry into that world: his lack of magical ability and his family's superstitions against spellcasting.

Alejandro eventually discovered that the study of alchemy came quite easily to him. He loved deciphering new formularies and brewing up his little pieces of magic. His parents saw nothing wrong with alchemy; despite the odd smells, the practice felt more like their ancient folk remedies than "magic."

Alejandro was admitted to the University of Texas at El Paso's new Advanced Alchemy program in 1972. He published several papers on medical elixirs and earned his Ph.D. by the time he was 26. Then, rather than take one of his many offers of corporate employment, Alejandro moved back to his old neighborhood, working odd jobs and double shifts until he had enough money saved up to start his own alchemy shop, Alquimia de Barrio.

In the last decade, business has declined. Alejandro's desire to succeed has forced him into a poor position; five years ago, he started producing illegal combat elixirs for the Juarez Cartel. The combination of steady cash and access to secure formularies was too much incentive for Alejandro.

The Cartel's money has kept the Espenoza family comfortable despite their failing business. It has even paid for Alejandro's daughter, Ana-Maria, to attend UTEP. But the pressures of a criminal life are weighing on him. Alejandro is a proud man, and he doesn't like being beholden to anyone. It's only a matter of time before he makes the dangerous decision to part ways with the Cartel.

Alejandro Espanoza is 52 years old, balding, and has hearing loss from several nasty backfire accidents in college. He stands 5'8" tall and weighs 135 lbs. His typical attire includes a white business shirt and black pants, black socks and shoes, and a white apron stained with various chemicals and dyes. When he makes "deliveries" for the Cartel, he drives an unmarked white van with a pump shotgun behind the passenger seat. He also wears a tactical vest on such occasions for personal protection.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: (7+1) [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [6]; Spanish (Native) [0].

Advantages: Acute Taste and Smell 2 [4]; Patron (Cartel; 6 or less; Can provide equipment up to starting wealth, +50%) [8]; Resistant to Ingested Poison +8 [5]; Security Clearance 1 (Granting organization is of relatively minor importance) [2]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Curious (15) [-2]; Duty (to Cartel, 12 or less, nonhazardous) [-5]; Greed (15) [-7]; Hard of Hearing [-10]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Proud [-1].

Skills: Alchemy/TL(7+1)-16 (IQ+2) [16]; Chemistry/TL(7+1) (Biochemistry)-14/12* (IQ+0) [1]; Computer Operation/TL(7+1)-15 (IQ +1) [2]; Driving/TL(7+1) (Automobile)-11† (DX+1) [3]; Guns/TL(7+1) (Shotgun)-10 (DX+0) [1]; Merchant-14 (IQ+0) [2]; Pharmacy/TL(7+1) (Synthetic)-16 (IQ+2) [12]; Research/TL(7+1)-15 (IQ+1) [4]; Writing-14 (IQ+0) [2].

Techniques: Battle Elixir-15 [2]; Healing Elixir-16 [2]. Spells: Extinguish Fire-12 (IQ-2) [1]; Ignite Fire-12 (IQ-2) [1]; No- Smell-12 (IQ-2) [1]; Purify Air-12 (IQ-2) [1]; Purify Water-13 (IQ-1) [2]; Seek Water-12 (IQ-2) [1]; Sense Foes-12 (IQ-2) [1].
* bought up from Alchemy default.
† bought up from IQ default.

Ana-Maria Espenoza   *135 points*

Ana-Maria Espenoza is a junior at the University of Texas at El Paso, majoring in Meta-Informational Thaumatology. An avid runner and swimmer, she opted against joining the school's track or swimming teams in favor of her true passion -- dance.

Ana-Maria's magery was detected very early in her life when she used a kindermagic variant of Seek Earth to find a gold coin in a Mardi Gras cake. She taught her father a few of the spells he uses in his alchemy work, and she helped out around his lab after school and on weekends throughout high school.

In college, Ana-Maria is struggling economically. While her father handles her tuition bills, he cannot afford to provide her with spending money. To earn a little extra cash, Ana-Maria has prepared and sold Attractiveness elixirs to her fellow students since she was a freshman.

Despite having quite a few extracurricular activities and a very heavy course load, Ana-Maria stills tries to spend as much time at home as she can. She is not an uncommon sight around the shop in the evenings and on weekends.

Ana-Maria is 20 years old, stands 5'4" and weighs 120 lbs. She is a very pretty young woman with thick brown hair and brown eyes. She is most often dressed in denim shorts and t-shirts.

ST 9 [-10]; *DX* 11 [20]; *IQ* 12 [40]; *HT* 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [3].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL:(7+1) [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [6]; Spanish (Native) [0].

Advantages: Appearance (Beautiful) [12]; Magery 2 [25].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted) (Glasses) [-10]; Shyness (Mild) [-5]; Wealth (Poor) [-15].

Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance; Dislikes Bigots [-2].

Skills: Alchemy/TL(7+1)-12 (IQ+0) [8]; Chemistry/TL(7+1)-10 (IQ-2) [1]; Climbing-10 (DX-1) [1]; Computer Operation/TL(7+1)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Connoisseur (Dance)-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Dancing-13 (DX+2) [8]; Hiking-10 (HT-1) [1]; History (Trinity's Shadow)-10 (IQ-2) [1]; Literature-10 (IQ-2) [1]; Mathematics/TL8 (Applied)-10 (IQ-2) [1]; Research/TL(7+1)-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Running-12 (HT+1) [4]; Swimming-11 (HT +0) [1]; Thaumatology-12 (IQ+0) [2].

Techniques: Attractiveness Elixir-12 [2]. Spells: Analyze Magic-13 [2]; Aura-13 [2]; Counterspell-12 [1]; Death Vision-12 [1]; Detect Magic-13 [2]; Dispel Magic-12 [1]; Identify Spell-12 [1]; Lend Energy-12 [1]; Purify Air-12 [1]; Purify Water-12 [1]; Recover Energy-15 [8]; Seek Earth-12 [1]; Seek Water-12 [1]; Seeker-13 [2]; Summon Spirit-13 [2].

Miguel Espenoza   *75 points*

Miguel Espenoza is Alejandro's younger child. Two years ago, Miguel joined up with a street gang calling itself the Greyfaces. A minor part of the Juarez Cartel's local distribution network, the Greyfaces were responsible for the lowest street-level dealing. Miguel was a scout for the gang, but a natural talent for smooth talking lead to his quick rise in the organization.

Miguel's star was rising fast until the day he was arrested for vandalizing a local business. A first-time offender and a minor but with obvious ties to the Cartel, Miguel was tagged as an intelligence asset and released back onto the streets. Since his arrest, Miguel knows that he's being tracked by the DAEA and Vice, and he's been avoiding the Greyfaces for their own protection. Much of his time has been spent at his father's store, and he's becoming fairly proficient in the family business.

Miguel Espenoza is 15 years old, stands 5'5" tall, and weighs 125 lbs. His wardrobe typically consists of tight white tank-top shirts and very baggy blue jeans. His head is shaved, but he covers it with a bandanna when manning the shop.

ST 10 [0]; *DX* 10 [0]; *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 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: (7+1) [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [6]; Spanish (Native) [0].

Advantages: Ally (75% of starting points; Group Size (6-10); 6 or less) [9]; Smooth Operator 1 [15].

Perks: Honest Face [1].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12 or less) [-10]; Curious (12 or less) [-5]; Enemy (El Paso Police) (medium-sized group, some formidable; Watcher; 9 or less) [-7]; Wealth (Struggling) [-10].

Quirks: Affects Broken English [-1].

Skills: Acting-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Alchemy/TL(7+1)-12 (IQ+0) [8]; Area Knowledge (El Paso)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Brawling-12 (DX+2) [4]; Detect Lies-11 (Per-1) [1]; Diplomacy-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Driving/TL(7+1) (Automobile)-10 (DX+0) [2]; Fast-Talk-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Guns/TL(7+1) (Shotgun)-11 (DX+1) [2]; Intimidation-13 (Will+1) [2]; Lockpicking/TL (7+1)-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Mechanic/TL(7+1) (Automobile)-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Merchant-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Running-10 (HT+0) [2]; Savoir-Faire (Gang)-13 (IQ+1) [1]; Shadowing-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Streetwise-12 (IQ+0) [1].

Techniques: Universal Antidote Elixir-12 [3]; Healing-12 [2].

"Toro" Ruez   *75 points*

"Toro" Ruez is an enforcer for the Juarez Cartel, a small-time hood assigned to protection rackets in the neighborhood. Big, none too pretty, and a little stupid, Ruez isn't good for much of anything requiring initiative, but he's more than frightening enough to keep most of the local businesses in line.

When he gets off work, Ruez likes to drink and gamble, and he can often be found at a local underground club called Lucifer Age.

Toro is 6'2" and weighs 215 lbs. He wears a Dallas Cowboys cap and windbreaker constantly, and he generally keeps one hand on the .38 revolver in his jacket pocket. He drives a rusted, 15-year-old Ford pickup.

ST 12 [20]; *DX* 11 [20]; *IQ* 9 [-20]; *HT* 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [5]; Per 9 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: (7+1) [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Accented/None) [2]; Spanish (Native/Semi- Literate) [-2].

Advantages: Contact (Police, Effective skill 12, 6 or less, usually reliable) [1]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Hard to Kill 1 [2]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Resistant to Disease +3 [3].

Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Bad Temper (15 or less) [-5]; Duty (to the Cartel) (12 or less (quite often)) [-10].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Ciudad Juarez)-10 (IQ+1) [2]; Carousing-11 (HT +0) [1]; Driving/TL(7+1) (Automobile)-12 (DX+1) [4]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-12 (DX+1) [2]; Gambling-10 (IQ+1) [4]; Guns/TL(7+1) (Pistol)-13 (DX+2) [4]; Holdout-10 (IQ+1) [4]; Intimidation-12 (Will +2) [8]; Shadowing-10 (IQ+1) [4]; Stealth-10 (DX-1) [1]; Streetwise-10 (IQ+1) [4].

Plot

There are several threads surrounding Alquimia de Barrio that could lead to the involvement of the PCs, depending on what kind of campaign you are running.

The War in the Streets: If the PCs are police or DAEA agents, the increasing frequency of combat elixirs in the hands of the Juarez Cartel will be an alarming development. Investigation could lead to one of Alejandro's monthly deliveries or to Toro Ruez and his intimidation racket in Alquimia's neighborhood.

The Helen Syndrome: A subtle critical failure in a batch of Ana- Maria's elixirs has produced a bizarre Attractiveness variant. The elixir makes the subject so attractive to members of the opposite sex that some develop an unhealthy and dangerous obsession. A rash of violent, competitive stalker activity draws the attention of police or campus-based PCs.

That Old Gang of Mine: Miguel is being pressured by his friends in the Greyfaces to help them move stolen property and drugs through the shop. With police attention firmly on him, Miguel is torn between loyalty and obedience to the gang and protecting the Greyfaces from their own poor planning. The PCs can become involved as officers assigned to Miguel's case, as agents of the Cartel attempting to work the kid, or as an independent force that Miguel might turn to to solve his dilemma.

Supply Run: The PCs are simply in the store shopping for elixirs when Toro and the Cartel make a visit looking for an emergency fix before a mission. Alejandro has been growing dissatisfied with his relationship with the Cartel and chooses today to stand up to their bullying. A conflict ensues with the PCs caught in the crossfire.

Interpretation

Using the Alquimia de Barrio in other settings involves making a few changes. The important elements are that the shop is run by a minority and maintains ties with both the ethnic community and some form or criminal organization.

Middle Ages/Renaissance: In a medieval or Renaissance campaign that includes open magical elements, Alquimia de Barrio can appear with little difference. Alejandro would fit perfectly as a Sephardi Jew in Moorish or (with an appropriate Secret) reconquered Spain. He chafes under his relationship with organized crime operated by Muslims or Gentiles.

Of course, in a secret-magic historical setting, the shop could become an apothecary that deals in elixirs under the

counter. Alejandro could then become involved with one or more secret magical societies, perhaps even being an uninitiated affiliate of the Cabal.

Modern/Cyberpunk: Assuming a fairly standard TL8 modern or cyberpunk setting without magic, Alejandro would become a pharmacist who deals in black-market drugs and combat stimulants. Remove all spells and alchemical techniques from Alejandro and his children. Ana-Maria and Miguel will decrease in point value, but Alejandro's skills should be modified as follows:

Skills: Chemistry/TL8 (Biochemistry)-16/14 (IQ+2) [8]; Computer Operation/TL8-16 (IQ+2) [4]; Driving/TL(7+1) (Automobile)-11† (DX+1) [3]; Guns/TL8 (Shotgun)-12 (DX+2) [4]; Merchant-15 (IQ+1) [4]; Pharmacy/TL8 (Synthetic)-17 (IQ+3) [16]; Research/TL8-17 (IQ+3) [12]; Writing-15 (IQ+1) [4].

Pyramid Review

Penguin

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Penguin artwork by David Clegg

Development & graphic design by Brian Schomburg & Christian T. Petersen

Full-color boxed game containing cloth bag, 36 penguin models in four colors, 39 penalty point chips, six player screens, & rule sheet; $14.95

For anyone who thinks global warming won't affect them, they haven't considered the plight of Fantasy Flight's *Penguin.* In spite of the singular form in the game's title, there are several of the little birds in peril here. They've all managed to get trapped on a small ice floe, and they're now jockeying for position, trying to get atop one another lest they fall over the side.

The object of the game is to end the game with the fewest penalty points.

Each player receives a small screen for privacy, and behind it places penguins he has blindly drawn from the selection in the bag. Every round a different player starts the action, placing one of his birds on the table. The penguins come in four colors. The next player may place one figure of any color on either side of the first. If someone tries to stack them, however, that penguin must sit atop two others in a pyramid formation, and it must match one of the two colors under it. Fumbling with the pieces carries a penalty; if the stack falls over, the player responsible is immediately fined for all his remaining figures and the round begins all over again.

The pyramid has a maximum base of eight penguins before it reaches the edges of the floe (about 12" on the tabletop), and ideally the 36 birds taper to a single animal at the top (seven or eight inches tall). It seldom works out so neatly. If on his turn a player finds he cannot meet the requirements for placing a penguin, he's done for that round. When everyone else has placed all their pieces or been eliminated, the round is over and any leftover penguins are revealed. Players receive a penalty point for every pawn they could not place, drawn from a pile of counters provided with the game. These points, like the penguins, are kept secret behind the screen after they're dispensed, so knowing how many a player has accumulated requires "counting cards" (so to speak). When everyone has had a turn to start a round, the game ends and penalty points are tallied. Whoever has the lowest total wins.

Most of the bad news regarding this game concerns the components. The cloth bag and the counters are both fine components. The little screens are nice, and it's surprising to find something that useful and involved (six of them, no less) in this box for the small sum Fantasy Flight is asking. Alas, they're awfully small, and fitting everything behind it isn't as easy as it looks (a round or square table works better in this regard; a long table causes privacy problems). The most disappointing feature is the penguins. These plastic figures are really nifty and the kids are going to love them. Trouble is, they might not stack as well as they should. They have slits along the shoulders, and the round bottoms should fit into these curved slots, but while that works fine at the kitchen table as an idle time-killer, multiple people contributing to the same activity during play won't have the same luck. The round bottoms allow them to rotate completely, so the bottoms almost always fit whereas the tops only do if one concentrates on aligning the shoulder

slots.

One solution is to line them up like bowling pins in decreasing rows on the table; players can still use the rules for knocking the penguins over, though not only is that a harsh penalty, it requires *everyone* to start from scratch . . . and passing that bag around gets old. The original plan was to make this a simple card game, and that would have cured many woes. Even now, though, if the rule sheet is folded up the whole thing fits into the cloth bag (which then makes the box, a surprisingly roomy one, obsolete).

It's easy to find good things about the game, too. Although foiling an opponent's plans is pretty much impossible (no one can possibly guess who has what behind their screen), stacking the penguins is a charming exercise . . . from a mechanics standpoint, anyway. One cannot help but think there's a strategy to be found lurking just at the corner of one's eye, and playing one more game might help unveil it, but even if this is an illusion it's an amusing and challenging one to pursue. The kids will love the colors and figurines, and parents will enjoy divining the patterns necessary for success.

--Andy Vetromile

The Omniscient Eye

How Much for Just the Senator?

So your character is a millionionaire playboy, a vampire cashing in some very long-term bonds, or an alchemist who finally has that lead-to- gold formula right. However you did it, you have a lot of money and want to buy yourself a Congressperson. How do you bribe an elected official, how illegal is that, and what can you do with your new friend?

First, know that this will be harder than you think. As frightening as it may seem, many politicians really believe most of the things they say. They have principles, believe they know better than you, or have fallen for their own PR. At least on core issues, bribery will not be the way to make large changes. Could you pay the President or Speaker of the House enough to reverse their positions on abortion? Even completely unprincipled politicians can be hard to sway because they are obstinate or too proud to be bought by someone from the 99.9999% of the population that is not a Senator. Or maybe someone else already bought that one.

And, frankly, can you trust him to stay bought? A quote attributed to a great many politicians holds, "If you can't take their money, drink their liquor, [enjoy] their women, and then come in here the next day and vote against them, you don't belong here." At best you are renting, not buying.

Even with a successful bribe, your range is limited. Your new friend (let's call him Bill) has a long list of old friends, alliances, and entanglements. A sudden change can undermine the power base you wanted to buy in the first place. Every hour Bill spends on damage control is an hour he is not advancing your interests.

Given these issues, one approach to buying an elected official is buying an election. Find a candidate who already agrees with you. This is how most special interest groups work: Support the home team instead of paying off your opponents. Besides, everyone wants to be your friend after you win, but you appreciate the people who helped you win in the first place. "Dance with the ones who brung ya."

There is, of course, a catch: Campaign finance laws are designed to protect incumbents. Your ability to fund an opposition candidate is limited, and meanwhile the existing representative can threaten your interests. You may need the challenger to win if you annoy the incumbent.

Consider the tools you have available for funding campaigns, whether you are helping someone's first or 31st election. The most obvious is "hard money," direct donations to campaigns. That will not get you far: a few thousand dollars in the primary and general elections. You can generate more hard money by organizing fundraisers, where many people donate a few thousand dollars, and if necessary make the fundraisers lavish enough to really be worth $1,000 a plate. You can also pour in as much "soft money" as you like, though it can be used only for "voter education" and other things that are not explicitly helping your candidate.

There are many backdoor methods of exceeding the campaign funding caps. Give generously to Bill's party, the state-level party, the state-level party in surrounding states, political action committees, or allied think tanks, non-profits, and university departments. Lend him a corporate jet for campaign appearances or some thugs for security.

You can also support causes Bill cares about. You held a fundraiser for him, so

The Americenteric View of the Universe

This column assumes current United States federal law. If you are playing in another country or century, you will have other exciting options. You might be able to bribe officials openly, or be required to do so in order to conduct normal business. You also might get hanged, so tread carefully.

hold one for his favorite charity. Let Bill headline an event and put out a press release taking credit; the public loves Bill, he loves you, and the charity loves you both. You are now on- record as a philanthropist who works on the same issues as Bill, so it is only natural that you meet with him frequently to discuss how you can help the public.

Maybe Bill is not the charitable type. He wants money, preferably legal and without your fingerprints on it. This is less efficient, but still doable. If Bill has written a book, buy a copy for everyone in your company, and he gets royalties; if not, have someone ghost-write one for him and get him a large advance. Buy some property from him at an inflated price or sell him a new car with a large discount. If your accountants cannot make that work, buy houses in his neighborhood and drive up his property value. Tell him just before you buy or sell a lot of stock. Try any of these ideas with his friends and family members. Basically, look up anyone involved in a federal ethics scandal. Whatever they (allegedly) did will probably work for you, if you can avoid getting caught.

Of course, why worry about getting caught? While most of the previous ideas are shady and/or unethical, they are only illegal under certain hard-to-prove circumstances. Someone will eventually make false ethics charges against Bill anyway, so he might as well get some money along the way (ask him, he'll take money and ethics charges over just ethics charges any day of the week). Investigations and hearings are far more common than prosecutions, and prison time is rare. Unless you are really obvious, your worst case scenario is the candidate forfeiting some of the money. At least Bill knows you tried.

You face two major risks. First, Bill must win. Supporting a loser means that you now have a legislator who knows you tried to take his job away. This makes investigation more likely and more rigorous, although there are also risks to having a high-profile winner.

Second, you the contributor bear more risk than the candidate. Bill can always claim he did not know it was dirty money and donate it to charity; you are the evil monster trying to subvert the democratic process (a completely fair charge in this case). The laws are written by politicians to protect politicians. You are a vulnerable outsider.

We're more than midway through the column, and we have not gotten to the simple option of giving Bill a suitcase full of money. If Bill is open to that, and no one cares that this is blatantly illegal and easy to tape, you win. However you did it, Bill is now on your side. What can Bill do for you?

Your rarest but most convenient case is for Bill to come with a price list. Evidence against Representative Duke Cunningham included a sheet showing how large of a bribe was needed to get various military contracts. He is now serving 100 months in federal prison, which suggests a reason why this is a rare and stupid brand of corruption.

Minus the explicit list, you are shopping for details. "Details," you say; "Thousands and million of dollars to support this buffoon and I get *details*?!"" Yes, details on a multi-trillion dollar budget and on regulations that can dictate winners and losers in an industry. Expect your bribe to be 5% of what you are getting.

Look at it from Representative Bill's position. Does he care whether school lunches are required to have an extra serving of dairy per week, especially when you are an old friend with such convincing graphs on why it is a good idea? Any bank could help with the loans on his new housing program, and conveniently you run a bank that employs many of his constituents. And does it really matter if, for purposes of this new legislation, companies of group C have regulations defined by subsection 3(e)iii rather than 3(e)ii (assuming Bill knows what that means)?

Earmarks have been in the news, as they are a convenient way of rewarding supporters. Earmarks are provisions in legislation directing funds to particular projects, organizations, or areas. Say Representative Bill is working on a $300 billion transportation bill; why not note that 0.1% of the money must be spent on building a bridge in his district? How about smaller potatoes, calling for the military to fund a specific $20 million research project? Really, $20 million is

less than a rounding error in a $3 trillion budget, but it means a lot to the construction or research company you happen to own.

Representative Bill could also give your company some relief from laws and regulations. Maybe Representative Bill can redefine size categories to put your company in a better bracket. If the new tax phases in over several years, you get to be the last group affected. He can call your federal oversight agency and ask them to back off a bit, or at least look more urgently elsewhere. Billion-dollar details are everywhere.

Of course, you will not want to be named explicitly in the legislation. That would look bad and be hard to get away with. Instead, we create a category with only one member: "This tax exemption is open to any company headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, that distributes at least one million gallons of cola per year." If you need more cover (or do not care about collateral damage), make it less specific: "For purposes of this legislation, hamsters shall be considered to be spotted owls."

Your details may not be financial. What if they built that freeway on your enemies' ley lines, disrupting his magic? The military's new weapon could include a particular material that you can sense and control. If an endangered species were "found," you could prevent development in an area, either protecting your fairy friends or giving your world-devourer enough time to hatch.

You can do this backwards if you want the legislation to smite your foes. Re-categorize them or their suppliers. Have Representative Bill launch an investigation. Take whatever limitations you labor under and force them on everyone else. For example, if your company has high labor costs and is losing market share to cheaper competitors, ask Representative Bill to mandate a living wage for the entire industry. Your competitors face additional costs, and you get to stand up as the good corporate citizen who has always been paying that much. Don't just fight your current competitors: Lobby for high minimum requirements to compete at all, so that no one can challenge you. After all, Representative Bill argues, who can be against having the highest safety standards in our industries? Don't you care about the workers?

This leaks into a tactical side issue under the heading "Baptists and Bootleggers." Your bribery is likely to be noticed unless you have cover. Since you are making a mockery of representative government to use The State as a weapon against upright businessmen and consumers, you need someone else to argue that your policies are on the side of the angels. Enter coalition politics: temperance and religious groups supported alcohol Prohibition on moral grounds, while organized crime supported it because it made alcohol more profitable. If there is not already some group on your side "for the children," start funding one today so that it will have a track record when you need it.

This all comes back to our first point: Find someone who agrees with you. It is easier to bribe a man to do what we wants to do anyway. You just needed to shift Representative Bill's priorities a little to put your issue near the front. It does not matter if you have the same reasons for supporting the law, just that it gets passed. He brings jobs to the hard-working voters of his district, and you get a no-bid contract with nicely padded expenses. It is a win for everyone (except the taxpayers who are forced to pay for it)!

The higher up the food chain you shop, the more your elected official can do for you. A senator is more valuable than a representative. Take a committee chair over a freshman legislator. The appropriations committee is where the money is. The downside is that you will find more people bidding for Bill's attention as he advances, and some people forget old friends once they hit the big time.

Darn it, Bill has become corrupt over the years . . . he is selling out you instead of the voters. The cad! It is time to turn another batch of lead into gold and head back to the first paragraph. Luckily, you can tell your new friend Billtwo all about irregularities in Bill's campaign finance reports.

--Piétro Semifero

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!

Pyramid Review

Mage: the Awakening (for the *World of Darkness*)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Kraig Blackwelder, Bill Bridges, Brian Campbell, Stephen Michael DiPesa, Samuel Inabinet, Steve Kenson, & Malcolm Sheppard

Front & Back Cover by Richard Thomas & Katie McCaskill

Illustrated by Michael William Kaluta

400-page three-clor hardcover; $34.99

With ***Mage: the Awakening,*** White Wolf Game Studio completes the re-launch and the re-imagining of the original trilogy of the ***World of Darkness*** RPGs. Technically, as with ***[Vampire: the Requiem](#)*** and ***[Werewolf: the Forsaken,](#)*** it is supplementary setting to the ***[World of Darkness Roleplaying Game,](#)*** replacing ***[Mage: the Ascension](#)*** and designed to add a particular supernatural element to a Storyteller's campaign. Unlike the first two, which involve the undead and the theriomorph, this third game has the mortal at its heart . . . but not the mere mortal, because each Mage has Awoken to the truth of the Universe, and as a Willworker, can quite literally impose his Will upon reality.

Whether through exposure to the supernatural or via a dream, his consciousness has been drawn to an isolated Watchtower. If he can mark his name on the walls inside, he has imposed his Will for the first time, and returns a changed person. With an Awoken soul, he is set apart from the sleeping world of mere mortals, knowing its truth and its structure. The world of the mortals, our world, is known as the "Fallen World," and is denied both magic and access to the "Supernal Realms" by the Abyss. Once it was different; mankind basked in a golden age in the awakened city of Atlantis, but pride was her undoing. Learned in the ways of the Mysteries, the art and practice of magic, and in the patterns that make up the Tapestry of the Universe, this power went to the heads of many. A Wizards' War ensued over who could ascend a ladder built to reach the Supernal Realms, shattering both the ladder and sinking Atlantis. It is thought that the winners of this Celestial War managed to ascend and rule as the Exarchs, while the losers -- known as the Oracles -- were able to establish five watchtowers via which a mortal with a strong enough will could access magic.

Looked upon as different and distrusted by ordinary folk, including his family, a Mage invariably finds a home with one of the four Orders that traces its heritage back to Atlantis. Each Order believes itself to be the inheritors of Atlantis' knowledge and its duty to pass on its traditions. The Adamantine Arrows were Atlantis' warriors and soldiers, today employing combat magic to protect mage cabals and sanctums. Guardians of the Veil were the Awakened City's spies and security, and today try to prevent the misuse of the Mysteries or their revelation to sleepers. Scholars and explorers in Atlantis, today the Mysterium seek the lore lost in the city's destruction. Viziers and priests in Atlantis, the Silver Ladder are the Awakened's organizers who want to rule again. Finally, the Free Council is a new Order with no links to Atlantis, which seeks to modernize magic.

While these five Orders lie at the heart of both the game and character generation, equally as important is a player's choice of Path. This is literally the route dreamt by the Mage to the Watchtower and thus the Supernal Realm from which the Mage draws his magic. In turn the five paths, along with their nicknames are Acanthus (Enchanters), Mastigos (Warlocks), Moros (Necromancers), Obrimos (Theurgists), and Thyrsus (Shaman). Each Path determines two of a Mage's beginning Arcana, each being one of the 10 principles or elements that comprise the Tapestry of creation -

- Death, Fate, Forces, Life, Matter, Mind, Prime, Space, Spirit, and Time.

Of course, there are some basic changes to a character's Advantages or secondary traits. A Mage still possesses a virtue and a vice, and is offered a selection of new Merits, including Familiar (both spiritual and embodied), Enchanted Item, and Library. He also has Gnosis, representing his instinctual understanding of and connection to the Supernal World; essentially, the higher it is, the more capable the Mage, but the harder it is to hide his true nature. Instead of Morality, a Mage has Wisdom, his understanding of the need to maintain the balance between the magical and the mundane. The fundamental question is, can a Mage resist the temptation to employ what is essentially the power of a god? If he fails, this act of Hubris leads to a loss of Wisdom. With successful resistance, a Mage can better gain the trust of spirits, stave off the effects of Paradox, and be trusted enough to be granted an apprenticeship.

At the game's core is its magic system. Two approaches are presented, both traditional, one more than the other. The first is through Rotes, tried and tested spells that are relatively easy to learn and cast. A third of the book is devoted to listing these Rotes. A Mage begins the game with between three and six Rotes selected from his known Arcana. The second approach harks back to previous incarnations of the game, being more freeform. Improvised magic lets a Mage cast spells on the fly, creating them according to known Arcana. In addition a Mage can alter a spell's duration, effect, range, and so on depending upon known Arcana and by taking dice penalties.

If a spell is cast against the normal laws of Fallen World or witnessed by a Sleeper, then it is Vulgar (for) example, floating lotus fashion in the air or transforming into a cat). Vulgar magic invokes Paradox, which can result in Havoc (loss of spell control), Bedlam (personal derangement), an unreal Anomaly, or a Manifestation from the Abyss. Covert spells, for example, using Fortune's Protection to stop a bullet with a hip flask, does not invoke Paradox. Within a Mage's or cabal's sanctum, magic is not Vulgar.

Unfortunately the Storyteller's advice is lackluster, never really rising above the theme of "power corrupts . . ." Also the given antagonists are surprisingly few. The setting's major villains are the Seers of the Throne, mages in the service of the Exarchs; they are left undeveloped for future supplements, and other opposing mages are relegated to the status of short term villains. Likewise, the appendix devoted to "magical" Boston never comes alive as the previous games' settings did. Other appendices detail Legacies, tutored rites that shape an apprentice's soul, granting innate and Paradox free abilities in return for a stipend of power. There is one Legacy here per Path, plus two for NPCs. The Scelesti is a Legacy corrupted by the Abyss, while the Tremere are Mages afflicted by a curse that forces them to steal other Mages' souls. Their nickname indicates their role in the game -- liches.

Mage: the Awakening has some interesting little wrinkles. These include having the Guardians of the Veil sometimes being the "Men in Black" who build labyrinthine secret societies and conspiracies through which a Sleeper must work if he is to Awaken. Cabals of player characters can be built around different sets of symbolic themes from astrology to baseball. Each Path corresponds to certain occult symbols in the Fallen World, for example Egyptology for Moros and Druidism for Acanthus, lending both a method of casting for a Mage and an Awakened reading into the occult. Equally, a Path suggests the nimbus or aura visible when a Mage casts Vulgar magic or is otherwise visible to Mage Sight. For example, the Acanthus nimbus is Fey-like. These small aspects help to color and add flavor to a game.

Behind the dazzling cover *Mage: the Awakening* is the least striking of the *World of Darkness Roleplaying Game* quartet. Although with one artist it has a uniform look, that look is quite subtle. That said, not all of the art works as well as it should. Each of the books has employed a second tone and here it is gold, which works well except for the spell lists. When combined with a cursive font, it makes individual entries difficult to locate.

What stands out with *Mage: the Awakening* is the soundness of the design, the magic system pleasingly pitched at both the neophyte caster with the Rotes and the practiced magician with freeform casting, and the little details that serve to add color to both the magic and the setting. Yet as written, the setting is underwhelming which -- combined with the weak storytelling advice -- leaves the Storyteller to wonder both what he does with a game and the direction he takes it in, let alone sell it to his players. After all, *Vampire: the Requiem* and *Werewolf: the Forsaken* sell themselves with easier tags -- "gothic monsters surviving the night" and "rage-filled beasts policing the spiritual divide" respectively. *Mage: the Awakening* never quite achieves this, getting as far as "with great power . . . " and no further. The lack of an obvious enemy beyond the distant Exarchs and the incidental foe is a further hindrance as is the

uninteresting description of Boston.

Like its look, *Mage: the Awakening* is the least striking of the *World of Darkness Roleplaying* Game quartet. Bereft of both focus and direction, *Mage: the Awakening* fails to entice as a setting, but it is underpinned by decent mechanics and a magic system that works.

--Matthew Pook

How Long Is It? (And Other Personal Questions)

I was a big fan of the old *Talisman* game . . . the second edition if I recall, although as I understand it the basic gameplay changed very little between the first and second editions. This game had the right mix of board-game ease with lots of variety and exploration. The only problem our group had with the game was that an average session would take about as long as a geologic era to complete.

Other games had similar problems. An early afternoon "let's learn *Star Fleet Battles!*" session turned into a "Why has the day ball arisen to burn us?" grousing as the two-ship conflict had not quite resolved. A game of *Mega Supremacy* with all the expansions took days to complete. And a session of *BattleTech* practically ended with Dorito-throwing after several long hours.

But some games have the opposite problem. For example, the missus and I picked up *Vampire Hunter* from the local Goodwill a couple of weeks ago, and were astounded to learn that a game -- complete with hall-skulking, investigating, equipment gathering, and vampire hunting -- takes about 20 minutes from start to finish, including set-up time. (It's weird to consider that it's possible to thwart an ancient evil in less time that it takes to get through an episode of *The Office.*)

In this regard, roleplaying games have a definite edge; their open-ended nature means it's possible to play as long as the players are willing (or as briskly as they can stand) without affecting the core experience overly much. But board and card games are different, and people have different ideas about how long a game "should" last. I remember a review of the *Marvel Trading Card Game* (the PSP/DS/PC game that's based on the *Vs.* system CCG) that complained that a hand of the game could last 20 to 60 minutes. But as someone who used to play *Magic the Gathering* I felt the length of a hand was just right.

The problem is that it can be difficult to gauge what the core experience is that the players are trying to achieve in a game. In an old issue of (I believe) *Space Gamer* (reprinted in the *Murphy's Rules* collection) there's rules for the "Simplest Wargame": One hex, one counter, one die roll to see if the counter is removed. Obviously that is too basic a game for almost anyone, but it raises the question: How simple *could* a wargame get and still be interesting? Or, conversely, how much more needlessly complex are some games?

The Third Edition of *Talisman* ranks in my mind as one of the best game revisions ever. It took a game that was difficult to finish in 12 hours, and pared it down to something which could be completed in three. Even better, it laid the groundwork in my mind for how to speed up the game even further; for example, if each player started the game with a set amount of experience (seven, 14, or 21 points), then the beginning stage of the game can be skipped and the game's length by an hour or more. But there is a point where the game probably couldn't be condensed anymore without impacting the base experience . . . reducing it to the "simplest wargame" scenario of "whoever wins an early die roll will win the game."

Beyond these ruminations, I confess that I don't really have an idea as to *what* makes a game an appropriate length. I tend to feel that my tastes for most old wargames -- where you set up gargantuan maps and countless chits -- has waned over the years, since I don't feel like I have a desire to keep playing a game for a week. Of course, I probably wouldn't have any problem playing a game of *Civilization* for the same amount of time on the computer. I note that "Rock Paper Scissors" is considered by many to be one of the truest games out there, and I confess to having many of the same feelings of victory or defeat in that five-second expression as I have felt in a two-hour card game.

Trying to sort out why folks are playing a game -- and what effect a game's length has upon it -- can be important for tinkerers hoping to expand or contract a game. For example, my armchair analysis of *Talisman* tells me that there are three rough stages that the game has: the initial survival build-up, where players try to get enough experience and loot to stay alive; the mid-game, where the tipping point is reached and the character will survive most (but not all) encounters, and the final battle that will win the game (or push the failing player back to the mid-game). In this case, I tend to find the early stages of the game less interesting but the endgame a bit more so; as such, I can add some experience to starting characters to hasten the first part, and beef up the final encounter a bit more to prolong that

interesting middle game. In the same way, many people enjoy playing the *Vs.* system CCG, but want to shift the game so that the more interesting "expensive" super heroes and villains can make their way out. This is easily accomplished by starting people with one or two Resources (similar to "Land" in ***Magic the Gathering***) and beefing up the number of Endurance (akin to Hit Points) each player has . . . from 50 to, say, 100; that way the early game is sped up but the endgame is slowed down. As a final example, my mental ruminations about Chess tell me that I don't particularly like thinking that hard about each turn; in this case, a variant such as ***Knightmare Chess*** can both speed the game up and make the whole experience more enjoyable for me.

Short games have the advantage of being over with more quickly, which allows for a rematch sooner or permits more games squeezed into a game night. Longer games have a more "epic" feel; winning a close game at the end of the night where everyone is almost but not quite tired of playing is a good feeling. And games in between have their own charm and appeal. Regardless, asking yourself "How long should this game be?" can be the first step toward finding games that are the right length for you, as well as an important part of fixing games that aren't the right length already.

--Steven Marsh

Putting the "Me" in Teams

Whether called a team, a group, a unit, or something else, the assemblage of protagonists forms the basic unit of a gaming group. But what is the reason that a team forms in the first place?

Although a simple question, it's one that has broad implications for a campaign. For example, a group that is formed because of blood relations would have a hard time replacing members regularly (unless there's a slew of "long-lost brothers" floating around), while another group that gathers due to the revelation of a grand mystery might have little reason to remain together once that tale is solved.

Here is an attempt to catalog the most common reasons that a team might come together, including ideas for expanding, evolving, and changing those parameters.

There are two and a half broad reasons why teams form. The first two are because the group *wants* to form (or stay together) or because the group *needs* to form or stay together. The "half" reason is the blood relation; whether these groups are because the person wants to be there or feels obligated to depends on the family dynamics.

The Choices of Association

Most groups of PCs tend to form because its members want to. This is partly because of the desires of players; many gamers enjoy the freedom that roleplaying games provide, and that extends to the ability to associate with whomever they want . . . and leave when they want to. Usually, this rationale doesn't extend any further beyond the idea that they work together well, often because the members complement each other. Thus, a healer, a warrior, and a magician might find themselves agreeing to become a team because all three recognize that successful groups often have a healer, a warrior, and a magician. Likewise, many teams form for no reason other than mercenary self-interest; it's more profitable and easier to survive as part of a group. In this case, groups might come together because of guilds, gathering points, competitions, and so on.

In the Beginning . . .

To quote a tagline, "every saga has a beginning," and every group has a point when they get together for their first adventure. *After* this tale, it becomes a simple matter for heroes to stay together, but sometimes the reasoning to remain as a group is nothing more than a successful initial outing. This is especially true if the adventure was noteworthy; the fact that everyone came back alive from a "get the orb to save the world" tale can be auspicious enough to warrant a team's formation.

Getting the heroes together for that first adventure can be a challenge unto itself, but at this point any of the standard advice for motivating a group can kick in: "The four of you stop at an inn separately to rest for the night . . ." For a suitably epic setting, that "initial adventure" can actually provide the impitus to remain together throughout the entire campaign; for example, the Fellowship of *The Lord of the Rings* are only together for one purpose, but it just so happens that the mission requires a thousand pages of adventure (or twelve hours of screen time) to achieve that purpose.

Of course, one tried-and-true method of forming a group is to simply say that

Why Ask Why?

Many groups -- especially old-school "hack 'n' slash" ones -- tend to exist without concern or rationale for the larger "why"; they get together as a team because, if they didn't, the players would need to find something better to do with their time. While it's perfectly reasonable for groups to just be together, coming up with larger motivations can make it possible to enhance the experience of even the most "get to the point" gaming groups. For example, if the fantasy heroes have been given special status by the king as Officially Unofficial Imperial Investigators, then it becomes that much more logical for the "mysterious old man" to track down the heroes; he's simply a liaison of the king. Likewise, if these heroes have OUII status, then this can become motivation for larger goals and rewards: "Do the following, and the king will grant you a parcel of land for the purpose of building personal castles."

everyone knows each other; the hows and wherefores about who met whom when can be waved again for another day (although if the players have chosen this option themselves, it's probably best for them to hash out the broad basics of the association: how close of a friendship do they have, how long have they known each other, and so on).

Mystery Play

One of the best reasons for getting a group to gel -- either for an initial outing or longer -- is the mystery that all its members are interested in solving. Thus, if the four PCs gather in a tavern one evening and awaken to the shrieks of the innkeeper being killed in his (locked) study, then that alone might be reason to gather . . . at least initially. All four PCs -- the only ones in the inn suited for adventure, naturally -- might be well-disposed toward the innkeeper and interested in seeking justice (or the reward offered by the widow); discovering what happened is motivation enough to form a team.

When using a mystery to get the heroes together, the biggest questions the GM has are: How big is the mystery, and is it solvable? The former part should be obvious and determines how long the mystery motivation alone is designed to propel the heroes. A mystery that is intended to be resolved in an adventure or three ("Who killed the innkeeper, and why?") is different than one that will be the focus of an entire campaign ("What is the grand conspiracy behind the disappearance of the moon?"). Making sure the players understand what type of enigma is being presented keeps them from being either surprised at a mystery's abrupt conclusion or frustrated at the continued lack of resolution.

The second aspect of a mystery -- Is it solvable? -- may be somewhat surprising, since many people approach mysteries with the idea that they are always intended to be solved. However, in general, the three answers here are: "Yes," "No," and "Yes But Not Really." "Yes" is the most common type of mystery and doesn't really need an explanation. "No" is usually the type of mystery that is intended as a long-term campaign, such as, "Why are the stars rapidly growing dimmer?" (from *Fading Suns*) or "How do we permanently stop unstoppable evil _____?" (from many *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns). Of course, a "No" mystery can be turned into another form at any point with the revelation of additional clues. The "Yes But Not Really" type is reserved for mysteries that will have some resolution, but either the heroes can't reveal what they know, or there is more than one answer for what happened. The movie *Hollywoodland* is an example of this sort of mystery, as is *The DaVinci Code*. These mysteries can be a good compromise resolution to what would otherwise be "No" mysteries, giving some sense of resolution but not seriously impacting the campaign world as a full revelation of truth might.

It's *very* important to understand what is expected from a mystery before attempting to utilize it; failure to do so can lead to a player revolt or the collapse of the gaming group. Mysteries formed the foundation of both *The X-Files* and *Twin Peaks,* and the audience did not ultimately enjoy the pacing with which those issues were resolved. If a mystery isn't intended to be resolved (or at least not for a *looooong* time), it can be useful to let the *players* know this. One good way is via prophets, seers, wise folks, or the like: "There was a case like this back in '58 . . . it was never solved, and I doubt you all will come any closer to the truth."

Finally, as another possibility to the mysterious motivation, it's common for one mystery to lead to another. For example, if the answer to "Who killed the innkeeper, and why?" turns out to be, "Suicide, to lead the adventurers on the trail and to keep from being tortured by the Grand Conspiracy to discern what the innkeeper knew," then suddenly the mystery turns into other questions: "What is the Grand Conspiracy, and what did the innkeeper know (or not know)?"

Communal Origin

In the comics, a communal origin is a typical reason for a team to form voluntarily. Communal origins are most

Of course, it's possible for teams to avoid even the flimsiest of pretenses, but these pretenses can actually provide in game reasons for speeding along the players' desire to get to the action. For example, if the OUII liaison has a special handshake and sigil and the heroes have the Scroll of Liaison Confirmation, then a mission from him can sidestep any wasted time questioning whether the contact is a doppelganger, mind-controlled, etc. In this case, having a group rationale means line-jumping right to the dungeon!

common in campaigns with unusual abilities. If all the PCs are exposed to the same radiation and given powers because of it (such as *The Fantastic Four*) or were all formerly dead but resurrected by the elemental forces of the universe to serve them (as in *The Elementals*), then that can be justification enough to create a cohesive unit.

However, a communal origin doesn't need to relate to powers, per se, and can instead refer to the reasoning behind a group's gathering. For example, let's take our tavern mystery from above. Instead of discovering the innkeeper dead, what if our heroes awaken in the morning to discover everyone else in town dead but them? This is a combination mystery ("What the heck happened?!") and communal origin ("Why were we spared?"). This is the tack taken by the classic **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** adventure/computer game **Curse of the Azure Bonds,** where the heroes all awaken with the same unusual tattoos that glow in certain circumstances. Another communal origin is the "escaped gladiators" premise that many **Dark Sun** campaigns were built around. Likewise, a group of heroes who all witness the same crime and are targeted by the mob might have a communal origin that gives a compelling reason to stick together.

With a Great Group Comes Great Powers

Related to the communal origin is the team that receives some kind of powers or abilities from being together. For example, a band of heroes exposed to radiation might be able to combine their powers into a powerful mega-blast, or a group of fantasy adventurers might be blessed by a deity such that none of them can die if all the members are within 100 yards of each other. The mere existence of such an ability could provide ample reason for characters to stick together.

Again, these "powers" need not be super-abilities in the traditional sense. For example, let's take our adventurers holed up in an inn once again. They're the only ones in the inn, and the innkeeper dies in the night. The mayor sorts out that the innkeeper's will stipulated that the tavern should be divided up among those who were staying there when he died . . . but they can't sell it for a period of less than five years. Such a contrivance would give the heroes a ready-made base of operations, ties to the local community (whose countryside is no doubt riddled with ancient dungeons), and a reason to stick together. (In this case, the GM might have an extra NPC or two in the inn at the same time as the heroes' fateful visit, to give a couple of "wild cards" a stake in the locale's operation.)

Generally, options that relate to additional abilities must usually be sorted out in character creation. However, this is not a requirement; for example, a group of heroes who were exposed to magical forces that enable them to focus as a party and determine the location of the next Great Evil in the world are really only doing the plot-device work that the Mysterious Old Men with Messages of the world would otherwise do. Such an ability could be granted by GM fiat after the campaign starts, and it probably shouldn't cost any points (unless the players figure out how to use this power in some creative way that gives them an edge).

The Trouble with Options

While reasons for a group's formation centering around their options have many advantages (most especially not feeling like they railroad the players), they also have their problems. First, it can be challenging to introduce new characters with some of these possibilities, such as the communal origin. Likewise, it can be difficult to bring in new *players* with some options, especially those that require player and character knowledge from the beginning. For example, a campaign that revolves around a long-running mystery with a lot of pieces might frustrate new arrivals who don't have full access to the back story, or may not appreciate future revelations ("Wow; the mastermind was the innkeeper's *widow?!*" "Err... sorry, Dave. Trust us; she was important.")

Assembly Required

The second broad class of a party's formation is where they are forced to together by some outside agency or element. The intensity of "requirements" can vary greatly; for example, someone instructed by their employer to join a team of PCs technically has a choice, but choosing to violate that option means unemployment. (Conversely, those who are compelled by their deity to join a group or die don't have a Plan B . . . unless you count "burial.") There are a few

classical ways that such a requirement might be devised, but many reasons can compel otherwise disparate people to join a team.

Agent X, You Know Agents Y and Z . . .

Perhaps the most common type of group organization comes from an outside agency (or agencies) that one or more of the heroes are a part of. If the PCs are all members of the same larger unit (such as *GURPS Black Ops*), then this justification is easy: "You are all assigned to the same team by the highers-up . . ." Likewise, if the heroes are parts of different organizations that have mostly friendly relations, then a group can be formed from inter-organizational loans; such arrangements often take place in spy games (where PCs are from different countries) as well as settings such as *In Nomine,* where the PCs all have angelic or demonic superiors (and, in a good number of games, all ostensibly work on "the same side").

In fact, the "different interconnected agencies" structure is ideal for many settings; it provides lots of different backgrounds and options and thus creates a varied group, yet the differences allow for some inter-party friction that keeps things interesting. ("Look, I know that the U.S. and Germany are on the same side now, but my dad was part of the Bulge, so you'll forgive me if I'm not all cozy about this arrangement, *mein freund.*")

If using this option, it's best to determine the extent of loyalty that the PCs have toward their organization(s), as well as the degree of freedom and latitude that they have in dealing with their teammates. Is there a designated "leader"? How often are they supposed to check in with superiors? How much freedom do members have to refuse an order, leave the team, or leave the organization? What kind of support can they expect from their superiors? A loose or weak group (such as a guild who recruits members to perform favors as a contingency of membership) will generate a different team dynamic than one assembled from a global-spanning intelligence agency . . . and both of those will be different from a band of PCs assembled within a military organization in a time of war.

One interesting use of agency-based characters is the possibility of multiple characters for players, with teams assembled *Mission Impossible*-like from the players' options. In fact, it should even be possible for players to concurrently run [multiple characters](#) in such an arrangement.

"I Must Ask a Favor of You All . . ."

Another reason for assembling a group is by having a powerful person request a favor from the PCs. (The strength of this favor -- and how much say they have about whether they accept -- determines if this is a "choice" for the heroes.) This is a common means of gather teams in settings where the individual PCs don't have specific allegiances. For example, a supers campaign might begin with the president (or governor or mayor) requesting the heroes undertake a mission. Since they aren't beholden *per se* to the person asking the favor, they are free to say no . . . but being "under investigation" by the police or military can be a pain. Likewise, this a typical way to get adventuring parties together in many *World of Darkness* settings, with various powerful entities requesting favors from a group of vampires, werewolves, or mages. Usually, this technique requires some sort of reward or promise, although the "reward" could simply be currying return favor with the requester.

Or Else *What?!?*

Of course, there's compulsory and then there's *compulsory.* Sometimes, saying "no" isn't an option. For example, if the heroes awaken in EvilCo's laboratory, with CEO Bob Evil explaining that they have all had bombs implanted in their skulls, and their options are "do a favor" or "chunky salsa style" . . . well, it's not really a choice then.

Many settings have options for making individuals or groups do something they wouldn't normally do, whether it's *geas* spells, drugs, nanites, or something else. GMs should use caution when relying on one of these options, as many players resent the "or else" form of team formation. After all, if their free will is going to be taken away from them in this circumstance, what's to keep it from getting taken away in the future? And if the GM's going to decide how the PCs will adventure, why play at all?

Besides, usually it's just not necessary for such measures to be employed; most players understand that they need to accept a "hook" tossed their way, and a note in a found bottle asking for a few adventurers to meet at the local tavern is just as compelling without resorting to taking away characters' free will. (Of course, if the player himself concocts such a compulsory origin for his belonging to a team, more power to him.)

The Dirty [Integer]

One type of required assembly -- and its resultant reward -- is common enough to form its own group-formation subgenre: The PCs are criminals (or at least serving prison sentences or on death row) and are offered a chance at freedom if they complete one simple mission . . . or work for the government for a period of time, or the like.

This is a great justification for a one-shot or convention game and serves as the foundation of the classic movie *The Dirty Dozen.* However, it can also be reason enough for an ongoing series; for example, DC Comics' *Suicide Squad* has its titular team composed of super-villains who are offered a chance at freedom if they survive a tour of duty performing missions with other costumed maniacs.

Although this option seems to imply that the protagonists primarily will be wrong-doers, this isn't necessarily the case. For example, if the PCs are trapped in the kingdom of a brutal dictator, then they might be captured by the ruler's agents with the sole purpose of using their arrest as leverage to accomplish some adventuring favor he needs done. (This could lead to interesting dilemmas: If a known wicked tyrant tells the heroes that time is of the essence to recover an orb of power and save the world, what do they do? It's not out of the question that he's actually telling the truth, since even the most sinister of dictators has a vested interest in keeping the world alive . . . but, of course, he's also one of the ones most likely to be lying for his own gain.)

As another possibility, what if a government has an investigatory committee whose job it is to research cases of those who proclaim their innocence and determine who is most likely to be, in fact, not guilty? The government could be callous enough not to drop charges or allow a retrial, instead using such low-risk "criminals" as a resource of adventurers who could be tapped for secret projects. (In this case, the PCs could all be designed around the question of, "Did they *really* do it?" which could lead to some interesting tension and subplots.)

He Ain't Deadly; He's My Brother

Whether or not familial ties are considered "optional" or "mandatory" depends on the nature of the family. Tight-knit families have a do-or-die loyalty that can bind them together more strongly than any government mandate. Conversely, families that are less interconnected can have the feel of a guild, and groups built around them can have a free-wheeling feel.

In some settings, the power of blood can provide reason alone for forming a team. For example, the noble houses of many fantasy and far-flung science-fiction settings rely on the interrelation of kinship to keep them moving toward the houses' goals (such as **Fading Suns** or **Menzoberranzan**). In other settings, this power can be much more literal, such as the families of *Amber* or the immortality of the *Highlander* MacLeods. (If so, this combines aspects of "common origin" with family ties.)

If family is important to a group of PCs (or a subset of a larger group), then the players should make sure that everyone is on the same page with regard to the family's facts: known history, genealogy, noteworthy victories or failures, family traditions, and so on. It's awkward for players portraying two brothers to disagree on salient points of their supposedly shared childhood. ("We need to bring this diamond home to Mom!" "Err . . . I thought Mom died during the Ice Wars when we were kids?")

The Sixth Sense: Duty

Another common element keeping many groups together -- or at least some of the members within it -- is a sense of duty. For example, a group member might have kept a vow to another character's mother to keep an eye on that character. Although not compulsory per se -- since people upholding such a duty usually have a "choice" -- these are typically at least as compelling a reason as any do-or-die requirements.

A Combo of Factors

Finally, it should be noted that many teams are not formed out of a single homogenous desire, goal, or rationale. Rather, each member can have their own reasons and justifications for participating. This is especially true for groups that have existed for a long time, replacing members as required or desired. Reasons for joining or leaving a team can also be deeply personal and not particularly interchangeable or expandable to multiple characters.

As an example, let's take a look at the group-dynamic justification of the comic-book version of the *Fantastic Four*. The four members of that team shared a common origin (irradiated spaceship) but were also united by familial ties. Sue Storm and Johnny Storm are siblings, Sue and Reed Richards are dating (later married), and Ben Grimm and Reed are long-time friends. As the team progressed, Sue and Reed got married (strengthening the family ties), and various other members joined and left (sometimes as a favor to others, sometimes as a sense of duty to keep the team strong in the public's eyes). Occasionally, a member would disappear or seem to die; additional members would get together with the others under the justification of attempting to keep the team together, as well as because of the mystery ("What happened to the missing/dead teammate?"). A similar amalgam of multiple motivations form the reason behind the *Stargate SG-1* teams, with varying levels of governmental duty, desire for adventure, sense of belonging, and overarching mysteries serving to give the group cohesion.

Having multiple motivations for a group's formation can make it much easier to keep the group extant in an entirely justifiable fashion, with new reasons serving to keep the group together even as old ones are resolved or fade into history. For example, let's look at the evolution of a (fictional) group of gaming heroes: Two of the PCs were the lone survivors of a great attack on their village; they have the desire to solve the mystery, along with the shared origin of their own survival. One of the other PCs is a prisoner offered a chance by the king at reformation by joining the first two heroes in their quest to determine what happened to that village (part of the king's holdings); another of the PCs is the officer assigned to keeping an eye on the prisoner. (These two combine obligatory duties with the chance at freedom.) Another PC believes that one of the others in the group might be his long-lost sibling, but isn't sure which one may (or may not) be, so is keeping the suspicions secret for now and instead offering his services as another adventurer. This character combines family ties, mystery, and "just because" motivations.

With such a Byzantine series of interconnections, it's trivial to introduce new players and/or characters, as necessary. For example, let's say that the series has been going for a while, and the heroes have unraveled who is behind the initial attack but not necessarily what their reasoning was. A new player could join and play an escaped warrior for that attacking army, providing (via the GM) new clues to advance the older mysteries. Such a character would also offer an interesting group dynamic: Can the new character be trusted? Later on, one of the do-gooder PCs dies, and the player -- seeing what a blast the reformed-criminal's player was having -- requests to play his own version of that idea. His new character is another released criminal given a second chance and assigned the same watchful officer. Finally, shortly thereafter, this group is exposed to strange magic that gives them telepathy and bizarre flashes of future insight, provided they all stay within earshot of each other. These new group powers help unify the existing structure, validating the current roster despite the fact that several members weren't there from the beginning.

All Together Now

It's easy to come up with reasons for having PCs come together for a single adventure. But a bit of extra thought on the part of the players and/or the GM can make such groups even more cohesive, providing both ample justification for undertaking missions and ample reason for sticking together. In so doing, it's possible to stretch one successful team outing into the foundation of a long and fruitful series.

The Three Dollar Society

A "Funny" Cult for Modern-Day *Call of Cthulhu*

by J. Edward Tremlett

Not every Mythos cult knows it's a cult. Some of them think they're scientists, philosophers or historians, which has to be as non-cultish as you get -- right? Some of them even think they're some kind of anti-cult, or a sophisticated joke.

One such "non-cult" is the Three Dollar Society. Formed as a joke (albeit one with economic incentives) the Society has become an underground phenomenon of sorts. You'll see their marks almost anywhere you go: t-shirts, buttons, graffiti, and bumper stickers . . . everywhere the face of their spokesperson, "Bubba" -- endlessly grinning.

But there's nothing to smile about. Somehow, somewhere along the way, the Three Dollar Society attracted the wrong kind of attention, and their mascot has come to hideous life. Terrible things are happening wherever their anti-ideas take hold.

Stranger still, the Society's founders are all missing in action, and yet someone -- or some**thing** -- is still running the show . . .

The Three Dollar Society can be background noise, cause for investigation, or an ongoing threat in your ***Modern-Day Call of Cthulhu/Delta Green*** game. Ideas on what to do with them, along with ideas of what its meme-made-flesh "Bubba" could be, follow the main section of the article.

It's Not Funny If We Gotta Explain It

Who's "Bubba"? Come on, now. You know "Bubba."

See, some time ago, down South, back in the 1990s, there was a bunch of disaffected losers with a high amount of disdain for American society and culture. They lazed around one another's houses, living off beer, food stamps, and whatever money they could bum from out-of-state visitors. And they sat around late at night, drinking beer and eating potato chips and telling one another how screwed up and stupid other people were.

After a while, they got sick and tired of just complaining and decided to do something. Since they were a bit on the impish side of things, they decided to play a joke. And since they really needed money, and didn't feel like working for it, they decided to make it a really good joke -- the sort of joke that got them money for almost nothing.

So they created a quasi-secret society for fellow disaffected losers, in which they declared that by being disaffected losers, they were actually better than most other people. They exhorted their followers to believe that only by lazing around the house, playing jokes on stupid people, and living off their money could they truly achieve enlightenment. And for the cost of three dollars -- just three measly dollars!!! -- they could join the group, get a packet of badly-photocopied introductory materials and be entitled to . . . well, sit around the house and do nothing.

But they needed some kind of figurehead. And since none of them really wanted their *own* faces or names in the public domain, one of them came up with Bubba. He would be just a fat guy in a rocking chair with overalls and a ball cap: the sort of person Yankees would expect to see on any porch once they got below the Mason-Dixon Line. He would be dumb and lazy, just sitting and drinking beer and doing and thinking nothing at all.

And yet he would *know* his indolence and stupidity for what it was, and would therefore be a king amongst men.

Of course, the founders weren't stupid, themselves. They knew "Bubba" was horribly stereotypical and offensive, and

the sort of idea they shouldn't be feeding. But by the time they voiced those concerns they'd already brainstormed about 50 ideas apiece on what to do with him, and they just couldn't drop him and let it go. So, like a bad germ they just couldn't shake, they learned to live with it. And "Bubba" was born into the world, hooting and hollering.

Oddly enough, the joke worked. There were enough disaffected losers out there who bought into it to turn the Three Dollar Society into some kind of underground phenomenon. So the founders didn't have to get real jobs, and were able to spend more time on their "hobby," and send out new materials on a regular basis. Soon they could make T-shirts and buttons, have a web page, and even publish a book, the *Three Dollar Bible*.

And that's why people know Bubba.

The Three Dollar Tao of Bubba

Bubba, as explained in Three Dollar Society literature, is basically the king of contradiction. He is all-knowing, all-wise, and all-understanding by virtue of being ignorant, foolish, and dumb. He has all the money in the world by being dirt poor, and everything of value someone could want because he doesn't have hardly anything. He speaks only lies, but tells nothing but the truth.

He also has all the power in the world by being horribly disenfranchised, and that's very important, right there, because somehow his being less than everyone makes him simultaneously *greater* than anyone. This gets him into the halls of power, where he can reportedly make his secret deals with the President, the Trilateral Commission, weird space aliens, and God (who is also, incidentally, a weird space alien). But by the end of the day he's back to sitting on a front porch and drinking his beer, so no one but the enlightened would ever know.

A perfect explanation of this principle is Bubba's car, which features in several drawings and parables in the Three Dollar Bible. It's a crappy, broken down Ford, rusting on cinderblocks in Bubba's front yard. It hasn't worked since Jimmy Carter was President, but it is somehow connected to every point in time and space. And, therefore, it's able to take its driver literally anywhere, and anywhen, all by virtue of being broken down and immobile. (And this is why Bubba's followers often punctuate self-contradictory statements with "Ford!")

Three Dollar Society and Its Discontents

So what does the Society do, exactly? "Take your money and laugh" is the short answer, but that goes for everyone in the Society. For example, it's considered a perfect day when the average member gets at least three dollars more than he lost, *without* having to really work for it. (Selling your old junk on eBay isn't considered working.)

Most Society members are aging hippies, wacky neo-pagans, or trendy non-conformist college kids. They wear "Bubba" T-shirts, ball caps, and pins, and put up the silly fliers the Society makes available for photocopy from their newsletters, book and website. They also graffiti his grinning face on public walls and buildings using the stencils the Society provides for that purpose.

They can be seen on campus greens, public parks and street corners, dressed like evangelists and shouting the word of "Bubba" at passersby. They have "sighting parties," where they try and find "Bubba" -- or someone who *looks* like him -- and snap his picture without his knowledge. Then they send it in to the Society for inclusion on the website.

They also post fictitious "events" in college newspaper calendars ("Bowling for Bubba," College Green, Noon), and lurk nearby with cameras to see who shows up, later posting the photos on fliers. "Looking for 'Bubba'?" the fliers ask: "If you call him, he will come." Oddly enough, some do.

The Three Dollar Bible is their testament, available from their website for $19.99 + shipping and handling. (It isn't available in stores, even through special order.) It's a bunch of disconnected, rambling essays, alternate histories, prophecies, and testimonies about the power of "Bubba," with kooky illustrations and collages. Members of the Society use it to preach to the heathen, but tend to keep it in their bathrooms as toilet reading.

Courtesy of these soft, almost subliminal pitches, "Bubba" has infested the fringes of popular culture, to the point where people who aren't in the Society have come to know who he is. His face has been spotted in high-priced Hollywood movies, television ads aimed at college-age kids and older teens, and the latest music video by Mr. T's Toenails. A small RPG manufacturer even made a boardgame about Bubba; the object is to win by losing.

If only they knew how true that was . . .

If You Call Him, He Will Come

There's something funny going on here, all right, but the joke is on us.

"Bubba" is a meme: a cancer of the mind that poisons the soul, creating a spiritual connection between the individual and the idea that "Bubba" can exploit. How likely it is that the connection happens depends on how much the afflicted individual fixates on the Three Dollar Society, and its many trappings. But even a passing fancy is just enough to let "Bubba" in, if He chooses to. And that is never a good thing.

It begins with Society members, in their dreams. "Bubba" appears at their periphery -- lurking and watching. Over time he becomes their center: suggesting new ways to spread His ideas. And together they walk hand in hand through a transformed city, where "Bubba" smiles from every wall and window.

In their sleep, the faithful desire nothing more than to see this world take shape. In their waking hours, they half-remember those dreams, but still seek to put the face of "Bubba" wherever they can. And while they don't always succeed as brilliantly as they'd like, it's often enough to gain a foothold on the innocent and uninitiated, so that they, too, will dream of "Bubba."

However, the dreams for non-members are much different. They suffer through increasingly surreal tableaus of madness, chaos and death, where "Bubba" reigns supreme. The dreams get worse, night after night, slowly working to a breaking point in the mind, when "Bubba" finally reveals himself for what he truly is.

After that, some people wake up changed. Some awaken long enough to kill themselves, just to end the visions. And some just vanish from their beds, never to be seen again . . . at least by human eyes.

They wouldn't be the only ones to disappear. The original, founding members of the Three Dollar Society have vanished, one and all. They don't answer their phone or their email, and the web site hasn't been updated since Windows 98.

But their book still ships if you fill out the form. And the newsletter still comes out on time, with photos of "Bubba" sightings duly reported upon. And if you send them $3 in the mail, you will still get a packet of badly photocopied introductory materials, complete with instructions.

And you *will* know Bubba, whether you want to or not.

Priceless Possibilities

"Bubba" is . . .

- Nyarlathotep, in yet another guise. He's decided to retool one of His lesser forms to get followers amongst the ultra-hip, "anything for a laugh" crowd, and claim the victims their jokes provide. So far it's working pretty well.
- The King in Yellow, seen imperfectly. "Bubba" has a ball cap that has a weird squiggle on the front -- one that no one can quite make out, or describe. That squiggle is the Yellow Sign, and those who spend too much time trying to discern what it is attract the King's attention.
- Hypnos, reaching a tendril from the Dreamlands into the waking world. It took him great effort to break through, but once He got here it was a simple thing to twist the dreams of the founders, and create a living meme. The

fear and love "Bubba" generates feeds Him greater than He's known for aeons, and He's bloating like a tick.

- "Bubba" -- most likely a Great Old One who's just escaped confinement, or a Larvae of the Other Gods (*Malleus Monstrorum,* pg. 211). Either way, the creature has latched onto the founders' ideas and taken advantage of them, assuming the shape of "Bubba." Unless stopped, "Bubba" will grow in power until He's powerful enough to drop the world into a maddened slumber. And then he will either rule over the ruins, or blast it apart on His way back to Azathoth's court.

The Founders are . . .

- Dead by their own hands, having succumbed to the dreams of "Bubba" long ago. Their bodies are rotting in a pit, somewhere. Meanwhile, "Bubba" runs the operation by mystical remote control, seeing to it that new material comes from seemingly nowhere.
- Sleepwalking zombies doing the will of "Bubba" in a shotgun shack, somewhere in Alabama. The letters arrive from nowhere, they sort out the photos and cash from the checks (which they burn), and make sure the newsletter comes out on time and the website gets updated . . . and that's about it. When one of them woke up a year back, the others killed and ate her.
- Willing and insane cultists overseeing the will of "Bubba." They faked their disappearance and live elsewhere, now. Once a week they pick up the Society's mail, spend the cash, burn the checks, and keep the photos. And once a month, when the Moon is appropriate, they harvest the souls their dream work has provided and send it to "Bubba" by way of His car.
- Victims, pressed into service with the souls of the taken. Their occasionally-corporeal shades walk the halls of Three Dollar central, working for "Bubba" until they're too tired and run down to continue. Then "Bubba" eats them and excretes them anew, so they can get back to work. Who's laughing now?

The Three Dollar Bible is . . .

- Utter and complete crap, however funny. Whatever occult significance it may have is cobbled together from numerous, unrelated sources and of no real use in understanding the problem. The illustrations are kind of cute, though.
- A key that unlocks the door to "Bubba." It doesn't look, or read, like much, but if an investigator keeps it in his house while he sleeps, there's a percentile chance equal to "Bubba's" POW minus his that "Bubba" may take notice, and come to visit in dreams. These will be the "friendly" type of dreams, until it's made clear the Investigator isn't a Society stooge. Then things could get ugly.
- A cipher-based text. The first and last paragraph on every page has only four sentences. If you put them together, and read them 8,4,1,5,7,3,2,6 it becomes a minor, if somewhat straightforward, Mythos text describing "Bubba," His true nature and how to Call and Dismiss Him. (English; 1d4/1d8; +3%; 2 weeks; Call/Dismiss "Bubba")
- Not the poison, but the cure. Hidden within the book are clues as to "Bubba's" true nature, and how to defeat Him. The founders put the book out once they realized what they'd done, and tried to make it sneaky enough that "Bubba" wouldn't know what they were doing. Unfortunately, it's so sneaky that only intense study of what seems to be its complete nonsense will reveal the truth.(English; 1d4/1d8; +3%; 8 weeks; Call/Dismiss "Bubba")

Care and Feeding of "Bubba"

Keepers have full reign to determine how powerful "Bubba" actually is. If He's an avatar, He might share the POW of the parent God, or might have something a little lower. If He's a Larvae or Great Old One, his POW is probably somewhere in the 30's, but growing as His web of dreams gets larger.

"Bubba's" two unique characteristics are the ability to transform the dreams of the infected (100%) and a dream attack. The transformation is "Bubba" entering a dream and changing it around to fit His needs. These changes can be maddening, but aren't cause for a SAN loss greater than 1d4.

The attack is a nightmare in which "Bubba" begins to show a little of His true nature, or warps the dream to the point where it does actual damage to the dreamer's psyche. Pit His POW against the POW of the dreamer on the Resistance Table. If the dreamer wins, there's a chance equal to the dreamer's POW that he's shrugged off the infection. But if

"Bubba" wins, the dreamer loses 1d10 SAN and wakes up screaming.

"Bubba" can attack once per day, when the dreamer is asleep. When the dreamer's SAN reaches zero the dreamer falls under His thrall. Some kill themselves, some join the Society fulltime as insane "helpers," and some vanish to slake His thirst.

"Bubba" is a magical infection of the mind. He usually transmits Himself via the facsimiles made of Him, but not every likeness is powerful enough to carry "Bubba." The difference is in seeing a symbol handmade by someone who's being guided in dreams by "Bubba," Himself.

So seeing someone's T-shirt or photocopied flier won't do it, but seeing the original collage or drawing the flier was photocopied *from* will. And seeing the graffiti definitely will, which is why "Bubba" pushes Society members to tag buildings with His likeness. Likewise, all copies of the Three Dollar Bible count, since "Bubba" is directly overseeing their mystical manufacture.

Anytime someone sees a worthy likeness of "Bubba," pit the POW of "Bubba" against the POW of the onlooker on the Resistance Table. If "Bubba" wins, infection has occurred. If the onlooker wins, then he's shaken "Bubba" off, and cannot be threatened by that particular form of infection ever again.

While second-hand likenesses aren't powerful enough to be carriers, there is a percentile chance equal to the POW of the observer that every new likeness of "Bubba" he sees will pique his interest enough to gain the attention of "Bubba." Subtract the onlooker's POW from the POW of "Bubba" to get the percentile chance that "Bubba" can infect him indirectly. This is how "Bubba" gains new followers, and the dreams He sends in these cases may be the more benign variety.

There are two ways to purposely get "Bubba" to take notice of you. One is to simply call Him into your life, either jokingly or earnestly. In this case, proceed as though someone saw a worthy likeness of "Bubba," but if the caller wins then "Bubba" isn't permanently shaken off. He's just not interested at that moment in time -- maybe the caller will have to do something to prove himself worthy?

There's also the Call "Bubba" spell, which functions as a normal Call Deity spell, with the addendum that each unique representation of "Bubba" the casters have with them increases the chance of "Bubba" appearing by 5%. Dismiss works as normal, but if the casters can get a number of unique representations equaling "Bubba's" POW (10 representations would be 50 POW, and so on) and destroy them during the casting, then "Bubba" will no longer have any hold over the city or town the Dismissal is performed in. This total Dismissal will last only so long as no one casts Call "Bubba" ever again.

Ways to Get the Investigation Going

- **Indirect:** "Okay, you like weird stuff, right? So you tell me how this is possible. Last night, we get a call of a drunk and disorderly at Mike's downtown, on Campus. We pick the guy up, and he's off his head and raving that the scary guy's gonna get him when he falls asleep. Of course, he's 10 sheets and resisting arrest, so we toss him down here. It's a light night, just him in the cell . . . and then, this morning, he's not here. Vanished! Camera down the hall doesn't have him leaving. No way in *or* out. Guard on duty heard him screaming sometime this morning, maybe four, but we get that all the time so he didn't check. Something about 'Go away' or 'I'm going.' No way to be sure, now."
- **Direct:** One of the Investigators discovers that someone close to them has disappeared. He'd been complaining of headaches and nightmares recently, and his significant other says he'd been like that for a month. What's changed in the last month? Plenty, but what really did it was a detour through a part of town where "Bubba" graffiti has been cropping up. It turns out he's not the only one in his office who's had nightmares, or vanished. And those suffering talk about the same weird guy with a ball cap, turning their dreams into freak shows.
- **Foreground:** An Investigator starts dreaming of "Bubba," either from seeing graffiti or too many fliers. If the GM has been running the sort of campaign where Investigators' brushes with the Mythos, or other horrors, are cause for the occasional in-game nightmare, along with SAN loss, then the Investigator might have no reason to

suspect anything's out of the ordinary. But as it continues, and gets worse, an Idea roll might be in order.

- **Background:** One or more of the Investigators live in a college town, and the Three Dollar Society has just become active on campus. Slowly make the Investigators aware that they're seeing "Bubba" everywhere. Maybe the fliers are put up around them while they're not looking, and then, when they turn back around, "Bubba" is everywhere. Maybe one of them winds up getting pictured on a "Looking for Bubba?" flier, entirely by accident. It all looks like harmless fun until the city is melting.

Pyramid Review

D1: Crown of the Kobold King

Designed by Nicolas Logue

Developed & edited by Jason Bulmahn, Mike McArtor, & Jeremy Walker

Art, cartography, & graphic design by Matt Cavotta, Eric Deschamps, Vincent Dutrait, Wayne Reynolds, Christopher West, & James Davis

32-page full-color softcover; $12.99

* * *

W1: Conquest of Bloodsworn Vale

Designed by Jason Bulmahn

Developed & edited by Jason Bulmahn, Mike McArtor, & Jeremy Walker

Art, cartography, & graphic design by Warren Mahy, Vincent Dutrait, Drew Pocza, Christophe Swal, Christopher West, & James Davis

32-page full-color softcover; $12.99

Shortly before launching their new *Pathfinder* line of products, Paizo Publishing warmed the engine with a couple of small adventure modules. *D1: Crown of the Kobold King* (for four 2nd-level characters) and *W1: Conquest of Bloodsworn Vale* (for four 6th-level PCs) are small but potentially formidable stories to get players back into the swing of things:

In *Crown of the Kobold King,* the party is asked by villagers to retrieve their missing children. Some are convinced the former mistress of the town orphanage extends her reach even beyond the deadly fire that killed her and destroyed her facility, but all anyone wants is to find and stop the force that takes their offspring.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

There are, in fact, outcast kobolds working in the darkness beneath the dwarven monastery, and the children have been scattered throughout. They were taken to appease a prophecy that could lift the curse from the kobold king's rule. Some are hostages or slaves, others hide out, and others still are more than they appear. The kidnappers aren't alone down here -- the darkness creeping up from below is why they moved up to begin with -- and everything from forgotten dwarven "inventions" (read: traps) to the restless dead walk the halls.

As a note to GMs in case they need to weigh future product purchases, there's a collapsed tunnel at the bottom of the dungeon, and it's meant to lead to further adventures in another volume.

Conquest of the Bloodsworn Vale brings the players to a build site where, after many years of disuse, the trade routes are to be reestablished by the king. The vale has become rough country after all this time, and only stout adventurers can tame it, answering the call given by the king's best soldier at Fort Thorn.

The story pulls in the influences of several different factions, some smarter than others. The valley is littered with thorny roses, supposedly the magical remains of the many souls who died here in battle. Roseblood sprites eat the workers, lizardmen and owlbears mark their territory, and firedrakes under the command of a powerful sorcerer threaten to level the entire area.

Crown of the Kobold King, covers ground that's been done before, though it's always good to see it done competently. The paintings of the targeted children in this module are some of the best in either book. A close comparison of the text accompanying the illustrations suggests there may have been some confusion when trying to match the two up, leaving the visuals and the writing somewhat at odds with each other. The map of Falcon's Hollow is a simple one, but that makes sense since it's only a logging town.

Of the two, ***Conquest of the Bloodsworn Vale*** is arguably the better product, though this one reads, runs, and feels more like a campaign setting, so if it's just a few quick evenings of play one wants it becomes less attractive. The plotting is tight, the encounters and puzzles interesting if not overly creative, and the roseblood sprites an excellent, creepy addition to any GM's stock of enemies. A timeline of events helps keep all the action manageable, and the well-developed fort is a good place to base a campaign (certainly given that success means lands and wealth for the party). Sporting a fabulous cover, about the only real complaint is the escalating danger.

It becomes less believable as the story progresses that there are so many layers of villainy to be uncovered (especially in a relatively small area), or that the sorcerer seems so intent on removing humanoid influences from the area when it seems that same pecking order depends on having at least some people around.

Both books use great maps and make full use of the insides of the covers. Four ready-made player characters are offered for those who want to hit the ground running. It's the same crew in both books, but their stats are tailored to reflect the different levels of the adventures. (As a strange aside, two PCs have portraits while the other two have pictures of their equipment.)

Crown of the Kobold King and ***Conquest of Bloodsworn Vale*** are brief but effective introductions to what Paizo Publishing is capable of, and can easily be used as well-reasoned springboards to larger stories. The writing isn't jaded and the quality worked into the books -- from the full-color artistry to the glossy pages -- means someone is serious about their work. If they put this much effort and care into two quickie items, their full product line is likely worth the further investment.

--Andy Vetromile

The Orgone Tomorrow

A Campaign Setting for *GURPS*

Jürgen Hubert

Aliens -- or rather, Extra-Dimensional Entities (EDEs) as they are called now -- have visited our Earth for a long time. However, proof of their existence remained elusive. The American government came closest when a flying saucer crashed near Roswell in 1947, but when the remains were teleported out of our dimension a short time later, the Army convinced most people that only a weather balloon had crashed. An organization named Majestic was created to keep a watch on UFO activity in secret, but for the next six decades they only caught frustrating glimpses of alien activity, in addition to interviewing the occasional former abductee and an enormous number of hoaxes and false leads. In the end, they concluded that otherworldly entities did operate on Earth from time to time, but that they only appeared once every few years at best. Similar efforts by other governments were even more inconclusive, and most scientists and politicians alike dismissed the idea of alien visitations as preposterous.

All this changed on February 10th 2010, when a Gray saucer appeared near the city of Samawah in Iraq. As it turned out later, its dimensional engines had problems, but the American fighter patrol that scrambled to intercept it interpreted the mysterious rays emanating from it as an attack, especially once they had destroyed one jet.

The Uruk Event

The missiles that were shot at the UFO resulted in a chain reaction that spread around the world and bathed Earth in a strange energy. Every human being alive experienced hallucinations of strange, alien vistas for several minutes. As the American military converged on Samawah and gathered UFO pieces from the area surrounding the ancient ruins of Uruk, reports from all over the world poured in about people displaying strange powers, from summoning columns of flame to causing dead things to come alive. Chaos reigned. Stock markets crashed. Many believed the End Times had come.

But eventually, things calmed down again. Many of the "Gifted," as those who attained these strange powers were called, had enhanced senses beyond those of any existing eyes -- or sensors. This allowed them to perceive a new form of energy dubbed "orgone," which co-exists with all matter and provides an infinite energy source for the powers of the Gifted. As the source of these powers became understood, it eventually became possible to train normal humans in their use. Though the Gifted had a large head start, with enough training and practice it would become possible for non-Gifted orgone users to reach or even surpass their abilities.

Though these "rational" explanations didn't satisfy everyone, eventually the world settled down uneasily and waited to see how these new powers would transform human society. Many people took up the study of orgone use enthusiastically, and strange cults formed in many places, in which orgone users claimed that they had been given their abilities by supernatural beings of vast powers and wisdom. Another noteworthy development was the discovery of alternate dimensions, which members of the Gifted with powers over dimensional travel explored.

And in 2012, they brought someone back with them.

First Contact

The species humanity dubbed the Anu (after the Sumerian sky god) arrived in a massive floating mothership and announced their "willingness to engage in trade" to humanity by broadcasting their statement over the airwaves in garbled English. Many nations were willing to take that offer, and in exchange for advanced orgone-using technology they traded raw resources, cultural artifacts, and -- especially -- land. While they would trade for minor trinkets with

anyone willing to deal with them, they only bought land from national governments. They also insisted that any land they bought would be their own, sovereign territory not subject to human law. Most countries were willing to sell them small estates for the establishment of local embassies and trade centers, but many poorer nations traded away vast tracts of land -- sometimes entire provinces of their countries -- in exchange for massive technological boosts, resulting in vast changes in the geopolitical power balance. While the First World nations protested, this did not faze the Anu in the least, and they simply kept buying lands in exchange for aid -- and never sold any of the land back. Instead, they changed the flora and fauna of these areas into one resembling their home dimension, and many ecologists worry that these alien life forms might eventually supplant the native ecosystem of Earth as they spread out from these zones. But so far, greed for Anu technology has outweighed such concerns.

Further Developments

The next species of EDEs humanity made contact with were more familiar: the entities known as Grays. In 2015, they established a colony consisting of almost fungal structures burrowing into the ice of Marie Byrd Land and have since used their superior technology to chase off most humans who entered their territory. Their flying saucers have appeared more frequently around the world. They will defend themselves from human aircraft when attacked, but on the three occasions when one was destroyed by human attackers (difficult but possible thanks to new, orgone-based technology), no retaliation or even reaction from other Grays was forthcoming. Diplomatic contact with human nations is extremely infrequent; while they have consented to send an observer to the United Nations in 2017, the ambassador generally only watches the discussions and makes enigmatic pronouncements from time to time.

However, apparently they make telepathic contact with a number of people around the world. Most people so contacted describe such contact as "visions of peace and bliss," although a small minority only dimly remembers scenes out of a nightmare. Many such contactees become obsessed with traveling to the Gray colony. Few return from there, and those who do help maintain an underground railroad bringing more people there. Most nations now undertake active measures trying to "deprogram" the contactees with a modicum of success, but a large number of people to slip through. And so far, no nation has dared to mount an attack on the main colony, though public pressure to do so is rising.

In 2019, Gray saucers attacked several Anu colonies in Africa and South America, causing large-scale damage. Anu ambassadors have refused to comment on the attacks, describing it as an "internal matter". Their human neighbors are growing nervous about the potential for an all-out war between those two species.

The third major group of EDEs to reveal themselves were the Nommo, a species of aquatic humanoids. Their existence became known in 2016 when three gigantic, living cities floated to the surface in the middle of the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. Thanks to their locations and the insistence of the Nommo in referring to these cities as "Sources," they were soon dubbed "Source Atlantis," "Source Lemuria," and "Source Mu" by humanity. The Nommo permitted humans to travel to their cities and engage in limited commerce. They primarily offer cheap fish and other ocean food, as well as jewelry and pieces of art which tend to have an alien beauty that has become fashionable in many circles. A black market in Nommo technological artifacts has also developed, though this seems to happen on the initiative of individual Nommo instead of their ruling classes, which periodically crack down on such trades.

Most disturbingly, it has recently become known that Nommo and humans are interfertile. Examination of Nommo DNA revealed a surprising number of similarities to human DNA. The few human-Nommo children that have been examined in a lab *seem* human, but their genes have significant differences which led some scientists to speculate that they might change their form later in life.

But while these are the best known types of EDEs, they are far from the only ones. Strange beings have begun to lurk in the corners of the Earth. Most of them seem unintelligent (which raises the question of how they got here), but others have displayed strong cunning or even tool use -- sometimes unique alien artifacts. The nations of Earth are struggling with cataloging the entities that are out there, and every week there seems to be a new discovery.

The Cults of the Unseen

When some orgone users started to claim that they had received their powers from supernatural entities, most researchers chalked it up to the general madness of the times. And when some of these people lost their powers for "violating the strictures of their deity," it was assumed that this was a purely psychological block.

However, a large-scale statistical analysis revealed in 2015 that large groups of such orgone users often acted with a unified agenda -- without even having been in contact with each other! While some sort of subconscious telepathic "group mind" cannot be ruled out entirely, most observers have come to the conclusion that yet another group of EDEs -- dubbed "the Unseen" -- was manipulating a large number of humans behind the scenes.

These beings always appear to their chosen humans in dreams. They usually take the form of figures out of religion or mythology, though stranger appearances have been known, from Elvis Presley to entities out of fantasy and science fiction novels. They offer instructions in the use of mystical powers (orgone powers, though the chosen human might refuse to recognize them as such) in exchange for following certain strictures of behavior (not necessarily outright worship, though this is far from uncommon). These apparitions almost always seem to relate to pre-existing knowledge and personal beliefs of the target -- someone who has studied Norse Mythology might be contacted by an entity resembling Odin, for example, and the imposed strictures are usually in a form with which the target will have few qualms about. A warm-hearted and caring cultist might be required to donate a portion of her income to charity, while a true sociopath will have to sacrifice a living human being four times a year.

However, the strictures stay the same even if the orgone user changes his own beliefs, and if he does not adhere to them he will loose his powers. Furthermore, he can teach those orgone powers to others -- but then those new cultists share the exact same strictures.

Acceptance of these cults has varied widely, though even the most liberal areas view them with suspicion. While many cults are basically benevolent -- and indeed, may have strictures to aid other humans even if they are not cult members -- a number of cults with truly disgusting strictures have given the others a bad name. And, of course, many are worried about the Unseen themselves, who often command their followers to engage in mysterious activities that might have long-term repercussions not readily apparent to observers -- including the cultists themselves.

Today

The year is 2020. Despite the upheavals of the last decade, the world economy is booming. New, orgone-based inventions and adaptations of EDE technology provide humans with cheap energy, food, water, and a staggering array of new entertainments. New innovations appear every day, and it seems that there is no limit to human achievements. Those humans who are not employed often train themselves in the use of orgone powers which will give them new job opportunities, or else figure out new applications for such powers -- for in such a young field, there are myriad money-making opportunities of which no one has thought of yet.

Despite this, the minds of many people are troubled. With the appearance of orgone powers, whole social structures and economies broke down overnight, and the repercussions are far from over. The appearance of the EDEs has caused large-scale upheavals and a shift in the global balance of power which isn't over yet, and many people and nations who have been humiliated in the past itch for a rematch. And no human knows the ultimate agenda of the Anu, the Gray, and the Nommo . . . or when humanity might have to defend itself against them or other threats lurking in nearby dimensions.

The future is uncertain. The only certainty is that this is an age full of adventures and opportunities for all who are willing to grasp them.

The World

Earth has gone through many changes in the last few years. This short gazetteer covers some of them.

The United States

The reputation of the USA was hit hard when it was revealed that their leaders had known of the Grays for a long time, and conspiracy theories abound concerning what else the American government knows and is not telling about the changes apparent in the world. In reality, the American government does not know much more about the EDEs than the other major nations . . . and that lack of knowledge has them deeply worried. Much of the government and the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider the EDEs the greatest threat not only to the USA, but Earth in general, and war games that deal with attacks by or against EDEs are becoming increasingly common. Though they are reluctant to deal with Anu merchants directly, American government agencies are willing to pay high prices for samples of EDE technology, and they regularly deal with the international black market trading in such artifacts. Someone who manages to steal or otherwise acquire new tech -- especially if it is weapons technology -- can become very rich and make quite a few useful contacts in the American intelligence community. Government-sponsored labs then try to figure these artifacts out and reverse-engineer them.

The USA has also reinstated the Draft. While the mandatory term of service is only nine months and conscripts are not sent to any actual combat missions, the government is worried about possible EDE invasions and wants to be able to organize a large portion of the population into fighting units on short notice should such a situation occur. A slim majority of the population currently supports this policy, though protests remain numerous and loud. A secondary goal is to increase the number of the Gifted, which typically appear under times of great stress . . . such as during boot camp. This policy seems to be working, and the Gifted are given strong economic incentives to enlist. This has contributed to allowing the USA to maintain its military edge, shrinking though it may be. Another measure the American government has taken is the mandatory registration of all orgone users -- they need to submit the precise nature of all their orgone powers and update those descriptions on a regular basis. The goal here is to integrate orgone users into appropriate military units in the case of an emergency, but the registration remains deeply unpopular among most orgone users -- if not the general population.

The European Union

While the EU is not quite as paranoid about the EDEs as the USA and has accepted the Anu and the Nommo as valid trading partners, there is still a general unease about just how far these beings can be trusted. As a result, the armies of the EU have gradually shifted towards a centralized command over the past few years. Furthermore, the expansion of the EU has accelerated, since it is felt that the more of humanity stands united against possible threats from EDEs, the better. Several nations in North Africa have joined after democratic reforms and receive generous economic subsidies, and at the moment there are negotiations about possible Canadian EU membership.

Economically, the EU is doing well; while they didn't sell large tracts of land to the Anu, educational standards were high enough that a large number of scientists and engineers were available for analyzing orgone-based powers and machines and engineering new devices. Additionally, the large training programs for unemployed people in place in much of Europe were quickly adjusted to training orgone use, resulting in a large percentage of the population being able to use low-level orgone powers. As a result, the EU is now the leader in human-manufactured civilian orgone technology (as opposed to the military orgone tech of the USA, or the Anu-manufactured devices available in large quantities elsewhere).

The Middle East

The Middle East was hit hard when portable orgone-based energy sources caused the oil market to collapse practically overnight. While oil is still required for many manufacturing processes, the previous high prices are no longer sustainable, and poverty and small wars are rampant. Iraq -- which gained a greater number of the Gifted than any other region thanks to the proximity of the Uruk Event -- is now effectively divided into three separate ethnic nations that coexist in an uneasy peace shattered occasionally by terrorist attacks, and the only thing that keeps the country from another civil war is the small American garrison which props up the (almost powerless) central government. An unexpected boon has been the ideological fracture of al-Quaeda and similar groups over the issue of orgone use; the majority of the terrorists reject it, but thus deprived themselves of a powerful weapon. They spend much of their time

fighting with pro-orgone use cells and are an easier target for the US forces in the region which have fully integrated orgone users into their units. Indeed, some claim that the American garrison is maintained mostly to test their theories on orgone-assisted combat tactics.

Russia

While Russia lost much of its economic influence with the collapse of the oil and gas markets, it found that it had another resource suddenly in strong demand: land. Large stretches of land were sold off to the Anu in exchange for advanced technology, and now the Russian government feels it can take the respect it thinks it deserves. It has bullied many of its neighboring nations to the south and west and even attacked them, all with the approval of much of the population. As the political system of Russia grows ever more authoritarian and nationalist, many worry that an eventual military conflict with either the EU or China will become inevitable.

China

China has steadfastly refused to sell any land to the Anu; even the territories for their embassies are only temporary leases. This does not mean they have any shortages of Anu technologies, however. Instead, they have convinced many allied African governments into selling land to the Anu, and then bought the technology from them. Domestically, China has introduced the Draft for the same reasons as the USA, and with similar results. They have also abolished the "One Child" policy, as orgone-based tech has made many provinces in the formerly inhospitable Western lands of China fertile.

Africa

The "mother continent" has now become the primary home of the Anu on Earth, as many poor nations have sold large territories to the Anu in exchange for technological aid and (especially) weaponry. Unfortunately, this has destabilized many nations in Central Africa even further, as each tries to seize more land from its neighbors. The European Union and South Africa try their best to stabilize the northern and southern ends of the continent, but so far this has not been enough to stop the wars.

Other Dimensions

A number of the Gifted have developed the ability to travel to other dimensions, and a few primitive orgone tech "gates" have been developed in recent years as well. A portion of these other worlds have recognizably been variants of Earth... but with vastly divergent evolutionary paths. No humans have developed in any of them, and while the fauna and flora was sometimes recognizable, the time when they diverged from our geological record was tens, and sometimes hundreds of millions of years ago. And a small number of worlds are *strange*, with normal physical laws being warped by orgone to create utterly alien habitats -- yet which are teeming with strange, alien life forms.

A few dozens of worlds have been cataloged, and none *seem* to have native intelligent life, though three have Anu outposts. Exploration of those worlds by major governments has mostly been fairly cautious, as no one knows what kinds of hostile entities might lurk out there. The exceptions have been India and a few other nations with severe population problems, who see off-world colonization as a solution to their population pressures. Additionally, various corporations have been more concerned with possible profits than any theoretical dangers posed by going off too far into the unknown too soon.

Technology

Humanity has reached a tech level of TL8+1. Mature TL8 technology is easily available, but anything more advanced than this incorporates orgone tech and often has a fairly alien "feel" to it, thanks to reverse-engineering from EDE technology. Feel free to add odd lights and noises, as well as strange protrusions and other minor annoyances to such equipment.

The Anu have TL6+4. Some of the more primitive mechanical functions of their devices are obvious to human engineers, but the most intricate details still elude terrestrial scientists. It is unknown whether this is the "true" technology level of the Anu, or just the one they choose to put on display on Earth. They will readily sell TL6+3 devices to interested parties in exchange for Earth products and raw materials or even cash in major currencies, but they will only sell TL6+4 devices or autofactories that produce some limited variants of their technologies in exchange for land from national governments.

The Gray have TL2+8. Most of their technology is utterly alien and hard to understand by human standards. Much of it is biotechnology based on strange, fungal matter with an amazing range of properties. While scientists continue to be fascinated by the small number of samples of Gray technology they have attained, reverse-engineering them has proven much more difficult than the relatively understandable Anu technology.

The Nommo generally have TL4+5, though their energy and materials technology actually reaches TL4+7 in certain limited ways. Many items they produce are made of alloys which are unexplainable by human science, and they frequently use both force fields as well as strange energy devices which they use as both melee and ranged weapons.

Characters

Characters of all power levels are possible, from relatively normal people with 100-150 character points to the most powerful Gifted and elite xenohunters based on 400 or more points. While in theory almost any combination of powers is possible, in practice it has been shown that those who learn to use orgone powers do so most effectively if they concentrate on learning powers centered around a common "theme," which helps with visualizing and practicing the power. This is represented by the sample powers in *GURPS Powers,* with the exception of Anti-Magic, Anti- Super, Astral Projection, Cosmic, Magic, and Time Mastery, as well as the psionic powers from the *Basic Set.* Antipsi is renamed Anti-Orgone, but otherwise works identically. Their Power Modifier is -10% (-5% for working anti-orgone powers, and -5% for rare and experimental technological countermeasures).

Furthermore, orgone users learning a new orgone-based advantage often take additional limitations on it to make it easier to learn. These "memory aids" are often shed as the user grows more proficient with the advantage, but some never bother to stop using them. At other times, the inexperience of the user causes problems when using that ability which persist until the user has trained long enough. Thus, most of the limitations from the *Basic Set* or *GURPS Powers* are appropriate.

Two groups of orgone users deserve special mention.

The Gifted

Sometimes when under stress, ordinary people suddenly display the ability to use orgone powers far beyond what they were capable of before, and even when the stress goes away they retain those abilities. This was the case with the first recorded orgone users during the Uruk Event, and even today many people suddenly gain a boost in their orgone powers. As far as scientists know, this happens when a local conflux of potent orgone energies interacts with a human currently under great stress. These confluxes remain hard to predict even with precognitive abilities -- though there have been a limited number of successes in deliberately triggering such an event, the vast majority of such incidents remain accidental (though that doesn't stop wannabe-Gifted from deliberately exposing themselves to great stress in the hope of gaining such powers -- a practice that has resulted in more deaths than new Gifted).

In game terms, there isn't any difference between the Gifted and other orgone users. The new Gifted gains anywhere from fifty to several hundreds of points (in the most extreme cases) of orgone-based powers, but those powers don't

Using the Orgone Tomorrow with *GURPS Infinite Worlds*

Given the technology available in this setting, along with various extra-dimensional complications, it can be tricky to incorporate this world into the *Infinite Worlds* setting, and GMs should pay special attention to how its technology, orgone powers, and extradimensional travel function elsewhere. Nevertheless, here are a few

differ mechanically from the abilities of those who gained orgone powers through training. It merely provides an in-game rationale for "ordinary people" to get vast powers without training them for many years.

Cultists of the Unseen

The abilities of cultists are also basically orgone powers, but they have additional strictures which they must adhere to in order to keep them. In game terms, this increases the value of their Power Modifier depending on the severity of their strictures; see page 21 of *GURPS Powers* for details.

EDEs

It is strongly recommended that EDEs are not allowed as player characters, since their motivations and activities are some of the central mysteries of the setting. Nevertheless, here are some basic templates the GM can use for EDE NPCs.

Anu

The Anu resemble gigantic slugs with a length of six feet and a diameter of two feet. Their front end has nine faceted eyes of various sizes and terminates in a long proscobis with which they digest their food -- the fluids of small, terrestrial animals apparently being one of their favorites. Around this "face" six lengthy tentacles ending in small feelers serve as their manipulative organs.

Attributes: **ST** 9, **DX** 10, **IQ** 12, **HT** 9
Advantages: Extra Arms ×4, Extra Hit Points +3, Hyperspectral Vision
Disadvantages: Basic Move -2, Greed, Honesty
Commonly Observed Powers: Electrokinesis, Gravity, Machine Telepathy, Psychokinesis, Sound/Vibration

Note: Their Honesty manifests itself as the refusal to knowingly break any local laws. However, they tend to regard as "law" whatever the local government says it is, and they have no qualms with bribing local dictators to do what they want. Additionally, they assert sovereignty over the land they purchase, and the laws of this territory are rarely well-known by humans.

Gray

The Gray look like their traditional portrayals -- 4' tall, gray-skinned humanoid beings with dark, faceted eyes, elongated fingers, and no visible sexual organs.

Attributes: **ST** 7, **DX** 12, **IQ** 12, **HT** 10
Advantages: Dark Vision, Racial Memory (Active) Disadvantages: Curious, Low Empathy
Commonly Observed Powers: Anti-Orgone, Body Alteration, Dimension Travel, ESP, Illusion, Probability Alteration, Telepathy, Vampirism

Nommo

The Nommo fit the traditional "fish man" archetype -- humanoids with green skin, fins, scales, and large, alien eyes.

ideas for incorporating this timeline.

Orgone-1 was discovered one year ago and has been a fascinating find -- not the least because of the natives' ability for crossworld travel. Not only that, but they also seem to be able to jump over a *much* larger "quantum distance" than Infinity technology; the measurements of Infinity ops who accompanied the native dimensional jumpers nearly went off the quantum scale! Infinity is now worried about the possibility of the natives learning to "tune in" into more local quantum bands, thus stumbling across worlds with Infinity influence.

Even more worrying is that the Grays probably know about Infinity activities on this world -- one of the statements of the Gray UN ambassador was: "The Infinity is not welcome here!" Subsequently, three Infinity teams were attacked by Grays, inflicting heavy losses. Still, the opportunity this world offers -- from new insights into parachronics to the mysteries of the orgone powers evident on this world -- remain too tempting to ignore.

Attributes: **ST** 15, **DX** 10, **IQ** 11, **HT** 13
Advantages: Dark Vision, Parabolic Hearing ×3, Pressure Support 2, Racial Memory (Passive), Regrowth, Scanning Sense (Sonar), Sharp Claws, Sharp Teeth, Unaging
Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Farsighted), Berserk, Odious Personal Habit (Lusts after humans -- not a universal trait, but far from uncommon)
Commonly Observed Powers: Bioenergy, Body Control, Electricity, Magnetism, Matter Control, Water, Weather Control

Possible Campaigns

The setting supports a large variety of campaign styles and adventures, from EBE "bug-hunting" to espionage, orgone-powered crime-fighting (masked or otherwise), political activism for the rights of orgone-users, exploration of other dimensions, and more. However, one of the most fascinating campaign types might be the investigation of the secret history of Earth, especially its involvement with other dimensions. It now is a known fact that the Grays have visited Earth before the Uruk event, and there are strong hints that the Anu and Nommo have also been here before . . . and perhaps other species as well. Just how far does the influence of EBEs reach back throughout the history of Earth, including in pre-human times? What do all these species know that they aren't telling humanity?

Such a campaign can mix conventional archeology (complicated by the interest of multiple intelligence agencies of major nations) with unraveling human conspiracies (such as Majestic and its counterparts elsewhere), tense negotiations with EBEs or daring raids into their territories, and exploration to nearby dimensions (just why do these pyramidical structures in a nearby dimension show inscriptions in ancient Sumerian?).

Pyramid Review

Generation Gap (for *[CyberGeneration](#)*)

Published by [Firestorm Ink](#)

Written by Ed Bolme, Wade Racine, David Ackerman-Gray, & Craig Sheeley

Cover by Paolo Parenté

Illustrated by Nick Bliss, Réne Barr, Jennie Breedon, Lance Card, Malcolm Hee, Avy Price, Alex Racine, Jenny Romanchuck, Jason Seabaugh, & Matthew Westberg

96-page b&w softcover; $18

Just as everyone is surprised at the final arrival of *Cyberpunk V3* after quite some time, support continues for its stepchild, *[CyberGeneration: The Final Battle for the Cyberpunk Future.](#)* Last year Firestorm Ink released the scenario *[Researching Medicine,](#)* and now they follow that up with *Generation Gap.* This is a companion volume to the core rules, designed to do several things. First, look at the life of the average *CyberGeneration* character -- or "juve" -- in the late 2020s; second, examine the relationship between the gene-teens, their parents and other adults, including those Edgerunners from the pre-Carbon Plague era that are still around; and third, provide advice for player and GenGM alike to make the game run and play better. In this, *Generation Gap* is more than reminiscent of the supplement, *Listen Up, You Primitive Screwheads!!!!* for *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*

Physically, *Generation Gap* is proof that Firestorm Ink has learned much from publishing *Researching Medicine.* This is a much better looking and laid out book. Yet it is not without problems. There is no index, awkward given the number of subjects covered in the book; there are references to page "XX"; and the page numbers and chapter headings are placed on the inside of each page in the book's center. On the plus side, the layout is tidy, and artwork a huge improvement. It only jars when pieces from *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.* are re-used to depict that game's signature Edgerunners -- Morgan Blackhand, Rache Bartmoss, Alt Cunningham, and John Silverhand. All four pieces feel out of sync with *Generation Gap's* otherwise Manga influenced look, but this actually works to highlight the actual generation gap between the juves and these "ancient" Edgerunners.

The book starts out small, concentrating on the role of the player and his juve in 2027. Fundamentally, the juve is not a miniature adult, and the pointers given here to playing a hormonally charged, angst-ridden teenager are more than useful for us adults who prefer not to remember their own adolescence. These pointers expand upon those found in the core rulebook: confidence, impulsiveness, passions, and hobbies, plus attitudes to sex, drugs, and the world in general. Of course, there is an addition to this so far traditional list: the change. Not just that of puberty, but that brought on by contracting the Carbon Plague, which has more radical effects, turning a juve into a nanotech fueled mutant with abilities that might let control electricity or morph his body. This is combined with an eclectic mix that includes the archetypes representing standard high school culture; advice on how the players can co-operate in helping their juves along with both yogangs and cyberevolved types; possible juve goals, reputation, status, and fashion; plus a major section on the subject of sex and the geneteen. Besides the obvious dangers and difficulties, the Carbon Plague might also reject a cyberevolved's contraceptive implant. This subject is further developed in a later section for the GM's eyes only.

After characters, campaigns receive similar treatment. It asks what sort of game within the CyberRevolution the GenGM wants to run and the players want to play: resistance, espionage, teen life, building a brave new world, or even young superheroes with really "neat" powers. It looks at possible goals and enemies, how the juves come and stay together, before bringing the adult into the game and the role he plays. This is not just as a member of BuReloc (Bureau of Relocation) or CorpSec, but also as someone who will interact with the juves on a daily and more personal basis. Most obviously a parent (who gets a whole section to himself), but it can also be a guerilla fighter, a teacher, or even Morgan Blackhand, who has established summer camps to further teach the skills needed to fight the revolution! The rules for teaching and learning complement this and school life. The real thrust of this chapter is that in an age when the family unit is rarely traditional, often dysfunctional, even not present at all, the juve's one aim is to build one of their own.

And once they have built that, the juves can build their desired future. This of course, is bringing about the revolution. Achieving this is described as a series of easy steps and is coupled with a solid method of tracking a campaign's progress via morale and resources. It takes into account player actions, the list of adjustments to both morale and resources for such actions also works backwards to serve as a list of simple scenario ideas. Parallel to this is *CyberGeneration's* Plot Path system, used to track the themes and events applied to individual characters rather than to the campaign. The advice here is tied into the various *Documents of the Revolution* sourcebooks, and culminates in the roles played by the leaders of the Revolution, also the signature characters from *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*

Having already suggested that a juve build his own family, his actual family is discussed. Diverse in nature and functionality, it should be more than a ready source of funds, equipment, and support, most obviously as a trigger for roleplaying and in-game events. The most radical thing a family has to deal with in 2027 is learning that a member is "suffering" from the Carbon Plague. Parental reaction to this bad news is going to color a juve's own reaction and heavily influence a game. Will automatically inform the authorities? Or respond with revulsion? Disown him, or support him as best they can? The book draws strong parallels throughout between the ISA of 2027 and Germany of the 1930s, though of course, the CyberEvolved have these neat abilities with which to strike back . . . This leads into the chapter on combat, which in *CyberGeneration* is particularly deadly as the juves lack the skills and the guns despite the neat abilities. The advice is to keep the game non-lethal, and to make the juve who wants to make it lethal pay for it with armed response upon the part of the authorities.

There is a lot of material to be found within the pages of *Generation Gap.* Much of it excellent and thoroughly useful advice for running a *CyberGeneration* game, that can be used by both player and GM alike, though unlike the earlier *Listen Up, You Primitive Screwheads!!!!* for *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.,* this book will not be particularly useful outside of *CyberGeneration.* This book is at its best when exploring the life and role of the juve, both normal and CyberEvolved, less so when dealing with the relationship between a juve and the adult world. Unfortunately, the book feels disorganized and although there is a reasonable table of contents, finding anything is hampered by the absence of an index. It is not a book though to be consulted mid-game; rather, *Generation Gap* is something for the GenGM to sit down, read, absorb, and apply the contents to his campaign.

--Matthew Pook

Longing for a Century Ago

In the 1958-59 season, what did seven of the top 10 shows in the U.S. have in common? (I know; you landed on "Science and Nature," and this is an "Arts and Entertainment" question. Bear with me.)

The answer is, "Westerns." Or, for those who've watched *Jeopardy!*
too often, "What are 'Westerns?'" For the curious, the shows in question are:

1) *Gunsmoke*
2) *Wagon Train*
3) *Have Gun, Will Travel*
4) *The Rifleman*
6) *Maverick*
7) *Tales of Wells Fargo*
10) *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*

Now, what's interesting (to me) is to map this interest in the Wild West with the *actual* Wild West. A cursory glance shows that the television series and its historical inspiration were almost 100 years apart, if one pegs the beginning of the Wild-West era with the end of the American Civil War in 1865.

This realization has gotten me pondering a bit about nostalgia. This is "nostalgia" as it relates to history, the collective conscious ideal of nostalgia . . . not the digging up of old stuff in the closet.

Now, there's already a perfectly good discussion of nostalgia at one of my favorite sites, The Straight Dope, so I'll try not to duplicate that article too much. But it's interesting to note that we -- at least, "we" referring to the Western world -- seem to be truly nostalgic for events that are almost but not quite beyond the peripheries of our memories. Thus the 90-year bridge between the historical Wild West and the "modern" romanticism toward it relied on the passage of a few generations. Some romanticism comes quicker than others; for example, World War II spawned hundreds of movies in the decades following that event, tapering off quickly as Vietnam escalated. But there has to be *some* distance; I suspect the failure of shows such as *That 80s Show* is because not enough time has passed. Of course, the old becomes new, and the success of Ken Burns' WWII documentary *The War* shows that there is a new audience for appreciating that global conflict.

This passage of time -- but not *too* much time -- I think is noteworthy. For example, the gulf between the real Wild West and the Hollywood Western allowed for many second-hand anecdotes of those experiencing it: "Grandpa, what was the West like?" "Well, I was only a little boy there during the tail end of it, but my father told me once that . . ." That 100-year (give or take) gulf between the event and the reflection makes it recent enough to remain relevant to modern events, but distant enough to allow for artistic and creative license. For example, modern audiences wouldn't accept a show set in the 1970s that had its main characters using cell phones (no matter how bulky), but they'd probably be okay with similar anachronisms in telegraph or railroad technology from Westerns.

To me, then, there are two interesting avenues of contemplation for gaming. First, I find myself wondering what "tomorrow's nostalgia" will be. We can already extrapolate the 100-year window and apply that to a renewed interest in Victorian and "steampunk" in recent years, and I can't help but wonder if the coming decades will see a resurgence in hard-boiled and Prohibition-Era stories.

Second, it would stand to reason that the wistfulness humans feel toward its past culture would extend to any society advancing at a reasonable clip. Thus I would imagine that a series set in 2207 would be nostalgic about events that took place at the turn of the 22nd century; GMs looking to add a bit of culture and color to such a world can merely look backwards a hundred years on the timeline and see what was going on then, make up a holovid series or two, and call it a "trend." Or, for near-future events, try to figure out what in our recent history might spark similar thoughts; for example, I could easily see a space-race based series taking off sometime between 2050 and 2070. (As a final food for thought, "100 years" equals approximately "three generations"; what would "nostalgia" look like for generations that

last longer or shorter? When the average human lifespan reaches 150 years, will that longing for the past shoot even farther back?)

Of course, the constant need for entertainment means that all eras will eventually be plundered. But, at the very least, it's interesting to note that 100 years ago is a nice compromise: Close to us, yet -- when it comes to adventure -- far, far away.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

The Omniscient Eye

What's a Fellow Have to Do to Maintain Civilization?

The Banestorm from *GURPS Fantasy* and literary devices in assorted sci-fi or "alternate history" novels transplant small groups of people into a primitive, hostile or just uncaring world and let them struggle to maintain their civilization and technology.

At a first glance, groups from a lower tech level should have an easier time retain their technology. There are fewer specialized professions and tools, so they have better chances that all required skills will be present in the group and that the specialists can make all of their own tools.

Is that true? And what is the highest tech level where a transplanted rural village or an infantry battalion would contain all the skills and tools to retain its TL, assuming an average village or battalion? No "gee, what a luck that we have a special forces medic, a couple of SCA fanatics and a former engineering professor in *each* squad" . . .

Note that I'm deliberately ignoring genetic diversity. There will be a barbarian princess for our Steel-Jawed Hero, or vice versa, if the story follows literary precedents.

It has been said that it's not a long fall that kills you, it's the sudden stop at the end. Something similar is likely here: it's not a lack of long-term skills that's going to be a problem (although it will, certainly, be a problem) so much as the sudden transition to another world.

It would indeed seem likely that people from lower levels of technology would have a better time of it than people with better toys. Maintaining hunter-gatherer technology requires some sophisticated but readily learnable skills, practiced by outdoorsmen through the ages, such as professional hunters and gamekeepers as well as modern survivalists and other interested amateurs, and taught by some military organizations. Of course, even hunter-gatherers rely on specialized skills, or at least specialized knowledge, which allow them to survive in their native environments. It's not just knowing "how to survive"; it's knowing "these particular things, which grow everywhere I've ever been but not necessarily elsewhere, are good to eat . . . and here's where all the watering holes are." Switching a band of Inuit from near the Artic Circle and !Kung San from the Kalahari desert would be a formula for cranking the life expectancies of both down to near zero.

Still, that's an extreme case. A group of hunter-gatherers transplanted to an unfamiliar environment would have a period of adjustment as they learned the specifics of which plants were edible, how local animals behaved, seasonal patterns, and so on, but they'd likely survive and thrive again once they'd adapted. After all, that's what our own ancestors did as they spread across the globe.

Farming

Moving from hunting and gathering to agriculture and higher levels of technology, however, requires not just a different skill set but also an infrastructure. Generally speaking, higher-tech skills require higher-tech equipment to be of much use, and producing that high-tech gear gets farther and farther out of the hands of the typical user. While any hunter-gatherer can make his own bow, clothing, or carrying basket, it's a rare doctor who can formulate his own medicines or a rare garage mechanic, let alone a typical driver, who can fabricate the mechanical parts necessary to

build a car.

So what does that mean for the size of self-sustaining groups? Sufficiently clever hunter-gatherers can find something to eat anywhere on the planet, but farmers need at the very least domesticated food crops and possibly domesticated animals. Domesticating wild plants is a process which can take less than a lifetime, but does take decades. If dropped into an alternative location without taking their land and homes with them, a group of individuals would need to be supported by hunting and gathering skills for a long time before they could restore farming technology, and few groups of people are likely to have sufficient skills in both.

Even with some tools and supplies, a moderate difference in environment can be a major obstacle. Despite merely going from one temperate climate to another and carrying significant quantities of relatively high-tech goods with them, early European settlers in the New World sustained serious casualties before they refined their farming techniques. However, if an entire village with a not-terribly-advanced level of technology were picked up lock, stock, and barrel along with their already-cleared fields, and placed in a new -- if not terribly different -- landscape, it could carry on with its previous lifestyle largely uninterrupted.

The Renaissance pushes the limits of the level of technology at which a typical small settlement could survive largely without regular support from the outside world. Once various kinds of water-powered manufacturing start to ramp up on the way to the coal-fired industrial revolution, an increasing number of small villages become more oriented towards trade with the outside world and more dependent on imported goods from cloth to agricultural tools. Even apparently independent backwoods Appalachian towns, some of which didn't have electricity until the TVA came along in the 1930s, nevertheless needed iron stoves, saw-blades, rifle and shotgun cartridges, cloth, and other goods produced in urban factories.

Partial Transfer

But then there's the question of just what technology will come along for the ride. A Medieval village transported to a new world with a compatible environment or left behind when everyone else in the world vanishes can probably survive indefinitely, losing little or none of they technology they've got. Just about everything they have is made locally anyway: food, cloth, pottery, lumber for houses, and so on, though they might have to do without some luxuries and less vital imported goods. For example, Medieval England saw a surprisingly brisk trade in preserved fish which penetrated well inland; if an inland village ended up somewhere else, it'd lose access to the trade network. With a large enough set of villagers, they might also have sufficient carpentry and masonry skills to build waterwheels. Metal formed a relatively small proportion of tools used by peasants (for example, shovels and other tools we'd make out of metal were often wooden, and little or no metal was used in home construction) and smithing at a village level was typically a part-time trade anyway, so if the local smith wasn't fully checked out on how to find iron ore and smelt new metal out of it, he might have time to experiment and figure it out.

However, the villagers wouldn't bring with them a number of contemporary technologies we might regard as characteristic of the era. For example, armory was a specialized trade practiced by urban smiths. A village smith could probably turn a bar of iron into something with a cutting edge, but it'd be a pretty poor sword. Likewise, they almost certainly wouldn't have literacy (let alone the skills necessary to produce illuminated manuscripts) or the masonry

Domestication

Hunter-gatherers, who are free to wander around the landscape, can opportunistically exploit whatever species come to hand. They adapt their behavior to the environment. Farmers, on the other hand, need their food species to adapt to them, growing in ways which lend themselves to efficient human cultivation. Just what that constitutes varies from species to species, but one of the fundamental adaptations in Western history was the development of the flexible rachis. The rachis is a structure which connects grain to the plant on which it grows. In wild species, the rachis is brittle. Wind, rain, and casual contact with passing animals can break it, scattering the seeds. That's fine for the plants, but bad for humans. With a brittle rachis, a large portion of a harvest can be lost to the elements before the farmer can try to collect the grain he's growing. Humans are much happier when the plant has a mutation which occasionally happens in the wild: a flexible

skills necessary to build flying buttresses, the conventional apex of Medieval architecture. They'd practice agriculture at a level commensurate with their original technology and be able to sustain that indefinitely, but large swaths of their contemporary technology, most of which they'd never come into contact with anyway, would be left behind. To maintain *all* of that level of technology, one would need a fair-sized city (say, at least 30,000 people), where one would be likely to find a population of scholars, master masons, and tradesmen catering to various elites. Of course, that city would need to be supported by an agricultural hinterland with a population several times that of the city itself. For example, if Florence were to be transported to another world, it would have to take the whole of Tuscany with it at the very least if it were to survive.

Industry

The Victorian age is probably the highest level of technology at which a moderately sized region would be self-supporting, and even that might be dependent on local geography. For example, around the end of the 19th century, Pittsburgh had active factories, access to massive coal resources and a bit of oil to boot (including, importantly, already active mines and wells), a large agricultural hinterland already under cultivation, and a sufficiently educated core of scholars and other specialists to maintain a level of medical, engineering, and scientific knowledge which -- while not cutting edge -- would be reasonably close to the state of the art. If western Pennsylvania (perhaps with an extension to iron ore deposits around the Great Lakes) were dropped onto another world, the chief city would probably have the physical resources to maintain its level of technology.

Even so, Victorian Pittsburgh would suffer tremendous economic and social disruptions which could endanger its survival. For example, although the farmland of western Pennsylvania might be enough to feed the city's teeming thousands, they'd be eating mostly local corn and wheat. Meat, increasingly shipped in from the Midwest, would be in shorter local supply the later in the period we're discussing, and cotton, largely imported from southern states, would also vanish, causing a collapse in the local textile industry until fibers could be grown or otherwise produced locally. (Synthetic fibers were invented in the 1850s but were unsuitable for commercial production until the turn of the 20th century.) Factories would have to retool their production for local needs, miners and food suppliers would have to quickly sort out new patterns of distribution, and the people would have to establish how they were going to govern themselves in their strange new world.

Other cities, of course, may not be so happily situated. Victorian Chicago would be in a position similar to Pittsburgh, trading oil and some coal (coal was discovered in northern Illinois in the 1860s) for better access to livestock and minerals. Victorian New York, Atlanta, or Boston, on the other hand, would probably lack energy resources, and most of the Midwest would probably be light on manufacturing or top-notch scientists. Given sufficient food production resources, such regions might be able to preserve enough technological knowledge to eventually rebuild their former sophistication, but it would likely take years or decades to get back to where they started.

In the modern era, the necessary region to support our technology is even larger and even more dependent on geography. A large chunk of the state of Texas, for example, might have enough agricultural land, energy resources, manufacturing capacity, and intellectual capital to maintain everything from a reasonable level of subsistence to nuclear and space capabilities, particularly if that chunk extends out of Texas and into the Great Plains and the Gulf of Mexico, retaining prime farmland and petroleum resources. A similarly sized chunk of the Northeastern US or western Europe, though, might have enough manufacturing capacity and all the knowledge, but too little farmland and not enough oil.

rachis. A less brittle rachis keeps more of the grain in place until a farmer reaps the plants and beats them hard enough to detach the valuable seeds.

It's not clear just why humans came to start cultivating grain, but it *is* clear that humans trying to cultivate grain would end up selecting for the flexible rachis, and when the flexible rachis became predominant in the plants the farmers were keeping for seed grain, the plant would become a far more reliable food source. However, even assuming a very optimistic scenario for the rate at which the mutation for the flexible rachis would occur and be selected for by farmers, it would take at least 20 years for the flexible rachis to become predominant enough to allow full-time farming, and 200 years seems a more likely span. Until that happens, even the most skillful and best equipped farmers are unlikely to be able to make a go of grain farming.

Armies

So a settlement or group of settlements of appropriate size can support itself and its technology up to a certain level. Can a battalion or other military organization? We'll assume a unit comprised of several hundred to a thousand men. For a low level of technology, quite probably. Most ancient armies contained a significant number of people who were already farmers and often included a small corps of carpenters, masons, and smiths, and the upper echelons might bring advanced literacy and other skills with less immediate application with them. Access to enough seed grain to go back to farming would be a significant issue if, say, a Roman legion or group of Crusaders were dropped into another world, but if they had a short-term subsistence fix, they would at least have a decent chance of survival while bringing along a significantly more technology (or, at least, technology-related skills) than a typical village. If the lost soldiers can find some local women to impress, they'll have the core of a nice little town.

But for higher levels of technology (say, anything since the invention of cartridge-firing guns), almost certainly not. A reasonably well-trained unit could survive indefinitely as hunter-gatherers, though even in a friendly environment, they'd have to spread themselves out over an area twelve to sixteen miles across. Beyond that, the infrastructure issue strikes again. It seems unlikely that they'd have botanists capable of recognizing undomesticated forms of food crops, geologists capable of finding metal ores, farmers used to working without industrially manufactured equipment, skilled herbalists, and so on. And even if there were a few friendly natives willing to point them to the basics, they would be extremely unlikely to have the kind of gear with them they'd need to bootstrap an industrial revolution.

However, though they don't have the skills and tools necessary to maintain their own high-tech society, a body of higher-tech soldiers would be in an excellent position to borrow somebody else's society and accelerate its own technological advances. As long as their ammunition, batteries, and discipline hold out, just about any military unit which has learned the lessons of the First World War would be essentially unstoppable against one which hasn't. And since pre-gunpowder societies are also likely to recognize conquest as a legitimate means of taking power, a sufficiently canny commander could turn his temporary technological advantage into a longer-lasting political one, putting him in a good position to infuse scraps of high-tech knowledge into a low-tech society.

The average soldier might not have many applicable skills, but given a critical mass of educated specialists and officers, they might be able piece together enough knowledge about modern technologies to push the societies they had taken over into a higher level of technology. Here, the composition of the unit becomes significant, but it need not have a preponderance of SCA members and hobbyist blacksmiths to make a dent in local technology. For example, a handful of people who had taken physics and chemistry classes at university might be able to piece together enough remembered information about electromagnetism to start producing magnets, which could be combined with waterwheels (available since Classical antiquity) to create small electrical generators. They might also work with local smiths, glassblowers, and potters to develop hotter furnaces; just knowing that high-temperature furnaces would lead to superior iron and steel could provide a considerable spur to local metalworkers more familiar with contemporary furnace designs. A doctor or even a few medics could provide invaluable assistance with instituting public health measures in cooperation with local architects, such as building sewers and draining swamps.

What the moderns would add in this case is not the engineering knowledge necessary to build such public works, but rather sufficient public health expertise to know that sewage-filled gutters and mosquito-filled swamps should be done away with . . . oh, and killing all the cats is not a good way of preventing rat-borne plagues. Just as important as positive new knowledge they can contribute is the knowledge of dead ends they can help the locals avoid. None of this is likely to lead to an overnight technological revolution. However, it can raise the tone considerably.

A peculiar side effect is that time-traveled soldiers might find themselves in the unusual position of being primarily administrators rather than warriors. Since modern soldiers are more likely to be literate than most historical people they'd subjugate and more used to the workings of a bureaucracy, they'd be better than average candidates to coordinate the actions of the ruling class.

Doing It Right

Mostly, we've been talking about what won't work. It might be useful to look at an example of something which *has* worked properly. For several centuries, from the end of the Greek Dark Ages to around the time Rome completed its dominance of the Mediterranean, all of the major Greek city-states established colonies around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, from modern Russia to modern Spain. Excess population was sent off to establish new settlements, starting with initial expeditions of as few as a hundred men, potentially growing quickly to the low thousands. These settlements, though political allies and trade partners of their parent cities, were as independent as any settlement could be. After all, their parent cities could be months away by even a fast ship, and more than token support would be impossible. However, by putting little cities all over the landscape, the Greeks managed to establish long-lasting, autonomous settlements with a vast cultural influence.

So why did this work? The specific skills of the colonists probably weren't much different from the skills one might find in a large random sampling of their home city's population: farming and animal husbandry, carpentry, masonry, ship-building, forestry and woodcutting, smithing, cloth-making, pottery, and a handful of additional trades and skills (for example, literacy and law), and their equipment would have been little more than they could have brought with them on their ships. One significant factor may be the environment. Everywhere the Greeks went had fairly similar climate and reasonably similar soil to their home. Very little of the farming knowledge they had wouldn't have been applicable anywhere else they tried to live.

More importantly, though, they didn't just drop people off into a blank landscape. Although colonies were established in places where there weren't already cities, it would have been impossible to find a completely unpopulated region around the Mediterranean or Black Sea which would have been capable of supporting a city. This gave the first colonists the bare minimum of infrastructure they would need to get through that initial period of adjustment. They might trade for locally produced goods or militarily subjugate the surrounding territory in order to impose taxes, but either way, they'd have all-important material support which would let them set up their own settlement.

So what, finally, does this mean for groups of people jumping timelines or worlds? Mostly, it's that they need to bring their high-tech tools and materials with them if they're to make any use of their high-tech skills. Higher-tech societies are increasingly integrated, with a small handful of producers creating the bulk of the country, region, or even world's supply of goods used elsewhere. For example, for many years after World War II, the majority of the world's producers of certain classes of machine parts (those made from fused powdered metal) were based in north-central Pennsylvania. Transporting any region or group of people into a new world and not including that area probably means that not only would they not have the skill to produce a wide range of vital machine parts, they wouldn't have factories with the specialized gear necessary to replace them, rendering the skills moot. Any number of high-tech devices from computers to medical imaging devices depend on rare earths mined and processed half a world away from where the devices are built. Modern technology is immensely powerful, but that comes at the price of requiring tremendous specialization and a vast web of dependencies. World-travelers may be able to work at recreating those webs if they find themselves far from home, but without support, there may be too many strands to construct on their own.

--Matt Riggsby

Pyramid Review

Ca$h'n Gun$

Published by [Asmodée Editions](#)

Designed by Ludovic Maublanc

Illustrated by Gérard Mathieu

Development & advanced rules by Les Belges à Sombreros

Translated by Benoît Löscher

Full-color boxed set with six foam pistols, 48 bullet cards (eight each for six characters), 14 Wound markers, 14 Shame markers, 40 banknotes, six characters with plastic stands, 10 super power cards, three switchboard cards, one telephone card, six secret role cards (one cop and five gangsters), quick reference card, & rules; $39.99

Have you ever seen one of those flicks where a heist goes off perfectly and the thieves, in the spirit of camaraderie and good fortune, compliment one another on their seamless teamwork, then split the take equitably before going their separate ways? Neither has anyone else, and that's why there's no game based on the concept. On the other hand, *Ca$h'n Gun$* from Asmodée Editions scratches the itch for anyone who ever wanted to play out the climax of a Quentin Tarantino movie.

The object is to be the richest thug left alive at the end of the game.

As four to six gangsters gather at their rendezvous to split the loot, everyone gets a character standup, a matching set of eight bullet cards, and -- sweetest of all -- a foam-rubber gun. Each round, five of the stolen bank notes are flipped face up so the crooks know what's at stake. Everyone places a bullet card facedown in front of them. Five of them say *Click Click Click,* two read *Bang!,* and one says *Bang! Bang! Bang!*

When the godfather counts to three, everyone levels his gun at another player so the game table looks like a John Woo confrontation. Another three-count, and anyone who doesn't like his odds with X number of guns pointed at him can lower his weapon and hit the deck. He takes no wounds but gets a shame tile and loses out on this round's loot. Of the remaining criminals, anyone who played a *Bang! Bang! Bang!* card has a hair trigger and starts firing. He wounds his target, who gets no share in the spoils and only fires back if he also played a *Bang! Bang! Bang!* card. The *Bang!* cards are last; these wound just as before, only now combatants have a better chance of returning fire. *Click Click Click* means a bluff (try explaining that to Mr. Black . . .). Three wounds kill a gangster, removing him from the game. Bullet cards can only be used once, but are not revealed if the gunman didn't get a shot off.

The survivors then share in the cash. An even amount goes to each crook but you can't make change, so you divide what you can and the rest carries over to the next round. For example, if you have five $5,000 notes and four people still standing, each gets one of the bills and the fifth stays in. It's easier than it sounds for the entire take to be stalled in this fashion. Whoever is still alive and has the most money at the end of round eight wins.

Unless . . . unless someone's giving everyone funny looks. Like he was hiding something. Say, Tino's not a *cop,* is he? He might be, if players use that option. In this case, there's an extra step in which a phone call card circulates. It gets

passed under the table to everyone who survived the round. Only the cop can flip it to show he snuck away to raise the alarm. The first couple of calls suffer bureaucratic snafus, but the third alerts the feds. The officer has only six rounds in which to contact his superiors, and he may be lying down wounded on some of those. That also narrows down who *could* have made the calls. If he's alive after round eight, the SWAT teams descend and he wins; otherwise, there's no one to testify against these respectable businessmen. Throw in the "super power" cards that allow players to break the rules somehow and the fun spirals out of control.

The bank notes aren't typical Monopoly money; they're good, stiff cardboard bits. You only get one reference card (almost not worth including it), the cards are so-so material, and the standup figures (to identify who's who) have bases too small to stay upright properly (they promise two for each standup on the box, yet you only get six), but that doesn't really matter because *players get foam-rubber guns.* These are too cool, and feel great when clutched in one's larcenous hands. As for why they changed the color to orange from the original black when reprinting the game, well, use your imagination.

Some games really capture the essence of their topic; this one sits on the motif's chest and slaps it backhanded in the face. It's hard to explain just how exciting it feels, how right, and then the mantra repeats: *foam-rubber guns.* It sets up a tense situation, and the box lies about taking up half an hour for playing time. That's true the first time, and maybe when the cop or super power rules are introduced, but then it's back to 20 minutes for each of the several games that *will* be played, many of them long after the impatient spouse has called wondering if there was a traffic jam.

Playing with the cop option won't be for everyone. It's a tough role to play, and it's hard to win with it, but it really ratchets up the stress for the whole group, and this from a game that already has everyone sweating bullets and staring nervously at their "partners." This time it isn't enough trying to figure out someone's strategy, players must get inside their opponents' heads. The "super power" cards are perhaps badly named. They're handy little quirks for twisting the rules, not Matrix-style wildcards that break participants out of the moment. *Ca$h'n Gun$* is a hard-rocking and tough-playing pastime, and rare is the board game that pumps the blood while just sitting at the table.

--Andy Vetromile

P.S. Foam. Rubber. Guns.

Pyramid Review

Affiliates RPG

Published by [Anglo-Canadian Games](#)

Written by Janet Neilson with Zavada McElwain, Brian Menczynski, & Ben Yee

Illustrated by Toos Holman with Janet Neilson

Player's Guide, 124-Page Perfect Bound Book; $22
Game Master's Guide, 108-Page Perfect Bound Book; $22

Affiliates, published by Anglo-Canadian Games, is a new entry in the crime genre of RPGs. Split into two books, the *Player's Guide* and the *Game Master's Guide,* this casts the characters as almost, but not quite, members of the Mafia. Rather they belong to "Smythe Affiliated," also known as the "Affiliation" or the Mafia's Mafia. Created by an expatriate Englishman in the days of Prohibition, it consists of a single family or bloodline with a very loyal cadre of specialists in criminal activity. Its role is provide other criminal organizations -- the Mafia, the Yakuza, the Triads, and others (though for historical reasons, not the Organizatsiya) -- with specialist services such as safe houses, weaponry, information, even assassination, but all without involving itself in the politics or wars of their customer base. As members of Smythe Affiliated, player characters will undertake such tasks while also protecting the Smythe family from its rivals, the Merritts. But when it comes to the job, an Affiliate's motto is, "Simple. Nasty. Effective."

The whole concept feels like a television series pitch -- "They're mafia, but not mafia, only associated with them, but they still get to do all those bad things that Mafioso do. Plus they do it while looking cool and every character has both an easy-to-remember nickname, and an easy-to-remember signature skill that defines his role." These last two are represented by a call sign given within a month of the character being hired by Smythe Affiliated from the criminal gene pool and elsewhere, and by every player character having a Signature Trait, an ability that was also their reason for being hired.

Mechanically, Affiliates uses the "Caltrops System," which -- as the name suggests -- uses the humble four-sided die. The base action check involves rolling and adding a number of dice equal to attribute, rated from one to six, though rarely more than three following character generation. The target number is 10, impossible or difficult with two or three dice. This is where skills come in. Rated from one to six, a skill makes an action check easier by directly lowering the target number value. Skill specialties, Signature Traits, and Merits (advantages) likewise lower a target number, while a Flaw will raise it. The system is fairly easy, as are the combat mechanics, which emphasis how deadly weapons can be, and how long it takes to heal.

Character generation involves spending a set amount of points on attributes, backgrounds, skills, and Signature Traits, all bolstered by a handful of freebie points. Ten points are distributed between the six attributes all have a free starting value of one, but cannot have a starting value of more than three. The skill list includes plenty of specialties, an affiliate beginning the game with three free. Of the skill list, the only interesting inclusion is the Menial Tasks skill, which enables a character to get away with a boring job without him looking like it is beneath him. Backgrounds represent a character's resources, both material and immaterial. Available in five levels for each type, they include Connections, actual Equipment, Patron, Reputation, and monetary Resources. Merits and Flaws can be purchased with any of the points spent during character generation, just as long as the points balance at the end.

Signature Traits represent an affiliate's specialty, something that he is good enough to come to the notice of Smythe

Affiliated's hiring agents. All require an associated skill, have four levels, and are expensive to buy. The choice available includes Geek (Computers), Craftsman (Crafts), Socialite (Socialize), Assassin (Stealth), Legit (Business), Ride (Drive), plus one each for guns, blades, and blunt weaponry. Most characters buy a few levels of one Trait, but with freebie points can afford to buy the basic levels in two. The levels do seem arbitrary, so that for Craftsman you have in ascending order: Saboteur, Blueprint Cipher, Petrolhead, and Duct Tape Magician. The question is, what happens if he wants to a play an expert car mechanic but not take the Trait's earlier levels?

Finally, a player is asked to detail his character by answering various questions about his Affiliate's personality, background, and ambitions. He also needs to come up with a call sign and select personal equipment, including weaponry from a somewhat eclectic list. The creation process is not a difficult one, but an example would have helped. The feel of both system and character generation process is reminiscent of a slimmed down version of White Wolf Studio's *Storyteller System.*

The *Player's Guide* gives a decent amount of background upon Smythe Affiliated, including its history, branches throughout the USA, major Affiliates, and enemies, in particular, the Merritt family. There are also six ready-to-play characters that do enforce the role defining nature of Signature Traits, and also feel stereotyped, something that the players will have to work hard at to overcome with their own characters.

Although there is no GM advice in the *Player's Guide,* the types of work undertaken by a Regime (a local branch of Smythe Affiliated) is discussed, serving as pointers to the type of adventures a GM could run. The book is rounded out with a short bibliography. In comparison, the shorter *Game Master's Guide* goes into much more depth about the game's background and setting, exploring in particular the enmity between the Smythe Family and their rivals, the Merritts. Actually a mafia family, the Merritts are definitely portrayed as the game's bad guys. The intention is also to have a campaign played out involving the recent history of this rivalry. All of the NPCs in the *Player's Guide* are given more detail and also a character sheet. In addition, there are rules for handling poisons, car chases, damaging objects, plus a collection of generic NPCs.

Advice on getting a campaign started is basic, but workable. It suggests having the player Affiliates establish an outpost in uncontested territory with the aid of an exiting branch. Also covered is how a member is brought into the Affiliation, allowing the recruitment of new characters to be played out. While good advice, it does not really cover campaign play. This is not to say that the background lacks inspirational potential, but a GM is nevertheless left to his own devices. A trio of myths and rumors do at least suggest how the game should be played and lend themselves to adventure ideas, but again the work is up to the GM.

Physically, both books are unremarkable, with neat layout, adequate artwork, and fitting photography. It needs both an index (for which there is room) and an edit. There is even one paragraph that ends with a note to the writer saying how it needs to be finished and what cool stuff will be in it. Fortunately, the lack of editing has been fixed since my pre-launch edition, and the lack of index, the blank pages due to a printer's error, will be fixed in a second edition. The layout feels unnecessarily spacious, and a better choice of fount and tighter layout might have improved the game's look.

Better layout and organization might have eliminated the sense of repetition between the two books, the splitting of rules that could have gone into the *Player's Guide,* and the presentation of the NPC character sheets. Why not give their game stats as text (as they do for the generic NPCs) rather than as fuzzy character sheets? It might also make space for more GM advice and help with running a game. This is the *Affiliates'* Achilles Heel. It does not help the GM enough, especially in the long term, and more effort should have gone into helping the GM expand the written history into something that can be run as a game.

Not a game for the inexperienced GM -- both because of its subject matter and dearth of advice -- *Affiliates* is a solid design despite its omissions. Although there is no specific background upon other criminal organizations or the law, a GM can find ready information in Living Room Games' *Complete Mafia* and Hogshead Publishing's *Crime Scene* series. Of course, Affiliates is not the first crime-themed RPG, but in comparison with *Haven: City of Violence* it plays its subject straight, and its mechanics are relatively contemporary. All of which is not to say that you could not get a good game out of playing the Affiliates. It certainly lends itself to the gritty (and probably amoral) "honor

amongst thieves" genre, and the concept sells itself easily enough.

--Matthew Pook

Brian Colver, Recovering Psychic Addict

for *GURPS*

by Paul Stefko

Brian Colver is a young resident at a major urban hospital. He is currently assigned to the ER, dealing with domestic abuse patients, gunshot victims, and worse. While he often seems cold and aloof, he does his job very well.

But Brian Colver has a secret. As a teenager, he discovered he had a gift, a talent for medicine that transcended the abilities of any normal doctor. Brian could sense and manipulate the very essence of life itself.

Brian possesses a rare combination of Psychic Vampirism and Psychic Healing. He is capable of draining a so-far unidentified "life energy" from large groups (anyone within 300 feet) and channel this energy into others to heal their wounds, repair crippled limbs, and cure diseases. He cannot hold onto this energy very long; either he uses it to heal, or it dissipates harmlessly.

Brian is reluctant to use his healing powers, however, for two reasons. First, he knows that he can only heal by draining life from others. As a doctor, he finds it hard to reconcile this drawback with the benefits of his gift. More importantly, though, whenever he uses his healing power, he feels an unstoppable rush of ecstasy, leaving him incapacitated for minutes at a time. The feeling is, for Brian, highly addictive.

Brian has a long family history with addiction. Brian's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all police officers and all alcoholics. His grandfather died of liver failure, while his great- grandfather was actually shot dead while drunk on the job. Brian's father is currently living in a psychiatric care facility after driving his car into a bridge embankment, killing his wife of 35 years. Brian visits him at least once a week. He knows nothing of his son's "gift."

Brian was treated for alcohol abuse in his early 20s. He had started drinking in high school, soon after his first major use of his ability.

Brian had witnessed a bus accident, and without thinking, he rushed in and tried to help the first person he saw. The man was bleeding heavily, and while Brian used some of the first aid training he'd received in Boy Scouts, he could feel the man dying beneath his hands. Instinctively, Brian reached out with his mind and drew on the life around him; all around, other victims took their last, rattling breaths, as their life flowed out of them and into Brian's body. With a push, and a surge of bliss, Brian gave that life to the man he was helping.

Brian has only used his power a few times since then. He quickly found the feeling of healing another person to be overwhelming. He turned to alcohol to dull his mind to the pain of others. Through college, he drank heavily, even tried drugs on occasion, usually marijuana but also cocaine and heroin. He slipped into the dark spiral of the addict, and he knew he would never climb out on his own. The summer before he was to have started medical school, he checked himself into a detox program.

Today, Brian is a grim, serious young man. He presents a front of cold detachment as a defense mechanism against his power. If he doesn't care about a patient's pain, he won't be tempted to give in and heal them.

Brian doesn't know much about the origin of his powers or the extent of others like him. He was approached once, several years ago, by a woman who called herself Eva. She claimed to represent a group of people "of like mind and potential" and that she was authorized to extend an invitation of membership. Brian refused, and since then, "Eva" or the people she works for have been shadowing Brian, watching from a distance but never approaching. The message was clear: they were waiting for his inevitable change of mind.

Mysteriously, Brian occasionally receives anonymous packages containing research data: MRIs, genetic analyses,

digital recordings of parapsychological testing. All are seemingly reproduced and verified by multiple groups, but none have ever been published in any medical journal Brian has ever been able to locate. He is slowly piecing together a comprehensive knowledge of psionic ability, despite never actually having met anyone else with demonstrable powers. Brian can't help but wonder if "Eva" and his mysterious benefactor are somehow connected.

Adventure Hooks

Brian Colver is designed for Psychic Wars or psionic Secret Powers campaigns (page 218 and pages 214-217 of *GURPS Powers,* respectively). The easiest way to introduce Brian into a game is to have one of the PCs taken to Brian's ER following a serious injury (gunfights and car crashes are rarely in short supply in many PCs' lives). The worse off the character is, the more likely it is that Brian will slip and use his ability to save him. If the heroes include anyone with ESP or the ability to detect psionic powers, they could easily sniff Brian out in the process.

Alternately, Brian could finally decide to seek out other psis on his own. With his growing collection of psionic research, he should be able to piece together reports of strange occurrences and trace it all back to the PCs and their activities. Does Brian want help, answers, maybe even a cure?

Finally, Brian could take up "Eva's" offer and join a shadowy cabal of psis (or even the Cabal itself, which has all manner of uses for a young psychic vampire). He could then become a rival or ally of the PCs, depending on their relationship with this group.

Brian Colver   *282 points*

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].
HP 10 [0]; Per 12 [0]; Will 13 [5]; FP 11 [0].

Advantages: Detect Life (Psychic Vampirism, -10%) [27], Energy Reserve 10 (Psi; Special Recharge, Leech, Bleeds away at one point per second, -80%) [6], Healer 1 [10], Healing (Cure Affliction, +60%; Xenohealing, All Earthly Life, +40%; All-Out, -25%; Backlash, Ecstasy, -100%; Capped, 10 ER, -5%; Psychic Healing*, -15%) [17], Immunity to Disease (Psychic Healing*, -15%) [9], Immunity to Poison (Psychic Healing*, -15%) [13], Leech 1 (Accelerated Healing, +25%; Area Effect, 100 yard radius, +350%; Malediction 2, +150%; Selective Area, +20%; All-Out, -25%; Emanation, -20%; Only Heals ER, -20%; Psychic Vampirism, -10%) [143], Patron (Powerful; 9 or less; Special Abilities, Powers in a non-powered world, +100%; Secret, -50%) [15], Psychic Healing Talent 2 [10], Psychic Vampirism Talent 2 [10].

Disadvantages: Alcoholism ("recovered") [-15], Dependent (father; no more than 25% of starting points; 6 or less) [-10], Enemy ("Eva"; powerful watcher; 6 or less) [-2], Loner (9) [-7], Secret (Psychic Healer, imprisonment or exile) [-20].

Quirks: Addictive Personality; Heartless (affects a Callous demeanor) [-2].

Skills: Computer Operation/TL8-12 [1], Current Affairs/TL8 (Science and Technology)-12 [1], Diagnosis/TL8-12† [2], Electronics Operation/ TL8 (Medical)-13 [4], Expert Skill (Psionics)-10 [1], First Aid/ TL8-14† [2], Pharmacy/TL8 (Synthetic)-12† [2], Physician/TL8-12† [2], Physiology/TL8-12† [2], Psychology-12† [2], Research/TL8-12 [2], Surgery/TL8-11† [2].

* draws on Energy Reserve Only
† includes +1 from Healer

The Last Days of New York

by Paul Drye

It was late 1977 when the first cases started showing up. Everyone had seen *The Boy In The Plastic Bubble* the year before, so they had some idea about immune deficiency. A few New Yorkers, often poor, died of something mysterious, then a few more. Philadelphia and Los Angeles started seeing cases too, and then the bomb dropped. Just after Christmas the Center for Disease Control announced that the new disease was infectious by air, and that it had a very long incubation period -- sometimes as short as a few weeks, but others over six months and with the horizon climbing. Worse, the discovery had been made by statistical analysis of cases; at first there was no test for finding out who was still asymptomatic yet passing the disease on. Worse, there was no cure, and this acquired immune deficiency looked as if it would always be fatal in the long run.

Later work would show that the percentage of the American population already infected with Communicable Immune Deficiency was about ten percent, particularly concentrated in the large cities of the East and West Coast, and Chicago. Despite widespread efforts to set up "public barrier prevention" by distributing paper face masks and the like, that figure was over 20% when the first CID blood test was developed in September 1978 and it became clear just how widespread the problem was.

By then, about a half a million people had died, two million were obviously ill and in decline, and another 40 million were "dead men walking": asymptomatic, but with every reason to believe that their own number would come up eventually. For six months, many people had been refusing to go to work, shopping malls and grocery stores were near-empty, and most public entertainment had been outlawed on health grounds. The economy dropped in size by 50% and the only thing preventing riots in the streets was fear of catching something from the other rioters.

As the United States seethed, Europe started its own decline when a cluster of cases appeared in Paris and began to spread. Armed with knowledge gleaned from the American outbreak the French authorities managed to blunt the infection, but complete eradication was elusive. With CID's long incubation period, it was impossible to track down everyone who'd made contact with each new case, and problematic to isolate the many who could be found. Cases rose to 8% of the population, and started to spread outside France's borders. West Germany and the United Kingdom were soon fighting the same battle.

The U.S.S.R. and the Warsaw Pact countries had only a few cases, thanks to their immediately closing off contacts with the West and working to distribute face masks and latex gloves before the pandemic hit them. The infected (and their social circles) were ruthlessly isolated, and in some cases euthanized out of hand. Still, the Kremlin worried about the problem incessantly as their long-term rival across the Atlantic collapsed. Perhaps the disease would get into their empire through Yugoslavia, or from Greece into Romania, and then who knew what would happen?

The particular thorn in their side was West Berlin. Protected by treaty that connected it to the rest of the world by air, it was an obvious flaw in the U.S.S.R.'s plan to isolate itself and its satellites. After months of dithering, and after cases

of CID started appearing in Hamburg, the Kremlin made the decision to shut down the world's connections to the city.

It was certainly a defensible moral position, but unfortunately the entire situation was poisoned by old Cold War animosities and the new feeling of crisis. The recent Helsinki Accords, in particular, made the whole maneuver legally questionable. In the chaos of mid-1978, NATO decided to make an issue of the new blockade, only to have the US portion of the military response fall apart. In France the threat of their own wounded country declaring war and tempting a nuclear strike caused huge populist riots and the downfall of the Giscard d'Estaing government. A Communist/Radical-Left coalition took over and essentially switched sides in the conflict. In the UK, the minority Labour government of James Callaghan was tied up by its own radical wing, and after an emboldened U.S.S.R. crossed over into West Germany and occupied it virtually unopposed, Britain capitulated and moved out of the United States' orbit.

With the Russians moving in, refugees from Western Europe left in the tens of thousands. Unfortunately for them, no country was willing to accept them for fear of the spreading infection. The United States seemed like the best bet, but the Coast Guard swept up most of the small boats (arguing, plausibly, that North Atlantic conditions made all small-boat crossings a case for humanitarian rescue). Anyone caught was brought to one of three processing centers: Wilmington in North Carolina, Key Largo, or Governors Island in New York. From there they were moved into the local quarantine zone. Manhattan rapidly developed a European, primarily British, subculture composed of immigrants who were destitute even by New York's rapidly lowering standards.

It's now October of 1980, and it's not at all clear that the Big Apple has hit bottom yet.

New York City

The population of New York is about a quarter of a million now. Most fled when it became apparent that the city was breaking down entirely, and that water, food, and law were becoming scarce. As many as a million and a half die-hards stayed, but between CID, other diseases, and violence most of them have perished.

On the mainland, mandatory testing of the entire U.S. population, quarantine camps in isolated places like Kansas and Nevada, and generally paranoid social behavior by the public have reduced the number of new CID cases to an appalling-but-manageable few thousand per month. New York (as well as a few other major cities) are considered too far gone for this to work. Unless a cure is developed, the American government's strategy for New York is to isolate it and let the plague burn itself out until the population is small enough to be taken to camps. After that, it will be reopened for settlement. They are expecting to be able to do this by 1985.

The National Guard has been mobilized in every state, and has been used (among other things) to quarantine New York since December of 1978. New York has been cut at the Cross Westchester Expressway to the north of the city. In the south, Staten Island is still "free," with the blockade being on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge; however, all of Long Island has been thrown to the wolves so that Long Island Sound can be used as a firebreak. The western border of the quarantine zone is the Hudson River, with the tunnels and bridges leading across it closely watched. At first people were still let out if they passed a CID test and stayed in a quarantine camp for another month, but by January of 1980 no one was passing the test anymore and that program lapsed.

Until the population is small enough for the Guard to move in safely, they're restricting their actions in the city to using the 105th and 109th Airlift Wings to drop food and supplies, concentrating on the poorest neighborhoods south of Houston Street as well as Harlem in the north. Most of the city between is empty and wrecked, with windows shattered by old riots, looters, and three years of weather. Cars are abandoned and rusting, their gasoline long since siphoned. The feral cat population has boomed, as abandoned pets figured out how to live off the city's pigeons and rats.

South of Houston

The rigors of illness and malnutrition have severely reduced the number of old and young in New York. People in their teens and 20s dominate the remaining population, and in the chaotic and nihilistic atmosphere punk culture has

spread widely. By day they live on the handouts that fall from the sky over SoHo, squatting in the buildings that haven't got collapsed floors or roofs. By night, they use scrounged car batteries to plug in their amps and either play or dance to exhaustion, and getting blindingly drunk or stoned if they can. If they don't wake up the next morning, what's the difference?

Without hope or even much to do, the punks have split into two factions based around love for American or British punk and engage in pitched street battles over it. Individuals are accosted with the challenge "Hell or Rotten?" and are beaten if they answer wrongly; most long-timers know which areas are safe for them and which are not.

Harlem

Fresh water is an issue in Manhattan. The Hudson is brackish, and the island's natural streams and springs have been paved over for a hundred years or more. The solution many New Yorkers have hit upon is to move into the subways, which are rapidly becoming the city's new "natural" waterways. Most of the underground tunnels are flooded after rains, and keep that water for a while now that the subway system's drains and pumps are failing due to lack of maintenance. To the north and east of Central Park, in Harlem, the A-Line is flooded even between rains, and has picked up quite a number of people from elsewhere to replace the population lost to disease and flight. The rest of the city may be verging on a ghost town, but Harlem is still recognizably a functioning neighborhood.

Naturally, most people still live above ground, but as Harlem's buildings decay and collapse, more and more are moving into the tunnels themselves (particularly in winter where the thermal inertia of the rock and concrete around the tunnels keeps temperatures 10 degrees or more above freezing).

Sanitation is also a problem, but again the flooded subways are helping. In Harlem the subway channels are used as sewers too. This has attendant smell and health issues, of course, but it's still about the best option in the city. The situation has improved since last winter when there was a noticeable increase in the flow of the water. Some worry that the Central Park Reservoir has started to leak into the subways, but few care very much.

The Central Park Farmers

New York's other stable settlement is in southern Central Park in the area known as the Sheep Meadow. The core of the community is the local Girl Scout organization, which had enough members left to organize after the city was cut off from the mainland. Led by a resourceful troop leader named Carolyn Ellenbecker, they managed to get a couple of dozen Girl Scouts and what was left of their families established in the city's Scout offices; from there they scavenged canned goods and clean water. It soon became apparent that they might be on their own for some time and so they moved north to Central Park. Between their own naïve woodcraft and research expeditions to the New York Public Library about a half-mile from the park, they quickly learned how to set up a permanent camp that's expanded into a passable village of about 350 people.

Corn was scoured from nearby grocery stores and planted, pigs liberated from the Central Park Zoo and set loose to feed on the local acorns, and nuts and fruits are retrieved from the Shakespeare Garden and the paths' occasional walnut tree. The first winter was harsh, but the city's preserved foods were not entirely gone and the village eked through. Now they're entirely reliant on their own resources, but those are growing stronger monthly.

The Central Park farms are low-tech by design, trying to stick with only what they can make or repair themselves when possible. There's no running water or electricity, but at times life there borders on rustically pleasant as long as one stays away from the hostel for the sick in the former Tavern On The Green. Unfortunately, all the people in the settlement are CID-positive, and will likely die in the next few years.

Riker's Island

Ironically, an extreme concentration of undesirable elements have made Riker's Island and the surrounding shore of Long Island one of the most comfortable places to live in this timeline's New York -- so long as some gangster is

looking out for you.

The prison island itself dominates the situation, as it was already designed to be a semi-independent town with its own housing, medical clinics, power plant, and water supply. Nearby Randalls and Wards Islands have a water treatment plant and plenty of parkland for growing food. Across the river by the Rikers Island Bridge are the main Con Edison power plant for the city and LaGuardia Airport. The former is running at a fraction of its capacity, but still keeps Astoria lit up more often than not. The latter has plentiful amounts of airline fuel and baggage cars (which can be converted into primitive motorized farm equipment) left behind after flights into and out of New York were suspended.

Of course, the major problem with this entire set-up is the power structure: Riker's Island was, after all, one of the largest prisons in the Western world. As New York emptied, fewer and fewer guards showed up for duty. The power kept failing, and during one of these blackouts the prisoners (who'd become progressively angrier and more desperate about issues ranging from fear of the plague to a lack of cigarettes) rioted and managed to take over the island. From there, they rapidly organized along gang and ethnic lines, and spread rapidly into Astoria and Jackson Heights to the south.

The gangs fought for six months using weapons looted from gun stores and even a few makeshift mortars fashioned by Vietnam vets. Eventually, through extinction and consolidation, the area was brought under the control of one man. Constantine Mitsopoulos was a grifter before he went in; now he's King of Rikers. He's a hero to the Greek immigrants in Astoria, whose support he relies on, for enforcing his favorite saying (to paraphrase): don't perform bodily functions in your own nest. Even so, people who get on Mitsopolous' bad side -- and there are a lot of them -- are little better than slaves. Some end up as fodder for the blood sports at Shea Stadium.

Most of his men's aggression is directed outwards across the Triborough Bridge to Harlem and the various access routes to southern Manhattan. The Central Park Farms remain undiscovered because of their relatively small population and the mysterious 1979 dynamiting of the 59th Street Bridge and Queens Midtown Tunnels that lead to them. Raids north and south bring back air-dropped packages intended for the people there, as well as more slaves and currently useless prestige items like jewelry. There's also a well-developed system of scrounging for tobacco, alcohol, and drugs throughout the city.

Mitsopolous is one of the very few people left in New York who is not CID-positive. He is obsessive-compulsive about germs and phobic about bodily fluids, oddities that have turned into a useful survival mechanism under the circumstances. He does not leave his home, formerly the gatehouse on Riker's Island for anything but the most urgent reasons, and the air around him is redolent of soap and perfumes.

Characters

Ronnie Faustino: A resident of East Harlem, Ronnie was a carpenter and family man prior to CID. After losing his wife and twin sons, his sanity became precarious and he moved into the Harlem Fire Watchtower in Mount Morris Park (on the south edge of the heavily populated part of Harlem); it had previously been unwanted because of its open cast iron construction and elevated, rain-exposed position, but Faustino put his trade skills to work and turned the top platform into a passable hut.

He pays his way by watching for fires in Harlem, or attacks from Rikers. The fate of his family has made him obsessively protective of the people in the blocks around him, so he's actually pretty good at his job despite a slight tendency to cry wolf. Visitors will find him a useful source of maddeningly vague tips about movements in Manhattan Island.

Kelly Brewington: A 16-year-old Scout with the Central Park Farmers, Brewington is a lowercase-s scout for the village, often spending several days prowling Manhattan looking for whatever the settlement needs this week. In the two years since being cut off in New York, she's become a decent archer, learned a lot of "urban woodcraft," and memorized much of Manhattan down to the last detail. She lived with her mother, who has since died, and may have a father; he was in Ohio on business when the quarantine came down. She talked to him on the phone a few times after the quarantine began, but the network broke down 18 months ago and she hasn't had any contact since. Belief in his

shadowy existence somewhere "out there" is what keeps her otherwise ruined life running, not any connection to the other Central Park survivors. While in the settlement, she's often screaming at people, or worse.

Visitors to this timeline would do well to talk to her, or even hire her as a guide. She can get them into Harlem and in touch with the people who help run it. SoHo and Rikers territory are more difficult -- no one goes to either in small groups -- but she'd be helpful when organizing an expedition.

Milan Barnett: Milan is a New Yorker, but of the Homeline variety. He acts as an agent for the various corporations and trusts buying up this world's New York (see below). He knows him home city well, and has spent years poring over the city's land title records for the 1970s, figuring out who owns what and how to get it from them for nothing. He doesn't actually leave Homeline very often -- that's what contractors are for -- but if something goes very wrong and there's a lot of his very important money circling the drain, he might end up having to go. No, he doesn't know how to fire a gun; "What kind of person do you think I am?" He needs bodyguards, and he passably pays well even if he treats them badly.

He's a good source of contract work that will send adventurers to this New York, as someone has to check out properties and get that information back home. If played right, players might enjoy shooting him for karmic reasons, though doing so will cause problems later.

Infinity and the Last Days

Until the outbreak of CID, this timeline was unexceptional. Dubbed Johnson-2 (for the man who beat out John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon to be the American president in 1960), it was contacted 14 years ago during its 1966. As it was on Quantum-5, there was no pressure to examine it for Centrum influence and nothing interesting about it from the standpoint of trading. Infinity set up a small office in the local Boston then ignored it.

When CID hit, however, Infinity's quarantine procedures kicked in. The virus had actually infected several staff and spread to other timelines, but Infinity's medical technology was quick to solve the problem. CID was just a variant on HIV-1 that developed the nasty twist of being transmissible through sneezes and coughs; Homeline's technology was easily up to detecting it and curing it. Travel restrictions to Johnson-2 were lifted six months later, and Infinity agents may travel there so long as they follow the usual medical and decontamination routines on entry and exit.

Paradoxically, the downward turn in Johnson-2's fortunes made it more interesting to Homeliners. Miracle Workers began humanitarian efforts, trying to spike the world's knowledge of the disease with the right hints about what was going on and how to fight it; the discovery of a test for it by local medical authorities in less than ten months is largely due to their efforts. Unfortunately, the kind of medicines needed to slow or halt the pandemic are clearly beyond Johnson-2's abilities (requiring moderately sophisticated genetic technologies), and so Miracle Workers have been unable to come up with a plan to offer more than charity and other relief.

The other, more ethically questionable interest that Homeline has is economic. Now that the city is at rock-bottom, various Homeline corporations are taking a long-term (and disease-immune) view to the ultimate value of Manhattan Island and are buying assets from people desperate to sell. Eventually the plague will recede, and Johnson-2 will recover. The Americans seem to be getting a hold on the disease, and if nothing else about 15% of the population has CCR5-D32 genes and are nearly immune to HIV infection. It may be only a few years or it may take a few decades, but things will eventually settle down and life will go on in some way. New York City will likely become a focus of the world economy again, and when it does, Homeline interests will own a lot of the real estate.

There are rumors of one other new project too. A long-term nightmare of Infinity's is that a world jumper will be born on a Gotha virus timeline and spread the contagion elsewhere; this is one of the major theories for how it's managed to appear on several quite separate worlds. CID is the same issue writ somewhat differently. There are signs that a shadowy group within Infinity is scouring the timeline looking for jumpers, and doing what it takes to neutralize the ones it finds. If they're willing to join up, they're accepted. If not, it's Coventry or worse.

Adventures in the Last Days

One Size Cures All: Infinity receives a tip, though their Homeline Russian liaisons, that Johnson-2's Russia has developed a novel approach to control CID. The remedy is a phage virus, capable of infecting only T cells that have themselves been infected with CID but doing it better and faster. By killing the T cell before it can develop a full load of CID retrovirus, it dramatically reduces the speed of CID's onset and can even prevent immune deficiency from developing entirely so long as the patient is periodically re-infected with the phage.

This is quite unlike any other known retroviral cure, and Infinity decides they want to acquire some for research purposes. Since it also provides plausible deniability if it's provided to the rest of Johnson-2, Miracle Workers is profoundly interested in it too.

The difficulty lies in spiriting it out of Johnson-2's U.S.S.R. The borders of the Warsaw Pact are sealed off to travelers from the West, and the KGB pays close attention to leakier routes like via Iran or China. The best solution might be by transiting in through Homeline's Russia, but there's the usual problems with lack of cooperation there. There is even the question of why the Russians bothered to tell Infinity about the phage in the first place. *Cui bono?*

Isolation: Voyeur Records is a small record label on Homeline which specializes in retrieving dark rock music from disaster-ridden timelines and marketing them to angsty teenagers. One of their execs and his heavily armed entourage has come to Johnson-2's Manhattan to record Falling Curtains, a punk band fronted by a deep-voiced British refugee who goes by the pseudonym of Transmission. The exec is now 48 hours overdue to return.

The Last Days In Other Settings

This version of New York fits into apocalyptic or cyberpunk sci-fi settings best, the only difference between the two being how bad things are in the rest of the world. It can also be used in another city, but be careful about where you move it. A lot of its frisson comes from the Hestonian "You maniacs! You blew it up!" fun of playing with well-known locations. London or Paris would probably work as well, with other candidates depending on what part of the world one hails from.

Space opera settings are more problematic, as the same stricture probably requires the sacrifice of a major city, and there likely aren't many that will have much emotional impact on players unless Earth is involved. If it's not, your other option is to use the inevitable "capital world" of your setting. Killing that off, however, does have larger implications for an on-going campaign.

Modern-day campaigns have a similar problem. Infinite Worlds has as many New Yorks as you need, so sacrificing one isn't that big a deal . . . not so with a supposed "real world." Horror campaigns do have some intriguing angles to use, especially if you're willing to run with the theme of "Cthulhu (or reasonable analog) may have already won." Under those circumstances, why not sacrifice New York as a consequence of player actions? It will certainly shake them up and get them wondering what other big and terrible changes you're willing to implement if they fail again. Merely getting them thinking this way is probably enough if a radically changed New York is about as much as you're willing to put into your campaign.

Johnson-2's New York can also be transposed to a fantasy setting if you have a city even vaguely resembling Byzantium or, failing that, Rome. Plagues are a common event in some fantasy settings, and even the ones without will withstand something that resembles the Black Death in many ways. One issue to consider is why it's so widespread and resistant to cure, as that implies the defeat of magical efforts to end it. A god's curse would work, and also explain why the kingdom's authorities have abandoned a major city entirely: It would be impious to do otherwise. Similarly, the divide between punk clans is based on the Blue/Green dichotomy in Byzantine culture; some readers may also recognize the ghost of religious strife in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the latter stretching down to the current generation.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Six 'Clix Morris

by Nikola Vrtis

This game for two players is a variant of Nine Men's Morris. Nine Men's Morris is a European strategy board game that first appeared during the Roman Empire; historians believe that it was popular among soldiers. It gained special prominence during the Middle Ages, particularly in England. The game also goes by such names as Mills, Merrills, and other variations on that theme.

The object of the game is to remove ("pound") or block all of the opponent's pieces.

Setting Up the Game

In this version of Nine Men's Morris, players need six *HeroClix* figures, with a maximum of total of 200 points. Also needed are the *HeroClix* rules, which can be found on the WizKids web site (on the rules page) and a *HeroClix* map with a large open space of at least nine squares on each side (such as a warehouse or park) or an assembled printout of the game board. (Players could also use maps of other locations, but the game might last longer.)

Participants can purchase *HeroClix* through most local and Internet retailers. Alternatively, players can use the basic generic characters created for this article and any sort of counter or figure with a base of no more than 1.5 inches at its widest point, such as Steve Jackson Games' *Cardboard Heroes Modern Characters.*

Almost any character goes, with a few exceptions: No double-base, giant, or colossal characters are allowed. Players may not use battlefield conditions or feats. Players may include flying characters.

To decide who goes first, each player rolls two dice and adds the results. The highest roll goes first; reroll any ties. The players then takes turns putting their figures anywhere on the map or board. (Players using the board provided with this article may not place characters in the solid black area.) After the participants have set out all of their figures, the game begins.

Playing the Game

Participants take turns in the same order as they placed their figures. For attacking, movement, and power use, use the *HeroClix* rules, with the following modifications.

Movement and Blocking Movement

Blocking Examples

Standard move rules apply, including the fact that characters may not move off of the edge of the board. Additionally, players using this article's board may not move (including hovering) through the solid black area on it, though flying characters may soar over it. Maps from other sources may have their own restricted areas.

A character is blocked and prevented from moving (including breaking away) if opposing figures surround it in a square (one figure in each square diagonal to the target or one figure in each square horizontally or vertically adjacent to the target; see the example picture).

If two or three figures are in the correct spots and one or two are not, the figure is not blocked. For example, if two figures are in squares diagonal to the target and two figures are in squares vertically adjacent to the target, the defending character may break away on the next turn.

Example Attacking but Not Blocking

Attacking and Pounding Characters

To attack an opposing character, the player must have at least three of his figures adjacent to the target figure (see the example picture). To remove (or "pound," to use the Nine Men's Morris term) a character, the target must receive enough clicks of damage to cause three KOs to appear in the stat slots.

Those who may move and attack as a single action (such as transporters and those with Hypersonic Speed) may only attack an opposing character if at least two friendly characters are already adjacent to the target.

Blocked characters may attack and be attacked, assuming the conditions are right.

Characters who are blocking opposing figures may themselves be blocked or attacked.

A player who is down to two characters may only attack if he can maneuver an opposing figure into a corner and surround it on two of the three adjacent squares with his figures.

Attacking Examples

Variations

Object Lesson: After all players have placed their figures, they take turns putting out any three objects. These objects are used as per the rulebook and other guidelines relating to them.

A Pounding from Anywhere: This variation relates to the special markings on the board that accompanies this article. If one player gets three of his characters on any three spots marked with an O in the same ring, one of those characters may attack any one opposing character anywhere on the board, regardless of the range. There is a price for this bonus: The player must lower the attacking character's attack value by 2 for the duration of the attack.

Generic Character Cards

To use these cards, you'll need a eight-sided die for each character. Turn the die so that the maximum clicks of damage shown on the card is face up. Each time a character takes a click of damage, turn the die to the next lower side. Stat values do not go down as a character takes damage. Additionally, characters with super powers retain the use of those abilities until they are KO'd.

Contributor's Notes: Here Today, *Paragons* Tomorrow

A few weeks ago saw the official street-date release of the ***Mutants & Masterminds*** setting book ***Paragons.*** ("Street-date release," of course, is industry code for, "They had a crate of them at GenCon.") Now, this fine volume was primarily Steve Kenson's baby, but he let a few freelancers toss their hats into the ring and offer up their own contributions to this world. And since I was as eager to work on this book as Kenson was eager to have me stop harassing him via cell phone several dozen times a day, some of my works are contained therein. While my discussion of my work in this volume may be seen as little more than self-hucksterism, I assure you that my motives are entirely devoted to you, the gamer, and are completely noncommercial [INSERT AMAZON LINK HERE]. So hopefully you'll glean a bit of insight into my creative process, and maybe tap an idea or two of your own for your game. Oh, and I'm including a few scraps that aren't in the actual book.

First off, actually, "setting book" is a bit of a misnomer. ***Paragons*** is more of a make-your-own-setting book, with a broad overarching idea ("super-powered individuals pop up not-too-recently, and are likely going to change the world") and a bunch of pieces-parts that can be plugged in and used . . . or not. I don't think there's any idea, character, or organization that is absolutely "essential" to the setting. This let me approach the project like an assemblage of *Pyramid* articles; whenever I write a piece for here, I usually do so with little expectation that the audience has access to little more than the basics. I ended up contributing two characters and three organizations, and I treated them all similarly to how I would approach articles.

The organizations were the more challenging of the two types, since I only had a few thousand words apiece to present an entire group and make it as logical, interesting, and playable as possible. (To put it in perspective, each organization got about half as many words as either the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) or the [National Rifle Association](#) Wikipedia entries.) Although not a mandate, one of the ways I accomplished the "toolkit" feel of this setting -- and saved a few words to boot -- was by avoiding *all* character names or assignments in the organizations; there's no one mentioned in the history sections, nor "current members" roll call.

Why? I didn't want these to feel like all the "good" parts were already assigned or even conceived, like often happens in some settings <koff>whitewolf<koff>. For example, one of the groups was the Paragon Professionals Society, a combination trade organization and advocacy group for paranormals. I could've made the head of the PPS be "Unum, the world's smartest lawyer," but what if a player wanted to play a smart lawyer? Do I force the GM to sand off the references to Unum and plug the PC into that role? What if the player doesn't want his super-smart lawyer to be part of the PPS? I find it very difficult to strip the roles of established characters in a setting; for example, in an ***Aberrant*** campaign, it would be near-impossible to recast the roles of Caestus Pax or Divas Mal and still have it resemble an ***Abberant*** campaign. Likewise in a remotely canonical ***Forgotten Realms*** campaign, someone taking the role of wizard or fighter just needs to contend himself with the fact that he'll never be as "cool" as Elminster or Drizzt.

While I realize I don't speak for all gamers, in my experience, it's near-trivial to come up with throwaway concepts that can fill out required NPC roles in organizations. ("Need to figure out the Inner Circle for Club X? Umm . . . The Fool, Skipper, Mr. & Mrs. Millionaire, Starlet, Prof, and Merry Ann. My sitcom education finally pays off!") Comic books often have throwaway heroes and villains who aren't particularly interesting, and only serve to advance the plot, make a point, or provide a momentary obstacle for heroes. In an RPG, though, this serves almost as a no-win situation; either characters are fully-fleshed and threaten to overshadow the PCs and their possible roles, or they're so disposable that one wonders why they're taking up space at all.

[Aside: For those looking for article ideas, there might be a possibility for quicker-than-quick character concepts: say, 100 throwaway supers characters, with a name and briefest of personality snippets . . . no more than 20-30 words apiece, I'm guessing.]

Anyway, I designed all my organizations with the goal that any of the PCs could easily take up any roles in the organizations. It's my fondest wish that a player working with the GM in a ***Paragons*** campaign might say, "I want to be one of the founders of this organization," or "I notice that it doesn't say this organization has an expert on *<something>*; can I fill that niche?"

And now, brief notes on the three organizations I did:

The Paragon Professionals Society: I've talked about them briefly already. As I envision them, they're the group who'll *always* weigh in with an opinion on paranormal-related issues . . . especially those that relate to the law or or how the rest of the world views them. The most challenging part of envisioning this group was coming up with examples and opinions that were at least somewhat universal; a ***Paragons*** campaign where paranormals are so accepted that one is running for President will see a very different role for the PPS than one where the courts are considering changing conviction rules for paranormal-related crimes from "beyond a shadow of doubt" to "preponderance of the evidence." Nevertheless, I tried to make a group that PCs could join and be part-time members, helping out for a mission or two a year (or more, if desired).

I never made a mock-up of their logo, but I envisioned it as a stylized version of the Greek God Atlas in a suit and tie, with the "globe" he holds displaying the letters "PPS" in the center ringed by the words "Paragon Professionals Society."

Zero Latitude: My eco-terrorist group; the rationale here was that, if Zero Latitude Logo
folks suddenly had world-changing powers today, many of them would
be tempted to . . . oh, change the world. This one was *very* hard to
design around the "no names" concept. It's tough to come up with an
environmental-themed group that doesn't espouse a world-view one
way or the other, but hopefully I succeeded. (If so, I was no doubt
helped by my own uncertainty about whether or not a group of super-
powered folks hell-bent on solving environmental issues -- humans be
damned -- would do more harm than good for everyone, let alone
humanity.) I created them with the idea that they would always serve
as a wild card in any interactions with other paranormals; ideally, I see
this group trying to (say) blow up a plane over the ocean one week
because they know that there's a deadly unnatural virus aboard, and
then saving another plane the next week from crashing into a group of
California redwoods.

This is the logo that I came up with for them. I wanted something that would be similar to the "anarchy" symbol or the "Zorro" slash, where it could be done quickly by its members. (In case the symbolism isn't obvious, it's supposed to represent a lightning bolt running through the Earth, representing their speed and object of their devotion.)

The Paramount Club: This was intended as the "fraternal" organization for Paramount Club Logo
paranormals: Show up at one of the clubhouses, drink, socialize, plot. It either
serves as a backdrop for other adventures, or a central ground in its own right.
I tried to create something that could either be like the Catholic Church or the
[Loyal Order of Water Buffalos](#) -- either globe-spanning major players with
lots of fingers in various pies; or a kind of goofy, trivial place that exists as an
excuse to hang out. In hindsight, I might have been a bit too ambitious with
some of the "behind-the-scenes" machinations (especially given that
paranormals are supposed to be fairly recent), but I figure that even if all that
stuff is ignored it still serves as a good set piece for a bar fight or three.

Here is the logo, evocative of a glowing mountaintop ("paramount" . . . get it?
). When designing it, I only had one goal in mind: "Would it look cool as a
wax seal or signet ring?" I didn't think of it at the time I came up with it, but
hopefully Steve Jackson Games doesn't have a trademark on the equilateral
triangle.

* * *

I also did two characters in **Paragons.** Again, I threw myself entirely into the "modular" ideal, and tried to come up with characters that could be used in a variety of settings: antagonist, protagonist, window dressing.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

For example, one "character" -- Logar -- is a force of energy that possesses random people, imbuing them with super-speed for 24 hours but also possibly draining a bit of their intelligence as the force becomes more and more sentient itself. It can serve as a Good Thing (a hero or ally gets a perk of speed), a Neutral Thing (something to investigate and figure out), a Bad Thing (an evil-doer goes on a super-fast crime spree), or a Really Bad Thing (a super-fast force of energy might eventually become one of the smartest entities in the world.)

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Hopefully I came up with interesting enough concepts that they can be used in a few different ways, even with the same group of heroes.

In all, I loved working on **Paragons;** I love the idea behind the toolkit setting, and hope that more campaigns take up the torch. And I'm also grateful to Steve Kenson for letting me contribute, and I'm equally grateful that he didn't renew the restraining order against me. And I'm grateful for you, my long-patient audience, for allowing me this moment of authorial self-indulgence.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Last Night on Earth, The Zombie Game

Published by Flying Frog Productions

Designed by Jason C. Hill

Layout, photographs, & graphics by Jack Scott Hill

Illustrated by Matthew Morgaine

Miniatures by James Ma & Gael Goumon

Music composed by Mary Beth Magallanes

Full-color boxed set with town center game board, six L-shaped outer boards, eight Hero figures, eight character boards, five scenario boards, 14 Zombie figures (seven each in two colors), 60 Hero cards & 60 Zombie cards (40 each for the basic game & 20 each for the advanced game), two sheets of counters, 16 six-sided dice, six reference cards, rulebook, and music CD; $49.95

Are they going to stop making zombie flicks? No. Are they going to stop making zombie games? Equally unlikely, especially if they're as entertaining as *Last Night on Earth, The Zombie Game.*

The object of the game, subject to alteration by the various scenario cards, is to survive the mission (if playing a Hero) or destroy all the living people left in town (if a Zombie).

Heroes and Zombies have separate decks, but only the Zombie player gets a hand of cards; the good guys have to scavenge theirs, trading their movement for a card draw when inside a building. The initial Zombies are spewed from pits on the board (the morgue, the graveyard, etc.), while humans are placed according to their character sheet; the nurse begins at the hospital, for example, and the high school quarterback at the gym.

The board is a customizable affair, with a center square surrounded by "L" shaped sections that cup each corner (it takes only four to frame the middle, but six are provided for variety). The center section has two sides; one is a wide-open park and the other, a mansion. A grid overlays the boards, and figurines move square to square (Heroes roll a die while Zombies shuffle one space at a time). Where the mansion has a normal grid (for the "Defend the Manor House" scenario), the park side uses oversized spaces to streamline movement. Heroes make better progress from end to end.

The Zombies are a pretty homogenous bunch of undead (though advanced rules turn conquered Heroes into "Zombie Heroes"). The good guys are more detailed: They have different wound totals and possess special abilities to give them the edge fighting the hordes. Game play is straightforward: Move and fight. Cards alter the flow of events. Some are weapons, some empower the user with heroic powers, and some affect the play of the game overall. The best way to kill the undead is with a gun from a pleasant remove, but if the two sides mix it up in melee they compare six-sided dice rolls. Zombies only get one to the typical Hero's two, but they win ties and, when a flesh-eater is killed, more are probably ready to respawn or take its place.

A game takes from an hour to 90 minutes, depending on the scenario; the basic setup is "Die, Zombie, Die," which is brief and requires the death of 15 Zombies in as many turns (and gets faster as players play it again . . . and again . . .). Five other adventures require rescues or gassing up the getaway vehicle, which in turn demands that certain items or people be collected or protected. A track is provided for counting up most anything: dead bodies, hours until dawn, etc.

The designers reportedly worked on the game for the last eight years, which is probably why nothing has been left to chance. The components are fully realized, with full-color pieces, heavy character cards, excellent sculpting on the figurines, and a gallery of illustration that consists almost entirely of live-action photos (Jenny the farmer's daughter is already an early fan favorite). The cards are good and thick, though they've been packed tightly and covered with some surfacing that makes them stick together something awful. The dice are standard six-siders, yet for some reason the "one" pip is a single oversized dot and the "two" is stamped edge-to-edge, not corner-to-corner. A couple of buildings have tiled floors to add character to certain locations, but some almost look as though players are meant to use them for movement. Most impressive is the inclusion of a mood-setting music CD, though the points here are for effort; it's professional but lacks tension, recalling 1980s science-fiction more than horror stories. An Enya-wannabe vocalist does not a thriller make. Oh, and once freed, the pieces don't properly fit back into the box (in spite of some clever packaging arrangements by the creators).

Flying Frog Productions is the new kid on the block and can easily be forgiven a few hiccups in an otherwise well-built product (the supplement is promised for early 2008). It plays fast, contains plenty of strategy, and has benefits to balance it at either end of the player scale (two to six can play). Reversals of fortune are common, and a hopeless situation (for either side) can turn into an endgame knuckle-biter. Pieces are even included simply because they may be used or useful in later releases or for home-brewed scenarios. Little touches like a counter for most every eventuality and those big squares spanning the middle of the board make *Last Night on Earth* like a well-designed car that anticipates all the owner's needs. As it promises, it's a deftly constructed recreation of zombie movies that cleverly mirrors those exploits.

--Andy Vetromile

Stay Awake, Stay Alive

A Lovecraftian Deadworld for All Flesh Must Be Eaten

by J. Edward Tremlett

*"It's coming . . . don't you see? The dreams I've had, the dreams others have had . . . the pictures Wilcox made before they locked him up. They all point to the same thing, and it's coming here -- for **us.***

*"It's all in the books! Von Liebekraft warned us, didn't he? He told us this would happen, and no one listened. They said he was a charlatan. They make horror movies of his books and discoveries and say he was a fraud. But how does that explain any of this? **How?***

*"What I've seen . . . my **God** what I've seen . . .*

"I'm not going to wait. I'm not strong enough. I know I'll break when I see it, so I'm not going to take the chance.

*"But you . . . if you see this video, if you hear my warning, remember -- **Stay awake, stay alive . . ."***

<click> <BANG>

* * *

Concerned astronomers often look up to the sky in fear, worried about a doomsday event. At any moment an asteroid or comet could crash into the Earth with the force of a thousand H-bombs, bringing about a global extinction.

They're right to be worried, but not everything that can kill us needs to actually *hit* us. Some things just have to get close.

And this Halloween, a massive, long-slumbering beast from before our universe was born will be coming very, very close. Close enough to infect us with visions that eat mortal souls, turning their emptied shells into twisted reflections of itself.

Ancient wisdom speaks of this threat, and tells us, "To stay awake is to stay alive." But how long can mere mortals do either while they're fighting the monstrous, dead servants of the sleeper?

This Deadworld for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* features a Lovecraftian theme, and introduces a new and nasty method of making zombies through dreams. It's a one-shot recommended for Norms, but it can be run with Survivors or turned into a Campaign if the Zombie Master chooses to worsen the presented situation.

Ancient History

Untold billions of years ago, while our universe was still forming, the truly ancient survivors of the previous universe eked out a sad and lonely existence amongst the new stars.

These refugees of the long, slow collapse, and subsequent big bang, had cheated death, but it was only a postponement of the inevitable. For the cosmic laws that supported their cyclopean bodies, and equally cyclopean appetites, no longer applied; once cannibalism was no longer an option, many of the great presences chose suicide to slow starvation. But some chose slumber: closing their massive eyes on the strange aeons, and putting themselves into stasis -- waiting for the right time to reawaken, and *feed.*

One such entity is Ul'Thuch -- a creature best described as a semi-translucent nautilus with a body the size of Earth's

moon. It has hundreds of long, ropy tentacles, stretching up to three times the length of its beetling, mottled blood-red and bruise-purple shell. Three great, burning white eyes lie on each side of its body, but these have been dim and sightless for billions of years, as Ul'Thuch has slept and dreamed of the age to come.

But though it merely slumbers, Ul'Thuch is still very dangerous. Its dreams are contagious, and any sentient creatures close enough to share in those powerful and all-encompassing dreams are likely to be taken over by them, and have their souls devoured from afar. The bodies of its dream-victims are then transformed into monsters -- near mindless echoes of Ul'Thuch who seek to bring yet more into the dreams of their dreaming god.

As the universe reformed around its strange bulk, Ul'Thuch fell into a long, weird orbit in our Solar System -- one that takes it well outside the Oort Cloud. It only comes back in every 1,074.45 years, shaking a few new comets loose and usually staying well clear of Earth. But every 5,372.25 years, it comes just close enough to be seen in the night sky for three days, seeming a third as large as the Moon from our perspective.

And for those three days the world finds itself lost in the maddening dreams of Ul'Thuch.

The last time Ul'Thuch came by Earth, more than 5,000 years ago, humanity barely survived the aftermath. What records were left by the survivors have been scattered by time and successive generations, until all that is left is fragmentary at best, leaving just enough evidence for certain scholars to piece together what may have happened. And their theories sound so insane that no one with any authority to do something has taken them seriously.

And so Earth remains unaware of the threat -- now swiftly approaching . . .

Recent History

It's October in Campell, Massachusetts, a sleepy, one-college town 25 miles from the Atlantic. The leaves are turning, the wind picks up and turns cold. School is back in session, the restaurants change to Fall menus, and football and Halloween are all anyone cares about, now.

On October 17th, radio telescopes begin to track a swift, strange object of indeterminate mass leaving the orbit of Mars, and heading for Earth. Operators have a hard time confirming its presence -- it seems as though it's only there half the time. Over the next few days, a couple of scientists come forward with news of the possible Near Earth Object. But it's the tenth NEO "warning" this year, and after the last nine false alarms no one cares.

On October 22nd, the T. E. Derleth Science Museum at Campbell U. begins a controversial exhibition of the work of Heinrich von Liebekraft, the late, local author, anthropologist and archaeologist considered by many to have been a deluded crank.

Von Liebekraft's theories that Earth was visited by a giant space monster made him the laughing stock of the early 20th century scientific community, and his one scientific treatise was panned. Having failed to convince the learned of his day, he turned to literature, penning several "fictional possibilities" in which he warned of the disaster to come. "The Scream of the Star-Squid" was the best-known of about twenty tales, all written from 1901 to his suicide at the start of World War I.

The author proved more accepted in death than in life, finding posthumous fame from his stories. Scientists still think he was a crank, but are at least willing to humor his theories, rather than dismiss them outright. The faithful, the curious, and the easily amused are visiting the Museum to view his puzzling evidence, some of which is on display for the first time ever. And afterwards, they descend upon the gift shop, buying copies of his books, plush toys of the "Star-Squid" and bumper stickers reading "Stay Awake -- Stay Alive!"

The Nightmare Now

On October 29th, psychics worldwide dream of something coming . . . something malevolent and hungry. Three

burning white eyes stare at them in their dreams, calling them forth. Some try to warn the world as best as they can, making manic, scribbled pictures, blogging of what they've witnessed, or leaving long, rambling warnings on YouTube. Some go mad and take their lives, and some take the lives of others to spare them the horror.

October 30th, something new shines in the early morning sky -- something that should not be there. It remains visible after morning, and appears to be getting larger. Astronomical bodies say it's the NEO they warned us about, but that there is no imminent danger of impact; it's just brighter, larger and more visible than usual. Those who warned of something terrible coming fall horribly silent, vanishing from the public eye. Amateur astronomers cannot make out many details during the day, but anyone who witnesses it after dark with a strong enough telescope shrieks in terror at what they see (Fear Test at -4 Modifier).

October 31st: Halloween. There can be no mistake. There is something wrong in the sky. It is a third as large as the Moon, and looks like some kind of monstrous fossil come to life. Worse still, it looks like it's moving, twitching its tentacles as it comes closer, and closer still (Fear Test at -5 Modifier).

Panic erupts as fear runs wild. Governments try to assure the people that everything is under control, and that the object is just passing us by. But religious figures tell the faithful that the End Times are here at last. Looting and mob violence break out everywhere, with police and emergency workers joining in the fray, convinced that none may survive. FEMA collapses under the strain of being everywhere at once, and the National Guard locks its bases down, one by one.

And then, with the rustling of twisted, reanimated flesh, the end truly begins.

They burst from seemingly nowhere: nightmare hordes of dead, nautilus- headed things. They rise as one, steadily stalking after the living, no matter where they hide. Those they corner or overtake are crushed in deadly embraces, and choked with a mouthful of slimy tentacles. And soon these victims, too, twist and change into dead monsters.

Horror looms in the sky. Terror swiftly blankets the Earth. Society collapses in a whirlwind of fear, panic and death.

The Course of Action

"Stay Awake, Stay Alive" starts out like any other one-shot Deadworld, albeit with unusual enemies. It's recommended that the Zombie Master starts the game a few days before Ul'Thuch appears in the skies, Oct 30th, so as to add a sense of foreboding, creeping apocalypse. This will also give characters a chance to meet one another, expand on pre-written relationships through actual roleplaying, and possibly look into some of the background information (NEO notices, von Liebekraft's exhibit, the psychics' warnings, etc.).

Once Ul'Thuch shows up in orbit, and the zombies attack, it's *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* as usual . . . until such time as the party hunkers down for some sleep. Once that happens, the true terror becomes apparent. Any Survivors who sleep, or lose consciousness, should be taken through the Dream of Ul'Thuch (see below). Those who lose their characters to the dreams either have the option of assuming new characters (have some pre-generated ones handy!) or watching in amusement as their former characters try to kill their former allies.

It will soon be obvious that the Survivors must stay awake to survive. A scrabble for caffeinated products may follow, unless the characters can think of other ways to stay up. But the more they run and fight, the more exhausted they get. And since they don't know there's a time limit to the madness, they may soon believe there's no hope.

The Zombie Master may choose this point to have events steer them to the Museum, where von Liebekraft's exhibit is running. There, they can discover that, according to ancient legend, the "star squid" was only near Earth for three days and three nights. Knowing that may make it easier, but can they hold out against masses of zombies, and their own need for sleep?

Environs

Lovecraftian Option:

Campbell, MA is a normal, medium-sized American town. That is to say there are about 50,000 people residing there, with one major hospital, two police stations and three fire stations. Several old, stone buildings downtown, and on campus, are strong enough to withstand a prolonged zombie attack. The Museum showcasing von Liebekraft's collection is one of these.

Firearms can be bought and sold at both Wally-World locations, as well as a handful of gun and ammo stores, most of which are in the outlying areas of town. These will have handguns, hunting rifles and shotguns, and there's a 1 in 1d10 chance that some of the nastier- looking stores will have "something special" in the back for "preferred customers" (most likely submachine guns or assault rifles).

Campaign Considerations

This Deadworld could be turned into a Campaign if the situation is worsened.

The first option has the zombies continuing to exist even after Ul'Thuch passes the Earth by. Any victims they take are still turned into zombies, as they can share a little of their master's dream with their victims. Mortals can sleep once more as they cleanse and rebuild the world, but can never rest easy again for wondering if the monster will re-appear in the sky . . .

A second variation has Ul'Thuch becoming a second Moon, caught in a long, elliptical orbit that takes one month to complete. For six days every month (three the first week and three the third) Humanity is in danger of zombie outbreaks. And one day, it may just wake up . . .

A third, even nastier option is invasion, as Ul'Thuch determines that the time is right to awaken and feed. It comes in for a surprisingly soft landing in the Pacific Ocean, and then calls to its "children" to remake the world in its image. The previously-unintelligent zombies gain an Intelligence of 2, and begin rebuilding Earth into something resembling an H.R.Giger landscape -- black, ropy towers with nautilus ceilings that pulse and ebb with dark, alien life.

Now that it is awake, Ul'Thuch does not dream; what remains of humanity is safe from falling victim to it in their sleep. The zombies it generated before can still turn humans into copies of themselves, but prefer to capture them alive for use as slave labor, or sacrifices to their great, dark God. Can the dwindling human population mount some kind of resistance, or are they doomed to watch their world be devoured by a thing from beyond time . . . ?

The Zombies of Ul'Thuch

STR 2
DEX 2
CON 2
INT -2
PER 2
WIL 2

DPs: 26
EPs: n/a

The Dream Warriors

If the Zombie Master wants to give the characters a chance to be proactive, there's a way to take the fight *to* Ul'Thuch -- provided they don't mind running a terrible risk.

Inside the pages of Von Liebekraft's "Doomsday Mysteries of the Ancient Fragments" – one annotated copy being kept under lock and key in the Museum's library -- it is said that Ul'Thuch's dreams can be disrupted. Details are given for an ancient Sumerian spell that will link souls together in a lucid dream.

Should they succeed in enacting the spell (Very Difficult Intelligence + Occult Knowledge Test to figure the spell out, and a Difficult Willpower Test to be made by each participant) they willingly enter the Dream of Ul'Thuch. Once there, they cannot be attacked by the Dream, itself, but must battle a variable number of Dream-zombies all the way back to their monstrous creator.

Consider each segment of the dream to be a separate battle, with 1d10 Zombies in the first, 2d10 in the second, and 3d10 in the third. If they survive the third, a last, symbolic blow can be struck against Ul'Thuch, itself. This will disrupt its dream, and dispel its effect on the Earth.

While dreaming through this spell, Survivors have whatever weapons and ammunition they are conscious of having on their person when they fall asleep. They cannot wake themselves back up until they

Spd: 4
Essence: 6
Skills: Brawling 2
Attack: Kiss of Ul'Thuch D4(2) x 10 per turn
Weak Spot: All
Getting Around: Life-Like +3
Strength: Dead Joe Average 0; Hug of Death +8
Senses: Like the Living +1; Life Sense +4
Sustenance: Who Needs Food? +8
Intelligence: Dumb as Dead Wood 0
Spreading the Love: Dreams +5
Special: None
Power: 32

The Zombies are truly grotesque things, all remade in the image of their monstrous creator. As they die in its dreams, their heads are twisted to look like Ul'Thuch: eyes going blank and sightless as three burning, white eyes push their way out of each temple; jawbone breaking and mouth ripping open as hundreds of long, slithering tentacles slide from between the lips; skull distending, stretching and bursting the skin as it turns into a great, mottled-red and purple nautilus shell.

The creatures are unintelligent, but move with the speed and agility of the living. They are also relentless in their pursuit of those who have not joined with their god, able to sense the presence of the living nearby, and run towards them.

They attack by grappling with a victim, getting in close enough to use the Hug of Death. Once they have succeeded in immobilizing their victim, they give them the Kiss of Ul'Thuch: sliding their tentacles into his mouth, doing D4(2)×10 combined crush and choke damage per Turn until the victim blacks out from the pain and lack of oxygen. The victim then suffers the Dream of Ul'Thuch, and may become another Zombie. If he resists, he will either die from his injuries or recover, depending on whether the Zombie who attacked him stays beside him or moves on.

The Zombies do not have long to ravage the world. When Ul'Thuch devours the soul, a small portion of its own, deadly dream slips into the body to replace it, and it is this fragment which twists and reanimates the body. When the source of those dreams slips out of range, 72 hours from the start of the contagion, the bodies will lose the power. And then they will fall down dead, disintegrating into powder as they strike the cold earth.

The Dream of Ul'Thuch

The Dream is presented in three segments, and each segment requires a Willpower Test. The first is Difficult, the second Very Difficult, and the third is Heroic. Success at any point means the Survivor has overcome the Dream of Ul'Thuch, and may stop reading through the dream at that point. The character can sleep as normal, and regain Endurance Points accordingly.

Failing all three tests in succession means the Survivor's soul has been consumed by the monster, and his body will soon be changed. His next breath is his last, his body shudders and spasms in its death throes, and he will twist and change into a zombie within 2d4 Turns. After that, the character is handed to the Zombie Master, who uses it to attack the rest of the Survivors.

It's recommended the following text be copied once for each player, and cut into separate segments, so the players can't "read ahead" if their characters survive a segment. If the Zombie Master has some creepy music to play in the

have succeeded in their mission. However, should a Survivor fail a Fear Test, the spell is broken for him and he wakes up.

Those in the spell do not suffer Endurance loss from exertion, but if they're wounded in the dream they lose Essence rather than Life Points, with all the losses that entails. If a Survivor so wounded fails his Survival Test at -30 Essence, he not only dies, but turns into a zombie, wakes up and rampages against the other Survivors, who can't wake up to fight back . . .

background as the players read, use it. (Especially "Metastatic Resonance'" from *The Place Where The Black Stars Hang* by Lustmord, if you can find a copy.)

One

There is blackness. There is cold. There is nothing but the dark, total and complete. You are dust within that darkness, floating forever in the void between worlds. No planet behind or ahead. No stars in the distance to guide your way. There is only the vague suggestion of shapes, out there in the distance.

And one of those shapes is calling.

It comes closer. You can feel it. You cannot see it, not just yet, but you know it's coming. The blackness rustles and pulses, like fog pushed by wind.

It calls again -- louder this time.

Two

The suggestion in the darkness hardens into shape. There's something large, there. Something terribly large and misshapen, with things scuttling ahead of it. Things that twirl and twitch and test the area ahead . . .

Another, louder call, shattering the darkness.

Tentacles. You're certain, now. A hundred . . . a *thousand* long, ropy things so large that it hurts your mind to try and put size to them. They stretch and wave like plants under the sea, pulling some yet- unseen bulk smoothly forward, through the shifting, pulsing darkness . . .

It is calling you forth, from the darkness, voice as old as eternity . . . *come.*

Three

The tentacles surround you. There is nowhere to run -- no escape from what comes towards you, from the timeless black between worlds.

It calls again -- *come* -- and between the swaying, pulsing arms, thick as worlds, you can see . . .

A head-body, large as the moon. Beetling, mottled red and purple nautilus shell. Massive, white eyes, three to a side, sightless in ancient slumber. Endless and timeless *thing* from beyond nightmares . . .

Without warning the eyes blaze. Your body is transfixed in pale, endless white. Your mind becomes hard stone underfoot.

It owns you, body and soul. It's calling you by *name.* There is no escape.

Come.

(If you fail, start coughing the word "Ul'Thuch" and hand your character sheet to the Zombie Master.)

dream is infecting people with the curse of undeath. It may be limited to a certain area, or worldwide in scope, and it may be caused by one individual, an artifact, a meme, or something much worse.

Any who fall fully unconscious or asleep while in the affected area must make at least one Willpower test to avoid dying and turning into a zombie. It's the Zombie Master's prerogative to state how many tests are needed, and if succeeding once completely inoculates the character, or just saves them for one night's worth of sleep.

The Hunter's Craft

A Martial Art for Monster Fighters

by Phil Masters

The fictitious martial art described below for *GURPS* use is derived from three assumptions: first, that more-or-less supernatural monsters exist in the game world, second, that some people set out to kill them, and third, that some of those people develop a set of fighting techniques, using low-tech weapons, which can be and are formalized as a style and taught to others. How enough monster-fighters survive long enough to manage all this, and how they tear themselves away from what's usually an obsessive career to take up teaching, may be an interesting question -- but the answers will depend on the game world. The form taken by the style is partly derived from the logic of the business of monster fighting, and partly based on the techniques used by various fictional monster fighters. In fact, the style has a range of options available, enabling it to be customized to fit with various different historical periods and cultures.

The Hunter's Craft *6 points*

The basic, "realistic" form of this style is straightforward and practical, being based on two principles: (a) Know your enemy, and (b) Kill it as quickly and efficiently as possible. Occultism is taught as one of the style's core skills because too many monsters can't be killed in a conventional way; a stylist has to know their specific weaknesses to stand a chance. (A version of the style intended for use against one single monster type -- say, European vampires who all have the same weakness -- could drop this component, saving a point from the style cost.) Research is a strongly recommended optional addition for the same reason. A stylist should always fight carefully until he's decided what needs to be done, then do it, often very aggressively, although monster-fighters who want to survive will temper this approach with rational caution. Some like large weapons; others think that it's far too dangerous to rely on raw power, because monsters are always *more* powerful.

The exact form taken by the fighting style can vary considerably, mostly depending on the cultural background of the fighter and the game setting, which is why the style has such a range of options among its basic skills. Which ones to choose should usually be determined by the campaign, *not* by individual preference! The broadsword is a classic weapon for these purposes, being effective in attack and defense, versatile, and widely available, but some cultures may have a strong preference for the shortsword, while fighters from a swashbuckling background might favor fencing blades, "Eastern monk" types might prefer the staff, fighters who favor dishing out as much damage as possible per blow might opt for the two- handed axe, and some purists might emphasize the you're-never-unarmed ethos of open-hand training. However, stylists always master knife-fighting techniques, which can be used for sacred or magical daggers or small wooden stakes, depending on the monster; and also spear-like weapon fighting skills, used as often as not with larger stakes, but also good for holding monsters at a relatively safe distance. Many fighters survive desperate battles by using whatever comes to hand as a weapon, or learn to wield strange objects (such as crude stakes, domestic silverware, or church/temple decorations) in combat in order to exploit peculiar monster vulnerabilities; some learn to construct or adapt their own weapons, in case of emergencies or in response to specific problems.

Grappling is rather less heavily emphasized -- getting in close is too often grossly unwise with too many types of monster -- although some stylists learn how to break and escape monstrous death-grips. Likewise, trainees are carefully taught *not* to think much about choke holds or pressure points; too few monsters respond satisfyingly to such assaults. On the other hand, many of them are vulnerable to strikes to the heart, or to beheading, so training may focus on those sorts of attacks. (If a campaign features a monster type with some other specially vulnerable location, the style can add a Hit Location technique to target that.) Many schools teach practical *hunting* skills, appropriate ranged weapons, arcane treatments for supernatural infections, strange secrets about monsters, or additional defensive options. Thrown weapon skills are fairly rare, though; they can too easily leave a fighter without a weapon in hand at relatively close ranges, and too many monsters are quick to close that sort of gap.

The cinematic version of this style can be *very* flamboyant; such stylists tend to have Acrobatics at high levels and to be very mobile combatants, dodging multiple monster attacks or warding them off with open-hand defenses while using any weapons largely for offense. Many fighters are noted for devastating killing blows, unleashing near-superhuman power against monsters which won't die of anything less; hewing the thing's head off with a single stroke always looks good. Resistance to psychic assaults can be useful, too. Some stylists also learn to fight without even looking at their opponents, as can be necessary when dealing with the sorts of monsters which kill or paralyze by eye contact or by their mere appearance, or which use literally dark magics to make things difficult. Really flashy stylists may be self-confident enough to learn throwing skills after all, probably adding Fast-Draw to enable them to bring another weapon into play if the throw doesn't end the fight.

Lastly, the disadvantages associated with the style mostly reflect the motivations appropriate to a career monster-fighter, which vary considerably; some treat this as a high-risk, high-return profession, others as a sacred crusade, others again as something very personal. And while many of these warriors are fiercely defensive of humanity, some develop a cold detachment or a crazy edge after seeing too many mangled bodies. In fact, some may be downright crazy in a *bad* way; *Battle not with monsters, lest you become a monster . . .*

Skills: Knife; Occultism; Spear; and any *two* of Broadsword, Karate, Rapier, Saber, Staff, or Two-Handed Axe/Mace.

Techniques: Back Strike (Knife); Hammer Fist (Karate); Kicking (Karate); Retain Weapon (any); Spinning Strike (Broadsword, Saber, or Knife); Sweep (Staff or Two-Handed Axe/Mace); Targeted Attack (Broadsword Swing/Neck); Targeted Attack (Knife Thrust/Vitals); Targeted Attack (Saber Swing/Neck); Targeted Attack (Spear Thrust/Vitals); Targeted Attack (Two-Handed Axe Swing/Neck).

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Flying Leap; Mental Strength; Power Blow.

Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack (Knife); Roll with Blow (Karate); Springing Attack (Spear).

Perks: Armor Familiarity (any style skill); Improvised Weapons (any style skill); Off-Hand Weapon Training (Knife); Rapid Retraction (Kicks or Punches); Technique Adaptation (Back Strike).

Optional Traits

Secondary Characteristics: Improved Per and Will.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Danger Sense; Enhanced Defenses; Fearlessness; Higher Purpose; Indomitable; Night Vision; True Faith; Unfazeable.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust; Callous; Charitable; Enemies (monster groups); Fanaticism; Greed; Intolerance; Nightmares; On the Edge; Sense of Duty.

Skills: Acrobatics; Armoury; Crossbow; Esoteric Medicine; Hidden Lore; Liquid Projector/TL; Observation; Research; Scrounging; Shield; Stealth; Tactics; Tracking; Weird Science; Wrestling.

Techniques: Acrobatic Stand; Breakfall (Acrobatics); Evade (Acrobatics); Targeted Attack (Crossbow/Vitals).

Cinematic Techniques: Roll with Blow (Acrobatics).

Pyramid Review

Zombie Fluxx: The Ever-Changing Zombie Card Game

Published by [Looney Labs](#)

Designed by Andrew Looney

Illustrated by Derek Ring

100 full-color cards & rules leaflet; $16

[*Fluxx*](#) is unlike any other game. Its mechanics fits its theme of constant change, of a chaos that cannot be beaten but rather adapted to if a player is to win. A game starts simply with two rules: draw one card, play one card, and winning achieved by playing Keeper cards that match those on varying Goal card. All this changes as new Rule cards alter the number of cards that can be drawn, played, held, and so forth, not only from turn to turn, but also within a turn itself. The result is that *Fluxx* cannot be played to win, but is best played to make the best of the current situation. Or not, as the game's fluid nature means that it can even be won when it is not your turn. This nature also divides players, with some (like my sisters) loathing it for its chaotic rules, while others (like my teenage daughter) loving it for the same reason.

Since its original publication in 1997, *Fluxx* has been modified and adapted to several flavors, including ecological, family-orientated, and religious themes. At its heart, though, *Fluxx* has always remained true to the designer's hippie beliefs and is a friendly, peaceful game. This makes *Zombie Fluxx* unlike any *Fluxx* game that has gone before, because it gives you weapons and lets you kill things, which is as deeply, incredibly un-hippie as you can get. Except that what you kill are Zombies, and Zombies are seriously, seriously uncool. Of course, this being a *Fluxx* game, the aim in *Zombie Fluxx* is not just to adapt to the changing circumstances of the cards being played, but also to adapt to the growing numbers of the corpse cortege that shuffle into play.

Designed for two to six players and to be played in about 10 to 40 minutes (although we found 20 minutes to be the norm), the first thing that strikes you about *Zombie Fluxx* is that many of the cards are illustrated in full color and that you actually get two sets of rules. One side of the rules sheet is devoted to the basic game and enables the purchaser to learn *Fluxx,* although the more complex *Zombie Fluxx* cards must be put aside for this. Once the basic rules have been mastered, the rules leaflet can be flipped over and the undead can walk the Earth.

Zombie Fluxx introduces two new card types. The first is the Creeper. Marked with an unhappy face, the Creeper is the equivalent of the anti-Keeper and depicts between one and four Zombies. Although a player does not want one in his hand, he must play any Creeper as soon as it is drawn. He gets to draw and play another card, but again this could be another Creeper. Once there are Creepers on the table, various Goals can no longer be met such as "Barricade the Windows" (which requires a player to have the "Lumber" and a "Friend" Keeper in place, but no Creepers in play by anyone at all); while new Goal cards, like "Zombie Baseball Team" (which requires the "Baseball Bat" Keeper and nine Zombies to be in front of you), can be.

The second new card type is the "Ungoal" card, marked with an octagon. In the standard game, *Fluxx* can be won if anyone matches his Keepers with the Goal currently in play, but in *Zombie Fluxx* meeting the conditions of "Zombie Victory" means that the cadaver cavalcade have won. This means that the players have all lost. Fortunately, "Zombie Victory" is the only "Ungoal" card in *Zombie Fluxx.*

Zombies are undoubtedly a bad thing, not just because they can stop everyone from winning, but because they can also win themselves. Fortunately, they can be gotten rid off. This merely takes the use of a weapon Keeper like "The

Shotgun," or under the "Weapon Bonus" New Rule, the use of potential weapon Keepers like "The Chainsaw" or "The Car." Any potential weapon Keeper is marked with a "POW!" symbol. If a player has any of these in play before him, he can use them once each round to kill or affect one of the Creepers also in front of him. Kill a Creeper that depicts a single Zombie and it goes into the discard pile. A Creeper depicting a Pair of Zombies can also be killed and discarded, but if another Creeper is killed instead, that Pair of Zombies will run and hide with another player of the killer's choice! A Trio of Zombies Creeper cannot be killed, but is instead moved to a neighboring player. Finally, a Zombie Quartet Creeper can be killed, but always comes back to life, being placed on top of the draw deck where it will affect whoever has to draw next.

What all of this means is that the appearance of the Zombies adds another level of chaos to the core *Fluxx* game play that can be spread among the other players. Further, it adds just the hint of a narrative structure. After all, at the start of the movie only a few zombies appear, but soon enough the cast are threatened, if not overwhelmed by a horde doing the undead shamble. Or in the case of *Zombie Fluxx,* the players are threatened by a horde of Creepers that are unrelentingly difficult to get off the table despite the inclusion of the new weapon/potential weapon Keepers (although the ". . . and Stay Dead" and "No Zombies" Action cards will get rid of every Creeper card on the table). Their growing (and spreading) numbers also makes it difficult to meet the majority of the new game's Goals and entirely possible for everyone to lose the game entirely. This is only in keeping with the feel of the genre. As are cards like "Let's Shamble" (which allows every player with a Creeper to move it to a neighbor), "Adrenaline Bonus" (lets a player draw another card if he has a Zombie in front of him), "Dead Friends" (which turns the Friends Keepers into Creepers), "Return of the Dead" (all of the Creepers in the discard pile are dealt back out to everyone), and our personal favorite, "Groaning Required" (a player must groan like a zombie when he draws a Creeper card or be given another Creeper).

Compared with other Zombie games, *Zombie Fluxx* is probably a little too light and -- bar its advertisement card for certain other zombie themed games -- all too gore free. And despite it being slightly more complex, it is still a *Fluxx* game, so treats its theme with a little more humor, making it a light, fun, and family-friendly card game (even if the Zombies are anything but). Like all *Fluxx* games, more players means more chaos and more fun, and with *Zombie Fluxx* fewer players means having less victims around which to spread the love . . . and if *Zombie Fluxx* is anything, it is an entertainingly chaotic means to spread both the Zombie and the *Fluxx* love.

--Matthew Pook

The Patriot Potion

by Steven Marsh

He had been known as Captain Stripes in the Big One. But that was a long time ago. The costume still fit, but it smelled of mothballs and smoke . . . the latter a reminder of a habit given up 20 years ago. His pacemaker shifted uneasily beneath his skin as he pivoted his hovering form over the city, focusing his Stripe Vision to maximum magnification. Somewhere, in the city of five million, was Tyler, lurking, the blood of a hundred subway commuters on his claws; part of the Captain still thought of him as Tyke-Tyke, the towheaded boy he fished with over a decade ago. But a lot can change in a decade, and the Captain tried to steel the part of his mind that knew the horrible truth: He would probably need to kill Tyler. And then, if he succeeded, hundreds . . . thousands more.

* * *

Whether it's global conflict, interstellar invasion, or environmental cataclysm, every world faces a crisis from time to time. As the base of human knowledge has progressed, the world's leaders have often turned to science in these cataclysmic times . . . often without fulling understanding the long-term consequences. Even more interestingly, many technological items -- wonderful and horrific -- have often found widespread usage in times of war, whether it's the machine gun, Agent Orange, or the nuclear bomb. One such marvel is the Patriot Potion. This chemical marvel alters the body on a genetic and biochemical level, imparting wondrous super abilities on some who imbibe it, creating a "supreme soldier" capable of performing feats that an entire squadron couldn't accomplish . . . while still looking perfectly human.

Unfortunately, there are some downsides. First, the Potion doesn't work on everyone, nor is there any way to tell if one who imbibes it will have powers bestowed upon them. (The percentage can depend on the level of super powers the GM wishes to have in the campaign world, but anywhere from 1% to one in a million are a good range, depending on the usefulness of powers). Second, the abilities the Potion gives seem to be entirely random; there's no way of knowing if a successful recipient will become super-strong, amazingly fast, able to control the weather, or anything else the mind can fathom. But these faults are relatively obvious, and able to work around.

And the last problem? Well, that was less obvious.

Those who received powers from the Patriot Potion program seemed otherwise normal, and -- after the crisis was over -- these Patriots resumed their normal lives, which included families. The children of those who received the Patriot Potion seemed absolutely normal. So did the grandchildren . . . at least, until sometime after puberty. But after a couple decades of life, somewhere between 10% and 20% of the grandchildren of the Patriot Potion recipients became horrible deformed monsters, possessing random powers similar to the successful Patriot Potion cases but unencumbered by sanity or conscience.

Worse, *everyone* who received the Patriot Potion was subject to these side effects . . . not just those who were granted powers. And, since there was no way of knowing whether or not someone was a good candidate to receive the treatment originally, the agency responsible for giving the Potion tended to give it wide swaths of people (which, in the case of a World-War-style global conflict, would have meant every able-bodied man in the Army).

If there is a "positive side," it's that the great-grandchildren of those Potion recipients seem to be normal, meaning that humanity has a reasonable shot at survival if it can eliminate the danger that the mutants pose. Of course, so too did the grandchildren seem to be normal, until they no longer were . . . and what hidden danger do the great-great-grandchildren pose to the world?

Campaign Uses

Designed as a Supers/Horror crossover item, the Patriot Potion is designed to be a versatile global conundrum in a

wide variety of campaigns. Out of the box, it provides an interesting take on many super settings involving legacy heroes, especially those from World War II. What do these aging heroes do if they are the only ones with super powers, in a world where large numbers of their descendants -- and those of their friends and neighbors -- are monsters? The passage of time will claim more and more of these supreme soldiers, while the numbers available to the deadly generation are seemingly endless. In this usage, PCs can either be these legacy heroes; the children of these heroes (unpowered but perhaps taking the role of mundane "masked vigilantes" to handle the monstrous hordes that their elders cannot); or the grandchildren, without currently manifesting mutant powers, desperately seeking a cure or a resolution to the impossible situation, all the while wondering, "Will I be next?"

The Patriot Potion can also form a background element as a previous horror endured by the world, especially if it was utilized in smaller quantities. For example, a Dr. Jekyll- or Invisible-Man-esque brew only consumed by a few people in Victorian times would see the monster generation manifest during the World War II era. In this case, the Potion can provide a tantalizing possibility for world leaders (or those with access to the technology) striving to overcome some new cataclysm: "Yes, using the Potion will create monsters in 40 years . . . but if we don't do something about this alien invasion, there won't be a tomorrow to worry about!"

The elixir can also be the source of powers for a PC or group of PCs in a larger Supers campaign, in a setting where the Potion wasn't used on large segments of the population. If the truth of the eventual fate of the PCs' descendants becomes known (say, by visiting the future or via other four-color supers plot), this could form a true angsty conundrum for those characters.

Finally, a particularly cruel GM could run two campaigns (either in series or parallel), with the first as a straight Supers setting focusing on the exploits of the colorful World-War-II heroes, and the other -- set in the same world -- a modern-day setting dealing with the monstrous aftermath.

Regardless of which option is used, the fact that the Patriot Potion is to blame for the rise of the mutants may not be immediately obvious, especially if the Potion was inflicted on large segments of the population.

Themes and Designer's Notes

The broad idea of the Potion is a metaphor for any number of global ways we affect our lives without necessarily understanding the long-term consequences: vaccinations, fluoridation, means of preserving food and beverage. (If cell phones *did* cause cancer, how would we ever discern this if everyone is using a cell phone? How does the equation change if cell phones did cause problems, but not for a generation or two? Would the world be able to go back to a cell-phone-free life?)

For the idea to work well, it does require some key concepts (or some contemplation to get around the reasons suggested). First, the Potion shouldn't work on everyone, nor should it be obvious who will be a successful candidate. This sows the seeds of the future generational conflict, and keeps it from being used in generations after that. Otherwise, the Potion's limitations are easy to remove; if one is able to ensure a 100% success rate in recipients, then one need simply sterilize those metahumans to prevent the problems. Likewise, if only the grandchildren of those who received super-powers became mutants, it would be straightforward to work out a vector about from where the monsters would come.

The percentage of the generation post-Potion affected can be adjusted. The 10% to 20% figure utilized was chosen to ensure a global end-times threat, yet one that can still be contained.

The Potion doesn't *have* to instill superpowers; for example, the Potion could be the cure to particularly virulent disease or other health problem. In this case, it's up to the GM how powerful the future mutants are.

Finally, the gestation period for the future menace could vary, but grandchildren ensures that a large number of the threat exists while keeping it within living memory of the primary beneficiaries.

Tomb of Clio's Nightmares

"Men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction betwixt the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made conscious of them; but the prosaic materialism of the majority condemns as madness the flashes of super-sight which penetrate the common veil of obvious empiricism."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Tomb"

Clio, being of broader intellect herself, knows full well the indistinction between the real and unreal. She knows better than to condemn as madness the flashes of alternate history, of times better past than present, which penetrate the skin of the world on Halloween. She sees them in her nightmares every year, and even in the cold light of day can take no refuge in the "obvious empiricism" that walls her in. This year, taking a key from our title, we present three campaign frames submerged for the most part in boundary zones. Two lie between secret history and alternate history, two between horror and fantasy, two between the general and the specific. But all lie heavy on Clio's brow, as she tosses and turns in her open tomb . . .

"It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood.
Stones have been known to move and trees to speak;
Augurs and understood relations have
By maggot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood. What is the night?"
-- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth,* III:iv:121-125

This much is truth: The ancient Norse and British had a custom called *alfablot,* in which women smeared blood on old megalithic barrows at the dying of the year, as a propitiation of the "alfar," the pale inhuman spirits who dwelt therein. The Neolithic megalith complex at Tarxien in Malta features "libation holes" in a lightless chamber, suitable for such liquid offerings. In the megalithic tomb at Altendorf, three quarters of the skeletons found by archaeologists had been decapitated. There have been no skeletons whatsoever found in the megalithic tombs in the Low Countries. Missing bodies are common at other megalithic gravesites. Later intruders in megalithic tombs from Malta to Ireland removed the heads and crossed the limbs of those interred bodies that could be found. The rest is terror: Of the thin, pale, almost spider-like things that laid themselves down in the long passage graves, open for escape but only to sunlight once per year; painting the walls red with ochre and carving their patterns of rings and spirals on the flat stones. Of how they slunk in with the sea fog when the cold returned, scuttling from their caves in the high Pyrenees or lying in wait in the rivers to drag down the unwary. Of how they knew the secret names of earth, water, and sky, and built their works to whisper them. Of how they raised herds of serfs to do their bidding, dragging great stones into position - stones they hinted were their own dead gods and makers - before slaughtering their kine to water the new granges. Of how they clung to the land and its hollows with fang and talon until sun's cross and bright bronze drove them deep, and bold heroes entered the blackness of their ancient stone tombs to do what had to be done at the last.

This campaign frame might be alternate history along the lines of Brian Stableford's *Empire of Fear,* or it might be a secret history of the vampiric Neolithic. That will be up to the GM - and to the heroes of this **GURPS Low-Tech** horror campaign. If they win, it's a secret history - if they lose, and the vampires hold on to Europe west of the Elbe, well, time to start hoping the Persians do better. But this campaign might happen during the onset of the vampires around 3800 B.C., during their great age of power from Newgrange to Malta at the turn of the millennium, or during the long war of humanity to retake the sacred power sites over the next thousand years. It probably works best either in the primitive beginnings, with swarthy warriors wielding the sacred flint (fire's favorite stone) to hold back the pale, crawling hordes from sea and river, or in the "last gasp years" around 2100 B.C. as the Bell-Beaker folk who broke the vampires' grasp have grown complacent, and certain of their wise have turned to the megalithic arts themselves. Why, there's even talk of re-setting the bluestones at the Henge! Only the bravest sons of the Sun-Cross will dare act on what the common folk whisper - that the Secret Men of Blood skulk forth once more, and hiss their poison into the ears of chiefs and priests alike.

"[T]his man's indiscretion had brought a great scandal upon the House of Commons . . . when we had prepared a statute to pass to this end and purpose for the removing of all offensive pictures yet we had specially provided that no tombs should be meddled withall . . . therefore I would wish we might have the tombs again repaired and the matters so compounded as he might come into no further danger for this, his indiscreet act."
-- Sir Simonds D'Ewes, M.P., *Journal* (Oct. 16, 1641)

It seemed like a good idea - even a godly one - at the time. In 1641, Parliament ordered "idolatrous images" be removed or defaced all across Britain. While some parsons were measured in their compliance, others smashed images indiscriminately - and one of those smashed images, somewhere, must have been very important indeed. Now, along with the marching of Roundheads and the raiding of Cavaliers in civil war, the depredations of the Irish and the invasions of mercenary Scots, poor England suffers from a plague of monsters thought bottled up in Hell, or at least vanished since the Deluge. Dragons and wyrms - some venomous, many more simply impiously vast and appallingly quick - have crawled from the fens and bogs. Lions and tigers, some with immense sabre-like fangs, once more prowl from Sherwood to the New Forest, and the trees themselves show shoots of growth more tropic than temperate. Giants - brutish to be sure, but ten feet tall and strong withal - climb down from the Pennines and even the Gogmagog Hills, and feast on the unwary, even as beetle-browed goblins with thick, yellowed teeth swarm up from the barrows and caves of the Downs to crack the marrow-bones of shepherds and goose-girls. Matthew Hopkins' so-called "Witch-Finders" do battle with the covens and esbats who have thrown off their disguise in these Satanic times, while savants at Oxford and Cambridge claim to have spoken with angels or with Atlanteans, and carry out strange projects as a consequence. Folk have seen Merlin walking with the trees, and a savage Arthur riding beneath the banner of Our Lady, wearing antlers and Roman war mail. Everywhere, the past of Britain is come alive, and the time itself is out of joint; everywhere, things have learned to walk that should crawl.

Herefordshire is no different. While Hereford Cathedral still stands, protected by the body of the sainted King Ethelbert of East Anglia, murdered by foul and serpentine treachery at the court of King Offa in 794 A.D., the county around it swarms with monsters, witches, fanatics, and Parliamentary dragoons. Some vast evil boiled up from the magic well and megalithic barrow at Turnastone, placed under interdict by the Bishop of Hereford in 1409; it crouches athwart the county's approaches to the southwest. After a brief and unwelcome Parliamentary occupation in 1641, Hereford remains loyal to King Charles I, but has only its own artisans and squires to defend it. Sir Herbert Croft, Dean of Hereford Cathedral, has taken command of the defenses, drilling troops and teaching what lore he can find in the Cathedral archives. His buxom, aggressive daughter Laura is not satisfied with such passivity. She seeks King Ethelbert's severed head, last reported looted from Westminster Abbey; if it can be returned to Hereford before the city falls, perhaps the land can symbolically be healed. The PCs in this *GURPS Swashbucklers-Dinosaurs-Horror* campaign frame (with as much *Fantasy* and *Celtic Myth* as you wish) are her noble band of tomb raiders: swordsmen, priests, sages, clever delving engineers - even thieves seeking pardon for their crimes -- dispatched to seek the Head of St. Ethelbert in a land gone mad though all Hell has let out for breakfast.

"The most startling scheme was one with which two young doctors, who took rooms at the then notorious Shakspere Hotel, were identified. The Police discovered that one of the employees in the Tombs had been, or was to have been, bribed to cut down the body while it was yet warm, that life was to have been restored by the use of a galvanic battery, and another body substituted for that of the resuscitated murderer. . . . [A] fire added to the excitement of the hour. This circumstance gave rise to a story that while the tumult was at its height . . . the attempted scheme of resuscitation had been really accomplished."
-- "A Crime of Forty Years Ago," *New York Times* (Dec. 18, 1880)

In New York City's Tombs prison, in the heart of the Five Points district, John C. Colt, brother of gunsmith Samuel Colt, awaited his execution for the hatchet murder of one Samuel Adams in 1841. Colt's brother was in the city testing a new battery and torpedo system for submarines. Colt had been allowed to marry his mistress (his brother's abandoned wife, the gossips whispered) that morning, a rite hastily carried out by a strange priest. But on the day Colt's hanging was scheduled to occur, a fire broke out in the tower of the Tombs. The firemen - all gangsters from the Points - appeared, and in the confusion, John Colt appeared to have knifed himself in the heart. But something happened that day in the Tombs; in a prison built to the plan of an Egyptian mausoleum by the architect John Haviland, resting on a foundation raft of hemlock logs floating on an underground river. On that day a pillar of fire appeared above the Egyptian Revival pillars and cornices of the Tombs. On that day, two doctors smuggled a

revolutionary galvanic battery - one that had gone beneath the waters of the secret Nile and risen again - into the Five Points. In the basement of the notorious Shakspere Hotel, they resurrected the murderer John Colt, bringing him out of Egypt and into Bablyon on the Hudson, the wickedest city in the world.

Like our first campaign frame, this **GURPS Screampunk** setting probably begins as a secret history, in this case, of New York City: *Gangs of New York* meets *The House of Frankenstein* with a big splash of *The Mummy.* John Colt, the Resurrected Man, is the secret lord of the city, running gangs like the Blind Apes, the Crocks, the Jackals, and the Hawk-Heads and displacing the old Shirt Tails, Chichesters, and Roach Guards. Only the old-Irish Bowery Boys, led by the Mighty Mose, and the up-and-coming new-Irish Dead Rabbits under Priest Vallon dare to stand against him. The GM can play it for full-on Egyptomania, with "Mose" and the Resurrected Man hurling plagues at each other while dueling over the Secret Nile beneath Manhattan in fine *Anubis Gates* fettle. Or go for hard-scrabble urban horror in an **Unknown Armies: 1848** mode, with Coltish mechanisms, sewer crocodiles, and albino hoodoo cults aplenty. PCs in either game might be Irish gangsters, Anglo cops, Black conjure-men, "Dutch" hexerei, Scots gearsmiths, Jewish sages, Welsh tunnel-jacks, or Italian revolutionaries, just trying to make ends meet and keep alive in the American melting pot - or is it the Black Cauldron of Annwn?

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

So long as you know that I know that I won't ever know what you know, I know that's okay . . .y'know?

Reality, and Other Constructs We'll Never Know the Full Truth About

One of my earliest "memories" -- one which I seldom think about, have only discussed with the missus, and never have I written about -- is of a "monster" under my bed. "Memories" is in quotes because it's hard to sort out which of one's early childhood recollections are real and which aren't, and "monster" is in quotes because it probably wasn't.

As far as monsters under the bed go, this one was relatively tame; I only encountered it once, and it seemed to me more something on the periphery of my perceptions. I think my primary memory of it is of it running under my hand, which was likely hanging off the side of my bed. (I primarily remember the tactile aspects of it, thinking that it had fur; I think of it as a black cat, although it was probably "black" only because it was dark, and it was probably a "cat" because I only had an idea of a few creatures, so any smaller-than-pony animal probably registered in my mind as "cat.") I also remember a sensation like my hand was licked, as well as some kind of glowing eyes, although that could be my mind creating details from the aether as the years have passed.

I remember being somewhat spooked at the time, but I think my greater sense of disease came from my inability to get my mom to take the situation seriously. Why wasn't she investigating? Why was she only offering hollow reassurances that everything was fine, when she did nothing to ensure my safety? And so on. I remember sleeping uneasily for a while, but it became easier with time until the incident became part of the static of childhood.

In hindsight, though, I think the thing that continues to disturb me to this day is that I'll never know the truth of the "incident." Did my arm fall asleep and flop off the bed (the tingling sensation kinda feeling like it's being licked)? Did I touch some piece of clothing or fabric on the side of the bed? Was it a particularly vivid nightmare? Did a rat find its way into my room . . . or Something Worse?

When I was six or seven, I remember watching *In Search Of . . .,* my first encounter with the World of Weirdness. (It also resulted in one of my first "What the heck?!" moments of quasi-continuity disbelief, when episodes about Big Foot, the Loch Ness Monster, and UFOs were followed by one about . . . tornados.) As an impressionable child of the television era, I think the thing that freaked me out the most about that series was how almost every topic was presented with an air of, "We will probably never know the truth . . ." As a fan of books, comics, and other forms of media (i.e. "more TV"), my sense of closure wanted to know what was *really* behind these strange phenomena.

But, of course, that's the secret of real-world and quasi-real-world horror phenomena: not knowing what's going on with absolute certainty. Where did AIDS come from? Do we know the full truth behind the Kennedy assassination? Even in those circumstances where we do come to understand something horrific, it can take an incredibly long time. For example, the Black Death struck without being comprehended for almost half a millennium. The knowable nature of horror flies in the face of what we expect from most forms of entertainment. In horror stories, there usually needs to be some manner of explanation or logical cohesion to the tale, even if those answers open up more questions.

There are three broad answers I can devise to this conundrum, with the additional toggle of whether or not the players know which option their GM is going with. First, the GM can allow for the "realistic" option that the truth is, ultimately, unknowable; the PCs (and players) merely need to deal with events as they happen, and they may never know what's really going on. This is the tack taken in some zombie flicks ("They just showed up!") as well as classics such as Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds.*

Alternatively, the GM can make sure that the truth *can* be known, although it may be difficult and might not be accomplished successfully. This is the strategy of many RPGs (including classics such as **Delta Green**), as well as the metaplot of the *X-Files* television show. Of course, for this to work, you need to know the big secrets in the first place. Trust me on this . . . the whole process goes a lot smoother. Finally, it's possible for the truth not to be known by the

PCs, but for the *players* to know the truth (or, at least, the GM's theories about what was going on). This is the tack taken by some classic games and adventures, including the superlative "In Media Res" from ***The Unspeakable Oath.*** In this technique, the GM can reveal the larger picture, although the players may not know it. This is especially satisfying for the conclusion of long-running campaigns; having a question-and-answer session where the GM answers all the players' questions can help provide closure to the players, even if their characters are still in the dark. This is also the default position of almost any commercial RPG and adventure; the players always have the option of reading the "Players Don't Read This!" sections once the adventure is over.

The gulf between the desire to know and the fact that many things will never be known can cause friction in an RPG, but as long as the players and GM are on the same page as far as expectations, there's nothing to fear.

Except creatures under the bed.

--Steven Marsh

The Seven Sinister Statuettes of Jose Von Lee

by Fade Manley

When the villagers looted the late Jose Von Lee's tower for anything that could be sold to unsuspecting passersby, the easily pocketed trinkets went first. (See "[The Six Cursed Rings of Jose Von Lee](#)" and "[The Seven Blessed Event Items of Jose Von Lee](#)" for more on the trinkets.) After they'd turned a profit on those, and no one had died in too horrible a fashion, the villagers went in for the trickier loot. They found seven statuettes arranged in a circle on a large brass disc, and yanked each one off its stand to sell individually. The brass disc itself seemed sufficiently magic-free that they made it a tabletop in the local tavern.

Meanwhile, the seven statuettes are circulating as minor magical items. Each one affects anyone who spends a few hours a day -- four or five will usually do it -- in the presence of the statuette. Putting the figure somewhere that it can "see" the person trying to take advantage of the magical effects works, as does keeping it in one's carried possessions. The effects last for a single day, and have to be renewed each day to keep the benefits.

Standard methods of discerning enchantments show off only the obvious, benign features of each statuette. It's a pity for their owners that those aren't the only magical effects. Or, more precisely, it's a pity for everyone their owners associate with . . .

Dryad

This silver statuette of a tree also appears to be a maiden with leafy hair, when viewed from certain angles. It gives the owner a green thumb; he can figure out how best to grow any plant, or treat any plant ailment, regardless of past experience or lack thereof.

The downside: The plants do just fine so long as they're still growing. Stored grain and vegetables, however, will begin to rot at an alarming rate. If there's any sort of nasty fungus or blight that can affect stored food, it appears within a week or two of the owner first using the Dryad's blessings. Meat and cheese are still safe, but beer made from grains goes sour. Unlike many the other statuettes' effects, this one will affect the owner's stored food just like anyone else's.

Sally

More of a doll than a statue, Sally has a porcelain face and a soft cloth body with wires to let her be posed. (Anyone who's seen someone wear the Ring of Pretty Lass will recognize the face and figure.) Sally keeps nightmares away from her owner. She's the perfect gift for any child suffering from nightmares, and will thoroughly eradicate them if left in the child's bedroom.

The downside: Eradicated? More like relocated. And amplified, in the process. The owner's best friends will begin suffering from nightmares instead. If the owner has no friends, the effects move on to relatives instead. If the owner has neither relatives nor friends, the nightmares wait for the first night he's no longer being influenced by the statuette, and then rebound on the owner. All at once.

The Rat Jester

A young man dressed in Harlequin garb smiles while a dozen rats climb up his legs. The statuette has been carved out of a single bone, with odd contortions in the figure's posture to accommodate the dimensions of a human leg bone. This figure gives its owner insight to wit, granting a bonus to any attempt to be entertaining or charming in a humorous manner. (In *GURPS,* +2 to social skills when any sort of humor is involved.) It also keeps the premises of

any building where it's left for a few days free from rats and mice for as long as it stays there.

The downside: When you're the funniest person around, no one else is very funny at all. Anyone in the owner's presence gets a penalty to all social skills while he's around. (-2 to any social skill, in *GURPS.*) Furthermore, any rats driven out by the statuette will take up residence in buildings nearby, while demonstrating a startling level of intelligence and health in avoiding any traps, cats, poison, or other attempts to remove them.

The Drowning Man

This is the only statuette that's obviously magical at first glance. Made of green glass, it shows a man struggling upward as if drowning, and hovers a few inches off whatever surface it's been set on. The glass always feels wet to the touch. Despite the appearance, this statue doesn't prevent drowning; instead, it protects the owner from inconvenient water. He can walk through a thunderstorm and arrive at his destination dry, stomp through mud puddles without dirtying his boots, or spill wine down his shirt and simply shake it off.

The downside: The statue doesn't look like that for no reason. Every time the statue keeps the owner from another inconvenience, it sends the accumulated liquid to someone else. In their lungs. When it's only water, this can be mistaken for a sudden onset of pneumonia; when an otherwise healthy person begins hacking up mud or wine, it draws more attention. Unlike some of the other curses, this one has a wide range, and has no preference for people associated with the owner. Anyone within a few miles of the statue's owner may be affected.

Medusa

This brass statuette shows a lovely woman with snakes for hair. Its primary effect is to make people better at romance and seduction. (In *GURPS,* a +2 bonus to Sex Appeal.) As a minor quirk, it also lets the person understand the speech of snakes; since snakes are dumb animals that seldom say much of interest, this is less useful than one might think.

The downside: Everyone the owner makes skin contact with while under Medusa's effects suffers from weakness to malign effects. (In *GURPS,* -5 to HT.) For the next month, any affected person suffers a sharp penalty to resisting disease, poison, being turned to stone . . . Touching the owner again will restore the penalty, though it won't increase it.

Lucky Dog

This clay statuette is of a cartoonish plump dog, displaying a winning hand of cards. Most of its owners believe it gave them better luck in games of chance. It actually gives a bonus to gambling skills.

The downside: Lucky in cards, unlucky in love. Any romantic relationship the owner participates in while under the influence of the Lucky Dog will end in tragedy for the loved one. Sudden revelations of arranged marriages that can't be escaped, jealous stalkers, bizarre misunderstandings . . . It's not always death, but it can't end with the owner still having a relationship with his loved one, or said loved one in any sort of happy condition. And the tragedy will always somehow be the owner's fault. Any sweetheart of someone with the Lucky Dog and Medusa can look forward to a strange death involving poisoned playing cards.

The Reader

A painted wooden carving shows a child in peasant's clothing, sitting with a book in her lap. The owner of the Reader becomes a paragon of a teacher, able to flawlessly impart knowledge to others with a few simple examples and a clear explanation. He can pass on any of his own learned skills to others in a quarter of the usual time, with no miscommunications or setbacks.

The downside: It's possible to teach people more than you meant to. The owner also passes on any flaws he has to his students, at the rate of about one major personal failing to every skill increase the student gains. "Flaws" include bad

habits, bad luck, and even bad skills; a profligate teacher who never could get the hang of sums may end up with a whole pack of spendthrift, math-illiterate students. Even physical disadvantages can be passed on over time, with appropriate tragic accidents as necessary to imitate missing limbs, poor eyesight, or a bad back. (In GURPS terms, move three points of Disadvantages from the teacher for every point of skill a student acquires under his instruction. If there are no more Disadvantages to move over, start reducing skills the student has and the teacher does not.)

Putting it All Together

The brass disc, on its own, is a minor cursed item. Anyone who spends a week of cumulative time within a few yards of it begins to lose his strength of purpose. (In *GURPS,* subtract one point of Will for each week.) From where it's placed in a village tavern, it'll be months -- or years -- before anyone notices the staff is becoming weak-willed and apathetic. And it'll be even longer before its effect on the whole village becomes clear . . .

Placing all seven statuettes back on the disc turns off the curse. Anyone who sits on the disc between those statuettes from one dawn to the next acquires all of the beneficial aspects of the statuettes permanently. This is an all or nothing proposition: a person cannot set down five of seven and get only five magical blessings.

Of course, all of the statuettes' less-beneficial side effects will also permanently follow this person around. The truly callous might not care, but anyone near them who figures out what's going on certainly will. This is not quite the stuff of which serious Evil Overlords are made, but PCs may have good reason to start investigating if anyone begins collecting the scattered statuettes.

Pyramid Review

Army of Darkness Roleplaying Game

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Written by Shane Lacy Hensley

Illustrated by C. Brent Ferguson & Jon Hodgson

242-page full-color hardcover; $40

"So listen up you primitive knuckleheads, here's how it is. Being god's gift to tool users, you're be able to take that big ol' file and apply it to one of them games like *__Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game__* or *__Angel Roleplaying Game__* until ya got all the purple and other goffic stuff off. Then take what's left and use a nail gun to get all the campy action horror I know you goofballs like from *Army of Darkness* stapled down good 'n' hard, and make it something all new. When you're done give a fresh lick of paint so it kinda reminds you of that corner of Medieval Merry Olde England right here in dusty California. Now you almost got yourself a whole new game. Just get some other bigger knucklehead to tell you lesser knuckleheads how the game goes . . . And hey presto, ya got yourself a copy of the *Army of Darkness Roleplaying Game.* Groovy . . ."

Of course, I could carry on like this in-voice for the remainder of this review, but since this is neither April 1st nor bearable for either reader or reviewer, I shall desist. Instead, I shall settle down and get on with telling you things that really need to know. Like the fact that this is not the author's first [book](#) for Eden Studios (he even gets to peddle his own games), and that this new game employs the publisher's same Cinematic UniSystem mechanics found in the games mentioned above. So if you have played either of those games, you can leap straight in here. It also means that there is a "cookie cutter" feel to this game, something that might impact upon the review.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Anyway, the *Army of Darkness Roleplaying Game* is based upon Sam Raimi's film of the same name, the third part of his *Evil Dead* trilogy. In that, Ash, our low-browed, big-chinned hero is thrown back in time after a disastrous encounter deep on the woods with the *Necronomicon Ex Mortis* and a host of deadites. Finding himself in the surprisingly dusty Medieval England, the chainsaw-for-an-arm, wise-cracking lunk not only has to contend with the naturally suspicious locals, but also another deadite outbreak. Having grasped the situation and been hailed as the "Promised One" by the local Wise Man, Ash must forge an alliance between the distrusting Lord Arthur and Duke Henry the Red, all before defending a castle besieged by a skeletal horde and demonic forces.

Naturally the game allows you take on the roles of Ash and other cast members, and it even provides guidelines for the Director to run the film as an adventure. All of the major cast members receive a full character sheet to that end. Changes have been made of course, so that anyone having seen the film will have to deal with a twist or two. While this is groovy enough, it only gets you so far. What do you do with the book next? Well, here the author takes his cue from Raimi's Director's Cut of *Army of Darkness,* in which Ash does not return to being an S-Mart store clerk, ready to raid the sporting goods section in the event of another Deadite outbreak. Instead, he oversleeps entombed in his cave and awakes to find a future London blasted all to heck. Knowing that the *Necronomicon Ex Mortis* and the Watcher in the Woods -- the big bad behind it all -- can appear here, there, and everywhere throughout time, and Ash of course being asleep for a lot of this time, then there have to be other Promised Ones ready to take up the good fight and lay down a mighty smiting on the deadites. Calling the player characters . . .

[END SPOILER ALERT]

If *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game* has its Experienced Heroes, Heroes, and White Hats, then the *Army of Darkness Roleplaying Game* has its Experienced Heroes, Heroes, and Primitive Screwheads, all character types that determine the points to be spent on attributes, Qualities, Drawbacks, and Skills, plus Drama Points. In a radical move compared to the previous Cinematic UniSystem games, the Director is not bound by default to include a single, tougher, more capable character such as the Slayer in a party. Everyone can play a character with the Promised One Quality, which like the Slayer Quality makes a character tougher and harder to kill, and be destined to battle Deadites throughout history. Indeed, the majority of the sample archetypes have the Promised Quality, being in the main ordinary folks raised to heroic status, just like Ash. They include a Zorro-like Folk Hero, the Mary Sue-ish Game Designer, a Roman Gladiator, a Wild West Gunslinger, a Hollywood Dick, a monster hunting Night Stalker, a near future Rollerball player, and a Viking. The selection also reflects the cross-time, "Circa" historical nature of the game.

Mechanically, the Cinematic UniSystem remains unchanged bar some additions to make it more like the film. One of course is the Promised One Quality, but other Qualities and Drawbacks include Big Chin/Really Big Chin, Schmuck, and Tool Man. Schmuck is for the goofball who always screws up, while Tool Man lets you replace a lost limb with something better suited to doing the DIY. Big Chin/Really Big Chin is the true measure of a hero, representing his ability to save others and urge them on in the fight against evil. The effect is either to grant a temporary skill bonus, which must be explained, or even restore another character half of his Life Points, though this costs a Drama Point. These all sum up Ash nicely, although (as pointed out by a colleague) they could work just as well with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* Xander.

In terms of combat, Ash -- or anyone so equipped -- gets to use the Chainsaw Ballet maneuver, but the real addition is the Battle System. Quick and dirty, this handles big battles such as the castle siege at the end of the movie, but it is designed cope with all levels of technology, and features in the sample scenarios and settings. It has built-in room for player planning and tactical decisions, and also expects them to participate in the battle.

The *Army of Darkness Roleplaying Game* retains the Cinematic UniSystem's major feature, the Drama Point system. Designed to encourage a player to act heroically, they are expended to gain a skill bonus, regain Life Points, gain a small break in the story with a "Plot Twist," work up a Righteous Fury upon a foe in combat, and finally, to bring a character back from the dead, though still badly wounded. Although they can be bought with Experience Points, they are better gained for delivering good one-liners, for committing heroic acts, and whenever bad things happen to a cast member, more so when they involve his Drawbacks.

The Director's advice starts with the movie and a description of its "Circa England" -- "Circa" here meaning that it gives more than a nod to the history, but without sweating the actual details. Thus you can have deserts and palm trees in an England of 1300AD. The description includes very-full write-ups of the Watcher-in-the-Woods, the Deadites, simulacra like the Tiny Ashes and Evil Ash (and how to do that to the cast members), plus relics, including the *Necronomicon,* Back Stabber, a dagger deadly to the Promised One, and the Spear of Destiny. The latter did not appear in the movie, but does in the book's sample settings. Yet the advice looks more to its sister games in suggesting that the *Army of Darkness Roleplaying Game* be played in a televisual format, with seasons and episodes, perhaps not even facing the Watcher in the Woods each season, but dealing with another foe. None are given here, but the other Cinematic UniSystem RPGs are a more than ready source. The suggested length for a season is four episodes, making it more of a mini-series than a full season, and closer to the source's movie format.

The included scenario, "Once More Unto The Breach," which has the cast members playing a sequel to the film still in Circa England, and the three "Worlds of Darkness" support this format. Two are set in times when the Necronomicon is known to have appeared: ancient Sumeria with "Gilga-Ash," and post-apocalyptic England of 2093AD with "The Future Dead." In-between is "War is Hell," a late World War II setting in which Hitler has harnessed the nasty book and the Deadites to throw the Allies back out of Europe. All provide hours of playing time, and showcase how the author takes the game beyond the film's confines.

Over all, this game feels very complete, something that other licensed RPGs fail to do. Actually lighter and dumber in tone than the other Cinematic UniSystem RPGs, it possesses a very beer 'n' pretzels feel in keeping with the source. Nicely presented and ably (if informally) penned, the *Army of Darkness Roleplaying Game* is pleasingly more than everything you need to run the movie and beyond.

--Matthew Pook

Adventurous Occupations: Man-at-Arms

for *GURPS*

by Sean Manning

For many centuries aristocratic heavy cavalry had an important role in society and on the battlefield. While good heavy infantry could always give them a tough fight, and priests and merchants often challenged their power in peacetime, cavalry had a special glamor. With their combat skills, gear, and political connections, men-at-arms can make excellent adventurers. This template is designed for a starting PC or major NPC in a fairly realistic campaign set at TL2-4, but can also serve as a quick set of stats for nameless opponents. Bronze Age societies used chariots, not cavalry, while quick-firing rifles and cannon relegate cavalry to the fringes of the battlefield at TL5. In history, the template could represent a knight, samurai, Macedonian Companion, Turkish or Persian spahi, or a professional cavalryman or noble from many societies. The classic "knight in shining armor" was a lancer and swordsman first and foremost, but heavy cavalry in other cultures were skilled with bow, javelin, or pistol to soften up tough opponents before a charge. This man-at-arms is respectable and owns his own mounts and arms.

One reason heavy cavalry tended to be drawn from an aristocracy was the sheer expense of good weapons, metal armor, and several horses. Most governments could not afford to arm, pay, and feed a large force of professional cavalry, and few amateurs could afford the needed equipment and training. Instead, rulers often loaned land or other sources of income to men who agreed to train as soldiers and provide a certain amount of military service. Sometimes land grants were hereditary, other times the son of a soldier would be issued a different parcel of land. Feudal landholding got started this way in much of Europe, but similar practices were used in the Muslim world and Far East. One danger was that if the government weakened the soldiers might come to think of themselves as owning the land outright, or even rebel. Another was that the men might come to think of themselves as landowners first, soldiers second, and neglect their military skills. Medieval governments sometimes encouraged this, accepting cash in lieu of service and using it to hire men. The governments of the Muslim world were often more successful in keeping control over the lands they loaned to their soldiers than their European counterparts, but the difference was not absolute. Muslim princes also bought mamluks or ghulams -- Central Asian slaves who were armed as heavy cavalry -- to provide troops without dangerous religious or family loyalties. Many were eventually freed, but retained responsibilities to their old owners. Another category of men-at-arms were household troops, men supported by a lord in exchange for military service. Their terms of service were often relatively informal, but they were generally expected to be very loyal to their current employer.

> ### Why "Man-At-Arms"?
>
> In late medieval Europe, a man-at-arms was any heavy cavalryman with full metal armor, whereas a knight was a gentleman who had been given the honor of knighthood by a lord. In earlier periods there was less distinction among those who could fight as heavy cavalry, as long as they had their own arms and mounts. The term is used here to refer to any aristocratic heavy cavalryman, whatever his arms or culture.

Because maintaining gear and mounts is so difficult, one of the first decisions that must be made about a man-at-arms character is how he makes a living. Full-time professionals generally make poor adventurers, unless the campaign is focused on a war, but a retired cavalryman could provide muscle for a party in a stable empire like Rome or China. Household troops tend to have a bit more flexibility, and are likely to be assigned interesting tasks by their master between wars. On the other hand, some players dislike being tied to an employer. Landholding men-at-arms have advantages and disadvantages as a character. They can do as they like in peacetime, but have responsibilities on their lands. These can provide many adventure seeds, but are restrictive. They would make good characters in a campaign centered on a limited area. Lastly, a man-at-arms could be a free lance, or mercenary. This fits the "wandering knight" of medieval romances and modern *d20 System* campaigns, and the need to feed several expensive horses gives an automatic motive for adventure! Almost any adventurous man-at-arms will spend some time traveling between employers, unless he owns enough land to support himself.

A man-at-arms is a fearsome opponent in combat, for several reasons. He is a frightening figure atop his steed and clad in gleaming armor, both faster than most enemies and better able to resist blows. His horse and armor make him faster and tougher than most commoners. Also, he has the time to learn a wide variety of military skills, making him a versatile and well-rounded soldier. Throughout most of the middle ages, knights fought on foot whenever necessary. Aristocratic men-at-arms also tend to have a formidable pride and camaraderie with their peers. Sometimes class pride, a demanding code of honor, or the sheer joy of a cavalry charge can lead men-at-arms into rash actions, although this has often been exaggerated. Most medieval knights were highly disciplined, for example.

As warrior aristocrats, men-at-arms tend to have their own distinctive way of life. Training and administrative duties keep them fairly busy. Training can be dangerous and exciting -- such as fencing with unbated weapons or galloping through rough terrain -- and is often done as part of a group. However, there is plenty of time for amusements, ranging from the common (singing, dancing, feasting) to the aristocratic (literature, hunting, more expensive feasting). These can provide background to an adventure- or trigger one, if a drunken contest goes wrong! They also provide opportunities for ambitious characters to make contacts or impress potential patrons. Men-at-arms often develop complex codes of behavior. Greeks and Romans dabbled in philosophy, medieval knights accepted chivalry, and the samurai developed bushido. These codes are often part of what men-at-arms believe separates them from lesser warriors, but they can often complicate life- another possible source of adventure. As prosperous horsemen, men-at-arms also often find an excuse to travel, whether on business for their lord or for themselves. Players of traveling men-at-arms should seriously consider bringing along luxuries, such as folding furniture, good food, or a servant, like their historical counterparts did.

Man-at-Arms   *100 points*

This template represents a professional heavy cavalryman, born to a prosperous family and the owner of his arms and mounts. Very rarely, professional armies draw their cavalry from ordinary citizens- use a different template in that case.

Attributes: ST 11 [10], *DX* 11 [20], *IQ* 10 [0], *HT* 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d+1/1d-1; BL 24 lbs; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Fit [5], Status 2 [5*], Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30]. 15 points chosen from among increased ST [10/level], HT [10/level], FP [3/level] or HP [2/level]; Allies (servants, squires, soldiers, etc.) [Varies], Charisma [5/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness [2/level], High Pain Threshold [10], Legal Enforcement Powers [5 or 10], Patron (Knightly order, lord, etc.) [Varies], Reputation (e.g. honorable) [Varies], or Very Fit [+10].

Disadvantages: -35 points chosen from among Bad Temper [-10*], Bloodlust [-10*], Callous [-5], Code of Honor (any) [Varies], Compulsive Behavior (Carousing, Fighting, etc.) [Varies*], Debt [-1/level], Duty (Lord) [Varies], Intolerance (Religious, racial, or national) [Varies], Overconfidence [-5*], Reputation (e.g. Dishonourable) [varies], Selfish [-5*], Sense of Duty (e.g. lord, vassals, the weak) [varies], Stubbornness [-5].

Primary Skills: 16 points chosen from among combat skills. Riding (Equines) (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12, Soldier/TL (IQ/A) IQ+2 [8]-12.

Secondary Skills: Savoir-Faire (IQ/E) IQ+1 [2]-11. 7 points chosen from among Administration (IQ/A), Area Knowledge (Local) (IQ/E), Climbing (DX/A), Jumping (DX/E), Leadership (IQ/A), Tactics (IQ/H), or various unarmed combat skills.

Background Skills: 3 points chosen from among Dancing (DX/A) DX-1 [1]-10; Armory/TL (Body Armor), Armory/TL (Melee Weapons), Connoisseur (any), Falconry, Farming/TL, Heraldry, or Poetry (all IQ/A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Law (Local customary) or Theology (Own religion) (both IQ/H) IQ-2 [1]-8; Carousing or Singing (both HT/E) HT [1]-11; or Tracking (Per/A) Per-1 [1]-9 35 points.

* One level free from Very Wealthy.

Landed Lens: Status 3 [+5], Wealth (Filthy Rich) [+20], Independent Income 5 [5]. Choose Administration (IQ/A) IQ+1 [4]-11, Area Knowledge (Own estates) (IQ/E) IQ [1], and Leadership (IQ/A) IQ [2]-10 as Secondary Skills. 30 points.

You have extensive land holdings, which bring in enough rents, taxes, and fees to support you and a retinue. As a result, you are a political leader as well as a soldier, and do not depend on a lord to support yourself. Legal Enforcement Powers will be appropriate in many settings!

A landed knight would work 20 hours a week as a feudal lord, using the best of Administration and Law (Local Customary). This is a Very Wealthy job with income adjusted by margin of success or failure, worth $7,000/month at TL3. Independent Income brings in $5,000/month at TL3, so with typical rolls he can support himself. On a critical failure, either there is some sort of disaster (half income for 1d months) or the lord gets himself in some sort of legal or political trouble. See for a more detailed discussion of landholding.

Cataphract Lens: Combat skills are Spear (DX/A) DX+2 [8]-13; one of Bow (DX/A), Buckler, Shield, or Thrown Weapon (Spear) (all DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12; one of Axe/Mace, Broadsword, or Shortsword (all DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12; and one of Brawling (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12 or Wrestling (DX/A) DX [2]-11.

You are one of your Iron Age (TL2) society's most fearsome warriors. You wear a full suit of metal armor, ride a horse with an armored trapper, and wield a long spear two-handed. You may not be nimble, but can push through most opposition confident that armor will protect you and your mount. A few cataphracts also carry bows, or use a pair of spears (one to throw, one to thrust) instead of the lance.

High Medieval Knight Lens: Combat skills are Lance (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12, Broadsword (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12, Axe/Mace (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Shield (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12; one of improved Axe/Mace, Bow (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Crossbow (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12, Spear (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Polearm (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Staff (DX/A) DX [2]-10, Two-Handed Axe/Mace (DX/A) DX [2]-11, and Two-Handed Sword (DX/A) DX [2]-11; and either Brawling (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12 or Wrestling (DX/A) DX [2]-11.

You are a classic mailed knight, wielding broadsword, lance, and heater shield. You can fight well on foot or on horseback, but dislike using ranged weapons except to hunt.

Horse-Archer Lens: Combat skills are Axe/Mace (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Bow (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12, Broadsword (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Fast-Draw (Arrow) DX [2]-11, Lance (DX/A) DX-1 [1]-10, Shield (DX/E) DX [1]-11, Spear (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Wrestling (DX/A) DX [2]-11.

You are an armored horse-archer, able to harass your enemy with arrows before closing with lance and sword. This is a flexible style of fighting, but you are neither as nimble as a light cavalrymen nor as fearsome hand-to-hand as a knight. Samurai could use a similar template, dropping out Axe/Mace, Lance, and Shield, and adding Two-Handed Sword, Polearm, and Shortsword.

Sample Characters

Mazaeos   *100 points*

Attributes: ST 11 [10], *DX* 11 [20], *IQ* 10 [0], *HT* 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d+1/1d-1; BL 24 lbs; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Move 5 [0].

Social Background: TL2; Cultural Familiarities West Iranian [0], Languages Old Persian (Native/None) [-3], Lydian (Accented/None) [2], Thracian (Broken/None) [1].

Advantages: Charisma [5], Fit [5], Legal Enforcement Powers [10], Status 2 [5*], Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Persian) [-10], Compulsive Carousing (9) [-7], Duty (Satrap of Lydia, 12 or less) [-10], Hidebound [-5].

Primary Skills: Bow (DX/A) DX [2]-11; Riding (Equines) (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12; Shortsword (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-13; Soldier/TL (IQ/A) IQ+2 [8]-12; Spear (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12; Thrown Weapon (Spear) (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12; Wrestling (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12.

Secondary Skills: Area Knowledge (Western Anatolia) (IQ/E) IQ [1]-10; Climbing (DX/A) DX [2]-11; Jumping (DX/E) DX [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (IQ/E) IQ [2]-10.

Background Skills: Carousing (HT/E) HT [1]-11; Connoisseur (Gardens and parks) (IQ/A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Dancing (DX/A) DX-1 [1]-10.

Quirks: Ambitious; believes Persians are a superior race; thinks he's a good judge of character; careless of his finery; mild stubbornness.

* One level free from Very Wealthy.

Equipment: Two spears, fine akinakes (straight-bladed shortsword with a small guard), composite bow and bowcase, hip quiver and 20 arrows, bronze pot-helm, linen cuirass (DR 2, protects torso and groin, 9 lbs). Brown cavalry horse, and several riding horses. All horses have bit and bridle and a thick saddlecloth (-1 equipment penalty to Riding skill). Normally, he leaves the bow and quiver behind when he is fighting on horseback. He has nowhere to put his spears when his hands are full with the bow!

Appearance: A clean-shaven, brown haired man with a swarthy complexion, wearing a brightly patterned shirt and trousers, several pieces of gold and silver jewelry, and a felt hood with flaps which can be wrapped around the chin.

Mazaeos is part of the Persian garrison of Lydia, in western Anatolia, in the fifth century BC. His grandfather was settled here when the Persians conquered the region, and he lives on the family estate near Sardis. He protects against raiders and invaders, and enforces the law as part of a squadron of 100 riders. He is popular with his comrades, and with the other local soldiers and officials. He is well known as a wrestler and as a good man to drink with. He doesn't mind learning languages, although many aristocratic Persians leave translation to scribes. The satrap Pissuthenes has used him several times to investigate various problems, but the results were not entirely satisfactory. Mazaeos tends to make snap judgments of people, and he isn't particularly clever (although it is easy to underestimate him). He dreams of being awarded an estate with green gardens, cool streams, and a happy population of herders and farmers.

In battle, Mazaeos uses standard tactics for medium cavalry. He tries to keep moving and throw one spear at dangerous opponents before closing with the other, provoking opponents too tough to fight with taunts and missiles in hope they will break position and pursue him. Dismounted, he often grapples with his left hand while stabbing with the right. He would make a good 'friendly Persian' for Greek characters to meet, or a distraction for out-timers in a historical parallel.

Sir Guy FitzWilliam   *150 points*

Attributes: ST 12 [20], *DX* 11 [20], *IQ* 10 [0], *HT* 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d+2/1d-1; BL 29 lbs; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Move 5 [0].

Social Background: TL3, CF Latin Christendom [0]; Languages Norman French (Native/None) [-3], Old English (Accented/None) [2], Greek (Broken/Broken) [2].

Advantages: Fit [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Independent Income 5 [5], Legal Enforcement Powers [10], Status 3 [10*], Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50].

Disadvantages: Duty (Lord, 12 or less) [-10]; Laziness [-10], Lecherousness (12) [-15], Reputation -1 (Weak lord, subjects and stronger-willed Normans, all the time) [-2], Reputation -2 (Conqueror, the English, all the time) [-5].

Primary Skills: Axe/Mace (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Bow (DX/A) DX-1 [1]-10, Brawling (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12, Broadsword (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-12, Lance (DX/A) DX [2]-11, Shield (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12, Spear (DX/E) DX+1 [4]-12, Thrown Weapon (Spear) (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-12, Wrestling (DX/A) DX-1 [1]-10; Riding (Equines) (DX/A) DX+2 [8]-13, Soldier/TL (IQ/A) IQ+2 [8]-12.

Secondary Skills: Administration (IQ/A) [2], Area Knowledge (England) [1], Area Knowledge (Normandy) [1], Savoir-Faire (IQ/E) IQ+1 [2]-11, Tactics (IQ/H) [1], Jumping (DX/E) [2].

Background Skills: Dancing (DX/A) DX-1 [1]-10, Falconry (IQ/A) [1], Law (Local customary) (IQ/H) IQ-2 [1]-8.

* One level free from Filthy Rich.

Quirks: Ruthless when he sets his mind on something; likes telling stories of his adventures, but does it badly; vocally pious; keeps his gear brightly polished at all times (makes him easy to spot); hates Norsemen.

Equipment: Steel pot-helm with nasal, mail hauberk (protects torso, groin, skull, arms and half the legs), fine lance, broadsword, small axe. Dappled grey-and-white warhorse, riding horse, and packhorse; all horses have appropriate tack and saddles.

Appearance: A scarred, redheaded man with big lips and an athletic figure, dressed in good clothes and wearing a sword.

Sir Guy is that rarity, a successful adventurer. He left his father's estate in Normandy as a young man, and drifted south to Italy to fight for the Greek Emperor. The women were good, but the pay was poor, and the fighting was too desperate for his liking. He saved just enough money to buy passage on a boat heading back to Normandy in time to join Duke William's expedition against England. He managed to escape both disease and angry Englishmen, and was rewarded with an estate in western England. The local peasants don't like him, but have heard of plenty of worse overlords. If he bothers their wives and daughters, he is not otherwise oppressive. Despite his piety and laziness he is protective of his rights, and he has clashed with the local church over legal authority. He is mostly satisfied with what he has, but wants a proper Norman wife. His current mistress, Cuthild, is pregnant and has her own feelings about this . . .

Sir Guy is equally comfortable fighting on foot or on horseback, although he avoids marching whenever possible. Sometimes he charges with his lance couched under his armpit, but he is more comfortable fighting in the traditional manner, thrusting or throwing his lance underhand (use the Spear or Thrown Weapon (Spear) skill). He could make a good opponent for a group of low-powered English characters, an interesting contact for some Norman ones, or a foil for a reform-minded cleric. He is one of the few people in eleventh-century England who can read any Greek, which could also make him useful to desperate adventurers. He could be set in another medieval setting, such as Yrth, with slight changes of back-story and gear.

Akechi Sengoku   *150 points*

Attributes: ST 11 [10], *DX* 12 [40], *IQ* 11 [20], *HT* 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d+1/1d-1; BL 24 lbs; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Move 5 [0].

Social Background: TL4; CF Japanese [0]; Languages Japanese (Native/Native) [0], Korean (Accented/None) [2].

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness 2 [4], Fit [5], Status 2 [5*], Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper (12) [-10*], Callous [-5], Enemy (Bounty hunters and the authorities in several districts, 9 or less; Hunter) [-20], Intolerance (Uppity poor people) [-5], Reputation -3 (Coward, to honorable samurai who know he survived his master: 10 or less) [-2].

Quirks: Fatalistic and lives for the present; mean drunk; hates gunpowder weapons and those who use them against gentlemen; tries to behave honorably; showy fighter.

Primary Skills: Bow (DX/A) DX+2 [8]-14, Broadsword (DX/A) DX+1 [4]-13, Guns/TL 4 (Pistol) DX [1]-12, Judo (DX/H) DX [4]-12, Polearm (DX/A) [2], Riding (Equines) (DX/A) DX+2 [8]-14, Shortsword (DX/A) DX [2]-12, Soldier/TL (IQ/A) IQ+1 [4]-12, Two-Handed Sword (DX/A) DX+2 [8]-14. 41

Secondary Skills: Area Knowledge (local region) (IQ/E) IQ+1 [2]-12, Climbing (DX/A) DX [2]-12, Jumping (DX/E) DX+1 [2]-13, Savoir-Faire (IQ/E) IQ+1 [2]-12, Tactics (IQ/H) IQ-1 [2]-10. 10

Background Skills: Armory/TL (Body armor) (IQ/A) IQ [2]-11, Poetry (IQ/A) IQ-1 [1]-10, Theology (Buddhist) (IQ/H) IQ-2 [1]-9, Singing (HT/E) HT [1]-11.

* One level free from Very Wealthy.

Equipment: Fine katana, fine composite bow, naginata, hip quiver and 20 arrows, wheelock pistol (concealed on his person), set of lacquered hide lamellar armor (protects torso, groin, neck, and legs to the knees; treat as DR 2 leather), steel pot-helm with face-mask. Good warhorse and ordinary packhorse; both horses have appropriate tack and saddle. He often leaves the naginata behind when fighting on horseback so he has both hands free to draw a bow.

Appearance: A wiry, clean-shaven Japanese man with rounded features, dressed in good but somewhat soiled and mismatched robes and armor.

Akechi is a master-less samurai in the wars of sixteenth-century Japan. Akechi's previous master was killed in battle against a neighboring lord and his musket-armed militia. Akechi escaped from that battle with a musket ball through his chest and an abiding hatred for lowly peasants who dare to stand against their betters. His prejudices don't stop him from working with commoners, or carrying a small pistol as a backup, though! On the day that his master died he decided that he would do what he needed to do to survive until the day of his fated death.

He wanders Japan, falling in and out with other groups of renegades and working for local lords. Eventually his temper slips, or someone learns of his past "cowardice." He is known as a useful ally, but unreliable, and a hard man. He fights ferociously, and rarely shows mercy. Sometimes he has stooped to banditry, with the result that there is a small price on his head. He makes an unpleasant ally or villain for a party of Japanese characters, and could be found almost anywhere in East Asia with a slightly different back-story. He could inspire a mercenary in almost any disorderly setting with a strong warrior class.

A Mélange of Magical Creatures XI

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

The tenth time's the charm when it comes to this collection of unusual entities. This time, we turn our attention to a smaller world . . . one that's sure to get under your skin in more ways than one.

Mageburn

"Mageburn is a blight on our guilds. It claims the lives of more mages than any other disease. Magic is a necessary industry, so we are trying to find non-magical solutions for the resistant curse. The presence of this plague is known throughout the world."
-- Ymitri Azilo, *Magical Disasters*

Mageburn is a magical, magic-resistant disease that steals life from a victim. Fortunately for civilization in general, it only affects people with Magical Aptitude, using that connection with magic to power itself. Each day it sucks more life from its victim. Non-constant Magery prolongs the cycles and pain; for example, night-only Magery mages lose life at about half normal rate.

The disease makes a patch of its victim's skin glow a florescent color. In some victims it turns pink, some blue, and others green. The pathogen normally takes only one color per person, although the same strain can express itself differently with different victims. The affected area itches and burns as the colors visibly throb. In the worst cases with victims with high Magery, the affliction actually appears to be flames that cause the victim agony (1d/2 shock penalty), although these flames cause no heat and do not affect others. Exposure to a no-mana zone will only make the virus dormant, although damage inflicted can heal normally. The cycle continues where it left off should the patient re-renter an area with mana.

Encountered

Mageburn is likely be seen first, before contracted. Magic-using characters should be worried when they hear about health and fatigue-draining *magical, magic-resistant, mage-only* diseases. Mild strains can be deliberately introduced as fashion, and to try to build up resistance. Settings with unstable magic and many young casters could expect different magical and magic-resistant diseases. However, entering a standard Low-Mana zone will afford the victim +5 to rolls to recover from this disease. It would seem likely that proliferators of this disease could be a large organization bent on removing mages from seats of power.

Industrial Uses

"What other plagues will be unleashed by common magic use? Everyone is afraid even to get near this plague. How will we be readied?"
-- Sage Antonius, *Practice safe hex*

The pigments from mageburn are useful for magical tattoos, and a carrier for tailored follow-up diseases and curses. Organizations might make use of similar organisms, perhaps even a weakened strain of this plague, to test individuals for Magery. This might take the form of blood testing in a laboratory, or simply infecting a group of students at a school. Some guilds have been using mageburn to help create wizard marks. In either case, the visibility of a victim's Aura is increased by Magery.

Game Mechanics

Mageburn is dangerous within 20 yards of an infected individual (or area): Roll vs. HT - Victim's Magery - Target's Magery, +1 per yard distance. The most effective way to resist the effects is using a HT-augmenting spell effect, such as Vigor, and then journeying into a Low-Mana zone. This sickness is defined as follows: HT-Magery; 1 day Onset; 1d+Magery FP; 1 day cycle; HT-Magery to recover. However, entering a standard Low-Mana zone will afford the victim +5 to rolls to recover from this disease. The disease cannot defend itself properly against the body's defenses in a low-mana zone. Ironically, a no-mana zone is more dangerous (in the long term) than a Low-Mana zone, since mageburn hides itself in such areas.

Adventure Possibility

The heroes have been hired to find a way to deliver a case of mageburn, supposedly to embarrass a very pompous mage. Little do they realize what else it carries: a mind-control spell. Victims of this strain will have to fight it off every night until the plague is cured or the brainwashing takes effect. If the intended victim is successfully infcted, this fact will become obvious when he goes to make a scheduled speech; when he begins, his opinions on certain political matters have turned completely, surprising anyone familiar with his work and ideals.

Mageburn

Appearance: Glowing patches of a victim's skin that are warm to the touch.
Category: Virus, magical.
Diet: Manavore.
HT 12.
Traits: Magic Resistance (Improved) 5; Metabolism Control 1 (Hibernation; automatic in No-mana zone)

Whispers

"Only recently identified as a life form, this species of energy beings is slowly migrating to our world. Those on the other side can see across space, and send messages to those traveling to our plane. This can make for an unwilling prophet if the being becomes stuck in a host."
--Divination For Village Idiots

First identified during a flu epidemic, early descriptions of these beings simply noted "a whisper in the dark." The real breakthrough was made when technicians were able to detect a dimensional distortion opening during the height of a patient's fever, followed by a change in the victim's brainwaves or aura, as if they were not alone. Could it be that at the height of the sickness, a pathway opens for pilgrims from another dimension?

Very few individuals stay infected for long. As individuals enter the fever trance, they can communicate with the other side, becoming an "oracle," of sorts. To maintain the oracle power, they must touch at least one person per day. The Whisper that resides with them has Will 15, IQ 12. Treat as per Epilepsy (see the ***Basic Set***).

Encountered

Prophecy and far-sight requires these "oracles" to enter a state of fitful sleep, send a message into the "old world," and receive a reply in the same session. The entire process takes 1d+2 hours.

Being touched by someone newly infected or an oracle can set in motion a "curse" that causes the new victim to subconsciously perform a ritual to bring in a spirit to this world. A few medics have discovered that they can ask some sick people questions, and *other* sick people in the vicinity can carry the answer back.

Industrial Uses

"An empathic friend of mine was recently ill, and she claims to have made contact with the Whispers while in the fever dream. She sent images of the pain to the spirit and asked it 'why?' She said the response translated to 'regretfully necessary." Of course, this was in the middle of a fever dream, but it is the most reputable tale of contact to date."
-- Tychnius the Elder, *Planar Visions*

The idea of far-seeing and instantaneous communications without a range appeals to many individuals and organizations. Alchemists theorize that leftover essence after arriving may be containable, perhaps leading into a doorway to the home dimension. Further experimentation is difficult, as their apparent need for information implies that they are intelligent.

The Truth?

These beings can scry from their home plane, and send word through the connection formed while a host is in a fever. Although Whisperers are certain that it is a peaceful immigration, all individuals are very tight-lipped about where they go once they arrive. Some sages suspect that it may be to leave for another plane of existence through a different fever dream. The beings that chase them may not be so friendly, and have no compassion for the sick . . .

Adventure Possibility

A doomsayer comes to the heroes, screaming about unseen invaders that have made his brother sick. If the adventurers can cure his brother, they might be able to quiet the preacher, averting mass panic. Either way, the sickness will run its course in 3d days. Until then, they will have to contend with disappearances and murders of sick individuals in the city, as a crazed killer is using the sown confusion as an excuse to cleanse the planet . . .

Game Mechanics

Victims resist infection with HT, plus modifiers such as Magic Resistance, Fit, and Resistance to Disease. Those victims who are already under a form of mental coercion are immune to the final summoning ritual, but still suffer the physical side effects (page 12 of *Magic*). Each infection gives a victim +1 to fight off a future infection. On a roll of 18, or a successful Will roll to invite the creature to stay, it *can* remain. Some psionic powers may also offer protection.

Whispers

Appearance: No known appearance.
Category: Energy Beings.
Diet: Unknown.
ST 8; DX 8; IQ 10; HT 12.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 5.
Traits: Astral Entity (page 263 of the ***Basic Set***), Compulsive Behavior (Answering Questions); Telecommunication (Shortwave; Accessibility: Only while in unconscious fever: Requires preparation)

Variant: Rival

Traits: As above, plus Callous; Obsession (Revenge)

Living Tattoos

"It was my first time in the big city. I was eating lunch at an indoor café on the ridge. While I was looking out the window, a man with a vibrant tattoo on his arm sat down with someone at the window side table. I tried not to stare as the cameo in the tattoo moved on its own. I was taken aback when a tattoo of a boat sailed past it and up his arm!"

-- Mordok the Unseen

The first sightings of these creatures date back to tribal shamans imbuing warriors with "the strength of the living spirits" to give them endurance. These symbionts wander the body, eating parasites and cleaning wounds. An advantage of their use as a tattoo medium is that the drawing can be made in an area with duller, flatter skin, and later coaxed to a sensitive area, such as the eyelid. They can be corralled to stay in one area, but then they can only service that area. Most can be trained to come to a certain point on command, to show others. "Free-roaming" living tattoos are not very good as a brand, except as a backup means of identification. There are rumors of variants that can "live" on chitin and scales.

Encountered

Adventurers will likely encountered these strange creatures as tattoos on people, or perhaps animals. On giant beasts, such as whales, these creatures could be real hazards.

Industrial Uses

"I was finally able to convince the shaman to let me observe the process of making the tattoo, if I promised not to give the details away, so I cannot. The dyes were mixed with an 'élan vital,' which, supposedly would bring the drawing to life. The process of drawing the tattoo seemed to take hours, and it was difficult to see without getting in her way. Finally, it was done, and the image rippled to life, as a rock dropped into a still pond, but in reverse. It soon slid out of the way. The shaman bandaged the operating site as it bled slightly. We led the horse outside, and I was surprised to see it wander over the animal's nose. I guess they need to see the sun, too."
-- Franz Zeiteil, *Warhorses of Taz*

Industrial and the military use these animals in the upkeep of cattle and war mounts. The tattoos are not visible under fur, and thus are less elaborate in colder climes. In hotter climates, the nose art on a war elephant can be terrifying, indeed! These life forms can easily hold enchantments such as knack tattoos (see the vignette on page 56 of *Magic*) if drawn in a sympathetic shape.

Adventure Possibility

The heroes are to intercept a message, and deliver it to the next town. Their contact lets them know at the last moment that it is on a cow. What no one but the sending agent knows is that it is a "living" tattoo. Not even he knows that it is a shy two-dimensional creature. Complications arise when enemy agents get on their trail, and the cow is recalcitrant to move. Can the adventurers keep from leaving behind telltale signs of a cow's passage?

Game Mechanics

To add such a creature with a tattoo, roll against the lower of Professional Skill (Living Tattoo) and either Artist (Tattoo) for static images that still slide around, or Artist (Illusion) for animated images.

The time it takes for the tattoo to react depends on its average proximity to the wound. A tiny tattoo (1 sq. in.) will arrive in about 20 seconds, a large one (1 sq. ft.), in 10 seconds, and a huge one in 2 seconds. Divide the time in the category by the number of tattoos in that category (minimum 1 second delay), and take the lowest of the three delay categories.

Note that the larger the tattoo, the more likely it will be struck in combat (see page 19 of the *Basic Set*). Solid, framed tattoos might qualify as a "box" for +2 to hit, while scattered grids might be at -1.

Living Tattoos (1 square inch)

Appearance: Any drawn image.

Category: Unknown.
Diet: Carnivore and photovore.
ST 1; DX 4; IQ 1; HT 12.
Will 8; Per 8; Speed 4; Dodge 8; Move 4.
SM -11; DR 1.
Traits: Affliction (Cosmic; Advantage: Sanitized Metabolism; Accessibility: Host only; only areas the tattoo is limited to); Body of Shadow; Combat Reflexes; Dependency (Host; Very Common; Constantly; Hibernate only); Domestic Animal.
Skills: First Aid-12.
Notes: Steals 1 HP per month.

Giant Living Tattoos (1 sf)

ST 3; DX 3; IQ 1; HT 13.
Will 9; Per 9; Speed 4; Dodge 8; Move 4.
SM -4; DR 2.
Notes: Steals 1 HP per week.

Humungous Living Tattoos (1 sq. yd.)

ST 9; DX 2; IQ 1; HT 14.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 4; Dodge 8; Move 4.
SM -2; DR 4.
Notes: Steals 1 HP per Day.
Notes: Average surface area of an average weight ST 10 man is 2,880 square inches or 20 sq. ft or 2.22 sq. yd.

Hypermorphosis Virus

"Aye was jus' gonna' nip into the O'Larry henhouse to borree a few eggs. I snuck into the pen, fine, but them dry twigs on the ground snapped somethin' fierce. A few o' the chick'ns woke, and started cooin'. There ain't been much light, but I swear one of them hens burst outta her feathers and leapt at my throat! Wrastlin', I managed to throw it off, and get outta' there. When I stopped runnin', I realized I had red fur in ma' clenched fists."
-- Overheard at the tavern *The Otter's Tale*

This strain of therianthropy was developed as a research tool to study the effects of such viruses on lab animals. Affecting only "lower" animals, this disease turns a timid creature into a single form of a natural predator for its species. In general, the hypermorphosis virus does not affect carnivores or creatures larger than a small sheep or small pig. Rumors persist of strains that can turn chickens into foxes, hares into ferrets, parakeets into falcons, and mice into cats.

Encountered

If controlled carefully, it can be used to protect a herd by affecting a single member to let it confront attackers.

Industrial Uses

"So, you heard about those chickens that can turn into foxes? That's sure something you don't expect. It's a good thing it doesn't work on cows! What's next, a toaster that turns into a microwave?"
-- Andi Tellain, Jester

This virus can be used to turn low-energy animals such as chickens and mice into higher-energy animals for fur, such as foxes and mink. Shapechanging spells can be aided, if one wants to turn into one of the two creatures.

Adventure Possibility

Something has been breaking into hen houses and removing only the roosters. Some prints point to a fox, but attempts to track or locate it come to nothing. Authorities would certainly like the culprit brought in alive for examination, if convenient. The culprit is a rooster were-fox that has been taking out the competition. After a merry romp through the forest or city, perhaps encountering rogues and monsters on the way, the heroes can triumphantly bring in the offender. Unless the players think to look into it, next month, when the eggs hatch, there will be a number of chicken were-foxes around. This strain of the virus affects only males; a GM should consider it infecting other small males in the vicinity of the heroes as well as an additional clue.

Shadow Moss

"Shadow moss is a severely misunderstood life form. Almost every book I have encountered it in lists it as something of pure evil. It is simply a malleable tool for individuals of that mindset. Here, let me show you."
-- His Grace, the Bishop of Cleeberry

Technically a lichen, this life form feeds on emotions, reacting to hate and loathing the strongest. People often get angry when a strange moss grows on their house, and this breeds hate in the creature. It can be frightening to watch a matte mass slowly spreading, taking over the roof of a building within days. The spores of shadow moss are relatively few for a fungus, making the mass fairly safe to work around. The colony shares resources to some extent. Cells in well-lit areas photosynthesize and store energy for use where light levels are low. The colony shares resources as if a single organism, allowing portions in low-light to receive energy gained in photosynthesis.

Encountered

It is said that jails and hospitals often attract this life form due to the emotional power these facilities foster. It is uncertain whether the emotions of undead can feed shadow moss, although some note (and worry) that cemeteries tend to accumulate the lichen. In some regions, it has a reputation of *being* evil, due to perceived association with negative emotion, although there has been no solid proof of this association. Conversely, there are places of healing that deliberately place careful "potted" mats of shadow moss to encourage loving thought. Undue shadow moss growth will be associated with negative emotions, and this may effect visitors' reactions to those in the area. Continued fungal growth may mean mandatory counseling, magical healing, or other setting-appropriate action.

Industrial Uses

"A strange use found for shadow moss is as a basic enemy detector. Unfortunately, it is vague as a reader cannot be sure that the emotions detected are against the organization or a specific person present."
--*Magic Security Monthly*

Oddly enough, the first multipurpose use of this life form is as paint. The moss is grown, and then scraped off, permanently staining the wood underneath. The easiest way to bottle food for it is using the essence of a previous batch of shadow moss. Dark villains or altruistic leaders always want to do more with this creature. Some individuals keep shadow moss to vent their anger, and claim to be refreshed afterward.

Adventure Possibility

The heroes are hired as bodyguards for a young rich man who turns out to be near-consumed with dreams of vengeance. He is set to take down a misanthropic local crime lord who has despicable personal habits. The adventurers must pass checkpoints without letting their hate fester . . .

Shadow Moss

Appearance: A matte black lichen - a fungal-photobiont symbiosis.
Category: Unknown.
Diet: Emotivore, Photovore.
HT 11.
Traits: Detect (Strong Negative Emotion); Leech (Maledication; Ranged 1; Requires Strong Negative Emotion).

Bone Plague

"I am writing this because my brother was changed by the plague that ravages our city. He is no longer himself. He does not remember our mother, nor the dog we had as a child. I fear for us all, as I, too feel the first of these symptoms. I sincerely hope that this is not the end, but farewell, mother."
-- The last written words of Enrico, before becoming known as Enrico the ripper, notorious mass murderer

From a distance, the symptoms if the bone plague appear to be those of a virulent cold. The patient gets allergenic symptoms, such as coughing and a runny nose, followed by a debilitating fever. A patient is bedridden for a few days, and then the fever breaks, and the body recovers quickly. Although a few weaker individuals die from fevers every year, most make a full recovery within a week or two. However, the bone plague has an odd property: A select few have reported some partial or even total amnesia, which sometimes recovers with time. Those interviewed during recovery seem to be looking for something; in fact, there is another, near-unknown property of the bone plague: Those thoroughly infected are actually possessed by an entity intent on xenophobic rage.

Encountered

If the bone plague already exists in a setting, then chances are that the adventurers have likely been close to someone infected. If one is familiar with the Whispers' plague, the two are superficially similar. At close examination, the afflictions may be distinguished by their divergent neurological effects, which may allow a clue as to how to develop a cure.

Industrial Uses

*"It is a waking nightmare to see so many friends and colleagues simply **replaced** with strangers. These individuals that have the same scars, blood, and eyes, but different auras and facial expressions."*
-- Alix Trutuk, *War of Beans*

Although it is an unusual technique, perhaps the illness can cause messages to be delivered circumspectly: If a group of individuals are given an important secret message and then exposed to the pathogen to induce amnesia, then the group can travel without fear of mental discovery or physical coercion. (A group should be so infected in case the amnesia is permanent.) If fully harnessed and controlled, the memory-erasing effects can be useful in a pacifistic society instead of a death penalty. The "clean slate" nature of the permanent form of the amnesia could spark a nature-versus-nurture debate, as subjects could be re-raised in a new environment. It can be used to guarantee spies' loyalty, safeguard industrial secrets, and to undermine an opposing army's willpower.

Adventure Possibility

A wizard claims to have captured an invading being from another plane, but fears that other agents of the entity might be after the captive. He hires the heroes to set up traps and later protect the shop from intruders while tests are conducted. Meanwhile, the adventurers will have to deal with jabbering politicians, arson, rioters, and more ordinary folk that seem to be causing trouble; a virulent form of the bone plague is intent on protecting its brethren. Just as some useful findings are almost complete, there could be a mass escape from the local jail, and the curiously organized mob rushes the lab . . .

Game Mechanics

When a person is sick with the "Bone Plague," he must make a HT roll, modified by Magic Resistance or Susceptibility. A critical failure on the health roll (usually 17 or 18) means "death," but after 1d minutes life resumes, but with the "patient" suffering from amnesia. If DX, Magery or psionics are mental traits (as opposed to physical), they are now gone with the original mind (see Mind Transfer, page 296 of the *Basic Set*).

Bone Plague

Appearance: True form unknown.
Category: Being of Pure Thought.
Diet: Unknown.
ST 10; DX 10; IQ 11; HT 12.
Will 14; Per 11; Speed 5.5; Dodge 8; Move 5.
Traits: Being of Pure Thought; Sadism (Not own species).

Host of the Bone Plague

ST +2 (Max*: 14); DX +2 (Max*: 12); IQ 12 to 14; HT +2 (Max*: 14).
Traits: Amnesia (Total).

* No increase beyond 14 as the parasite cannot control beyond this level, even if the host's physical ability is higher.

Keyworms

"These bugs can allow less-talented individuals a quick way into the criminal agency, but they have a price. They seem to keep traces of blood from everyone who feds it in the last week or month. One lesson is 'don't use second-hand tools.'"
-- Detective Igram Madson, *Tredroy Allied Guard*

This tiny brown-gray invertebrate fits to shapes, possibly an adaptation to stay inside crevasses in rocks or trees in swamps; the obvious usage for picklocks (legitimate or otherwise) led to the name "keyworms." Unfortunately, the creature has an instinct to become rigid when it becomes stressed, making it hard to pull it out of a hole.

A keyworm drinks blood like a leech, making small, diamond-shaped wounds. In feeding, it becomes very pliable, and placid for hours, until it becomes hungry again, or is scared. When it is squeezed, the whole creature becomes rigid, and surprisingly effective as a key. Thus, the keyworm is fast becoming the tool of choice for thieves and infiltrators, until forensic and law enforcement technology catches up. According to the word on the street, a person can tell a leech's individual moods by the kind of marks it makes.

Encountered

Keyworms are a dramatic tool to encounter, likely as a thief shows a PC the "real" way to pick a lock. These living tools don't rust and are not detectable as metal.

Preventative measures must be drastic to keep keyworms from being effective -- contact poisons don't work well, and can be dangerous for normal users. A messy solution is to embed razors into locks. Thus adventurers may encounter bleeding locks (which may cause them to interpret the locks as an omen or an evil sort of foreshadowing). Some agencies have reported some success in marking keyholes with pheromones that prevent keyworms from tensing up. Problems include time delays and the fact that not all worms respond equally to the scents.

Keyworms are presented as a socially dangerous creature, and can pass on germs through themselves and on keyholes. As a vector for disease, it is recommended that a person never feed a worm, and one should always wear gloves when holding one. Paradoxically, gloves inhibit fine motor control, and thus are eschewed by picklocks . . .

Industrial Uses

"It is considered a mark of bravado for master thief to eat his keys after he thinks he's done with them, disposing of the evidence in a dramatic way. This works very well, as long as no one empties his stomach."
-- Detective Marcius Askelon, *Megalos PD*

Some companies have begun to make locks without keys, specifically requiring a person to use such a lock pick. This has led to the creation of locks almost impossible to open even with a standard key lock picks. This arms race will only hold until the underground get enough keyworms of their own, at which point it becomes a novelty. Options for utilizing keyworms in enchantments include those effects that alter a subject's fortitude or flexibility. The widespread proliferation of the keyworm may result in the emergence of keyless entry, whether by ways magical or mundane (such as combination locks).

Game Mechanics

On locks not designed to resist keyworms, this creature provides +1 to +5 to skill. A GM may wish to limit the bonus to 1/4 the character's Animal Handling (Keyworm) skill.

Adventure Possibility

The owner of a an inner-city medical clinic comes to the PCs. It seems that a virus or plague is sweeping the streets. It is not debilitating at first, but sets in after a month. It is passed by blood, and official responses are nominal and slow to arrive. A careful reading of the expressions of the prominent politicians suggests that they endorse the disease. Perhaps they released it to wipe out crime and homeless people. Although, if so, the vector for how it was spread initially may surprise (and horrify) the heroes . . .

Keyworms

Appearance: A grey-brown worm.
Category: "Insect" (worm).
Diet: Carnivore.
HT 12.
Will 6; Per 6; Move 1/4.
SM -8 (5" long).
Traits: Combat Paralysis; Flexibility (Double-jointed); No Manipulators; Regrowth; Vermiform; Wild Animal.

Beyond Fantasy

This installment's creatures could be altered to exist in hard-science worlds, even if the more wondrous aspects can't translate directly. Mageburn can be merely an unusually vivid phage. Whispers are energy beings or hallucinations. Living Tattoos might be made of nanomachines. The Hypermorphosis Virus could be a virus that changes the scent of a creature to emit hallucinogens. Shadow Moss could merely react to the stimulus of loud noises (which would mean roadways and airports could have large accumulations of it). The Bone Plague might just be a vicious mental disease that affects the memory and personality of its victim. Keyworms can translate fairly directly, although the need for such a lockpicking device is questionable in the future; regardless, they are still good vectors of disease.

Pyramid Articles

- "Deathtrap Construction Kit" by Chad Underkoffler
- "Tattoo 2.0" by R. J. Heath
- "Marks of Distinction" by Daniel Bronson

* * *

Special thanks to JT Hatlen Linnell for helping sort the plagues and viruses...

Sidekicks: A New Look at Child's Play

by Brian Rogers

Comic tropes are like fashion: they change over time without discernible cause, and you can look back on decades old photos and say "Why the heck was I wearing that?!?" What you're wearing in this case is a costume disturbingly similar to your mentor's and an innocent grin that makes your older self take two insulin shots and go to bed. Once all the rage, of late sidekicks have fallen out of vogue, replaced by, um, adventurous teenage heroes who bear a striking similarity to a major figure with whom they occasionally work. OK, so there are still sidekicks, but they're more angst prone and independent. Still, it's easy to say that the glory days of the sidekick are past.

But what glory days they were! Even into the silver age DC had sidekicks a'plenty (in the early Pre-crisis Justice League of America there were seven heroes and seven sidekicks, plus one for the team as a whole) and even the less sidekick friendly Marvel universe had Wyatt Wingfoot and Rick Jones (who would sidekick to anyone for panel space). So if you're going to run a supers game, you have to give sidekicks some thought, if only to figure out why you shouldn't have them. The following is a deconstruction of the various types, how to model them with game mechanics, with examples tying back to the [Omniman Family](#).

Sidekick Breeds

*The Protégé

The classic super-hero sidekick is the apprentice who happens to share the hero's powers: Robin, Kid Flash, Aqualad, Speedy, etc. Mechanically this is the easiest to do, as a version of the hero "on the cheap" and doesn't require a lot of new power designs. However, since there's nothing the sidekick can do that the hero can't do better, why bother? The narrative answer is emotional resonance; the Protégé provides a second emotional viewpoint, and shows how different minds will approach problems in different ways with the same tools. The tactical reason is the character can't be in two places at once and can't watch his own back, so the sidekick provides an extra set of eyes and hands.

Best Pals

Almost as common is the normal (if highly capable) human who hangs out with the hero as his best friend. This can pose some mechanical problems, as the Best Pal is usually much less capable than the hero he hangs out with: Jimmy Olsen and Superman, Rick Jones and the Hulk. This means either making use of some mechanical tricks to even the odds (giving the Best Pal a lot of Luck, levels in Hard to Kill, etc.) or just accepting the genre convention that the sidekick will not be a direct target. The Best Pal serves some of the same functions as the Protégé, but often serves as a humanity translator: explaining the world to their alien / monster / time traveler friend and their friend to the world.

Active Contact

One of the sidekicks least often seen as such is the hero's contact who has their own adventurous capacity: the crusading DA, the field testing scientist, the mystic voyager. More potent than the Best Pals, they have specialized skills and limited powers rather than an everyman's versatility and charm. Active Contacts straddle the line between being sidekicks or being contacts, allies and dependents. The determining factors are how often is the character working directly with the hero? And how do the characters view their relationship? Jim Gordon often works directly with the Dark Knight, provides advice and contacts and even occasionally gets held hostage by the villains, but neither he nor Batman see Gordon as a sidekick.

Sidekick Mechanics

Here are a few alternate approaches to the construction of your closest companion.

Allies and Pets

This is how most systems handle Sidekicks: a simple mechanic where the player invests a certain amount of their character's ability into a reliable partner. This gives the player a sizable degree of control over the sidekick's actions, and is usually well balanced.

Omniman has one such sidekick in Omnidog. Most Protégé sidekicks are most easily done via this mechanic.

Duplication

The hero is able to generate an independent, likely less potent version of him or her self. Because this is an independent personality this makes the duplicate more a sidekick than it is an extension of the heroes own being (which is how a duplicate is normally handled). It's up to the GM and player as to which of them has control of the Duplicate's actions; the player might enjoy arguing with himself in the form of two different versions. While the mechanics are via duplication, the breed is very similar to Protégé since the 'sidekicks' powers are usually duplicated.

Omniman has this sort of sidekick by calling on his younger self. Other examples could include Tom Strong's occasionally recruiting of help from his other-dimensional counterparts (such as his funny animal version Warren Strong), or possibly Superman's cadre of Superman-robots, though those seldom provide him with advice as much as they do extra hands. Oftentimes such duplicate sidekicks require being in specific locations or the use of strange devices or rituals to bring the sidekicks into play.

Transfer, Usable By Others or Affliction

The hero is able to give other people some portion of his powers and abilities, turning them into their "Sidekick of the Moment." This is sometimes done magically or bio-chemically ("Here, take a Miraclo pill!"), but it's a great way to increase the punch of a Best Pal or Active Contact, or to make sure that someone on the ground will always have the ability to back you up. Another option is occasionally outfitting people with the hero's lesser used devices, scavenged enemy tech or untried inventions - not technically a Transfer (unless the hero keeps several earlier prototypes of his gear or outdated power suits around for just that purpose) but the concept is the same.

Since Omniman's powers all stem from his ability to make things more powerful, several of his sidekicks have some form of transfer involved - most specifically Omnilass. Dr. Strange has upgraded others with magical powers to help him out, and Tony Stark has given others access to his back up armors when he needed a boost. Jimmy Olsen has had so many short term power sets (I'm fond of the one where his touch brings images to life) that Superman might well have a seldom-used variable power pool transfer for his pal. Few heroes use this on a regular basis - in most cases it's seldom enough to be a story idea rather than something they pay points for - but well worth considering, if only to determine why they _don't_.

Contacts/Dependents

Just as it's possible for allies and contacts to become romantic partners it's possible for any NPC tied to the character by points to take a role as a sidekick . . . of a sort. If the NPC has sufficient power or skill to be able to act effectively on their own, their repeated presence could elevate them to sidekick status, If the hero's kid partner is half as powerful as the hero but it perpetually getting into trouble from which the hero feels obliged to rescue him, is he an accident prone sidekick or a competent DNPC? If the hero's scientific friend appears in every episode to help circumvent the monster's powers or opens wondrous new worlds for the hero to explores, is he a brainy sidekick, or a highly reliable contact?

Omniman has both Professor Blast and Detective Quincy as sidekick/contacts/dependents: both appear regularly, have very useful skills, and are independent players. Given how blurry this dividing line can be, the argument can be made

that almost any sidekick character is actually a dependent, or contact. The real test is who ultimately controls the NPCs actions; if it was purchased as an ally or sidekick then the player has significant, perhaps final, say on what he does. If the NPC was worth points, the GM is in the driver's seat. If the player has flagged the dependent as being highly competent and frequently appearing, some deference might be paid to the sidekick title - the NPC might even think of himself in those terms, even if the character sheet doesn't back him up.

Another Player

Not usually seen as an option, but another player could take the role of the sidekick. The success of the ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** RPG proves that this can be done (on a classic level, Buffy is a solo hero with a broad cast of sidekicks, dependents and contacts), but sidekicks also make great way-stations for part time players, new players learning about RPGs or the system (especially since protégé sidekicks can see what their mentor hero does with the powers and mimic them to get an idea how powers work), or people just in town for one session (as it mitigates the need to play 'introduce the new character'). Plus, players more interested in the narrative or the genre conventions just enjoy playing the second string hero with the new viewpoint.

As was discussed in the article on [League](#) play, all of the Omniman family except his younger self had been designed as secondary PCs by the other League players, but in practice it's Captain Quincy that's usually under another player's control. As a detective and representative of the law she has access to skills and contacts that complement the big guy, as well as the ability to requisition tactical support teams that give the player something to do in major fights. As with the line between sidekicks and dependent/contacts, this one is impossible to clearly define in the source material: there are times when Robin or Rick Jones are independent and potent enough to be under the control of other players, and times when they're not.

Sidekicks in Play

Fortunately, My Trusted Companion Will . . .

Sidekicks make for a great excuse to suddenly change the conditions on the ground: Just as things look really bad for the heroes, the one with the curiously-absent-sidekick narrates out what his faithful companion has been doing (usually setting explosives, shutting down the base's power supply or successfully impersonating one of the mooks) to turn the tables. For narrative gamers, it may be enough that the Sidekick-owning player makes the statement, while more rules-focused GMs can ask for a quick series of rolls (say a stealth, lock-picking and demolitions checks) for the sidekick to get the same effect.

Can We Go Get the Bad-Guys Now? Huh? Can We?

Youthful exuberance is forte of the kid sidekick, and the character can either come to personify the need to protect innocence or give the grim defender a mouthpiece for any emotion the player might want brought to the fore. Sidekicks make great goads to keep the game moving: if the players are making wildly incorrect assumptions the GM can use the sidekick as a "voice on the spot" to point this out; if they're getting bogged down in endless argument they can try to solve the problem themselves and hence provide a new, genre-appropriate looming deadline.

No, Don't Shoot! He's My Friend! And I'm a Federal Marshall!

Sidekicks can provide their own contacts, resources, and status for the heroes to draw on one step removed. A team of high powered heroes might spend an extended story arc on the run with the one government agent who believes them, or trying to learn more about 'the human condition' by driving their super-vehicle-disguised -as-a-tour-bus around the country with a down-and-out rock musician. Either would give them access to skills and societies that they might not otherwise see, and can give monsters or vigilantes an image of respectability in an otherwise hostile environment.

"If this is Singapore, I must be Vijay!"

Finally, there's the idea of a variable or rotating sidekick, where one or more world traveling heroes have allies everywhere who will immediately drop what they're doing and move to help. This gives the players an automatic insight into the local culture and the GM a free pass to dump information on the players from a trustworthy source. If you have a Player-As-Sidekick who is also one who likes making up new characters he could just swap PCs every time the players move to a new locale - this is great way to incorporate such a player into a Wonder/Exploration based campaign. For an example of this, the film *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* can be cast with three players: Polly, Joe, and Joe's rotating sidekick, Dex/Kaji/Franky.

In conclusion, there are a lot of lenses to apply to the classic companion, with varying potency, utility and independence. It's worth taking a look at which might best fit your game before you kick the idea to the side.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

What's an RPG Got in Its Pocketses?

I've been spending my last batch of random personal CPU cycles trying to figure out the answer to one question. Namely, why are there so many songs about rainbows? No, wait; there's only two.

No, the question is a seemingly obvious one, and an answer I find satisfactory has proven as elusive as the question is obvious. Namely, what advantage(s) do RPGs have over other forms of entertainment?

Now, I'm not going to discuss what answers I discarded (although I might return to that list in a future column). However, I was surprised to realize that I only had two answers. However, they're pretty meaty answers, so I'll tackle each answer in its own column.

The first answer is the more obvious one, but it's also the one that's most likely to be rendered obsolete as computer games grow more complex and sophisticated.

RPGs permit the attempt of any type of action the player might want to attempt, with the expectation of an answer more satisfying than, "You can't do that."

Okay; I'm sure this answer *seems* obvious. But let's look at our two-entry truth table.

RPGs let you do unexpected things with the expectation of a rational (if not successful) result. Assuming this is true, then we see the appeal of the "classical" RPG: Any actions for which there are not rules can be attempted, with the GM adjudicating an appropriate response on the fly. Whether throwing sand at an opponent's eyes, kissing the king by surprise, or attempting to make a deal with a monster that it was presumed you would only fight, it's entirely possible for an RPG to exist such that the GM needs to make up a fair bit of actions, reactions, and effects on the fly. But is this a mandate from the heavens?

RPGs *don't* let you do unexpected things. One of the emotions I felt when I first read the final version of the ***Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition Player's Handbook*** was how unbelievably complete it was. It seemed that, literally, *every* possible action possessed an accompanying action and roll, a success at which would bestow some kind of bonus, penalty, or damage. This is especially true if you look at actions along the lines of desired outcomes, rather than discrete actions themselves. For example, an action for which there does not seem to be rules -- such as "I kiss the king" -- has as its core an attempt at a desired outcome. Is the goal to rattle the King? There's rules for confusing an opponent (and an accompanying skill). Is the goal to enrage him? That's a taunt. Is the goal to seduce him? That's a seduction roll. And so on.

Looking at it in this fashion, it's possible to envision an RPG in which it is *not* possible to do unexpected things, simply because all actions have been expected. One early example of this distinction comes from the ***Torg*** RPG, where practically all combat actions could be sorted into a category of (possibly) "approved" actions: attack, trick, taunt, maneuver, and so on.

Non-RPGs don't let you do unexpected things. Again, this is the default position from which I'm working. But, as should be obvious from the point immediately above this one, if the list of "unexpected things" is reduced to zero, then non-RPGs should be able to compete entirely on that ground. Again, interacting with NPCs (Interrogation or Streetwise checks), taunting (Taunting powers or skills), throwing sand in eyes (Improvised weapons and/or Blinding), and so on could all -- theoretically -- be coded out in the not-too-distant future. Even going "off the map" has no meaning if the map is rigidly defined and/or new content can be generated dynamically or randomly as necessary; in the same way that players can't go off the map on an RPG set aboard a space station, players should have no expectation for being able to do so in a computer RPG's solid stone dungeon coded^D^D^D^D^Dcarved centuries ago. Of course, this avoids the "roleplaying" aspect; for example, in a game like ***World of Warcraft,*** there's no contingency for something like taunting monsters or another player.

Or is there?

Non-RPGs *do* let you do unexpected things. All games encourage and often reward thinking "outside the box," which can let players accomplish things even if they weren't the original intent. I have two ***World of Warcraft*** stories to share, both of them expressed by me, someone who hasn't played the game. (Which is prelude to say that if I got a fact wrong or am not explaining it right, I wouldn't be surprised.) First, when the game was released, the various factions couldn't talk to each other; attempts at typing messages to others resulted in those players seeing gibberish. However, people figured out how to use one of the commands -- I believe "emote" or "yell" -- to broadcast messages one character at a time. Some enterprising characters figured out how to make a macro that would take a line of text and craft it into lines readable by the other factions. *Voila!* Instant ability to taunt!

Another great story I've heard about was how one of the guilds managed to get its members to lure one necessary NPC to a remote corner of the game world and cordon him off, making it so that none of the other players (who weren't in the guild) could access him and get the necessary info/item/whatever to continue their own quests.

Both these actions were eventually undone -- a developer patch in the case of the former and an in-game GM resetting the NPC in the case of the latter -- but that doesn't change the fact that players were "rewarded" (up to a point) for their efforts at doing the unexpected . . . just like they would be in a tabletop RPG.

Next week: The second, more complex, less obvious (and more difficult to execute) advantage that RPGs possess.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

The Shackled City Adventure Path (for *Dungeons & Dragons*)

Published by Paizo Publishing

Written by Jesse Decker, James Jacobs, Tito Leati, David Noonan, Christopher Perkins, & Chris Tomasson

Cover by Matt Cavotta

Illustrated by Attlia Adorjany, Tom Baxa, Peter Bergting, Matt Cavotta, Jeff Carlisle, Christine Choi, Stephen Daniele, Omar Dogon, Tom Fowler, Andrew Hou, Ben Huen, Eric Kim, Chuck Lukacs, Val Mayerick, Mark nelson, Ramón Pérez, Chris Stevens, & Jim Zubkavich

Cartography by Christopher West

418-page full-color hardcover; $59.95

Traditionally, the roleplaying scenario comes in just a few parts, typically a trilogy or quartet. Rarely do they come longer, although *The Shackled City Adventure Path* is a rare exception, consisting of 12 parts. Originally appearing separately in issues 97 through 116 of *Dungeon Magazine* as eleven parts, the campaign has now been collated, organized, and updated for presentation as one whole campaign designed to take a party of first level characters right up to 20th level. And that includes the addition of a whole new scenario to those seen in the magazine, designed to smooth play at low levels.

As a campaign, *The Shackled City Adventure Path* is designed for generic *Dungeons & Dragons,* primarily using only the three core books. That said, having copies of the *Monster Manual II, Monster Manual III, Fiend Folio, Draconomicon,* and *Libris Mortis* on hand could prove useful. This generic nature applies equally to the setting; apart from references to the basic pantheon detailed in the *Player's Handbook* and some names drawn from the Greyhawk campaign, the campaign can be placed into almost any *Dungeons & Dragons* world. Not that it needs to be, as the campaign is pretty much self-contained.

The setting for *The Shackled City Adventure Path* is Cauldron, an important trading town built within the caldera of an extinct volcano. The town is only a few centuries old, but the region has a longer, more turbulent history, involving Yuan-Ti, a necromantic cult, demonic infestation, one of history's greatest spell casters, plus several dragons. All of which -- and more -- might become relevant as the characters are thrown up against a plot that just happens to make use of Cauldron's unique location.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

What the villains of the piece have in mind is the destruction of Cauldron by activating the volcano underneath it. Once the lava flows, its power can be harnessed to fuel a ritual that will open a permanent portal between the Material Plane and one deep in the Abyss. Also necessary is the sacrifice of the 13 Shackleborn, individuals born of demonic blood and marked with an invisible sigil, the ritual requiring that they be placed in a tree of Soul Cages. There is the

possibility that one of the player characters is one of the Shackleborn, but in what is really the book's only major downside, this aspect is left relatively unexplored. Of course, this cabal, known as the Cage Wrights, is not the only villain that the player characters will have to face.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The campaign opens with "Life's Bazaar" and a cliché. In the old days, an adventure began in a tavern, with an old man staggering in and delivering a cry for help, before invariably dropping dead at the characters' feet. These days, the cliché to get a campaign going is to have the characters come to the aid of someone in the street. In this instance, three thugs are beating up a priest of the church of St. Cuthbert. The trio has been hired by Cauldron's notorious thieves' guild, The Last Laugh, to dissuade the priest from investigating a recent rash of disappearances including several from the town's orphanage. Besides giving her thanks for their aid, the priest's superior and acting head of the church in Cauldron, Jenya Urikas asks the party to conduct the investigation on her behalf. This leads the characters into an abandoned gnome workshop below Cauldron and below that, the local headquarters of a slave ring. The question is, are the slavers just after more merchandise, or are they working to order?

This first part sets the pattern for much of the campaign. As it progresses, the dungeons grow smaller and smaller, but also deadlier. Yet the campaign is not just a series of dungeon bashes. The party will face several other interesting challenges that include saving a neighborhood from a rampaging Umberhulk; trekking across a level of the Abyss part infused with celestial elements to take the tests that will make them its master; and, when the bad guys' plans come to fruition, working hard to evacuate a panic-stricken city. The dungeons though, are well designed, but take on increasingly tactical and resource management elements as they increase in complexity and lethality.

The campaign is structured in the classic onionskin mode, with a lot of information from the DM to keep on top of, and impart. The players will need to make as many friends as they do enemies, but their efforts should be monetarily and magically rewarding. The structure for the campaign also leaves plenty of room for character research and magical item construction, and whilst there is some railroading, the DM is given several areas to detail himself. That said, there is relatively little advice in terms of running the campaign, which might prove handy if the players wander too far from the plot. Advice on getting the campaign started is good though, suggesting which classes are best suited to the campaign and rewarding characters if they are local to Cauldron. This is in the form of "traits," first seen in ***Unearthed Arcana,*** which give benefits and drawbacks that fit easily into the campaign.

Physically, ***The Shackled City Adventure Path*** is a nice presentation in full color, with a chain motif used in the page margins throughout. A pleasing touch is the coming apart of the chains as you progress through the book. The artwork is also good, although it would have been nice to see some of this presented in a manner that could be shown to the players. Everything from the campaign's NPCs and monsters (standard and new), to the new Prestige classes, feats and magic, are handily organized into several appendices. This is awkward for including the protagonists though, meaning that no little preparation is required. The cartography -- presented in a poster map of Cauldron and its surroundings and as a booklet of the dungeons -- is never less than superb.

The Shackled City Adventure Path is nothing less than a challenge, both to run and to play. In part it feels a little old fashioned, harking back to ***Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*** campaigns like ***A1-4, Scourge of the Slavelords*** and ***GDQ1-7, Queen of the Spiders,*** but this is a more modern affair, not dissimilar to ***The Enemy Within*** campaign of ***Warhammer Fantasy Role Play*** fame. It certainly possesses the same grand, epic scale, yet more particular to this campaign is the serialized structure that means the time and effort needed to invest in this campaign can be more easily halted and come back to at a later date. This is the best way to really play what is an epic affair, much more than a mega-dungeon. ***The Shackled City Adventure Path*** is a big investment, not just in time, but also money, but it more than delivers with the fate of Cauldron relying completely in the hands of the players.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Dilbert: The Board Game

Published by [Hyperion](#)

Designed by Eric Lang

Graphics by Simon Stone, Brian Wood

Copy editing by Pat Harrigan

Full-color boxed set with game board, six-sided die, six employee stand-ups, six employee cards, Pointy-Haired Boss stand-up, plastic stands, 15 glass signature tokens, 70 memo cards, 26 project cards, 18 consultant cards, 18 trait tokens, 17 work tokens, six happiness tokens, six cubicle tokens, two donut tokens, one out of order token, one Todd token, one Ted token, one family portrait token, one plastic plant token, rulebook; $29.95

Scott Adams, creator of the mega-popular Dilbert comic strip, has been accused of having spies in everyone's office. How else could his observations be so piercing? Well, the folks at Hyperion must have agents in everyone's game group, because they've developed a fine adaptation that brings the strip to the tabletop while maintaining its cursed humor. Everyone must now report to work at *Dilbert: The Board Game.*

The object of the game -- designed for two to six players with an hour playing time -- is to have the highest Happiness level when the boss finally gets traded to upper management.

Players take an employee playing piece and the card and work tokens that accompany it. Three to six drudges can take part. Everyone gets lined up in cubicles; the closer one is to the boss, the unhappier one becomes, knowing at any moment the call could come to perform the most pointless task first (cube position breaks many ties). Every character is rated for Motivation (how far he can move), Apathy, Incompetence, and Offensiveness. What no one has a lot of is Happiness, and they'll spend the game trying to get it.

Each turn, characters find themselves assigned to horrible, thankless projects, and they wander the halls and offices of the board in hope of finding all the signatures they need for the job. They may be helped by Memo cards; these offer ways of skirting danger or foisting things off on someone else. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome may place the burden of making die rolls on another player; Casual Day could work against any player wearing blue jeans; and Sexual Harassment hurts those who touch someone else's tokens. If someone gets a signature from all the departments involved in a task, the project is killed (no one wants to take responsibility for that particular turkey).

Those signatures may not be easily secured if the employee runs afoul of one of many pitfalls. Meeting the boss knocks a character over and darns him to Heck. Some tasks are assigned to, say, "the most Offensive employee," and if someone chooses to switch their level of that stat with someone else they may dodge that bullet. Worse still, a set of Dogbert's consultant cards sit in the middle of the board, and anyone who stumbles into the meeting there may trigger one. These make life even more miserable for everyone (except Dilbert, who can ignore them; and anyone currently enjoying the anonymity of the restroom). For example, budget cutbacks drain Happiness every time the sufferer touches the die. Other cards may require everyone to guess the next die result or to compliment the active player, and Proprietary Non-Disclosure Policy makes the game worth buying all on its own.

But once the signatures are in hand, they can be placed on a matching project. Enough of them kill an assignment. That's good for anyone working on it, because every turn players lose Happiness for their tasks. The person who ends an assignment gains Happiness. When a character and the Pointy-Haired Boss cross each other on the Happiness track, the poor taskmaster gets traded to upper management. The player with the highest final score, as adjusted by things like how good their current cubicle assignment is, claims what little victory his dead-end position allows him.

The best part about the pieces is how big and bright they are. There's not a lot of time wasted on overly fancy graphics. The game shares the cartoon strip's Spartan sense of style and décor, favoring the simple over the detailed. Cartoon blurbs are scattered throughout the game's equipment and the rulebook is clear and concise. Everyone's skills (Apathy and so on) are tracked on the board using markers, and these are unfortunately quite small. Also, the board seems to warp without too much effort.

A lot of games like this turn out to be gimmicky cash-in opportunities, and while that would be quite Dilbertesque, this game makes players laugh just reading the rules. It becomes funnier still when all the separate ways to hose players come together to make life miserable for all concerned. Touches like drawing a real and practical distinction between the employees and the players playing them (some cards target one over the other) set off round after round of the giggles, and some of the potential card combinations can be positively gut-busting.

Dilbert: The Board Game is funny, unpredictable, and playable. The humor and the game both have staying power and make good use of their subject matter. More than a straightforward Dogbert marketing ploy, Hyperion makes their license count.

--Andy Vetromile

Rockets High!

for *GURPS* and the *d20 System*

by R. West

Lieutenant Jaeger swept over the front, leading his flight of Aeolus attack craft. Improvised anti-aircraft guns reached up, but there was no real threat; the Alliance's monopoly on powered aircraft -- even on the technology needed to produce them -- meant that he and is squadron merely had to drop their bombs, shoot up the artillery positions, and return home. Indeed, in the six months the Aeolus had been in action, only five had gone down -- and all of them had exploded, so only fragments would be available to be examined.

As the first of the 25-pound bombs struck the enemy position, over two hundred streaks of flame streaked through the formation. Lieutenant Jaeger snapped his head around as two of those streaks struck his number two's plane, which simply vanished as two three and a half pound warheads detonated, along with the bombs still aboard. Another plane staggered from the blast, lost control, and plunged to the ground. "This can't be . . ." was the lieutenant's reaction as he saw what was coming -- airplanes that simply could not be. He had no time to think further, as the supposedly impossible planes were stitching the sky -- and his Aeolus -- with machine-gun fire.

What seemed like a lifetime later, the strange planes roared away at impossible speeds, flame jetting from their tails. Nine of his flight of 12 were gone, at the cost of only one enemy. The war had stopped being fun . . . and he had a report to file.

* * *

With the Habsburg's enemies controlling the skies -- for the simple reason that they had the only heavier-than-air aircraft -- something had to be done. Pieces of a destroyed enemy plane, downed by pure luck, gave the basic shape, while the Habsburg Monarchy had the resources of some of the world's best engineers and chemists.

It cost many lives, but eventually, artillery rockets were scaled up for propulsion, and a complex amalgam of wood, fabric, and metal was contrived to act as an airframe. The first efforts crashed and burned, but eventually, sheer brute force combined with more experiments, coupled with the conceptual breakthrough of putting the horizontal stabilizer in front and away from the rocket's exhaust, produced an airframe that could carry machine guns and rockets.

The resulting machine looks quite strange by almost any standards. At first glance, an interworld agent would think of a World War One biplane fighter, but there is no propeller in the front -- instead, a long boom holds the horizontal stabilizer well in front of the nose of the plane. Doped cloth gives the latticework boom some semblance of streamlining. The vertical stabilizer sits in its traditional place, at the rear of the fuselage. From the lower wings hang a miscellany of rockets and bombs.

The "Vengeance" series aircraft is a nightmare to handle; once the engine is ignited, it must burn at full power until it burns out. Changing speed is impossible. Although quite responsive, it is also unforgiving of mistakes. In addition, when it's overly stressed, it has a bad habit of breaking up. It must land and take off from a hard surface, either paved or well cared for packed dirt, or be air launched from a dirigible. Glide ratio is adequate, but there are no mistakes on landing; all landings are dead stick. Any accident on takeoff, with a burning rocket and missiles or bombs attached, is usually fatal. An added complication is quality control on the propulsion rockets: Burn time and thrust are somewhat variable, with a higher thrust rocket burning for a shorter time. On the plus side, internal combustion technology is not needed to build it. Even the latest version is still deadly dangerous to the pilot, but is never the less in full production. A fortunate lull in the pace of the war allowed for a substantial number to be built, and the next Habsburg offensive will have air power.

It is a weapon of desperation -- the rockets or bombs are dangerous, but inaccurate, and the twin machine guns are of

relatively minor use against ground targets, but quite effective for air to air combat. The air to ground rockets are risky to use. For the first six months of deployment, any malfunction on a rocket attack has a one in six chance of setting the launching aircraft on fire. Additionally, on the earlier versions, all ordnance on a single hardpoint must be launched at once.

The smallest missiles are designed for salvoing at Aeolus aircraft or infantry, while the other weaponry is intended to deal with Republican ground forces. A squadron of twelve can put 240 light missiles into the air, or drop 2400 pounds of explosives on Republican positions.

In the Ming-3 timeline, all the elements are there for a similar craft, with the exception of the chemistry. Rockets and gliders are both known technology, and a sufficiently brilliant chemist or team of chemists could perhaps work out an adequate rocket. This could be the result of a warlord working to develop a counter to the immense weight of numbers of the Imperial Army, or someone within the Imperial hierarchy preparing for a civil war. The resources required would likely be extreme, but the expenses could be hidden in the labyrinth of bureaucracy, or gleaned from a warlord's treasury.

In Cornwallis, the Aeolus version could be used almost unchanged, as a vehicle built by the Sons of Liberty in secret. Cornwallis's tech level is such that it would not represent cutting edge technology, and could perhaps be built in a barn in the woods. Even Rome Aeternus is close to having the needed technology . . . with a little help from outside.

TL5/6 Rocket Plane (*GURPS* Stats)

The TL 5/6 rocket plane is developed as its society is approaching tech level 6; a good understanding of airfoils and a TL 6 chemistry knowledge are assumed on an otherwise TL 5 craft.

The following items are the only ones that do not conform to TL 5:

- The engine and the missiles use TL6 explosives and fuel.
- The machine gun is TL6.
- The wings use TL6 knowlege of airfoil construction.
- The wings and machine gun could be developed near the end of TL5; GM may wish to change the Malf. number of the machine gun, and introduce uncertainty as to exactly how long the rocket will burn.

Note: Although the vehicle's HT computes as 10, insufficient knowledge of the stresses of aerobatics could, at the GM's option, reduce the HT by as much as 4.

Crew: 1 total. 1 crew station covering vehicle maneuvering system.
Subassemblies: Vehicle +4, Wheels +1, Fuselage +3, 2xWings +2.
P&P: 1,000 lbs. thrust solid fuel rocket (45 minute burn time) [Fusalage].
Fuel: Built in to engine
Occ: cramped crew station (exposed) [Fusalage]

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Wheels	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/2
Fuselage	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/2
Wings	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/2

Weaponry	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D yds	Max yds	RoF	TL
12.5mm .50 cal machine gun	Crit.	Cr	11d+1	20	13	890	4,500	13	6
12.5mm AP ammo	-	Cr	11d+1(2)	-	13	890	4,500	-	5

Equipment

All: two 100 lbs. untapped hard points. Fuselage: two 12.5mm .50 cal machine guns (long barrel); 1,600 rounds 12.5mm AP ammo.

Statistics

Size: [L×W×H] 23.6'×5.9'×2.95' *Payload:* 784 lbs. Lwt.: 15,871 lbs.
Volume: 410 cf Maint.: 36.5 hours (2.63 mh/day) *Price:* $75,125

HT: 10 HP: 16 each [3×Wheels], 177 [Fusalage], 240 each [2×Wings].

Wheeled Ground Performance: Speed Factor 12, Top Speed 70 mph, gAccel 5 mph/s, gDecel 10 mph/s, gMR 0.5, gSR 3, Ground Pressure 1,558 lbs./sf, Off Road Speed 25 mph.

Aerial Performance: Stall Speed 50 mph, Drag 456, Top Speed 130 mph, aAccel 1 mph/s, aMR 4.5, aSR 1, aDecel 18 mph/s.

Design Notes

TL5 light frame very expensive materials [Vehicle].
TL5 DR 2 TL6- non-rigid [Vehicle].
Payload Cost: $576
Vehicle Features: mechanical controls, fair streamlining, cheaply made.
Wings: biplane.
Wheels: quantity 3, small.
Volume: 12.4 cf [Wheels], 248 cf [Fuselage], 75 cf [2×Wings].
Area: 32.1 sf [Wheels], 237 sf [Fuselage], 320 sf [22×Wings].
Empty Space: 100 cf [Fuselage], 75 cf [22×Wings].
Aerial Performance: external item drag 1, payload 0, sweep none

These are typical weapons that the Habsburg Empire might mount in the two 100 pound hardpoints:

Weaponry	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D yds	Max yds	RoF	TL
50 pound bomb	Crit	Exp	4dx145[10d]	-	6	0	0	-	6
100 pound bomb	Crit	Exp	6dx200[12d]	-	6	0	0	-	6
10 pound bomb	Crit	Exp	6dx20[6d]	-	6	0	0	-	6
2 pound bomb	Crit	Exp	23d[4d]	-	6	0	0	-	6
Heavy ground attack missile (100 pounds)	Crit	Exp	4dx175[10d]	-	13	660	1,200	-	6
light ground attack missile (25 pounds)	Crit	Exp	5dx7[6d]	-	13	660	1,500	-	6
Light Missile (10 pounds)	Crit	Exp	21d[4d]	-	12	520	520	-	6

The stats presented here represent an ideal version, with all the bugs worked out. Since a solid fuel vehicle is more difficult to test than most (replace the engine after every flight) testing is expensive, and time consuming, a perfected version is unlikely to be developed before it becomes obsolete. (Two vehicle files are included; the first one is for Aeolus, while the second one is a lower technology version, suitable for Ming 3.)

Likely Bugs

Airframe design is at a very primitive level for Aeolus and Ming-3, and similar craft in Cornwallis will be amateur efforts, and prone to failure in high stress situations. Subtract 1D from the health of the aircraft.

Likewise, poor control and/or stability are also very likely.

The four 100-pound hardpoints can carry a variety of ordnance, with the most common being bombs and two different varieties of rockets. The munitions listed are the best Habsburg technology could produce -- if the vehicle is used in the Ming-3 timeline, substituting lower technology munitions is recommended. All ordnance on a single hardpoint must be released simultaneously.

There is 100 cubic feet of empty space in the fuselage. This is to allow for the maze of wires and struts that hold the craft together -- it is not useable for anything large, although a timeline with radio could perhaps shoehorn one in.

An engine costs $7,020, and must be replaced after each flight. Installing a new engine takes approximately two hours.

Adventure Ideas

- In any timeline, PCs could be elite test pilots, flying the first mission with the new aircraft against the enemy, or desperate spies, trying to obtain the plans -- or a sample -- of the latest weapon they have faced. Intrepid rebels could even be the inventors of one of these craft.
- Similar craft have appeared in several timelines, changing delicate balances of power. Is this a coincidence, or out time meddling? And by whom? Centrum would be a logical suspect, but the rocket craft have been seen flying for the Sons of Liberty, and Centrum would most likely have nothing to do with them.
- A primitive world is seeking entrance into the local interstellar polity as a developed world rather than a primitive (i.e. "exploitable by the big corporations") world. Functional heavier-than-air craft, built with purely local resources and knowledge, are an artificial benchmark for this coveted status. The player characters have to build such by the time of the hearing. Be they native or visitor, they need to gather (and perhaps steal) enough chemical information to compound the fuel: a fuel that at least looks like it could have been developed locally. Then, they have to craft the aircraft, test-fly it, and demonstrate it. A suitable climax for an adventure could be a desperate race to first get the plane close enough to the conference site, then roar overhead, rockets thundering as the craft circles, and finishing with a dramatic dead-stick landing on the space field, or on the grounds of the facility where the conference is taking place. Opposition could range from the natural risks of experimental aircraft, to (far more likely) agents of vested interests that will loose money of the planet gains entry as a full member state.

d20 Modern/Past/Future Stats

PL: 4
Crew: 1
Passengers: 0
Cargo: Personal gear only, plus 4 100 pound external hardpoints
Initiative: -4
Max speed: 210 squares
Defense: 8
Hardness: 3
Hit Points: 42
Size: H
Purchase DC: 31
Restrictions: Mil (+3)
New engine (required for each flight): Purchase DC 25

It can be armed with two of almost any Progress Level 4 machine guns.

d20 System Stats

Huge Vehicle

Profession: Pilot (-2)
Speed: 1000 (special)
AC: 0
HP: 42
Ram: 15D6, but destroyed in the collision
Face: 5 feet wide, 25 feet long, 25 foot wingspan

Height: 10 feet
Crew: 1
Cargo: 400 pounds on external hardpoints
Cost: 1000 (or more) gp without engine
Engine costs 4000gp (or possibly *much* more) and can be used once, assuming alchemical engines.

Notes

- Unlike most objects, the vehicle takes full damage from fire, and will explode in a fireball if destroyed by fire with a fueled engine still in place (10d6)
- The price assumes a moderate to high magic campaign; in a low magic campaign, the value of a flying machine could be much higher.
- Note that, due to the fragile nature of the craft, it does not have sectional HP or AC -- as wires break and frame members crack, damage cascades through the entire vehicle.
- No *d20 System* stats are provided for weapons, as that will vary from campaign to campaign -- from falling rocks to wands mounted on the wings, and anything else that can be imagined.

Memory Corrupt

More Moving Performances for *GURPS*

by Paul Stefko

In "[Moving Performances](),": we discussed ideas for using sensie technology or sensory transmission abilities in your *GURPS* game. In this article, we expand on those themes, branching out into the deeper realm of memory.

Making New Memories

With the addition of the Conditioning enhancement, the Mind Control advantage can be used to alter a subject's personality (through any number of mental disadvantages) and memories (specifically through the Delusion disadvantage). The following enhancement and limitation allow for the ability to alter memory without changing personality traits.

Memory Implant: A limited form of Conditioning, this enhancement allows you to give your subject Delusions representing false or altered memories. These memories can come from any source available to a sensie transmission, including your own experiences, stolen memories, and artificial memories created with the Artist (Sensie) skill. +20%.

Memory Implant Only: Your Mind Control ability is only capable of giving the subject Delusions representing false memories, as above. -80%.

New Powers

Here are two sample powers that can be useful for creating characters that manipulate memories and senses respectively.

Memory Control Power

Sources: Biological, Magical, Psionic, or Super.

Focus: Extracting, manipulating, and transmitting memories.

Considered by some to be a limited form of Telepathy (page 134 of *Powers*), Memory Control can have subtle yet profound effects on its subject. If you are seeking to create a dupe to assassinate a rival, you don't need to dominate him. Just implant a memory of your rival assaulting the victim's sister and let good old fashioned vengeance work its magic.

Memory Control Talent   *5 points/level*

Memory Control Abilities

Cultural Adaptability; Eidetic Memory; Language Talent; Mind Control, with Memory Implant Only; Mind Probe; Mind Shield, limited to protecting memories (see Protected Memory below); Modular Abilities, limited to skills and "learnable" advantages (see Borrowed Training below); Photographic Memory; Protected Power; Racial Memory; Social Chameleon; Telecommunication (Telesend); Xeno-Adaptability.

Attacks should all be Afflictions that cause disadvantages such as Amnesia (erasing all the subject's memories) or Incompetence (erasing the memories of training in a particular skill). Optionally, the GM may allow Afflictions that stun or daze, representing a massive burst of conflicting memories.

Sensory Control Power

Sources: Biological, Magical, Psionic, or Super.

Focus: Sensory manipulation.

Like the Illusion power (p. 129 of Powers), Sensory Control deals with manipulating a target's senses, but Sensory Control is generally much more focused than Illusion. Sensory Control also includes abilities that can tap into a target's senses, allowing you to experience everything your subject does, as well as abilities that protect your own senses from manipulation.

Sensory Control Talent   *5 points/level*

Sensory Control Abilities

Illusion, with Mental; Invisibility, with Glamour; Mind Reading, with Sensory Only; Mind Shield, limited to abilities that manipulate the senses; Morph, with Cosmetic and Glamour; Obscure (any); Protected Power; Protected Sense; Silence; Telesend, with Sensie Only.

Attacks are Afflictions that grant or negate any sense-enhancing advantage or sense-impairing disadvantage, that stun (with sensory overload), or that cause Agony, Dazed, Ecstasy, Euphoria, Hallucinating, Moderate Pain, Nauseated, Severe Pain, or Terrible Pain conditions.

New Sensie Packages

The following perks, advantages, and meta-traits provide packaged abilities for stealing, manipulating, and transmitting sensies and other memories. The GM is free to add power modifiers appropriate to his campaign.

Borrowed Training: You have the ability to absorb memories of skills training from those around you. Mind Shields and other forms of mental protection automatically block this ability. Modular Abilities (Cosmic Power; Limited, Skills possessed by unprotected minds around you, -30%; Physical and Mental, +100%) [17/level]. 17/point of skills.

Full Sensie Experience: You are able to extract a memory from a subject's mind and project it as a full-sensory illusion in a two-yard radius around you. Illusion (Extended, taste/smell and touch, +40%; Link, +10%) [38] + Mind Probe (Invasive, +75%; Link, +10%; Sensory Only, -40%) [29]. 67 points.

Gift of Scheherezade: Your supreme gift of storytelling allows your audience to actually experience the tale themselves. Telecommunication (Telesend; Broadcast, +50%; Sense-Based, Hearing, -20%; Sensie Only, -10%) [36]. 36 points.

Memory Connection: You can extract a memory from the mind of one individual and transmit it directly into the mind of another in real-time. Mind Probe (Invasive, +75%; Link, +10%; Sensory Only, -40%) [29] + Telesend (Link, +10%; Sensie Only, -10%) [30]. 59 points.

Protected Memory: You can selectively protect a single memory from theft or alteration. Mind Shield (Limited, abilities that alter or steal memory) [1/level]. 1 point/level.

Sensie Bug: A nanotech device injected into the target by dart discretely transmits all sensory data the subject

experiences to a predetermined receiver. Target must roll against HT or be afflicted with Telecommunication (Radio; Sensie Only, -10%) for 30 minutes per point by which he fails, beginning one hour after exposure. Affliction 1 (Advantage, Telecommunication, +90%; Extended Duration, 30 minutes, +60%; Follow-Up, -15%; Onset, 1 hour, -20%) [22] + Small Piercing Attack 1 damage (Accurate, Acc 4, +5%; Increased Range, 1/2D only, ×10, +15%; Reduced Range, 1/10, -30%) [1]. 23 points.

Pyramid Review

Legends of Excalibur (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [RPG Objects](#)

Written by Charles Rice with Paul King & Chris Davis

Cover by Jeremy Simmons

Illustrated by Eleanor Brickdale, William Russell Flint, Louis, Arthur Rackham, & George Wooliscroft Rhead

160-page hardcover; $29.95

If you have a yearning for roleplaying in the Arthurian Age, then no doubt you will have rejoiced in the news that White Wolf republished the **King Arthur Pendragon RPG.** And while it can be successfully argued that it is the definitive game of the genre, what are the options for the **d20 System?** One might be **Legends of Excalibur,** published by RPG Objects. This has the feel not dissimilar to Green Ronin's ***Medieval Player's Manual*** and Atlas Games' **Love & War,** in the main part it draws several particular sources for its inspiration. The first is that of Le Morte D'Arthur by Sir Thomas Mallory, which gives Legends of Excalibur its high romance and medievalism. The second is Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King,* which infects this gaming interpretation with a stark brutality. Both of these sources, (which the author quotes from), and others, have been referenced in their Project Gutenberg editions. Other sources of also referenced, but perhaps the most notable of these is the film Excalibur, which imparts a sense of epic grandeur and sweep to the game.

Another source of the game's Victorianism comes in its appearance. While the book is clean, tidy, and utilitarian in its look, it benefits from the works of the Pre-Raphaelites. Unfortunately they are reproduced in black and white, but they still add much to the flavor of the game. Another fine point about Legends of Excalibur is the use of its maps. Not only nicely drawn, they are both reproduced in grey scale within the pages of the book and in full glorious color inside the front and back covers, an intelligent and pleasingly effective use of space.

The starting point for characters is their Bloodline or Lineage, which replaces the race of other settings. It represents a character's destiny, opportunity, and determination as they can rise from a lowly blacksmith's son to become a Knight of the Round Table, and indeed vice versa. Ranging from Base/Criminal and Common/Serf through Middle Class to Lesser Nobility/Peerage and Nobility/Royalty, a lineage also represents a character's social origins and each lists several traits. These are his feats, skill points and bonuses, resources, attribute changes, and his initial Nobility score.

The latter takes the place of alignment, being a measure of a character's actions and deeds. High values qualify some characters to enter prestige classes such as the Quest Knight class. Knights of Renown, such as Sir Gawain or Sir Lancelot, have nobility ratings in the 90's. Each 20 points of Nobility gives additional bonuses to Charisma-based skills, plus various class abilities. The book includes the transgressions against and virtues inherent to Nobility in a clear manner.

Characters in **Legends of Excalibur** are by default British, but an option suggests class skills for other nationalities. Others give favored classes such as the Barbarian for the Saxon, and the Yeoman for the British, the Barbarian being one of the allowed classes from the Players Handbook, as are the Bard, Druid, Fighter, and Rogue. These are joined by several new classes. The Fool is an all-round entertainer, wanting to make everyone laugh, but also surviving by luck,

wit, and agility. The prophecy-gifted Hedge Mage replaces wizards and sorcerors, and draws upon Ley Lines to power his spells. Both the Hermit and the Priest are divine spellcasters and capable healers, the latter also the representative of the One God and the Church of Rome. In particular, they are opposed to Druids, and they have power to declare a crusade and groups of people as being infidels. Priests face penalties when they are violent or greedy and must learn to "turn the other cheek." The Bard is supplemented by the Minstrel, who works with the Druid, and by the Skald, who marches with the military to keep the men's morale up. The Yeoman is woodsman, hunter and archer, inspired by Robin Hood as much as Arthurian Legend.

Perhaps the two central classes are the Noble and the Knight. The former are powerful in terms temporal and divine, being bound to his lands and subjects. Not only can he send knights on quests, he can grant knighthood, but will lose Nobility should anyone he dubs transgress against the knightly virtues. One such transgressor is the Robber Baron, who does not adhere to the codes of chivalry. The Knight itself is both a warrior and a horseman, the class leading to the most prestige classes. The Crusader class serves the holy cause, while the Quest Knight is the purest of the pure, represented by the likes of Tristan and Percival. Perhaps the most interesting is the colored or Spectral Knight and includes the Black (against Arthur and the Round Table), Blue (servants of the Lady of the Lake), Green (knights of the wild), Purple (servants of royalty), Red (secretly uses sorcery), and White (serves the One God). Other prestige classes are logical progressions of earlier core classes such as the Berserker for the Saxon Barbarian, and the Court Mage for the Hedge Mage. Given the epic sweep of the setting, a guide is given for all of the classes at Epic Level -- for use with the *[Epic Level Handbook,](#)* including Epic Feats.

Only one new skill, Prophecy, is given while there are several new feats. Many of these are adaptations of *Legends of Excalibur's* spell point system, which works for all of its spell casting classes and enables a character to cast as many small spells as his points allow or one big one! Point recovery varies by class, a Hedge Mage tapping into Ley Lines while the Hermit from time spent alone.

The chapter on the Arthurian Legend includes a history, from the age of antiquity when Giants ruled Britain, to the passing of Arthur. Its gazetteers cover Britain (which gets right up to date with the inclusion of Seahenge) and abroad. The latter stretches as far away as Baghdad and the Ethiopia of Prester John as well as touching upon the mythic places of Amazonia, Atlantis, and Fairyland. Stats and write-ups are given for all the Legend's major figures.

Legends of Excalibur divides the legend into three adventuring eras: the "Rise of Arthur;" the initial reign of King Arthur and his marriage until he is crowned High Emperor in Rome; and "Dream's End," its onset marked by the affair of Lancelot and Guinivere. The first of the three eras is supported by three campaign outlines: the "Childhood of Arthur" has the player characters guarding a young Arthur; "War of Ascension" follows on almost immediately after Arthur's coronation when King Lot rebels; while in "Cameliard," King Arthur sends young knights to aid an ally of his father. Several adventures are suggested for each, as are their recurring themes and notable cast members. The discussions of the themes are an invaluable aid to writing further adventures. The basic adventure model is that of the quest, two samples being given, and suitable for quick start play.

Both quests and campaigns are suggested by example of a town, a city, a Henge (Seahenge) and a ruined castle (Tintagel). These tie back into the sample adventures as well as being a source for them. Write ups are given for magic items and weaponry suited to, and from the legend, along with monsters from the Monster Manual suited to the setting.

There is sparseness to the campaign advice, but what is given is nevertheless useful. If Legends of Excalibur lacks anything, it is sample campaigns for the latter two eras. Despite this lack, the supplement is very well written and a well-done adaptation of the legend. But above all, it feels right, conveying both the romanticism of the source (especially in the choice of illustrations) and the epic sweep of the legend. With that in mind, it might be the perfect choice to run a game inspired by the excellent Excalibur. While the first choice for roleplaying in the time of Arthur still remains the *King Arthur Pendragon RPG,* there is no better choice under the *d20 System* than *Legends of Excalibur.*

--Matthew Pook

Loch, Loch, Who's There?

"There's a shadow on the door
Of a cottage on the shore
Of a dark Scottish loch
Many miles away."
-- Sting, "Synchronicity II"

We haven't really set our nets for big game in a while, so bear with me while we return to the Department of Blurry Photography and angle for explanations. With the Loch Ness Monster, there's no shortage of those, though answers are in somewhat lower supply. So trail your hands in the black, cold water of that dark Scottish loch -- and let's see what bites.

"On Friday last, a well known business man, who lives near Inverness, & his wife, a university graduate, when motoring along the north shore not far from Abriachan Pier, were startled to see a tremendous upheaval on the loch, which previously had been calm as a mill pond. The lady was first to notice the disturbance which occurred fully three quarters of a mile from the shore & it was her sudden cries which directed her husband's attention to the water. There the creature disported itself, rolling & plunging for fully a minute, its body resembling that of a whale & the water cascading & surging like a simmering cauldron. Soon, however, it disappeared in a boiling mass of foam."
-- Alex Campbell, "Strange Spectacle in Loch Ness," *Inverness Courier* (May 2, 1933)

The Loch Ness Monster may be the most famous cryptid that ever creeped, but its history goes back a bare 70-plus years. Aside from a single letter to the editor of the *Northern Chronicle* in 1930 and a mistaken "sea-serpent" sighting in 1852 (it was an escaped pony), the article above is the first contemporary record of a monster in Loch Ness. The "well known business man" was John Mackay, the proprietor of the Drumnadrochit Hotel, which saw booming business as the story broke across Britain. A score of reports flooded in during 1933 and 1934, and the Monster drew Britain's leading expert on sea-serpents, Commander Rupert T. Gould, and the first of many expeditions to investigate the Monster, organized by the *Daily Mail.* It was photographed at least twice in that period, most famously by Lt. Col. Robert Kenneth Wilson in April 1934. (This "surgeon's photograph" is the photo you're thinking of right now.) From those photos and reports, the creature assembled itself. The 'consensus' Monster had a long neck held vertically, with a smallish, snake-like (or horse-like) head. It is dark-colored, usually gray or black, and has a long, club-like tail and one to three humps. Repeated expeditions have reported odd clicks, "ascending sonar contacts," blurry photos, and the occasional anomalous echo. And that's the way the Monster has stayed in the popular imagination ever since.

"We went from shoreline to shoreline, top to bottom on this one, we have covered everything in this loch and we saw no signs of any large living animal in the loch."
-- Hydroacoustic engineer and surveyor Ian Florence, quoted by the BBC (Jul. 27, 2003)

And as so often happens, the popular imagination is full of baloney. All the "seed" reports in mid-1933 came from the industrious pen of Alex Campbell, who had been riding a pet hobby-horse of a haunted loch for years. Mrs. Mackay later denounced Campbell's article on her sighting, saying she had merely seen two ducks fighting. The "surgeon's photograph" was exposed as a hoax in 1994, and close examination of the height of the waves in the image makes clear that the intrepid surgeon had shot a small plastic or wooden model of some sort. (It is theorized that the *Daily Mail* cryptid-hunter, the euphonious Marmaduke Weatherall, faked the "surgeon's photograph" in revenge for having been hoaxed himself with a stuffed hippo footprint.) At least some of the expeditions have returned hoaxed footage or faked photos along with their "anomalous recordings," which calls the whole program into question. The most complete Loch Ness sonar survey, the BBC 2003 investigation, turned up absolutely nothing. And perhaps the best evidence for the Monster's absence is the absence of evidence. Nobody has ever found a dead monster (although pranksters have left skinned dolphins by the lake) or monster spoor of any kind. Worst of all, the sighting record far more closely replicates psychological patterns than it does biological ones. Monster sightings *increase,* statistically, between "flaps." In other words, when more and more people -- and more scientifically trained people -- look for the Monster, they see it less and less. When a scattering of untrained people just happen to be looking at the loch, that's

when the Monster deigns to show up.

"To my mind, the evidence available at present goes all the way to demonstrate the real existence of a creature much resembling in outline and structure the plesiosaurus of Mesozoic times."
-- Cmdr. Rupert T. Gould, *The Case for the Sea-Serpent*

But that's just what one would expect if the Monster has been hiding out for 70 million years, no? The traditional explanation for the Monster is a surviving plesiosaur, a long-necked aquatic dinosaur that has become the template for the Monster in popular illustration. The recent shift to "warm-blooded" theories of dino-biology removes one big objection -- that Loch Ness is too cold for a big reptile to flourish in. Other objections, such as the fact that Loch Ness is fresh water not salt, that plesiosaurs were likely sight-hunters and therefore would be stymied by the Loch's thick, peaty water, and that the Loch doesn't hold enough fish to support a breeding population of plesiosaurs anyway can be waved away by positing 70 million years of evolution. If it can turn cave fish white, surely it can turn plesiosaurs into Nessies. It wouldn't even have to take 70 million years if the Monster was actually a zeuglodon (or basilosaurus, when it's in polite company), a sort of Eocene-era snake-like whale that actually fits the eyewitness descriptions a trifle better than the plesiosaur, as long as you ignore the Monster's neck. Plenty of neckless Monsters have turned up anyhow.

"Occasionally something will happen which makes an eel sterile. Instead of swimming to the open sea, they stay in fresh water and keep on growing and eating. And as long as something doesn't get them first, there's no real size limit -- a few years ago an 18ft long eel was found in a ship canal in the West Midlands. If you ask me, Nessie is a bloody great 30ft long eel."
-- Jonathan Downes, of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, quoted in the Edinburgh *Evening News* (Jul. 18, 2003)

Which is why the compromise solution is some sort of giant, overgrown, mutant eel. Eels (which have either no, or all, neck) have the advantage of being animals capable of living in both fresh and saltwater, and they also have humps, as the Monster does. They don't poke their heads up out of the water too much, but how much of those sightings, reports, and post-facto recollections are contaminated by the "surgeon's photograph," anyhow? Even Rupert T. Gould, he of the plesiosaurian sea-serpent, eventually decided that the Monster was actually a giant prehistoric newt, which is the next-best thing to an eel, surely. Other clever fellows have proposed seals (which like the Monster but unlike eels can go up on land), Steller's sea cows (which ties mermaids and the Monster together), otters (clowning around as they do posing as dinosaurs), pike or sturgeon (although if you're going to propose fish, just propose eels), and even an escaped circus elephant! Honest to Barnum, menagerie impresario Bertram Mills toured Inverness in the Thirties and at least some reports claim that he let his elephant swim in Loch Ness to cool off. Eerily, that fits the Monster even better -- an elephant is large and gray, the head and body give you the humps, and the raised trunk makes an excellently erect "neck." And that would also explain why the sightings suddenly started in 1933, which none of the "natural" ones -- including eels *or* plesiosaurs -- would.

"I observed the most extraordinary form of an animal crossing the road. It was horrible -- an abomination. First we saw an undulating sort of neck, a little thicker than an elephant's trunk. It did not move in the usual reptilian fashion but, with three arches in its neck, it shot across the road until a ponderous body about four feet high came into view. When we reached the part of the road it had crossed, we stopped, but there was no sign of it. It had been a loathsome sight. It seems futile to describe it because it was like nothing I have read about or seen. It was terrible. Its color, so far as the body was concerned, could be called a dark elephant gray. It looked like a huge snail with a long neck. I reported the affair to various scientific bodies all of whom seem to be incredulous. I am willing to take an oath, and so is my wife, that we saw this Loch Ness beast."
-- Eyewitness report of George Spicer

But chasing our elephant has let us swim dangerously close to the lee shore of fact. Let's tack back with the most elephantine sighting of all, the famous "land sighting" of George Spicer on July 22, 1933. The above quote is the one given in F.W. Holiday's magnificent *The Great Orm of Loch Ness,* and Holiday notes the sheer horror inspired by the Monster in this report. "Horrible . . . abomination . . . loathsome . . . like nothing I have read about or seen . . . terrible." Other reports (including one that I heard first-hand from a close friend) emphasize a similar dread. It seems almost to be something out of Lovecraft, not something out of Loch Ness. (Ugly-minded skeptics prefer to quote Spicer's initial

letter to the *Inverness Courier* of August 4, in which he describes the horror as only eight feet long.) Holiday builds on Spicer's report, and on the generally eel-like nature of the Monster as recorded by others, and comes to the conclusion that the Monster is, to quote Sherlock Holmes, "a remarkable worm unknown to science." Specifically, it is a surviving descendant of *Tullimonstrum,* a prehistoric slug-like thing (paleontologists seem just as creeped out by it as Spicer, and they haven't classified it yet) known only by 200-million-year-old fossils from Mazon Creek near Chicago. Sure, the *Tullimonstrum* is only six inches long and has no known relatives, much less surviving descendants, but to Holiday that's just more evidence that the "Great Orm" is special. He even identifies it with the snake symbol carved by the Picts across Scotland, including at Balmacaan, about a mile from Loch Ness.

"On another occasion also, when the blessed man was living for some days in the province of the Picts, he was obliged to cross the river Nesa; and when he reached the bank of the river, he saw some of the inhabitants burying an unfortunate man, who, according to the account of those who were burying him, was a short time before seized, as he was swimming, and bitten most severely by a monster that lived in the water. . . . But the monster, which, so far from being satiated, was only roused for more prey, was lying at the bottom of the stream, and when it felt the water disturbed above . . . suddenly rushed out, and, giving an awful roar, darted after him, with its mouth wide open, as the man swam in the middle of the stream. Then the blessed man observing this, raised his holy hand, while all the rest, brethren as well as strangers, were stupefied with terror, and, invoking the name of God, formed the saving sign of the cross in the air, and commanded the ferocious monster, saying, 'Thou shalt go no further, nor touch the man; go back with all speed.' Then at the voice of the saint, the monster was terrified, and fled more quickly than if it had been pulled back with ropes."
-- St. Adomnan of Iona, *Life of St. Columba*

Oh, and Holiday also identifies the Loch Ness Monster as the medieval "worm" or dragon. He says that similar Monsters were the source of the British water-dragons from the Lambton Worm (killed in the River Wear in Durham in 1420) to the Henham Dragon (killed in an Essex fen in 1668). Sadly there are no dragon reports from Loch Ness itself, unless you count the hagiographical incident recounted above in the *Life of St. Columba.* St. Columba's encounter (which you will note happens in the River Ness, not Loch Ness) occurred in 565 A.D. or thereabouts, and intrigues us primarily because the method of Monster-thwarting is a good old-fashioned Sign of the Cross. In other words, an exorcism. And while Loch Ness has no dragons, it does have the occasional kelpie, or water-horse (*each uisge* in Scots Gaelic) legend. And intriguingly, kelpies are shape-shifters, which could explain our multifarious Monster -- and his playful sense of timing -- right there. Holiday's further explorations of the Loch, and his sighting of a yellow Monster, began to convince him of this supernatural explanation. His film (and that of others) would mysteriously malfunction right when the Monster hove into view. He noted a ley line running through Loch Ness (and indeed, there is also a geological fault line running beneath it), saw Men in Black on the scene, and drew connections with UFOs and other mysterious phenomena. Eventually, in June 1973, Holiday and the Reverend Donald Omand rowed out into the Loch to exorcise the Monster once more. But it didn't take -- Holiday suffered a heart attack in Foyers, near the Loch, in 1974. In 1979, he died of a second attack.

"First the Abyss of the Water: on which I, even I, brooded amid other dusky flames as Shin upon Maim, held by my Genius. And I beheld the victory of Ra upon Apophis and the First of the Golden Dawns! Yea: and monsters, faces half-formed, arose: but they subsisted not."
-- Aleister Crowley, *Confessions*

I now direct your attention to the passage above, which refers to a dream that Crowley had while engaging in elemental invocations at Boleskine Manor in 1900. And where is Boleskine Manor, you may ask? Why, it is nearest the village of Foyers, where Holiday suffered his heart attack and saw his Man in Black. And, as it happens, 'tis right on the shore of Loch Ness. Crowley bought Boleskine Manor (for "twice its value") in order to have a suitable retreat for performing the Abramelin Working, which allows the magus "conversation with his Holy Guardian Angel." Crowley moved up to Boleskine in 1899, intending to perform the Abramelin Working on the next Easter. But in typical Crowleian fashion, he got distracted, first by the opportunity to snake the O.T.O out from under Macgregor Mathers, and second by an attractive woman. Although by his own account he had successfully attracted "the Abramelin demons," he never did finish the Working at Boleskine. He instead went on a world tour, during which he received the *Book of the Law* -- which he left in his attic at Boleskine for several years thereafter. In other words, he left a whole lot of magical doors open on the shore of Loch Ness, at the birth of a new century. And what happens 33

years afterward, the same length of time it took a different Revelation to go from inception to totality? (From 4 B.C. to 29 A.D., if you need a hint.) A "loathsome, terrible" rough beast, a Great Orm, a Monster, if you will, slouches toward Boleskine, waiting to be born. The Loch Ness monster is a tulpa, worshipped by the Picts, driven out by St. Columba, conjured up again by sloppy black magic and unleashed on the modern imagination, barely contained in plesiosaurs and eels, and casting its shadow on the door. Better not let it in.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

The Computer Doesn't Know If You're Bored

[Last week](#) I promised to talk about the second advantage that RPGs have over most other forms of entertainment (the first one being freedom of action, or the illusion thereof).

This week I keep that promise, without going off on any tangents, or padding the front of my column to make my meager revelation seem more revolutionary than it is.

But first, I would like to mention that the greatest hits album name of 80s group Roxette is entitled *Don't Bore Us -- Get to the Chorus!* (Roxette, of course, is known for their smash hit "The Look," which contains the lyric "She's got the look" repeated five times in a row.) It's quite possibly one of the greatest seven-word commentaries ever on the pop music scene, eclipsing Elvis' 1976 proclamation, "I'm bigger than Jesus . . . and still hungry!" (Okay; I made that one up.)

Many popular songs -- perhaps most -- are popular primarily because of their chorus, where the "good parts" of the song are. Indeed, many hit songs consist of little more than the chorus coupled with a few inconsequential verses designed to get to bridge those reiterations. (c.f. "Roxette") The creators of such songs realize -- consciously or otherwise -- the desires of their audience, and tailor their songs accordingly.

Speaking of 80s music, as another aside, last week I realized that, if I my son maintains a pattern of musical interest similar to mine, his musical tastes will be most greatly influenced by the 2010s, and he will grow nostalgic for this era in the '20s and '30s. This realization makes me feel one bandage away from being a dust-covered shambling mummy.

Speaking of mummies, I've just learned that our local Children's Museum is planning on returning the mummy Wenu-hotep to the Art Institute of Chicago after a one-year loan turned into a 48-year stay. (I always wonder how those one-year arrangements turn into something that lasts decades: "Dear Art Institute of Chicago: We're keeping the mummy, and there's not a lick you can do about it. Ha-ha...")

Where was I? Oh, right . . . not stalling.

Anyway, the second advantage that RPGs have is the ability to control the pacing of the experience depending on the wants and needs of the audience . . and it can do so on the fly. Does the gaming group seem to be nodding off during the political intrigues of the court? The phrase "Suddenly, ninjas burst through the wall!" can work wonders. Do the players have a fondness for developing magical items and spells? Well, then, hints can be dropped about new components and reagents, ready to be found the Next Town Over. Do the players like urban exploration? A city can become *much* more interesting than originally planned.

Games can be zoomed in as narrowly or grandly as desired. I still remember the mental tripwire that was triggered when our GM of our long-running *Vampire: The Dark Ages* campaign asked, "Is there anything you all were hoping to accomplish in the next few years of game time? Because, if not, time's going to fast-forward here in a bit." Likewise a group that enjoys tactical wargaming can convert from a narrative system for combat to a tactical miniatures one, and might even try its hand at a strategic system for those really epic battles. Conversely if the heroes face a group of mooks that everyone knows they can beat, and the GM sees the players roll their eyes and look a little restless, he can wave his arms and say, "Okay; you mop the floor with them and continue . . ."

Compare this with nearly any other kind of game. If folks decide the middle game of (say) **Rail Baron** or **Are You A Werewolf?** is dragging a bit, there's no real option to "fast-forward" to the good bits. Computer RPGs often make you re-fight battles you find boring or pointless ("84 Level Ranger Hits Giant Rat For 87,244 Points! Giant Rat Dies!"). And if in that computer RPG you need (say) 723 gold to buy another level of a skill and you can boringly farm 20 gold an hour, then the next 36.15 of your leisure time is going to be devoted to doing something you don't find fun.

Oh, sure, for some games the gaming group can try to make up rules or other initial conditions beforehand that mold the game something more to the player's liking (something I've talked about [before](#)). . . but it's much harder to make

those changes on the fly[1]. And computer games (online or offline) can't adapt to the desires of individual players in the way that RPGs can (although it is possible for players to find their own fun, as I discussed last week).

In a lot of ways, this pacing feature of RPGs is the flip side of last week's idea. Last week focused on how players in an RPG have the freedom to choose their own levels of focus (primarily by doing unexpected things), and this week deals with the idea that the GM can also do unexpected things in an effort to keep the game rolling smoothly and for maximum fun for all.

It's possible to envision a computer game in the future being able to discern the actions of the players and adapt accordingly; for example, if you spend more time in the shops than you do fighting monsters, it might generate more and different items to buy, sell, and trade. But it can be difficult to discern *why* a player likes something -- does the player like trying to min-max his character? Does he enjoy trying to immerse himself in the culture of the world? -- and a GM in a tabletop RPG can just ask. Plus, the desires of players are often mercurial; what starts out as a desire for shopping one week can turn into a longing to investigate a mysterious castle, a plot thread left dangling in a sourcebook. The GM has the power to wrap up what was previously intensive shopping and wipe-fade to . . . the outside of a mysterious castle! It's hard to get that kind of responsiveness in other games.

I have a few more thoughts on these two columns, but I'll save 'em for next week. In the meantime, I've got to pay a visit to my mummy one more time.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] I might make the argument that a fast-paced meta-game such as Poker also allows this kind of adaptability; if a group doesn't like five rounds of betting entailed by Seven-Card Stud, they can opt for a different game on subsequent hands. But I won't, this time.

Designers' Notes

GURPS High-Tech

by Shawn Fisher & Hans-Christian Vortisch

We have been fans of Michael Hurst's original *GURPS High-Tech* for almost as long as its existence; we both wrote other *GURPS* books that were inspired by it in one way or another. As equipment aficionados, firearm enthusiasts, and vehicle fans, we have tinkered with how to describe technology of all kinds in terms of the game for many years. How much damage does a flechette rifle do? How does a thermograph work? How fast can you distill ethanol for your armored car? What are the game stats for a flying boat?

When *GURPS Basic Set* *Fourth Edition* came along, it was clear from the outset that *GURPS High-Tech* was one of the other core books that would need to be updated. Rules- and stat-heavy, there was much that would have to be changed to align it with the new improved system. A few years earlier, still in the *Third Edition* era, we had conceived a joint-project called *GURPS Gadgets,* which was to be a gear catalog to update and expand *High-Tech,* and to address one of its few weaknesses, that being its focus on weaponry, especially military weapons. *Gadgets* was to address this, but never came to be.

Finally, in early 2004, we were extended an offer to write the new edition . . . something which we had dreamed of for a long time. However, we were not only contracted to update the old material, but to write a hugely expanded version for the *Fourth Edition,* a full-color, hardback book containing a whopping 240 pages of guns, gear, and vehicles (this was later even further increased to 256 pages!).

The main requirement was to change the outline of the book. The original book, as published in 1988 and revised (in details only) for two newer editions, was in many parts organized like a historical textbook, outlining technological developments as they occurred in history. The fourth edition was to become, first and foremost, an adventurer's catalog, not unlike *GURPS Ultra-Tech.* Thus, where the chapters in the old editions each addressed a different tech level, the chapters of the new edition had to cover a specific type of equipment instead -- survival and exploration equipment, weaponry, armor and defenses, medical technology, etc. An entirely new chapter on a few adventuring vehicles was to be thrown in, as well. Also, instead of TL4-7, as the old editions, it would now cover TL5-8.

Working closely together with David Pulver, who at the same time was working on the new edition of *Ultra-Tech,* we decided what gear to put in which chapter. We split the workload in half; Hans writing the chapters about weaponry and vehicles, and Shawn everything else.

The new organization makes it more easily accessible since individual items can be found more quickly, and the entire book is more generic and thus better suited to campaigns and settings that do *not* use historical Earth as background. That said, we included many historical examples and tidbits to explain the context of the equipment in a way that gamers would appreciate. Theodore Roosevelt kept extra pairs of eyeglasses while commanding the "Rough Riders"? Doc Holliday carried a Belgian Meteor "whippit" shotgun at the O.K. Corral?

Chapter One covers the basics: equipment statistics, design options, and explanations on the introduction of the Dirty Tech design textboxes. These boxes explain ways to make high-tech devices from scratch: armor, explosives, guns and ammunition, batteries, and so on. The goal here was to use as many of the background skills on the character sheet as possible.

Chapter Two was probably the most difficult chapter for Shawn to write. It describes the core technologies of a civilization -- power and information. Steam engines, generators, batteries, computers, slide rules, and office equipment. How do you copy a letter at TL5? What *GURPS* computer program does the ENIAC run? Books and libraries, database queries, and the Internet all get covered in Chapter 2. For purposes of brevity, much was left out -- microfilm and microfiche, nuclear power plants, and so on. Still, we feel the chapter is a good basic introduction to the

type of technology for which an adventuring party might have a most pressing need.

In Chapter Three, Shawn went nuts. It's the tools and equipment chapter. Swiss army knives, survival kits, flashlights, hand-held sonar devices, night vision goggles. The list goes on and on and on. Climbing equipment, skis, snowshoes, scuba. We tried to be as generic as possible here, and still add historical flavor.

Chapter Four, required the most design work for Shawn. He had to find obscure body armor weights and costs, figure out their historical performance, and then massage the whole thing into a unified whole. This required a lot of communication back and forth between the authors and Sean Punch and David Pulver.

Chapter Five, Weaponry, turned out the longest, for several reasons. First, it covers the bulk of the material from the original editions, which was mainly weapons. Second, weapons are of special interest to many players. As *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* "only" lists a selection of generic weapons, this was the book to fill in the gaps. Also, guns are an especially notable part of popular culture, and many players want to get more specific when their characters' guns are concerned. Finally, this chapter includes many new rules to make gunplay more detailed, more interesting, and more fun. Covered are not only practically all the entries from the old editions, but also most of the stuff from *GURPS Modern Firepower* and *GURPS Special Ops,* and a lot from the various *GURPS WWII* books. The emphasis is on man-portable stuff useful to adventurers, but there *are* artillery pieces, missiles, and bombs.

Chapter Six is the espionage chapter: spytech and police equipment. Much of it was cribbed from *GURPS Covert Ops,* updated to *Fourth Edition* standards. Some of it is brand new, some based on David Pulver's *Vehicle Design.*

Chapter Seven is the medical chapter. It was written in parallel with the new edition of *GURPS Bio-Tech.* This is mostly brand new text, with extensive details on historical medical equipment.

Chapter Eight, Vehicles, covers an eclectic selection of vehicles for use by adventurers, from skateboards and motorbikes to jeeps, tanks, and flying boats. The vehicles described were primarily chosen for their potential use in adventures, but some also showcase special rules or features. While further books should considerably expand on this, *High-Tech* gives you a decent start.

How We Did It

We're often asked how one goes about writing a book. We won't lie to you: it's a massive undertaking. Be prepared for endless hours in front of a computer, chasing leads in the Internet, asking questions in various online forums full of experts, and ordering books from online retailers.

Some especially useful websites include:

- Google's Book Search feature. Many of the best primary sourcebooks for this project were "full view," that is, free!
- NewspaperArchives.com. A wonderful site that for a small fee which allows you to download .pdfs of newspapers dating back to the American Civil War. Excellent stuff.
- Military historical agencies, such as the U.S. Army Center of Military History, or the Naval Historical Center have extensive websites packed with primary source material and articles from their publications.
- How Much Is That Worth Today? converts prices from back then to 2004 dollars, the basis for all *GURPS* costs.

Frankly, if you expect to do a decent job, we feel you'll spend all your advance royalties on books, books, and more books. Buy backorders of out-of-print historical journals, and any old catalogs you can find. Frequent garage sales, estate sales, and thumb through the bookshelves of used bookstores any chance you get.

We also contacted manufacturers, historians, historical re-enactors, military accoutrement aficionados, and called a few museums to set up a good time to visit. Tip: when you go to a museum, bring your own white cotton gloves in a little baggy. Ask polite, specific questions. Bring a notebook. You'll be surprised what you can get your hands on.

Outtakes

We eventually ran out of space; even 256 pages were not enough for all the gear that we researched and provided with *GURPS* stats. Here is a grab bag of outtakes that didn't make it.

Price

In the interests of keeping **High-Tech** as generic as possible we used an item's full retail price, MSRP if you will. It would not be unreasonable to vary the price by 10-30% for market conditions, buying in bulk, etc. We assumed Merchant skill would drop the price for those with the requisite expertise. Used equipment would be even cheaper; half-price is a basic approximation. For "military surplus" equipment, meaning the stuff left over from a previous tech level, the price may be as little one-tenth of its original retail price, though equipment in good condition might actually increase in value -- as antiques!

Nuclear Power (TL7)

Nuclear power plants are essentially steam engines -- using a nuclear reaction rather than coal shoveled into a firebox, to create the steam which spins a turbine and creates electricity.

Self-Contained Nuclear Power Plant (TL8): This is nuclear-power-to-go: a sealed, computer-controlled nuclear power plant the size of city bus. It will operate, more or less without human intervention, for 30-50 years. It is specifically designed to be maintenance-free throughout its lifetime and can meet all the energy needs of a city of 50,000. $25 million, 250 tons., LC 1.

Nuclear Fuel (TL7)

Uranium is used as fuel in most nuclear reactors. Civilian power-plant grade U-235 (4% enrichment) is $500 per pound (about the size of a golf ball), and provides 150,000 kWh. Weapons-grade uranium is enriched to 90% or more; it is available on the open market for research and power production for $25,000 a pound (a "simple" nuclear bomb needs 70-90 pounds). LC0.

Historical Computers

Computers advance so rapidly throughout TL5-8 that a few sample computers can help show the rapid growth. Of course, these are intended to be general approximations, rather than exact simulations.

Difference Engine (TL5+1). Babbage's design was never completed. If it had been, it might look like this: macroframe computer with the hardened, electro-mechanical, and slow options. Complexity 0. $100,000, 4 tons, external power. LC4.

ENIAC (early TL7). One of the first all-electric computers, the ENIAC was a monstrous device with 19,000 vacuum tubes. Megacomputer with vacuum-tube option. Complexity 3. $10,000,000, 20 tons, external power. LC4.

UNIVAC (early TL7). The UNIVAC I was one of the first commercial computers. It had 5,400 vacuum tubes. Macroframe with vacuum-tube option. Complexity 2. $1,000,000, 2 tons, external power. LC4.

Bendex G-15A (TL7): The Bendex was one of the first successful business and research computers, with 800 vacuum tubes. Mainframe with vacuum-tube option. Complexity 1. $100,000, 1 ton, external power. LC4.

IBM 1401 (TL7). A major IBM product during the 1960s, it could be found in many large corporations and universities. Macroframe with transistor option. Complexity 3. $1,000,000, 2 tons, external power. LC4.

PDP-8 (TL7). A very common computer in middle-level business and science applications. Mainframe with transistor

and compact options. Complexity 2. $200,000, 200 lbs., external power. LC4.

The machines require a primitive terminal and primitive storage, though magnetic tape is common for the later models.

Note that most of these computers cannot run a full suite of Software Tools, and so are restricted to running certain *applications* within the suite. The GM may, for instance, give a small bonus (+1 or +2) if the user is performing one of these limited functions against an adversary who does not have access to a computer.

Generally, however, primitive computers are simply basic tools for technological skills -- though the GM may declare that a bank of multiple computers can act as one or more Complexity levels higher, which may boost this high enough to act as Good-quality Software tools.

Alternately, the GM may declare that for certain applications the a computer's Complexity acts as a divisor on how long a project takes. For instance, a Complexity 3 computer may be treated as the equivalent of three skilled helpers (see *Time Required*, under *New Inventions*, p. B00). Note also that even primitive computers fulfill the requirements for Cryptography skill (p. B00), making the task much easier.

Infinite Weapons

The following firearms were intended to illustrate alternate technology paths or designs that could have been done historically, but just weren't.

Jarré-Armstrong Machine Carbine P/1860, .405 Pinfire (U.K., 1860-1869)

In 1859, Jean Jarré of Paris patented a selective-fire machine carbine that used his harmonica-type feed: the "magazine" is a steel block drilled with 20 holes that serve as chambers and are individually loaded with copper pinfire cartridges. The magazine is then inserted horizontally from the left into the gun, and slides to the right like a harmonica as the chambers are fired in series. The overall weapon is compact and well-finished with gleaming brass fittings. The Pattern 1860 was adopted by the British Army and Royal Marines.

This submachine gun is found on Etheria, a Quantum 6 world (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds* and *GURPS Steampunk*). Historically, Sir Robert Moray of the Royal Society of Science wrote of a British inventor who, in 1664, claimed to be able to construct a selective-fire black powder machine pistol! Unfortunately, the name of that genius is not known, nor whether he actually built such a device and how -- but the *idea* certainly is very old. "Machine carbine" is the old-fashioned British nomenclature for a submachine gun, which was still used during WWII. The pinfire was an early type of metallic cartridge that predated the more commonly known rimfire and centerfire variants still used today. Jarré patented and sold harmonica-type repeating weapons in the 1850s and 1860s. And Sir William Armstrong & Co. was an important English arms manufacturer in 1847-1897.

Barrett M97 Dragonfang, .50 Browning (USA, 1997-)

The M97 Dragonfang is a short-barreled, stockless personal defense weapon (PDW) designed for dragons and combat golems -- it would also be suited as a sidearm for large supers or mecha. Chambered for the .50 Browning round, it can deliver a considerable punch against other magical creatures as well as light vehicles. It lacks a stock and is intended to be fired one-handed.

Many dragons have their guns custom-enchanted. For example, giving it +1 Acc would add $6,250 (see pp. B481-483).

It fires solid projectiles (in the table) and APHEX (Dmg 6d×2(2) pi with 1d-2 [1d-2] cr ex follow-up) or SPDN (Dmg 6d×2(2) pi).

The Dragonfang is found on Merlin-1, a Quantum 3 world (see p. B529, *GURPS Infinite Worlds,* and *GURPS Technomancer,* where it first appeared). In real life, Ronnie Barrett patented his first .50-caliber semiautomatic sniper rifle in 1982. Shortening the M82 and providing a selective fire option is certainly possible, although it poses certain

strength requirements on the user . . .

Gustloff MG88, 7.92×42mm Krieghoff (Germany, 1988-)

The *Maschinengewehr 88* is the latest variant of the long line of German general-purpose machine guns (GPMG) tracing their origins back to the Gustloff MG44 developed by Professor Barnitzke. It employs a flywheel action that keeps weight low and allows a high rate of fire. Like the Mauser StG03 assault rifle (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds*), the MG88 fires a caseless telescoped round perfected in the 1970s. The weapon is still standard issue for the stormtroopers of the *SS-Raben-Division* in 2010.

The gun feeds from 150-round disintegrating belts (6 lbs., 6.5 lbs. in pouch) and the standard round is APHC-T (Dmg 7d+2(2) pi- inc). A spare barrel weighs 4 lbs.

The MG88 is used on Reich-5, a Quantum 3 world (see p. B543, *GURPS Infinite Worlds,* and *GURPS Alternate Earths*). Back in the real world, Professor Barnitzke existed, and patented a flywheel machine gun in the 1940s, but the gun never entered production. German small arms designers and the military had worked on caseless ammunition development since the 1940s, but historically only managed to make it work in the late 1980s, for use in the H&K G11 rifle. Gustloff-Werke produced many automatic weapons during WWII, and was one of the companies occupied with caseless ammunition research -- another being the Heinrich Krieghoff Waffenfabrik.

Weapons Table

See pp. B268-271 for an explanation of the statistics.

GUNS (SUBMACHINE GUN) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
5+1	Jarré-Armstrong P/1860, .405 Jarré	2d pi+	3	140/1,500	12/1.5	6	20(3)	10†	-4	3	$1,500/$30	2	[1]
8	Barrett M97 Dragonfang, .50 Browning	6d×2 pi+	3	1,600/6,700	30.7/9	10	30+1(3)	20	-4	4	$3,000/$68	1	[2]

GUNS (LIGHT MACHINE GUN) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Empty Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
8	Gustloff MG88, 7.92×42mm	7d+2 pi	5	1,100/4,500	26/6.5	25!	150(5)	11B†	-6	2	$10,400	1	[2, 3]

[1] Very unreliable. Malfunctions on 15+ (see page 407 of the *Basic Set*).

[2] Accessory rails (see *GURPS High-Tech*).

[3] Very reliable. Will not malfunction unless lack of maintenance lowers Malf. (see page 407).

Pyramid Review

Carcassonne: The Discovery

Published by Rio Grande Games

Written by Leo Colovini

Illustrated by Oliver Freudenreich

Translated by Jay Tummelson

75 Town Tiles, 70 Wood Walls, 12 Wood Towers, 32 Followers in four colors, two Canvass Bags, Scoring Track, & a four page full-color Rule Booklet; $18.99

There are plenty of variants available for the *__Carcassonne__* devotee, including several that take the franchise away from the original game set in Medieval France, both in terms of time and distance. The latest addition maintains the Medieval theme, but takes it over the sea and far away. In *Carcassonne: The Discovery,* the peoples of *Carcassonne* have decided to expand into distant lands, sending expeditions off to explore the new territories, facing the perils of the mountains and the seas before venturing out into the vast grasslands.

This new variant is designed by Leo Colovini, the creator of titles such as *Doge* and *Carolus Magnus,* and it brings a radical style of play to the series. Yet it is still a *Carcassonne* title and comes nicely appointed with solid full color tiles, brightly colored wooden followers (or meeples), a scoring track (vertical rather than horizontal and drawn as a river), a full color rulebook, and five reference cards, one per player. The artwork on the tiles is not as vibrant as in other *Carcassonne* titles, but the muted, slightly old-fashioned style is appropriate and captures the feel of unexplored virgin territories. The tiles themselves depict the mountains and grasslands of the new lands, the seas surrounding them, and the cities located along the coast and at the edge of the mountains.

Designed for two to five players, *Carcassonne: The Discovery* is played like any other *Carcassonne* game. Each turn a player still draws and places a tile to create and enlarge the map-like board, and he can still put a meeple of his color on the newly placed tile. Brigands are placed in the Mountains, Explorers on the Grasslands, and Navigators in the Seas. He can also pick up a meeple and score for the feature it is on. What he cannot do, is both in a single turn. He can place a meeple, or score from a meeple. Further, a player does not have to complete a feature in order to score from it. If he decides to score from an incomplete feature, fewer points are scored than if the feature was complete. It is also possible to score more than once from the same feature. This can be by joining two features together such that it has two or more meeples on it, or by scoring from a feature a first time, then in subsequent turns adding another tile and placing a meeple on that to score from later on in the game. This of course, can only be done with incomplete features.

Another fundamental change is the lack of competition over individual features. In other *Carcassonne* games, players can win and score for an area by having the most meeples on it, often stealing it from an opponent. Not so in *Carcassonne: The Discovery,* where more than one player can have meeples on a feature, (possible by joining separate areas together), and instead of the points going to the player with the most or being divided, players score the full points possible for the area.

The method of scoring is also different, just like other *Carcassonne* titles. Brigands score for the cities located within the Mountains and all adjacent grasslands; Explorers score for each segment of Grassland as normal; and Navigators score for each city along the nearby coastline and also for each Sea segment if the Sea area is complete. Roughly half

the number of points are scored if a feature is incomplete. Any meeples in play at a game's end are scored as if the feature was incomplete, even if it is actually complete.

The effect of the new playing method -- coupled with the fact that each player only has four meeples -- is to make *Carcassonne: The Discovery* a more thoughtful and much tighter game. Choosing when to score becomes vitally important. Do you wait to complete a feature and score high, or score earlier with fewer points to ensure that you have a spare meeple to add to a new feature? Another effect is that a player no longer has a meeple sit fallow throughout the game, like the Farmer, waiting until the end of the game to score.

Two variant rules are offered. The first suggests that each player initially draw two tiles to be kept face up and visible. On his turn, player places one of the tiles and then draws another. The second variant suggests removing a number of tiles so that all players take the same number of turns.

The low tile count and mix further adds to the game's tight nature, with players competing for the higher scoring more attractive Mountain and Sea areas. In general, my partner and I found it better to build big as it increases your scoring potential, but with just three tiles comprised of a single feature (Grassland, Mountain, or Sea), it was not always possible. This left gaps in the tiles that we really wanted to fill as we like the jigsaw-puzzle quality of *Carcassonne* games.

Yet aside from this low number of tiles, there is no downside to this *Carcassonne* variant. Its place a follower or score from a follower mechanic is certainly radical, perhaps too much so for some. There is no denying that it is a limiting factor in play, but a player has instead a greater flexibility in how and when he scores points than before. Overall this is a less fussy variant than ***Hunters & Gatherers*** or ***Carcassonne: The City,*** harking back towards the original game in its simplicity. The combined factors of the either/or play and the different scoring method though, both interesting enough to try out on other *Carcassonne* games, make *Carcassonne: The Discovery* less of a family game and more of a gamer's game.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Cutthroat Caverns

Published by [Smirk & Dagger Games](#)

Designed by Curt Covert

Developed by Justin Brunetto & Curt Covert

Art & graphics by Justin Brunetto, Tim Wollweber, Chad Savage, Mats Holmgren, Adam Vehige, Eric R. Martin, William Teo, Steve Messenger, Bruno Krippahl, Uraga, Morgan Rashand, Henri Härkönen, Ian Field-Richards, Noel Hill, Mark Jernstrom, & Paul Adam

Full-color boxed set with die-cut sheet of game tokens, six character cards, eight glass tokens, one monster life tracker, 100 cards (Action, Attack, Initiative, & Item), 25 Encounter cards, & rules; $29.95

It has long been said there are no winners or losers in a roleplaying game, but anyone whose character has ever seized the hilt of a mighty relic and felt that surge of power knows that's the bunk. The adventurer who walks away with the best stuff and the most kills is definitely "da man." For those without the time for a full-blown RPG session, *Cutthroat Caverns* is the quick and dirty way to show others who's top dog.

The object of the game is to finish with the most Prestige points.

Three to six players get a hand of cards and a character to play. The latter includes an archetypical dwarven warrior, an elven archer, a mysterious thief, and so on. A random set of nine Encounter cards are taken from the deck, to be used as that game's dungeon. The first is flipped over, and players take turns interacting with it. Most are monsters of some sort, and the goal then is clear: Wale on the thing until it breathes its last. Well, all right, not all critters are as straightforward as that . . . take for example the beast that's a delicate bag of poisonous gas. Any damage destroys it and fills the air with toxins, hurting the person responsible. No one wants to do this, but unless someone does the party can advance no further. That's part and parcel of the "cutthroat" element.

Most monsters have their own way of doing things, or create special effects when attacking. They might hurt multiple characters, absorb hit points, steal cards, or require ever-increasing damage levels to defeat. Wolf Packs may multiply, getting harder to reduce as they add to their numbers. The Encounter describes who gets hurt; it may attack the adventurer who did the most damage, or it may simply go for the second person in this turn's Initiative order. Still other cards may be locations, like the Trap Room. Here the team has to draw cards -- from their own hands -- to see who springs the traps before anyone can get past it. The bottom of a monster's card indicates how many hit points it has depending on the number of players -- more participants means a tougher kill, and Encounters use that number as a constant for the game even if one or more members are eliminated early on.

The cards heroes play come in a few varieties. Item cards can be magic potions that heal or increase one's damage capacity, or the amulet that adds to one's hand limit. Actions let the player play dirty pool; while it can improve the damage done or allow a good counterattack, many of them pull the rug out from under allies. Their strike could miss, or they might find themselves staring at a toothy maw when someone else was the intended target. In short, the trick

is: Everyone must help to overcome obstacles, but only the adventurer who delivers the killing blow gets the Prestige.

The equipment supplied is nice, and thorough to boot. The cards don't just have attack values, they have that same number halved and multiplied on each edge. If someone improves or cripples the effectiveness of an assault, the card is turned to determine its current value. Aside from the cards there's a panel that tracks monster hit points (and the current Encounter number), fancy glass beads to track numbers, and several cardboard tokens and markers for managing wolf attacks and Prestige awards (or for use with the promised supplements). The artwork is flawless and intriguing, and the Encounter sheets are large enough for all the information.

The rules themselves are a bit iffier. While all the material looks to be there, some of it is presented just off-kilter enough that the reader does a double-take. It could use another pass with an eye toward the presentation, and duplicating some important rules or having this section refer back to that one wouldn't hurt either. Some of a player's plans end up at the mercy of random elements, but arranging things so he comes out on top is a labor of love. The characters don't feel like distinct entities; if an Attack cards depicts a specific persona, that character gets a bonus to play it (it's a generic way of representing that character's special attack).

If the buyer can get past that, this is a fun way to spend time with one's most vicious friends, at 90 minutes a game. Tripping others up, jockeying for position, and pulling out last-minute upsets is the name of the game. It's real competition -- one does not play this with those who are easily upset -- and while its promise of roleplaying action in a card-game format probably depends more on the style of RPG one plays, there's clearly a lot of space here for additional material, house rules, and extended scenarios. *Cutthroat Caverns* doesn't hit quite as high a mark as it aims for, but the opposition isn't going to last long.

--Andy Vetromile

Designers' Notes: Creatures of the Night, Volumes 1 and 2

by Scott Maykrantz & Jason Levine

In September 2007, Jason Levine and Scott Maykrantz were interviewed on CBC for "The Farley Bloom Conversation." The theme for the week was "Fantasy Design: Artist and writers working in the field of computer games, board games, and roleplaying games."

Bloom: You wrote the *Creatures of the Night* books -- two volumes so far -- for the *GURPS* game. Have either of you collaborated before?

Levine: No, I've bounced ideas off of other people, but this is my first time working directly with another author.

Maykranz: I have before, but this is a step forward--

Bloom: An evolution.

Maykranz: You could say that, yeah.

Bloom: And how does it work? I'm interested to know [thoughtful pause] I'm fascinated by the "division of labor," as I call it. Who does which part?

Levine: The concept stuff is all Scott. He comes up with the basic idea behind each critter, and then I come home from work to find a demonic midwife in my email. [laughs] Usually it's a solid treatment -- what the creature is, what it does, and how you'd use it -- along with artwork. In fact, if I can reveal your trade secret, Scott? [Maykrantz nods] He often just draws a creature with no preconceptions, then looks at the drawing later on and figures out what it will be.

Maykranz: Yeah, that's true. I draw a lot of monsters--

Bloom: Every day?

Maykranz: Yes. I have a backlog of pictures to choose from. I brainstorm names, I link names with pictures, and then I start writing ideas for traits, habitat, and adventures. The other day I drew a picture of a humanoid made of rocks. I looked at my list of names and chose "Clatternorn." Then I wrote what the creature does, what it wants, weaknesses, and that sort of thing.

Levine: And once I get the first draft of a critter, it's usually obvious where it's going. If I'm not sure, I interrogate Scott until we're both on the same page -- which occasionally involves changing the concept, or at least part of it. After that, I start "*GURPS*-ifying" it by statting the beast up and turning references into rules.

Maykranz: When Jason sends the creature back to me, it has a different feel. My version has minor references to game mechanics and a few numbers that don't mean much.

Bloom: So Jason nails it down. He makes it more specific.

Maykranz: Yeah. With his input, I can see flaws that aren't apparent when I'm sitting at home, typing at the computer. I see the stats, the advantages, the disadvantages -- and I get right back into the creature, adding --

Bloom: Now be honest, Scott. Have you ever sent a creature to Jason that needed a serious overhaul?

Maykranz: Yeah, I've sent a few that I needed help with completing the concept. I think the *slake hounds* fit that

description. [Turing to Levine.] They weren't finished when I sent them to you, were they?

Levine: Well, the rough concept was there. Originally, they were these undead things that drank body fluids. You wanted them to have a "black heart" --

Maykranz: Right, but I wasn't sure what that meant. I just wrote "black heart" and said, "Jason, what does that mean?" [Laughs]

Levine: Yeah, so we brainstormed on it. We already had a few undead things in the book, so it seemed more fun to make them living creatures -- part of the ecology, so adventurers might wander into a pack of them in a forest. And then we hit on the "bile organ," which is what I feel makes them interesting. It gives them an Achilles' heel, a potent defense, and a reason to be hunted by the PCs, all in one package. So they turned out quite different from the initial concept . . . and definitely for the better.

Maykranz: And then we spent a lot of time on the *miser troll*. That one was hard to write. I struggled with the idea of a creature that instigates a series of political adventures. It sits at the center of a geopolitical conflict. It was hard to get a grasp on.

Levine: He's a slippery little guy, pun intended, especially because we wanted to make him more of a plot hook than an opponent you'd go toe-to-toe with. The conflict that springs up around him is the real adventure, with the troll existing more to surprise the players with a supernatural twist. In fact, we originally had more rules for running a war of influence than we did for the troll itself. But we ended up cutting it, for various reasons.

Bloom: I understand you're going to share that "lost footage" with us tonight. I think we have the clip. [Looks past the cameraman to the producer.] Hal, can we see that clip now?

The Groups and Their Assets

Rival groups come in many forms. The GM should define each with three characteristics called assets, each with a strength from one to six. The GM can set appropriate values or just roll 1d for each asset.

Strength	Explanation
1	Just starting out; loose organization; pathetic, rag-tag charm
2	Real potential; resourceful; weak, early stages
3	Significant; hard core but weak along the edges; bright future
4	Almost a major player, but with a fatal weakness or two; former world power a generation later
5	Major player; rival for the top; deep roots; flexible and strong
6	World-class; setting new standards; awe-inspiring

Firepower: This is hardware, people, and money. It is a combination of weapons, soldiers, reserve troops, supply lines, vehicles, money, allies, fortifications, and intelligence-gathering systems. When thinking of a major political or military power, Firepower is the "raw strength" that first comes to mind.

Strategic Skill: The ability to use firepower effectively, the wisdom of retreat, when to make and break alliances, controlling the group's public image, and taking advantage of opponents' weaknesses. A group that lacks Firepower can make up for it with Strategic Skill.

Tenacity: The resolve of the group, its dedication, the ability to recover from setbacks, and to change with new conditions. To have a high Tenacity, it helps to have a unifying ideology, a deep need for revenge, and homogeneity within the group. Tenacious groups have a strong internal culture, memorization of history, and see themselves as righteous soldiers.

Example: The Mondragon Army (MA) is fighting for control of the poppy fields of Central Asia. They're a

medium-sized guerrilla force, well-equipped, with no allies, lots of cash, and enough vehicles to move troops and supplies. They rely on locals for food, water, and medicine. They're a versatile group, with excellent diplomatic skills. However, their leader is too megalomaniacal to pay attention to the realities of the world. Their commitment to control the poppies is impressive, but they do not have a coherent ideology. Their Firepower is 3. Their Strategic Skill could be 4, but the leader's eccentricity lowers it to 3. Their Tenacity is 2.

Using Asset Numbers

The group with the highest sum of assets controls the resource. If two groups are tied for the highest total, the group that currently controls the resource maintains control. Events in the adventure alter these numbers, reflecting a gain or loss of strength for each group in the conflict.

If a new group takes over, they will announce their victory. The transfer takes time and should be worked into the plot by the GM. The new group will employ key figures of the old regime, purge traitors, and rebuild their organization for permanent rule.

Example: The People's Revolutionary Vanguard (PRV) controls the poppy fields. They have Firepower 4, Strategic Skill 2, and Tenacity 2 (asset total: 8). The MA assassinates the PRV's leader. The GM decides that this will reduce their Strategic Skill to 1 and an asset total of 7. This gives the MA (asset total: 8) control of the fields. The takeover by the MA is not instant, but once the assassination takes place, everyone can see that the PRV is defeated.

Asset numbers bring player characters into the heart of the conflict. The players should be encouraged to make decisions using the asset numbers as targets. For example, they could carry out a mission to destroy the key weapons depot of an enemy group. The GM informs them that this will lower the group's Firepower by two levels. If they complete the mission, they can easily see how they affect the conflict for the resource.

For the players to know the asset numbers, their characters will need access to reliable intelligence. This requires data gathering and use of the Intelligence Analysis skill -- see page 201 of the ***Basic Set*** for details on both. (If no one in the party has Intelligence Analysis, they can rely on an expert NPC to keep them informed.) Success on the analysis roll reveals the relative ranking of the major groups, from strongest to weakest, without knowing any real numbers. Success by 3 or more reveals the asset total for all major groups, while success by 6 or more will reveal the individual asset strengths for each group.

Bloom: Interesting. Mmmm. Tell me, how was Volume 2 different from Volume 1?

Maykranz: As I worked on the new volume, I asked for opinions on the Steve Jackson Games forums. I wrote "Tell me how you've used Creatures of the Night." Kevin Munoz mentioned that the creatures had traits without explanations.

It was a useful criticism. I thought, "I should explain *why* this creature has these particular abilities." I didn't want the creatures to be arbitrary collections of strengths and weaknesses. When I was coming up with ideas for Volume 2, I tried to tie all of the traits for a particular creature into a coherent concept. I thought about real-world animals, and used their natural traits as a template for my ideas.

Bloom: Right. Now, Volume 2 has a theme: Territories. Did Volume 1 have a theme?

Maykranz: No. It was scattered. I wanted variety -- smart humanoids, big dumb combat monsters, something that looks normal but is really a creature --

Bloom: Like the *guardian owls?*

Maykranz: Yeah. The guardian owls are passive, in a way. They are doing their own thing, and don't need to interact

with the player characters.

Levine: Most creatures aren't out to bother the PCs. It's more realistic for them to be left alone. We did that with the *tellanodes.* The psychic eavesdroppers they create would be perfectly happy to sit in their house all day, stealing secrets. Of course, this creates a weird, Twilight-Zone atmosphere that will inspire the players to figure out what's really going on. But they're not obvious monsters or bad guys in any way -- just opportunists.

Bloom: Where do you see this series going? Are you going to continue using themes?

Maykranz: The theme for Volume 2 was really just a way of saying "I know that you can find similarities among these creatures." It's like listening to your favorite album and you notice that every song has something in common. I looked at the Volume 2 creatures, re-read them a few times, and then realized that they had a theme, a unifying idea.

Levine: My only concern with consciously pursuing a theme is that you tend to force your ideas into that one mold, whether or not that's the best thing for them. I'd prefer keeping all possibilities open.

Maykranz: Yeah. The theme was an afterthought. It's best to keep it scattered, with a lot of variety, during the first draft.

For the next volume, we'll use feedback from the gamers. They can tell us what they like most. We'll do more of the good stuff. They'll let us know what's missing, too.

Bloom: Well, I look forward to continued installments of the series. I'd love to have you back to talk again.

Maykranz: It's been great, Farley. Thanks for having us here.

Levine: Yes, thanks for the opportunity. I'm a big fan.

The Omniscient Eye

If Magic Items Are Common, Should They Be Called Mundane Items?

How much are magic items invented by modern fantasy writers, or just by modern fantasy games? I'm not an expert on mythology or Medieval history, but where characters in games are dripping with magic swords and wands and potions, they look pretty rare in historical stories. Is that true?

Determining how powerful and prevalent to make magic and magic items in a given world is quite possibly one of the most difficult and important decisions a fantasy author or GM has to make. It they are too common or powerful, they can easily upset the balance of the game or plot. Too weak or nonexistent and the audience questions just how fantastic the setting really is. What we have here, though, are really two different questions. The answer to the first is simply that very few magic items that appear in modern fantasy novels or gaming are entirely invented by the author/GM. Most are based, at least loosely, on historic or literary models. Others -- such as Terry Pratchett's -- are based on technological devices. The second question is a bit more difficult and involved, so a few categories seem appropriate. We will then broadly group the response into four divisions: mythic, historic, literary/legendary, and modern.

Mythic Magic

Western mythology is surprisingly filled with magic devices of various sorts. Taking just three of the most well known mythologies -- Graeco-Roman, Celtic, and Norse -- we see a wide range of items appearing in the hands of heroes and gods alike. While there are great differences in the types of items possessed in each mythology, they all generally serve to develop the plot or point of the particular myth they belong to. None of the mythic magical items are simply there as loot for the hero. In fact, many are merely loaned to the hero by a divine being who expects to get his possession back in a reasonable amount of time. They always get their items back, but the Repo Men of Olympus conjures interesting images and could serve as an adventure or campaign hook for a game.

Looking at specifics, though, a few items come instantly to mind. In Graeco-Roman mythology, we see Hermes' winged sandals which are briefly loaned to Perseus in some tales; and Aphrodite's girdle, said to mystically enhance her already unearthly beauty. Among the Celts, we see a plethora of magic cauldrons and weapons. Most of these appear in the hands of the gods, such as the Dagda's club (which both kills and resurrects) and cauldron (which always feeds anyone who wishes to eat from it); or Manannan mac Lir's ship (which moves without sails), invisibility cloak, flaming helmet, and sword (which always hits its mark). Nordic possibilities include Thor's hammer, Mjolnir (which always returns to his hand after it is thrown); Idun's apples (without which the gods grow old and die); and most of Odin's armament. In the Christian tradition, the most obvious (if rather rare) magic item is the Archangel Michael's flaming sword. Across the world, Sun Wukong, the Monkey King's staff which changes sizes, certainly fits within this category as well.

The overall trend is that mythological magic items are fairly common in most traditions. That said, virtually all mythological magic items are unique. They are almost always associated with a particular individual, either as identification or as a necessity for doing his or her job, such as Hermes' winged sandals which increase the messenger god's speed, Thor's hammer which is the tool and weapon of the smith god. Most seem to be associated with a divinity rather than a particular mortal, even if mortals sometimes borrow the items (mostly in the Graeco-Roman and Celtic traditions, rarely if ever in the Nordic). When the magic item is not used to identify its owner, and even in times where it is, it typically appears as an integral part of the plot. For example, Idun's apples first appear when Loki convinces her to leave and bring her apples along. Were it not for the apples and their power, the plot would not exist. The same can be said when Perseus borrows Hermes' sandals; the loan makes for a sign of divine favor and provides a means of moving the myth's plot along.

Magic Items in History

If we move away from the semi-literary world of mythology into the physical, historical realm, we find that items imbued with magical powers multiply but change. As a broad survey, I classify these items into six areas: amulets/talisman, gems, potions/unguents, animal pelts/belts, runic inscriptions, and saints' relics. The first three classes appear from at least as far back as Sumeria and continue, arguably, into the modern day. The latter three really come into their own during the post-Roman era and continue into modern usage, especially saints' relics.

Amulets and talismans typically appear as protective devices. While charms, spells, and animal-based remedies were often used to cure illnesses after the fact, amulets and talismans are meant to prevent the illness from occurring in the first place. The purpose behind both types of item are identical, but the source and form vary. Amulets are made from plant or animal parts while a talisman has "written words or at least letters written on" it (Kieckhefer 77). Some examples include wearing a hare's foot on the left arm to prevent all dangers, hanging springs of rosemary to repel venomous snakes, or "a series of names for God which, if borne on one's person, will protect against fire, water, arms, and poison" (Kieckhefer 77). These items appear to be permanent in nature, efficacious so long as the item continues to exist in one piece. They are typically small, simple to make, and usually (in the Christian era at least) have prayers said over them. Because of the ease with which they can be produced and how often they are discussed in treatises, amulets and talismans were probably very common at least through the end of the Renaissance.

While not enchanted, as such, various gemstones were also considered to have a range of pseudo-magical effects. Nearly any medieval lapidary contains such details, though Bishop Marbode of Rennes' *Book of Stones* from the 11th century is probably the most commonly cited. Some of the abilities associated with stones include: the sapphire's ability to dispel terror and cure headaches; and the power of crushed magnet sprinkled over hot coals to cause "the occupants of the house [to] mysteriously depart, leaving the place easy prey for burglary" (Kieckhefer 103). General belief held that while herbs had various mystical properties, stones and especially jewels had even greater strength. This belief was probably held because most of the stones included in lapidaries were quite rare at the time. Thus, since any peasant could hunt around the woods and find various common herbs yet only the wealthy could afford sapphires, clearly sapphires were more mystically potent.

Another common class of magic items from the ancient world that reaches into the modern era is the ingested or applied items, potions, and unguents. Many of these items were created by doctors and herbalists and were meant to be single use, or limited use, items. The majority were used for medical purposes or as love potions. That said, there were those learned in such lore who used their skills to harm others. As Europe moved into the medieval and Renaissance periods, more unguents which were said to allow people to transform themselves or others into beasts -- cats, wolves, and horses being the most common -- appeared in popular stories and broadsides. Many of these were said to be recipes learned from the Devil (most common from the 15th century onwards). Any late medieval or Renaissance witchcraft or witch-hunting source covers a variety of such unguents, especially the French sources like Henri Boguet.

A related item that was very common in France and Italy during the Renaissance and Scandinavia during earlier periods were animal pelts/belts. These were said to transform the wearer into the animal the pelt or belt was made from, typically a wolf. If sources such as Boguet are to be believed, every village in France had at least one such pelt floating around (as well as numerous unguents). Of course, Boguet made his living as a witch and werewolf hunter, so it is very likely that he was simply attempting to drum up business.

One of the most highly debated medieval magic items is the runic inscription. From what archaeologists and runic scholars can tell, there were quite a few inscriptions meant to protect the wielder of a sword or amulet. Others have a less well defined purpose. Being conservative, we can only count as magic those inscriptions which we can translate into meaningful text and which clearly call upon aid (usually divine) for the owner. Some less conservative individuals have taken to calling any runic inscription that we cannot meaningfully translate "magic." This approach calls to mind the archaeologists' reference to an object having "religious significance." In the latter case, "religious significance" can either mean that the object has verifiable religious use or that the archaeological community has no idea what the object was used for. Most untranslatable runic inscriptions, the Omniscient Eye would argue, probably fall into the non-magical category. For all we know, they could simply be the first owner's initials or a version of a smith's mark,

depending on the region, time period, and culture.

Perhaps the most recent type of magic object to enter the general public was the saints' relic. These objects, whether formerly owned by a saint or a bone/body part of the saint, were incredibly common during the middle ages. Nearly every church, cathedral, or shrine of note had some sort of relic on hand to draw pilgrims and donations. If we are to believe the sources, some saints apparently had 20 or 30 fingers, sometimes as many as seven heads, or uncountable ribs. But, various abbots, pastors, and pardoners had a reason for this multiplication. By turning to the Bible, they claimed that as Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes, the relics left behind by saints multiplied for the greater good of Christendom. This replicate effect clearly did not create enough relics, though as we have several reported cases of monks, priests, and others stealing relics from various sanctuaries, or hiring people to steal them. Most of these relics were believed to be imbued with power from the saint to whom they formerly belonged. Because of this, most were believed to have curative properties or to extend the saint's "sanctity field" around the owner to protect him from demons and devils. Whatever properties the relic was supposed to have were almost always related to the saint's life and area of influence. Obviously, such relics as the Shroud of Turin and the True Cross were believed to be incredibly potent.

Enchanting Words

The medieval literary world is no less productive than history or mythology when it comes to magical devices. A brief survey of Arthurian romances, or instance, presents a plethora of mystical herbs, unguents, love potions, gems, and other artifacts. Many of these became the source of modern Eurocentric fantasy items. One classic example is Tolkien's One Ring which derives its primary power (invisibility), in part, from Chretien de Troyes' *Yvain*, who acquires a magic ring which hides him from his enemies in the same fashion. As with the historical sources, most herbs and unguents were used for healing purposes in the various romances, *lais*, and other tales. Perhaps the most famous love potion is that which drives the plot of *Tristen and Isolde* in any of the story's incarnations. Most gems, as with their historical cousins, are put to protective use, typically in rings. Artifacts are where we see the greatest variation. These devices range from magically imbued dishes (plates and other flatware) and drinking vessels to swords and boats. As Kieckhefer states, "The world of the romances seems at times a vast toy shop stocked with magical delights" (107).

Other important artifacts include both of King Arthur's swords (the one in the stone and Excalibur) as well as his scabbard -- which prevented blood loss -- and Sir Gawain's green sash. The latter, present in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is a debatable object in that Bertilak's wife claims it will protect him from being beheaded, but she is also his opponent's wife, so she is not an entirely reputable source. A perfect example of myriad magical objects is Chaucer's "The Squire's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales*. This particular story is a veritable treasure trove of medieval magical items. Among the latter's collection are a brass steed that never tires, a mirror that shows friend and foe (Rowling's "foeglass" seen in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*), a ring that allows the wearer to understand bird speech, and a sword that cuts through anything and can heal the wounds it causes. In the Breton *lais* recorded by Marie de France, such as "Guigemar" and "Les Deus Amanz," we can find another boat/ship which moves on its own with no crew and a potion which instantly restores the drinker's strength respectively.

While we find innumerable magical items in medieval literature, there are a few common characteristics that all of them share. Most artifacts discovered in the romances, *lais*, and other works are unique. That is, they are not mass produced, most have names, and finding two with the same powers is difficult at best. One of the few exceptions to the latter is magic ships, which all seem to be able to propel themselves without sails, crews, or oarsmen. In nearly every case of artifacts, there are limits to who can use the item. This does not apply to potions, unguents, gems, and other "common" objects. For example, a magic boat may only work for passengers who are humble, loyal, and innocent of treachery. A knight who boasts of some conquest may find himself magically tossed overboard. Likewise, a castle may be visible only to those who are brave, remaining invisible to cowards. And a magic sword may fail its owner if the cause is not righteous (Excalibur is a good example). In almost every case, these items are integral to the plot of the story or are necessary to keep the story moving. Without the love potion, *Tristen and Isolde* loses a considerable amount of the dramatic tension which arises from the Tristen-Isolde-King Mark triangle. King Arthur, without Excalibur and the sword in the stone, is simply another trumped up warlord and mediocre knight. Lacking the magic invisibility ring, Yvain finds himself trapped in a room with no exits and his enemy's men-at-arms with no place to

hide and no chance of winning a fight.

To a modern audience, these may seem like crutches to avoid having to find creative solutions to problems. However, to the period and many later audiences, various magic devices served to create problems that needed creative or divinely mandated solutions. They also served to show that the hero was truly heroic, possessed certain knightly virtues, and/or had divine blessing. The latter is clearly the case with Arthur and the sword in the stone as well as with Galahad's sword in a stone (which proved that he was the perfect knight). From a certain perspective we can also argue that the various knights of the romances and *lais* were the James Bonds of the period and that the magic devices they acquired or encountered were the equivalent of high-tech gadgets or defenses.

Modern Applications

What the modern author or GM does with these sources and the prevalence of magic items really depends on what his purpose is. We can identify three basic, broad, and certainly not all-inclusive, classes in the work of modern authors: practically nonexistent, rare, or mass produced.

The first class includes those authors who limit magic devices to the point that they effectively do not exist. George R. R. Martin's Song of Fire and Ice series, at least the first two books, are a good example of this sort of setting. Over the course of the first two books, the audience is presented with only three arguably magical items: Dani's dragon eggs. ("Arguably" here because the eggs are not necessarily magical in and of themselves, but the creatures they hatch reintroduce magic to the world.) William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* presents a similar fantasy setting in which magical devices are virtually nonexistent; the only ones that come to mind are Miracle Max's chocolate coated pill and possibly the death device in the Pit of Despair. The rare class includes those authors who definitely employ magical items, but do so sparingly or make them difficult enough to acquire that they have no effect on daily life. Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar is a good example of this category with almost all of the magical items being provided by Ningauble and Sheelba when, and only when, the heroes need them. In both classes, the magical items are used to inject a sense of mystery and the epic into the world. They can also be used, as with the medieval examples, to move the plot along or to outclass the heroes, whose enemies often have more and better magic than they do.

The mass-produced class is probably the one most familiar to many gamers. In these settings large quantities of magical items exist and usually have generic names, such as the classic **Dungeons & Dragons** potions of healing, +1 swords, or bags of holding. Good examples in fiction include J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and Terry Pratchett's Discworld in which mass-produced magic items are used to replace technology. Another is Steven Brust's Dragaera setting which has some mass-produced magical devices, almost exclusively weapons. The most notable of these are the Morganti blades that were potentially inspired by Elric's Stormbringer, without necessarily having the latter's sentience. In most of these cases the prevalence of magic items is purposely chosen in order to create a world similar to our own without resorting to technology. Thus Rowling's wizards replace sports cars with broomsticks and Pratchett uses imps with painting equipment to replace cameras. Some of these mass produced items are unique to modern fantasy, others have classical, historic, or legendary ancestors (such as flying broomsticks), while most of the rest are based on primary world items (Unseen University's Hex). This class is definitely a modern creation that does not appear to have any historical -- mythic or literary -- predecessors.

Gaming Application

The potential application of this question and answer to gaming should be pretty straightforward. Both the GM and players should decide what role magical devices are going to play in the setting or game. Any of the historical, mythic, or literary trends lead to a variety of gaming or writing opportunities. Characters could be sent on a quest to retrieve a rare, unique magic item. As we can see in the tale of the Argonauts, this could lead to several side quests involving single-shot magic. In a related style, they could perform a quest for their divinities in order to borrow a special item that they need for their greater quest. On the other hand, they could be contacted by a divinity to retrieve an item he loaned to a mortal who never returned it. Magic items could remain in the hands of powerful NPCs for use against the characters, making the PCs underdogs. Or they could be so common that the world is little different from our own, just archaic in appearance -- possibly the medieval/Renaissance version of steampunk or cyberpunk: manapunk, a world in

which enchanter guilds/companies control the government and everyone seeks the latest and greatest magical upgrades.

Selected References and Further Reading

- Ankarloo, Bengt & Gustav Henningsen eds. *Early Modern European Witchcraft.* Oxford UP, 2001.
- Anon. *The Quest for the Holy Grail.* New York: Penguin Books, 1969.
- Anon. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Trans.
- J.R.R. Tolkien. New York: Ballantine, 1980.
- Beroul. *The Romance of Tristan.* Trans. Alan S. Fredrick. New York: Penguin Books, 1970.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales.* New York: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Chretien de Troyes. *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion.* Trans. Burton Raffel. Yale UP, 1987.
- Geary, Patrick J. *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages.* Princeton UP, 1990.
- Kieckhefer, Richard. *Magic in the Middle Ages.* Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Malory, Sir Thomas. *Complete Works.* Ed. Eugene Vinaver. Oxford UP, 1971.
- Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France.* Trans. Robert Hanning & Joan Ferrante. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- Otten, Charlotte ed. *A Lycanthropy Reader: Werewolves in Western Culture.* New York: Dorset, 1989.
- Pollington, Stephen. *Rudiments of Runelore.* Norfolk, England: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1998.

--Brent Stypczynski

–21

Village of the Star

by Paul Drye

There's not much original research on Homeline, but that doesn't mean there's none at all. Observational astronomy took a huge hit after it became apparent that there were timelines as advanced as Homeline (or more) that had made their own telescope runs to steal. Rather than building an observatory and paying to man it, one could just mine the papers produced elsewhere. Still, there's grant money to be had if a scientist can tie his work to parachronics, no matter how obliquely. Other timelines just don't know what to look for in that case.

The Schuler Project was founded more than a decade ago by several major American and European observatories. Its purpose was follow up on hints that some of the processes occurring during neutron star formation might give insight into projector physics. Waiting around for a neutron star to form (and even expecting to catch it early enough to see the whole process) is a fool's errand under normal circumstances, as you need a particular type of supernova to make one. With hundreds of timelines at hand, though, each with a different date in the past, it was possible to know when and where one could be seen by examining Homeline's own history.

That was the theory, anyway, but even with this advantage the Project has struggled. The 1572 and 1604 supernovas were of the wrong type, and the Cassiopeia A is too dim and shrouded by interstellar dust to give good readings. The 1181 and 185 explosions were hunted down and observed too, but they turned out to be the useless Type Ia as well. Only the Crab Nebula supernova produced a clean neutron star and, while it's been studied on several different timelines now, only one data point is a disappointing harvest for what counts as a major scientific endeavor by Homeline's standards.

Accordingly, the Project has moved on to the one remaining candidate despite its inherent difficulties. The Vela Supernova took place more than 11,000 years ago, and before the Project started looking into it the error bar on the exact date was more than 1,300 years. Close study of records from the most advanced timelines at that date took more than two years, but have finally narrowed the explosion down to somewhere in the years 11,291 and 11,290 BC. For the last 18 months, two astronomers have been living in the central Chilean mountains of Clovis-3, the sole timeline presently known to be moving through those two years. Their mission is to keep a battery of telescopes pointed at the progenitor star and catch it when it finally goes off. When they do, the Project's board will finally be able to justify the expenses of their project, and hopefully can extend the program further into the past.

Of course, there are complications.

The Project

Schuler's people selected Santiago, Chile as the point from which they'd transition to Clovis-3. The Vela Supernova is to occur in a southern constellation, and Chile has a history of high-level astronomical work. Many unemployed

workers from Cerro Tololo and Las Campanas moved back south to Santiago in the post-parachronics pure-science funding bust, and were hired as support crew for the current effort. One of them, Juan Navarro Hernandez, is on the two-member team out-time.

On Homeline, the Project has a small but advanced facility in San José de Maipo, a small town 30 miles outside of Santiago. Though quite accessible, it is on a river embedded in the Andes (the Rio Maipo) and so is also close to the mountain tops the researchers need on Clovis-3; there is a climbable ridge to the east, a couple of miles long, which takes travelers to a small plateau more than a mile high. Just 100 yards long and 50 wide (running southwest to northeast in its long axis), it's more than big enough for the task at hand.

On Clovis-3, the plateau has been turned into a small observatory. Porters having translated in from San José carrying an aluminum sheet observation dome, several small telescopes (visual light and other frequencies), and the necessities of life for the two on-site personnel. There are a series of tree-protected rock shelters on the north of the plateau where the researchers have set up their tents, slit trenches, and cooking area. Once installed, the plan was that the researchers would walk down to a contact point nearer the Maipo where they would drop off their latest observations for translation back to Homeline, then return to the plateau.

As there's a chance the supernova will explode at a time when the constellation is not visible from Santiago -- Vela is quite high in the sky most of the year, but it does disappear at various points -- there is also a backup station near the similarly dry and high Warburton, Western Australia. However, it is unmanned for budgetary reasons. The plan is that if the neutrino detector at the Maipo station says the star is going off when it's below the horizon, the two researchers will crash a message back to Homeline where two more researchers in Australia can back them up.

The Refugees

The Khormokatho are a tribe of some 20 Paleo-Indians who lived in the Santiago Basin until last year. They're members of the sparse and rather unsuccessful people that inhabited South America prior to the real conquest of the New World by Asian hunters crossing Beringia. It's taken these Clovis culture people and their descendants this long to reach southern South America, but now they're pushing out the Khormokatho and their like. If history runs anything like it does on Homeline, they're going to be very successful.

After a raid killed several of their fighting-age men, the remnants of the Khormokatho escaped up into the mountains surrounding their former home. It was a strategy of desperation, as life in the mountains is harsh and none of the tribes-people had any skills geared to living there. By a stroke of luck -- whether good or bad depends on one's perspective -- they stumbled across the Schuler Project's encampment where the two astronomers took pity on them.

They allowed the Khormokatho to set up a permanent encampment on the plateau, and have used their technologically advanced resources to help defend them. The two out-timers use their local knowledge, the firearms they've been given, and even their food and medicine (to the extent that they can be extended to ten times the number they're supposed to support) to keep the Clovis-culture interlopers off the backs of their charges. Unfortunately, while the invaders are somewhat afraid of chasing down the Khormokatho now, they're not entirely dissuaded. The refugees have had to be enlisted to protect the plateau, forming a bicultural, bi-technological society that breaks every kind of rule Infinity has.

The researchers have justified their decision on the basis that the Clovis people would have found the encampment otherwise and brought the attempt to observe the supernova to an early end. However, the Project's protocol was that, if attack threatened, they were to wrap up and come home. This has been ignored. Quite rightly, the researchers believe that failing at this observation will break the Project, and there will be no second attempt. Accordingly, they've been falsifying their reports. They include mentions of friendly natives in the area (true, as far as it goes) while omitting the reason why the natives are this high up in the mountains.

The Khormokatho's origins are somewhat mysterious, and certainly they don't look much like any group of humans living in the modern world. Their arms and legs are relatively short, leaving them about a head below most out-timers. Their skins are quite dark and their hair brown and curly, which suggests some association with Australian Aborigines,

but their facial features have a "European" cast. If any of them survive the next few years, some geneticist is going to find it interesting to study them.

Changes

The researchers have used the isolation of their plateau base to their advantage. They walk nearly a mile to their drop-off point, and often the contact is automated, with no other humans involved. Accordingly, they've been careful not to give any indication that things are not going according to plan. They don't think they're doing wrong, but they know what they're up to would not meet with approval back home. As long as their reports are either bland or upbeat, they're hoping to be left alone.

Anyone on a journey from the drop-off point to the camp will realize right away that all is not as reported. The occasional switchbacks along the ridge route are crudely fortified with piled rocks retrieved from around the area. Observant visitors will notice that a few spots between the drop-off and the Rio Maipo plain below -- in other words, in the opposite direction from the camp -- are fortified too. The obvious implication is that the astronomers are trying to keep something from getting between down there and the plateau. Neither the Homeliners or the Khormokatho know much about defensive structures, but their hearts are in the right place. While very basic, the gates are admittedly somewhat effective in keeping the Yultang from an all-out assault. However, their size and number will be the first clue that not just the researchers are involved. Unless the two have been doing nothing but toting boulders around, there's more manpower involved.

The camp itself is a dead giveaway. The edges of the plateau are piled up with rocks and logs to throw at (or roll down on) anyone approaching from those angles. Posts have been driven into the ground at the flatter spots and wicker fences woven between them; some are still in the process of construction. The line of approach along the ridge is guarded by one of the two researchers carrying a rifle or, more worryingly, a Khormokatho woman named Pangka armed with the researchers' spare. She's the only one who can hit the broad side of a barn with it. Within the compound itself, fire pits line all the available rock ledges and outcroppings. Children run around playing, while adults watch newcomers warily.

The Researchers

Juan Navarro Hernandez: A graduate of the University of Chile in the mid-1990s, Hernandez was on track for a career as an astronomer when most institutions pulled out of Chile's observatories. For the last three decades he's been stuck as a high-school mathematics teacher in Valparaiso, pining for the life he nearly had. When the Schuler Project contacted him, he jumped at the chance to do "real work" even if he had to go out-time to do it.

As well as being a trained astronomer he is into hiking and outdoor activities, a combination that brought him to the attention of Schuler. Though over 50 now, he is still very fit, with tanned skin and distinguished-looking gray hair. To some extent he has never lost his youthful idealism, which people who know him attribute to the influence of his missing father. The elder Hernandez was an educated union organizer who was murdered in the aftermath of the Chilean Coup of 1973. Juan has always thought of himself as a passionate, socially responsible person in the mold of his long-lost parent.

He is the driving force behind giving the Khormokatho protection. It was obvious to him that the ragged band that appeared on his doorstep was in trouble, and he was the one who used his orienteering skills to establish that a new group had appeared in the region and were ousting the previous natives. In the months since, he has developed some rough language skills that let him communicate with his new charges, and direct them in their resistance. He does harbor some guilt that this is interfering with his duties as an astronomer, but as mentioned previously he claims that the two are complementary to one another. What would happen if he were forced to choose between the supernova and the people is unclear.

Jenna Harpe: A 28-year old native of Seattle, Washington, the young Jenna somehow got interested in astronomy despite her hometown's terrible skies. Her mother is Mexican-American, so she grew up bilingual in Spanish and

English, then took a degree in astronomy at UC Davis. After graduation she was hired by Infinity as a "time-checker": one of the people who went in early to an empty timeline and used astronomical observations to establish the local year in the absence of any cultures with recognizable calendars. She was seconded to the Schuler Project two years ago after they asked for some help on the Vela observations. Though working in civilian life since then, it's entirely possible that any visiting Infinity personnel will have met her at some point, perhaps during training.

As well as being a good liaison to the locals in Homeline Chile, and a skilled astronomer, she is also Infinity's eyes on Clovis-3. Unfortunately for that idea, she and Hernandez have fallen in love and, despite her misgivings, she is going along with his plans to protect the Khormokatho. With her insight into Infinity's procedures, she's even been helpful at constructing the ruses with which they deceive the folks back home.

She is a young "American-looking" woman with tanned brown skin and long black hair that she wears in a practical pony-tail. While in the field she wears a mixture of the leather-and-denim clothes she picked up during her post-graduate work in the American Southwest and the more colorful (but equally field-practical) Chilean huasa garb she discovered recently. Somewhat chubby, she could be quickly described as Indiana Jones turned female and squashed down into a 5' 4" frame.

The Enemy

The Yultang are the newcomers to the area, the vanguard of the Beringian colonists known to archeologically minded Homeliners as the Clovis culture. They're not the stereotypical picture of the slavering invader, being in dire need of a new homeland themselves. Native to the Atacama region to the north, the recent end of the last ice age has been drying out the plains they called home; in a few thousand more years it will be transformed into the driest desert on Earth. Faced with severe population pressure, some of them have moved south.

They aren't even very good fighters, as they've spent the last couple of thousand years on two continents so wide and empty that it's simply easier to move to another location rather than conflict with another group. Still, they have spear-throwers and basic ideas about tactics. The Khormokatho, on the other hand, are more technologically primitive, and they and related peoples were so widely spread out that they rarely encountered each other let alone fought. Their native language is unrelated to anything found on Homeline (or a lot of other timelines, for that matter), but Juan Navarro Hernandez has a smattering of it as mentioned above, and some of them have started picking up Spanish.

The Yultang (and their relatives) are in the process of becoming the typical pre-Columbian people of the Americas; only an expert would be able to distinguish them from an American Indian, as per Homeline's idea of the term. They are relatively tall, with reddish-brown skin and black hair. While their language is ancestral to modern-day Mapudungu, even on the off-chance an out-timer knows this obscure tongue it will be of little use. Their speech is as different from the modern version as English is from Armenian.

The Star

Sooner or later, the Vela Supernova is going to blow. Before it does so, anyone who wishes to look at it at night will just be able to make it out with the naked eye in the dry, thin air of the plateau; if viewed through binoculars or anything stronger it is obviously "fuzzy" from the gas it has been expelling over the last few millennia. When it explodes it will increase in brightness over a day about magnitude-11 then gain another magnitude over the next week before slowly sliding back down the scale of brightness. At its peak, it will give off as much light as the full moon, but compressed into a point source rather than spread out across a disk. Unless the GM has been indulging in some unusual timelines, it's likely to be the most remarkable thing the adventurers have ever seen in the sky. It will certainly be the most unusual seen by the natives of Clovis-3.

The uncertainty in the actual day it will go off lets the GM use the star at the high point of any visit. If the situation is deteriorating, an attack by the Yultang can occur just as the critical observations are getting underway and it will be up to the adventurers to keep the astronomers safe for extraction . . . either after the recordings are made, or before if that's absolutely necessary. Alternatively, if the visitors are trying to broker a peace between the Khormokatho and the

Yultang, a latter-day Thales of Miletos might want to use the supernova as an omen. "Behold! The sky gods smile upon peace!" Hopefully they'll think to do this before some bright spark among the Yultang decides it's a signal to finish their enemies instead, and convinces the others of the same. Some tension can be milked out of having both interpretations occur at the same time.

Other Adventures in the Village of the Star

Simon Says: The Khormokatho aren't inclined to listen to the players' characters; after all, it's Juan and Jenna who've helped turn their lives around. If they want to cajole the natives into doing something against their better judgments, the strangers will have to help too. The only question is, what can they do that doesn't break four kinds of laws?

In talking with the Khormokatho, they'll find that they had to leave behind an object of religious import, the native equivalent of an altar or totem pole. It's now deep inside Yultang territory on one of the city of Santiago's hills. Retrieving it without alerting the invaders might be just the ticket.

For an additional wrinkle, perhaps the object in question is irretrievable on Clovis-3 but still can be found in the matching spot on Homeline. Or the object the natives revere could be something entirely out of place for their timeline, such as a knight's helmet; is there a natural weak point in the multiverse here?

One Down, Several to Go: If the researchers are given sufficiently long warning of visitors, they might be able to set a trap. One of the group (either an NPC or a handily unavailable player's character) will be taken hostage and used to pressure the remainder to keep their mouths shut and help the conspirators arrive at a permanent solution to their problems. They won't kill the hostage if their bluff is called, but they won't free him either and won't allow the remaining group to stay on the plateau. The visitors will have to stage a rescue with two groups against them instead of having allies in one against the other.

What's All This Then?: The Homeline visitors are projecting into the drop-off point (either on their first visit or, if co-opted by the researchers earlier, perhaps returning with some aid) only to find themselves in the middle of a group of Yultang assaulting the stoutly defended gate next up the line. A very confused combat ensues.

Attack From Within: There is one basic question that might be worth answering: Why are the Yultang here, now? If the GM wants to throw a completely different light on things, it may be that this is not a natural migration. The Yultang may be attacking the Khormokatho at the instigation of someone else from out-time. After all, the Schuler Project was initiated to study a poorly known aspect of parachronics physics. There's money and power in play here. This possibility is particularly worthwhile if the playing group is having a hard time bringing the situation in the Village of the Star to a satisfactory conclusion, as discovering outside interference would justify the group throwing themselves behind the plateau dwellers. Possibilities for the Yultang's mentor include Centrum looking to prevent Infinity from getting info the Centrum already has, an alarmingly well-informed Reich-5 group that somehow knows what's going on, or even Infinity themselves trying to prevent the study. Perhaps the terrifying secret Paul Van Zandt revealed to the UN has something to do with it.

If the GM uses "Simon Says," above, the unusual out-time object being retrieved could foreshadow the identity of the opposing faction.

Using the Village of the Star in Other Settings

The key element of this setting is to nail down the adventurers in a situation where they'll be tempted to help a desperate group of primitives against their enemies using what amounts to godlike powers. A fantasy setting likely has the advantage of several different races, so the main difficulty is picking ones that make a moral conflict. If saddled with an alignment system, take care not to make the Yultang a band of orcs or whatnot. There are more subtle antagonisms -- elves against dwarves, for example, or Lawful Neutral against Chaotic Good -- that would work better. Transposed into a primitive tribal region, they would fit the events described above to a T.

Sci-fi settings also have opposed races, but here the danger lies in getting the players to identify with the Khormokatho. If mapped onto an alien species, the GM runs the risk of the players not caring very much. *GURPS Traveller* has the advantage of primitive minor human races, so placing one of those in peril of extinction at the hands of an equally primitive alien race would work. Come up with a reasonable justification for the aliens to be aggrieved that is no fault of the humans (perhaps the aliens are violently allergic to human body chemistry, or "galactic culture" humans once took them as slaves) and you'll be good to go.

Pulp settings have it easiest of all, since one can hardly turn around in those without discovering a new tribe in Africa or South America. About the only part of the Village of the Star that has to change is the astronomical justification for the civilized folks to interfere, but naïve scientists can be found in any field of knowledge and co-opted for similar purposes.

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Gulf Between "Cool" and "Customer"

The past couple of weeks I've been talking about the two advantages I see RPGs having over other forms of game-like entertainment. This week contains a few random thoughts to wrap up this epic series.

Speaking of epic series, my beloved (former) hometown Miami Dolphins continues their epic losing streak. Supposed players of American-rules football, this team last won a game during the Roosevelt administration (which Roosevelt, I'm not sure). Now, one interesting thing about sports teams is that (for the most part) the local interest in the team is directly proportional to whether or not the team wins. From an economic point of view, this "interest" translates into "principle" (i.e. "piles of cash"). In other words, there are dozens of other factors behind the scenes of a sports team that have little to no bearing on the success of the team: how picturesque the stadium is, how affordable the tickets are, how tasty the hot dogs are, how nice the head coach is . . . none of that matters anywhere near as much as whether the team wins.

One analogy I can make to the tabletop gaming world -- and the epilogue-y point I'll be driving into the ground here -- is that the success or failure of an RPG on the micro sense is the ability of the GM (and, to a lesser extent, the players) to make it fun. It's been said before -- by me and others -- that a good GM can make the worst RPG a blast, while a bad one can turn the best RPG into a one-session wonder. But, unlike the winningness of RPG teams, "good" and "bad" can have different definitions, depending on the group. For example, I consider myself to be a better-than-the-average-bear GM, but if I were saddled with a group that only wanted a rich tactical-combat experience, all parties would probably be profoundly disappointed.

In general, RPGs have been portrayed as having a wide scope of *possible* audience: combat folks, storytellers, character actors, and so on. But the *actual* manifestation of how specific games translate to specific audiences' desires can vary widely from game to game. For example, the most recent **Dungeons & Dragons** game is much more clearly designed with the tactician in mind compared to (say) classic **Paranoia.** But other publishers, utilizing the **d20 System** (or even OGL material) have transmuted this game into something closer to other audiences' desires. The most obvious example I can consider is Green Ronin's **Blue Rose** RPG, which looks to me like what the bog-standard **d20 System** game would become if it went away to art school for a summer of change involving poetry readings and clove cigarettes.

And the actual way audiences use their chosen games is (mostly) out of the hands of the publisher. In other words, RPGs' two greatest advantages -- as I described them the last two weeks -- aren't up to the publisher, for the most part. If recognized, this must be frustrating for those who make a living from the RPG biz; like the hot dog vendor whose profits nosedive when the team whose stadium he's in has a cold streak, so too can RPGs fail to shine at their full potential because of outside agents.

In my mind, then, two possible courses of action are -- paradoxically -- to make the GM either less or more involved. I've talked before about the possibility of [making GMs obsolete](), but it might be possible to go in the other direction, giving GMs the tools and training they need to fully utilize the advantages that RPGs have. Envision, say, regional GM trainers, who hold seminars at local cons about tips and techniques to be better. Those who participate would be rewarded with certain perks (access to special websites, ability to playtest certain games), and possibly more "tangible" rewards (limited-edition adventures, shirts, or other goodies). Perhaps ways to get GMs more involved could be devised as well, such as filing after-game reports (what books/rules/situations worked, what didn't) that could give the GMs additional rewards.

In a way, this has been attempted before: **Torg** with its Infiniverse newsletter encouraged gaming groups to send in reports. I don't know how well the concept worked then, but if there were weaknesses in this method then I can't help but wonder if they could be overcome with technology; the original reports needed to be mailed in, and I understand they've come up with a few faster means of information transmission technology in the past couple of decades. But regardless the idea previously was to make a better *game* rather than better *gamers;* focussing on one side of this equation without looking at the other would be like a golfing magazine focussing all its attention on how to buy better clubs and balls rather than how to play the game "right."

RPGs have a lot of potential advantages over other forms of entertainment, but turning that "potential" into a consistent force is a challenge for the entire hobby. As the de-motivational poster of the [one mangled fork](#) says, "Just because you are unique does not mean you are useful."

--Steven Marsh

Adventurous Occupations: Journalist

for *GURPS*

by Paul Stefko

The journalist is often a standard feature of adventure fiction. Curious, resourceful, and dedicated, the reporter will often break the case, poking into holes and discovering clues that other investigators miss. They are also good at spotting lies as well as telling them, manipulating witnesses and sources into giving them the information they need.

The intrepid reporter fits into just about every genre and in any setting that includes organized media. Superheroes maintain secret identities as journalists because it gives them an excuse to disappear at a moment's notice, off to catch the latest scoop. Paranoia thrillers see conspiracies split open by the lucky reporter in the wrong place at the right time. Horror reporters are often the first to discover the mysterious and terrifying (and just as often the first to die).

Journalist PCs

As a player character, the journalist can often serve as a walking adventure hook. Three things make the journalist ideal for spring-boarding the party into an adventure: professional interest in solving mysteries and uncovering obfuscated truths, reliable sources of information, and strong investigative skills.

A reporter is nothing without the scoop. His job hinges on being able to recognize an important story, being in the position to investigate, and actually being able to unravel the case. Success in his career can lead the journalist to major awards (granting Reputation or even Wealth and Status), while failure can leave him discredited (a negative Reputation) or -- depending on the society -- facing harsh punishment (with the law as an Enemy, assuming the player won't retire the character to his justice).

Of course, the reporter's next big story will typically be the tale of the party's current adventure. This keeps the journalist character motivated, and his interest may be enough to draw the entire group deeper into the goings-on. And with his skills and resources, the reporter will also be a valuable part of the investigation.

Any good reporter cultivates a stable of informants, snitches, and friends that can feed him information from various corners. A low-level crook attached to a larger gang, a minor official at City Hall, or a RN at the hospital can serve as helpful Contacts. When the journalist finds himself in need of information, he might give any one of these sources a call.

But it's when the sources dry up that an adventuring reporter can really shine. A talented journalist will have sharp investigative skills such as Fast-Talk, Detect Lies, Body Language, and Observation, but he could also be expected to have skills like Administration (for dealing with officials), Intimidation (to bully information out of a reluctant witness), Stealth and Shadowing, various Savoir-Faire skills, and Streetwise. In many genres, some combat ability wouldn't be out of line, either. (For players and GMs with access to *GURPS Martial Arts,* the discussion of self-defense styles on p. 145 would be a good place to start.)

Journalist NPCs

As an NPC, a reporter serves as a font of aid or information, an annoyance too nosy for his own good, or a legitimate threat to the PCs in the form of secrets revealed and dangers exposed.

A journalist as an NPC will rarely warrant the level of Ally. Reporters capable enough to be of use on an adventure should probably be reserved for PCs. However, an Ally reporter is possible in many genres, useful for establishing

covers ("With your press pass, you could easily get one of us into the gala as your date") or providing "soft skill" backup for more physical (read: combat-oriented) PCs.

However, a journalist is perfectly suited to the roll of Contact. In fact, with his own wide-ranging network, the journalist Contact could serve as a filter of many different areas of expertise. With a high enough effective skill and reliability, the journalist could be the only information source the party needs.

Journalists make interesting Enemies. Typically, they will fall into the Watcher or Rival categories, dogging the PC and hoping to catch him in a compromising position. This will, of course, wind up on the front page, potentially exposing Secrets or alerting more dangerous Enemies to the character's whereabouts.

Journalist PCs will often have journalist Enemies through professional rivalries. Perhaps one reporter scooped the other on a major story, leading one to promotion and the other to disgrace. (This very relationship has even lead to the creation of supervillains in the form of Spider-Man rogue Eddie Brock, a.k.a. Venom.)

New Perk

Many settings grant members of the press certain special privileges, such as access to secured areas and important individuals. The following perk reflects this.

Press Pass: You possess credentials that allow you access (albeit potentially restricted) to areas a normal citizen may not be able to visit.

Disadvantages

The following professional Code of Honor is adhered to by most scrupulous journalists in the modern world.

Code of Honor (Professional Journalist): Remain objective; avoid conflicts of interest at all costs. Protect your sources; never reveal an anonymous source unless extreme circumstances require it. Report accurately and without bias; seek reliable sources and quote them faithfully and in proper context. -5 points.

New Skill

The frontier of the news in the early 21st century is online, and the following new skill allows Internet journalists to present themselves and their stories in a more appealing way.

Artist (Web Design)   *IQ/Hard*
                                                                                    Default: IQ-6.

This is the skill of making visually appealing web sites. While related, there is no default to Computer Programming; that skill can be used to add functionality to a web site, but it has no bearing on the site's aesthetics.

Modifiers: Equipment modifiers (p. B345); -2 if the medium is unfamiliar; -5 if the medium is difficult (mobile devices like cell phones).

New Templates

Blogger   *25 points*

You are a blogger, the modern vanguard of independent media. Bloggers are increasingly often the first to break the most important stories in many fields. Some are competent, clever, and ethical . . . and some are complete whack jobs. Most bloggers fall somewhere in the middle.

Contacts and Patrons: The best bloggers know people just about everywhere who can pass them information. The worst will pretend to have sources to legitimize their own pet theories. Some bloggers work for companies who are trying to capitalize on a "big name" in Internet circles.

Equipment: Blogs can be accessed from just about any location with an Internet-connected computer - public libraries, cybercafes, or an old PC at home. Bloggers don't need much in the way of equipment.

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

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 10 [0].

Advantages: 15 points chosen from Contacts [varies], Intuition [15], Patron (Minimal Intervention, -50%) [varies], Reputation +1 or +2 (small class of people, "the blogosphere"; 10 or less) [0 or 1].

Disadvantages: 15 points chosen from Chauvinistic [-1], Delusions [varies], Enemy (rival) [varies], Imaginative [-1], Nosy [-1] or Curious [-5*], Odious Personal Habits (vocally opinionated) [-5], Proud [-1], Reputation -1 or -2 (small class of people, "the blogosphere"; 10 or less) [-1 or -2], Trademark [-1 or -5], Wealth (Struggling or Poor) [-10 or -15].

Primary Skills: Artist (Web Design) (H) IQ+1 [8]-11, Writing (A) IQ+2 [8]-12.

Secondary Skills: Pick three of Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+1 [2]-11, Computer Programming/TL (H) IQ-1 [2]-9, Current Affairs/TL (any) (E) IQ+1 [2]-11, Savoir-Faire (Internet) (E) IQ+1 [2]-11.

Background Skills: 3 points chosen from Fast-Talk, Propaganda/TL and Research/TL, all IQ/A; or Market Analysis, IQ/H.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. 120 of the ***Basic Set.***

Journalist   *55 points*

You are a trained journalist working for a newspaper or broadcast outlet. You have resources, contacts, and credentials, and you always get your story.

Contacts: Sources are a journalist's lifeblood. Most reporters will protect their sources tenaciously. Reporters have even gone to jail protecting a source's identity.

Equipment: A journalist, regardless of medium, will typically carry a cell phone and some way to record notes (either a notebook or a tape recorder). Video or radio journalists will have more sophisticated recording and editing equipment.

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 12 [5]; FP 10 [0].

Advantages: 25 points chosen from Alternate Identity (Illegal) [15], Charisma [5/level], Contact Group [varies], Contacts [varies], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Favor [varies], Fearlessness [2/level], Honest Face [1], Intuition [15], Patron [varies], Press Pass [1], Sensitive [5] or Empathy [15], Smooth Operator [15/level].

Disadvantages: -30 points chosen from Addiction (tobacco) [-5], Alcoholism [-15 or -20], Attentive [-1], Broad-

Minded [-1], Code of Honor (Professional Journalist) [-5], Curious [-5*], Enemy (rival) [varies], Imaginative [-1], Obsession [-5* or -10*], Stubbornness [-5], Truthfulness [-5*], Wealth (Struggling) [-10], Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills (24): Detect Lies (H) IQ [4]-11, Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-12, Research/TL (A) IQ+1 [4]-12. Pick one of Acting (A) IQ+2 [4]-12 and Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [4]-12, or Writing (A) IQ+2 [8]-13. Pick one of Area Knowledge (E) IQ+2 [4]-13 or Current Affairs/TL (any) (E) IQ+2 [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Pick three of Body Language (A) Per [2]-12, Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-10, Electronics Operation/TL (Media) (A) IQ [2]-11, Intimidation (A) IQ [2]-11, or Observation (A) Per [2]-12.

Background Skills: 5 points chosen from Computer Operation/TL, IQ/E; Stealth, DX/A; Propaganda/TL and Streetwise, both IQ/A; or Law (Print or Broadcast), Market Analysis, and Sociology, all IQ/H.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Lens

Combat Experience (+20 points): You have served extensively as an embedded journalist with a military unit in a live combat zone. You have picked up critical skills for surviving in a battlefield. Add Combat Reflexes [15], Soldier/TL (A) IQ-1 [1]-10, and Tactics (H) IQ [4]-11.

Pulp Reporter   *100 points*

This template represents the image of the reporter in adventure fiction: brave, tenacious, and ingenious. These journalists are adventurers in the truest sense. They are typically able to handle themselves as well in a fight as they do at a press conference.

Pulp reporters are typically newspapermen (and -women), reflecting the age in which the pulps were written. However, with the miniaturization (or even implantation) of recording devices, broadcast journalists could easily become adventurers.

Allies and Contacts: The pulp reporter's contacts are wide-ranging and world-spanning. More often, also, a pulp reporter will have true allies willing to get involved in a tough story. These could be old war buddies, or maybe cops cleared of charges by the reporter's dogged investigations.

Equipment: Just as often as a microphone or notepad, a pulp reporter might have a gun tucked into his trousers or hidden in her handbag.

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

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].

Advantages: Fit [5] plus 35 points chosen from Ally [varies], Charisma [5/level], Contact Group [varies], Contacts [varies], Danger Sense [15], Daredevil [15], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Favor [varies], Fearlessness [2/level], Intuition [15], Luck [varies], Patron [varies], Press Pass [1], Reputation [varies], Sensitive [5] or Empathy [15], Smooth Operator [15/level].

Disadvantages: -30 points chosen from Addiction (tobacco) [-5], Alcoholism [-15 or -20], Attentive [-1], Broad-Minded [-1], Chummy [-5], Code of Honor (Professional Journalist) [-5], Curious [-5*], Enemy [varies], Imaginative [-1], Honesty [-10*], Obsession [-5* or -10*], Stubbornness [-5], Truthfulness [-5*], Wealth (Struggling) [-10].

Primary Skills (24): Detect Lies (H) IQ [4]-12, Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-13, Research/TL (A) IQ+1 [4]-13. Pick one of Acting (A) IQ+1 [4]-13 and Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [4]-13, or Writing (A) IQ+2 [8]-14. Pick one of Area

Knowledge (E) IQ+2 [4]-14 or Current Affairs/TL (any) (E) IQ+2 [4]-14.

Secondary Skills: Pick one of Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-12 or Guns/TL (any) (E) DX+2 [4]-12. Pick three of Body Language (A) Per [2]-12, Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-11, Electronics Operation/TL (Media) (A) IQ [2]-12, Intimidation (A) IQ [2]-12, or Observation (A) Per [2]-12.

Background Skills: 6 points chosen from Computer Operation/TL, IQ/E; Driving, Piloting/TL, and Stealth, DX/A; Propaganda/TL and Streetwise, both IQ/A; or Law (Print or Broadcast), Market Analysis, and Sociology, all IQ/H.

Lens

Psychic Scoop (+50 points): You possess mental powers beyond mere reporter's intuition. Maybe your ears itch when someone is lying to you, you can hear through walls, or you get glimpses of breaking stories before they happen. Add ESP Talent 1 [5] and 45 points chosen from additional levels of ESP Talent and abilities from the ESP power (page 256 of the *Basic Set*).

Sample Reporters

The following are sample characters built using the Pulp Reporter and Journalist templates above. Carson Walburn is suitable as a PC and intended as an alternative to the traditional gumshoe in a 1950s investigation campaign; Molly O'Shea is his Ally/Dependent.

Carson Walburn   *150 points*

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 10 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 7 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0]; French (Broken/Literate) [3]; German (Broken/None) [1].

Advantages: Ally (Molly O'Shea; 75% of starting points; 12 or less) [6]; Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Charisma 2 [10]; Contact (Johnson at City Hall; Effective Skill 15; Usually Reliable; 12 or less) [8]; Contact Group (Criminal; Effective Skill 15; Somewhat Reliable; 6 or less) [5]; Fit [5]; Intuition [15]; Photographic Memory [10]; Sensitive [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Perks: Press Pass [1].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Tobacco; Cheap; Highly addictive; Legal) [-5]; Code of Honor (Professional Journalist) [-5]; Dependent (Molly O'Shea; no more than 75%; Loved one; 6 or less) [-2]; Enemy (Dirk Logan; equal in power to the PC; 9 or less; Rival) [-5]; Enemy (the Mob; 6 or less) [-15]; Honesty (9) [-15]; Obsession (Bring down McCarthy; Long-Term Goal; 15 or less) [-5]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Affects Intolerance of Communists; Alcohol Intolerance; Ashamed of his family; Only smokes Turkish cigarettes; Proud [-5].

Skills: Boating/TL6 (Unpowered)-12 (DX+1) [4]; Body Language (Human)-12 (Per+0) [2]; Brawling-14 (DX+3) [8];

Current Affairs/TL7 (People)-14 (IQ+2) [4]; Detect Lies-13* (Per+1) [4]; Driving/TL6 (Automobile)-11 (DX+0) [2]; Fast-Talk-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-13 (DX+2) [3]; Guns/TL6 (Rifle)-13 (DX+2) [4]; Intimidation-12 (Will+0) [2]; Law (Print)-12 (IQ+0) [4]; Observation-12 (Per+0) [2]; Research/TL7-13 (IQ+1) [3]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-13 (IQ+1) [2]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Soldier/TL6-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Streetwise-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Writing-14 (IQ+2) [8].

* +1 from Sensitive

Carson Walburn was born to a well-placed Connecticut family in 1923, and he was afforded all the comforts of wealth. He attended Deerfield Academy, where he was captain of the crew team. When he was young, Carson's parents toyed with emerging European fascism, but Carson didn't pay the idea much thought until December, 1940, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

By the time he was 18 and free of his father's control, Carson had set his mind on enlisting, and he soon sailed off to North Africa and Italy, where he served ably but without distinction. He was well-liked by his fellow soldiers and officers.

After he returned from the war, Carson turned his back on his parents and the family business and enrolled in Columbia University to pursue a degree in journalism. After graduating with honors, he took a job with the New York Globe, much to his dismay, working at the Society desk.

At the Globe, Carson met two fellow reporters, Dirk Logan and Molly O'Shea, and the trio quickly became friends. Unfortunately, the two men found each other vying for Molly's attention, and when Carson eventually won her hand, Dirk vowed to prove once and for all that he was the better man, both in love and reporting. The two have been bitter rivals ever since.

A few lucky (or perhaps not-so-lucky) breaks led Carson to a run-in with Mob boss Angelo "the Captain" Cantone. Carson's articles sent the Captain to prison, but the gangster's soldiers still harass Carson from time to time. More than once, the Cantone mob has targeted Molly, hoping to use her as leverage against her fiancée.

Today, Carson has his sights set on Senator Joseph McCarthy. He views the Senator's anti-communist witch hunts to be just as reprehensible as the persecution of Jews, Gypsies, and other "undesirables" conducted by Hitler and his ilk. While he publicly toes the line, Carson is slowly digging into McCarthy's activities, looking for anything that he can use to bring down one of the most powerful men in the nation.

Physically, Carson is a rugged young man in his late 20s. He stands 5'8" and weighs 145 lbs., with sandy blond hair and hazel eyes. He typically wears a well-tailored but relatively simple suit and hat. If he's expecting trouble, he'll carry a .38 snub revolver in a shoulder holster beneath his coat.

Molly O'Shea *100 points*

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP 10 [0].

Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL: 7 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages: Ally (100% of starting points) (Favor; 9 or less) [1]; Appearance (Beautiful) [12]; Contact (Effective Skill 18) (6 or less; Usually Reliable) [3]; Contact Group (Effective Skill 12) (9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [5]; Empathy [15]; Fearlessness 2 [4].

Perks: Honest Face; Press Pass [2].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Professional Journalist) [-5]; Curious (9 or less) [-7]; Stubbornness [-5]; Wealth (Struggling) [-10].

Quirks: Attentive; Broad-Minded; Imaginative [-3].

Skills: Acting-10 (IQ-1) [1]; Area Knowledge (New York City)-13 (IQ+2) [4]; Body Language (Human)-12 (Per+0) [2]; Carousing-11 (HT+1) [2]; Dancing-11 (DX+0) [2]; Detect Lies-15* (Per+3) [4]; Diplomacy-10 (IQ-1) [2]; Fast-Talk-12 (IQ+1) [4]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-11 (DX+0) [1]; Observation-12 (Per+0) [2]; Research/TL7-12 (IQ+1) [3]; Sex Appeal-13† (HT+3) [1]; Singing-10 (HT+0) [1]; Sociology-10 (IQ-1) [2]; Stealth-11 (DX+0) [2]; Streetwise-11 (IQ+0) [2]; Writing-13 (IQ+2) [8].

* +3 from Empathy

† +4 from Appearance

Molly O'Shea was born in Queens in 1927 and spent her childhood running all over New York City. Several of her older brothers are police officers, and Molly got to know a lot of New York's finest quite well. Many of them pass her information from time to time. One, Officer Sean Loughlin, owes her big after she introduced him to her sister, Mary. Their daughter, Liza, just turned three.

Molly talked her way onto the staff of the New York Globe at the age of 17, and the shortage of experienced journalists led to the "girl reporter" getting quite a few decent assignments. After the war, however, she was put back on more "feminine" topics, where she chafes vocally.

Still, the Globe introduced her to Carson Walburn, so the job wasn't all that bad. When Carson joined the paper, Molly had already been on staff 6 years, and she took it upon herself to show the college boy a thing or two about being a newspaperman. The two quickly fell in love, and Carson relies on her more and more professionally as well as he rises through the paper's ranks. As for her own career, Molly thinks that television is the future. She's beginning to look into broadcast journalism, a practically unexplored field.

Molly is a strikingly good-looking young woman in her mid-20s. She has fire red hair and green eyes and is slim and leggy at 5'7", a trait she accentuates with long, slender skirts.

Menagerie-1

for *GURPS Infinite Worlds*

by Eric Funk

Name: **Menagerie-1**

Worldline Data

Mana Level: Normal
Infinity Class: O10
Centrum Zone: Red (Indigo before Secundus intervention)

History

When Menagerie-1 was first discovered at the beginning of the age of exploration, the explorers were taken aback by the sheer variety of the creatures that lived there. Almost every ecosystem had evolved differently than on their Earth. The closest they come are creatures that *look* like known creatures, but have unusual abilities. Both Greenpeace and the [Genetic Diversity and Re-establishment Program](#) had a field day, and at the same time mourned the exploitation of a pristine environment.

Once the explorers were reasonably sure that there were no native intelligent species, people began to flood in. Certainly, upon arriving, the colonists made many attempts to locate traces of an industrial civilization, but none were successful. Attention soon turned to cataloguing the most useful species in this wondrous world. Shortly thereafter many species "hot spots" were marked on the maps, and visitors could pick which they visit. Such locations were typified by the kinds of creatures, be they desert, jungle, or arctic. Hunting in these tourist traps is prohibited, but there are a variety of shops providing pets to tourists.

Today, a census reports well over a million permanent residents, with more immigrating every day. There are major settlements near the coasts connected by rough roads, ferries, and electric planes and helicopters. Most of the trade in the Northwestern hemisphere is coordinated from the settlement Safari One. Acting as a Customs gate around the landing platform, the largest publicly accessible labs are here as well as veterinary quarantine facilities for new and sick creatures. All around this settlement, botanists, biologists, and explorers scramble to be the first to discover something noteworthy. Paleontologists are continually finding new kinds of bones on each layer of soil. Many have yet to be classified. The call for taxonomical classification can slow official excavations, encouraging "accidental" digs.

Peter's Panoptic Pet Panorama

Peter's is a typical pet exporter operating on Menagerie-1. He operates a large variety of cages and pens with all sorts of animals, from small telekinetic mice to elephant-sized worms that are as gentle as lambs. His corporation operates a store and web presence at the home world, as well as on several colonies. There are some regular "items" that are shipped out at a steady rate, while others are on request only. A few are restricted, either to be sold to Earth-dwelling citizens only, or even locally, not permitted to be exported. Many pets have special diet and maintenance requirements, and Peter's can offer a discount to frequent customers as an encouragement to come to the shop frequently. Such requirements can also make an animal popular for suppliers. "Honest" John Peters guarantees that the pets sold from his store have no illnesses when brought in and when they are sold. He apparently has *some* creature that cures such illnesses. See below for the template of "Honest" John Peters.

Visiting Menagerie-1

Although city dwellers are generally friendly toward tourists willing to spend money, colonists living outside of towns generally prefer their solitude. Many are involved in private research, breeding, or training indigenous species.

Smuggling is a big problem across the planet. It ranges from parents trying to bring back a mini-dragon for their nephew Johnny to terrorists trying to smuggle out a fire elemental. The text and illustration on p. 11 of ***Infinite Worlds*** is particularly relevant. Legitimate shipping companies suffer as employees are severely tempted to "drop" items into cargo containers. As of today, there are hundreds of tons of legitimate trade export in biomass leaving the planet every day. There are many people who suggest that the mass exploitation of the ecosystem must be balanced. Thus they recommend shipping back natural biowastes in otherwise empty containers, to be buried or dropped in the ocean, and slowly restore the balance.

"The fabulously beautiful planet Bethselamin is now so worried about the cumulative erosion by ten billion visiting tourists a year . . ."
-- Douglas Adams

Adventure

Tour

Sightseeing goes wrong in so many ways. The heroes could be posing as bodyguards for a celebrity, waiting for some smugglers to act, and get embroiled in a plot to install some authoritarian policies in the government.

Recapture

A millionaire's pet *[something]* has escaped! It has been rendered harmless, but its sudden appearance could frighten citizens. The heroes are to recapture it, unharmed.
Complications: A wild *[something]* has wandered into the area. In addition to being dangerous, the two creatures are now a mated pair, never far apart.

Exploration

There are still vast tracts of land upon which no man has set foot. Who will be the next to find an upside-down duck, a yeti, or a rainbow-shooting tiger?

Elusive Pets

Because of the unusual biodiversity of DNA, many researchers suspect a higher number of parachronozoids on Menagerie-1 (see page 544 of the ***Basic Set*** and page 73 of ***GURPS Infinite Worlds***). Likewise, the black market would be a concern, if a species were confirmed, as it could become a prime target for anyone seeking a means of illegal (and silent!) parachronic travel. Thus, when a rich man pays good money for capturing and taming any animal that has certain qualities, such as white fur, violet eyes, and so on. When such a specimen is found, hapless hunters that chase it could wind up far, far away from the safe O10 world they started on.

In Search of Sentients?

A "crackpot" researcher tries to put forth the idea that he has found a species that can exhibit intelligent operation. Although he has several arrests for fraud and a smuggling sentence behind him, he has willingly submitted to a lie detector test and passed. He will not reveal the location or describe the species in any but the vaguest terms. He plans to take three parties: one interested, one doubtful, and one neutral. The PCs should fit into at least one of these groups.

Is it real, or just parroting? Whether or not he is telling the truth or is correct in his conclusions, he is in trouble. Former smuggling contacts have surfaced, and are looking to get their share of money from his hide. The researcher hopes that all this publicity can buy him time to prepare an escape. Unbeknownst to him, they have infiltrated the mission . . .

Intrigue in Safari Town

A smuggling ring has been leaning on some local operators. They are trying to live as honestly as they can, but cannot give evidence, or they will suffer backlash from the powerful cartel. The heroes must unearth their own, and get justice served.

Unhealthy Competition

The heroes are paid or otherwise encouraged to take part in fauna herding. There is a competitor making a similar ride just on the other side of the river. Both are equally outfitted. Tension mounts as sabotage is found. As accusations fly, will cooler heads discover that *both* camps have been sabotaged? Is there a mole in the party? (As a likely complication, perhaps both parties have moles; the culprit is not the opponent rancher corporation, but a competitor at the destination that does not want either to succeed!)

On the Move

While animals are being moved, they are skittish and afraid, ripe for someone to drug or help escape. An animal breaking loose of a cargo container will create problems, no matter what vehicle or loading dock it is on.

The Truth?

On this world is a powerful, regularly waxing and waning banestorm that draws animals to this world (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds,* p. 75). Scientists are slowly realizing their detectors are registering a buildup of oz particles. What is happening is that every hundred years or so, there is a banestorm that drops dozens of animal and plant species from parallel worlds all across the planet over the course of a year. However, it only pulls non-sapients. Some of these species die out, while others mutate and adapt to their new surroundings. The first human children born on Menagerie-1 are now coming into adolescence. Perhaps the heroes could be on the other side of the banestorm where a favorite pet disappears, and following it leads them here.

Variants

Instead of Infinity Unlimited, this setting could just as easily be run by Centrum or a private corporation. Policy may not even change, but darker truths could lurk anywhere. (Of course, this could occur even under an Infinity Unlimited operation!) For a "gray" option, most exports are still pets, but some animal resources are being exploited unfairly. For a truly dark variant, the entire world could be a haven of ghoulish biomass exploitation and utilization.

Menagerie-1 works fine in a science-fiction setting; simply ignore the Infinite Worlds information. Likewise in a Fantasy or Cliffhangers campaign, ignore the world description as well; it is simply a "lost world."

GURPS Fourth Edition Character

"Honest John Peters"   *150 points*

Human male, 5'10", short black hair.
Primary Attributes: **ST** 10; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 20 lbs; HP 10; Will 12; Per 12; FP 12; Basic Speed 7 [20]; Basic Move 7; Dodge 11. (Total: 120)

Advantages: Animal Empathy [5]; Charisma +3 [15]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contact ([GDREP](#) Agent; Effective skill 18, 12-, completely reliable) [9]; Plant Empathy [5]; Talent (Animal Friend +4) [20]. (Total: 60 points)

Disadvantages: Duty (Job, very hazardous, 15-) [-20]; Easy to Read [-10]; Gregarious [-10]; Sense of Duty (Family) [-5]; Truthfulness (6) [-10]; Workaholic [-5]; Xenophilia (6) [-20]. (Total: -75 points)

Skills: Administration-12 (IQ A) [2]; Animal Handling!-15 (IQ‡+3 !) [12]; Electronics Operation (Security Systems)-11 (IQ-1 A) [1]; Diplomacy-15/19‡§ (IQ+3† H) [4]; Fast-talk-15/19‡§ (IQ+3† A) [2]; Intimidation-15/19‡§ (Will+3† A) [1]; Law (Pets)-12/10 (IQ-1 H) [2]; Merchant (Pets)-14/12 (IQ+1 A) [4]; Veterinary-15 (IQ+3‡ H) [2]; Wrestling (Animals)-14/12 (DX+1 A) [4]. (Total: 36)

† Includes +3 for Charisma.
‡ Includes +4 for Talent (Animal Friend).
§ Higher number for animals, see Animal Empathy and Plant Empathy.

Note that all animals are at -1 against this character due to Animal Handling.

* * *

Special thanks to Max Belankov and Deanya Lattimore for their expertise in wrangling parachronozoids.

Pyramid Review

R-Eco

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Designed by Susumu Kawasaki

Translated by Ro Sato

Full-color boxed set with 104 cards (100 garbage, four recycling facilities), 32 tokens, & rules; $15

Gaming can be glamorous, putting one in the role of superhero, time traveler, or even commander of the Allied forces. Even so, everything has its dark side. Someone's gotta take out the garbage, and Z-Man Games has a card game for that, too: *R-Eco.*

The object of the game is to earn the most money by having the cleanest environmental record at the end.

Two to five players are garbage collectors, and they are vying to be the best person in the city for the job (and to have all the glory that accords). They get a three-card hand to start their ventures. The department isn't just amassing the trash, it's recycling it . . . or rather, it ought to be. There are four color-coded dump sites for the types of materials: plastic, steel, paper, and glass. A player may discard from his hand as many of the same color cards as he likes onto the matching site. For example, the worker could choose to dump yellow steel cans, but any and all cards discarded at the same time must be cans.

If that site now has four or more steel can icons showing on the cards built up there, the stack is swept to the discard pile and the player takes a token from atop that location. Running from -2 to 5 points, these represent the money the company has gained, but a player must have at least two of the same color to score points for them (no doing things by halves). Every site also has a dump site out back where they throw the overflow from their trucks. If someone plays cards onto a location, they must take any cards stacked up there (whether they got a token or not) and add them to their hand. If this totals more than five cards, the excess must be placed in front of the player; each such shameful bit of business is worth -1 point at the end of the game. If the hand is only five or fewer cards, the collector still has some breathing room to get this junk into the right disposal units next turn. When the dump site is cleared, more cards are placed there to keep the cycle going.

When one of the four units has lost all its tokens, scores are tallied. Tokens and excess dumping are added together, and if someone manages to stay a step ahead and not have any excess cards to be embarrassed over, they get a bonus for their environmentally enlightened ways (specifically, they get points for everyone else who blew it).

For a small box like this, the description ends up being pretty workmanlike. The cards are colorful and serviceable, and the tokens are about what fits in the little container. It's simple but utile. The rules are only a couple of small pages, and it manages to squeeze some inoffensive two-player tweaks in as well.

What sounds like a complex, interlocking series of card plays is actually a simple process, familiar after a few experimental rounds of play. What the never-ending cycle does convey pretty effectively is the snowballing sense of how tough it must be in the sanitation industry to keep ahead of mankind's waste output.

Which is not to say the game is preachy. It's only functional, and players can come to their own conclusions about what the game's politics might be (Z-Man Games imported this one from Japan). No, this one is all about the game

play, and it's a good-natured sort of evil. Sticking it to the next guy over isn't a walk in the polluted park, but it's possible; tracking the interactions of dump sites, recycling units, and one's own hand keeps things lively and interesting, and just trying for that coveted Honorary Garbage Collector bonus is a gameable bit of entertainment. Add to this that there's a -2 token in each stack no collector wants to be stuck with (yes, it counts against someone), and manipulating the order of plays to one's advantage becomes an art (everyone knows the order in which the tokens are placed).

R-Eco takes a solid half hour to play when all the seats are taken, but it's an enjoyable 30-minute excursion (incidentally, R stands for Recycling and Eco is short for "ecology"). It manages to capture a tiny bit of what it must be like to maintain landfills but never lets the real-world headaches get in the way of having fun at the gaming table.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Time of Vengeance (for [*Mutants & Masterminds*](#))

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Chris McGlothlin

Cover by Attila Adorjany

Illustrated by Talon Dunning, Greg Kirkpatrick, Tony Parker, Kevin Stokes, & Darren Taylor

64-page b&w softcover; $16.95

Back in 2003 Christopher McGlothlin penned [*Time of Crisis,*](#) the first and only scenario published by Green Ronin for the publisher's award winning [*Mutants & Masterminds.*](#) So it is only fitting that he is the author of *Time of Vengeance,* the first scenario for [*Mutants & Masterminds 2nd Edition,*](#) still the best superhero RPG to be derived from the **d20 System.** Where *Time of Crisis* presented a parallel-Earth-hopping romp in search of a solution to the threat posed to [*Freedom City*](#) (the default campaign setting for *Mutants & Masterminds*), the new scenario keeps everyone at home to face another threat to Freedom City, a threat that is particularly old style . . . *really* old style, and not just from the Golden Age of comicdom.

Time of Vengeance is designed for a group of six or so superheroes, each of Power Level 10, the default for all starting heroes in *Mutants & Masterminds.* No particular superhero types are required, but a good mix including a flyer and a brick or two as well as an investigative type will see the heroes through. There are also plenty of opportunities for roleplaying, and -- ultimately -- it is roleplaying that will enable the threat faced in *Time of Vengeance* to be overcome, and not fisticuffs, energy blasts, or the like.

Set entirely within the confines of Freedom City, *Time of Vengeance* opens on one of those blissfully calm days before the proverbial storm. Over the course of three days a series of villains appear to bring devastation to the city and fear to its citizens. With the city's top-flight heroes -- The Atom Family and The Freedom League -- otherwise engaged, it is up to the player characters to save the day. In an escalating series of encounters, the heroes are going to be challenged and put through the wringer. First they face a carpet of fleas, then an army of frogs, then a sanguinary encounter . . .

[SPOILER ALERT!]

. . . which raises the question, what exactly is going on in Time of Vengeance? Having asked, this review isn't going to answer the question. Having already said too much, we can say that there is a little more involved than the list of plagues hinted at . . . It involves a forgotten heroine from the Golden Age, and encounter with an old-time hero and an old-time villain, and a run in with some real comic book aficionados.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Where *Time of Crisis* was in color, *Time of Vengeance* is in black and white. Nevertheless, *Time of Vengeance* is a good-looking book with some excellent artwork. The front cover is perhaps a little scrappy, but the adventure itself is engagingly written with plenty of staging advice on how to run every scene.

Although a challenge to the heroes, *Time of Vengeance* is not as much of a challenge for the GM to run. The staging advice certainly helps, but so does the fact that the heroes never have to face more than three of the villains at the same time. Besides the write ups of the 10 villains -- who of course can easily make return appearances -- the GM gets details of a new super-heroine, and of a Golden-Age heroine. There is advice on how to use her beyond the pages of *Time of Vengeance,* written in a prequel or sequel.

By adventure's end, the heroes should have saved Freedom City and (in game terms) been awarded more than a few Hero Points and even a Power Point or two. More importantly, they will have made a name for themselves, established a reputation, and made plenty of friends and connections . . . all of whom are ready to appear in future scenarios.

If the GM does not own a copy of *Freedom City,* details are included in *Time of Vengeance.* Then again, *Time of Vengeance* -- like the earlier *Time of Crisis* -- can easily be set in almost any supers RPG. All the GM has to do is recreate the various villains in the system of his choice.

Time of Vengeance is another fine entry for *Mutants & Masterminds* and an excellent entry in the superhero adventure field, which is somewhat small to start with. It would be great to have more of its ilk and its quality, but *Time of Vengeance* is worth having for any super-powered RPG.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Things To Be Thankful For: #217,744 (In a Series)

A few months ago, I read a quote in *Blender* magazine that's stuck in my cranium ever since; at the time, it even managed to momentarily dislodge other thoughts, such as, "Why the heck am I reading *Blender?!*" (For those of you unfamiliar, *Blender* is a mainstream music magazine, although it is to music journalism what *The Sun* is to . . . well, music journalism.)

Anyway, some music celebrity whose name utterly escapes me said something along the lines of, "I would think being a baby is a lot like being kidnapped by aliens." Being a somewhat new father myself, this struck me as a perfect analogy. I imagine the life of my child, and how arbitrary and unfathomable it is to him; strange beings snatch him up seemingly at random, chittering incomprehensible noises, exhibit unknown powers like the ability to walk, and subject him to unspeakable torments like diapers.

The ability to place myself in my son's shoes is truly amazing, when you think about it. (For one thing, his shoes don't fit me very well . . . hah!) It's an ability my son doesn't have yet, and it will take him a number of years to develop this gift. Likewise animals generally don't have such abilities; while some smart critters can show complex problem-solving capabilities, it's usually only of the sort "how do you handle the problem immediately at hand?" (as in, "How do I get at those yummy bananas dangling from the rope over these unstacked boxes?") But anything more complex either needs to come from instinct, genetics, and heredity ("must . . . build . . . dam . . .") or it just doesn't happen; humans are pretty much alone when it's able to put itself in different shoes and ponder, "If I build a basin to collect rainwater, I can have fresh water after it finishes raining. Then I can devote more time to sharpening these sticks, rather than looking for water." Animals usually don't even understand the concept of "pointing"; if you point at something with your index finger, almost all animals will -- at best -- concentrate at the tip of your finger, unable to conceive the imaginary line that connects your fingertip with the object in question.

Here in the states, it's that time of year when we're thankful for various things. I try to spend lots of my time being thankful in general, but this year -- for this column, at least -- I'm thankful for the gift of imagination. It's what makes all but the most immediate and basic of games *possible.* Whether I'm competing in the home-game version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and feeling a sinking in my stomach as I wonder if I'm willing to "risk" "my" "$500,000"; or whether we're playing the **Lord of the Rings** cooperative boardgame and truly wanting to win because it's "right"; or whether I'm a PC on trial for a crime I didn't commit, and I feel a true desire to vindicate "myself" . . . in all these cases, it is the gift of imagination that turns these from being pure mathematical endeavors to something more. Something magical, and worthy of appreciation.

Why do we play games where we are pushing around spaceships or horses or sword-wielding heroes or Batman, instead of utilizing featureless cubes on plain white grids? (Of course, if you're playing German-style boardgames, then you're back to the featureless cubes . . . but never mind that right now.) Why do we dress in paintball garb or laser-tag equipment and attempt to "kill" our friends? Because we can imagine. We can imagine infinite worlds, infinite vistas, infinite leopards, infinite . . . ubuntus? Whatever.

So the next time you look at a colander or soup pot and wonder what kind of protection it would offer as a helmet; or the next time you're walking on the sidewalk and you decide that the grass is the inky abyss and the street is lava; or the next time you feel despair because the 16x16 pixelated plumber that represents you falls off the screen . . . think of the fact that it's imagination that makes it all possible. And that's truly something to be thankful for.

--Steven Marsh

GURPS Martial Arts Case Study

Strong Guys: Part I

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

In *GURPS* combat, generally skill trumps strength. No matter how strong you are, a superior skilled fighter can eventually take you apart. Perhaps if you lack vulnerable locations like the eyes or vitals you can stand up to him longer. But it takes luck to penetrate his superior defenses, your Feints are wasted, and he'll use Deceptive Attack and Feint to pick you apart. Only superior DR and a lucky hit or two, maybe a broken weapon on a parry, will shift the fight in your favor. Oh sure, you can try to smash his weapon but he'll parry, or you can try to grapple but his superior skill will result in sliced up arms as he dances free.

Until the publication of *GURPS Martial Arts.* It presents a lot more options for fighters. Strong fighters especially benefit -- with rules for using your strength and classic big-guy weapons to full effect. This article will discuss the options and the tactics that *GURPS Martial Arts* opens for strong fighters, and the tactics allowable in the *Basic Set* that make the most sense for high-ST characters.

Fighting Tactics for Strong Guys

In order, let's look at Maneuvers, Combat Options, and Optional Rules. Many rules affect everyone equally; we won't examine those. Those rules which are most useful -- or most problematic -- for high-ST fighters are the ones we'll look at.

Maneuvers

Most Maneuvers are just as useful for a strong fighter as for any other fighter. But a few are worth special consideration.

All-Out Attack. The (Strong), (Double), and (Determined) options are quite valuable here. Strong gives +2 damage, or +1 per die. For ST 13+ fighters swinging, +1 per die means at least +2 damage, and +3 for ST 17+ fighters. This extra damage costs you your defenses, so use it with caution. If you've designed your fighter well enough, his strength and weapon selection will mean most of the time he won't need this extra damage. Determined is useful for overcoming skill penalties for vulnerable locations such as the Vitals (for impaling attacks) and Skull or Neck (for swinging attacks). Because your damage is already high, you can often skip using (Strong) and instead aim at a location that will provide much more damage potential if you can hit it. (Double) is attractive because your damage should be high enough that your unaugmented attack can maim or kill. (Feint) and (Long) are not without their uses. (Feint) is useful if you have more skill than your opponent, or when combined with a Beat (see below) against weaker foes. (Long) provides even more reach for long weapons or multi-hex reach for shorter weapons, but for swinging it attacks it costs damage. A strong fighter can absorb that loss of damage, so don't overlook trading damage for range. At ST 15 with an axe swing, AOA (Long) is (2+3)-2=2+1 cut; at ST 18 and a staff swing (reach 3!) it's (3+1-3)=3-2 crush. It's best used for lunging thrusts or reaching targets who won't be able to strike back.

All-Out Attack (Determined) is also useful for ranged attacks; you can throw a heavy thrown weapon like an axe, hungamunga, or spear. Don't forget that strength will also let you throw things for damage at range. If you don't have a weapon handy, grab a rock and toss it! For high-tech fighters, Determined will give you a +1 to your gun skill, letting you trade off your defenses for a better shot.

Note Slams as All-Out Attacks. You can use your full move on an All-Out Attack using a Slam. Combine this with Determined to ensure you hit, or Strong to get some extra power to put your opponent down. Also note that with Double, you can only move *half* your move but you can attack either your slam target (great for soaking up a potentially damaging parry or doing extra harm), or attack *someone else on the way*. Strong Guys using their size and power to clear a crowd can use AOA (Double), run past one target and attack him, then slam a second target on the same turn. This is doubly effective if your opponents can't defend, either because you're attacking by Total Surprise, from behind, or because they've taken All-Out Attack themselves.

Attack. Your bread-and-butter. Wade in and hit them. Don't overlook the basic tactics of keeping out of your opponent's reach if you can, stepping in and out of close combat, or other uses of your Step. But if you're sufficiently strong and well equipped, you should be able to fight with a long series of Attack maneuvers. If your weapon(s) are heavy enough to force opponents to check for breakage when they parry, repeated Attacks may pave the way for later finishing moves against your disarmed opponent. This is also a good way to work as a team with other fighters -- target those opponents armed with light weapons, forcing them to check for breakage if they parry (and likely force them to try and disengage). This will allow your companions to take advantage if the weapon breaks, or just to pile on after the opponent has used a Block or being forced to Cross Parry or Supported Parry against your weapon.

Fighters will Gigantism can benefit from their C reach attacks being reach 1 instead. Unarmed, you can punch, or Knee Strike, or Elbow Strike at the same reach as your smaller opponents can only Kick (making DX rolls to avoid falling when they do!). You can also use short-ranged attack (like thrust/impaling for your Large Knife) at reach 1, avoiding the need for close combat if you want to avoid it.

Ranged fighters will generally be using this maneuver. Just open up with your machine gun/plasma rifle/shotgun. Remember your high ST might let you fire some of these weapons without a bipod, tripod, or with one hand instead of two.

Committed Attack. Against, like All-Out Attack, your great strength means (Strong) is less valuable than it might be for a weaker fighter. But if you're armored like a tank thanks to your high ST, and if you're carrying an off-hand parrying weapon or, better yet, a shield, this can be a good way to get a +2 skill (Determined) or a little extra damage (Strong). Some powerful techniques, including Jump Kick and Axe Kick, are based on Committed Attack, so you may have no option but to choose this or All-Out Attack. For a U-stat Parry weapon like an axe or morningstar, this is often better than Attack; you can't parry with it anyway, so you may as well get some bonus damage or an extra step. But be sure your other defenses are up to the task of keeping your intact until your turn comes up again!

Defensive Attack. Ironically, your great strength is going to allow you to pull your blows while still dealing a lot of damage. This makes Defensive Attack very attractive, especially for unbalanced weapons. A ST 13 fighter with a Dueling Halberd does 2+3 cut or 2+3 imp, or (2+3-2)=2+1 with a Defensive Attack . . . still plenty of damage, and the weapon can be used to parry, allowing it to take advantage of the multiple-parry rules. This is also handy for axe-and-shield or morningstar-and-shield fighters -- you can use Deceptive Attack as your normal attack, saving Attack or Committed Attack for vulnerable foes or one-on-one fights. For fighters with balanced weapons, this is less of a concern -- but it's still handy if you *need* that +1 to defend either for the attacking weapon or a backup weapon/shield.

Evaluate is a good way to trade time for skill. Each turn you spend Evaluating is a +1 to attack that target. If you use the optional rules from *GURPS Martial Arts,* it also provides its bonus to counteract Deceptive Attacks and Feints. Against a superior opponent, if you can find the time to Evaluate you can frustrate attempts to Feint or Deceptive

carries connotations and limitations not common to other strong guys in other genres. As such, this article deliberately chose a different term. For *lots* of tips, rules, and build advice for Bricks, check out Bill Stoddard's excellent ***GURPS Supers.***

Attack you, all the while accumulating bonuses to help *you* when you launch your own attack. The maximum +3 can be traded for a +1 to hit and a -2/-1 Deceptive Attack, or give a much-needed bonus to partly or fully offset the penalties for an important hit locations -- such as a leg, weapon arm, or the Neck or Skull. It's less useful against lower-skill opponents, because you can generally bull them around with your strength. Use it when you need extra skill, but unless that +1 to +3 is worth 1-3 turns, do something else instead.

Feint. Feints are potentially useful for any fighter. For a strong fighter, the best option is usually a Beat (***Martial Arts,*** p. 100).

Beat. Beat is perhaps the single most useful combat option for a strong guy. Beat lets you leverage your strength to crush the defenses of weaker fighters. It is a more limited version of feint; first, you must already have contact with your opponent's weapon to lower Parry, shield to reduce Block, or body to defeat his Dodge. That means they must parry or you must have parried them. If your opponent refuses to engage you with a parry, and instead relies on Dodge, you've lost the ability to Beat . . . but then they can't risk attacking you, either, without lots of Feints and Deceptive Attacks or you'll Beat after *your* successful Parry. Dodge is generally less of a problem than Parry when fighting skilled opponents. While a skilled and fast fighter may have a high dodge, in melee combat their parry is your first obstacle. Beat that down and *then* you can worry about Dodge.

Second, Beat is limited to lowering *one* defense, but *anyone* can take advantage. This means big guys can use historically accurate tactics, like bashing down opposing pikes, polearms, or other weapons with their two-handed sword so friends can take advantage of the opponent. Use your strength and your weapon as a can-opener for your buddies -- Beat down the guard of a defensively-able opponent and your friends can attack into the gap, forcing him to rely on a secondary defense. This is especially useful if you grapple one or both arms of your opponent -- use a Beat to reduce Dodge, hold onto his parrying arm(s) with yours, and he's defenseless against your friends. Risky if they miss and stab you, of course, but you're a big guy, you can take it.

Beat is also a useful way to deal with foes who Wait with a braced weapon -- step in, parry the attack, and then use Beat to lower the parry -- and let your friends close to attack the enemy.

Move and Attack. Note that you can substitute your slam damage calculation for your normal damage if you're big and fast enough to take advantage and have a thrusting attack. To do this, you need a lot of HP and velocity.

Combat Options

Now let's look at some combat options.

Rapid Strike and *Dual-Weapon Attack* are useful, but if you've emphasized your ST over DX and skill, you may not have sufficient skill to pull these off very effectively (unless you're also Trained By A Master or Weapon Master, of course). Keep them in mind, but don't depend on them. A -6 penalty is very steep unless your skill is 16+. Keep your mind on business; for a strong fighter, your goal is to get damage on the target as often as possible. Two attempted attacks resulting in possibly zero hits is less useful than one attack almost certainly resulting in one hit. Dual-Weapon Attack is useful if you can buy it up, same with Combinations. These are worth considering if your skill is high enough. For a very strong fighter with sufficient skill, these can dramatically increase your killing power in combat. But they all come at a cost in skill penalties and character points.

Deceptive Attack. If your skill is sufficient, take advantage of this like any other fighter would! Against skilled defenders, you may need it to get through their defenses. Against lesser foes, it might be a cheap and easy way to reduce their moderate defenses to low defenses, allowing for easy victory. This can also be used as a "team tactic." If you're working with a weaker but more skilled companion, have them use Deceptive Attacks and/or techniques come with

Trading Strength for Skill

GURPS effectively allows skilled fighters to trade skill for effect. They can choose to attack vital Hit Locations such as Eyes, Skull, or Vitals to increase damage, or limbs and extremities for fight-ending cripples or low-damage Major Wounds. They can trade skill for more attacks (Rapid Strike and Dual-Weapon Attack) and to make attacks harder to stop (Deceptive Attack). They can soak up the -2 skill from a Defensive Grip and get a +1 damage. Anyone can trade some or all of their defenses for

defense penalties for the target to force your opponent to use Retreat to bring his defenses back up to par. This will use up his Retreat, preventing its use against your strong but less skilled (and therefore less Deceptive) attacks. If Retreating foes are giving you a problem, try to maneuver them into a corner or against impassable terrain, eliminating his retreat!

Telegraphic Attack. A tempting option if your skill is relatively low, but the +4 to hit comes at a steep cost of a +2 to defend. It can't follow up a Feint, either . . . but it *can* follow up a Beat. It's also ideal for use against foes who All-Out Attack (Strong) to crack your armor -- who cares if they have a +2 to defend if they have no defenses? A Telegraphic Attack is also handy for luring an opponent into a Beat. Use a Telegraphic Attack to draw a Parry, then use that Parry as the setup for a Beat! The same goes for heavy weapons -- an opponent may be forced to parry with a weapon that may break, or need to use a Cross Parry or Supported Parry (page 121 of **Martial Arts**) instead. This can backfire, of course. With a +2 to defend, your victim might just Dodge instead. This type of attack can be useful with flail-type weapons, too -- they give opponents a -4 to parry or -2 to block. Telegraphic Attack will lower these to -2 to parry, no penalty to block, and +2 to Dodge, but give you a +4 you can use to target the Skull much more easily.

Defensive Grip. Most useful for one-on-one situations. One a one-handed weapon you get -2 skill but +1 damage. For a really strong guy, this generally isn't worth the skill drop, but don't overlook it for a real "power" attack using Defensive Grip and any one of All-Out Attack (Strong), Committed Attack (Strong), or Mighty Blows. With a two-handed weapon, it reduces your swinging damage in return for better defensive benefits: you suffer -2 damage or -1 per die, but get a +1 to defend from attacks from the front. Here again, you can trade some of your high damage for a better parry. Combined with Defensive Attack, your strike may be quite weak but your parry will be excellent -- very useful for duels. For a ST 15 man with a Dueling Halberd using Defensive Grip and Defensive Attack, Parry will be +2 against an attacker from the front and damage drops to (2+5-2-2)=2+1, still plenty of damage. This grip and attack combination is extremely useful with a staff, too, giving a +4 parry when counting the +2 Parry stat of the staff, in exchange for -4 damage or -2 per die. That's great for situations where you have a single opponent you can damage easily, but you can't afford to let hit you -- such as an even bigger and stronger opponent!

If you choke up sufficiently on a sword, you can knock off -2 from the penalty to target Chinks in Armor, but damage drops to flat thrust/impale or thrust/crushing. It's a useful finishing move or for when you *need* to stab someone at reach C with a longer weapon.

Shoves and *Shoves with Long Weapons* are most effective for strong guys. Use it like an attack, but for when you need to clear opponents out of an area. Or you need to knock them back into even more danger. Useful for putting foes into pits, down stairs, off suspiciously railing-less walkways, and so on. Don't forget to try slamming down two opponents with your long weapon, either. It takes skill (it's a Dual-Weapon Attack) but if you're ST and Move are sufficient you should be able to knock smaller foes down.

Disarms and *Striking At Shields* are both worth considering. Your ST and

---

extra skill or damage.

What about ST? What can you trade it for? Trading ST for effect is rarely as direct as trading skill. But you've got some options:

Defenses. Defensive Attack reduces your damage, but increases your Active Defenses. It can also allow you to parry despite using a unbalanced weapons. You'll also do enough damage that All-Out-Attack and Committed Attack aren't as vital for victory.

Reach. All-Out Attack (Long) costs damage to swinging attacks but adds +1 reach.

Side benefits. Strong fighters don't need to use risky Exotic Hand Strikes or normal punches; a Hammer Fist can be sufficiently effective and reduce the damage from striking DR.

Move. High ST means high BL, which further means heavy weapons and armor won't encumber you as much. "Big and slow" is only the case if you carry too much. Keep your load reasonable and you can be "big and fast."

DR. If Move isn't a concern, you can load up with gear, extra weapons, wear heavy armor or layered armor (see p. B286) or both, and so on.

Skill. This is more indirect than most. A high ST means you can wield high-damage weapons with a high ST statistic without any penalties. A ST 13 sniper rifle is -3 skill for a ST 10 sniper, but for a ST 15 guy hip-shooting the rifle is possible without any penalties!

damage might be enough to shatter a weapon or break a shield into flinders. If your problem with a foe is penetrating his Active Defenses, these tactics don't make so much sense -- they're just as likely to be Parried or Blocked as an attack on the foe's body. But if you need to capture an opponent, or otherwise can't reach him but can reach his weapon or shield, go for it. Remember that using a Beat first can lower defenses against this, and open a foe's weapon or shield for destruction.

Tip Slash isn't useful for the kind of large, cutting weapons generally carried by strong fighters. But if you've got a non-swinging weapon like a rapier or spear, your high strength can make this tactic work well enough to try.

Grappling

Grappling is an especially useful tactic for Strong Guys. Several important actions after a grapple are based on strength, including the all-important Takedown, Pin, and Choke or Strangle.

The entire Grab and Smash! box on page 118 is like it was written for strong guys. Twofers especially require lots of strength to pull off, but can be effective. They're also a signature Strong Guy move, so you owe it yourself to try it at least once. Just like in the movies, it works best from behind and by surprise.

Also take a look at The Sound of One Hand Grappling. A high-ST fighter can use these rules to engage a single weaker target with one hand, freeing the other for strikes, drawing a weapon, or grabbing another for a twofer.

Parrying with Two-Handed Weapons. This rule is vital if you're running a two-handed balanced weapon wielding fighter. Without it, you're stuck at a cascading -4 penalty for multiple parries. With it, the penalty is halved, and you can swipe away Dual-Weapon Attacks with a single parry.

Low-tech strong fighters can wield heavy Dueling Polearms or use two-handed weapons in one hand. High-tech fighters can carry lots of ammo, enabling them to use full ROF (or very high ROF weapons) to get bonuses to hit. Weaker fighters can do the same, but can't carry the ammo load to sustain it as long.

Any fighter can use these options, but for a high-ST fighter the cost is less onerous. A ST 11 fighter with a Broadsword does 1d+1 thrust/impale and 1d+2 swing/cut. With a Defensive Attack this becomes 1d-1 thrust/impale and 1d swing/cut, a big drop in damage! For a ST 15 fighter, the same sword gives 1d+3 impale and 2d+2 cut . . . reduced to 1d+1 and 2d for a Defensive Attack. Still enough damage to potentially penetrate Light Plate with a thrust and cleave unarmored foes into pieces.

All of these attack options work well with unarmed attacks. Grappling is very useful for high-ST combatants. Takedowns allow you to use the best of your ST, DX, and grappling skill. Pins are a regular Contest of ST. Slams damage is based on your HP. You can also use your high strength to Choke or Strangle, execute a Neck Snap, or Wrench Limb. Wrench Spine (for realistic fighters) and Snap Weapon (after grabs) and Backbreaker or Piledriver are also terrifyingly effective for cinematic strongmen.

Opponents who grapple you but who have half or less of your ST score don't stop you from moving, they merely act as encumbrance. But if enough of them pile on, you're in trouble. This mob-grapple tactic is called dogpiling. Per the **Basic Set,** the highest ST and DX of the attackers count, and each additional attacker adds 1/5 of that. Six ST 10 DX 10 thugs have an effective ST and DX of 20, meaning a ST 20 fighter has only even odds of breaking free! The best way to counter a dogpile is not to let it happen. Don't let yourself get surrounded, and deal immediately and ruthlessly with anyone who grapples you. Maybe you *can* take all of 'em, but no reason you have to take all of 'em at once. If you're potentially going to get mobbed, avoid using Sprawls to counter grapples (you'll be on the ground and easier to attack). Retreat if possible. Don't grapple, strike -- you can't parry while you hold on for a Takedown, Choke, or Wrench Limb. If the worst happens and they get you, your best move is to Break Free. Use Mighty Blows or All-Out Attack (Strong) if you have to. The first is better; avoid being defenseless on the following turn and you'll avoid being re-grappled immediately.

Miscellaneous Tactics

Finally, always remember to take advantage of your companion's skills and abilities. In a game with supernatural powers, keep an eye on how they can help you. Magical additions to your strength (elixirs, Might spells) are useful. But additions to DX or skill might be more useful, as your high ST might not need enhancement. Try to leverage synergies as well; bonuses to Move might not seem so useful, but if its sufficient to push you over the edge to take advantage of Move and Attack's slam damage rule, it's more valuable than it seems. Psi powers like TK may allow your friends to grab a foe and hold him in place for your Slam or prevent a Retreat away from your attack. The possibilities are endless; just remember what you're good at, and try to find ways to maximize that!

Conclusion

The new rules and styles in *GURPS Martial Arts* open up a world of pain and misery for your opponents everywhere, perhaps no more so than for very strong or very skilled fighters. So get out there and try out your strength!

But what if you don't *have* a strong character? Next month, in Part II, we'll look at how to build a big guy.

GURPS Accelerator

Class Act: Emulating Fantasy Character Classes

by Matt Riggsby

As the chapter of the *GURPS Basic Set* on templates makes clear, *GURPS* does not have character classes. Nevertheless, some players may want guidance through the mass of character generation rules to help them build characters with well-defined sets of abilities and improve them appropriately through the course of play. This article presents templates which represent a number of common fantasy character types (warriors, wizards, and so on), priced for campaigns with starting characters in the 100-200 point range. Not only can they be used as-is, but they can be combined to produce a variety of other character types. For maximum compatibility, all templates use only traits in the *Basic Set,* except for the Magician templates, which require *GURPS Magic.*

Warriors

These templates are for characters whose primary occupation is fighting.

What You Need To Do

This article presents templates with abilities fitting particular job descriptions common in fantasy games. They do not, however, include traits representing social and legal relationships or personality traits. The Fencer template, for example, sets out abilities useful to a skilled fencer, but doesn't include other traits necessary to make him a highwayman leading a double life in high society (for example, Secret, Disguise, and Streetwise), a guardsman of the Cardinal (Rank, Patron, Duty), a dastardly nobleman (Wealth, Status, Bully, Alcoholism), or an dangerous dandy (Compulsive Carousing, Fashion Sense, Rapier Wit). You, the individual player, must still fine-tune the template to turn it into an actual character.

Brick   *111 points*

The brick is a simple, straightforward warrior. There's nothing subtle about a brick. He stands on the front line, dishes out a lot of damage, and soaks up the same. The brick has a good ST for damage dealing, hit points, and wearing heavy armor.

Attributes: **ST** +3 [30]; **DX** +2 [40]; **HT** +2 [20]
Advantages: High Pain Threshold [10]
Skills: Broadsword (A) DX+2 [8], Brawling (E) DX+0 [1], Fast-Draw (Broadsword) (E) DX+0 [1], Shield (E) DX+0 [1]

Fencer   *110 points*

The fencer, on the other hand, doesn't have a lot of armor or hit points standing between him and an untimely demise. He depends on high skill, quick moves, and occasional surprise techniques.

Attributes: **DX** +3 [60]; **HT** +1 [10]
Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]
Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX [4], Fast-Draw (Rapier) (E) DX+0 [1], Main-Gauche (A) DX+1 [3], Rapier (A) DX+3 [12]
Techniques: Disarming (Rapier) +1 [2], Feint (Rapier) +2 [3]

Martial Artist   113 points

Like the fencer, the martial artist has to rely on speed and skill rather than brute force and ability to absorb damage. This template presents a "balanced" bare-hand martial artist, equally capable of hard techniques like strikes and kicks and soft techniques like holds and throws.

Attributes: **ST** +1 [10]; **DX** +3 [60]; **HT** +1 [10]
Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]
Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [2], Judo (H) DX+1 [8], Karate (H) DX+1 [8]

Archer   75 points

An archer must combine ST (for range and damage) and **DX** (for accuracy). A relatively high skill is important to counteract range and speed penalties, and having a backup weapon is a good idea in case enemies can get into hand-to-hand combat range.

Attributes: **ST** +2 [20]; **DX** +2 [40]
Skills: Bow (A) DX+3 [2], Broadsword (A) DX+2 [8], Fast-Draw (Arrow) (E) DX+0 [1]

Rogues

These templates are for characters who rely on stealth and deception.

Basic Rogue   92 points

This is template represents someone who is generally good at being sneaky and running away. However, it doesn't represent a complete rogue. You'll want to apply a Burglar, Cutpurse, or Assassin lens, immediately following.

Attributes: **DX** +3 [60]; IQ +1 [20]
Skills: Brawling (E) DX+0 [1], Knife (E) DX+0 [1] or Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1], Streetwise (A) IQ+0 [2], Observation (A) Per+0 [2], Running (A) HT+0 [2], Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]

Burglar   22 points

This rogue specializes in breaking and entering.

Advantages: Perfect Balance [15], Acute Hearing 1 [2]
Skills: Climbing (A) DX+0 [2] (receives bonus from Perfect Balance), Forced Entry (E) DX+0 [1], Lockpicking/TL (A) IQ+0 [2]

Cutpurse   25 points

This rogue specializes in crimes of opportunity, such as shoplifting and pickpocketing.

Advantages: Danger Sense [15], Acute Vision 1 [2]
Skills: Filch (A) DX+0 [2], Pickpocket (H) DX+0 [4], Shadowing (A) IQ+0 [2]

Assassin   20 points

This rogue kills quietly and from hiding, getting close and striking when the victim is defenseless. This is a murderer, not a warrior. This lens is, strictly speaking, 20 points, but since the Basic Rogue template already has a point in Knife or Shortsword, you can reduce the cost by a point if you increase skill in the weapon already learned.

Advantages: Night Vision 2 [2]
Skills: Climbing (A) DX+0 [2], Disguise (A) IQ+0 [2], Knife (E) DX+2 [4] or Shortsword (A) DX+1 [4], Lockpicking/TL (A) IQ+0 [2], Poisons (H) IQ+0 [4], Shadowing (A) IQ+0 [2], Throwing (A) DX+0 [2]

Con Man   84 points

Unlike other rogues, who rely on being inconspicuous, the con man is all about being seen. This template is a flexible social operator who doesn't necessarily have to be dishonest, but he's very good at it if he is.

Attributes: IQ +1 [20]
Advantages: Smooth Operator 2 [30]
Skills: Acting (A) IQ+0 [2], Carousing (E) HT+0 [1], Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2], Diplomacy (H) IQ+0 [4], Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [8], Gambling (A) IQ+0 [2], Merchant (A) IQ+0 [2], Observation (A) Per+0 [2], Running (A) HT+0 [2], Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+0 [1], Sex Appeal (A) HT+0 [2], Shadowing (A) IQ+0 [2], Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]

Acting, Carousing, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Savoir-Faire, Sex Appeal, and Streetwise receive a bonus from Smooth Operator.

Magicians

"The Modular Magician" presented a number of lenses for magic-using characters, but don't constitute complete templates themselves. All those spells rely on IQ and Magery, and spellcasting characters might have a few supporting mundane skills. These basic templates combined with some spell modules will produce more-or-less complete magicians.

Magician, Functional Build   53 points

This template, built on a relatively low number of points, doesn't represent a particularly powerful spellcaster, but it is, at least, reasonably capable, with enough IQ and Magery to buy a handful of spells at a fairly functional skill level for a moderate point cost. Moreover, in a game with starting characters at around 150 points, it leaves room to combine it with other templates.

Attributes: IQ +1 [20]
Advantages: Magery 2 [25]
Skills: Any two of Alchemy (VH) IQ-1 [4], Hidden Lore (A) IQ+1 [4], Innate Attack (A) DX+1 [4], Occultism (A) IQ+1 [4], Thaumatology (VH) IQ-1 [4]

Hidden Lore and Innate Attack both require specialization.

Magician, Optimized Build   123 points

It's general knowledge among experienced players that there's a statistical "sweet spot" for building magicians. With

IQ 14 and Magery 3, a magic-using character can spend a single point in most spells (two points for VH spells) and get them at skill-15, the level at which fatigue reductions for high skill start to kick in. It's a significant investment of points and some GMs get quite thoroughly tired of seeing IQ14/M3 mages all the time, but it's both a very efficient build and one which fits the stereotypical picture of a magician; without points to spend on much else once he gets done buying spells, optimized magicians tend to be intelligent but not terribly physically or socially capable.

Attributes: IQ +4 [80]
Advantages: Magery 3 [35]
Skills: Any two of Alchemy (VH) IQ-1 [4], Hidden Lore (A) IQ+1 [4], Innate Attack (A) DX+1 [4], Occultism (A) IQ+1 [4], Thaumatology (VH) IQ-1 [4]

Magician Variants

Some kinds of magicians are distinguished by small differences in how they can use their magical abilities and where they come from. The "standard" *GURPS* magician is relatively scholarly, studying hard to learn his spells. However, some games and fictional worlds have what might be called intuitive magician, who develop their powers more by force of will than by study. There are a number of ways to model this, but one of the easiest is to take the advantage Wild Talent (Retention +25%, Focused: Magic -20%) [21/level]. With this advantage, you can attempt to cast any spell you don't know and, if you succeed, may be able to buy that spell immediately.

Another common variant is the priestly magician, who has supernatural powers which are similar in effect to magical spells but are powered by faith, divine power, or something similar. If a spellcaster's abilities are a gift from his deity, he should take an appropriate disadvantage such as Code of Honor or Disciplines of Faith and apply the Pact limitation to his Magery (see also the Holy Man template below).

Other Character Types

This last batch of templates is for specialists in social and technical fields.

Bard   *41 points*

This template represents a professional storyteller and musician. Bards may recite classic stories, comment on current events, or know well-hidden secrets.

Attributes: IQ +1 [20]
Advantages: Charisma 1 [5], Musical Ability 1 [5]
Skills: Musical Instrument (H) IQ+0 [2] (gets bonus from Musical Ability), Poetry (A) IQ+0 [2], Public Speaking (Storytelling) (E) IQ+0 [1] (gets bonus from Charisma), Singing (E) HT+1 [2] (gets bonus from Musical Ability), and two of Current Affairs/TL (E) IQ+1 [2], Hidden Lore (A) IQ+0 [2], or Literature (H) IQ-1 [2]

Current Affairs, Hidden Lore, and Musical Instrument take specialties

Mystic Bard   *20 points*

The basic Bard template is a mundane performer. With this lens, the bard takes on nigh-supernatural abilities to influence people's minds.

Skills: Enthrallment (Persuade) (H) Will+1 [8], Enthrallment (Sway Emotions) (H) Will+1 [8], Musical Influence (VH) IQ+0 [4] (gets bonus from Musical Ability)

Craftsman   *97 points*

This is more than just an ordinary craftsman. It's an all-purpose, highly skilled low-tech mechanic and inventor, who might be on hand to build siege engines, armored wagons, and Da Vinci-esque gliders.

Attributes: IQ +1 [20]
Advantages: Artificier [20], Gadgeteer [25]
Skills: Alchemy/TL (VH) IQ+0 [8], Armoury/TL (A) IQ+1 [4], Carpentry (E) IQ+0 [1], Engineer/TL (Specialty 1) (H) IQ+1 [8], Engineer/TL (Specialty 2) (H) IQ+0 [4], Jeweler/TL (H) IQ+0 [4], Masonry (E) IQ+0 [1], Smith/TL (A) IQ+0 [2]

All skills but Alchemy get a bonus from Artificier. Armoury, Engineer, and Smith take specialties.

Holy Man   *13 points*

This is someone who has deep religious faith, works hard for it, and gets a certain aura of holiness because of it.

Advantages: True Faith [15]
Disadvantages: Code of Honor or Disciplines of Faith [-10]
Skills: Religious Ritual (H) IQ+0 [4], Theology (H) IQ+0 [4],

Religious Ritual and Theology are specialized by religion.

Leader   *48 points*

This is, more specifically, a war leader, someone capable of leading troops into battle.

Attributes: IQ +1 [20]
Skills: Administration (A) IQ [2], Diplomacy (H) IQ [4], Leadership (A) IQ+1 [4], Soldier (A) IQ+0 [2], Strategy (H) IQ+1 [8], Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]

Outdoorsman   *41 points*

This template is appropriate for barbarians, gamekeepers on large feudal estates, and others who spend most of their time outdoors.

Advantages: Acute (Sense) 2 [4], Outdoorsman 1 [10]
Skills: Bow (A) DX-1 [1], Climbing (A) DX+0 [2], Fishing (E) Per+0 [1], Hiking (A) HT+1 [4], Mimicry (Animal Sounds) (H) IQ-2 8 [1], Naturalist (H) IQ-2 8 [1], Spear (A) DX-1 [1], Stealth (A) DX-1 [1], Survival (terrain 1) (A) Per+1 [4], Survival (terrain 2) (A) Per+1 [4], Swimming (E) HT+0 [1], Tracking (A) Per+1 [4], Weather Sense (A) IQ+0 [2]

Naturalist and Survival take specialties; this template provides survival skills in two different kinds of terrain.

The "Adventurer" Lens And Professional Connections

Although some of these might be regarded as skills more relevant to particular templates, all are ultimately skills which "professional" adventurers, who travel extensively, go places they're not supposed to, and otherwise get themselves

into trouble, should have regardless of what their main tasks are. Consider buying this 11-point lens:

Skills: Climbing (A) DX+0 [2], Hiking (A) HT+0 [2], Stealth (A) DX+0 [2], Swimming (E) HT+0 [1], Riding (Animal) (A) DX+0 [2], Running (A) HT+0 [2]

Sooner or later, every adventurer is going to have to scale a cliff or wall, walk a long way, sneak around, get into the water, get on a horse, or run away, and buying the skills in advance will save you some very nasty surprises. In addition, several characters in any group should have First Aid and/or Survival skills. A few characters with those skills can effectively look after a larger group, so not everyone needs them, but any functional group absolutely requires them.

Do note that this lens, while good for the footloose PC adventurer, isn't necessarily sufficient to reflect subsidiary traits which characters with "day jobs" might need. For example, the warrior templates are good for lone fighters, but professional soldiers will have Soldier skill. Likewise, rogues may have a Savoir-Faire skill reflecting the etiquette of a criminal organization they work with, magicians may have similar skills to fit into a formal guild, martial artists for their dojo or temple, and so on.

Combining Templates

In addition to the basic character types presented here, other common types can be created by combining them. For example, let's say you want to play an officer. He's a fighter with leadership abilities. That sounds a lot like one of the warrior templates combined with a leader. Here are some other character types which could be produced by combining these templates:

- *Barbarian:* outdoorsman + brick (a stereotypical barbarian has the Berserk disadvantage as well and uses an axe instead of a broadsword)
- *Druid:* outdoorsman + magician with plant or animal spells
- *Holy warrior:* holy man + any warrior
- *Ninja:* Basic rogue + assassin + martial artist
- *Priestly healer:* holy man + magician with healing spells and the Pact limitation on his Magery
- *Ranger:* outdoorsman + any warrior

Of course, less common character types can be created by experimenting with other combinations. A war-leader doesn't necessarily have to swing a sword. He could be a magician instead; indeed, because leadership skills are largely mental and magicians tend to be smarter than warriors, a wizard-general would be a relatively easy-to-build character. The bard and con man templates could be combined to produce a medicine show charlatan, who uses his performing abilities to help sell bogus cures.

When combining templates with overlapping traits, you could combine overlapping traits, but in general it's probably a better idea (or, at least, more affordable) not to. Simply take the higher attribute, advantage, or skill level. For example, to create a roguish swordsman, you might combine the basic rogue and fencer templates. Both templates include **DX** +3. While you could create a character with DX +6, but it's highly unlikely that the character will be able to afford the 120 points for a single attribute, so just take DX+3. The combined template, then, would look something like this:

Attributes: **DX** +3 [60]; IQ+1 [20]; **HT** +1 [10]
Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]
Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX+0 [4], Fast-Draw (Rapier) (E) DX+0 [1], Main-Gauche (A) DX+1 [3], Rapier (A) DX+3 [12], Brawling (E) DX+0 [1], Knife (E) DX+0 [1] or Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1], Streetwise (A) IQ+0 [2], Observation (A) Per+0 [2], Running (A) HT+0 [2], Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]
Techniques: Disarming (Rapier) +1 [2], Feint (Rapier) +2 [3]

The cost of 142 points is considerable, but well within the realm of reason for a 150 point game, even leaving (with a few disadvantages) room for the cutpurse, burglar, or assassin lenses. You might also remove the Knife or Shortsword

skill, since the high Rapier skill provides much better fighting ability than a smattering of the other combat skills.

Advanced Classes

Just as there are no character classes in *GURPS,* there are no specific avenues for advancement which resemble "leveling up." Characters can improve their abilities, of course, but advancement tends to be much more gradual than in class-and-level games. Players can spend points on incremental advancement of skills as they come in rather than waiting for a few big jumps in ability (though, of course, they can choose to do so).

It also happens in a less structured fashion. There's no set schedule for improving abilities. Given a fistful of points, a player can chose to improve attributes, buy advantages, buy off disadvantages, buy new skills, or increase existing ones freely (within the bounds of whatever limitations the GM imposes on the campaign, of course). But while there's no fixed path for advancement, there's a huge menu of options.

The most obvious avenue for advancement is simply to increase the skills (and, if there are enough points, the attributes and advantages) a character already has. However, there are a number of skills and advantages appropriate for many character types which aren't already in the templates. Here are some examples:

Warriors: Fighting characters probably have the broadest range of options. Combat Reflexes and High Pain Threshold are all but mandatory for fighting characters, with Weapon Master (for armed fighters) or Trained By a Master (for unarmed fighters) coming in a very close third. If your GM is amenable, you might consider buying Weapon Master in stages, starting with a single weapon, then moving up through classes of weapons until you've got the full advantage, but since it's most effective coupled with high weapon skills, make sure you've got at least one or two relevant weapon skills at DX+2 first. Once you've got WM/TBaM, you've also got access to cinematic skills like Blind Fighting and Power Blow. Enhanced defenses, extra attacks, extra hit points, increased Arm ST, and Fit/Very Fit are also very useful. Archers with a high enough skill also have access to Zen Archery.

Rogues: Some esoteric skills may become available to stealthy characters, such as Light Walk and Invisibility Art. However, these are cinematic skills, and your GM may require that you buy an Unusual Background to be allowed to learn them. Night Vision is another very useful ability, though the GM may, again, limit its purchase. Con men may pick up Contacts, Cultural Adaptability, and Social Chameleon.

Magicians: Magicians can spend countless points buying spells not in the given templates, picking up a vast range of new abilities just in new spells. However, they may also be able to justify developing just about any supernatural advantage the GM will allow in the campaign. Particularly relevant abilities include Mana Enhancer and Oracle. Magicians can also make good use of Extra Fatigue, and check out the Ally advantage if you want a familiar.

Bard: There are two more Enthrallment specialties not in the Mystic Bard template, and the GM may allow skilled bards to buy Magery, with the limitation that spells must be sung, which opens up the entirely of the magic system.

Craftsman: A craftsman might pick up High Manual Dexterity or any number of Gizmos. He might also upgrade Gadgeteer to Quick Gadgeteer.

Holy man: Blessed, Healer, and Oracle are very appropriate advantages for holy characters. Among the more mundane abilities, Clerical Investment and Social Regard are natural advantages to have.

Leader: The template here provides the ability to lead, but not necessarily the authority. A more able leader might have Status or Rank, indicating a position of some official power, or an Ally group, indicating a body of personal followers.

Outdoorsman: Animal Empathy and Plant Empathy are appropriate to outdoorsmen, and in a more mystical campaign, even Speak With Animals and Speak With Plants. Likewise, they may pick up Herb Lore.

Since there are few if any restrictions imposed on a character's development by their race or previously obtained

abilities, characters built on one template may also start to acquire traits from related templates (for example, a cutpurse may start acquiring burglars skills) or "multi-class" by dipping into others without fear of penalties (the cutpurse may start learning fencing skills and, indeed, turn out to be quite good at it, given his already high DX).

Finally, don't disregard the social and legal advantages which *any* successful character might pick up. In some games, high-level characters gain followers, strongholds, and other trappings of notoriety. Those would be reflected by advantages such as Status, Allies, Social Regard, and Reputation.

Pyramid Review

Star Wars Roleplaying Game, Saga Edition Revised Core Rulebook

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Bill Slavicsek, Andy Collins, JD Wiker, Christopher Perkins, Owen KC Stephens, & Rodney Thompson

Edited by Christopher Perkins & Gary M. Sarli Art, imaging, & graphics by Travis Adams, Bob Jordan, Paul Hebron, Scott Okumura, Keven Smith, Leon Cortez, Michael Martin, Angelika Lokotz, Jay Sakamoto, Daniel Falconer, Langdon Foss, 4G Squared, Daniel Gelon, D. Alexander Gregory, Matt Hatton, Raven Mimura, Vinod Rams, Ramon Perez, Andrew Robinson, Marc Sasso, Greg Staples, Mark Tedin, Chris Trevas, & Lucasfilm Ltd.

288-page full-color hardcover with a double-sided battle map; $39.95

An epic movie series, an epic topic, and an epic name: ***Star Wars Roleplaying Game, Saga Edition Revised Core Rulebook.*** Think of it as Wizards of the Coast's own trilogy. Is the third time the charm for the exciting d20-version of the popular setting? Tune in next paragraph to find out.

For anyone who's been living in a spice mine for the last three decades, it's all about the rise, fall, and rise of the star-faring Skywalker family. There are some sword fights.

This is the first publication for the franchise to come out after the movie saga was completed (hence the title), so readers may rest assured it's a fairly exhaustive treatment of the setting. Planet gazetteers, lists of races and their features, and a history of the galaxy all add to the body of knowledge. Even the "extended" world is included, so favored video games, novels, comic books, and so on get enough mention to make them useful.

Most of what Wizards of the Coast is pushing to sell the book, though, is the streamlined nature of it all. Characters start as one of only five classes -- soldier, Jedi, noble, scoundrel, and scout -- and personalizing these requires either a prestige class (most of which are just better versions of these, like ace pilots and officers) or a talent tree. Borrowing heavily from ***d20 Modern,*** the in-game persona is constructed more from the things he chooses off these lists than the things he's locked into within his species or "job." That greatly improves the choices, especially if someone is here for the Force goodies. Those can be gained from feats or talents, and one need not be a) a doddering, white-haired relic or b) locked into the Jedi milieu to get them. A boost to personal competence isn't dependent on going up a level for the next cool ability, and even the hit points are beefed up to make first-levelers someone to be reckoned with.

Skills have been cut by about half, as have the rules for vehicle combat. In the former case, it's a strange mix. Iffy skills like Disguise and Forgery have been rolled into Deception, yet the new Acrobatics is still separate from many physical abilities like climbing or jumping. On the other hand, there are no ranks. All "skills" are sets of many smaller skills -- they must be purchased at creation, and new skills or the improvement of old ones requires a feat at some future level (though these, too, are generous enhancements). In the latter instance, vehicle combat is still abstracted, but the same rules cover all vehicles; ranges don't depend on a weird graphic; and a quick list of options for pilots and

other combatants cover a lot of ground (or space, or . . .). Combat in general is less detailed and more forgiving: Heroes get those extra hit points so they can enjoy some of the more cinematic maneuvers seen in the films, and not being shoehorned into specific roles broadens one's menu.

The look of the book is great. The artwork is just quirky enough to represent the tapestry of Star Wars, while the photos, -- mostly things any fan has seen before -- are big, bright, and beautiful, as though they've been digitally remastered along with everything else in the modern world. A lot of that artwork was taken from previous editions, but the graphic design is far clearer. Readers (and some shops) may have mixed feelings about the size . . . it comes in an odd little square format, 9.5 inches on a side. It has a double-sided map suited to using figurines, though these, too, may look familiar (they're basically revamped maps from some of the miniature sets), and it has to be pulled out along a perforated dotted line.

Wizards of the Coast can do all the streamlining they like, but one of the best additions to this book is something many of their products could use: a chapter on being G. They often promise that advice but seldom deliver, yet here they offer a solid section on how to create games and what goes into a campaign. It may not be of much use to the experts, but for a game that always ought to be accessible to lots of people -- it is a good entry point for new roleplayers, after all -- this goes through the motions and puts folks at ease with tabletop gaming.

With a fresh and far less complicated look at Lucas' world, ***Star Wars Saga Edition*** is a fine buy to get players up to speed on roleplaying their favorite Jedi. That life of adventure should be characterized by saber-wielding and blaster-twirling, not page-flipping, and the condensed guidelines found here make that galaxy not nearly so far away.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Mansions of Madness: Six Classic Explorations of the Unknown, the Deserted, and the Insane (for **Call of Cthulhu**)

Published by **Chaosium, Inc.**

Written by Fred Behrendt, Michael DeWolfe, Keith Herber, Penny Love, Wesley Martin, Mark Morrison, & Liam Routt with David Conyers, William Dunn, & Charlie Krank

Cover by Lee Gibbons

Illustrated by Janet Aulisio, Sam Inabinet, & David Lee Ingersoll

Cartography by David Conyers, Lydia Ortiz, Carol Triplett-Smith, & Pegasus Spiele

160-page b&w softcover; $21.95

Like 2006's *__The Stars Are Right,__* this Chaosium anthology for *__Call of Cthulhu__* is a reprint given a makeover and some additional new material. Originally published in 1990 as a quintet, *Mansions of Madness: Six Classic Explorations of the Unknown, the Deserted, and the Insane* returns as a sextet, presenting domestic tales despoiled by dark dreams, murderous malignancy, and insidious insanity. It differs from *The Stars Are Right* in that this anthology is for the game's classic period of the 1920s rather than the modern era, but any of the scenarios here could easily be transposed to the 1890s of *Cthulhu by Gaslight* or the here-and-now of *Cthulhu Now.* That said, the Keeper will have to work hard to make them suitable for *Delta Green.* In addition, the collection contains a good mix, suited to both the experienced and the inexperienced player and investigator alike. Further, many are suited to play by small groups, even by a single player and Keeper.

Physically, *Mansions of Madness* is a surprise. Of late, Chaosium's releases for *Call of Cthulhu* have suffered from poor design and irritatingly poor handling of both art and cartography, the end result invariably looking grubby and fuzzy. For the most part, *Mansions of Madness* suffers from none of this; the illustrations are crisp and the maps legible. Exactly as they should be. The only real oddity is the inclusion of the maps in the players' handouts, which despite having had most of the important information removed, are superfluous.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The collection opens with Michael DeWolfe's "Mister Corbitt," suitable for the inexperienced and for smaller groups, even a single investigator. It even begins in an investigator's home, so can be set anywhere. When the investigator spies his neighbor out of the window, he sees him drop an item: a child's arm. What does Walter Corbitt want with such an object? Obviously, there is something going on here, but surprisingly Corbitt is neither the villain of the piece, nor even really evil. Despite its small scale, "Mister Corbitt" nicely showcases the uncaring nature and effect of the Mythos, making it a solid introduction to the game that can still be enjoyed by the experienced player in a single session.

"The Plantation" by Wesley Martin is a much longer adventure held in high regard by the game's devotees. It begins in Arkham, but is set mainly in the Deep South. A young African-American boy comes looking for help from Miskatonic University's Professor Albert Gist. His brother, Caleb Gist, owns the plantation where Joe lives, and (as the boy explains) is holding his sister prisoner and is messing with a new Mojo man. If the investigators agree to help Joe and the Professor, they journey to South Carolina and a rich, fetid mix of clichés that includes decay and degeneracy, snakes and snake cults, and voodoo (although the faith is properly described as Obeah) and zombies. Fittingly, the scenario's Mythos revolves around Yig, Father of Serpents, used to a surprisingly benign, possibly beneficial effect, and although it leans towards the game's Pulp style, this is an enjoyably grand affair that easily slots into any tropical or sub-tropical setting.

Mark Morrison's "The Crack'd and Crook'd Manse" is again a shorter scenario, another classic mix of the haunted house and rats in the walls. Again suited to inexperienced investigators, here they must locate an archaeologist who has not been seen at home for some weeks. The solution to the problem here is a familiar one, but much like the core rulebook's "The Haunting," the Keeper can happily play up the haunted house's special effects. And as with "The Haunting," there is something nasty in the basement.

Like "The Plantation" earlier in the book, Keith Herber's "The Sanatorium" relies upon clichés, but unfortunately they are used to less pleasing effect. It takes place on an offshore island, home to a sanatorium where a doctor is conducting treatment on the mentally ill. Naturally, the patients have run amok, all hell has broken loose, and a murderer stalks the island upon which the investigators will find themselves trapped. The monster at the heart of the scenario feels too similar to that of "The Crack'd and Crook'd Manse," just in a larger, though still self-contained area. "The Sanatorium" will be of interest to medically trained investigators, and discovering one solution might prove entertaining involving as it does the regression of a patient into past lives. The Keeper may well also enjoy the opportunity to roleplay the scenario's cast of the asylum's patients, but otherwise, "The Sanatorium" has little to recommend it.

The last of the original scenarios is "Mansion of Madness" by Fred Behrendt, another missing persons case, but one that takes the investigators to several different homes, and is thus much longer. They find themselves mired in the murderous wake of a female cultist, her trail leading them through the Boston's art world and underworld, back to her own home, and finally to that of a local underworld figure. If the scenario's finale literally turns into a bug hunt, the investigation is worth playing through to see the devastation wrought by the cultist.

Mansions of Madness' sixth and new scenario is "That Old Damned House" by Liam Rout and Penny Love. Inspired by the H.P. Lovecraft story "The Mound" and the film *The Old Dark House,* this scenario's simple opening has the investigators hired to verify an insurance claim. The Hazard family claims that an heirloom, the famous Hazard Pearls have been stolen, the police suggesting that a renowned cat burglar was responsible. The job requires the investigators visit the Hazard family home in Mystic, Connecticut, prove that the pearls were stolen and identify the thief. This will expose them to the Hazard family, a collection of seemingly eccentrics hiding both a number of grotesques and a dark secret. This is a detailed adventure, but with surprisingly little going on, and really it requires the Keeper to be reactive rather than proactive as both the threat and the aging Hazard family being slow to move. Although its background links to Indian legends of an underground city make this scenario the most difficult to relocate elsewhere, this is still suitable for play by the inexperienced.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

With only the one weak adventure, and the rest a good mix of short scenarios and scenarios suitable for play by inexperienced players and investigators, this second edition of Mansions of Madness is an improvement upon the original. Physically, *Mansions of Madness* is also an improvement, hopefully marking the end of Chaosium's presentation problems. Of the scenarios, "The Plantation" certainly stands out as a Pulp classic, but others like "Mister Corbitt," "The Crack'd and Crook'd Manse," and "That Old Damned House" nicely counter this trend. It is this low key nature of so many of the scenarios herein that is the main feature of this anthology. This not only makes *Mansions of Madness* a welcome reprint, but also a wise purchase for the beginning Keeper.

--Matthew Pook

Is Training to Be "Good Enough" Good Enough?

Over in the *Pyramid* message boards, there was an interesting discussion that stemmed from my column two weeks ago. As you'll recall, that was when I proposed that it might be possible to have sessions or seminars for training about how to be a "good GM." One facet of this discussion asked (paraphrasing), "Is such a thing possible if there's no agreement on what being a 'good GM' means?"

At its core, this is an excellent question. Because, obviously, what makes a "good GM" in one instance might make for a lousy one in others. (I've expressed my own inability to be the tactical-combat adversarial mastermind that some player groups love to square off against, but such a deficiency was seldom missed among the folks I gamed with.) In mulling it over, I eventually rephrased the question in my mind: Is GMing more like sex, or parenting?

See, when it comes to affairs of the bedroom (or wherever), what makes any two (or more) people appropriate for each other can vary wildly from couple to couple. What Pablo Plain finds appealing might differ greatly from what Molly McWhipcrack enjoys. *But* there is enough common ground between practically all variations for countless tomes, TV shows, and podcasts to fill all available media outlets. And it is in this common ground that lies the most fruitful ground for improvement: the need for communication, the importance of honesty tempered with diplomacy, and so on.

In contrast, it is possible for two people to disagree *entirely* when it comes to parenting. For example, one set of parents might believe in a strict "obey or else" model of behavior from their children, while another household might be more permissive and lenient in their upbringing. In such a case, the two sets of our hypothetical parents would be unable to find *any* common ground outside of the most basic "well, duh" concepts: Feed your kid, give him a place to sleep, don't let your child bring the blue ironing board crashing atop his body while you're trying to finish a book deadline even though you thought you'd secured it (the ironing board) sufficiently the *last* time he tried to commit unwitting suicide. The classic cinematic masterpiece *Meet the Fockers* hinges on this dichotomy in parenting styles . . . although I think the two sets of parents learn in the end that maybe they're not so different after all, undermining my thesis statement. (I'm not certain, because by that point in the film I had long since succumbed to the neuron-deadening comforts of palm-oil-soaked popcorn.)

Now, I obviously believe that there's enough of a common ground to not worry about alienating too much of my audience each week. And many of the high points of "crucial" things for a good GM to know and do I've harped on before (c.f. "communication," "honesty," "diplomacy"). But I'm less certain if that common ground is enough to produce a foundation that can be utilized by all GMs to produce better-than-adequate results. In other words, if all the good GMs of the world shared the good advice that they could generally agree on and infused that knowledge with a blank clay vessel of a GM, what level would that GoleM be at? Would he be any good at what he does?

The answer to this question obviously is directly related to a hypothetical training program (or any other means of improving GMs); if a GM resulting from generic appeal-to-all training still isn't any good, then why bother?

Alternatively, it might fall to the game to define what it means for a GM to play the game "right." This seems antithetical to some folks, and is indeed contrary to much of my past advice; I've long believed and espoused that -- so long as everyone has fun -- what does it matter *how* the game is played?

But that isn't a universal notion, at least compared to other games and hobbies. For example, consider golf. It's entirely possible for someone to "play golf" with the sole idea of having fun out in the fresh air, chatting with friends, trying to get the ball going (mostly) in the right direction, and so on; in such a game, it's possible to envision everyone taking a lax attitude toward, say, mulligans ("Try again, Dave!") or out-of-bound shots ("Aw, just toss the ball somewhere interesting and go from there . . ."). Really, in this case, one doesn't even need to keep score, if one's group doesn't desire. (I've played some rounds of miniature golf like this, where total strokes weren't counted so much as who won each hole . . . and often we forgot even that by the end of the game.) Yet this isn't how the hobby of golf envisions their game to be played; if you read a golfing magazine, it's going to tell you how to improve your swing, how to get out of difficult ball positions, and so on. It's going to devote precious few resources to in-game conversation topics, or "Hole 19" mixed drink suggestions, or wacky alternate games you can play when duffing around.

To a certain extent, some games already take a fairly hard line against certain styles of play or mindsets. For example, the various **Vampire** lines from the past few years have strongly emphasized that, no, being a vampire is *not* cool or fun, and you're not a blood-drinking super-hero. Yet this is a case where many fans often override the written word and creators' intentions, and I've heard of plenty of games that were basically blood-powered supers settings. (Heck, I've played a few myself . . . it's pretty fun, really.)

In this circumstance, I believe it might be possible for the developers of such a game to emphasize and train others in how they feel their game *should* be played. Of course, this introduces a somewhat adversarial relationship between the consumers and the publishers, which could prove problematic . . . especially given how, in some aspects, the hobby's been having a hard time maintaining strong numbers.

But that still leaves open the general case: Is there enough useful information that's applicable to enough people that it can benefit most games? And, if so, is there a good way to train would-be-brilliant GMs on that information?

I don't have any answers . . . just lots and lots of questions. But an inquisitive nature is a good way to lead to enlightenment.

Of course, it can also lead to an ironing board crashing down on your head . . .

--Steven Marsh

Changeling: The Lost

Published by [White Wolf Gaming Studios](#)

Developed by Ethan Skemp

Written by Justin Achilli, Joseph Carriker, Jess Hartley, Wood Ingram, Mathew McFarland, Peter Schaefer, John Snead, Travis Stout, Chuck Wendig, & Peter Woodworth

Art by John Bridges, Mathew Dixon, Andrew Hepworth, Jeff Holt, Veronica Jones, Brian LeBlanc, Pat Loboyko, Eric Lofgren, Thomas Manning, Britt Martin, Peter Mohrbacher, Justin Norman, R.K Post, Steve Prescott, Mathew Stawicki, & William Teo

350-page black-white-and-green hardcover; $34.99

White Wolf's *[Changeling: The Dreaming](#)* was one of those games that you either "got" or you didn't. It had its fans, but many would-be players were put off by its setting and mechanics, as well as its' seemingly "cheery" atmosphere in a game world ruled by cynicism, dread and treacle-thick angst. And that was unfortunate, as *Changeling: The Dreaming* was a glorious treasure trove of story for those wanting to rage against the darkness, or aid it in its course.

But, in the spirit of re-doing old *World of Darkness* games, *Changeling*'s time for a makeover has come. And it's undergone a drastic change in becoming *[Changeling: The Lost.](#)* It's not the same game with a different setting and vibe; it's a whole new beast, born of beauty and madness, and very much at home within the re-imagined, re-tooled *World of Darkness.*

I came to this new game hoping to recapture the days when a Corebook could open up an entire new world, offer a coherent way to work within it, and beg to be played. *Changeling: The Lost* doesn't just succeed in these goals; it excels. Whether you're an old fan of *Changeling: the Dreaming* or never quite got into that game because of its flaws or off-putting atmosphere, you should definitely check out *Changeling: The Lost.*

(One small note for the uninitiated: As with the other New *World of Darnkess* corebooks, *Changeling: The Lost* does not have all the rules you would need to play a the game . . . only those bits that pertain directly to Changelings. You have to possess the *World of Darkness Rulebook* to fully understand and play the system, and create characters in it.)

Changeling: The Lost is set up in what's become standard format for most new corebooks. There's a piece of opening fiction, followed by a short but decent Introduction. We then get four chapters that describe the setting, character creation, special rules for Changelings, and Storytelling, respectively. These are followed by a pair of appendixes which give characters another level of social interaction, and a sample setting to play in: Entitlements and the Freehold of Miami, in this case.

So what do we have here? White Wolf has taken the idea of being a Changeling back to its original meaning: the characters are those mortals who have been abducted by the True Fae, or tricked into entering Faerie, and been replaced in the real world by a doppelganger, known as a Fetch. Forced into bargains with their new masters in order to survive in the beautiful but maddening realm of Faerie, these victims are slowly changed to be more like their truly inhuman captors. One day they escape through the dangerous Hedge between worlds, only to find that years have gone

by, and something else has been living their lives *for* them. They have become Lost.

The book grabbed me right from the start with the mysterious and violent "What Alec Bourbon Said." Instead of the drawn-out initiation tales we used to get in most corebooks, we get a compelling sideways glimpse at Lost culture at work as it hides among the mortals. And it's one of those stories where, as you read the book, you begin to understand what you saw, and why it's important, which is always good reading for me.

The setting described thereafter is both intriguing and evocative. Changeling society is rife with contradictions, precariously balanced between hospitality and paranoia, change and stability, insane beauty and bone-ugly madness. That's hardly surprising, given what we learn about the True Fae; they are harsh monsters with alien minds and hearts, utterly unlike anything we read about in fairy tales as children. We are introduced to the Freeholds the Lost gather in, the four seasonal Courts which rule over them in turn (or *should*), and the threats they face, from within and outside their society.

So far so good, but then there's always the tricky part of any game: matching the mechanics up with the themes and concepts described in a fun, playable manner. This is something I think ***Changeling: The Dreaming*** failed at in a few respects in both editions. The good news is that ***Changeling: The Lost*** does not repeat that mistake, and does an excellent job of capturing the theme of the game in how the characters are set up, and how their special features and powers work.

For example, I like the fact that the Lost *don't* have to pick a Court, given how paranoid and distrustful they may be after their experiences in Faerie. Likewise, while every Changeling has a Seeming which governs its general appearance and origins, and gives benefits and drawbacks, they don't have to pick a Kith (a further subdivision of that Seeming, each with its own general appearance and benefit). And if they don't see a Kith they like amongst the 39 ones listed, players are outright encouraged to make their own.

And yes, you read that right: 39 Kiths, all with a spelled-out benefit. I think that's the most "splats" I've ever seen in a new corebook, ever. If you're looking for something to match a character concept, you'll probably find at least one possibility there . . . maybe even two.

And while we're giving out plaudits, the idea that the Wyrd -- which measures how powerful a Changeling is -- not only causes increasingly serious problems for them once they get over 5, but can also be *voluntarily* decreased to avoid these problems, is sheer genius. I'm not so sure about bundling the Lost's morality and grip on reality into one scale -- Clarity -- but I can see how having two scales might make things overly complicated. And while Changelings still use Glamour, the means of getting it have been vastly simplified and improved.

A further improvement is in the powers the Lost use, known as Contracts: ancient agreements that Changelings, and their individual Seemings, Courts, and Kiths have made with the world to wield temporary power over parts of it. These powers aren't old, re-flavored and renamed Arts from ***Changeling: the Dreaming;*** they're new and truly remarkable ideas. They've also done away with the old, clunky magic system of Arts and Realms that ***Changeling: The Dreaming*** used, and made it more straightforward. I also like that most of the Contracts have Catches, whereby a scheming Changeling can forgo having to pay to activate a power if a certain condition is met. Some have Bans, prohibiting your character from using the Contacts too often, and some have a harmful price to pay for their use.

The other systems in the book are intriguing as well -- I particularly like the idea of the Pledges that bind Changeling society together with magically-enforced promises -- but time and again I keep looking past the rules and coming back to how full the setting is. Like I said earlier, this isn't just an old game with new names; this is something entirely new and amazing, with something for almost any style and flavor of play, giving you enough information to tell any kind of story. The Freehold of Miami alone illustrates how the game can be put to work almost anywhere, and can work well with the local environment.

I kept reading ***Changeling: The Lost*** looking for some flaw, but I didn't find anything major enough to grouse about. As with most new corebooks it has a case of being overwritten in spots, and one gets the feeling one has read something a few times before. But the book is still meat from cover to cover, with little waste and not much want . . . except to see what comes in the next book in the series.

--J. Edward Tremlett

Go With the Phlogiston: Reality Hekla

" Most of the items it describes are based on specific, historical devices . . . but the treatment is intentionally generic, making the equipment useful even in non-historical campaigns."
-- Shawn Fisher and Hans-Christian Vortisch, **GURPS High-Tech,** *Fourth Edition*

And indeed, whole stretches of the new **GURPS High-Tech** might still come in handy in this Reality. Or it might not. That's the fun of a truly alternate high-tech, one that diverges with the last great whipping boy of the physical sciences, phlogiston. Like our previous ventures of this sort, this setting is designed "feel first." Reality Hekla is a sharp contrast of glacial cold (with a tip of the cursor to the setting of the vignettes in Shawn and Hans-Christian's **GURPS High-Tech**) and philosophical fire, for a powder-wigged Mordor flair. It combines Robert Louis Stevenson and Neal Stephenson, or Tchaikovsky and the Clash, with images by J.M.W. Turner and Andrei Tarkovsky. Bundle up and feel the burn.

"During several of the summer months of the year 1783 . . . there existed a constant fog over all Europe, and great part of North America. This fog was of a permanent nature; it was dry, and the rays of the sun seemed to have little effect towards dissipating it . . . They were indeed rendered so faint in passing through it, that when collected in the focus of a burning glass they would scarce kindle brown paper. Of course, their summer effect in heating the earth was exceedingly diminished. . . . Hence the first snows remained on it unmelted, and received continual additions. . . . Hence perhaps the winter of 1783-4, was more severe, than any that had happened for many years."
-- Benjamin Franklin, "Meteorological Imaginations and Conjectures" (1784)

Iceland's Mount Hekla may not have been the gateway to Hell, as the medieval chroniclers wrote following its 1104 eruption, but in 1766 its explosion gave birth not to demons but to a new world. The caloric currents within the earth roiled and foamed: Vesuvius erupted in 1779 and 1794, Mount St. Helens in 1800, La Soufriere in the Caribbean in 1812, Mayon in the Philippines in 1814, just to name a few of the greatest plumes of calcinated ash flung into the skies. But the greatest blasts were those hurled out by the volcanic rifts Laki and Grímsvötn in Iceland in 1783. The fog they expelled began to darken the very sun itself, and the glaciers crawled forth once again, in Norway and Switzerland and Canada and Tibet. By the time Mount Tambora exploded, blasting the East Indian island of Sumbava to pieces in 1815, there had been many years gone without summers. And there would be many more in the next 200 years.

Savants have determined that the glaciers may not yet have reached their fullest extent even now; though Scandinavia and Scotland lie covered in ice, and only the most powerful ice-breaking ships can keep the St. Lawrence open. North Sea has become arctic swamp, and the Baltic a lake, as the frigoric fluid bound up beneath Iceland and Greenland flows south in subterranean flood. The great forests of Northern Europe have thinned to pine and alder or died entirely, leaving a howling, bitter wasteland from Ireland to Anjou. This "New Siberia" extends to the Ural glaciers, and the rain once favoring Britain and Germany now falls in Spain and across the Sahara grasslands, born of moisture and caloric carried straight east across the Atlantic by the new Gulf Stream.

"Heat, therefore, and phlogiston, appear to be two opposite principles in nature. By the action of heat upon bodies, the force of their attraction to phlogiston is diminished; and by the action of phlogiston, a part of the absolute heat, which exists in all bodies as an elementary principle, is expelled."
-- M. Adair Crawford, *Experiments and Observations on Animal Heat and the Inflammation of Combustible Bodies* (1779)

Indeed, were it not for the philosophers' tireless pursuit of the phlogiston, London and Paris might be completely uninhabitable, rather than the cozy towngas-lit frontier outposts of the Bonaparte-Murats that they have become. But even as the skies darkened and the sun dimmed, the light of philosophick inquiry waxed and overspilled. In 1718, Georg Stahl had taken the "oily earth" (*terra pinguis*) of Johann Joachim Becher from the fringes of alchemy to the frontiers of natural philosophy, explaining that phlogiston (from the Greek *phlogiston,* meaning "burnt up") was not an earth, but an immaterial elemental substance like any of the magnetisms. Present in all flammable matter, it is released into the air by burning; once air is fully phlogisticated, it damps fires and can no longer support life. (Respiration

removes phlogiston from the body.) Furthermore, explained Stahl, rust was merely the dephlogistication of metal down to its own elemental state, the calx.

Over the next century, experiments by Lomonosov, Cavendish, Priestley, Rumford, and Lavoisier repeatedly demonstrated the validity of Stahl's principle, and began to establish the relationships between phlogiston, the caloric, frigoric, and galvanic fluids, the four magnetisms (animal, cosmic, mineral, and planetary), corpuscular light, and the virtue of metals. In 1864, when Maxwell (working in President Seward's brand-new Philosophick Academy in Baltimore) demonstrated the cyclical equations at the basis of phlogiston-physics, the modern High Technologick age can truly be said to have begun.

"To return to the experiment of the deflagration of dephlogisticated and inflammable air, it appears from the two airs becoming red-hot on their union, that the quantity of heat contained in one or both of them, is much greater than that contained in steam; because, for the first moments after the explosion, the water deposited by the air remains in the form of steam, and consequently retains the latent heat due to that modification of water."
-- James Watt, "Thoughts on the Constituent Parts of Water and of Dephlogisticated Air," *Philosophical Transactions* 74:329 (1784)

Of course, savants, enginers, and philosophers had been applying basic phlogiston theory for some time before that. James Watt had produced the combined-airs boiler, which vastly increased the efficiency of his steam engines, before his 1810 emigration to America (along with, eventually, several million of his countrymen) ahead of the Ben Nevis glacier. Trevithick in Bengal, and Carnot in the French Empire, both built caloric interchange engines in the 1830s and 1840s, which became the primary drivers for the rail networks the Bonaparte-Murats flung across North Africa, the Brunel ships that carried the "Empire Loyalists" to India after the fall of Ireland in 1851, and the steam-wagons that Lee and Sheridan used to conquer Mexico in the Third Mexican War of 1861-1863. With only a few modifications (such as conversion to pinguine-fired ignition-chambers) and exceptions (primarily galvanic-fluidic carriages in urbanized corridors such as the Gulf Coast, Casablanca-Nouvelle Paris-Cairo, and India's Imperial Grand Trunk) it is such engines that power today's vehicles from smart phaetons and cabriolets in Algiers or Sao Paulo, to sky-schooners carrying medicine to the Sioux and Chippewa protectorates on the interglacial plains, to load-hauling boxcarts crossing the Deccan or Sonora, to the silent nautiluses of the Royal Australian Navy that keep the Tian-Kuo Republic bottled up behind the Flores Strait.

"For though with the same external appearance, the same metal may contain different proportions of any particular principle, as phlogiston, they must be denominated different substances, if some specimens contain this element, and others be wholly destitute of it."
-- Joseph Priestley, "Considerations on the Doctrine of Phlogiston" (1796)

Lee's men in 1861, and King Harry's sailors today, would recognize each other's guns, and even Napoleon's grognards made the switch to modern weapons for the final Franco-Austrian war against the increasingly desperate Russian hordes in 1821-1828. Only the Bavarian forces, and the militias of four American states, switched to Count Rumford's new "excited transfer" guns within a decade of their invention in 1794, but the increasingly high cost of sulfur (ever more desirable as a source of phlogiston for industry) and the discovery and expansion of pitchblende mines in the Upper Louisiana regions of America (which eventually caused the War of 1837), Bohemia, and Australia did much to encourage the shift. Also, the new weapons had a much higher rate of fire, could be loaded from the breech, and though less powerful than gunpowder muskets, were much less noisy and smoky. Indeed, the excited transfer of phlogiston from the pitchblende cylinder to the lead bullet generates only a thin "crack" and the hissing vent of steam from the barrel as the water in the chamber rapidly dephlogisticates.

Clever geometers even in Napoleon's day had determined how to shape helixes of platinum or pitchblende into the barrel of a howitzer to impel maximum velocity to a shell or petard with the minimum transfer possible of phlogiston, although coil-artillery didn't really come into its own until the War of 1837, when it was adopted wholesale by the American, French, and Prussian-Hanoverian forces. (The English had made the change by 1848, but it came too late to save the home islands - by then the British Peninsula -- from France.) Improved hyper-phlogisticated pitchblende cylinders have made hundred-bullet guns possible in the last century, as the world learned during the first Turkish War, but their principles remain those elucidated by Count Rumford over 200 years ago.

"Phlogiston doth not gravitate, and . . . hath a power whereby it counteracts the gravitation of other matter; unless the bodies whose gravitation is encreased whilst they are deprived of phlogiston, attract and combine with the air which cannot be extricated or discovered by any known art."
-- Bryan Higgins, *Philosophical Essay Concerning Light* (1776)

Gabriel Venel in 1755 and Louis-Bernard Guyton de Morveau in 1772 demonstrated experimentally and theoretically that phlogiston had a "negative mass," since metals gained weight when they lost phlogiston. Rumford's excited transfer method was the first application of this discovery, although it remained primarily a theoretical concern for many decades. Rumford also developed an insulating compound for inflammable-air balloons that enabled their wide-scale use beginning with Napoleon and Jackson in the 1800s and 1810s. With balloon travel becoming increasingly common, savants turned to the question of phlogistonick lift: Could a sufficiently phlogisticated air be developed that the mass of the balloon or carriage would be completely negated by phlogiston's counter-gravitic properties?

Although there were a number of false alarms and unrepeatable breakthroughs, the problem was not truly solved until 1900, when William Thomson, Lord Chenab, developed modern corpuscular theory at the Imperial Observatory in Buganda. By stripping out the corpuscles of light from phlogiston, a negative mass could be annealed onto a lifting body. Counter-gravitic craft were initially far too expensive and unwieldy for mass production, until the Empire's wars with Turkey, France, and Tian-Kuo in the first half of the century left all the combatants (as well as America and Australia) awash in surplus sky-schooners and aerostats. America's great distances, and its wars with Brazil and Shina-Nihon, provided its own enginers with incentives to improve on counter-gravitic design, and to finally abandon its fleet of steam aircraft, which had been flying since the 1890s. But once they took it up, Americans created some of the most impressive examples of counter-gravitic craft, not least the *Seward* and *Burr,* which landed American explorers on Mars and Venus.

"Our quadrupeds have been mostly described by Linnaeus and Mons. de Buffon. Of these the Mammoth, or big buffalo, as called by the Indians, must certainly have been the largest. Their tradition is, that he was carnivorous, and still exists in the northern parts of America."
-- Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784)

Mars, of course, proved far too cold and dry even for Americans used to the tundras of Nebraska to settle, but Venus is another matter. Its caloric fluid is almost permanently in tumult, and its atmosphere and soil is rich in phlogisticated sulfur. A Rush similar to the California Gold Rush of 1848 or the Dakota Pitchblende Rush of 1834 is underway, and international law has essentially broken down on that warm, moist world. America, the French and British-Indian Empires, and Prussia-Hanover all claim overlapping swathes of the planet, while Brazil, Shina-Nihon, and Australia maintain the right to explore and prospect throughout the "terra nullius" of Venus without let or hindrance. The saving grace is that such competition provides an outlet for the rebellious youth of the old world, hemmed in by aristocratic monopoly in the monarchies, immiserated by encroaching permafrost in the north, or excluded by racial barriers everywhere.

Those who cannot afford the passage to Venus, however, have taken to sojourning amongst the Indians of America's far north, or among the cannibal savages of what once was Russia and is now ignored by the Sultan of Turkey, or in the African interior. They hunt the mammoth in Russia, or the man-eating megalonyx in Wyoming, or the fearsome grey tiger in Turkestan, or the brontosaur in the wild unclaimed Congo. Their camps combine prospector's boomtown (a pitchblende strike in Congo has attracted the attention of the French Empire), phalansterist's colony (many of them are Fourieristes), enthusiast's camp (with sermons from Methodism to Vril-ya), and pirate haven (with old war-surplus aerostats or sky-schooners hanging in the gray skies). They draw power from wildcat phlogiston-fixing engines, live by their wits, and trade furs and gems with agents of radical parties and second-son Imperial nobility. Every crackpot dream finds voice there, and they seek to excite a new caloric spirit in the dawning 21st century.

"You do not surely expect that chemistry should be able to present you with a handful of phlogiston, separated from an inflammable body; you may just as reasonably demand a handful of magnetism, gravity, or electricity, to be extracted from a magnetic, weighty, or electric body. There are powers in nature which cannot otherwise become the objects of sense, than by the effects they produce; and of this kind is phlogiston."
-- Richard Watson, "Of Fire, Sulphur, and Phlogiston" (1789)

In similar fashion, so do the emperors, kings, and presidents of the great powers, as they pour ever more resources into the race for the Phlogiston Bomb. With tensions rising on Venus, millenarian expansionists ruling both Turkey and Tian-Kuo, global cooling (caused, say some savants, by increasing industrial liberation of phlogiston) killing crops worldwide, and no real alliances among any of the powers, global war could return at any time. The nation that builds the first Phlogiston Bomb can save itself from that oncoming avalanche.

Although in 1931, building on Thomson's work, the Austrian savant Einstein theoretically demonstrated it to be possible, no philosopher has yet isolated fixed phlogiston. Calcined phlogiston has been used as an explosive for centuries, of course -- phlogistickal petards blow holes in glaciers along the St. Lawrence and Brahmaputra, and phlogistickal mines dug the canals through Nicaragua and Tunisia -- but calcined phlogiston remains intermixed with light, and therefore fluid. Fixed phlogiston, contrarily, would have no corpuscular properties whatsoever, and would theoretically expand at perhaps infinite speed. It would be a total explosive, although savants still dispute its effects. It might forcibly phlogistonate everything in its radius, killing off all animal life. It might simply create a city-wide sphere of fire, as light corpuscles rush back into it and create calcined phlogiston. It might redirect the caloric fluid, freezing and boiling its targets seemingly indiscriminately. Or, of course, it might set off a runaway chain reaction, exciting air and metal, dephlogisticating everything in its path in a vast storm of plasmatic gas and burning the entire globe to a cinder. Thus, testing occurs on Mars, or in evacuated chambers deep underground, carried out by savants hoping not to destroy the world in fire before it dies under the ice.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Robot Fighting

A *GURPS* Martial Art for the Future

by Phil Masters

In futuristic worlds where robots are used in combat, it's surely inevitable that some human fighters will study methods for dealing with them at close quarters . . . and these studies could evolve into a full-blown martial art. This article describes such a style, named with elegant simplicity "Robot Fighting" (though people are welcome to rename it to something more allusive or graceful, such as "Organic Self-Protection Procedures" or "Anticyber-Fu"), with consideration given to its origins, uses, and variations, all presented within the framework defined by ***GURPS Martial Arts.***

This style is closest in spirit to various modern-day "Military Hand-to-Hand" styles (see ***Martial Arts,*** pages 182-5); it's a functional collection of skills, intended to give a serious fighter some chance in what's likely to be a desperate situation. Indeed, in most worlds, such a style is most likely to be developed and taught by the military, and may be an offshoot or an element of some force's preferred Military Hand-to-Hand style. GMs are welcome to combine this style with elements of some other practical style (MCMAP would be a good candidate) to represent a more rounded training for combat against both men *and* machines. Something like this might also be taught to civilians, if there's a perceived need for self-defense against rebellious or misused robots, or perhaps more likely, to police forces when robots start to be used for criminal purposes or start misbehaving in public and the cops have to stop them, or to paramilitary forces faced with a desperate need for ways to deal with warbots or battlesuits.

Although Robot Fighting is explicitly designed for use against, well, robots, it's a functional fighting style incorporating general-purpose skills; even without added "human fighter" features, stylists should be quite effective in combat against organic opponents. It can also be used against "mechanized human" foes such as battlesuit troops. The fact is, though, that a lightly-unarmed human faced with serious mechanical enemy is almost certainly going to lose, probably badly; combat robots are built for the battlefield of the future, and the human body isn't. This style merely gives the user a slightly better chance, especially against non-military robots (such as civilian models run amok or maliciously reprogrammed), and may teach the use of any weapons that might equalize things a little.

There is no "sport" form of the style; future societies may develop some kind of sport of robot fighting, which may even pit humans against machines, but if so, it's likely to be carefully restricted, or at least highly formalized, and any martial arts used will surely take very specialized and specific forms. On the other hand, there are already sci-fi stories about ultra-competent humans with amazing fighting skills taking on powerful robots and winning, and any world in which humans really do have to fight robots will surely develop its own myths, so the style has a set of cinematic options.

Development Considerations

Any fighting style designed to deal with robots will have to allow for specific facts about the opposition. Above all, the point is that *Robots Aren't Human.* While Robot Fighting can draw on the rich practical traditions of the martial arts, any ideas or techniques predicated on the assumption that the opponent has specifically human features will have to be ruthless eliminated. This central fact has a number of aspects.

First, *Robots Don't Have Human Bodies.* Even models built with a humanoid body plan are merely impersonating humanity, and are unlikely to have specifically human vulnerabilities. Any fancy ideas about "pressure points" have to go right out of the window, along with more basic but serviceable tricks such as strangleholds or most targeted attacks. A humanoid robot may even be able to fight on with its head cut off, if the brain and enough of the sensors are in the torso; it may also be built double-jointed or otherwise less like a normal human than it looks. Individual robot models may have their own weak points, but those won't necessarily be replicated even on similar-looking designs, so it's safer

not to waste much time studying them. Even if this style is used primarily or entirely against battlesuit-clad human troops, the point still holds; battle armor is likely to be designed specifically to protect human weak points and vulnerabilities.

A partial exception to this is the fact that many (though not necessarily all) robot models may have relatively vulnerable visual sensors -- usually camera lenses -- which can be blinded, at least temporarily, if not smashed; stylists may be taught to go after these, probably with firearms or perhaps with blinding weapons, which can be as simple and improvised as spray paints. Still, some combat robot designs may incorporate countermeasures to this, so stylists shouldn't depend on such tricks. The only other hit location which a stylist might learn to focus on is the center of mass; whether the robot has its brain, power plant, or anything else there, a good solid hit which penetrates usually has a fair chance of getting *something* essential to its function. This can be represented in **GURPS** terms as a Vitals hit. Unfortunately, though, that part of most machines is also usually one of the best armored areas, so few attackers try to exploit such weaknesses unless they have powerful weaponry of some kind. Targeted Attacks against chinks in armor *may* be possible, but as a distinctly cinematic option in this context; properly designed combat robots may well not have such flaws, and in any case, the penalty to hit is likely to be overwhelming for a most fighters, who should be looking for some more reliable way to survive.

Non-humanoid robot chassis designs make many other common fighting tricks ineffective; for example, sweeping two legs out from under a human (or a humanoid) drops the victim to the floor, while doing so to a six-legged robot probably barely inconveniences it much, and never mind wheeled or flying machines. Whether robots have a flow of *chi* which can be manipulated by advanced cinematic martial artists and esoteric medicine is up to the GM, if and when the question arises, but the suggested answer is "probably not."

Another related principle sometimes dinned into students of the style is that *Robots Don't Feel Pain.* Actually, this may not be entirely true; whether or not they feel "pain" in the organic sense may be a philosophical question, but some models can be temporarily discommoded by damage, in a way very analogous to "shock" felt by a human. However, military designs usually have overrides and feedback dampers (giving them High Pain Threshold, in **GURPS** terms), and most robots will be immune to fighting tricks such as arm or finger locks which work specifically by inducing pain rather than permanent damage in a human victim.

Also, *Robots are Armored.* This arises most notably with serious military robot designs, which are likely to be so rugged that no human can hope to cause them physical damage with bare hands, even using advanced cinematic skills, but even cheap civilian models will generally have metal, plastic, or ceramic casings which can hold off normal human punches. In grittily realistic games which allow for the problems of bruised knuckles, punching *any* robot may turn out to be a bad idea.

And as has already been mentioned in passing, *Robots are Diverse.* That is, robots are likely to be built in a wide variety of models and configurations, with form following intended function -- and even where two units have the same shell, they may have radically different processors and software. Hence, fighters are advised to study these variations, with enough understanding of the basic engineering principles that they can analyze a model which they've never seen before and guess what it might do -- but even with such knowledge, stylists are advised to rely on straightforward, general-purpose fighting methods, rather than getting fancily specific.

And lastly, *Robots Don't Think Like People.* Well, not necessarily. (In worlds with advanced sapient robots which *do* think a lot like people, instructors who quote that line a lot will not only be branded as carbon supremacists; they'll potentially be doing their pupils a grave disservice.) Aside from the fact that robots may not worry about being threatened, and may have reprogrammable loyalties, they'll usually be immune to martial arts tricks that depend on essentially human psychology. In even the most flamboyant of cinematic games, skills such as Kiai and Hypnotic Hands will probably be assumed to be useless against robots -- although *extremely* cinematic fighters *may* be able to exploit specific flaws in programmed robotic psychology.

High-Tech (and Other) Melee Weapons

Expert Skill (Robotics)

One way for a human to have a chance in close combat with a robot may be to

use some kind of weaponry -- which may even be something simple or improvised, if the robot isn't very tough. A good heavy two-handed axe or mace can inflict a fair amount of damage, enough to damage many civilian-model robots, and some stylists learn to wield whatever heavy implements they find to hand. Likewise, spraying a robot's camera lenses with paint *may* be a useful trick (see above), and such a spray can might be available in a lot of places.

But high-tech weaponry, whether designed specifically for use against robots or more for general-purpose applications, really is a better bet in most cases. The simplest option, possibly not actually manufactured for combat, is the *Fist Load Weapon.* This consists of a cylindrical device, about the size and shape of a chunky pen or a hypodermic syringe (indeed, this may *be* a hypodermic syringe). There's usually some kind of safety cover or catch, but when that is released and the "business end" is jabbed firmly against a target, or perhaps when a button at the other end is pressed, the device delivers its payload. That may consist of a dose of some chemical, a quantity of nanotech devices, an electromagnetic pulse, or anything else that may do what's needed and which can be delivered by something this large. The best method for wielding this sort of thing in a fight is usually, as the name suggests, gripped in a clenched fist and swung with a "hammer hand" action.

Because "fist load weapon" describes a format rather than a specific device, it's impossible to assign it a single price or set of details. A one-shot disposable syringe or nanotech dispenser is a TL6 device with a nominal cost of a dollar or two, but the contents may be cheap, may cost thousands, or may be one-off experimental concoctions; see *GURPS Bio-Tech* or *GURPS Ultra- Tech* for some ideas. For example, a concentrated application of "high intensity" disassembler nano might have the cost and damage effects listed on page 169 of *Ultra-Tech,* but applied to a single hit location, or a squirt of viscous MEA (pp. 160-1 of *Ultra-Tech*) could be an effective if slow anti-robot weapon. Alternatively, technology might permit a weapon consisting of a small power cell, a capacitor, and an electromagnetic pulse generator which produces a signal which can scramble electronic circuitry, temporarily or permanently. Costs and effects for this will depend heavily on the setting and technological assumptions, but might run to thousands -- or start as low as $50 or so for a one-shot device using established technology.

Fist load weapons are frankly fiddly and tricky to use, although they're also light and easily concealed. Alternatively, something very similar can be mounted on a short staff or baton, and jabbed against a target from a slightly greater distance; add around $30 to the cost for this. Indeed, this makes it relatively safe to load the weapon up with a more *vigorous* payload, such as a small explosive charge, producing a classic "bang stick." (For some examples of the bang stick principle in a futuristic martial arts context, see [Transhuman Martial Arts](#).) This category also encompasses all sorts of hand-held tasers and "stun wands," which may be effective against poorly insulated robots; see pages. 164-5 of *Ultra-Tech.* Such devices are usually wielded with Shortsword skill; if they're made rugged enough (+$10 to cost), they can also be used as ordinary batons or clubs, for crushing damage.

Robot fighters may do a lot with physical skills, but some of the problems discussed under *Development Considerations* make the timeless principle of "Know Thine Enemy" even more pressing than usual. Hence, this style incorporates an Expert Skill which may also be known to peaceful technology buffs, salesmen, and journalists in any robot-rich setting.

Expert (Robotics) grants knowledge of different models of robots and the basics of how they work, mentally and physically, including some idea of their flaws and how they can go wrong. It isn't much use in fixing problems, especially as it doesn't cover use of the requisite tools and doesn't include any hands-on experience, but it may help with diagnosis, at the GM's option. It even covers the aesthetics of robot design, if any, and probably something about the market for robots, though not in great depth. It can substitute for Computer Programming, Electrician, Electronics Repair, Engineer (Robotics), or Mechanic (Robotics) in matters relating to general robot design and standard robot models and behaviors; it might also substitute for Current Affairs (Science & Technology) or even Connoisseur ("Robotic Arts") if these are important to anyone who wants to keep up with the field of robotics, and perhaps likewise for specialties of Psychology relevant to robots.

To inflict serious damage on an armored robot, though, heavier explosives may be indicated. Fighters may opt for limpet mines, which can be attached to a target and then detonated moments later when the fighter is (hopefully) well clear. These will usually do damage equal to that of a shaped charge warhead of similar size; *Ultra-Tech* again has

rules, and offers a limpet mine dispenser which might become a favorite of among fighters who are often forced to close quarters with robotic opponents. The same book offers a number of other melee weapons with damage and armor divisor ratings sufficient to hurt even quite tough warbots, although many of these are flagged as superscience developments, and hence won't be available in all campaigns. Still, if they are, robot fighting at close quarters can be made into a viable and impressive weapon- oriented martial art, just by adding the skills to use them.

But lastly, of course, firearms (or similar devices, such as liquid projectors to dispense nanotech concoctions) may well be the best bet of all. Fighters may be taught to hang onto such weapons and to bring them to bear quickly in any situation, with the relevant skills and techniques being incorporated into Robot Fighting training.

Robot Fighting Style   *4 points*

As described above, this style is based on a set of classic practical fighting skills, adapted to its special purpose largely by a process of *subtraction,* eliminating things that don't work well against robots and adding just a few new ideas that do. This process of elimination sometimes makes it harder to teach to people who've already learned useful "human vs. human" styles; they have to break some carefully engrained habits! Where the style is combined with another, more traditional martial art, part of the training is designed to adjust the fighter's reflexes according to the type of opponent.

"Ordinary" robot fighters *usually* work on the principle that they should get out of any combat situation as soon as possible. If they've got a ranged weapon that can damage the robot, they should hang onto it and try and buy enough space to use it properly; if they know that they haven't got a chance of actually destroying the thing, the best hope is just to *get away.* Certainly, going to very close quarters with a robot may well be a bad idea; many robots have multiple limbs, superhuman strength, or built-in blades, and *will* win in a grappling match. Fighters learn elbow and knee strikes to use if they are forced to close quarters, hopefully discommoding the robot for a moment while the human moves away.

Hence, this is taught very much as a striking art, using both disciplined punches and kicks intended to maximize hitting power, and less elegant brawler's tricks; "fighting dirty" is rarely deprecated when fighting machines. But most stylists fight very defensively, using Defensive Strike (especially with weapons) or All-Out Defense and an array of techniques which are designed to avoid close engagement and open the gap; Push Kick is heavily emphasized by some instructors, and a karate parry with retreat is the foundation of the style. This leads to the seeming paradox of a defensive style which concentrates on striking skills; many arts which emphasize defense over attack focus on Judo, but they're designed to defend against *humans,* with ideas which aren't reliable against robots. Still, some versions of this style may add Judo to their skill list, especially if users often have to fight humanoid robots or human battlesuit troops; these will probably also add Breakfall (Judo) and Evade (Judo) to the list of techniques.

Other skills and techniques are included in the style's options list to work with common anti-robot weapons (see above); if any of these weapons are considered standard among robot fighters, move the relevant items from the optional section to the main part of the style, and increase the point cost accordingly. Robotic opponents with no more than human strength and mass may be slammed or battered aside or bowled over, giving the human a chance to get away or deliver a weapon attack; variant styles which focus on this idea may add Sumo Wrestling to their core skills, again increasing the cost accordingly.

Cinematic stylists are usually assumed to have a real chance of actually damaging their opponents, and so fight rather more aggressively -- though even they may focus on defense for the first couple of rounds of a fight, until they have the measure of a new mechanical opponent. They also tend to show off their defensive skills against bigger machines, making any robot look like a lumbering joke, then use exotic weapons or devastatingly powerful strikes with pin-point accuracy to shatter or bypass armor, leaving heaps of dismantled scrap in their wake. (GMs can add Targeted Attack against chinks in armor to such a fighter's technique list if they like.) They may also be highly acrobatic fighters, especially if robots aren't; add Acrobatics to the main part of the style if desired. Against hordes of small, weak robots, they'll probably use Whirlwind Attack to take down multiple targets in the shortest possible time. While hand or weapon parries can work against robots, cinematic stylists may prefer to focus on dramatic but effective dodges; too many of the robots they fight have built-in claws, plasma blades, or other deadly melee attacks, or just overwhelming

strength.

Most of the types of anti-robot close-quarters weapon described above are used with specific Melee Weapon skills, which are therefore included in the style's options list. If any of these weapons are considered standard elements of the robot fighter's arsenal in a setting, the associated skill should be moved to the style's mandatory list, increasing the style cost by one. Really fancy cinematic fighters may even use baton-format weapons with elegant fencing techniques, giving them better parries; for these people, use Smallsword skill instead of or as well as Shortsword throughout, and add the Weapon Adaptation (Shortsword to Smallsword) perk (see *GURPS Martial Arts,* page 52). Alternatively, such weapons may be constructed in the shape of side-handled batons, in which case, Tonfa skill can be used instead of or in addition to Shortsword. (For a really fancy weapon, try a tonfa with a different high-tech weapons payload mounted at each end of the baton.) Fist load weapons are used with the Hammer Fist technique instead; that too may be moved from the list of options to the main style list, if desired. In fact, it's only really included here because of these weapons.

Cinematic robot fighters are sometimes depicted using devastating karate chops against robots. This would theoretically be represented by an Exotic Hand Strike or maybe Lethal Strike, but in reality and with the rules as written, using such techniques with an empty hand against an armored robot is likely to be dangerous and painful. Rather, treat this as an ordinary strike, probably enhanced by Breaking Blow or possibly Power Blow, with the appearance of the thing being a special effect. Alternatively, such fighters may have the Iron Hands perk (probably twice) and so be able to learn and apply those techniques relatively safely.

Skills: Brawling; Expert Skill (Robotics); Karate.

Techniques: Back Kick; Elbow Strike (Brawling); Kicking (Brawling or Karate); Knee Strike (Brawling); Push Kick (Brawling or Karate).

Cinematic Skills: Breaking Blow; Power Blow; Push.

Cinematic Techniques: Flying Jump Kick; Roll with Blow; Springing Attack (Karate); Whirlwind Attack.

Perks: Armor Familiarity; Rapid Retraction (Kicks or Punches); Style Adaptation (usually for a military style, but possibly for some types of Karate or other "hard" styles).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Cybernetics; Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Parry; Gunslinger.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Professional Robot Hunter); Intolerance (Robots).

Skills: Acrobatics; Armoury (Body Armor, or anything relating to standard anti-robot weapons); Beam Weapons (any); Fast Draw (anything useful for robot fighting); Force Sword; Guns (various); Liquid Projector (Sprayer); Monowire Whip; Shortsword; Soldier; Sumo Wrestling; Two-Handed Axe/Mace.

Techniques: Breakfall (Acrobatics); Close Combat (various); Evade; Hammer Fist (Brawling or Karate); Retain Weapon (various); Targeted Attack (Liquid Projector (Sprayer)/Eyes); Targeted Attack (Shortsword Thrust/Eyes); Targeted Attack (Flying Jump Kick/Vitals); Targeted Attack (Karate Punch/Vitals); Targeted Attack (Shortsword Thrust/Vitals).

Perks: Improvised Weapons (Two-Handed Axe/Mace); Suit Familiarity.

Campaign Uses

Robot Fighting may be an essential skill for a desperate resistance movement in a "rise of the robots" campaign, a functional set of techniques for professional future soldiers, or the peculiar invention of a group of paranoid

technophobes or "organic chauvinists" determined to keep the tin men in their place. It can also be handy for professional bounty hunters or law enforcers in a setting where robots are mostly accepted and friendly, but where enough go rogue from time to create a need for specialists in dealing with the problem. The cinematic version fits super-soldiers, futuristic "kung fu monks" who come down from their mountain retreats to show the modern world what old-style martial arts can achieve, and super-agents who can not only infiltrate a master villain's lair single-handed, but take down a dozen of his guardbots with their bare hands when eventually detected.

Amongst other things, the exact nature of the typical robot fighter's background and motives will determine which *GURPS* disadvantages are most often associated with the style. Professional soldiers and cops will usually have no particular dislike for robots in general, regarding these skills as a necessary tool for occasional circumstances. However, as with any military style, intensive training in ruthlessly pragmatic fighting skills may leave the trainee with a tendency to Bloodlust -- making sure that a downed foe stays down. Likewise, professional bounty hunters may be cool-headed and efficient, with no strong disadvantages related to their work other than a Professional Code of Honor, or maybe Greed. On the other hand, resistance fighters battling against the tyranny of the machines will probably develop Intolerance (Robots), especially if they're motivated by seeing friends or loved one die, and may approach outright Technophobia -- although the cool-headed, cautious, analytical methods of the disciplined stylist aren't really compatible with a phobic response.

Several published *GURPS* campaign settings feature combat robots, and hence may have a place for this style. These can provide examples of different ways to use it in a setting:

GURPS Ogre

This style could easily emerge as a specialized aspect of military or militia training at some point in the *Ogre* future, although it would be intended for use against battlesuit troops rather than self- willed robots; the only sapient war machines in the setting are **not** going to be worried by karate punches. On the other hand, it's likely to be fairly rare; professional soldiers won't bother with it much, having battlesuits or armored vehicles of their own, and the less formal militias who might appreciate it as a last-ditch self-protection skill generally won't have time for lengthy training in a martial arts style. Still, the infantry training schools of the major power blocs will surely have a few instructors with the mind- sets and just enough time to develop such things.

GURPS Reign of Steel

Robot Fighting would be a useful martial art in the *Reign of Steel* future, but there's a serious problem; who would get the time and opportunity to invent and teach anything approaching a new martial art?

Well, Zone London's SAS would be primary candidates -- this is exactly the sort of thing they're doing in their hidden bases. Zone Washington's WASPs, Moscow's info-commandos, and Tel Aviv's slave- soldiers may also be permitted to learn such skills; while their masters may be nervous about humans learning how best to kill machines, these troops do have to tackle enemy robots sometimes. Likewise, the bio-engineered troops created by zoneminds such as Caracas would be trusted with such training, although most zoneminds would probably consider that fast reflexes and big guns did the job best. In other zones with reasonably substantial free human populations, there may be aging survivalist-martial arts masters, or small communities of eccentric low-tech warriors, hiding in remote and well-concealed communities, and any of these people might have decided to create and then teach something like this style.

Transhuman Space

In the world of 2100, human warriors still share some battlefields with human-scale cybershell troops. Hence, the Robot Fighting style could well represent part of some forces' training -- including the training of AIs running on humanoid military cybershells! Likewise, the pervasiveness of cybershells, and the existence of rogue AIs and criminal bot-jackers, will make this an appealing art for cops and hyper-cautious civilians. Most users will combine it with training in the use of electrolasers or missile pods -- both of them hand-held weapons which can disable or destroy many cybershells. Nanotech weapons are another option, though the lack of "dry" nano limits their lethality against

well-protected cybershell targets.

See ["Transhuman Martial Arts,"](#) by Peter V. Dell'Orto & Werner H. Hartmann, for more on martial arts in this setting. (That article was written for *GURPS Third Edition*, but it would be very easy to update the styles it defines.)

Traveller

Robots aren't a major feature of the *Traveller* background at any date, but they are usually present; however, *combat* robots are prohibited in the Third Imperium and largely avoided by other interstellar powers, with the crucial exception of the Zhodani. On the other hand, the Imperium is huge; there are likely to be some high-tech planets where, thanks to local incidents or sheer paranoia, some people worry enough about misbehaving or misused robots to think about ways to fight them. Also, elite Imperial troops doubtless train to deal with all sorts of potential threats from beyond the frontier, including Zhodani warbots.

Hence. the Robot Fighting style could show up in *GURPS Traveller* games, although it's only likely to see heavy use in specialized sorts of campaign. Still, "Trained in the robot- fighting arts of Planet X" (or ". . . of the Imperial Marines") makes an interesting background for a brawler character.

The Omniscient Eye

How Big a Suitcase Does My Colony Need?

A [recent Omniscient Eye](#) talked about the minimum technology to continue a level of technology for transplanted settlements. Is there a specific, minimum amount of technology that needs to be sent along with *new* colonies for optimum self-growth, or is it the skills that are more important? (That is, until ultratech minifacs come along which can produce anything, given time and licenses . . .)
--Eric Funk

In order to survive and thrive, a colony needs three things: fear, surprise, ruthless efficiency, and an almost fanatical devotion . . . no, wait, we'll try that again.

In order to survive and thrive, a colony needs three things: natural resources appropriate to the colony's technology, skills appropriate to use and maintain that technology, and equipment sufficient to exploit the resources when operated with the skills. Like a table with three legs, take away any one and the whole thing collapses. There's no "minimum level of technology," as such, required to make a colony thrive. Early Iron Age Greeks were downright promiscuous in hurling colonies around the Mediterranean, and before them prehistoric and early historical humans spread out across the globe even if we're unsure about their methods for setting up new settlements, so clearly one can set up successful new settlements with a very low level of technology. The real requirement is a matching of appropriate skills, equipment, and environment. Any settlement which has the appropriate tools to survive should be able to grow, and as it grows it can increase the range and quantity of resources it controls and develop new ways of dealing with them.

If you're intentionally placing a colony rather than spiriting a random group of people away across space and time, you can typically buy the equipment and train or select colonists for their skills, which makes natural resources at their destination the most pressing issue. It's not that they're more important, just harder to control from a distance. Moreover, much of the territory the colony needs must undergo some preparation before it can be useful. It's almost a Catch-22: in order to have a successful colony, you need a prepared settlement, but before you can prepare the settlement, you have to have a colony. For example, the bare minimum requirement for most colonies is fields for growing cereal crops (short-term shelters are relatively easy to build in a reasonably hospitable environment). Before the advent of powered earth-moving equipment, it could take an entire working season for farmers to clear a patch of land large enough for them to support themselves. This means, naturally, that they'd need someone else to feed them for the time they're clearing the land *and* for the time from when they get the land cleared to when it produces its first harvest. If the colony is to depend on labor-intensive resources like orchard crops or irrigation canals, that period of initial investment gets even longer.

A higher-tech colony with bulldozers avoids this particular problem for the most part; clearing arable land takes days, not months. But it'll have problems with its own infrastructure. Even with contemporary tools, it takes months if not years and truckloads of specialized materials and equipment to set up power plants, multiple mines for industrial metals, chemical refineries, hospitals, factories, machine shops, and roads, sewage pipes, and power lines connecting everything.

Therefore, for just about any colony, colonization is a process, not a single event. The first step is to establish a core settlement which can manage day-to-day survival over a short to medium term. This is far simpler than reproducing the whole of the home environment in microcosm. This bare-bones settlement has to produce basic foodstuffs, perform basic medical care and equipment production and maintenance, and perhaps (at appropriate levels of technology) provide basic utilities. All of these services are likely to be far inferior to whatever conditions obtain back home.

Once that foothold is established, the colony can grow. If it has a good enough subsistence base and isn't afflicted with serious diseases, it can grow with remarkable speed. Historical records indicate that healthy populations expanding into

fairly open territory (frequently the case for European expansion in the New World, not so much so for Greek Mediterranean colonies) can grow as fast as three or four percent per year. A very modest settlement of 5,000 -- about as small as a settlement can get and still be called a city -- could grow into a respectable colony of 30,000 to 40,000 without any further input, large enough to support most Medieval technology, in the space of a few generations. After a century, the colony could have nearly a hundred thousand people, probably good enough for Victorian technology and possibly a bit more than that.

Knowledge transfer is an issue in this scenario. Even into the modern period, most practical skills have been transmitted by practical instruction and one-on-one teaching, not by textbooks. For example, a colony with Medieval technology might include a few masons capable of building broken arches, flying buttresses, and the like. However, until the colony is large enough to support labor-intensive building with precisely shaped stone, those masons won't have much opportunity to pass those skills on to the next generation of apprentices. Consequently, revived technology is likely to lag at least a generation or two behind the economic ability to support it as craftsmen decades removed from use of more esoteric skills work to convert largely theoretical knowledge into real-world applications, repeat old mistakes as a consequence of having little guidance, and reinvent what has been lost in the intervening years. Increased literacy and better information technologies could offset that problem to some extent in prospective higher-tech colonies, but since a higher-tech colony also has to build up a much broader range of infrastructure and related skills, there's still going to be a considerable lag between building up population and filling in semi-lost technology.

Moreover, a colony can outgrow a formerly appropriate environment. For example, a colony with Renaissance technology can thrive on fertile fields, a good supply of limestone, and relatively modest metal deposits as long as they're near the surface. However, when that colony approaches Victorian-level technology, they can find themselves in trouble when those surface deposits run out and there's no coal or oil in the offing. Without appropriate resources, the colony's own technological development will be stunted.

Of course, most of this can be offset where skills, equipment, and/or resources can be bought or coerced from someone already established. This can be done at a variety of levels. The first Puritan settlers in Massachusetts, who were very badly prepared for their new home, depended on food provided by Indian neighbors for the first few years until they could establish their own agriculture. European settlers in the Caribbean put themselves in charge and pressed the natives into work, handing off subsistence tasks and a great deal of other productive labor to them (replacing them with African slaves only after they died off from disease). Trading post-type colonies would usually lean heavily on the ability to trade for everyday necessities locally rather than develop their own productive capacities.

Having said all that, though, the idea of a *completely* isolated colony which must be in all ways self-supporting is thoroughly artificial. One-time colonization events, involving devices like slow interstellar spacecraft, time travel, or global disasters which are about to annihilate the parent world, appear frequently in the literature, but historically, as a rule, colonies weren't spun off from their mother countries never to be heard from again. At the very least, they were preferred trading partners and occasional allies. In many cases, they were founded quite deliberately as bases for military conquest or rapacious economic expansion.

Trading Posts

We've been discussing one kind of colony here: a settlement in relative wilderness whose primary purpose is to support itself with some kind of autonomy and the ability to expand. But there are other kinds of colonies. Most notably, many powers established small colonies whose purpose was not to grow or take over territory, but simply to have a presence, usually in support of commerce. Genoa, Venice, and other important Italian trading cities of the later Middle Ages and Renaissance established small but permanent settlements around the eastern Mediterranean. The Genoese controlled their own neighborhood in Constantinople, a district named Galata across the Golden Horn from the city proper, from the late 13th century to the city's fall in 1453. Colonization becomes much easier when you can simply rent a house in your new home. In later times, the Portuguese, Spanish, and other Europeans established small trading colonies around Africa, Asia, and some richer islands in the western Pacific. These ranged from small fortresses on relatively unsettled west African coast to small neighborhoods and suburbs in southern Asia. At the extreme end of the scale, one might

Successful colonies were, therefore, in slow and distant but nevertheless regular contact with home, importing manufactured goods, skilled labor, and simply more colonists to fuel their survival and expansion. Day-to-day survival was still a local matter; basic foods and building materials had to be obtained locally, and clothing from home would be in limited supply. But more esoteric bits of technology and complex skills were still supplied from elsewhere. Instead of needing to make their own cannon, for example, European colonies in the New World could ship them in from the established foundries of their homelands. Instead of having to breed their own populations of horses and cattle, more could be imported from the fields and pastures of home to supplement local animal husbandry. Instead of training their own doctors, engineers, and other technical specialists, they could bring in graduates of well-established universities. For example, the Universidad de Santo Domingo, the oldest institution of higher learning in the Western hemisphere (founded in 1538), post-dates European colonization of the Caribbean by nearly a half-century.

point to European colonies in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Although some of them in time became large enough to turn into towns and cities which ruled over a large area of colonized territory, many remained distant outposts of empire.

In short, colonies maintain and develop their technology, particularly the most cutting edge technology their society has to offer, in large part by continuing to get it from where they always got it: home. That has been the case in the past and will likely continue to be the case in the future. Even our own tentative plans for "colonizing" (or, at least, making semipermanent outposts on) the Moon and Mars involve a steady stream of imports and even the tireless efforts of worker robots to prepare a more habitable environment for us. Only when a colony is very well established, a process of generations, can it even pretend to be able to stand on its own, and even then it won't care to, preferring continued trade and cultural relations to isolation.

--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!

Pyramid Review

War on Terror

Published by [TerrorBull Games Ltd.](#)

Designed by Andrew Sheerin & Andrew Tompkins

Illustrated by Tom Morgan-Jones

Full-color boxed set with map, rulebook, card appendix, three six-sided dice (two standard, one customized), "secret message" pad, pencil, Axis of Evil spinner, six reference cards, 47 Terrorist cards, 65 Empire cards, 60 oil counters, 15 radiation counters, 180 bank notes, 150 ownership counters (50 Empire, 100 Terrorist), & "Evil" balaclava; $58

America was awfully generous when it got everyone involved in the conflicts over in the Middle East. Sadly, Great Britain was a bit slower reciprocating, only recently allowing the United States to join in their *War on Terror.* Admittedly, theirs is a bit smaller, comes in a box, and fits on a tabletop. Oh, and it's produced by TerrorBull Games.

A game lasts two to three hours, and the is to achieve a certain number of Liberation Points, as either an empire or a terrorist.

Using a map of the beleaguered real world, two to six players go looking for oil and trouble. A cross between *Risk* and *Settlers of Catan,* world powers (called Empires) start villages in the various countries and improve them into towns and cities. An oil counter lies facedown on each province, to be uncovered by its "liberators." If its number (two to 12, though some markers are worth zero) comes up when the two six-sided oil dice are rolled, the settlement makes money for its owner (a bigger development returns more cash). These may fund more conquests, towns, or cards, but a player can also buy Terrorist vanguards, columns, and cells (the counterparts to Empire developments). These "training camps" may be part of a player's plan to make life difficult in some area of the world, or they may be kept off the board in an intimidating pile as a way to dissuade similar attacks by one's enemies.

Cards (again, one deck for the good guys, one for the bad) determine when attacks can be made, and each has a chart that shows the type and effectiveness of an attack against a Terrorist base or opposing Empire. Some raids offer better odds on the dice than others, depending on whether it's, say, an air strike or a nuclear event. Some cards have special effects like switching one base for another color or allowing a better return on one's investment. Still others may demand a use of the Axis of Evil spinner. If it points to a player's color, that person plays the Terrorists until another spin is made. Then again, anyone who doesn't like his chances as an upstanding member of the world community can simply declare himself a Terrorist. All players who choose this course (or are forced into it by bankruptcy) constitute a single "player" for both turns taken and victory conditions.

An Empire gets Liberation Points for having a whole continent to itself, plus points for any cities it owns. Terrorists get points for removing any and all traces of Empires from a continent. In both cases, the fewer nations, the fewer points needed to win. This may make victory for the Terrorist player(s) easier, but at the same time, every nation that falls to terrorism reduces the number of points the remaining Empires need for a win.

For a freshman effort, TerrorBull puts out a pretty decent product. The production values are high, from the cartoon art that's so bad it's good to the fully mounted map board. The quality pieces fall into the shadow of the most notable component, however: the [balaclava](#) of evil. When a player plays the Terrorists, he puts this item on to identify himself. (It has the word "EVIL" stitched across the forehead, just so there's no confusion.) To avoid communicating colds and

other respiratory diseases, it fits rather handily over an arm as well.

And for a game that has but a small rulebook (and a card appendix to help forestall arguments), the depth is surprising. Not only is it a well-thought-out work of strategy, it's a deft and insightful observation on the nature of the actual wars being played out on the world stage. Anyone can fund and place Terrorist units somewhere to slow an opponent's advance, but that player may himself have to face those units later. The bases are built in the same countries as the Empires' towns, and the greater the influence of evil becomes, the more detrimental are the effects suffered by that location's economy.

In *War on Terror,* not only is it possible to play both sides of the conflict; not only is it subjective who counts as being the real Terrorist; but one may find oneself simultaneously playing both sides in ways big and small. A wry sense of the absurd contributes immensely to one of the easiest large-scale war games in recent memory. There may be little to like or laugh about in the day's headlines, but playing out on the living room coffee table is a likable mix of social commentary and satire that, similarly, is hard to ignore.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Grim Tales (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Badeaxe Games](#)

Written by Benjamin Durbin

Cover by Ken Kelly

Illustrated by Scott Drouin, Andrew Hale, Jeremy Mohler, John O'Connor, Scott Purdy & Jim Zubkavich

212-page hardcover; $34.95

It is an unfortunate fact that the pulp genre has been ill served by the *d20 System.* Until the publication of *d20 Adventure!,* the [adaptation](#) of White Wolf's Origins Award winning RPG that is a prequel to the [*Aberrant*](#) and [*Trinity*](#) RPGs, the best choice still remained the two mini games published in issues of *Dungeon/Polyhedron.* Badaxe Games' Grim Tales sets out to counter this omission. With its tagline of "High Adventure, Low Magic," it is a "Rules Resource And Campaign Toolkit" that describes itself as a sourcebook for fantastic roleplaying in the pulp genre. It sets out to cover material "from the dawn of Atlantis to the apocalyptic future of a dying planet." These are not high claims, but on past form, pulp RPGs often fail to live up to their claims.

In simple terms what *Grim Tales* does, is being together a wide selection of rules and mechanics from other sources. This game files off the knobs and whistles of the *d20 System,* best represented by the [*d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*](#) (but any *d20 System*-based RPG will do) and distills the remainder down into its essences. From that base, the author retools the game based on one simple fact: Magic is both scarce and potentially dangerous to its user. With magic scarce and magic weaponry scarcer still, players will find that even the lowliest of creatures is now a far greater threat than in other games. In *Grim Tales* magic is as much a prize as it is a danger.

At various turns, *Grim Tales* offers options that allow the GM to tinker with and set various factors within his campaign. Many are rated by their threat level, measured in Skull & Crossbones symbols. One indicates a forgiving nature favoring the players; two the danger found in most games; and three a lethality that will gain a GM an unpleasant sobriquet. Threat levels are in addition to the variant rules also given.

Grim Tales boils characters down to just six classes, each tied to a single attribute; for example, the Strong Hero might represent the typical fighter, while a rapier or pistol-wielding fighter might multiclass as a Fast Hero. Characters can multiclass freely, the classes awarding a feat or talent at alternate levels. Talents represent abilities integral to, and available only from a class. For example, a Smart Hero could take the "Linguist" Talent from the Research Talent tree, while a Tough Hero can select the "Stay In The Game" Talent from the Unbreakable Talent tree. Besides a class, a character has a background that defines up to five core class skills, to which a player adds one Craft, one Knowledge and one Professional skill to represent the character's current career. Another three skills are freely selected. Character generation is very flexible for the *d20 System,* and is aided by full listings of skills, feats and talents.

To mark a character as special, he also possesses Action Points. These can be spent to improve a d20 roll, activate a heroic ability (some feats, talents, or class features require the expenditure of action points); improve personal Armor Class temporarily; or even heal after combat. Each is modified by the roll of a die, variants suggesting the die type rising by level or having the die explode when maximums are rolled. The first of *Grim Tales'* threat level choices are

given for the action point replenishment, which can be by session, by level, or even never!

Combat is as per *d20 System* standard, although options suggest changing or altering the massive damage threshold. The combat system is supported by a simple set of rules for creating firearms and handling vehicles. Others cover hazards, natural and unnatural, right up to the effects of fallout, suitable to some post-apocalyptic settings. The threat levels for this are grim indeed, though a separate variant allows for mutations.

Where *Grim Tales* starts to get interesting beyond the character beginning is with magic. Here anyone can cast an arcane spell and at any time, if they know it, although the Spellcraft skill is needed. Adepts -- arcane, divine, and wild -- have a bonus to their Spellcraft checks. But all spellcasters suffer from "Spell Burn," damage applied to the caster's Strength or Constitution attribute, depending upon whether he is trained or untrained. Spell Burn damage is inflicted by die type (which becomes higher the stronger the threat level) and although adepts have an innate resistance, a natural roll of one per die cannot be resisted.

While some sections are useful, others are too short. Of the former, the one devoted to the Economy and Equipment covers both the use of currency and the purchase difficulty check models, while the one on Horror and Insanity nicely handles its subject. Of the latter the chapter on Fantastical Technology focuses too much on the creation and installation of cyberware in too short a space. The rules are decent enough, but the genre encompasses far more than that technologically speaking. (A further nitpick would be to point out that John Logie Baird is also recognized as the inventor of the television.)

The GM that likes not just to tinker with the campaign, but with the nuts and bolts of his creatures, will enjoy the chapter on creature creation. These rules get under the skin of the monster's skin by listing all of the factors that go into its Creature Rating. Expansive and detailed, these rules are coupled with those for designing Encounter Levels that take up the bulk of the chapter on Gamemastering. Only in the final two pages does it address adventure design, which seems wholly inadequate. The section though does include a checklist for the various threat level rules given throughout the book.

That said, the appendix gives three different Campaign Models, each reworked across the game's three eras: the archaic, the modern, and the post-apocalyptic. The undead campaign has the characters facing a mummy lord in the archaic era, an Austrian vampire archduke in the modern, and a cyborg Lich in the post-apocalyptic. The same is done again with a trio of dragons in the Dragon Lords campaign, and then in the Lethid campaign against brain controlling puppets.

While there are adventure hooks for each, the three campaign threats do feel like a last-minute addition to rectify something that *Grim Tales* does not address. While it does deal with what lies under the hood, and effectively so in most cases, *Grim Tales* seems reluctant to discuss the nature of the hood itself: that is, the pulp genre. Yet the rules themselves are effectively reworked so that in their simplicity they feel right for the genre. The work done on the character generation gifts the player the ultimate in flexibility in creating a character and the rules on magic use stand out in capturing the flavor of the genre. The GM will have to develop the rest himself, but *Grim Tales* is very much the rules resource needed to power a pulp action game. In the meantime, we are still waiting though for the definitive pulp game *d20 System* RPG.

--Matthew Pook

The Function and the Form

When I was in college pursuing my Creative Writing degree (a degree that is "pursued" at my college in the same way that sheriff's deputy might pursue an escaped convict who's wearing a dayglow-orange jumpsuit and leg irons so tight they cause a trickle blood to mark his crippled passage like a crimson calling card -- take your time, don't get bored, try not to get shanked at the end, and you'll succeed), one of my areas of interest was how the medium affected the message of a piece of writing. As a few examples: What is the difference in how a piece is perceived if it is in a hardcover versus softcover format? If it's in a two-column format versus one? If it's onscreen versus paper? (As an aside, I purchased many book compilations once upon a time -- from the Complete Shakespeare to the Complete Hitchhiker's Guide -- and discovered that, for the most part, I wasn't able to read and enjoy them for what they were; the mere presence of, say, 500 pages left in my lap keeps me from immersing myself in the page I'm reading.)

And, of course, the notion of presentation has affected other forms of media besides the written word. The rise of the long-playing record over the two-song single utterly changed the musical landscape, and the existence of the random-access digital music world has altered that world again. The home-video revolution of the 1980s forever changed Hollywood, and television on DVD has completely changed how some shows are marketed and financed. And, of course, each of these changes has altered how the medium is *experienced;* watching the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* on a video tape is a very different experience from viewing it in a theater with an exuberant crowd. And (at least for me) some television shows have become completely different when experienced on DVD.

I was reminded of my collegiate studies earlier this week when I learned about the closing of *Comics & Games Retailer,* a fondly remembered yet fluffy magazine I recall from my days working the comics-and-game store, over a decade ago. (A nice overview and reminiscing is available online from former editor John Jackson Miller.) In the news about the magazine's departure from the print world, one of the tidbits mentioned was the fact that some aspects of the publication would transition to the Web. This fact got me to thinking, "Is it really the same?" and -- having quickly arrived at my answer (c.f. "Nope") -- "Is it close enough?"

When I was working on my grand ideas, the Internet was one of those vague, abstract-y kind of things that the folks in the comp-sci department got to play with . . . not that anyone would have wanted to with the 2400 baud modems that were commonly associated with the steam-powered PCs of the era. ("How long ago was this?" you ask? Well, I remember asking my computer-savvy friend what this ominous blue screen I got when running Windows, and he said, *"I don't know . . . I've never seen that before."*) So I never got to incorporate more grandiose digital ideas of the medium-affecting-message thesis in my collegiate studies.

A few years after I graduated, for example, letter pages in comic books shrank from two pages an issue to one, then disappeared altogether, with the justification that computer message boards had completely supplanted letters pages. (Actually, technically "extra page of advertising" nudged out the letter column, but I digress.) Now, for anyone who's ever participated in a message board, the notion of an edited, finite letter page with multiple months between a printed letter and possible response being replaced with an unmoderated message board will find this ludicrous on the face . . . really, it's the difference between a museum that exhibits artist-submitted statues, and a pile of fist-sized rocks next to a sign that says, "Make your own statue here!" Oh, and the rocks are next to a building made up of hundreds of windows, and all submitters have to wear smocks with red and white concentric circles on the front and back.

Of course, for many people, the thrill of seeing an interesting response or insightful comment within minutes of a previous post more than makes up for the flame wars and pointless digressions; in this case, immediacy trumps idiocy. And, indeed, more instantaneous forms of communication gave largely usurped their more traditional ancestors; the number of emails I receive in a day is an order of magnitude larger than the number of paper-based letters I receive in a *year.*

The gaming world has been sorting out the two aspects of the "medium affecting message" conundrum for a number of years now; the publication you're reading right this instant is a very different beast from its bimonthly paper-based form of a decade ago. *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines seem to be returning to Wizards of the Coast, their brands returning as some kind of on-line initiative. I've mentioned before how tabletop wargames have largely been

supplanted by computer iterations. Over on the West End Games forum, Publisher Eric Gibson [revealed](#) that last month was the first month where PDF revenue exceeded paper product revenue.

Of course, different presentations aren't limited to various electronic initiatives. Hardcovers, once limited to one or two books in a product line (if then), are now the norm instead of the exception; and with these durable covers have come increased page counts; many fat supplements being released nowadays would have been published as two or more books a half-decade ago. And full color has become much more common, with both jaw-dropping visual potential and jaw-dropping price-increasing potential. The rise of alternative distribution and printing methods have opened up many other opportunities, all of which might affect how a product is perceived. (As a thought exercise: Imagine two otherwise identical books, where you are told that one of the books had nationwide distribution, is available from Amazon, and has sold over 10,000 copies; while the other book is only available by ordering it from the publisher's website, which informs you that copies are printed as needed. Does that knowledge make you perceive the work differently? Why or why not?)

As the Information Age chugs along like a barely fathomed freight train, the ideas of what works and what doesn't seem to be changing on a daily basis. The petrie dish of the marketplace has enabled various ideas to compete in new and fascinating ways. And one of the hallmarks of evolution is that some ideas are destined to die, or at least morph into forms that might not be immediately recognizable. Whether this is good or bad remains to be seen, but there's no doubt that it'll be fascinating.

--Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Pyramid Review

Elasund: The First City of Catan

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed by Klaus Tauber

Boxed set with game board, 40 wooden Victory Point Cubes, 4 round wooden cylinders, 1 wooden boat, 2 wooden dice, 2 city gate tiles, 37 building tiles, 9 church tiles, 36 city wall tiles, 20 building permits, 4 turn overview sheets, 51 gold cards, 39 influence cards, & 1 rulebook; $49

Elasund: The First City of Catan is the second Catan spin-off in a series called "Adventure Catan," with the first being [*Candamir.*](#) The goal of this game is to deploy all ten of your Victory Point Cubes (VP) to the game board by building structures on the map that have spaces for them. Designed for two to four players, the play area is enlarged in proportion to the number of players. *Settlers of Catan* players will notice the familiar grid of two to 12 along the coastline, with the 2 and 12 along the north and south border walls, respectively. The 7 is still lacking, as it represents the familiar robber mechanic.

Setup involves distributing "exclusive" buildings to each player (colored with no VP cube spots), separating the buildings of each type, and shuffling the temple tiles and Influence cards. The gold cards are stored face-up as they are identical. Each player is given three gold cards and one Influence card, and his two, free, starting buildings are placed on their colored official starting locations. Each player has a Wall stack in front of him with his wall tokens in increasing order. The board is large and elegant, with spaces ready for the Temple stack, the Commerce track, and wall pieces. The pieces themselves are robust. The "tiles," "permits," and "sheets" are made of stiff cardstock, and seem to be quite resilient.

There are four actions that occur in order, the numbered sequence given by the rules and turn overview sheets.

First roll the dice. The ship is moved to that row, and any building on that row produces gold or Influence, as indicated on the tile, e.g., if the blue player has two gold-producing buildings and an influence building on a row that is rolled, he receives two gold cards and an influence card. If a 7 is rolled, there is no production, and the roller chooses the row to place the ship. This is generally a boon for the roller, helping him in later steps. In addition, a player must discard a card (gold or Influence) for each cube in the pirate's row. (Fans of [*Settlers of Catan*](#) may recognize the ship as an unpainted pirate ship from the [*Cities and Knights of Catan*](#) or [*Seafarers of Catan*](#) Expansions.)

Next is the Build action. A player may build one or two structures, a structure being defined as a building, wall, or a piece of temple. Buildings normally bring income in the form of gold or Influence cards, should they be in a row that was rolled before. Dimensions vary from 1×1, 1×2, 2×1, 1×1, 2×2, or 2×3. They require from one to three permits on the ground to build them, and up to 7 gold, in addition to the cost of the permits. Each building has a small compass, and it must point North. Thus, "tall" buildings are more attractive as they produce more often, and they cover more Trade Windmills if placed on the coast, the latter leading to a secondary track to deploy Victory Point Cubes. At least one of the permits for the building must be yours, but the others can belong to anyone. The player placing the structure need only pay the player the value of the Permit(s). Building choices are critical at the beginning of the game. Later, when a player has more resources, he can more easily build over or displace buildings.

Early in the game, players normally start by building their own "exclusive" buildings as they are cheaper, then moving up to the "common" buildings. The latter are more numerous, have spots for VP cubes, and are usually larger and more expensive. The largest buildings offer two Victory Point Cubes, but produce nothing! As this is a competitive game,

there is no cost to build over a smaller building, and to build over an identical-size building merely costs three Influence cards of the same color. This assumes that a player can place the required permits properly adjacent and pay the normal gold building costs. Normally, the building is returned to the pool from whence it came, except if it was one of the victim's two starting buildings (marked with totem poles). The victim immediately gets to place the starting building somewhere else on the map, before builder can take any more actions.

The exception to this is the Temple with its special mechanic. The nine tiles that comprise it are shuffled at the beginning, and the first player to buy a Temple tile gets to look at the first two tiles, and put one back at the *bottom* of the stack, allowing for strategic placement. That said, the first tile always goes on the specially marked square in the center of the board near the shore. As shown in the diagram by the Temple tile stack, it builds a puzzle as the tiles are purchased. Each allows for a single VP cube. This temple has priority, destroying or displacing any structure in its way. Until revealed, any of the 24 tiles around its starting square could be in danger. Of course, this is right in the middle of the seashore 5-9 range, the highest probability and thus most valuable real estate. Players *will* want to build there until the Temple chases people out.

The last form of building that players can build is not in the town itself, but pieces of wall around the town. The number of squares available is determined by the number of players. For example, the North and South faces vary from three tiles long at two players to seven long with four players. The North and South pieces of wall cost only two gold each, while the East wall costs 4 gold per piece (the West of the city is the sea). Building the Wall either grants players one or two Influence cards (as indicated on the tile) or a space to put a VP cube.

The third action allows the player to either place a permit in the ship's row *or* take two gold. At this stage, a player may place a permit in the ship's row at no additional cost, or pay two Influence cards of the same color and place the permit anywhere. Each player has five permit tokens, numbered 0 through 4; this is the gold value of the permit. It costs this value for the player to place it, and an opponent to displace it. The gold a player spends to place the token is not recovered unless an opponent "steals" his token to use it to place a building. Early in the game, it is usually better to place a token if the player has few on the board, as they can be moved in step 4. If placed carefully, they can obstruct opponents' plans.

The last phase is the "Special" one. By paying three differently colored Influence cards, a player can place a permit wherever he wants, *or* take two gold, *or* pay two Influence cards of the same color, and a player can upgrade or move one of their building Permits.

The Influence card mechanic is clever: the colors themselves don't matter . . . it is the number of cards of the same color that does. Each player receives a handy turn overview card that neatly states the turn steps and option costs.

Beyond putting cubes on production buildings, there are other ways to deploy cubes to the board: The temple guarantees 1 VP cube for seven gold for each of the nine temple tiles. Another path to victory can involve claiming the Trade Windmills dispersed along the shore and at the sparse two and 12 walls. These can afford a player up to 4 VP cubes, if that player has structures over all the Trade Windmill squares. Finally, a player's Wall tile has three cube tiles interspersed, offering yet more ways to deploy cubes. A perk here is that each Wall VP slot allows the player to randomly recover one of the cards "stolen" by pirates if *that player* should roll a 7 on the resource dice.

The many choices in this game can paralyze some players. The myriad pieces can overlap and easily get mixed up. Players may spend some time looking for a specific tile if it is not meticulously stored at the end of the previous session. A single mistake early in the game can cripple a player later. For example, in one game during the review process, a player strategically placed permits, and then built the largest structure available, a 2×3 two-VP building. Its purchase displaced several opponents' buildings, and gave that player a temporary lead, but as it produced nothing and was in the middle of the production area, it hampered that player's game for a long time. Thus, strategy is an important thing to consider at all times.

Elasund: The First City of Catan's' game play will be slightly different each time as the exact location of the temple will change; it can occupy any of nine different positions, which makes a huge difference in two-player games when space is at a premium. In all, the game is a good, if somewhat complex, addition to any Euro-game collection. It has a

modest learning curve on par with the original *Settlers of Catan,* but like its originator, still has you coming back for more.

--Eric Funk

Sentinels of the Styx, Part I

An Adventure for *GURPS Martial Arts*

by Stephen Dedman

Part One: En Garde

For this adventure, the GM will need the **GURPS Basic Set** and **GURPS Martial Arts.** It is designed for Heroic-level *Martial Arts* characters (100-200 points), but it can be tweaked for higher level characters and is also suitable for "realistic" *Supers* or a cinematic *Espionage* campaign where magic-using NPCs are a possibility. It is set in the present in a generic medium-sized city and can be easily adapted for any period from *Cliffhangers* to *Cyberpunk,* or for other systems such as *Shadowrun.*

Incoming!

The action begins in a dojo, where some or all of the PCs are present. They may be teaching, competing in a tournament, or simply watching. After a little (mostly harmless) sparring, there is a sudden screeching of tires and a motorbike comes flying through the dojo window, dumping its leather-clad rider on the mat. None of the heroes should be injured, though everyone present should make a Fright Check at -2.

The rider wears a helmet with the visor down: -2 to identify as female, -6 to recognize the person without opening or removing the helmet. Alternatively, PCs can roll with Drive (Motorcycle) or Mechanic (Motorcycle) to recognize the bike, a Kawasaki Ninja, as belonging to Kim Song, a freelance journalist and fellow martial artist (Hapkido black belt). Kim is lying face up, immobile and barely conscious, and the wooden quarrel sticking out of her back just below the shoulder blade will not be apparent until someone moves her body.

When Kim's face is revealed, and she sees a friendly face, she will whisper ". . . styx . . ." immediately before dying. If the PCs unzip her jacket, they find a small digital camera tucked into an inside pocket. There are no stills on the disc, only a 135-second movie clip of a martial arts battle in a space between stacks of cargo containers.

If any PCs venture outside immediately, they will see a black SUV speeding away from the scene: roll Vision (-5 for poor light) to read the license plate. Should anyone give chase, the adversaries escape in a suitably inventive way: crossing railroad tracks an instant before the train barrels through; throwing down caltrops (spikes) to puncture the tires (or soles) of any pursuer; or as a last resort, opening the back window and blasting away with a 12G shotgun and a 9mm machine pistol, aiming low. Inside the van are Sabra Stein and three Merrimac heavies; Sabra has a pistol crossbow, with six wooden bolts tipped with fresh cobra venom, but this will only be used if the pursuers prove resistant to everything else.

Martial Law

Two uniformed cops arrive 6 minutes after the motorbike, followed 11 minutes later by a crime-scene investigator and two homicide detectives, Sidney Torres and Vincent Kane. After questioning all the witnesses, officers let the heroes go, giving them business cards in case they remember anything else.

How much information the PCs decide to give the detectives has no immediate effect except to change the detectives' reaction to them: +1 for every potentially useful piece of information voluntarily handed over (the camera, the license number of the SUV, etc.), -1 for every lie detected. Cop PCs get a +2 reaction and will be kept up to date with the police investigation into Kim's death.

Follow that Car!

Heroes deciding to investigate Kim's death themselves have a few possible leads they can follow. By checking Kim's apartment, they discover the police have been there before them and removed her computer. If they talk to Kim's editor, and he has a good or better reaction to any of them, they learn that Kim was investigating a major smuggling ring, but he doesn't have any other details. With a police contact, they can find out the cause of Kim's death, though the source of the cobra venom is unknown. If they have a police contact and know the license plate of the SUV, they can track it back to Rio Lobo K-9 Services, a business that breeds and trains guard dogs, and a subsidiary of Merrimac Security Consultancy.

Research -4 or Street, Business, Police, or Military contacts can all give the same information about Merrimac: their main business is in survival and combat training, high security couriers, and private security services for small businesses and entertainment venues. While most of their executives, instructors, and pilots have impeccable military or law enforcement backgrounds, they also hire ex-cons as nightclub bouncers, security guards, and "consultants." They are rumored to have links with the Serbian and Bulgarian mafias, and to be involved in the illegal arms trade and other forms of smuggling, but none of these charges have ever been proven.

Caught on Camera

If the group watches the movie in Kim's camera, they see a slender Asian woman (Lin Chu) fighting off six men in a space between two cargo containers. The movie is badly lit and obviously shot with a handheld camera, but the sequence of events is easy to make out. The woman faces four men: two armed with heavy flashlights, one with a knife, one apparently unarmed. One man with a flashlight rushes her and is knocked down with a sweeping kick, followed by an elbow to the temple as he falls. Flashlight 2 and Knife attack from opposite sides; she spins, disarming both, knocks the knife-wielder out with the flashlight, and back-kicks the man who's just lost his flashlight. He tries to tackle her from behind; she grabs his arm and throws him at the last man standing. Another two men come running into the picture, one with a machete, the other with a baseball bat: she turns her back on the machete in order to dodge a blow from the bat, then is hit between neck and shoulder with the machete. Apparently unfazed by this, she knocks the batter out with a jump-kick to the head before turning her attention to the machete. When the man with the machete strikes again, hitting her arm, she grabs his wrist and kicks him in the jaw. At the sound of shots, the camera pans to show two men with shotguns running toward the scene and firing; the clip ends on that image.

Those who make a Vision roll at this point see a logo on a container behind the gunmen. A roll on Research identifies the logo as belonging to Kaimuk, a Thai seafood exporter. Another success at Research reveals that a Kaimuk container of frozen fish arrived at the local harbor two days ago.

None of the men are immediately recognizable: All seem to be wearing the same uniform (dark jacket, cargo pants, cap, and boots), with cloth badges on their caps and jackets, but the image resolution is too poor for the badges to be readable.

Something Fishy

When the investigators search for the location of Chu's fight, a roll on Research (or successful use of a Business contact) leads them to the dock where the Kaimuk container was unloaded. Signs on the dock (roll Per) tell them that it is patrolled by Merrimac security. Getting close to the container requires either a Contest of Stealth vs. the watchman's Per, or a Good or better reaction from the watchman (a Merrimac mook, but not one of those who fought Chu).

The location has been thoroughly cleaned up -- no trace of the fight -- but after a few minutes, the heroes see another guard in the doorway of a nearby warehouse, with a bruise partly hidden by his mirrorshades: those who make a Vision roll recognize him as the knife-wielder from the video.

Upon successfully interrogating the guard (Paul Brogsdale), he tells them that he works for Merrimac and that extra guards had been put on the docks because a package was coming in and a reporter, an Asian woman, had been

snooping around. They were told that if they caught her, to bring her to the boss -- or failing that, to scare her away. He doesn't know what happened after he was knocked out, except that the woman somehow got away. If the heroes ask who the boss is, Brogsdale says it's Glanton, one of Merrimac's managers.

PCs who make a roll on Current Affairs (Sports) at +2 recognize Glanton as a contender in the international Mixed Martial Arts full-contact scene. Research or a Business contact reveals that Donald Glanton is Merrimac's VP in charge of recruitment and training; he also teaches their advanced martial arts classes. A critical success uncovers the less secret parts of Glanton's bio (see Part II).

Dogs of War

An attempt to physically break into Rio Lobo's facility first requires getting by the front gate, which is constantly watched by security cameras (infra-red and visible light), and electronically locked (-4 to pick). The complex is 100 yards by 60 yards; the surrounding wall is 12 feet high and topped with an electric fence (Per to detect, Acrobatics to avoid; failure triggers an alarm and delivers an electric shock. If shocked, roll vs HT; failure results in the character being stunned for 20-HT seconds.) Inside are several kennels, a car park, and a two-story house. All buildings are electronically locked. The SUV seen outside the dojo is parked near the front door of the house.

Once inside, the investigators need to make stealth rolls for every 5 hexes moved or every 10 seconds spent not moving. As well as hidden infra-red cameras, there are kennels full of guard dogs along the south and east walls, and a guard (a Merrimac mook) patrolling with a dog at all times.

The guard is armed with a heavy flashlight, a .40 Auto Pistol, and a small folding knife. He wears a quilted jacket (treat as cloth armor with sleeves), boots, gloves, heavy trousers, a cloth cap, and a headset radio. If attacked, he releases the dog and (unless silenced immediately) call for backup; he defends himself by using the flashlight as a baton. If outnumbered, he moves the flashlight to his left hand and draw his pistol. Should the guard watching the monitors inside hears a shot, he remotely unlock the cages and releases eleven dogs, as well as sounding a general alarm. At the blare of an alarm, Volker, Sabra, and another two mooks (armed with shotguns) come running out of the house.

If the PCs manage to get inside the house without incident, a search turns up two cobras in glass cases in the veterinary clinic. The weapons safe in the security station contains two dart rifles, two self-loading rifles, four pump shotguns, eight .40 auto pistols, and 100 rounds of ammunition for each weapon (not including those guns carried by the guards). A computer in Volker's office houses details of Merrimac's smuggling operations, but recovering useful data demands rolls on Computer Hacking -3 (a critical failure causes a security program to erase the hard drive), Cryptanalysis -5, and 10 man-hours of Research. The data is not admissible as evidence, but it will count as probable cause for a search warrant or wire-tap on Merrimac's offices. The e-mail inbox holds a series of fuzzy photos of Lin Chu, taken on a cell phone camera at the local airport; roll on Per to recognize as the woman from the video on Kim's camera. The only caption is the date, four days ago.

Those captured by Volker, the guards, and the dogs are interrogated by Volker. When he is satisfied that he has learned all he can, he shuts the heroes naked in a large meat locker. The refrigerator is bolted from the outside; Escape and Lockpicking are useless. A correctly placed Breaking Blow might shatter the weakest point of the latch (metal, DR 7, 30 HP), but it is completely dark inside the locker, adding to the difficulty unless the martial artist also has the Blind Fighting skill.

PCs without the Temperature Tolerance advantage must make their HT roll against cold (p. B430) at -5 every half hour. As the locker is airtight as well as cold (34 F), the investigators may be in greater danger of suffocation than of freezing. The refrigerator holds enough air for 18 man-hours of mild exertion (e.g. six PCs can survive for three hours). Heroes who make a roll on the Body Control skill consume a negligible amount of air and do not suffer any of the physical ill effects (described below) from their confinement.

To determine how much air the PCs consume, divide an individual's breathing rate by 1.5 if he makes a Breath Control skill roll or goes to sleep (e.g., three sleepers consume as much air as two active people); multiply by up to 5 for frantic

activity (e.g., constantly attempting to break out).

When a third of the total time (adjusted for activity) has elapsed, the heroes are in danger from carbon dioxide build-up and oxygen depletion. Those who have not made a successful roll on Body Control should roll vs HT; failure results in them suffering nausea (see p. B428; normal bonuses for Fit and Very Fit advantages apply). Characters who are not already nauseous should roll vs HT again when half of the total time has elapsed; characters who are nauseous also roll again, with failure resulting in moderate pain and 1 point of toxic damage, and critical failure in unconsciousness. This pain and nausea lasts 15-HT days.

Fortunately, before any of the heroes die or suffer brain damage, the door is opened by a man in a Merrimac uniform. The man, John Turvey, is an undercover cop who is willing to risk blowing his cover rather than see the PCs fed to Volker's dogs. Unfortunately, he couldn't retrieve the investigators' clothing, but he did procure a waterproof camo poncho for each of them. It's raining outside, and his shift has just ended, so he should be able to sneak them out to his SUV and through the gate if they hurry and don't draw attention to themselves.

If the heroes decide to trust Turvey, he leads them safely outside the building -- but when they are approximately 12 yards from his car, Sabra walks outside to her car. If every PC wins a Contest of Stealth vs her Per, they can get to Turvey's SUV safely. If anyone fails, the investigators either have to outrun her (they have a 5-yard start, but she tries to tackle the slowest) or fight her and prevent her from raising the alarm. Neither she nor Turvey are armed.

Once in the car and outside the compound, Turvey tells the PCs that he has enough evidence against Volker to charge him with cruelty to animals (he's been running dog fights), smuggling wildlife, and supplying animal steroids and veterinary drugs to humans. That, he hopes, will be enough to get him to testify against the police's real target, Don Glanton, who Turvey suspects of killing Kim Song as well as running a major arms-smuggling operation. Turvey has also heard that Glanton is trying to make a deal with some group called the Sticks, and that the cobras Volker smuggled into the country have something to do with that, though he doesn't know any more details.

Inside Job

The logical way to confront Glanton, or to infiltrate Merrimac to find evidence of criminal activity is to apply for a job with the company; to sign up for one of Glanton's intensive training courses (see p.B293) in kajukenbo, firearms, or survival; or to enroll in his dojo. Applicants to enroll in the dojo must win a full-contact unarmed fight with a Merrimac heavy. Any investigators who have already encountered Glanton or Sabra also need to disguise themselves.

Minimum qualifications for any job at Merrimac are Literacy, DX 10+, IQ 9+, HT 10+, Per 10+, Basic Move and Speed 5+, First Aid/TL8-10+, Driving/TL8 (Car)-9+, and a Neutral or better reaction from Glanton's secretary. They also are asked whether they speak any other languages. To be put on the books, PCs need to succeed at any five of the following tests.

Test 1: Surveillance. This test involves watching a bank of monitors for half an hour. Applicants need to roll on Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security Systems) at -2 and a Contest of Observation vs. Sabra's Filch skill. Characters with the Absent-Mindedness or Short Attention Span disadvantages need to make 1d Will-5 rolls; those with the Distractible quirk are at -1 to their Observation roll.

Test 2: Gatekeeper. The candidate must roleplay minding the door at an entertainment venue, not allowing in any weapons, cell phones, or alcohol. Six people walk past -- two mooks, three clerks (Fast Talk-10, Holdout-6), and Sabra. One has a cell phone (-1 to Holdout); Sabra or one of the mooks has a small folding training knife (-1 to Holdout; -2 crushing damage). This is firstly a Contest of Search vs. Holdout and/or Detect Lies vs. Fast-Talk, but if the applicant spots the items, he then needs to ask the "smuggler" to hand it over, which requires a neutral or better reaction. A very bad or worse reaction means that the "smuggler" attacks and has to be restrained with minimal injury.

Test 3: Courier. The hero has to pick up an order of take-out food for the staff at Merrimac's office (using their own car). Roll on Driving and Area Knowledge (City) or Navigation to find the diner in time. When the PC arrives at the diner, he finds that the cashier -- an underage but pretty girl - speaks no English, only a language the character has told

Glanton he knows (e.g. if he claims to speak Korean, he is sent to a Korean restaurant in Koreatown; Spanish, a Mexican cantina in the barrio; etc.). If the applicant successfully communicates with the girl, he can return on time; if not, he fails the test.

Test 4: Firearms. This "shoot-no shoot" exercise involves firing an automatic pistol (9mm or .40) at stationary man-sized pop-up targets at 20 yards (-6) in poor light (-3). Targets pop up for two seconds; 2/3 are of unarmed people and 1/3 of armed (GM should roll separately for each target). The PC must make a Vision roll (at -6, with penalties for poor light) before shooting. With 10 shots and 20 pop-ups in this test, the hero must hit more than half of the legitimate targets, and shooting the wrong target is an automatic failure.

Test 5: Fitness. The character runs a 1,500-yard course on poor ground in 12 minutes. For anyone with Ground Move 5+, this can be done in 10 minutes and requires 10 HT or Running rolls (see p. B354).

Test 6: Animal Handling (Dog). This test requires two rolls at -3. On a critical failure, the guard dog bites.

Test 7: Unarmed Combat. The applicant walks down a dark alley (-5 to vision), making a Contest of Per vs. Stealth to avoid ambush by two mooks armed with training knives. Failing either contest means that the PC can be attacked from behind as well as from the front.

Test 8: Clerical. The hero has to proofread and correct a number of standard computerized forms (inventories, rosters, incident reports, etc.). This requires rolls on Administration, Computer Operation/TL8, and Writing at -2.

Characters who succeed in getting put on the books at Merrimac probably have a day or night doing a boring courier or watchman job, transporting or guarding something with little resale value, before the big doom-metal Cyanotix concert, which will require a lot of security personnel and would be an opportune time to talk with other Merrimac employees.

Charm Offensive

If the investigators aren't working for Merrimac and they haven't already been recognized by Merrimac's people in the week after Kim's death (i.e., by Day 8; see *Timeline for Part I*), Glanton sends someone to question them about Kim's death -- whether she said anything or gave them any other sort of clues before she died. Sabra makes the first approach; she comes to the dojo on to see which PC will be easiest to seduce. If she can get this character alone, she handcuffs him to a chair or (preferably) the bed and brings in Volker and Turvey -- Turvey to help her search the hero's home, and Volker to interrogate the PC to find out what he knows about Glanton, Lin Chu, the death of Kim Song, and any illegal activities that Merrimac is involved in. Once the interrogation is over, Volker tries to intimidate the investigator into keeping quiet; if he's not convinced that his victim will, he draws his knife with the intention of cutting the character's throat. This causes Turvey to draw his pistol and point it at the back of Volker's head, leading to a standoff and the end of this part of the adventure.

Also turning up at the dojo on Day 8 is Sidney Torres, who has become attracted to one of the PCs and offers to act as a Police Contact (at least as a one-off "Favor"), providing useful information about Kim's death.

Timeline for Part I

Day -2. Lin Chu arrives in town, photographed at airport.

Day 1. Kim Song and Lin Chu, independently, investigate smuggling operations at the docks. Song films Chu defeating eight Merrimac guards, flees from gunmen. Chu defeats gunmen. Sabra Stein and heavies arrive at dock, mistake Song for Chu, and shoot her with crossbow. Song heads for PCs' dojo, dies. Torres and Kane investigate murder, question PCs.

Day 8. Sabra and Torres return to PCs' dojo. Sabra attempts to seduce a PC, then interrogate him. Torres, attracted to a PC, offers to help their investigation.

Cast

Merrimac Mook   *70 points*

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 11 [5]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Acute Hearing 1 OR Night Vision 2 [2]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Style Familiarity [1].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bully (12) [-10]; Chauvinistic [-1]; Dull [-1].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Animal Handling (Dog) (A) IQ-1 [2]-10; Brawling (E) DX [1]-10; Detect Lies (H) Per-2 [1]-9; Driving (Car) (A) DX [2]-10; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security Systems) (A) IQ [2]-10; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-10; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+2 [4]-12; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-11; Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX [2]-10; Observation (A) Per [2]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10.

Mook Martial Arts styles (roll 1d):

1. *Jujutsu:* Judo (H) DX [4]-10; Karate (H) DX [4]-10; Arm Lock (A) Judo+2 [2]-12 or Disarming (H) Judo+1 [2]-11.
2. *Kajukenbo:* Judo (H) DX [4]-10; Karate (H) DX [4]-10; Exotic Hand Strike (A) Karate [1]-10; Hammer Fist (A) Karate [1]-10.
3. *Karate:* Judo (DX-2) [1]-8; Karate (DX) [8]-11; Exotic Hand Strike (A) Karate [1]-11.
4. *Krav Maga:* Karate (H) DX [4]-10; Wrestling (A) DX [2]-10; Choke Hold (H) (Wrestling)-2 [2]-9; Disarming (H) Wrestling+1 [2]-11.
5. *MCMAP:* Brawling (DX+2) [3]-12; Judo (DX) [4]-10; Elbow Strike (A) Brawling-1 [1]-12; Stamp Kick (H) Brawling-2 [2]-10.
6. *Savate:* Karate (DX) [4]-10; Wrestling (DX) [2]-10; Head Butt (H) Karate [2]-10; Kicking (H) Karate-1 [2]-9.

Merrimac Heavy   *170 points*

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

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34; HP 13 [0]; Will 11 [5]; Per 11 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Acute Hearing 1 [2]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 2 [2]; Style Familiarity (Kajukenbo) [1].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper OR Berserk OR Bully (15) [-5]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Merrimac, small group) [-5].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ [2]-10; Animal Handling (Dog) (A) IQ [4]-11; Brawling (E) DX [1]-10; Carousing (E) HT [1]-12; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-10; Driving (Car) (A) DX [2]-11; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security Systems) (A) IQ [2]-10; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-10; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Judo (H) DX+2 [12]-13; Karate (H) DX+3 [16]-14; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-12; Leadership (A) IQ [2]-10; Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX [2]-11; Observation (A) Per [2]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10.

Techniques: Exotic Hand Strike (A) Karate [1]-14; Hammer Fist (A) Karate [1]-14; Stamp Kick (H) Karate-2 [2]-12;

Sweeping Kick (Karate) (H) Karate-2 [2]-12.

Gear: TL8 ballistic vest, leather jacket, cup, and boots. Weapons and other gear as described in adventure.

Sabra Stein   *250 points*

Sabra Stein's father, an Israeli soldier selected for pilot training, was killed by Palestinians before Sabra's second birthday. Her mother returned to her native Chicago a year later, and remarried when Sabra was five. Her stepfather, a lawyer, sexually abused her for several years before she started junior high, where she finally found a teacher who would listen to her accusations and act on them. Sabra's stepfather was acquitted, and Sabra ran away from home.

By the time she was old enough to enlist in the Air Force (under her biological father's name), Sabra was a seasoned streetfighter with an erratic employment history. Dismissed for kicking her drill sergeant, she applied for work with Merrimac. Glanton recognized her talent, gave her as a job, lent her the money for flying lessons, and became one of her favorite lovers. Though promiscuous, she is fiercely loyal to him in all other ways.

Violent, vicious, and not inclined to fight fair, Sabra is not evil: She prefers to vent her sadistic impulses on willing or deserving victims, such as drug dealers or child molesters.

Height 5'8", Wt 110 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 28.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, short but unruly black hair, hazel eyes, snakes tattooed around biceps and ankles: a large-breasted, sexy, strong, and confident-looking woman.

Languages: English (Native); Hebrew (Broken) [2]. *TL:* 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 13 [30].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 12 [5]; Will 12 [5]; Per 11 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6.5 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]. 130

Advantages and Perks: Ambidexterity [5]; Attractive [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Improvised Weapons (Karate) [1]; Night Vision 4 [4]; Rapid Healing [5]; Style Familiarity (Escrima, Kajukenbo, Krav Maga) [3]; Unusual Training (Dual-weapon attack) [1].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Atheist, but eats kosher food out of habit [-1]; Attracted to men in uniform (reacts at +1) [-1]; Callous [-5]; Chauvinistic [-1]; Debt [-3]; Enjoys cigars after sex and/or violence [-1]; Greed (15) [-7]; Insomnia [-5]; Lecherousness (12) [-15]; Likes snakes, especially venomous ones [-1]; Sadism (15) [-7]; Sense of Duty (Glanton) [-2].

Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX [4]-13; Acting (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Animal Handling (Dog) (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Carousing (E) HT [1]-13; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11; Crossbow (E) DX [1]-13; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-11; Disguise/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security Systems) (A) IQ [2]-11; Erotic Art (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-14*, (Balisong) (E) DX+1 [1]-14*; Filch (A) DX [2]-13; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-11; Guns/TL8 (SMG) (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-11; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-12; Karate (H) DX+4 [16]-16; Melee Weapon (Main Gauche) (A) DX+1 [4]-14, (Smallsword) (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Observation (A) Per [2]-11; Piloting/TL8 (Helicopter) (A) DX [8]-15; Running (A) HT [2]-13; Sex Appeal (A) HT+1 [4]-14; Smuggling (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Soldier (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Stealth (A) DX [2]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Swimming (A) HT [1]-12; Throwing DX+1 [4]-14; Urban Survival (A) Per+1 [2]-11; Wrestling (A) DX+3 [12]-16.

* +1 for Combat Reflexes

Techniques: Aggressive Parry (Karate) (H) Karate Parry [2]-11; Eye Rake (H) Karate-4 [2]-14; Head Lock (H)

(Wrestling)-2 [2]-14; Knee Strike (A) Karate [1]-16.

Gear: Fine Balisong knife; cheap plastic knife. Usually wears leathers (including leggings) when not in dojo. 9mm Machine Pistol usually close to hand.

Vincent Kane/John Turvey   *115 points*

Vincent Kane and Jon Turvey are both second generation cops, both eldest sons, both divorced and childless, both quietly devout. Kane is descended from Russian Jews; Turvey, from Irish Catholics. Otherwise, for gaming purposes, treat them as identical.

Height 5'11", Wt 180 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 32.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, short brown hair, blue eyes.

Languages: English (Native). *TL:* 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western.

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 10 [0], IQ 11 [20], HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

*Advantages and Perks:*Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Honest Face [1]; Legal Enforcement Powers [5]; Police Rank 2 [10]; Style Familiarity (Jujutsu) [1].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Disciplines of Faith [-1]; Duty (15) [-15]; Minor Addiction (Coffee) [-1]; Overconfidence (15) [-2]; Sense of Duty [to fellow cops and honest citizens, -10].

Skills and Techniques: Acting (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Area Knowledge (city) (E) IQ [1]-11; Arm Lock (A) Judo+1 [1]-11; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Criminology (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Current Affairs/TL8 (regional) (E) IQ [1]-11; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-10; Disarming (H) Judo+1 [2]-11; Disguise (A) IQ [2]-11; Driving (Car) (A) DX [2]-10; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security Systems) (A) IQ [2]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+3 [8]-14; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11; Guns/TL8 (pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Holdout (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Intimidation (A) IQ [2]-12; Judo (H) DX [4]-10; Karate (H) DX [4]-10; Law (criminal) (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX [2]-10; Observation (A) Per [2]-11; Psychology (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11; Shadowing (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Stealth (A) DX [2]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Writing (A) IQ [2]-11.

Sidney Torres   *150 points*

Homicide Detective Sidney Torres is intended as a potential Police Contact and possible future Ally and/or Dependent, and may be male or female depending on the make-up and preferences of the PC group.

As well as being single, Sidney is a serious student of the martial arts, trained in aikijutsu and interested in studying new styles.

Height 5'8", Wt 140 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 27.

Appearance: Olive complexion, wavy black hair, dark brown eyes: wears leather concealed carry coat over ballistic vest, cargo pants, hiking boots.

Languages: English (Native); Spanish (Accented) [4]. *TL:* 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 13 [5]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [10]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Attractive [5], Charisma 1 [5], Legal Enforcement Powers [5], Police Rank 2 [10], Style Familiarity (Aikijutsu) [1], Voice [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1]; Duty (15) [-15]; Curious (12) [-5]; Imaginative [-1];]; Impulsiveness (15) [-5]; Lecherousness (15) [-7]; No fashion sense (-1 reaction from fashion victims) [-1]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Responsive [-1]; Sense of Duty (fellow cops and honest citizens) [-10].

Skills and Techniques: Acting (A) IQ [2]-12; Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Area Knowledge (precinct) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Arm Lock (A) Judo+1 [1]-16; Brawling (E) DX [1]-13; Breath Control (H) HT-1 [2]-10; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-12; Criminology (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-12; Diplomacy (H) IQ+2 [4]-14*; Disarming (H) Judo+1 [2]-16; Disguise (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX [2]-12; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [1]-12*; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-12; Forensics/TL8 (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Guns/TL8 (pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-12; Judo (H) DX+1 [12]-15; Law (Criminal) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Observation (A) Per [2]-12; Running (A) HT [2]-11; Sex Appeal (A) HT+2 [2]-13*; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+2 [1]-14*; Search (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Stealth (A) DX [2]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-12; Writing (A) IQ [2]-12.

* +2 for Voice

Pieter Volker   170 points

Pieter Volker was raised on an isolated farm in Rhodesia, but his family fled to South Africa after Mugabe came to power, then to Canada, then to Idaho. Unskilled at making and keeping human friends, Pieter spent most of his time with the farm's animals, particularly the dogs. His grandfather and father taught him how to hunt and slaughter animals, and took him to illegal dogfights. Pieter also made friends with the local sheriff, who trained dogs for tracking, and the local veterinarian, who treated him as an apprentice and encouraged him to go to college.

While at college, Pieter began working part time as a security guard. Years later, when a former workmate became a regional manager for Merrimac, he sent their guard dogs to Pieter's surgery. As Merrimac expanded, their demand for dogs increased, and Pieter proposed a breeding and training program for larger, more dangerous sentry dogs.

Pieter's breeding and training program includes setting stronger dogs on weaker ones, as well as smaller animals, as a spectator sport; he also sells veterinary drugs and steroids to some of Merrimac's staff. His dogs are in sufficient demand that Glanton turns a blind eye to this in exchange for Pieter's co-operation with Glanton's own schemes.

Height 5'11", Wt 170 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 39.

Appearance: Lightly tanned complexion, short blond hair receding from widow's peak, blue eyes. Wears military style khaki pants and jacket, brown work boots, mirrorshades during day.

Languages: English (Native). *TL:* 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western.

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

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 13 [5]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Fearlessness 2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Improvised Weapons (Karate) [1]; Penetrating Voice [1]; Style Familiarity (Fairbairn Close Combat Training) [1]; Talent (Animal Friend) 1 [5]; Temperature Tolerance 2 [2]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bloodlust (15) [-5]; Dislikes all small animals [-1]; Horrible Hangovers [-1]; Intolerance (All other races) [-10]; Incompetence (Sex-Appeal) [-1]; Minor Addiction (Cigarettes) [-1]; Unattractive [-5]; Uncongenial [-1].

Skills and Techniques: Administration (A) IQ [2]-12; Animal Handling (Dog) (A) IQ [8]-15*; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-13; Driving (Car) (A) DX [2]-11; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security) (A) IQ [2]-12; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-12; Guns/TL8 (Rifle) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Holdout (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Interrogation (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-12; Judo (H) DX+1 [8]-12; Karate (H) DX+1 [8]-12; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Neck Snap (H) ST-3 [2]-9; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Riding (Horse) (A) DX+2 [2]-13*; Search (A) Per [2]-13; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-12; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10; Survival (Plains) (A) Per [2]-13; Tracking (A) Per [2]-13; Traps/TL8 (A) IQ [2]-12; Veterinary/TL8 (H) IQ+2 [4]-14*.

* +2 for Animal Friend

Gear: Fine large knife. Sometimes carries dart rifle, self-loading rifle, or .40 Auto Pistol.

A Mélange of Magical Creatures XII

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

On the twelfth day of Christmas, this twelfth installment of magical creatures will fill your adventures with holiday cheers . . . or, perhaps, screaming of a different sort.

Wrecking Crane

"The criminals dug themselves into the home, and beckoned for us to try to come in and get them. The Chief called over a team from the Special Unit. The handler, Stevens, readied his lantern, and unmasked the bird. 'Hawnk,' the creature said. The Chief gave the signal, and Stevens shined the light at the front door of the home. Seeing the light, the bird charged the door with the men running behind her. As the door lay in splinters, the men pushed the bird in, and arrested the startled criminals."
-- Marcus Stevens, Crime Reporter

Outwardly appearing to be similar to whooping cranes, but with the build of an ostrich, these thick-billed birds use their mighty beaks to crack open dead trees. With an armored head, they are suggested to be a link between birds and dinosaurs. These birds are a nuisance to organizations that erect poles, such as hill forts and telephone and telegraph companies.

Encountered

These birds can easily be trained to "hate" a particular colored shape. "Operators" can then use hooded lanterns and project the shape on a wall. If it is close enough to the bird (normally about three yards), it will move and swing at the spot. Once it is in motion, it is hard to stop. Adventurers could easily make use of these creatures when breaking into fortifications; fitting it into the hallway is the trick.

Industrial Uses

"The craziest act? There was a guy that came in with a big bird, see? When it was his turn, he donned a shirt with a logo, and then took the bag off its head, jumping back. The bird then swung at him, even chipping the floor and walls as it did, but never connecting with the guy. For a finale, he swung himself up onto the bird's back and pulled his shirt over its head, stopping the rampaging beast. Never seen anything like it since."
-- Iani Rapozo, *Breaking into Show Business*

Wrecking Cranes are useful in many fields of construction, from knocking down trees to driving piles into the ground. Industry sees use for sound baffling (such as a "Wall of Silence" spell; see page 172 of ***Magic***) around these creatures to reduce the noise pollution while allowing the operator to receive feedback. Enchantments of Iron Hand and Body of Metal/Stone can be greatly enhanced by by-products of this bird.

Adventure

Some criminals seem to be using wrecking cranes as weapons. They will ambush targets, and from high cover, shine the "hate" shapes on their foes. The owners of the cranes have a reward out for the safe return of the animals. How will the PCs prepare? How will they bait the criminals?

Wrecking Crane

Appearance: A large crane-like bird with the build of an ostrich. Its head is grey to black, and body white to brown.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 20; DX 9; IQ 3; HT 12.
Will 10; Per 11; Speed 5.25; Dodge 8; Move 5.
SM +1 (3 hexes, 8' tall); 200-300 lbs; DR 2 (+DR 20 head, +DR 10 neck).
Traits: Acute Vision 1; Congenial; Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Move 10); No Fine Manipulators; Semi-Upright; Striking ST +20 (Head only, bash only)
Skills: Brawling-10 (normally at +4 for immobile targets).

Giant Wrecking Crane

ST 40; DX 8; IQ 3; HT 14.
Will 11; Per 12; Speed 5.25; Dodge 8; Move 5.
SM +2 (4 hexes, 15' tall); lbs; DR 5 (+DR 15 head, +DR 30 neck).
Traits: As above, but Enhanced Move 1.5 (Ground Move 15); Striking ST +40 (Head only, bash only)

Acid Trees

"It was getting dark, and we were all tired from the hard march. The eight of us felt fortunate to find this cleared campsite in time. With the last light, we set up camp. The fire started quickly despite our soaked firewood. It sizzled and popped all night. The sound from the fire disguised the damage of the trees. Fortunately, our oiled tents took the brunt. We awoke in the morning to the acrid smell of seared leather. Some scout our guide was, camping us under Acid trees. At least we got a good night's sleep; we were to need it."
-- Lord Everett Brannigan, *Forests of Pain*

"Acid tree" is a term for a family of trees that share a common trait: caustic sap. Certain trees developed a form of acidic sap to deter herbivores, parasites, and competitors. Many are content to keep to themselves, but some drip sticky acid sap throughout mid-spring to mid-fall. This is uncomfortable to unfortunates who come in contact with it, and will overcome natural protection given time. These deciduous trees are on the offensive in the realm of plant warfare.

Encountered

The most visible signs of these trees are the seeds -- which seem perfectly ordinary -- flying in the wind. The trees do not start "weeping" until their tenth summer, when they are about 10 feet tall. Many cultures consider these arbors pests; a few mythos even label them as "cursed." The maturity at which the telltale signs become obvious will make them harder to remove as the acid damages axes and saws. The first sign of their maturity is often when metal implements used to chop them down begin to sizzle, which is bad news for armor, roofs, vehicles, and gates.

In *GURPS* terms, those victims without innate Damage Resistance and those with Damage Resistance due to Fur or Thick Skin will notice quickly (in 1d seconds). Rigid DR will not tell a victim more than if splashed by water! If ignored, it can cause 10 damage over a day or erode 10 points of armor.

Industrial Uses

"The portents indicated that the young man's rite of passage was to be 'trial by water.' Thus, he was stripped to his waist, with paint on his eyes and hands. Now, he must walk through the orchard nonchalantly without flinching, while acid drops fall on his skin. If he can keep a steady pace over the scarred ground, he will emerge on the other side a man."
-- Lord Everett Brannigan, *The Forest People of the Entaxi Plateau*

The wood from these trees is perfect for containing and resisting acids. Alchemists often make their work tables from this wood, although it offers no special resistance to flame. The acid is good for reducing the impurities from neutral metals such as gold. Less friendly places might plant these trees to prevent loiterers; victims might be tied below such a tree in a cruel form of water torture. Sages are often seeking the formula for the Universal Solvent; a few Guilds claim to have succeeded, but before they can claim the prestige, they are now racing to perfect the Universal Bottle so that they can present their findings.

Adventure

The heroes come across some young troublemakers who are passing the afternoon by baiting a large lizard to run through a thick copse of acid trees again and again. Just as it gets near one end, the youth hides, and another calls to it. The drake is injured and angry. As the party approaches, they can hear the youths' intentions to unleash it on the town as a prank. Will the adventurers kill it to put it out of its misery, or find a way to heal it, lead it away, and bring the real criminals to justice?

Acid Trees

Appearance: deciduous trees.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.
HT 14.
SM +2; DR 2, (+DR10 (Caustic only)).
Traits: Affliction (Agony (mild , 1h, 6-)); Affliction (Agony (extreme , 8h, 6-), insidious; Link); Resistance to Poison +8 (Caustic Only); Toxic Attack 1 (takes extra time, 8h; Link).

Clodhoppers

"These creatures have spawned many legends and faerie myths. This is impressive, considering that they are not magical creatures at all. All they do is steal people's shoes. That said, they were a part of children's tricks, especially in regions where shoes are customarily left at the door."
-- Historian Yvette Tsial, *Myths that are Not*

Clodhoppers are creatures with two reputations. Outside of a "shell," they appear to be small, short-nosed, short-tailed rodents that are brown or dark gray. They are more commonly noticed when they have appropriated a shell . . . or, in the case of urban areas, shoes or baskets. The name "clodhoppers" comes from city dwellers' sightings of a mammal acting like a hermit crab. Clodhoppers like taking cover . . . and then they take the cover with them. The habit of a mated pair to steal a pair of shoes together and then hop around in them inspires myths of ghosts. Their small, low-set ears are barely visible from under the inanimate object, and thus might be overlooked.

Encountered

In general, clodhoppers either found alone, in pairs, or in packs of about 20-30. They do not like stairs, so upper levels of homes are generally safe, although a "naked" clodhopper could navigate stairs in an emergency, should there be no cover it could take. In the wild, clodhoppers can often be found around seashores, carrying shells far inland. Some have also been seen using large, curled leaves.

Industrial Uses

"What can be said is that these animals have a sense of rhythm, able to keep in time with each other, and to pace other creatures as they move about. They say that a group of clodhoppers could destroy a bridge, if they all tried to cross it at once."
-- Comedian Arin Riadt

Industry continues to search for a practical uses for this creature. Some entrepreneurs are using clodhoppers in magic tricks, entertaining the public. A few prototype factories have them flipping switches in an assembly line. Enchantment of mirrors, illusions of independence, are simplified, if only to mirror other actions.

Adventure

The heroes are sent to obtain specially guarded magic boots. They are guarded by golems to keep sophonts and magic spells away. If the adventurers could keep a pair of clodhoppers occupied, and smuggle them in, they can hope to get the right result . . .

Clodhoppers

Appearance: A small grey-brown rodent, likely hiding in a shoe, or similarly sized concealment.
Category: Rodent.
Diet: omnivore, mainly herbivore.
ST 2-3; DX 12; IQ 3; HT 11.
Will 10; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM -5 (10"); 1-2 lbs.
Traits: Absolute Timing; Catfall; Super Jump 2; Talent (Music); Wild (or Domestic) Animal

Skills: Jumping-14.

Giant Clodhoppers

ST 4-6; DX 11; IQ 3; HT 12.
Will 10; Per 12; Speed ; Dodge ; Move 6.
SM -3 (2' long); 4-8 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Add Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 12)
Notes: This giant variant is, thankfully, rare, and has been blamed for broken kegs, pots, sacks, waste baskets, and the odd camper being pulled away in his sleep.

Woundwarts

"Have you ever seen a woundwart literally suck the injury from a person? It is hard to believe that such a vile-looking creature could save so many lives."
-- Captain Mathew Livent, plainship *Merlin's Cape*

The woundwart is a green, mottled lizard with a spine ridge. This long, tubular reptile has a big mouth, not unlike the maw of a leech; all these characteristics make the creature unlikely to win beauty contests. What makes this creature stand out is its ability to detect wounded creatures, and then apply first aid. They lick and suck the injury, internalizing the damage. Finding a wound, the woundwart devours the excess blood, and seals the wound with an antibiotic secretion. Unfortunately, because of the vacuum, the "patient" takes a small amount of internal damage at the same time due to blood loss. Its first documented use seems to be from a healing temple that sought to find a silver lining in an abominable-looking natural symbiont.

Encountered

Woundwarts are naturally encountered in swampy areas, especially those that tend to attract (or create) many injured creatures. It seems that in the wild, woundwarts are normally found in a symbiotic relationship with a species of large swamp dweller with relatively thin skin. These gargantuan beasts frequently get into contests "to first blood," requiring first aid.

The animal is hard to conceal especially in normally sterile areas, such as places of healing. It is noisy, requires lots of water, and smells terrible. Despite these negative characteristics, the woundwart is, itself, a very clean animal. Hospitals and military field stations may be issued as many as possible, but their upkeep is expensive, and are best used where the most wounded are.

In *GURPS* terms, the creature can provide the equivalent of TL6 First Aid. The "patient" -- and possibly witnesses -- may require a Fright Check if the victim is not expecting it.

Industrial Uses

"If the magical or alchemical means are available, it might be a good idea to put a woundwart in a form of suspended animation, or at least deep sleep, until it is needed."
-- Avid Txan, *Magical Logistics*

Medical areas can benefit the most from these creatures, but the food packing industry can use these clean creatures to remove a large percentage of blood from meat. Alcohol is technically a poison, and a woundwart can remove it; although there is a price, it is better than dying of alcohol poisoning. The enchantment of wound and fatigue-transfer items is aided by these creatures.

Adventure

The adventurers are instructed to healing a man against his will. The plan is to get him ready before a fight by closing his wounds, and sobering him up. The man's brother begs the heroes to sober the challenger, as he needs his wits about him. Even a master of drunken fighting needs help . . .

Woundwart

Appearance: An ugly-looking tubular-headed reptile with a leech-like mouth.
Category: Reptile.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 4-6; DX 9; IQ 2; HT 13.
Will 8; Per 9; Speed 5.5; Dodge 10; Move 5.
SM -2; 40-60 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: 360° Vision; Appearance (Ugly); Bad Smell; Charitable; Faith Healing (Patient left with at least 1HP lost; user takes equal damage); Increased Consumption (Water); Reduced Consumption (Food); Regeneration (Wounds transferred by Healing only); Resistance to Disease +8; Resistance to Poison +8; Restricted Diet (requires red blood); Perks (Piercing Cry; Sanitized Metabolism); Wild Animal
Skills: First Aid-12.

Tiny Woundwart

ST 1-2; DX 10; IQ 2; HT 12.
Will 7; Per 10; Speed 5.5; Dodge 11; Move 4.
SM -4; 10-20 lbs; DR 1.

Giant Woundwart

ST 9-11; DX 8; IQ 2; HT 14.
Will 9; Per 8; Speed 5.5; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -1; 100-200 lbs; DR 2.

Dreamfruit

"Engineered by FabulFoods, the dreamfruit was an immediate success. Marketed initially as a diet aid, its popularity spread like wildfire through different demographics. It gives people the best culinary sensation that they can remember, or want to remember.

*In response, some companies then began to serve food that a diner **can't** remember . . ."*
-- Milo Travis, *Popular Magic*

Dreamfruit gives the diner the sensation of eating whatever he would most like to eat right now, even if he doesn't consciously recognize it. The "meat" of this tan-colored seedless "apple" is somewhat nutritious, and is a good stabilizer for other recipes. If resisted or eaten in no-mana zone, these fruit have only a neutral, acidic taste and the consistency of a seedless apple.

Encountered

The oil or juice of a dreamfruit is a key flavor in preserved rations. The fruit itself can be purchased at street corners, in supermarkets, as food additives, flavor enhancers, and raw fruit. A good maî tre D' can lead the diners to expect certain flavors, and thus a creative storyteller can make the meal . . .

In *GURPS* terms, a diner that specifically wills a sensation (on a Will+4 roll) will give him what he wishes, or Will-4 if he resists (or isn't expecting a magical effect). In either roll, Will can be replaced by the Mind Shield skill, if it is better. The effect could also be psionic or biological in nature. If the latter, then rolls are against HT instead of Will.

Industrial Uses

"Dreamfruit do not grow on trees. Instead, they are cultivated from a small frond which does not cast seeds. It must be spliced and grown in a special solution to grow roots . . . or so they say. They say that it cheapens a meal with an irreplaceable resource. Can it be true?"
-- Comedian Amil K'ran

Dreamfruit are considered incredibly useful for stored rations. In addition to fighting scurvy, these fruit can remove the tedium of dried rations, at the expense of reality. The art of storytelling at the dinner table might be revived to invite someone to experience something new. The enchantment of certain illusion and mind control effects are much more effective with this creature.

Adventure

The adventurers are charged with investigating a rumor that many people who have eaten dreamfruit are experiencing unusual side effects. Research seems to point back to a batch from one orchard. Digging will reveal that someone has added a secondary enchantment to a single bush. Getting access to check the farm's orchard will not be easy. Who did this? Is a spy testing a new spell?

Dreamfruit

Appearance: An apple-shaped tan fruit.
Category: Plant.
Diet: none.
HT 11.
SM -6 (3.5" "cube").
Traits: Affliction (Will; Blood Agent; Incapacitation: Hallucinating; Limited Use)

Dreamfruit Bush

Appearance: A misshapen, crooked bush with s-shaped leaves.
Category: Plant.
Diet: photovore, manavore.
HT 9.
SM -1; DR 2.

Mist Mount

"Foretelling if the mistriders had arrived was often an easy task. All a seer need do is look out the window and see the wall of fog. Isn't it odd that most seers are blind?"
-- Master Alfred Coren, *Popular Magic*

A mist mount looks like shaggy equine, with a frame something between that of a horse and a deer. The most noticeable feature is that it creates mist. The fog seems to seep off the animal, especially from the legs. The mist mount operates best in fog, providing it a measure of stealth (outside of the fact that the fog itself can often be seen as suspicious). This works well in the hilly highlands with a very light or no wind. In the wild, mist mounts normally operate in small herds, creating their own fog banks. In the dells these creatures naturally inhabit, the fog gathers, and rarely dissipates.

Encountered

Wild mist mounts must generally be broken before they can be ridden by just anyone (Otherwise, Animal Handling and riding rolls are at -5). They can bond to a rider with years of trust, generally raised from a calf. Bonded mounts will fight fiercely for their riders. Wild mist mounts seem to do best in rolling hills or forest with very little wind. Both sexes grow horns, but keepers normally trim and round the horns of domesticated animals.

Industrial Uses

"For all the hype, a lone animal can only move at a brisk walk, or it will outrun its fog. Where do they get the water from? Is it created, or do they leech it from the air?"
-- Kiel Arislund

Mist mounts are the preferred steed for scouts, sentries, and forest guardians. Lone sentries in graveyards and courtyards can also benefit from its abilities. Some seek to breed winged mist mounts that create clouds; the ability to see through clouds would make them much safer than pegasi in mountainous areas. Some enterprising businesses have been shipping mist mounts to the tropics and deserts to help normalize environments. Although the humidity mist mounts generate can be crucial to cargo and comfort, the creatures can be miserable if they do not have much room to move, however. Organizations that find they have too much mist often turn to fan birds to clear the area. Spells of Water Vision, fleetness of foot, and coolness can be aided even by discarded antlers from these animals.

Adventure

The heroes must find the way to a Lost Valley. To make the journey up the mountains requires a surefooted mount, preferably one that can see in fog . . .

Mist Mount (see horse and deer in *GURPS Bestiary*)

Appearance: A slender shaggy horse-deer hybrid that has seasonal horns.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 10-12; DX 13; IQ 2; HT 13-15.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 11; Move 7.

SM +1; 200-400 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Acute Hearing +3; Acute Vision +1; Acute Vision +4 (Only to counter penalties due to fog); Create (Water; Permanent); Domestic (or Wild) Animal; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 14); Temperature Tolerance 4; *Skills:* Blind Fighting-12.

Giant Mist Mount

ST 15-20; DX 11; IQ 2; HT 15-16.
Will 11; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM +2; 1,000-1,500 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: As above, but Enhanced Move 2 (Ground Speed 24)

Variant (to either): Unbroken: add +1 to IQ, and an additional +2 to Will.

Dancing Eyes (*Rubax*)

"These little shadow creatures are just glowing eyes and a circular maw of pointed teeth . . . It is said that their bark is much worse than their bite. Still, any bite from something with that many sharp teeth would hurt, even if it is a small one."
-- Lady Amelia, *Journeys through the Crystal Fish*

This loud creature is just as it appears, a pair of eyes and a circular maw of teeth, floating in shadow. Its slitted eyes can come in different colors, although in stories they are usually glowing red. When it blinks, it is virtually untouchable. Fortunately, it rarely flinches, although it does growl as it shies away from very strong lights. Sudden bright sources of light can startle dancing eyes, if only to make it blink and take a new target. In general, light from wooden torches and small sources of flame do not scare the creatures any more than it would any other wild animal. Dancing Eyes are natural predators for shadow hands (hand-sized shadow creatures), and other such small creatures of shadow. Curiously enough, for a creature of shadow, dancing eyes seem to be afraid of absolute dark.

Encountered

Dancing eyes are often encountered nipping at individual's heels from the shadows. Dancing eyes will try to frighten humans just to get them out of their territory. They seem scarier than they actually are and will rarely *wound* larger creatures. Some individuals have raised rubax from pups and claim that they make good pets. If so, the usefulness of the creature as a sentry is thought to be on par with a small, yapping dog: more alarm than attack animal.

Industrial Uses

"Almost paradoxically, it is those individuals who hate creatures of shadow who will benefit the most from keeping a pet rubax. They eat or scare away most creatures of shadow that are smaller than them. They do have a problem with larger shadow predators that do not feel fear, however . . ."
-- Lady Amalita, *Better Homes and Drawbridges*

There is clear use for these beasts as symbionts to grant the host night vision ability. Research continues in the exploration of the other powers, such as flexibility and perfect recall. Enchanters today see opportunities to enhance night vision and meld with shadows using what they can gather of this creature.

Adventure

The Eyes Have It

Dancing eyes have stolen a McGuffin and have hidden it in a haunted house. Several prominent researchers believe

that dancing eyes are the product of human nightmares brought to the waking world. Alchemists are trying to bring objects such as goblets of gold to and from nightmares Studying lucid dreams seems to be the first obstacle. Now, they need volunteers to try to tap these powers . . .

Dancing Eyes

Appearance: Disembodied, cat eyes and a circular maw of teeth.
Category: Shadow.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 2-4; DX 11; IQ 4; HT 11.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 5.5; Dodge 11; Move 5.
SM -5; 1-2 lbs; DR 1 (ablative).
Traits: Body of Shadow (Switchable; Usually On); Bully (9); Fearlessness +4; Insubstantial (Accessibility: Must have eyes and mouth shut; Accessibility: Only in the Dark); Night Vision 6 (shifted); Night Vision 3; Phobia (Pitch Black) (9); Teeth (Fangs); Vermiform; Wild (Or Domestic) Animal

Giant Dancing Eyes

ST 5-7; DX 10; IQ 4; HT 12.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 5.5; Dodge 11; Move 6.
SM -4; 4-8 lbs; DR 2.

Huge Dancing Eyes

ST 8-10; DX 9; IQ 4; HT 13.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 5.5; Dodge 11; Move 7.
SM -3; 16-32 lbs; DR 3.

Gargantuan Dancing Eyes

ST 11-13; DX 8; IQ 4; HT 14.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 5.5; Dodge 11; Move 8.
SM -2; 64-128 lbs; DR 4.

Beyond Fantasy

This article describes seven creatures, most of which could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. Wrecking Crane could be birds with very thick skulls that stun prey. Acid trees exist to a less powerful extent. Clodhoppers, though slightly over-the-top, have no real special powers. Woundwarts can provide basic cleaning of wounds, as per bandaging. Dreamfruit might contain psychotropic drugs, not a magical effect. Mist mounts could simply have adapted to foggy conditions prevalent in their native area. Dancing eyes might be matte black creatures that keep to shadows, perhaps possessing luminescent teeth and eyes.

* * *

Special Thanks to JL Hatlen Linnell for his reply of "Me! me! me!" when the call went out.

From Stairwells to Sled Rides: A Case Study In Recycling

Yesterday, I took the family to the Indianapolis Children's Museum again, in our continued efforts to get the most out of our season pass. (There are still permanent exhibits that we haven't set foot in yet, even after a half-dozen trips.) One interesting thing about this visit was the trip on the Yule Slide, a temporary curved two-lane white slide that stretches from the second floor of the museum to the first, where folks climb aboard white pillow-case-like things akin to sleds and zoom down. Sam rode in each of our laps once, unsure the first time but having a good time the second.

Unfortunately, once we rode the slide to the first floor, to get back up to to the second floor, we either needed to take the elevator (which is pretty slow) or go a bit of a trek to the spiral walkway that interconnects all floors of the museum. Ordinarily, from that point in the museum, we would have taken the wide curved staircase that connects the first and second floors. But this wasn't an option today . . . because that staircase had been converted into the Yule Slide.

I'm not a museum nut, so such transformations might be commonplace. But I found it a brilliant usage of the space, radically altering the shape and structure of the museum and forcing me to reevaluate the entire experience with new eyes. But mostly I marveled in the efficiency of the entire endeavor; even if the kids knew of the structural alteration, they didn't *care;* the Yule Slide lines were long (but brisk) throughout the day.

In the world of RPGs, I can't stress how useful a technique this is as well. See, if you're a typical gamer, you probably have an entire library of useful books and products designed to make your life easier. (If nothing else, you're one click away from perusing the thousands of articles in our own humble archives.) But a long-running RPG campaign has a constant demand for new material. So why not transform what you already have into a new form? Depending on what you want -- and what you have, obviously -- it can be surprisingly trivial to slap a new coat of paint on something, rendering it almost unrecognizable. For example, if one of your books details the *Orient Express* train (such as the superlative ***Horror on the Orient Express*** or the old ***Orient Express*** supplement for ***Top Secret***), then you have a tube-like luxurious means of transport for a hundred different settings. Whether you need a magic-powered vehicle in a fantasy world, a steampunk subway system (or steampulp Cannon-Train to Mars), a mag-lev super-train in a Cyberpunk campaign, or a splendid interstellar spaceship, you're covered.

You can also reuse game stats as much as you like. Once you have one vaguely competent police-office type, you also have a security guard, an army recruit, a mastermind's mook (make as many as you like!), and so on. Of course, some games make this easier than others . . . a Generic Universal RolePlaying System really pays off here, as do games such as ***Savage Worlds, World of Darkness,*** the ***d20 System*** (and, to a lesser extent, its other time-period variants), and others. And if you're quick-witted enough (or plan ahead of time), you can even use more important "unique" characters again. For example, imagine a criminal genius with telekinesis, able to manipulate objects from afar. Or a martial artist with psychic "hunches" and hands with gauntlets with monomolecular blades that whip out in thin wires of death (with the gloves protecting the wearer). Well, I've just described filed-down versions of Mr. Fantastic, from the Fantastic Four; and Wolverine, from Every Marvel Comic Ever Extending Retroactively to the Dawn of Time. Really, the game stats would need to be changed very little, provided the name, costume, and attitude were all tweaked accordingly. (As an aside, Spider-Man used this very technique himself in the Identity Crisis storyline, splitting his Spider-Man persona into four different costumed identities -- two criminal, two heroic -- each using his powers in different ways so no one could discern that they were all the same person.)

And, of course, I've talked before about [reusing plots and storylines](), [exploring variations on plots](), and even [rebooting a campaign and using the same characters]().

The biggest obstacle in all this is trying to maintain the knowledge of "what is where"; it doesn't do you any good to have a need for a luxury train-like conveyance if you can't remember the name of the ***Orient Express*** and which of your books contains it. And, in many cases, it's probably easier to recreate game stats or other information than it is to

find it elsewhere (especially in fast-and-easy game systems where you are just scribbling down a few stats). I suspect the quest might become simpler in the future if and when libraries migrate more to electronic, PDF-like models, which are much more conducive to electronic information management; searching for "luxury train" (no quotes) in Google popped up a reference to the *Orient Express* in the fifth non-sponsored site.

In the meantime, reuse whatever you can; players probably won't notice . . . and even if they do, they may well not *care,* content to be wide-eyed kids ready to experience something as commonplace as a staircase with the new eyes of a sledder on the first snowy morning.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

King Arthur Pendragon

Published by **[Arthaus, Inc.](#)**

Written by Greg Stafford

Cover by Michael Phillippi

Illustrated by John Bridges, Talon Dunning, Eric Hotz, Larry MacDougall, & William O'Connor

Cartography by Jeff Holt

234-page b&w hardcover; $34.99

Although there have been several RPGs devoted to the Arthurian legend, none have acquired the reputation and acclaim of *King Arthur Pendragon.* First published by Chaosium in 1985, it went through four editions with the fourth being regarded as the most complete version. Unfortunately out of print for some time, the new edition published by White Wolf Studios under its Arthaus imprint sees the designer revisiting the game, reorganizing and redesigning for a fifth edition.

When first published, *King Arthur Pendragon* was regarded as a highly radical game, introducing several revolutionary concepts. The first was that only a single character type, the knight, was available to play and that in order to play a knight, the character had to be male. Although later versions of the game allowed female knights and magic-using characters, the game's emphasis meant that any druid or sorcerer character was always secondary to the knights. Second, a character undertook adventures, quests, tasks, and battles during only part of the year, the rest of the time being dedicated to the upkeep of family, possessions, and lands. Third, long-term play was designed to be dynastic, with a character being expected to marry, procreate, and will his possessions to his eldest son, who in turn would become a player character. Fourth, characters were designed with traits and attributes that not only enforced a certain style of play and feel for the setting but could actually dictate the actions of a player character.

This new edition retains many those features. Players take the roles of knights newly ennobled at the age of 21 in 485 A.D., years before King Arthur's Golden Age when King Uther's Britain is threatened by Saxon invaders. Female knights are discussed, but whether they are allowed in a game is up to the GM.

The young knights follow Christianity or a pagan faith of the Cymric culture and owe their fealty to the Earl of Salisbury. Unlike the Fourth Edition (which provided cultural options for Saxon, Pictish, and Gallic knights), the Fifth Edition does not, instead returning *King Arthur Pendragon* to its beginning. In this, it is much like Green Knight's *Book of Knights,* but this Fifth Edition provides everything necessary to play, including an introductory scenario. The scenario casts the player characters as squires undertaking the ceremony of knighthood and then going on their first adventure, itself a series of encounters that neatly showcases various aspects of both the rules and the setting.

The rules themselves are a scaled down version of the Basic Roleplay System, employing a d20 rather than percentile dice. The core mechanic is still rolling low to succeed, but the closer the roll is to a target, the better the result. An exact roll of a target or skill value gives a critical success. Players deal damage using handfuls of six-sided dice, with a knight's strength and weapon used dictating how many; his constitution and size determine not just how many hit

points he has, but also how much damage it takes to knock him down and how much is a major wound.

Character generation also remains unchanged; involving the selection of attributes, assigning of skill points, and determination of distinctive physical traits, the aim being to qualify the character for knighthood. In addition, the player develops the family back story, rolling for the significant events during the lives of his character's father and grandfather. The new knight also inherits a family characteristic, for example, "Light Footed" (+10 Dancing) or "Love For Arms" (+10 Heraldry) plus a singular heirloom or legacy (such as extra money, a sacred religious relic, a weapon, a piece of clothing, or jewelry) or an extra horse. A player also needs to create his knight's coat of arms; unfortunately, in the game's only proper omission, a page of helpful heraldic charges and devices is absent.

To measure his personality and feelings, every knight (and major NPC) possesses a set of 26 Traits, divided into 13 pairs and any number of Passions. Each Trait pair, such as Chaste/Lustful or Valorous/Cowardly, together add to a total of 20. If any Trait has a value of 16 or more, then the knight is famous for it. During play, a Trait can be tested by the GM, a simple roll under it on a d20. For example, when a temptress tries to seduce a young knight, he resists by checking his Chaste Trait. A successful roll indicates resistance, but a failure does not mean that the knight falls for her charms. He still needs to make an opposing Lust check; if she wins, he falls into her arms.

The Traits also provide an objective for the character knights, not just in attempting to act in a particular way (for example, trying to be more Chaste or Energetic) but also in bonuses gained for attaining religious virtue. When a knight raises the Traits valued by his faith to 16 or more, he gains a bonus. For example, Roman Christian knights attempt to improve Chaste, Forgiving, Merciful, Modest, and Temperate Traits. Bonuses vary from faith to faith, such as a +2 Healing Rate for virtuous pagans and +6 hit points for Roman Christians.

A character can also possess Directed Traits, lesser feelings about a particular thing that give a bonus toward a full Trait in play. Acquired through play, suggested by the player or the GM, or inherited from family history, a Directed Trait might be weakness for redheads or a suspicion of a particular person. Additionally, knights hold to Passions, strong emotions toward something or someone, initially of a character's family and liege lord. Again, these work in fashion similar to Traits, which guide adventurers to expected behavior and attitudes as much as they enforce it.

Unlike other RPGs, experience checks come not at the end of an adventure but instead while in the game's Winter Phase. Likewise, checks for aging, economic circumstances and maintenance, a knight's stable and family, and training and practice occur during this period. This is also the time to run any solo adventures. Lastly, a knight's Glory is computed. Obtaining Glory is the objective of the game; it exists as a measure of a knight's fame, success, status, and influence. Glory is quantitative, representing the knight's reputation in bulk, the actual nature of the reputation being handled by the knight's Traits and Passions. This differing emphasis enables an evil knight to gain Glory despite the nature of his actions. Glory can be inherited, gained during play, and come from holding office and lands. As well as greater recognition and precedence, high Glory rewards a knight with enhancements to non-combat skills such as Flirting and Singing.

The book further explorers the knight's role with rules for handling tournaments and battles. There are guides to the function of magic and faith in Arthurian England with sufficient detail to involve both in a game. Despite the game's focus being 485 A.D., the future is not ignored. The book examines some of the changes inaugurated with the reign of King Arthur, such as the introduction of chivalry, the importance of romance, and various customs and advances in knightly equipment. All of this hints at the things to come in the Diana Jones Award-nominated ***Great Pendragon Campaign Sourcebook.***

So which version of the Arthurian legend is this game? It is certainly not that of Monty Python and the Holy Grail, a danger that it rigorously avoids. (This does not make the game humorless; for example, Brian, the knight of a player in the reviewer's group, inherited a holy lance and became Sir Brian of the Blessed Lance.) Rather, the game presents an idealized version that draws on the feudalism of the Middle Ages as much as English, French, Welsh, and modern versions of the legend, from *Le Morte D'Arthur* to *Once and Future King* to *The Mabinogion.*

Physically, the Fifth Edition of ***King Arthur Pendragon*** is a sturdy hardback given a clean polished look. Removing so much of the Fourth Edition's information has allowed the contents to breathe a little, and the book's layout suffers from none of the Fourth Edition's stodginess. The end papers are the book's only points of color, the front given over

to the saga's leading figures' heraldic devices, the back to a full-color map of Britain circa 485 A.D. Although a nice map, the reviewer's parents will be dismayed to learn that they live near "Donchester" rather than Dorchester.

King Arthur Pendragon is 21 years old and has not aged at all. It still feels fresh and modern, comparing pleasingly with more contemporary designs. Yet this new edition returns the game to the First Edition's simplicity, placing the emphasis on young knights as they prepare for the campaign to come. Although there have been pretenders to the throne, *King Arthur Pendragon* remains the definitive Arthurian roleplaying game.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Pick & Pack

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Designed by Simon Hunt

Art & graphics by Régis Moulon, Simon Hunt, & Kris Hunt

Full-color boxed game with board, wooden grabber pawn, 36 apple trays, 24 action tiles, & rules; $20

The best time for apples is in the fall, so grab those Red Delicious while you can. As you eat, appreciate the hard work the folks down at the plant put into packing them. Their mechanical grabber isn't working properly, so the workers are fighting over control of it as they attempt to *Pick & Pack.*

The object of the game is to score the most points for the apples collected.

Two players are vying for a bonus this season, so contention over the claw is fierce. The board is six spaces on a side, a grid of 36 squares filled with trays of apples. These counters have from one to six pieces of fruit on them. Two sides of the layout have spaces where special action tokens are placed for the blue player. The other two sides have the same thing, but in red for the other player. The apple counters are laid out at random and the grappling hand (a wooden cylinder) is placed wherever the big six-point tray is.

On his turn, a player moves the grabber left or right along its current row. The other player does the same, but he sits at a right angle to his opponent, so one person's "left to right" is another's "up and down." If someone lands on a tray of apples, he takes that counter and puts it into one of his four crates (pictured on the board just off the grid). Apple trays have to be (ahem) doled out evenly, so operators cannot put a second set of fruit into a box until all crates have their first.

If the grabber is shifted to an empty space on the board, the player instead gets the special action token above or below his position (both players get the same selection of action tiles). Most of these have an immediate effect, like switching trays of apples in their boxes or preventing anyone from getting a specified apple tray, while Rush Order permits two actions, one after the other. The "crate lids," however, can be the key to victory.

A crate can hold up to four trays before it's full. After that, it's a matter of sealing it up, something the player hopes to do before his opponent does it for him. One of the special actions is the Premium counter -- it's a mark of quality that says the apples inside are the best. Conversely, one's adversary can instead stamp the box Wholesale, which lowers the value of the fruit.

When one player has all his crates sealed, or he cannot make any more legal moves, the game ends and points are totaled. Unsealed apples are worth one point each, premium apples are worth two, and wholesale apples a disappointing half point per fruit.

While some amount of fumbling is almost guaranteed when all the pieces to be manipulated are pushed together into a grid like this, the apple counters are still good, thick items with pleasant illustrations. The special action chits are the same, and there's no arguing against a nice cylinder of wood for the grabber. The foldout, fully mounted board is an impressive item at this price, and it all fits in a sturdy little box. The counters even come punched out for you and fitted into a molded plastic bottom.

Z-Man Games has brought back the thinking man's game. It won't be replacing chess any time soon, but players who can think a move or three in advance have the rhythm necessary to excel at this endeavor. It can be mentally taxing to work out so many possibilities, but it's doable. Players can actively work against each other to prevent someone from getting certain actions. An opponent can be held at bay simply by not letting him get to the same area twice (he can only activate an action tile by landing on a space where apples *were*).

Players choose where to place their action tiles before the game starts, but there's no single overwhelming strategy, and grabbing a few good apple tiles and forcing a quick end to the game isn't easy either. While a player has two Premium lids at his disposal, he can't seal the other two crates himself . . . his rival has to do that, and if he's good, he won't do it until he's in a winning position. The dance **Pick & Pack** requires is a simple but highly replayable waltz that, at a mere 20 minutes a go, will keep this game near the top of the stack.

--Andy Vetromile

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Etherscope

Published by [Goodman Games](#)

Written by Nigel McClelland & Ben Redmond with Christopher F. Allen, Chris Durham, Mark Charke, & David Schwartz

Cover by Jonathan Hill

Illustrated by Ilya Astrakhan, James Cosper, Eduardo Herrera, Alex Kosakowski, Jeremy Mohler, Ethan Pasternack, Alex Shiekman, & Chris Watkins

304-page b&w softcover; $24.99

Most Victoriana RPGs mix in another element with those of 19th century history, imperialism, industrialism, chaos based society and so on. Usually based around a new discovery this catapults society forward encompassing several changes, but still remaining with the 19th century and still with the base genre both recognizable and gameable. *Etherscope,* an OGL RPG from Goodman Games, the publisher of ***[DragonMech](#)*** and the Dungeon Crawl Classic lines is different.

True, *Etherscope* is a steampunk RPG and it is a Victorian age set RPG, but it is not set during the 19th century. Rather, it is set in the 20th Century, specifically 1984. The discovery of the Ether in 1874 gave another avenue for Victorian inventiveness and industry, through the discipline of Ether Science. Innovations and inventions enabled smaller steam engines, more powerful weaponry, advanced lighter, tougher metals, and both cybernetic limbs and implants. Not only is Ether a ready source of energy, it can be manipulated directly, and via an ingested drug or an implanted device, has become a frontier into which the user projects his mind . . .

Britain is of course still a world power, but with two rivals. British disinterest allowed a newly powerful Germany to conquer most of Europe during the 1914-1922 Pan-European war. A subsequent Royal marriage united Germany with the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and today the Kaiser rules the New Reich that dominates Europe. During the Pan-Pacific War of 1941-1943, Britain used the Royal Navy to counter Japan's expansion of the 1930s, but before the home islands could be invaded, the corporate-dominated United States of America interceded to broker a peace treaty. This effectively divided the Pacific between the two of them, plus several smaller nations.

Currently a Cold War exists between the three great powers, with Great Britain the greatest industrial, largest sea going, and most extensive power. The USA dominates both North and South America, having admitted several Spanish and Portuguese colonies as full States. Today these territories form a new frontier that is not the Wild West, but rather the Savage South. The New Reich rules Europe with huge armies and aerial fortresses with the blessing of the Pope, who has called the New Reich the Holy Roman Empire. In the Far East, China remains a mysterious unknown, while Siberia is home to the Communist state of Russia. The Middle East is stilled ruled by the sybarite Ottoman Empire, which has found wealth anew with its oil deposits used for plastics.

At home, Great Britain is dominated by one city . . . not London, but the Great Metropolis, a conurbation that takes in both Liverpool and Manchester. It is the heart of the Empire's industrial might, a squalid warren rife with crime,

iniquity, and revolution. The Northumbrian Republican Movement foments for independence; the criminal gangs sell the Tabs that grant users access to pleasure palaces in the Etherscope; and the transgenic strains are put to work that normal workers will not do. After a workers' revolution was violently put down in 1937, the Eugenics League developed new human species that could be put to work, with the Alphas at the top, of course.

Humans (known as "Betas"); along with four transgenic strains (Alpha, Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon); and the little regarded Fey, the descendants of lost Lemuria, make up Etherscope's six races. Alphas are bred from the finest Beta examples, while Gamma, Delta and Epsilon humans have been cross bred with other species. Besides his race, each character also has a social template, representing his place in society. A social template gives wealth, feat, and skill bonuses, plus Influences. Working like skills, Influences represent a character's connections, social standing and so on within particular areas. Personality traits provide the opportunity to gain Excellence Points, used for re-rolls and activating abilities. Most characters will have an avatar, in essence their visible self when projected into the Etherscope.

The six basic classes are all tied to a particular attribute. The Charisma-based Broker builds connections and status; the Strength-based Combatant does as his name implies; the Constitution-based Enginaught is a worker, engineer, or pilot; the Wisdom-based Pursuer is a hunter, detective, or explorer; the Intelligence-based Savant is brilliant in one or more fields; and the Dexterity-based Scoundrel is also self-explanatory. Besides the usual skills and feats, a player selects his character's traits from each class' Talent Trees. These enable a player to customize his character, so that a Broker could concentrate upon influence, charm, or leadership talents or even become spirit medium. All of the six classes possess this degree of flexibility.

Etherscope's cybernaughtics are kept to a pleasing but simple few. The various devices are divided between implants, such as a Scope Jack or Motor Neuron Accelerators; and attachments, like limbs . . . though several items are available as either implants or attachments. The only limitation on how much cybernaughtics a character can have is his Constitution. Various feats can increase this, and feats provide the points to buy the cybernaughtics. The range of cybernaughtics available is what you would expect and also come in aesthetic (for the Toffs), industrial, military, and street grades.

The Etherscope is accessible via scope portals, literally openings into the Ether, by a 'scope jack, a cybernaughtic implant, or by a Tab, a chemically impregnated paper square that when ingested casts the user's consciousness into the 'scope, usually in a particular location (pleasure palaces being a popular destination). Other Tabs can upload knowledge or skills. Inside the 'scope itself each nation has created its own city based domain. Traveling between them is difficult, with the spaces between reputedly home to scope demons, including the mysterious System Agents. Movement and combat within the 'scope is much like roleplaying another character, making gaming within the 'scope easier than in other Cyberpunk games.

Given its mélange of genres, adventure ideas almost suggest themselves. Many of which are discussed in the GM's section. In addition, the book comes with two adventures itself, both designed for first level characters and involving a mcguffin of some kind. The ready-to-run "Analogue" takes place in the Great Metropolis and has the characters preventing a new device from falling into the hands of the New Reich. Earlier editions of the rulebook contained "Compound 13," a detailed outline involving a chase against every power to retrieve a new weapon from a crashed zeppelin in the Congo. The new edition replaces it with "Cinnamon Rose," a search for a missing Scope performer, a more useful inclusion as it can be run after "Compound 13." Also included is a very helpful list of inspiring reading, viewing, and listening, and -- new for this edition -- some bonus material taken from the game's other supplements. This is actually useful advertising, and it's nice to see a publisher use a second printing to make useful changes.

As an OGL game, *Etherscope* provides everything necessary to play, from the point-buy system for character attributes to the rules for creating beasts and NPCs. Of course, it also makes it mechanically familiar and all a player and GM has to do is familiarize themselves with the setting. Although there is just about enough detail provided, it is hindered in several ways. First, there are not enough illustrations, especially of the various pieces of equipment, weaponry, and vehicles. Second, there's no index. This is an absurd omission given the frequent need to refer to the book's contents. Third, the text in the book's many tables is a little small on the eye. Fourth -- and this is a minor problem -- another edit is needed, particularly as headlines often end a column, leaving its subsequent paragraph

widowed in the next column over. Finally, and this is a slighter problem, the map would have been clearer had it been in color.

Etherscope also suffers from having a little much of everything. For example, the Lemurian and the Fey aspects of the setting are left unaddressed in this book. In fact, they could have been dropped and the game would still be as interesting. And the reason it is interesting is that it blends several genres -- Victoriana, steampunk, and cyberpunk -- allowing only the first to dominate, though the rest still remain part of the setting. It is also interesting because time is given for the setting to develop at a more reasonable pace, rather than rushing to get to the point when play begins. Although the suggested time line feels forced in places, it gets the game into a very alternative (yet still cyberpunk) 1980s. But just as *Etherscope* is a whole new 1984 -- the seminal year for the genre -- it brings a pleasingly fresh eye to the steampunk genre.

--Matthew Pook

GURPS Martial Arts Case Study

Strong Guys: Part II

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

Only the Strong Shall Survive

In <u>Part I of this case study,</u> we looked at how Strong Guys fight. To benefit the most from these tactics, you need to be powerful enough to pull them off and strong enough to use the heavy weapons designed with big characters in mind -- those two-handed swords, polearms, morningstars, M60 machine guns, manpack miniguns, and your own meaty fists. So let's see what we need to build a Strong Guy.

Building the Strong Character

Building a Strong Guy isn't much different from designing any other type of fighter. Rather than go into a treatise on creating a fighter, this article concentrates on those particular aspects that help a powerfully built fighter thrive.

Many templates in *GURPS Martial Arts* come with the "Tough Guy" lens, detailed on page 32. That lens is a gold mine of good purchases for a would-be Strong Guy. Consult that first! You can't go wrong dedicating most of your spare points to characteristics from that lens.

Strength

This is the defining, central statistic for a Strong Guy. One good definition for a Strong Guy-type character is someone whose ST exceeds their DX. You need lots of it. How much? For humans, you'll want at least ST 13. That strength gives you a base thrust of 1d and swing of 2d-1. That's important for taking advantage of the "per die" multipliers for unarmed combat skills, various techniques, and maneuvers and options like All-Out Attack (Strong), Committed Attack (Strong), and Extra Effort (Mighty Blows). It'll also help offset the penalties for weaker moves that give you more flexibility, like Defensive Attack and Aggressive Parry.

But don't stop at ST 13. The more strength, the better. ST 17 provides a further breakpoint for 3d-1 swing, and ST 19 is the first appearance of multiple dice for thrust.

You'll also need to decide how you intend to fight before you settle on your final stats. Taking advantage of heavier weapons calls for a high ST score. For Unbalanced weapons, you'll want ST that is 1.5 times the Min ST of your weapon to avoid needing to ready it after each use. With sufficient ST, you can use even some two-handed weapons in one hand.

Don't forget about HP. Extra HP are always useful for keeping yourself alive and for doing more damage on a slam. If you can reach 20 HP, do it -- you'll heal twice as rapidly and get double benefits from magical healing (see page 88 of the *Basic Set*). The *Basic Set* recommends a limit of +30% over your ST. With that limit in place, you'll need at least ST 16 to obtain a high HP. With the appropriate Special Exercises perk from some martial arts styles (for example, Sumo), you can buy +100% of your ST as extra HP. This is usually well worth the investment. A ST 15 sumotori with this perk can buy his HP up to 30, allowing for triple-rate healing and massive slams! A great investment for the cost of a 1-point perk and 30 points for the HP.

Finally, a *large* guy is cheaper to make into a *strong* guy. Consider Gigantism and its SM+1 for the 10% discount on ST and HP. A ST 16, HP 32 sumotori would save 9 points this way -- enough to buy the required Special Exercises perk and +2 skill in Sumo Wrestling! Gigantism also comes with a +1 Move. But being big has its disadvantages.

You're more likely to be hit with missile weapons. Armor and clothing cost and weigh more. You might not be able to shop off-the-rack for armor in a modern society. That's less of an issue in a historical low-tech world where everything is usually handmade for a specific person, but the extra weight of your armor might be more than your additional BL. In fantasy worlds with tiny villages supporting smiths selling armor off the rack, modern limitations may apply -- sure, he has six suits of plate for sale, but none in XXL . . .

Health and Fatigue Points

Fatigue Points can be expended for Extra Effort in combat, allowing for Mighty Blows to get the benefits of an All-Out Attack without the loss of defenses. Fit helps a character to recover from FP loss because of combat at high encumbrance. On a budget, Hard to Subdue is useful for staying conscious, and Hard to Kill is useful for staying alive. But given a choice, improve your HT to take advantage of better rolls to avoid unconsciousness, overcome stunning, avoid lasting effects of crippling injuries, stay alive, and provide a larger pool of FP. A Strong Guy without fighting endurance won't be much use. Make sure you have enough HT to stay up fighting and shrug off the effects of incapacitating attacks, stuns, and so on, plus enough FP to fight hard and often. Afflictions and many spells are resisted by HT, which means HT is critical for a tank-like bruiser. Consider HT 14-15. It's not terribly expensive (only 40 or 50 points), and it gives you at least +1 Basic Move before accounting for DX, gives at least a 14 or less to survive or stay conscious, and gives you 14 FP.

DX and Combat Skills

You're strong and healthy now, but don't ignore DX and combat skills. You must be good enough to hit your target without resorting to All-Out Attack (Determined), Committed Attack (Determined), or Telegraphic Attack. Don't go crazy if you're on a budget, but don't cut here. You need to be able to fight. Emphasize ST over DX, and damage over skill, but don't ignore either. A powerful fighter pushes the balance between attacking skill and damage to 75%/25% or 60%/40%, not 100%/0%. All your ST is no good if you can't hit, or if you can only hit when you give up your defenses or enhance your opponent's defenses! A good skill level to shoot for is 14-16 -- you get a Parry of 10-11, and an unaimed attack or a torso attack will be good enough to minimize your chances of a critical failure. Don't let "Strong Guy" equal "unskilled klutz."

Perks

Any perk that fits your fighting style is worth taking -- don't limit yourself. But some perks are especially useful. Remember, you can buy perks from your style with half as many invested points in the style. But anyone can take one of these perks if they have 20 points in the appropriate skills. Certain perks are especially useful for Strong Guys.

- **Armor Familiarity.** Generally, Strong Guys reduce penalties for heavy armor simply by being tough enough to lower their overall encumbrance level. Most armored Strong Guys rely on weapon skills that simply aren't penalized by encumbrance. But if your main unarmed attack is Karate or Judo, or if you expect to fence with your rapier while armored down with a full musketeer's kit or slash with your saber while carrying off the Lost Gold of the Andes, Armor Familiarity becomes useful. An additional reduction of the penalty by -1 is worth looking at -- a fighter could armor up to Light encumbrance and have no penalty, or up to Medium for a mere -1. For a powerful character, that's a *lot* of additional weight carried without penalizing mobility-based fighting skills.
- **Improvised Weapons.** Strong Guys can benefit from this when it comes to swinging around barbells, chairs, lengths of pipe, tree branches (or sufficiently small trees) . . . and assorted bar-hall favorites like bottles and

Too Much HT?

One problem with HT 14 or 15 is that you're as likely to die as you are to pass out. In a losing fight, you may get hacked down to -5×HP and automatic death before you're unable to keep fighting . . . which means your fights will generally be "win" or "die." That *can* back a GM into a corner, and prevent fun opportunities for being captured by enemies who'll lecture you on their plans or toss you in gladiator pits. Before you make someone impossible to subdue, consider the consequences. That out of the way, a high HT is useful -- and a clever GM will find lots of penalties to your "unfailable" rolls . . .

barstools. This one is more useful in a modern campaign, where you might not be armed -- or can't resort to firearms to end a fight.

- **Iron Body Parts.** You've got high ST and a solid HT, but these perks let you withstand even more punishment in the chosen area. Many are gateways to Striker or Claws, Striking ST, or additional DR, all of which are useful for a big bruiser.
- **Neck Control.** Strong Guys are effective grappling against weaker opponents; this lets you leverage that for striking as well.
- **Power Grappling.** For Strong Guys who grapple, Power Grappling provides the best bang for the buck. In any situation you could benefit from the ST-bonus from Wrestling or Sumo Wrestling, you can swap it out for a ST-based skill roll. If your ST is much higher than your DX -- and it should be with this kind of character -- this means you can really maul opponents when you get a grip. Highly skilled grapplers are still a problem, but you'll be able to counter their DX-based moves with your ST-based skill. Combine this with a striking skill and Neck Control to grab opponents and belabor them about the head with your fists.

If your GM allows it, the Perk *Focused Fury* from the "[Designer's Notes: ***GURPS Martial Arts***](#)" is extremely useful for Strong Guys.

Weapons

"For Boris, weapons are like accessories to his damage score."
-- Aaron Falken, commenting on his then-ST 18 fighter's three-second tackle, grapple, and Neck Snap kill.

What to fight with? A critical question for any fighter, but for a Strong Guy, the options are much wider. With sufficient ST, almost anything can be a weapon. You might not even want to bother with weapons at all.

For fighters using low-tech weaponry, you want a weapon that doesn't have a low ST statistic -- if your ST exceeds the ST of your weapon by three times or more, the excess ST is wasted (see page 270 of ***GURPS Basic Set*** for details). This means that dress smallswords and smallswords are probably less effective for you. Ditto for other fencing weapons. This might explain *The Three Musketeers* hero Porthos' penchant for fighting with chairs, table legs, and his fists instead of his sword. You can use these weapons, but if your ST exceeds the minimum by three times, consider a heavier weapon -- or accept the restricted damage.

As noted earlier, a good ST score can allow two-handed weapon use in one hand, or get rid of the need to re-Ready it after attacks. However, this doesn't help if your weapon's *Parry* statistic is marked with a U -- but see Defensive Attack for a way to work around that limitation. If you're going to wield a balanced weapon or fight unarmed, a specific ST score isn't as critical.

Rely on big weapons that take advantage of additional special rules. Certain two-handed weapons rack up additional parries at -2, not -4, using the optional rules on ***GURPS Martial Arts,*** page 123. These include any ready, two-handed polearm, spear, staff, or two-handed sword weapon. Excellent choices within this group are the staff, pollaxe, greatsword, and longsword.

- **Polearms.** The Dueling versions of various polearms detailed in **GURPS Martial Arts** really shine in the hands of a Strong Guy. Wielded in a Defensive Grip and using the optional rules for Two-Handed Weapon Parries, they can fend off many attacks. Your superior ST means the damage penalties drop you from "high damage" to "medium damage" potential. This effectively allows you to trade ST off for superior skill when you need it most!
- **Two-Handed Swords.** Perhaps ideal for Strong Guys. Thrust/impale? Check. Swing/cut? Check. Useful at two different reaches without grip changes? Check. Balanced? Check. Two-handed swords in the grip of a Strong Guy are effective offensively, benefit from the optional rules for Two-Handed Weapon Parries, and, with enough ST, can be used one-handed. The real drawback is cost -- they're expensive. Good compromise include the bastard sword, the longsword, or the katana -- less damaging than a greatsword but more adapted to one-handed use. They are typically cheaper, which may be a factor in your weapon selection.
- **Two-Handed Axes.** Perhaps surprisingly, these are not so good for Strong Guys. Yes, your high ST lets you whip them around and deal lots of damage. But they are unbalanced (and thus parry poorly) and don't add

enough extra damage to justify that. Avoid them if you can and you don't need them for your character concept. They aren't without their uses, and the low cost and cutting damage of a greataxe -- even a Fine-quality greataxe is cheaper than a Good-quality thrusting greatsword -- makes it a destructive weapon in the right hands. They're also great for dealing with doors and other obstacles. Nonetheless, consider their downsides carefully.

- **Staves.** Staves exist as another excellent weapon for a tough fighter -- powerful defensively (both a +2 bonus to Parry and the rules for improved two-handed parries apply), powerful offensively (flexible reach, good damage), cheap, and heavy enough to parry all but the largest weapons. A high-ST fighter with a staff can be terrifying.
- **Morningstars.** Morningstars are another excellent weapon for Strong Guys. Investing points in ST instead of DX and skill means less ability to make Deceptive Attacks, but the morningstar comes with its own penalties for the defender. Following a Beat against Block or Dodge, you can force an opponent to Parry -- penalized because of your weapon!

If you use a one-handed weapon, consider adding a shield. A strong shield rush can knock down foes, and a good Block score can allow you to get away with normal Attacks and Committed Attacks using U-stat Parry weapons like morningstars and axes.

Weapons that get stuck -- picks and other swing/impale weapons -- pose fewer difficulties for a sufficiently powerful fighter. Freeing such a weapon takes a ST check, which a Strong Guy (especially with ST of 15 or more) will have no problems with. It also deals additional damage coming back out . . . but this damage is often less than you'd have dealt with two blows from another weapon. Take advantage of this feature, but don't make it your signature move. Your damage potential should be high enough to make this extra damage icing, not the cake.

One problem with swing/impale weapons is that they *require* two turns when you successfully hit someone: One to hit; one to pull it out. Against a high-defenses opponent with lots of HP, this may be useful. But in general, it's a wasted turn. Your goal should be to do enough damage to dispose of most normal fighters with one big, frightful attack. Swing/impale weapons slow you down and restrict your tactical options. If you need to engage another target, you're out of luck; even if you release the weapon, you'll need Fast-Draw to get out a replacement and attack.

When deciding upon a missile weapon, look for armaments with "swing" in the damage listing. Axes, hungamungas (large for Axe Throwing, small for Knife Throwing), slings, throwing sticks, and spear throwers really let you leverage your strength into range and damage. If you want impaling, you're going to need to settle for thrust damage, but a spear or javelin is a good way to get it. They also have good Accuracy, range, and damage. Don't bother with thrown knives. The range is short, they have poor Accuracy, and their maximum damage is low. It's generally wise to start a potential fight situation with a throwable weapon in your hand -- throw it at a likely target (whomever seems most dangerous or, preferably, least likely to be able to defend against it) -- and draw or Fast-Draw your main melee weapon.

For ***High-Tech*** and ***Ultra-Tech*** fighters, you may as well go for something big, either a large weapon with a lot of damage, or a smaller weapon that consumes ammunition prodigiously. Your great carrying capacity allows for a larger ammo load, a bigger gun, or a balance of these two aspects.

Similarly, the Strong Guy's high ST means that carrying a couple of pistols, some grenades, a light machine gun, and a rifle becomes possible. But don't overdo it. You're a fighter, not a mule. Pick what you need and what you'll use, and then load up on the ammunition and accessories for it. Generally, it's better to have one machine gun and lots of ammunition than three different long arms, if only because you can't shoot all three at once!

Note that many guns, especially bigger guns, have a ST statistic above 10. Large pistols (like the Auto .44M, minimum ST 13), squad-support weapons like the SAW (minimum ST 12B), and light machine gun (minimum ST 13B) are capable of being fired from the hip or shoulder by a well-built fighter. A ST 10 fighter with one of these weapons must use a bipod or two hands or both, or suffer a penalty equal to his ST deficit. ST 10 two-handed weapons like some submachine guns can be used one-handed with ST 15, too, allowing for dual-wielding Uzis if you're tough enough. While gun damage stays constant, stronger fighters can carry bigger guns and use them more effectively. That means more damage! At the high end of the scale, the .50 cal machine gun has ST 20M -- anyone can fire it in a vehicle mount, but a ST 20 fighter can dispense with the mount . . .

High-tech fighters should otherwise follow the guidelines for low-tech fighters. While a dueling halberd is unlikely for a Victorian soldier, a heavy broadsword or axe isn't so outlandish. A modern 21st-century fighter might carry a long knife or pack some brass knuckles to increase his punching damage. Don't overlook non-muscle powered weapons like pepper spray, force swords, or backup firearms, but take advantage of your ST. You don't need a power cell for brass knuckle-reinforced punch or a yawara-loaded Hammer Fist.

In the end, any weapon -- from a high-quality broadsword or dau to an improvised club -- is going to deal good damage for a high-ST fighter. Don't feel limited to only classic "Big Guy" weaponry. Take a look at all of your options. With enough ST, your weapon choice is more about style, versatility, and budget than the damage stat.

Armor

Wear as much armor as you can; you can hack it with your high ST. This means the nicest flak jacket or bullet-resistant vest you can get at high tech levels, or the most advanced metal armor (mail, scale, or plate) you can afford at low tech levels. Armor up -- if you maximize ST over DX, your defenses will suffer a bit and you'll get hit more often. Therefore, you should leverage that ST score to carry lots of DR, so you can absorb damage as well as deal it out.

You can also *layer* armor. Wearing multiple layers anywhere but the head gives you a -1 to DX and DX-based skills (see page 286 of the *Basic Set*), but that -1 DX can mean lots of extra DR. A suit of mail under light plate provides a total DR of 10/8. That's sufficient DR to *ignore* any non-critical hit from a ST 12 or less fighter with a broadsword or axe. Faced with a multitude of weaker foes, you may be able to forgo any defenses and rely on your DR to keep you safe. At the very least, wear a mail coif under your other headgear . . . there is no DX penalty, the weight is rarely significant, and a hit to the skull can end a fight.

In some genres, not much armor is available, but wear what you can -- extra DR is usually worth having, and with a high ST it shouldn't slow you down much. And for goodness' sake, high-tech fighters, in a cinematic game should remember to strip off their shirts under that flak jacket and crisscross ammo belts to show off their (Attractive or better) muscles! Bulletproof Nudity rules (page 470 of the *Basic Set*) aren't just for chainmail bikinis.

Martial Arts Styles for Strong Guys

Any style can be a "Strong Guy" style . . . but some styles really let big guys take advantage of their strength. Unarmed styles that focus on grappling are good Strong Guy styles, as are armed styles that feature heavy weapons. Styles such as French Smallsword Fencing, Dagger Fighting, and Shortsword Fighting aren't out of the question, but consider something that takes better advantage of your strength. Light weapons -- knives, smallswords, rapiers, batons -- often come with a low Min ST, which means a low maximum damage. A tough fighter shouldn't be limited by his weapon.

Some unarmed martial arts styles are well-known for their strong practitioners. These include Boxing (think heavyweights here), Judo, Hung Gar Kung Fu, any of the Wrestling styles (especially Indian Wrestling and Professional Wrestling). Sambo fighters are typically depicted as powerfully built men; they often lack shirts and seem to own only camo pants. Pankration and Ancient Greek Boxing are noted for their lack of weight classes, and the champions were often huge. Several of the short bios in *GURPS Martial Arts* talk about famously strong men -- try modeling your Strong Guy after Milo of Cretona (Greco-Roman Wrestling), Mas Oyama (Kyokushin), Gama (Indian Wrestling), or John L. Sullivan (Bare-Knuckle Boxing).

One quick way to find a style that's suited for a Strong Guy is to look for the words "Power Grappling" in the perk list. If it's there, it's an exceptionally appropriate style for big guys. For example, Judo, Jujutsu, Sambo, Sumo Wrestling, and Greco-Roman Wrestling all have Power Grappling, which is a perk any sufficiently hardy unarmed fighter will want. Getting a style with it as a perk means you can buy it as a Style Perk, freeing your "anything" Perk choice for other options.

Next, check the techniques. Look for the inclusion of things like Neck Snap, Wrench Limb, Wrench Spine, and Backbreaker. If they aren't there, consider a "Street" lens for the style and lobby the GM for your favorite Strong Guy

technique. Maybe you learned a stripped-down version of Boxing on the street and included Neck Snap, or someone in the big house taught you how to use a shiv with the Street version of Dagger Fighting . . . but tossed in Wrench Limb because of its bare-handed potential.

Soft arts, like T'ai Chi Chuan and Pa Kua Chuan, or those that emphasize skill over power, like Chin Na or Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, might not fit your conception of a tough fighter. But again, keep an open mind. Heavyweight Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu fighters are perfectly realistic, and the surprise value of a mammothly built fighter who uses delicate Chin Na locks to defeat his foes in close might be rewarding to play. Nonetheless, when in doubt, look for something that directly rewards your ST.

For armed styles, give particular attention to ones that use heavy weapons. These include Longsword Fighting and Kenjutsu (two-handed swords), Pollaxe and Naginatajitsu (or anything under Polearm Fighting, page 187 of *GURPS Martial Arts,* for polearms), and Quarterstaff (and anything under Staff Fighting, page 192). General armed styles -- Masters of Defense Weapon Training, Krabi Krabong, Banshay, and Kobujutsu -- also favor powerful fighters. Unlike skilled fighters or someone with Weapon Masters, your ST score is sufficient to deal your full damage with these weapons without needing to plunk down a lot of points. You can learn a large number of weapons at a relatively low skill level, and then focus on one or two within the style. That way, you are versatile but also have sufficient ability in a choice weapon or two to face down skilled fighters.

Some armed techniques are especially useful for big fighters. Armed Grapple depends on your skill to catch the enemy, but once you have him, you can execute a takedown, pin, choke, or lock . . . with a two-handed weapon you've already put in position. (With a one-handed one, you'll need to Ready first.) The Hook technique requires a Contest of ST to pull them down once you hook them, but that's a contest you'll win. The same principle applies to Sweep.

Certain techniques default from Strength. Realistic ones include Neck Snap, Wrench Limb, Wrench Spine. Cinematic ones feature Backbreaker, Piledriver, and Snap Weapon. Any of these techniques can be used by a Strong Guy, even if they haven't been studied; just use the default. With a high ST score (15 or more), most of these are reliable enough to depend on in combat.

High-tech Strong Guys should take a look at the One-Man Army style in *GURPS High-Tech.*

Conclusion

The most important characteristic of strong guys is strength. But you can't just pay attention to your Strength score. Armed with a muscular fistful of points, the tactics in Part I, and the tips in this article, you're set to pack on the ST points and get fighting!

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Nibá the Shaman

for *GURPS*

by Phil Masters

Nibá is a shamanic magic-worker dwelling in a sub-Arctic region, with powers and skills appropriate to those conditions. He's presented here as one of the Sami people of far northern Europe (previously known as Lapps), but he could easily enough be shifted to a setting with a similar environment and culture (such as the far northern Nomad Lands of *GURPS Banestorm's* Yrth). He can be used in a range of campaign types, so long as they can include powerful spirit-based magic in the hands of remote but not completely concealed experts.

In a supers game, he might sometimes be seen as the heroic defender of his homeland, but also, more often, as a rather crazy, sometimes unhelpful figure to whom super-mages might go for special advice and training, which in turn often comes with a strange price attached. In a "secret magic" game, he might have to be played as a bit more secretive, but the sheer remoteness of his home would help keep him concealed; he'd then be someone for PCs to meet when they have to travel northwards or when they need help with strange spirits from the northern lands. (In a *GURPS Cabal* game, he'd mostly avoid cabalists, seeing them as sinister and overly obsessed with dealings with the wrong kind of spirits, but he might be willing to trade lore if correctly approached with a very well-calculated offer.) In a "Weird War II" game, he could be encountered on the fringes of events, perhaps aiding the heroes against twisted Nazi sorcerers or militantly materialist commissars, but mostly concerned to maintain some kind of stability on the far northern flanks of the Finnish theater as the darkness of the modern world completes the occultation of spiritual power. And in a "Heaven vs. Hell" campaign, he might see himself as part of a third force, deeply suspicious of the great and arrogant powers of the universe just as his mundane neighbors may be cautious of the modern world's material goods, but fully aware of their raw power and so appropriately cautious of their agents. In all cases, he should strike even magic-wielding PCs as *strange* -- something from outside their regular range of experience, whatever that might be and despite the fact that he's fully human by most measures. He could also appear in multiple campaigns in the same setting, even in events which occur centuries apart; he seems to be effectively immortal.

Nibá is a major figure in his immediate home area, commanding considerable respect from his neighbors -- but, like many shamans, he's something of a loner, and is regarded as rather worrying and uncanny even by those humans whom he helps. (He doesn't see himself as solitary, however; he's almost always surrounded by spirits.) These quasi-solitary tendencies partly explain why Nibá hasn't moved to warmer, more populous regions; he's more comfortable in the wilderness, and sheer habit has a lot of force, too, even for someone with Nibá's willpower and intelligence. In addition, he has built up considerable knowledge of and contacts among the local spirits; he might have to start from scratch if he moved elsewhere. And, in fact, he has a real sense of duty to his people; shamans tend to drill this sort of attitude into their apprentices, as one who loses interest in helping others can all too easily tip over into dark madness, which usually leads to trouble for *everyone*. Incidentally, contacting him can be a rather weird procedure in itself; the best approach may well be to use an odd ritual to invoke some kind of minor messenger spirit.

Nibá *is* powerful, with enough arcane might to escape the effects of age. In fact, no one knows exactly how old he really is -- and he isn't telling, possibly because he isn't very clear on exact dates himself. He projects something of the image of timeless arcane power incarnate, perhaps because he really has achieved that status, perhaps just because an effective shaman needs to keep other people in awe. Even with his real power, it's convenient for him to keep other people a little bit nervous, and hence respectful, and it wouldn't be surprising if he has the act well down by now. His age in turn means that he has accumulated considerable knowledge, but this power also derives partly from a willingness to achieve altered states of consciousness by the most expedient methods to hand, which would be downright dangerous for most people. Going to him for training or insights can be hard on the brain.

Personality, Perceptions, and Poisons

It could also involve tricky negotiations. Nibá is good at "reading" people, animals, and spirits; the problem is, he believes that he is not merely good, but more or less infallible, and he tends to act on his opinions as though they were absolute certainties. He's intensely, even ruthlessly judgmental. If he finds someone undesirable on a first encounter, it's very difficult to get him to change his mind . . . and he firmly believes that he has the *right* to judge. He also draws little or no emotional distinction between the mundane, material world and the realm of spirits. He understands the difference between physical and intangible beings perfectly well, and indeed he can work powerful magic that hinges on the division, but he deals with beings and forces on both sides of the division with equal ease, and doesn't respect spirits any more or less than mortals . . . except insofar as they tend to be more powerful. In fact, he has a strong sense that all sentient beings are part of a complex hierarchy, in which some of the most powerful happen to be spirits; there also happen to be some less powerful spirits and very powerful material beings. He also has a very keen sense that his place in that hierarchy is fairly high.

This is another of Nibá's central personality traits; while he isn't overwhelmingly arrogant, and he will often help others for no reward other than gratitude if that's all they can afford, he has a very, very clear sense of his own worth, and he expects to receive the respect and honor he is due. This includes material rewards such as gifts or shelter when he needs them; in particular, he is a big eater who enjoys his food. (He likes a drink, too, though generally in moderation; self-control is important to him.) Although he burns food off fairly effectively thanks to his outdoor life, he is noticeably overweight. He might be compared to a career policeman who is proud of the badge (and who enjoys his donuts), except that he deals with powerful supernatural forces rather than petty criminals; he expects respect for his work, is at the very least curt when he doesn't get it, and also expects the pay that's supposed to come with his position. He doesn't have any delusions of grandeur; he *knows* that he is powerful . . . more powerful than many spirits, in fact, and if spirits are treated with reverence and awe, well, he must be due the same. As a matter of social convention, he expects to be offered good food and drink by anyone he meets -- or at least anyone he helps -- as a matter of course, with no comment or thanks required.

His aptitude for magic largely derives from his keen perceptions, which have relatively mundane as well as arcane aspects. His raw power involves an ability to detach himself from normal physical limitations and to perceive the world from a very strange, arcane, mystical point of view. To accomplish and reinforce this, Nibá makes use of psychoactive substances: specifically, the fly agaric mushroom, *Amanita muscaria,* which most people would classify as simply poisonous. This makes him rather *strange* by most people's standards; he spends much of his time in a semi-hallucinatory state, and his more polite social skills are unpracticed at the best of times. However, while Nibá usually has a few of the red-and-white heads of this mushroom in his belt pouch, to chew when he needs to unleash his full power, he'll usually advise anyone else against experimenting with it. As he explains, he's somewhat hardened against its effects, and he knows what makes an appropriate dose for himself; for almost anyone else, his habits would be fairly reliably deadly. (Actually, he appears to be almost immune to some of the non-psychoactive toxins -- but even he is still rationally cautious.) However, if anyone *insists* that they need to learn some of Nibá's arts, and he hasn't taken to them especially well, he may feel that they deserve whatever happens to them; even if he likes someone, if they look to take training from him, he'll assume that they've accepted the risks. Still, he won't usually *deliberately* poison anyone . . .

(It is said that some shamans who employ fly agaric's hallucinogenic powers protect themselves against its worst effects by feeding the mushroom to their reindeer, then collecting and drinking the reindeer's urine, which supposedly contains most of the psychoactive elements but fewer of the toxins. Nibá would say that this is slow, eliminates some useful effects of the mushroom, makes the dosage harder to judge, and is *unfair to the reindeer.* Other shamans have been heard to say that Nibá is crazy.)

Nibá's Powers

As a shaman, Nibá is a specialist in dealings with the spirit world. His magic, which, in **GURPS** mechanical terms, uses the Ritual Magic rules from page 242 of the **Basic Set,** technically involves the invocation of minor specialist spirits which will perform specific tasks on command; GMs can rule that any spell effect which can't plausibly be explained in terms of spirit invocation is beyond him -- though this shouldn't exclude much, given what spirits might be considered capable of achieving. Many of his demonstrated abilities require spells from **GURPS Magic.**

Incidentally, he rarely casts "Flying Carpet" on an actual *carpet;* he prefers to use a sleigh as a vehicle.

He doesn't need rituals for his more common operations, though, given his specially trained, psychoactively augmented perceptions and spiritual "authority." This is represented by a number of advantages, some of them with limitations such as Magical (see page 27 of **GURPS Powers** -- this is equivalent to Mana Sensitive, page 34 of the **Basic Set**), Temporary Disadvantages (side-effects of the necessary *Amanita* consumption, spiritual effects, or both), and Trigger (*Amanita* consumption). He sometimes implies that he is more than human in some specific but important respects, and he may have a point, given that he can apparently transcend aging and mortality.

His magic should be played as having a raw, elemental flavor, full of the power of ice and blood. The spirits on which he calls represent the rawness of nature, not higher ethical powers or intellectual abstractions. He's not *unduly* violent, and nor does he ever engage in blood sacrifices, and he avoids and despises any hint of demon-worship, but his magic draws on the uncaring elements. He's far from inhumane, though; in his terms, the duty of a shaman is to mediate between the nature-spirits and his fellow humans, and his ultimate loyalties lie with his own kind. While he's sometimes capable of real kindness, he is cautious about using his magic for casual purposes; he's fully aware of its frightening power, and he doesn't take it lightly. On the other hand, he's fully confident in his own ability to handle it when necessary.

He also has a group of eight intangible "airy animal spirits" who serve his will; if he was a PC, these would certainly be classified as an Allies, increasing his point value. They act as his guides and aides in the spirit realm and sometimes assist him in other ways. To spiritual perceptions, they appear as misty animal shapes, but they have more intelligence than a mundane animal. They can possess and control ordinary animals, scout for Nibá in spirit form, and so on. (As an Ally Group, these beings would rate as being worth 75% of Nibá's total value and appearing on 15 or less, making them worth 54 points on his character sheet, and him worth 604 points in total.) He *also* has a Contact Group: a group of "earth spirits," possibly akin to the dwarfs of Norse myth, with a keen supernatural sense of the nature and position of the minerals around them, and considerable skill in working them. They can tell him about events on or under the soil of his homeland, providing skills such as Area Knowledge, Current Affairs (Regional), and Prospecting, and also supply Nibá with good-quality equipment on occasion.

Nibá the Shaman   *550 points*

5'10"; 220 lbs.; A ruddy, stocky figure, dressed all in furs, with a long, snaggled beard.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 14 [40].

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 15 [8]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 14 [0].
Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 6 [-10].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: Northern Sami (Native) [0]; Finnish (Accented) [4]; Norwegian (Accented) [4]; Russian (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Animal Empathy [5]; Channeling (Trigger, *Amanita,* Common, -20%) [8]; Charisma 1 [5]; Contact Group (Earth Spirits; Effective Skill 15, 15 or less; Usually Reliable) [60]; Empathy [15]; Indomitable [15]; Magery (Ritual) 2 [25]; Magery (Ritual) +2 (Trigger, *Amanita,* Common, -20%) [16]; Magic Resistance 4 (Improved, +150%; Temporary Disadvantage, Phantom Voices, Annoying, -5%; Trigger , *Amanita,* Common, -20%) [18]; Medium [10]; Night Vision 3 [3]; Outdoorsman 2 [20]; Reputation +1 (As a force to be reckoned with, in the mystical world; 10 or less; Large

class) [1]; Reputation +2 (As a respected shaman, among his neighbors and traditionalist Sami; All the time; Small class) [3]; Social Regard (Respected) +1 [5]; Spirit Empathy [10]; Temperature Tolerance (Cold Resistance) 20 (Temporary Disadvantage, Odious Personal Habit -2 (Weird Behavior), -10%; Trigger, *Amanita,* Common, -20%) [14]; Unaging (Magical, -10%) [14].

Perks: Autotrance [1].

Disadvantages

Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Charitable (15) [-7]; Gluttony (12) [- 5]; Overweight [-1]; Selfish (9) [-7]; Sense of Duty (The Sami People, Large Group) [-10]; Wealth (Struggling) [-10].

Quirks: Broad-Minded; Judgmental - stubborn about first impressions; Staid; Uncongenial [-4].

Skills

Animal Handling (Reindeer)-14 (IQ+1) [4]; Area Knowledge (Lapland)-16 (IQ+3) [8]; Bow-11 (DX+0) [2]; Brawling-12 (DX+1) [2]; Camouflage-15* (IQ+2) [1]; Climbing-10 (DX-1) [1]; First Aid/TL6 (Human)-14 (IQ+1) [2]; Fortune-Telling (Dream Interpretation)-16† (IQ+3) [1]; Hidden Lore (Spirit Lore)-15 (IQ+2) [8]; Housekeeping-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Hypnotism (Human)-12 (IQ-1) [2]; Knife-11 (DX+0) [1]; Knot-Tying-11 (DX+0) [1]; Mimicry (Animal Sounds)-13* (IQ+0) [1]; Mimicry (Bird Calls)-13* (IQ+0) [1]; Musical Instrument (Percussion)-11 (IQ-2) [1]; Naturalist (Earth)-14* (IQ+1) [2]; Navigation/TL6 (Land)-14* (IQ+1) [1]; Packing-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Pharmacy/TL3 (Herbal)-14 (IQ+1) [8]; Poisons/TL6-13 (IQ+0) [3]; Psychology (Human Applied)-13 (IQ+0) [4]; Ritual Magic (Shamanic)-20‡ (IQ+7) [20]; Skiing-13 (HT-1) [2]; Spear-10 (DX-1) [1]; Staff-10 (DX-1) [1]; Stealth-10 (DX-1) [1]; Survival (Arctic)-16* (Per+3) [4]; Survival (Woodlands)-15* (Per+2) [2]; Teamster (Reindeer)-15 (IQ+2) [8]; Theology (Sami Folk-Beliefs)-12 (IQ-1) [2]; Tracking-14* (Per+1) [1]; Traps/TL3-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Veterinary/TL4-12 (IQ-1) [2]; Weather Sense-13 (IQ+0) [2].

* Includes +2 for Outdoorsman.
† Includes +1 from Charisma and +3 from Empathy.
‡ Includes +4 for Magery; note that effective skill drops to 18 if Nibá doesn't have access to a supply of fly agaric or isn't using it for any other reason.

Paths: Animal-16 (IQ+3) [3]; Body Control-18 (IQ+5) [11]; Food-15 (IQ+2) [1]; Gate-15 (IQ+2) [1]; Healing-15 (IQ+2) [1]; Movement-16 (IQ+3) [3]; Necromantic-18 (IQ+5) [11]; Water-16 (IQ+3) [3]; Weather-16 (IQ+3) [3].

All include +4 for Magery. Note that all effective skills drop by 2 if Nibá doesn't have access to a supply of fly agaric or isn't using it for any other reason.

Techniques: Banish-16 [9]; Command Spirit (Nature Spirits)-16 [4]; Control Gate-12 [9]; Cure Disease-13 [4]; Ethereal Body-13 [2]; Flying Carpet-16 [4]; Hail-13 [5]; Plane Shift (Spirit Plane)-14 [11]; Rain of Ice Daggers-12 [9]; Relieve Madness-12 [7]; Seek Gate-11 [7].

All include +4 for Magery. Note that all effective skills drop by 2 if Nibá doesn't have access to a supply of fly agaric or isn't using it for any other reason.

Notes

Nibá is defined here assuming a TL8 (modern-day) campaign, but he can be used in *many* other settings. Hence, his actual tech level depends on that of the game, but will usually be a couple of levels less than the baseline; he lives in a remote area and has little interest in new ideas. However, if the campaign TL is 4 or less, Nibá may not be *very* far behind; in such a case, the GM can reduce or eliminate his Low TL disadvantage. The TLs assigned to some of his skills are similarly adjustable, but some of these have been set even lower than his personal TL to reflect his old-

fashioned approach and tendency to work with minimal, primitive equipment and concepts.

His Wealth level and Status are complex issues, and even more campaign-dependent. He doesn't have much in the way of possessions by the standards of an advanced industrial society, but he does own a well-made sleigh, a few reindeer, and some good low-tech weapons; by the standards of his *own* society, he is quite well off. The above treatment views him from the point of view of the wider world from which the PCs will probably come. Likewise, he might be considered to have some positive Status, as a well-respected professional in his field -- but most people other than his neighbors would perceive him as a wild and scruffy backwoodsman, at least on a first meeting. Hence, he has been given Social Regard rather than raised Status.

The Sami speak a number of related languages, of which Northern Sami is today the most widespread. Nibá might be assumed to speak at least a little of some of the others, or at least to be able to get by on "default knowledge" from his native tongue. The Sami people are in close enough contact with Europe that they probably don't qualify for a distinct Cultural Familiarity in *GURPS* terms, but some games might treat this differently, especially if they are set during earlier periods or the GM wants to play up Nibá's strangeness even more.

Nibá *is* meant to be *powerful;* in games where ambient mana levels never rise above Low, GMs should feel free to improve his magical skills substantially, either directly or by giving him extra levels of Magery. The ritual magic system also makes him very versatile; for convenience, GMs should generally decide before the game begins which spells he's able and likely to use in the session, and calculate all the appropriate defaults and parameters in advance.

Animal Spirits   *450 points*

ST 14 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%; Size +1, -10%) [20]; **DX** 13 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [36]; **IQ** 8 [-40]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14 [0]; Will 12 [20]; Per 13 [25]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9; SM +1.

Social Background

TL: 3 [-25].
CF: Northern Spirit Worlds (Native) [0].
Languages: Northern Sami (Native/Illiterate) [-3].

Advantages

3D Spatial Sense [10]; Astral Entity (Insubstantial has Affects Substantial Enhancement) [251]; Claws (Hooves) [3]; Damage Resistance 1 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3]; Discriminatory Smell [15]; Enhanced Move (Ground) 3 [60]; Night Vision 3 [3]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Possession (IQ 5- Creatures Only, -25%; Spiritual, -20%) [55]; Speak With Animals [25]; Striker (Crushing -- Antlers; Cannot Parry, -40%) [3].

Perks: Fur [1].

Disadvantages

Bestial [-10]; Callous [-5]; Duty (to Nibá, 12 or less) [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Quadruped [-35]; Weak Bite [-2].

Quirks: Congenial; Staid [-2].

Skills

Area Knowledge (Spirit Plane)-12 (IQ+4) [12]; Running-13 (HT+1) [4]; Stealth-14 (DX+1) [4]; Survival (Woodlands)-13 (Per+0) [2].

Notes

To anyone who can perceive astral spirits, these beings appear as rather nebulous four-legged creatures. In combat, however, they manifest hooves and short, blunt antlers. While they have some understanding of the human world, they evidently haven't paid much attention to technology in recent centuries; in most games, they should be treated as operating 5 TLs behind the campaign standard. However, if the campaign TL is 4 or less, they will simply be TL 0, and of course will get fewer points back from this than listed above increasing their net total.

If you consider the spirit plane to have a physical temperature, these entities are used to cold conditions; their native temperature range can be set accordingly.

Plot Ideas

You'd Better Watch Out: Nibá is a powerful NPC, but not generally likely to be directly hostile to PCs or their interests. However, he can be *difficult,* and if he does take against anyone, he is brusque at best, deadly at worst. Heroes who find that they *have* to deal with him for aid or advice, or who encounter him in the course of wide-ranging adventures, will have to work around his foibles. And if they are engaged in magical activities anywhere that he sees as his territory, they would be well advised to approach him first, even if they aren't doing anything dangerous or immoral; his Contact Group or other spirits will very likely alert him to the presence of such outsiders, and he regards himself as the local governing authority in such matters.

Won't you guide my sleigh? Things get even more complicated if the PCs have to approach Nibá for aid or advice. This might mean guidance through the northern spirit-realms, information on fighting monsters, dark spirits, or corrupt magic-workers from his land, or training or technical advice regarding some crucial ritual. He won't necessarily be unfriendly to visitors, but he'll expect even more respect, and very likely assign a price to the task. It may take him a while to decide what such outsiders have that he can use, and his decision may involve anything from minor (if outdated) luxury goods, through the acquisition of rare and bizarre herbal ingredients from around the world, to a dangerous quest through the spirit plane to fight some formidable and ancient spirit. Of course, in the latter case, it will be hard for Nibá to admit that any spirit is too powerful for him to tackle, so he may just imply that this task is beneath him, or he may say that it has some peculiar power to defeat his own abilities, which shouldn't worry these foreigners with their alien magics or weapons.

Coming to Town: Nibá rarely has much cause to travel outside of his home region . . . which is how he prefers things, because he knows very well that if and when he does, he's at a serious disadvantage. He lacks experience of the modern world and its technology, the local spirits may be unfamiliar or just sparse, the people he meets see him as a wild-eyed, fur-clad crazy man, rather than as an awe-inspiring spirit-commander. But if a threat to his people has to be pursued back to its source, or an intruder steals something of importance (perhaps from the spirit realm), it would hardly be the way of a great shaman to shy away from the task.

Getting PCs involved in the ensuing fun shouldn't be difficult. Perhaps they know Nibá from some earlier incident, and either owe him a favor or feel that anything which demands his attention must be serious. Perhaps they know him only by repute, but have a technical interest in his skills and take the chance to observe him. Or perhaps they feel obliged to oppose him, either because he's being unreasonable (on their terms), because he's acting like a supernatural vigilante and they have more respect for whatever law applies, or because, somehow, it's them he's after. Whatever the reason, the ensuing adventure can involve a strange mixture of social comedy, magical combat, and ethical debate.

References

- Fly Agaric/ *Amanita muscaria*: Wikipedia, [h2g2](h2g2).

- The Sami People: [Wikipedia](#).

Holy Symbols Mundane and Magical

for *d20 System*

by Lloyd Brown III

A religious character's holy symbol is the character's most identifying piece of equipment. It identifies to the world who or what the character worships, and this bit of information brings with it preconceptions based on the worshipper and the viewer. It is also the crux of the character's divine power, providing a tangible link to an intangible force.

Holy symbols can be held in the hand, but they often come with a metal chain by which they can be worn around the neck. Magical holy symbols either occupy the amulet body slot if they come with a chain or are unslotted items (thus requiring greater cost to craft).

Magical holy symbols are often restricted in their use. They might function for any character with the same alignment, a similar alignment (all Good characters, for example), or for characters who worship the god represented by the symbol. They might be usable only by characters who channel positive or negative energy. Lastly, they might be restricted to characters with access to a particular domain.

Except where otherwise indicated, an unholy symbol is treated the same as a holy symbol. A character may only have one holy symbol at a time serve as the focus of his faith; changing from one symbol to another would require some kind of ceremony or other non-trivial means of announcing his usage of a new symbol.

Mundane Holy Symbols

Arcane

The arcane holy symbol is carved with greater detail than a normal holy symbol. It is usually made from silver or electrum and traced with arcane symbols. Often, it incorporates lesser symbols of the faith in its designs.

Once per day, a spellcaster who uses an arcane holy symbol as a divine focus adds +1 to the save DC against that spell. This bonus only applies to a spell of less than 3rd level.

Celestial

A celestial holy symbol is crafted from some unique material not found to the material plane. It might be wooden, metallic, or completely different. It possesses an aura of the alignment of the plane on which it was crafted. Celestial holy symbols are very rare, even on the outer planes. When referring to an unholy symbol, this type of item is fiendish.

Celestial holy symbols allow a character who channels positive energy to turn or destroy evil outsiders as a good cleric turns undead. Fiendish holy symbols allow a character who channels negative energy to rebuke or command good outsiders as an evil cleric turns undead.

Darkwood

A darkwood holy symbol looks like a normal holy symbol of any other wood, except that it shows exceptional craftsmanship and is virtually weightless. Some of them feature thin ivory inlays, but clerics insist that they function best when unsullied by other materials. Darkwood is very hard and resists scratching or casual wear. Some of the darkwood holy symbols in use today have been around for generations.

Undead turned by a darkwood holy symbol remain turned for an additional 1d6 rounds.

Dragonbone

Dragonbone holy symbols, as the name indicates, are made from the bones of a dead metallic dragon. For unholy symbols, the makers use the bones of chromatic dragons. In either case, the bone is treated and coated to resist decay. The amount of detail is usually low because of the difficulty of working with the raw material.

Undead turned by a dragonbone holy symbol (or rebuked by an unholy symbol) suffer 1d6 points of damage of a type appropriate to the type of dragon-usually fire or acid. They suffer this damage at the same time as the other effects of turning, and they get no saving throw.

Gold

A gold holy symbol is the mark of a wealthy priest or experienced adventurer. In some cases, it is a sign of vanity and desire for personal gain at the expense of the church. In other cases, it might be a sign of great success within a church-if the church can afford this indulgence, the faithful must be filling its coffers with largesse. Other times, the gold holy symbol is a gift for a favored speaker or a reward for a challenging task.

Once per day, a gold holy symbol provides a +1 bonus on a turning check and turning damage for that check.

Ivory

An ivory holy symbol is more stylized than one made of metal or wood. In some cases, it might be difficult to identify the nature of the symbol due to the artist's personal touches. A worshipper or priest carrying such a symbol might be an iconoclast, a heretic, or a member of a religious minority. While his faith is sincere, it is often unorthodox. (Of course, in some religions, ivory might be a standard material, in which case this trend is invalid.)

A character using an ivory holy symbol as a divine focus receives a +2 bonus on Concentration checks made while spellcasting.

Mithral

Mithral gleams like silver, but its shine is brighter and resists tarnish. Some of them include a single gemstone in a central part of the symbol, but most of them are plain, relying on the purity of the exotic metal to channel the god's power.

A character with access to divine spells can make a touch attack with a mithral holy symbol. This touch inflicts 2d4 points of damage to undead or evil outsiders, as if they had been splashed by holy water.

Platinum

A platinum holy symbol make a clear statement about its owner: this character is wealthy and powerful.

Once per day, a character with a platinum holy symbol can turn undead as a move action instead of a standard action.

Relic

A relic holy symbol has a special compartment built inside that houses a part of a famous saint or hero of the faith. It might be a hair, a bone, a tooth, or even a few threads from an article of clothing. As with a sacred holy symbol, a character might recognize the symbol. In this case, because of the item's fame, the Knowledge (religion) check to recognize the symbol is DC 25.

When turning undead with a relic holy symbol, you can choose which undead are affected first. Normally, the closest undead are affected first.

Sacred

A sacred holy symbol is usually made of some exotic material like ivory, copper, or bronze. Originally normal in its effects, the sacred holy symbol belonged to a powerful or famous cleric of the faith. It might have been used by a special outsider, a high priest, or a martyr. They are unique; a character can recognize a sacred holy symbol and its story of origin with a Knowledge (religion) check DC 30.

When used to turn undead, the sacred holy symbol grants a range of 90 feet instead of the normal 60 feet.

Silver

A silver holy symbol is a more expensive display of the cleric's devotion. With proper care, it is a bright center of attention in a crowded worship hall or on the battlefield. When used to turn undead, it seems to shine with a brilliant white flame.

Once per day, a silver holy symbol provides a +1 bonus on turning damage.

Wooden

A wooden holy symbol is the standard holy symbol of most common clerics. It is inexpensive, easily replaced if damaged by accident or maliciousness, and perfectly serviceable for spellcasting and prayer. It provides no special benefits.

Holy Symbol	Cost	Weight
Arcane	900 gp	1 lb
Celestial	8,000 gp	--
Darkwood	350 gp	--
Dragonbone	2,000 gp	--
Gold	250 gp	1 lb
Ivory	100 gp	--
Mithral	2,500 gp	1 lb
Platinum	2500 gp	1 lb
Relic	5,000 gp	--
Sacred	4,000 gp	--
Silver	25 gp	1 lb
Wooden	1 gp	--

Magical Holy Symbols

Clerics with valuable holy symbols attempt to protect these holy symbols from incidental harm or from the hazards of their adventures. Glyphs of warding are common, usually tied to a spell like blindness/deafness. Blast glyphs are risky; they might go off accidentally and harm the cleric or an innocent worshipper.

Clerics also enchant their holy symbols to increase their potency. These effects tend to increase the magical uses to which the holy symbol is applies: turning undead and serving as a divine focus. They might also host a variety of effects concerning undead or other archetypal foes.

Icon of the Dungeons

This image sacred to certain faiths is rendered to show an opposition to chaos and destruction. It allows you to turn or destroy oozes as a good cleric turns or destroys undead once/day.

Strong conjuration; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to turn or rebuke undead; Price 5,100 gp.

Icon of the Forestlord

This icon shows images of control over nature, often in the form of a lightning bolt or flood. It allows you to command or rebuke plants as an evil cleric commands or rebukes undead once/day.

Strong conjuration; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to turn or rebuke undead, blight; Price 5,100 gp.

Icon of the Sewers

An image of an animal associated with destroying rats, like a snake, dog or cat is often featured on this icon. It allows you to command or rebuke vermin as an evil cleric commands or rebukes undead once/day.

Strong conjuration; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to turn or rebuke undead, repel vermin; Price 5,100 gp.

Mark of the Enchanter

When used as the divine focus for magic fang, greater magic fang, magic weapon, greater magic weapon or magic vestment, the bonus granted is increased by +1.

Moderate transmutation; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to turn or rebuke undead, magic weapon; Price 6,000 gp.

Mark of the Summoner

When used as the divine focus for a summon monster spell, all summoned creatures gain an additional hit point/level.

Minor transmutation; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to turn or rebuke undead, summon monster I; Price 4,000 gp.

Martyr's Mark

This holy symbol of wood or copper is plain and unadorned. Once per day, a character holding it can turn undead as a 1st-level cleric. A character must hold or wear the martyr's mark for 24 hours before using this ability.

Minor transmutation; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to turn or rebuke undead; Price 5,000 gp.

Shield of the Faithful

When used to repel a vampire, the shield of the faithful prevents the vampire from approaching within 10 feet instead of the normal 5 feet. Also, the vampire cannot attack the character with ranged attacks or target the character with spells. The vampire can cast area of effect spells that encompass the character as normal.

Strong abjuration; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to turn or rebuke undead, invisibility to undead; Price 4,500 gp.

Symbol of Mercy

This symbol invokes the image of a god of healing, medicine, or strength. When used as the divine focus for a spontaneously-cast cure spell, the spell cures an additional hit point per spell level. If the spell affects multiple targets, each target receives the bonus healing.

Minor conjuration; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to spontaneously cast cure spells; Price 4,900 gp.

Titan's Shield

When brandished in one hand, this holy symbol provides a sacred bonus to saving throws. It takes a move action to gain this bonus; the bonus remains until the beginning of the character's next action.

Strong abjuration; CL 1st to 15th (3 times the bonus); Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to turn or rebuke undead; Price +1,000 gp (+1), 2,000 gp (+2), 3,000 gp (+3), 4,000 gp (+4), 5,000 gp (+5).

Warded

Each of these items bears an alignment appropriate to the divine force it represents. A character holding a warded holy symbol gains the benefit of protection from good, evil, law, or chaos, according to the alignment of the holy symbol. The symbol provides only one such benefit, even if two alignments are appropriate.

Strong abjuration; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, protection from evil; Price 4,000 gp.

Holy Symbol	Cost	Weight
Icon of the Dungeons	5,100 gp	--
Icon of the Forestlord	5,100 gp	--
Icon of the Sewers	5,100 gp	--
Mark of the Enchanter	6,000 gp	--
Mark of the Summoner	4,000 gp	--
Martyr's Mark	5,000 gp	--
Shield of the Faithful	4,500 gp	--
Symbol of Mercy	4,900 gp	--
Titan's Shield +1	1,000 gp	1 lb
Titan's Shield +2	2,000 gp	1 lb
Titan's Shield +3	3,000 gp	1 lb
Titan's Shield +4	4,000 gp	1 lb
Titan's Shield +5	5,000 g	1 lb
Warded	4,000 gp	1 lb

Hell's Black Intelligencer: *Richard III*

"Foul devil, for God's sake, hence, and trouble us not;
For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,
Fill'd it with cursing cries and deep exclaims.
If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
Behold this pattern of thy butcheries."
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III,* I:ii:53-57

Now once more it's Yuletide, the long night of the year when thoughts turn to the fires of dramaturgy. Or mine do, anyway, and [each year](#) we puzzle out yet another batch of sorcerous hints in the works of Shakespeare. This time out, it's a delight to view the heinous deeds of the crouch-back, and learn the true meaning of Antichristmas.

"Bear with me; I am hungry for revenge,
And now I cloy me with beholding it.
Thy Edward he is dead, that kill'd my Edward;
Thy other Edward dead, to quit my Edward;
Young York he is but boot, because both they
Match not the high perfection of my loss:
Thy Clarence he is dead that stabb'd my Edward;
And the beholders of this tragic play,
The adulterate Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey,
Untimely smother'd in their dusky graves."
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III,* IV:iv:64-73

Now as it happens, Richard, Duke of Gloucester and brother of the victorious King Edward IV of England, is bored in peacetime. As a crippled hunchback, he has no other outlet but Machiavellian maneuvers. He convinces the King Edward that their brother George, Duke of Clarence, is plotting against him, and then convinces Clarence that it is Edward's queen Elizabeth who has intrigued to imprison him in the Tower. Richard interrupts the funeral procession of the dead King Henry VI to woo Henry's daughter-in-law, Lady Anne, despite having killed both her husband and her father-in-law. Amazingly, this works. At court, his further machinations are interrupted by a lengthy series of curses delivered by Henry's widow, Queen Margaret. Two murderers (on Richard's orders) enter the Tower and drown Clarence in a barrel of wine. Edward's attempts to foster reconciliation in his court are cut short by his death. Richard and his ally Buckingham arrest Elizabeth's kinsmen, gain custody of Edward's heirs, and pop them into the Tower to await the young prince's coronation. Despite having been aggrieved by Elizabeth's faction, Lord Hastings refuses to go along with Richard's plan to usurp the crown.

At the meeting to plan the coronation, Richard accuses Hastings of witchcraft and has him executed. Then, he reveals that the young princes are bastards who cannot inherit, and with pious dumbshow convinces the Mayor of London to accede to his crowning as sole legitimate heir. Richard is still worried about his claim to the throne, so he has a destitute gentleman named Tyrrel kill the princes in the Tower. Further, he attempts to court his own niece, Edward's daughter, Lady Anne having conveniently died offstage. But Richard arrogantly refuses Buckingham a preference, alienating his key ally just before the Earl of Richmond (a kinsman of dead King Henry) lands with an army of Frenchmen in Wales. Lord Stanley, Richmond's stepfather, offers Richard an alliance which Richard, though suspicious enough to take Stanley's son hostage, must perforce accept with Buckingham gone. Richard prepares to meet Richmond in battle at Bosworth Field, and spends the night in near-collapse, visited by the ghosts of all his victims. Regardless, he charges into battle, despite the news that Stanley has indeed gone over to Richmond, and is slain. The victorious Richmond (the future Henry VII) vows to marry Edward's daughter and unify England under his new Tudor dynasty.

"But say, my lord, it were not register'd,
Methinks the truth should live from age to age,

As 'twere retail'd to all posterity,
Even to the general all-ending day."
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III,* III:i:79-82

Shakespeare took the bulk of this story from Raphael Holinshed's 1587 *Chronicles,* although the dramatic theme of Nemesis came from Edward Halle's 1548 *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York,* which also served as a source for Holinshed. One or two elements came from *A Mirror For Magistrates,* a book of historical morality tales revised in 1563 by one William Baldwin, and reprinted in 1587. Everybody involved took their portrait of Richard from Sir Thomas More's 1513 *Life of Richard III,* which came from a sincere desire to butter up King Henry VII by blackguarding his predecessor. When, exactly, Shakespeare wrote the play is a fraught question. The first quarto edition of *Richard III* was registered in 1597, and it is obviously a sequel to, or even a completion of, Shakespeare's *Henry VI* trilogy (or tetralogy), which would argue for a date close to 1592, when we know that *Henry VI, Part 3* had been performed. The only problem is that there is good evidence that *Henry VI, Part 1* was brand-new in 1592, which throws the dates for *Part 3* into a tizzy. Worse yet, the First Folio adds some 200 lines and makes any number of improvements in the play, which would be acceptable if the First Folio hadn't been assembled in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death.

"Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me, as I halt by them."
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III,* I:i:22-25

So was the text of the play, likewise, "deform'd, unfinish'd"? If so, it would get even moreso: The impresario-poet Colley Cibber put together a godawful abridgement in 1700 that became the default stage version for over two centuries. But the real deformity, monstrosity, "indigested lump" is Richard, as he and every other character in the play reminds us. But is that always a bad thing? In *Henry VI, Part 3* Richard brags that he can "add colours to the chameleon, change shapes with Proteus," which implies that Richard's misshapen self is but a guise that he can shift. In IV:v, Elizabeth swears she will not serve as go-between for Richard and her daughter "Unless thou couldst put on some other shape." And about 150 lines later, she agrees to do so. Richard's other great self-symbols are the mirror and the shadow, two more exemplars of shape-changing. The mirror famously shows something different to every beholder, and shadows grow and shrink depending on the hour.

"See how I am bewitch'd; behold mine arm
Is, like a blasted sapling, wither'd up:
And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch,
Consorted with that harlot strumpet Shore,
That by their witchcraft thus have marked me."
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III,* III:iv:72-76

The rest of the play shows some standard earmarks we've come to recognize as Shakespeare's magical signature. The unlucky Lord Hastings is twinned with a walk-on pursuivant; there are two Elizabeths (a mother and a daughter), and two Edwards (the king and his heir). From the opening soliloquy -- "Now is the winter of our discontent/Made glorious summer" -- to the final battle between Richard and Richmond (who speaks of "summer fields"), the old winter-summer dichotomy is omnipresent, not least in the white (winter) rose of the Yorkists and the red (summer) rose of the Lancastrians. (The battle gives us our major time-shifting moment when the sun "disdains to shine" in the morning.) When Richmond wins the battle, he proposes an alchemical marriage of the two colors, of White Queen and Red King. Shakespeare gives us two murderers of Clarence, but our three murderers return to kill the princes in the Tower. Tyrrel recruits (offstage) two accomplices, Dighton and Forrest, which means we wind up seeing a total of three murderers on stage, though not all together.

There are even three witches, by the beginning of IV:iv, when the Duchess of York (Richard's mother) joins the dowager Queen Margaret (the prophetic crone) and the young, beautiful widow Queen Elizabeth (the maiden) in cursing Richard. (The woman named as a witch by Richard, Anne Shore, never appears on stage.) Margaret

specifically embodies the figure from Senecan tragedy known as the Fury, and the play hints that she has come back from the land of the dead ("I do find more pain in banishment Than death can yield me here . . ."), which might make the Three Sisters three aspects of Hecate or the three Furies. Clarence actually evokes the Furies during his lengthy dream sequence, which becomes an obvious -- and then, an explicit -- initiatory journey to the underworld in his dream, complete with implied shamanic body replacement (gems for eyes). This, combined with his theological disputations with his murderers, implies that Clarence is a priest-king, and sets up yet another triplicity. If Clarence is Jupiter, then Richard the warrior is Mars (he even conquers a woman with a sword, although Richard-like he does it backward), leaving the uxorious, lecherous, but sunny and fertile third brother Edward as Quirinus.

"What, do you tremble? Are you all afraid?
Alas, I blame you not; for you are mortal,
And mortal eyes cannot endure the devil."
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III,* I:ii:46-48

But protean Richard embodies another figure still better than Mars. His first miracle -- the seduction of Anne, turning hate into lust -- occurs at a funeral. He makes the dead bleed, not rise. He massacres the innocents, like Herod. He orders the parodic "christening" of Clarence, and makes his death a parodic Eucharist. He is rejected, not mourned, by his mother. He is not Adam Kadmon, the ideal son of Adam, but a misshapen "toad." His emblem is the hog, where the demon Legion dwells. He honors the letter of the law while violating its core, and seeks the outer show of piety while inwardly villainous. He takes the crown despite the mob's disinterest, not the other way around. At his Last Supper, there are eleven ghosts (and one traitor, if you count Stanley, wherever he is) of victims, not eleven apostles. Finally, he dies fighting, and his crown is not of thorns, but (in a legend Shakespeare oddly didn't include) found on them. In short, Richard is the Antichrist.

"Come, cousin, canst thou quake, and change thy colour,
Murder thy breath in the middle of a word,
And then begin again, and stop again,
As if thou wert distraught and mad with terror?"
-- William Shakespeare, *Richard III,* III:v:1-4

So to what end would Shakespeare have written a dramaturgical capacitor for the Antichrist, a magical athanor in which to distill his infernal power? (And who wrote the patch on it in 1622? Bacon?) It's difficult to say, although one function of the Antichrist is to draw out the Last Emperor, known as King Arthur to all good British occultists such as King Edward IV. It's possible that the endless performances of *Richard III* (it went through seven editions by 1622, so we know it was popular) were building up a charge that would manifest in the brief, glorious career of Crown Prince Henry. Another possibility is a very dangerous attempt at sorcerously scapegoating Good Queen Bess' own hunchbacked "intelligencer" Robert Cecil, who may have retaliated by ordering the termination of Kit Marlowe. But whatever purpose Shakespeare, or his patron Lord Ferdinando Strange, intended with this Antichrist Engine, it apparently went unfulfilled. In Britain, anyway.

But somebody may have figured out the method, plumbed the dramaturgical circuitry in Shakespeare's play. Junius Brutus Booth was born on the same day as the Bavarian Illuminati, May 1, 1776. His first performance on a royal stage was as Richard III at Covent Garden on February 12, 1817. His first performance in the New World, likewise: Richard III at Richmond, Virginia, on July 6, 1821. And he brought up his sons in the same way: Edwin Booth's first stage performance (in 1849) was as Tressel in *Richard III,* but two years later, Edwin's first lead performance was as (you guessed it) Richard III, understudying his sick father. Indeed, Edwin performed as Richard III for Abraham Lincoln in 1864, on March 10: the beginning of the Dionysia, the sacred days that begat Western theater. And his son John Wilkes Booth made his 1855 stage debut in *Richard III* playing Richmond -- the tyrant-killer. But something had gone wrong; Booth, Sr. had died of drink, though his tipple was rum not malmsey. (But Booth, Sr. suspected something; like the flamen dialis, the Roman priest of Jupiter, he ate no meat.) So John Wilkes was unbalanced -- he played Richard III on his third major stage appearance (doubling up the thirds to make up for losing the charge from a debut, perhaps), but was shot in the leg the next day. Was John Wilkes' un-Ricardian handsomeness taking its toll by crippling his foot? He made up for it on November 2, when he played Richard III for his first performance at Ford's Theater. In his mind, he was Richmond, and when Richmond was burnt, perhaps the safeties on the play, even in

Cibber's stepped-down version, came off. He went back to the theater to kill a true king on Good Friday, 1865, a king whose birthday was the same date as his own father's first invocation of Antichrist. The play powered his murder, and then it presented the reckoning; Booth broke his leg -- the mark of Richard Club-Foot -- and his companions deserted or betrayed him in their turn. The handsomest man in America was left a cripple in a field, praying for a horse, with Nemesis closing in.

Holiday Gift Exchange

for *HeroClix*

by Nikola Vrtis

It's that time of year again: time for the office holiday party! And that means a white elephant (or Yankee) gift exchange. Not familiar with the concept? You don't know what you're missing! (And if you *are* familiar with this ritual, please keep reading anyway; different folks have different ways of running them.) In general, each participant brings in one inexpensive wrapped gift -- sometimes useful, sometimes with an amusing concept -- and places it in a central location. Then each person picks a gift, either a wrapped one or a gift that someone else already chose.

In this version of the gift exchange, players use teams of *HeroClix* figures to snag gifts from a central location and bring them back to a starting point. The team with the most and best gifts at the end of the game wins.

Setting Up the Game

In this game, two to four players assemble teams of two or more *HeroClix* figures, with a maximum total of 200 points. To know how to use the figures, this game requires the *HeroClix* rules, which can be found on the WizKids Web site (on the rules page). The playing area can be a *HeroClix* map with a large area of at least eight squares on each side (such as a warehouse or an office) or a checker board with squares that are at least 1.5 inches on each side. The game also needs one or more printouts of the gift tokens and their explanations, plus several tokens or items representing office equipment and furniture.

The game requires at least two gifts per figure; thus, if there are two teams, one with three figures and the other with two figures, then 10 gifts are used. Shuffle the gift tokens face down and randomly choose the appropriate number; players may decide to use more gifts than the minimum if they want.

Most local and Internet retailers sell *HeroClix,* but players can use the basic generic characters created for the "Six 'Clix Morris" article and any sort of counter or figure with a base of no more than 1.5 inches at its widest point, such as Steve Jackson Games' *Cardboard Heroes Modern Characters.*

Players may include almost any character in their teams with a few exceptions: No flying, double-base, giant, or colossal characters are allowed. Additionally, participants may not use battlefield conditions or feats.

Each player selects one corner of the board and places his figures in the squares closest to that corner. Then, the players decide who goes first by each rolling two dice and adding the results. The highest roll goes first; reroll any ties. (If there are more than two participants, play moves to the right of the starting player.) Next, the players takes turns placing furniture and equipment tokens anywhere on the map or board. Finally, all of the gifts are placed faced down (blank side up) in one or two squares in the center of the board. The gift explanation cards are set off to the side. After the gifts have been placed, the game begins.

Playing the Game

Participants take turns in the same order as they put down tokens. For attacking, movement, and power use, refer to the *HeroClix* rules, with the following modifications.

Quick Links to Useful Stuff

- *HeroClix* Rules
- Gift tokens and abilities
- Generic *HeroClix* Characters

Movement

Standard move rules apply, including the fact that characters may not travel off of the edge of the board and furniture, equipment, and gift tokens block movement (until picked up or moved). Maps from other sources may have their own restricted areas.

Getting Gifts

To pick up a present, a character must be adjacent to the gift token pile or a dropped gift token. It takes one action to pick up a gift. Figures may not attack when they are picking up a gift, although they may be attacked while they are so occupied. Figures may move and attack as normal when they are carrying presents.

Gifts must be kept face down until they are opened.

A character may not carry two gifts at the same time.

It does not take an action to drop a gift. A dropped present is placed in a square adjacent to the figure; it may not be put off of the board or map.

Team members may pass gifts to each other. The characters must be adjacent to each other. It costs the passing figure an action, but the accepting character does not use an action to take the gift.

In ranged combat, any hit that does damage forces the target to drop his gift (if he's carrying one); he also takes the clicks of damage inflicted. With close combat, the attacking player has two options with strikes that inflict clicks of damage: The figure may either force the opponent to drop the gift or he may take the opponent's gift (assuming, in both outcomes, that the defending figure has a present). Remember that a figure may not carry more than one gift. However, an attacking character who has a gift may exchange it for the defending player's present.

Teams may steal gifts from their opponent's starting areas.

Opening Gifts

To open a gift, the figure must first return with the gift to the team's starting corner. Once in the corner, it takes one action to open the gift. A character must be holding a gift in order to unwrap it. A figure may drop a present after he's opened it. The player with the opened present in his starting corner or carried by one of his figures takes the corresponding gift-explanation card.

A character does not have to unwrap a present when in the starting corner; he can simply drop it. If there are other presents already at the starting location, he may pick up on of those (which takes an action).

To indicate that a present is unwrapped, flip the gift face up. Once a gift is unwrap, the figure holding it may utilize any special powers that it confers.

Destroying Gifts

Treat gifts as light objects for purposes of inflicting damage. Presents can be destroyed in the same manner as any other object; however, gifts may not be targeted if they are in the center starting spot, in a team's corner, or being held by someone.

Ending the Game

The are a couple of ways the game could end:

when there are no more gift tokens in the center of the board and at least one team has at least one unwrapped gift per figure (either carried by a member of the team or in the team's starting corner)

- when only one team has any figures remaining on the board

Once the game has ended, each team adds together the point value on the gifts in their possession. Whoever has the highest total wins.

Variations

First Things First: A character may not take a present from another figure without first having picked up a gift from the central pile (even if he drops that gift immediately).

Treasure Hunt: Instead of putting all of the gifts in a central location, players may randomly place gift tokens (face down) anywhere on the map, except in squares in a player's corner or anywhere within one square of the starting corner.

Generic Hero Cards

To use the generic hero cards provided with the "Six 'Clix Morris" article, players must have an eight-sided die for each character. Turn the die so that the maximum clicks of damage shown on the card is face up. Each time a character takes a click of damage, turn the die to the next lower side. Stat values do not go down as a character takes damage. Furthermore, characters with super powers retain the use of those abilities until they are KO'd.

Pyramid Review

True20 Worlds of Adventure: Five Thrilling Worlds of Adventure (for *True20 Adventure Roleplaying*)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

"Agents of Oblivion" by Sean Preston
"Blood Throne" by David Jarvis with Chris Caran, Aaron Henson, & Kenneth "Axel" Carrlson
"Land of the Crane" by David Garrett with David Kuchler, Scott Perry, Robert J. Schumacher, & Sarah Zielinski
"Nevermore" by Joseph Miller
"The Razor" in the Apple by Robert Schwalb

Cover by Vincent Dutrait

Illustrated by Michael Dixon, Chris Grun, Eric Lofgren, Malcolm McClinton, Scott Purdy, & Jason Walker

128-page b&w softcover; $22.95

When [*True20 Adventure Roleplaying*](#) was published in 2005, it included four different settings that showcased the versatility of the *True20* system. Each of the four were actually winners of a setting design contest launched by Green Ronin, the four best settings ending up in the core book, but such was the quality of the submissions that the publisher had more that it wanted to use. So the people at Green Ronin took the next five settings that they liked and put them in another book, and thus *True20 Worlds of Adventure: Five Thrilling Worlds of Adventure* for *True20 Adventure Roleplaying* was born.

Each setting presents a wealth of new background material along with a few new rules and feats specific to the setting. The shortest of the five is just 20 pages long, while the longest is 30 pages. All are decently illustrated and well written. There is even an index that covers all five settings! In fact, the only problem with the book is that in printing the pages have slightly slipped, cutting off the footer and page numbers on most pages. This is more of an aesthetic problem though, as the page numbers can still be read.

It opens with "Agents of Oblivion," a horror-conspiracy-espionage setting in which a government sanctioned top secret organization fight monsters, cultists, the eldritch, and the unknown, just as the Pandora Institute wants to use them all to gain power and influence. It gives a wealth of new backgrounds and roles, more detail on modern firearms and other gear, plus rules for Corruption and Sanity. Corruption represents the taint of the dark powers of the universe, and can be acquired through contact with them, usually by the Adept class to gain a power they do not have. Corruption can be worked off by paying Conviction points, the game's equivalent of Hero points, but is costly. The rules for Corruption feel under developed in comparison with those for Sanity, which work like a "psychological Toughness saving throw," and is a welcome addition to *True20 Adventure Roleplaying*. "Agents of Oblivion" is a frothy mix of magic, madness, psionics, esoteric tomes, guns, and explosions.

"Blood Throne" is another fantasy setting, one that has all but fallen to evil. Once a land of peace and high magic, Simarra has fallen into the Age of Blood and stands to be conquered by the avatar of an evil god. Refugees flee to the few remaining bastions of light, perhaps there being a few heroes amongst them who can stave off the darkness? Given the origins of the *True20* system, it is no surprise that Blood Throne feels very much like *Dungeons & Dragons,* but it packs in a lot of background information and adds in some interesting elements to its magic. It can be fueled from ley lines and mana wells, and shaman can call of spirits to aid them and fight for him, but with Ascendant Technology, fantastic devices can be constructed using mana shards, which feels reminiscent of computer games like *Final Fantasy* or *World of Warcraft.* The shortest of this supplement's settings, it deserved more space.

"Land of the Crane" presents a feudal Japanese fantasy Shogunate, complete with samurai, ninja, and martial arts monks, rival clans, while barbarians threaten the borders. It details all a GM needs to run a Bushido style game, even going as far as to alter *True20's* Conviction points to Honor, but the most notable fantasy addition is that of several new races. Kobolds become lizard riding barbarians who also train cavalry units; Hanyo are the distrusted children of humans and Oni who have horns, steaming breath, and an elemental ability; Harinezumi are anthropomorphic porcupines that revere nature; and Kitsune are mischievous shape-changing fox spirits. All this shows that True20 can do this type of setting and do it well, but "Land of the Crane" is the weakest of the five settings because it feels static and never comes alive compared to the other four in this supplement.

"Nevermore" is the oddest of the five settings: a land of dreams and imagination, a faerie world that is at times predictably changeable, at other times wildly chaotic. It can be run as a setting by itself, or as a parallel that the characters can visit from the GM's existing campaign, whether it is horror or standard or urban fantasy. Either way, a character gains Dreamer Conviction points, with which he can Dream Craft and Dream Weaving, creating items and manipulating the world around him. Dream Weaving can be dangerous, attempt to change too much and the weaver will suffer backlash as Nevermore reacts to the changes made to it. Of all of this supplement's settings, "Nevermore" is the least mainstream and the least accessible.

The fifth and last setting is "The Razor in the Apple," in which American kids face the monsters that their parents cannot see. Of course, in *True20* terms, kids are weaker than adults, and they are also defined by the roles of school subculture, such as Nerd or Cheerleader, and by their parents. A parent type is defined by its Sense Motive modifier: the degree to which the parents believe that their offspring is telling the truth, curfew hours, and Allowance modifier for buying things. During a game, a kid acquires two types of points: Imagination and Naughtiness. The latter are accrued for various actions, from getting into a fight to finding Daddy's secret magazines, and at the end of the day, a Kid must account for his actions to his parents. If they believe him, fine, but if not, his parents might be merely disappointed with him, or at worst, send him to military school. Imagination points are used to fight monsters, but not directly, rather they empower a kid's favorite toy. Need to fight a monster, then turn that action figure into an actual warrior or load that toy ray gun; distract the monster with the Bambi Doll's fluttering eyelashes and improbable anatomy; use your favorite blankie to hide form the monster; or get some random effect with a card drawn from your favorite Collectible Card Game deck. Although the GM will have to create the monsters, "The Razor in the Apple" suggests plenty of ways in which it can be used, from facing aliens from outer space to exploring haunted houses and going after buried treasure. Other options include running it at a certain school for wizardry or having the kids go through a wardrobe to a whole new fantasy world.

In addition to the settings, *True20 Worlds of Adventure: Five Thrilling Worlds of Adventure* adds in some new rules useful to other *True20* settings. Most notable being the Sanity mechanics, but also the extra information for modern firearms and equipment, and for summoning spirits. Other new rules, like "Blood Throne's" Ascendant Technology deserve more space and development. Yet, it is the settings, the "Worlds of Adventure," that is point of this supplement, and although a solid set of game worlds, there is nothing all that new here, at least in terms of the hobby. For each of the five settings here there is at least one complete RPG available that covers something similar in more detail. For "Agents of Oblivion" there is *Delta Green* or *Conspiracy X,* for "Blood Throne" there is *Midnight* or *Evernight,* for "Land of the Crane" there is *Legend of the Five Rings,* for "Nevermore" there is *Deliria* or *Changling: the Lost,* and for "The Razor in the Apple" there is *Grimm* or *Meddling Kids.*

Even if you can find an RPG that can do each of these settings to a fuller extent, these are nevertheless all good settings, even "Land of the Crane" which merely shows you how to do a Japanese style fantasy game using *True20*

and little else. The other four do that and more. Thus the bulk of ***True20 Worlds of Adventure: Five Thrilling Worlds of Adventure*** showcases what the ***True20*** system can do, but at least four both present and sell themselves, such that you would consider not only playing them, but also looking at them further if each were to see release as a full supplement.

--Matthew Pook

Family More, or Family Few'd?

This past weekend, in time for the holidays, I got to visit my uncle in Michigan. The trip was a lot more stressful than I was expecting, as the drive through the Michigan weather proved much more problematic than expected because of the existence of a foot of snow (what I called a "blizzard" and what I suspect kin Michiganders called a "dusting"). It wasn't until I got to check the Internet that I discovered the probable reason for this incredible amount of precipitation: The Miami Dolphins finally broke their 13-game losing streak, doing whatever the opposite of losing is against the Baltimore Ravens (who'd won four and lost nine in the season to that point), barely clinching their victory in an Overtime of Suck. Clearly, if the Lord of Lies is hucking snowballs at Hitler, it's going to get pretty frosty in the Mideast as well.

Anyway, the luncheon was a lovely affair, where I got to show off my toddling toddler Sam to his favorite great-uncle (at least, his favorite on my side of the family . . . I think my wife's gargantuan family brings in 117 other uncles into the fold). Oh, and there was one awkward bit where I got the critical failure on my Social Interaction roll:

Steven: So how is Tom? Do you talk to him at all? [My other uncle, his brother]

Uncle: Tom? That would be a long-distance call; Tom's been dead for years!

Yes, it turns out Tom died back in 1999, and somehow this fact had escaped below my radar. Clearly Tom and I weren't the closest of kin; my father and Tom had a falling out years ago, and so I never really kept up with him after that point. Then my Grandmother's death in 1999 (shortly before Tom) pretty much signaled the disintigration of that side of the family, and I guess with Tom's death shortly thereafter there wasn't really a network to let it be kwown to the rest of those out of the loop (which, now that I really think about it, pretty much means "me").

Also of personal note is the fact that this Christmas luncheon -- which, with me and my uncle, comprised about 50% of the Marshes in the universe -- followed less than 24 hours on the heels of my wife's family's Christmas party, an event that had a cast of thousands . . . or at least in the high double digits. To put it in perspective, there were about dozen kids within six months of my son's age there (and, curiously, all of them toddled out after dinner in an impromptu team and proceeded to beat the Miami Dolphins in a quick game). And that was just my wife's mother's side of the family . . . last I heard, her father's side had rented out Chicago for their Christmas party.

In RPGs, I know there's a tendency (at least in my own circle and in submissions I receive) to make family an "all or nothing" prospect; either family is an integral part of the character's *raison d'être,* or he's a loner whose entire family vanished from the scene long ago: The parents were killed by the Yakuza; the grandparents were eaten by unemployed rodents during the Great Depression; and every last aunt, uncle, niece, and nephew all succumbed to the [Byte_Bandit](#) virus. Oh, maybe there's a sister who was kidnapped by pirates he needs to find. Pirates are cool.

But for many characters, the pull of family forms a strong pull, even if it isn't the primary focus of the character. As a few examples from popular culture:

- I would argue that, more than any other trait, Peter Parker -- Spider-Man -- was defined in the beginning by his role as a family man (in his case, the need to care for an aged widowed aunt).
- In comparison, Superman's foster parents have played an important part of stories set in the past couple of decades. In fact, Superman is probably the best example of "important, but not central" role of family. Many tales have been told that play off various fascets of his family: his orphan-of-the-universe status, his obligations and desires to his foster family, his need to protect and encourage his wife, and so on. And in both the Silver Age and recent years, the "Superman family" has come to represent a wide net of supporting cast members with lives of their own: Supergirl, Superboy, super-dogs, and Heaven knows what else has been added this month.
- All five *Star Trek* television series have had captains with different tacks of family life, focus, and involvement, ranging from the detached flashbacks of Captain Archer to the day-to-day childhood upbringing of Captain Sisko to the vinyard visitations of Captain Picard.
- [Jessica Fletcher](#) and [Adrian Monk](#) are both defined, in many ways, by their relationships with family and kin . . .

yet neither one has family as a central characteristic. In other words, they're an ideal "middle ground" to examine for coming up with ideas for PCs.

- As an exercise, consider the family lives of action heroes [Martin Riggs](), [John McClane](), and [Conan T. Barbarian]().

In speaking with a number of players over the years, one concern that I've seen before is that they feel weird about introducing family if they haven't been a part of the character concept from the beginning. But this is only a cause for concern if the family is supposed to be extremely tight-knit; it's entirely possible for family to be distant, or even reasonably close. (Just because a character hasn't mentioned visiting his aunt once or twice a year doesn't mean it can't have happened . . . unless it's an interstellar "in a tin can, far above the world" campaign, of course.)[1] And even if someone *is* reasonably plugged into family events, it's still possible for things to fall through the character's knowledge . . . like a dead uncle.

But regardless of what your family state is like, and regardless of how big or small it may be, may the end of this year and the beginning of next see you and your loved ones as healthy and happy as you'd like them to be.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] I'm probably one of the few folks who wasn't particularly bothered by the revelation of Spock's (half-)brother in *Star Trek V for Vendetta Against Logic* . . . although there are other miles of celuloid in that film to be bothered by.

Pyramid Review

Ingenious (for Windows)

Published by [Merscom LLC](#)

Original design by Reiner Knizia

Project lead Lena de Riese

Programming & design by Kai Ludwig, Stefan Stefanow, Jürgen Hoffmann, & Michael Zeilfelder

Graphics by Sascha Urbanek & Oliver Schulz

CD-ROM, rulebook; full color, boxed, for one to four players, 20 minutes playing time; $19.99

If it was taken out back behind the woodshed and beaten with a rubber hose, the attacker would only tire himself out; *Ingenious* is here and it's here to stay. It was recently reduced to a convenient little *travel* size, but depending on how one defines that term in an age of portable lap-top computers, it may also go on the road as part of the desktop. Welcome *Ingenious* for the personal computer.

The play of the game remains the same: There are six colored symbols in play, and players take it in turns to place domino-like pieces, with these same icons at either end, onto the board. Every color that matches a symbol already on the board scores a point in that color, and as the tiles stack up into a line, players can get a bigger score for every symbol in that line. When the board has filled up with tokens (a game takes about 20 minutes), the highest score wins the game . . . but every player can only claim his *lowest* scoring color as his "high" score.

The Windows computer version is good for anyone who wants to hone his skill when he doesn't have his friends handy (or if he just doesn't know one to three additional Euro-gamers). The user may choose to play against however many artificially intelligent opponents he cares to, and toggles determine how good the enemy is and how quickly the game moves. If the AI plays too fast to keep track of, the computer can be required to move only when it is told to, so that his strategies can be studied in a more leisurely fashion. There's a team option so it can be played like partners in bridge, if it gets too tiresome being beaten on one's own.

To really challenge oneself, the user can turn on the timer. Much like a chess clock, this forces the player to go more by instinct instead of carefully examining which plays garner the most points and which tile arrangements get maximum bonuses. Waste the entire allotment of time and the game ends tragically. If humans are around and ready for a game, there's a hot-seat option (players take turns sitting down to a single computer to take their turn), and the program can also be run on-line. Finally, the program keeps track of past games; it's a high score board, to put it simply, but with the quirky scoring

> ### System requirements
>
> - **OS:** Windows 2000/XP/Vista
> - **CPU:** 500 MHz
> - **Memory:** 128MB RAM
> - **Video Card:** 3D video card with 16MB RAM
> - **Hard Disk Space:** 170MB free hard disk space
> - **DirectX:** 8.1 or better
> - Internet connection is optional but necessary for multiplayer on-line play

system used the information provided is a bit more involved, not to mention performance is divided up into scores for the various modes of play.

There are a few minor catches here and there. It doesn't mention that players must choose a separate starting color the first turn of the game (not that it lets someone take an illegal move anyway); there's a grammatical error in the tutorial; and some background colors work better than others (this, too, can be chosen). Red and green are harsh on the eyes, but the gray backdrop makes it harder to tell which player is taking his turn (the current player's name highlights in gray). Blue seems the best way to go. Also, occasionally the game slows down for no apparent reason (perhaps it's been programmed to go more slowly on subsequent games depending on its opponent's achievements), and very rarely it locks up. In these cases the game can be saved and reloaded and that seems to clear the difficulty up.

Sweeping these aside, it's a tidy package. It duplicates most if not all of the options offered by the physical version, and even improves on it in a few spots. The included tutorial is quick and, though a bit dry in spots (it's mostly just the rules doled out in easily digested chunks), it's informative. The visual clues do a better, faster job of describing the action and its abstract nature. And unless someone in the play group is a classical musician, the jazzy score that plays along with it (with shades of reggae or Enigma) will actually see a bit of play before one toggles it off in frustration. Same goes for the sound effects.

It's never optimal, having to turn to a computer application to fulfill one's amusements, but in the absence of friends, *Ingenious* for Windows-based computers serves admirably. One can start at the easiest levels and work his way up against tougher opponent settings, and even at the top of the ladder there's no such thing as a guaranteed success with the canny and capable AI. Players will recognize that feature all too well.

--Andy Vetromile

'Clix New Year Balloon Drop

for *HeroClix*

by Nikola Vrtis

One of the fun ways to celebrate the coming of the new year is with a balloon drop. It's even more exciting with prizes, especially "powerful" ones that'll have heroes and villains battling over them into the new year. Once all of the balloons have been dropped and popped, of the two to four participating teams, the one with the most points wins.

Setting Up the Game

This game uses the *HeroClix* rules, which players can find on the WizKids Web site (check the rules page); the rules are used largely as is, with modifications mentioned herein.

For the playing area, the game requires a large area that's eight 1.5-inch squares on each side; a checkerboard or a map of a warehouse would work, or players can print out and assemble the game board. If participants decide to use something other than the supplied game board, they need to determine which is the upper-left-hand square of the board. This will be where they start counting from when figuring out where the balloons drop.

The game also needs one or more printouts of the balloon tokens and their prize explanations. Optionally, participants can include several tokens or items representing restaurant or party equipment, decorations, and furniture. Finally, two eight-sided dice of different colors are used to determine where a balloon lands. Decide on which die is associated with the rows and which one is associated with the columns of the board.

Once all of the components have been gathered, two to four players create teams of two or more *HeroClix* figures, with a maximum total of 200 points. Players may include almost any character in their teams with a few exceptions: No flying, double-base, giant, or colossal characters are allowed. Additionally, participants may not use battlefield conditions or feats.

Most local and Internet retailers sell *HeroClix,* but if those aren't handy, players can use the basic generic characters created for "Six 'Clix Morris" along with any sort of counter or figure with a base of no more than 1.5 inches at its widest point, such as Steve Jackson Games' *Cardboard Heroes Modern Characters.*

Once the teams are settled, players randomly choose the balloons so that there's a minimum of one balloon per figure. (For example, if two teams have two figures and one team has three figures, the participants would select a minimum of seven balloons.) Shuffle the balloon tokens face down and randomly choose the appropriate number; players may opt to include more balloons in the pile if they so desire. Set the chosen balloons, with the prize explanation cards, near the game board.

Players determine who goes first by each rolling two six-sided dice and totaling the results. The highest roll goes first, with ties rerolled. With three or four participants, play moves to the right of the starting participant.

Next, the players take turns placing party and restaurant items on the board, if these are being used. Finally, each person places a figure, one per turn, anywhere on the board.

Playing the Game

Participants take turns in the same order as they placed figures. For attacking, movement, and power use, use the *HeroClix* rules, with the following modifications.

Movement

Standard move rules apply, including the fact that characters may not travel off of the edge of the board. Party and restaurant tokens block movement (until picked up or moved). Balloon tokens do not hinder movement or line of sight; rather, if a figure moves through a spot with a balloon on it and does not pick up the item, the balloon is put on a square to the right or left (player's choice) of the movement path. Note that balloons cannot be shoved off the board.

Releasing the Balloons

Each player helps with deciding where each balloon falls. At the start of a participant's turn, before doing any other action, the player rolls the two eight-sided dice. Starting in the upper-left corner of the board, count, to the right, the number on the column die. Then go down from there, counting out the number on the row die. (The supplied game board is marked with coordinates.) This is where a balloon lands. If there is a figure there, the figure automatically catches the balloon if he is not holding any other object (even another balloon); otherwise, the balloon falls on the nearest empty square adjacent to the figure.

Balloons must be kept face down until they are popped.

Balloons and Prizes

It does not take an action to catch a falling balloon, nor does it take an action to drop a balloon. The player puts the released balloon in a spot adjacent to the figure; he may not place it off of the board.

To pick up a balloon or prize, a character must be adjacent to the token. It takes a single action to pick up a token. Characters may not attack when they are picking up balloons or prizes, although they may be attacked. Figures may move and attack as normal when they are carrying balloons and prizes.

A figure may carry up to two balloons at a time. However, a character can only catch or pop one balloon at a time (thus, if a figure has two balloons, he must drop one before he can pop the other).

Popping a balloon requires dealing it at least two clicks of damage. Once popped, flip the balloon over to reveal the prize number. Give the corresponding prize card to the player whose figure holds the prize. (Transfer this card if an opponent steals the prize.) The figure may now rely on the special power listed on the prize explanation for the duration of this game -- or until he loses the prize! (Of course, if the character already has the power, a second set doesn't do any good, though the team receives points for having the prize.) Figures may carry as many prizes as they like.

Team members may pass balloons and prizes between each other. The recipient must be adjacent to the passer. It costs the passer an action to hand over the balloon or prize; it does not cost the recipient an action to accept a prize or balloon.

In ranged combat, any hit that does damage forces the target to drop all of his balloons or (if he has no balloons) one prize (if he has any); he also takes the clicks of damage inflicted. With close combat, the attacking player has two options with blows that deal clicks of damage: The character may either force the opponent to drop balloons or he may take his choice of one of the target's prizes (assuming, in both outcomes, that the defending figure has a something). The defender also takes the damage. An attacking figure in close combat that has two balloons may exchange one of them for one of the defending player's balloons.

Balloons can be popped at a distance, as long as they are not being held by anyone.

Balloons and prizes may not be used as weapons. Prizes may not be damaged.

Ending the Game

The game ends when one of the following events occurs:

- There are no more balloons to drop and all of the balloons have been popped. (Should there be a balloon-carrying holdout, it's highly recommended that the opponents gang up on that character.)
- Only one team has any figures remaining on the board.

After the game ends, each team adds together the point value of the prizes in their figures' possession. The team with the highest total wins.

Variation

Turning in Early: Once all of the balloons have been released, each player gets one additional turn before the party ends. Unpopped balloons and prizes not in the possession of anyone do not count toward any team's final total.

Generic Hero Cards

To use the generic hero cards provided with the "Six 'Clix Morris," players use an eight-sided die to track character damage. Turn the die so that the maximum clicks of damage shown on the card is face up. Each time a character receives a click of damage, flip the die to the next lower side. Do not reduce stat values as a character takes damage. Furthermore, characters with super powers may continue to rely on those abilities until they are KO'd.

Designer's Notes: *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy: Adventurers*

by Sean Punch

There are times when you simply don't have enough hours to tackle something big. That statement applies in two very different ways to *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy: Adventurers.*

Toward the end of November 2007, I finished my edit of *GURPS Thaumatology* and found myself with perhaps a month left before my scheduled end-of-year vacation. My thoughts turned to an outline for a 240-page book called *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* -- an outline that had been sitting on my hard drive since 2004. Here was a book that I had always wanted to write but never had time even to start . . . and now I had an opening. Unfortunately, that opening gave me a few *weeks,* not the few *months* that I'd need to write a full-length book.

Around that time, I noticed several threads over on our [forums](#) asking about stats for archetypal dungeon adventurers in *GURPS,* and how to convert abilities from other fantasy RPGs. To be honest, I could see why; *GURPS* hits gamers with a lot of information. Even a hack-and-slash fantasy romp means poring over the *GURPS Basic Set and [GURPS Magic](#) and [GURPS Powers](#)*, looking for skills, spells, powers, and gear. It was clear that many people still had a place in their heart for old-school dungeon crawls, but lacked the time to tackle character templates and special powers.

This is when Paul Chapman, Phil Reed, and I got the brainstorm that we could address both my lack of time and that of *GURPS* players by having me create *Dungeon Fantasy* not as a massive tome -- which would *worsen* the "information overload" problem -- but as a series of PDFs. We decided that the first two PDFs would be *Dungeon Fantasy: Adventurers* and *Dungeon Fantasy: Dungeons,* in keeping with the *Basic Set* split into *Characters* and *Campaigns.*

What It Is

Dungeon Fantasy: Adventurers focuses strictly on what you need to create stereotyped dungeon explorers in the spirit of old-school RPGs, [roguelikes](#), and [their more polished descendants](#). It's a crib sheet for GMs who can't justify spending hours immersed in their *GURPS* library, jotting down powers, equipment lists, and notes on allowed traits just so that their players can create PCs for one-off dungeon crawls. It's also a time-saver for players who don't want to put a lot of effort into designing hack-and-slash heroes who might get eaten by ice weasels in the first game session.

It took me 60-65 hours to pull everything together, check the math, and come up with "house rules" that let you skip most of *Characters* and get right to "You meet in a tavern." Granted, I spent half that time editing and polishing, but still . . . that's 30+ hours that *you* don't have to spend on this stuff. Not having to do all that work should make beer-and-pretzels dungeon hacks a lot more attractive to gamers who love the genre but feel that *GURPS* is too much game for the job.

What It Isn't

Appropriately enough for a minimalist supplement, *Dungeon Fantasy: Adventurers* is defined as much by what it *isn't* as by what it is.

First, it isn't a standalone game or even a half-step between *[GURPS Lite](#)* and the *Basic Set* (would that be *GURPS Medium*?). You still need the *Basic Set* for the advantage and skill write-ups, the combat system, and so on -- and you'll probably want *[Magic](#)* for spells, unless you seriously believe that you can run a dungeon crawl without goodies like the Rain of Nuts spell. This PDF is an excellent player handout and a real time-saver, but it doesn't cure cancer and produce infinite free energy.

Second, it isn't all of ***Dungeon Fantasy.*** At minimum, there will be a ***Dungeon Fantasy: Dungeons*** that does double duty as a GM's crib sheet for dungeon design and as a players' crib sheet for common tasks and activities down in the dungeon. There may be other PDFs, if people like the first two . . . monsters, traps, treasures, maybe even complete dungeons. We'll see.

Finally, it isn't serious. It is by turns cheesy, silly, and munchkin. If you're the sort of gamer who likes everything to be proper and by the book, or who believes that fantasy should always be serious, you might just want to skip this one. But where's the fun in that?

What's In There

The main components of ***Dungeon Fantasy: Adventurers*** are:

- Templates for 11 classic fantasy RPG archetypes: barbarian, bard, cleric, druid, holy warrior, knight, martial artist, scout, swashbuckler, thief, and wizard. These were designed as a set, in an effort to give each kind of PC a distinct, useful role. They're also optimized -- maybe even a little munchkin -- but not so much that they lack color.
- Seriously chopped down traits lists for players who don't like templates, removing distractions like Improved G-Tolerance and Beam Weapons.
- Quick-and-dirty rules for adapting the basic magic system to work for clerics, druids, *and* wizards without making them cheap carbon copies.
- Four nifty powers for simulating the innate abilities of certain fantasy heroes, with all of the modifiers and point costs worked out so that you don't have to do it.
- A big list of equipment, including old dungeon-crawl standbys, simple rules for custom weapons and armor, and even notes on oversized weapons and armor for *big* PCs.

Other useful tools include a set of new wildcard skills, explanations of how various spells and powers interact, and a few quick hacks that replace the standard rules for Wealth and Powerstones. Packed in around all of this are bits of advice on how to handle "training expenses," social traits in a genre where society consists of "town, where we buy, sell, and steal things," and disadvantages in a game where they amount to a way to tell Ed the Barbarian apart from Joe the Barbarian.

It's actually a lot of *crunch* squeezed into a small package.

As I hinted above, nothing here is exactly *new,* or much better than what any experienced ***GURPS*** GM could create with a couple of weeks of work. Except that you don't have to be experienced or do a couple of weeks of work to use it. And of course everything is consistent, and will remain consistent with later ***Dungeon Fantasy*** installments -- and also with your memories of good ol' hack-and-slash.

Pyramid Review

The Red Dragon Inn

Published by [Slugfest Games](#) Designed by Geoff Bottone, Colleen Skadl, & Cliff Bohm Art, direction, & layout by Cliff Bohm, Kennon James, Cold FuZion Studios, & Beth Trott

Full-color boxed set with 160 character cards (four decks, 40 cards each), four player mats, 30 drink cards, 50 gold piece counters, eight tokens (four fortitude & four alcohol content), plastic tray, rule sheet; $34.95

As the new year approaches, game groups are on the lookout for new games to play at parties, something to herald the onset of . . . never mind. If anyone's looking for a good drinking game -- literally -- they could do worse than Slugfest Games' latest, ***The Red Dragon Inn.***

The object of the game is to be the last character standing at the end of a hard evening of carousing.

It's an accepted fact that most adventuring parties get their start meeting at a tavern, so it's only fitting the survivors end up there to spend their hard-won gains. Here, two to four dungeon crawlers gather at the pub and gamble. And drink. And fight.

Each of these heroes gets his own deck of cards, a playing mat, and a pair of tokens to track fortitude and alcohol content. On his turn, a player may play an action card. These have many effects, like starting a round of gambling, causing harm to a fellow adventurer (*purely* by accident, of course), or getting a recount on the gold, among other things. He can only play one action per turn, but the other cards may be playable at other times: to counter a loss of health, for example, or to increase a rival's drunkenness. Then he buys a round for someone, and puts a drink card facedown on their playing mat. Finally, just to be agreeable, he slugs back one of the beverages someone else bought him.

A character starts with 20 fortitude and no alcohol in his system, the picture of health (now that Deirdre the Priestess has healed everyone up from their stint in the underearth). If he takes damage, his fortitude goes down on the point track on his mat, and if he consumes booze his alcohol content goes up on the same track. If e'er the twain should meet, that adventurer has had enough fun for one night, goes unconscious, and is out of the game (save that he -- or rather, his purse, divided as it is among the conscious -- continues to enrich the party). If he runs out of gold before he passes out, he's ejected from the Red Dragon and forced to sleep with the horses.

The threat of running out of money is a good reason to gamble. If someone uses their action to get a hand going, everyone is forced to ante up (unless they have a card that lets them skip the game), and all have a chance to play a card. If they can play a card, they take control of the game. If they haven't, they pass. If everyone passes, the person still in control collects all the gold. And what would gambling be without drinking? Easier, but what adventurer takes the easy way out? Drinks may be a straightforward addition to one's inebriation level, but some come with special effects like a chaser or an event like a drinking game. It's important to buy drinks for opponents, lest their drink stack runs out and they (gasp) sober up.

Booze, violence, and splurging eventually do everyone in. The last hero remaining with gold and his conscious wits wins.

The game is simple, but the components don't skimp. The money counters are tough cardstock, the playing mats are firm (and have most of the information needed during the game, like the order of play), and the alcohol and fortitude

counters are those fancy glass beads favored by players everywhere. The cards fall prey to the thin-stock syndrome, but the artwork is marvelous. It's humorous, colorful, and enjoyable, and could hold its own against your Phil Foglios and John Kovalics. The box comes with a quality, molded, plastic insert for keeping everything in its place.

And game play is just what gamers want to see: strategy balanced with simplicity. The rules are easy, and they make perfect sense. The separate decks for each character bring them to life. They all have their own advantages and drawbacks, and played properly the former keep someone in the game and the latter give definite vulnerabilities that can be exploited by a shrewd opponent. The priestess, for example, has her gods to turn to for favors and healing, but she's easily overtaken by imbibing too much. Sly Gerki, on the other hand, does well when cheati . . . er, gambling, but can't take too much physical punishment. Card interaction is lively and keeps things funny and fresh every game.

The Red Dragon Inn is going to be in business for some time to come, given its clientele and the supplement intended for 2008, and with a mere 30 to 60 minutes playing time, it deftly fills the holes in a gamer's, or partier's, schedule.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds Roleplaying Game (1PG System)

Published by http://www.deep7.com/Deep7

Written by James Stubbs

Photography by Andrew Tomlinson

13-Page 705 KB PDF file; $3.95

For very personal reasons, things have been very quiet at Deep7, best explained with the publication of their latest 1PG as the "Samantha Downing Commemorative Edition." This 1PG is also a marked departure for the 1PG (or One Page Game) series. All of the previous entries have been generic in their treatment of the genres covered. Each one upon several sources for their inspiration, whether Word War II for *Battleforce Bravo: Wartime Adventure*, anthropomorphized computer-generated bugs for *Buggin' RPG: The Tiny Game of Big Adventures*, or 1930s' pulps for *Dime Heroes*. The release of *H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds Roleplaying Game* significantly deviates from this by focusing on just the singular source.

It is still a 1PG though, meaning that its elements -- character generation, game mechanics, notes for the referee, and each of the six scenarios -- each just fit into a single page. But as the title suggests, this 1PG is based upon the classic tale of alien invasion, depicting an England overwhelmed by the superior technology of the Martians, only to be foiled by the smallest of details. Although the novel has proven a rich source for radio plays, movies, records, and television series, this is not the first time it has served as a source for RPGs. Gold Rush Games' *War of the Worlds Sourcebook* provides details for both the *d20 System* and the Action! System, while the possibility of the Martians possessing Mythos connections is explored in *Cthulhu by Gaslight*.

Mechanically, the *H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds Roleplaying Game* is no different from other 1PG titles. Attributes and skills range from one to three, and to do anything, a six-sided die is rolled to get under a combination of an appropriate skill and attribute. Character generation is quick: 1d3 is rolled for four attributes (Sturdiness, Looks, Craftiness, and Brains) and 1d3+3 points assigned to various skills. Further rolls determine a character's Blood (hit points), Spirit (mental well-being), Guts (courage), and Reputation. Unfortunately, unlike other 1PG titles, the dice rolled for each, and what exactly each term means, differs between the generation explanation and the checklist.

This being a Victorian/Edwardian set game, the usual status and background tables of a 1PG assume a greater importance. Each, of course, provides bonuses to attributes, skills, and secondary statistics, but the rolls on these tables also determines a character's place and role in society. Combinations like Aristocrat and Rake, and Soldier and Veteran give obvious results, while Aristocrat and Irrepressible could be explained as an adventuring noblewoman or wealthy adventuress, as could Working Man and Seduction, though the latter more in the style of Lola Montez.

The advice for the referee is typical for a 1PG: short and sweet. It directs the GM to cut to the chase, choose appropriate music to set the mood (suggesting even using the soundtrack to the modern film version), and keeping the bad guys -- the Martians -- a malevolent and unknowable antagonist. More importantly, characters are not expected to get along: Class and personal differences rear their ugly head as the invasion strips away the veneer of English civilization. Not surprisingly, this is at odds with the more contemplative nature of the novel, considering as it does the condition and survival of humanity in the face of bleak destruction, but then again, this is a roleplaying game. And a 1PG, which to be fair, does not call upon a player to contemplate the depth of his character's soul, or even employ method acting.

Being the lead guys of the piece, the Martians receive a whole page to themselves and their technology. Statistics are given for the Martian race, as well as all of their technology, including the cylinders they land in, the tripods they travel in, the handling machine used to construct and repair other devices, and the weapons they employ to eradicate mankind. All are given in terms compatible with ***The 1PG Companion: A Toolkit For Deep7's Beer & Pretzels RPGs*** and all are designed to give the invaders a very unfair but fitting edge in a fight.

The default set-up for the six scenarios included with the game casts the characters as refugees fleeing across England's green and pleasant lands, attempting to escape the path of the encroaching invaders. In "The Strange Case of Charles Milford," the odd behavior of a fellow refugee threatens both the party and an artillery battery. The opportunity to strike back at the invaders occurs in "The Destruction of a Martian Cylinder," in which the guerrilla action against the Martians takes to the sewers. "Those Who God Would Destroy" focuses on a madman in possession of a canister of Martian Black Smoke, which could either kill hundreds or be used to synthesize an antidote. A rumor of the government distributing bread in "Feast or Famine" proves to be a draw for the refugees just as they could be an attraction for the Martians. "Flight to the Coast" hides political motives, while "Martian Britain by Rail" and its potential sequel, "In a Puff of Green," present another opportunity to strike at the invaders and exploit a possible weakness.

These six are decent scenarios and, given familiarity with the source novel, could easily be run as part of a *The War of the Worlds* campaign. Yet this "as part of" aspect highlights the central weakness with this 1PG. Other titles in the series take a broad approach to their genre, but here the reverse is true. The game focuses in to give just snapshots of the time following the invasion, whereas a complete RPG would explain and explore much more -- if not its entire source. Perhaps not necessarily in scenario form, but at least within the meat of the game's background material. However, the game fails to provide this, just as it fails to give a guide to gaming in the Victorian or Edwardian eras.

To be fair, the ***H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds Roleplaying Game*** is well done, but not as a *complete* RPG. Instead, it works better as a source book for roleplaying in an England invaded, whether for the 1PG system, ***GURPS Steampun,k Forgotten Futures,*** or indeed the **War of the Worlds Sourcebook** published by Gold Rush Games. Perhaps if it had addressed the two omissions -- that of Victorian-era gaming and discussing the novel and how to "game" it, even with just a single page devoted to each -- the ***H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds Roleplaying Game*** would have lived up to its claim as a roleplaying game. In its current form, it does not quite do that and it feels constrained by the 1PG format. That is an unfortunate first for the series.

-- Matthew Pook

Vacation: Society's Smokescreen

It's that magical week between Christmas and New Year's. And you know it must be a magical time, because everyone and everything stops working right. At least, almost everything.

Yes, as tenured folks burn up the rest of their vacation time, the seats of government and many non-seasonal businesses tend to crawl to a standstill this week. Newspapers get notoriously light on "real" news, instead opting to whip out fluffier pieces that could have been written weeks or even months earlier. (Slate.com bemoaned this fact a [few days ago](.))

So, naturally, many people in positions of power often use this lull as an opportunity to sneak in questionable or undesirable news, knowing that in-depth analysis of the decision will be lacking for a couple of weeks. Thus this is the time of year when many companies announce major layoffs, or when questionable laws get passed (or vetoed). And the media is reluctant to admit that it dropped the ball when it finally dusts itself off a few weeks later, so the odds are slim of seeing a headline that reads, "Interim Appointments Made Two Weeks Ago; Department of Interior Now Headed by [Galactus](); This Might Be Important."

Of course, this doesn't apply to especially important news, such as Thursday's tragic assassination of Benazir Bhutto. But even in such events, it sometimes feels like the news media can be slow to respond during the holiday period; I remember the [Asian Tsunami of 2004](), and being glued to the television and hitting reload on websites for more info . . . which seemed to come in days later.

On a lighter note, I've also heard it be said that the popularity of the satirical political "news" commentary show *[The Daily Show]()* has resulted in some in the halls of power to try to time potentially embarrassing or mock-worthy incidents with the frequent hiatuses of that show. (Again, it isn't very timely to make fun of "news" that's two weeks old.)

So what relationship does this have to the world of gaming? Well, the desire to control the flow of information -- especially by timing -- has a long pedigree. For example, the American colonies declared their break from the English mainland on July 4th, the day they knew all the British would be at picnics and Independence Day sales. In particular, then, musing about timing can provide some interesting plot seeds and catalysts, as well as being an interesting way to "sneak" in revelations or campaign developments, especially in modern or not-too-distant-past (or future) settings.

- One long-running conspiracy theory has been that, when the invasion or black-helicopter overthrow of the United States comes, it will happen on Thanksgiving, when everyone's consolidated at home and drowsy from starches. (I'm not a big proponent myself, but it does make for some interesting idle consideration as I'm fumbling for the remote as powerful gravity rays grab my eyelids at 5:00 p.m.) Heroes might have their holiday meals interrupted by the need to disrupt a plot, or they might stumble across a town that *has* been taken over in a Thanksgiving Coup.
- Any campaign-affecting laws or decrees can come into effect in the world's "downtime." This can be especially useful in settings with PCs with powers: announcements could be made that psis are now required to register, or super-powered humans need to pay an unreasonable "insurance" tax. (As an added bonus, if these developments occur during holidays or other public festivities, the players have a chance for their heroes to react in not-entirely-familiar surroundings; how will they react to needing to register for the draft in the next 48 hours, when they had plans to spend the week with their relatives from Rwanda?)
- If the heroes need to find out any significant information that involves human interaction, it's entirely possible that their efforts will be more difficult (or even impossible) during those times of the year when mass vacations are popular. This can either be abstracted by increasing the difficulty of rolls, or roleplayed by the investigators trying to get the information they need from fill-in know-nothings or by interrupting vacations. ("You called me to learn *what?!* How did you get this number?!")
- News of significant but not earth-shattering importance can occur during such timing lulls. For example, any mid-level villain might escape during this time, or be acquitted (quite possibly on a technicality), or otherwise become available to be a future thorn in the heroes' sides. These adversaries need not *attack* during this downtime; rather, they can merely set their plans in motion, relatively confident that the two-paragraph blurb

about their freedom will be relegated to the bottom of page seven of the mid-week paper.

- On a related note, it's entirely possible for less-important (or seemingly less-important) news to be completely obscured in the news by larger events . . . or, at least, events that will sell more papers/airtime. As one example, the events of September 11th, 2001 led to a near-blackout of the reporting of any other significant news in the United States for almost a month; as another example, the mundane death of Mother Teresa on September 5th, 1997, was almost entirely overshadowed by the continuing coverage of the much-more-sensational demise of Princess Diana, five days earlier.

Things don't cease happening in the real world merely because people stop paying attention. The heroes may know what to do about a prison break of a hated foe when they hear about it "as it happens" on the news . . . but how do they react when they discover the news several days later? Or when they discover an anonymous threatening message on their voice mail? When the New Year comes in a few days, the dropping ball at midnight may well obscure the sound of the other shoe dropping elsewhere.

--Steven Marsh

Sentinels of the Styx, Part II

An Adventure for *GURPS Martial Arts*

by Stephen Dedman

Part Two: Return Strike

In [Part I of "Sentinels of the Styx,"](#) the heroes seek to avenge a dead friend. A series of clues leads them to murderer. It is recommended that players experience the first part of this adventure before continuing on to the second one, though any good GM should be able to tweak this set of scenarios into a one-shot if so desired.

As a reminder, the GM needs the *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS Martial Arts* for this adventure. It is designed for Heroic-level martial arts characters (100-200 points) but can be tweaked for higher level characters. It is also suitable for "realistic" supers or a cinematic espionage campaign where magic-using NPCs are a possibility. It is set in the present in a generic medium-sized city and can be easily adapted for any period from Cliffhangers to Cyberpunk, or for other systems such as *Shadowrun.*

Acting in Concert

Any PCs who have signed up with Merrimac Security receive a phone call on Day 9 (see *Timeline for Entire Adventure,* toward the end of this article) asking them whether they can work the next night. The doom metal band Cyanotix is performing in town, Merrimac is handling the security, and they need more bodies. Pay for the night's work is $250, plus the chance to talk to bored Merrimac staff.

Security at the concert mainly comprises checking people at the doors for obvious weapons (cell phones are not considered a problem), and standing guard over valuable equipment and staff-only entrances. Heroes who performed well in the "Gatekeeper" test are assigned to the doors. They are issued metal detector wands (which can be used as a baton at -2 damage; Shortsword -1), but these mostly give false alarms, as many of the concert-goers are carrying or wearing harmless metal items. A Very Bad reaction from someone who doesn't want to be searched may result in violence.

The rest of the characters guard the instruments and other equipment. At least one hero is nearby when a violent incident does break out -- a young man takes out a knife and inexpertly tries to commit seppuku during Cyanotix's song "Chushingura Café." (For the man, use the *Non-combatant* stats, listed in the *Cast* section of this article.) If an agent can disarm him without causing any further harm and get him into a lock, he drags him to the nearest first aid station without difficulty, and the audience thinks it's part of the show. Word of this gets back to Glanton, giving him a +2 to any reaction rolls made to the PC in future; on a Very Good or better reaction, he invites the infiltrator to his next mixed martial arts class (Day 16).

After the concert is over, the crowd has left, and the gear has been safely stashed away (about 1:00 a.m.), the security guards join the after-show party backstage. The band members have already left, but the backing musicians are still around, and there is plenty of food, alcohol and illegal drugs, as well as a few discarded groupies. PCs with the Addiction, Alcoholism, Compulsive Carousing, Gluttony, or Lecherousness disadvantages have the opportunity to indulge their vices. Any PC seen breaking the law becomes a potential blackmail target, but the only disadvantage likely to lead to trouble is Honesty: A PC who reports the drug use or any other illegal activity to the police or press receives a -4 to reactions from all Merrimac personnel.

A Thief in the Night

If Sabra has attempted to entrap and interrogate a hero and failed, Jerome "Ferret" Barrett finds out what he can about the PCs. If no one seems easy to blackmail, Ferret picks one, break into his home late at night, and lets Volker and Turvey in (plus a Merrimac heavy for everyone else who lives in the character's home). Volker then interrogates the investigator: see *Charm Offensive* in [Part One](#) for some ideas on how to proceed with this scene.

The China Shop

A hero who signed on with Merrimac (male, chosen on the basis of a reaction roll) receives a call after the Cyanotix concert, asking if he can substitute for another bouncer at the Moondance strip club, on the edge of Chinatown. If he accepts, the supervisor tells him to wear casual clothes with no obvious weapons.

The club complies with local laws, and the job is mostly trouble-free until shortly before midnight. With a successful Per roll, the guard notices that some clients pay the cover charge, move quickly to the bar, hand a large amount of money to the bartender in exchange for a scrap of paper, then walk through the club to the rear exit. They return by the same route 6d minutes later and quickly leave. If the hero investigates, he finds that the exit leads to a dimly lit (-6 to Vision) alley behind the club. The alley is a dead end, and a padlocked metal gate closes off the other end. Approximately opposite the exit are the back door and loading dock of another business, which a sign above the loading dock's door identifies as "Qian Kun Imports." A security camera mounted at the end of the alley watches all these doors.

Should the infiltrator knock on the door, it opens a few inches by a Merrimac mook, who has been ordered not to let anyone in without a ticket (available from the bartender for $200); how politely he communicates this depends on his reaction to the PC. The reinforced door (DR 7, HP 50) is secured with a chain lock (DR 11, HP 22: +3 to Lockpicking when open, -4 when closed).

If the hero takes more than a few minutes with his snooping, the bartender sends someone to remind the character that he's being paid to watch the front door, not the back one.

At 11:48 p.m., Lin Chu walks into the club and, unless stopped by the PC, straight through to the exit. Two minutes later, a small bell sounds and a light flashes at the bar. The bartender motions the guard over and tells him that he's needed "out the back." If the character ventures through the exit, he sees that the door opposite is wide open, and Lin Chu has disarmed the mook. As he watches, she hits the mook in the face once, stunning him, then steps out of sight.

Quian Kun Imports, as the name suggests, is filled with assorted Asian imported goods -- including two futon beds surrounded by folding screens, upon which lay four young, attractive, and scantily dressed Chinese women, all handcuffed and gagged. The women are illegal immigrants forced into the sex trade, whom Chu has come to rescue. Another Merrimac mook stands guard over the women.

Other imported goods on display that might prove useful to the PC include cheap quality martial arts weapons -- balisong knives, butterfly swords, combat fans, hook swords, horse-cutters, jianns, kakutes, machetes, nunchaku, rope darts, sais, shuriken, and slashing wheels -- as well as handcuffs, flashlights, cigarette lighters, batteries, and assorted other goods (clothing, furniture, fabrics, knock-off toys, and pirated DVDs). A first aid kit and small fire extinguisher are mounted on the wall next to the back door. Display cases and other furniture provide cover and may hamper the use of long weapons.

As soon as Lin Chu sees the women, she explains to the slaves (in Chinese) and to everyone else (in English) why she is there. She then disables the second slave guard and watches the PC warily while she frees the women. She intends to leave via the club and to fight anyone who tries to stop her -- preferring non-lethal but crippling attacks. This would be a very good time for the PC to decide which side he's on.

When Chu and the women come into the club, the bartender (treat as a mook) draws a .40 auto pistol from under the bar, and Ferret appears from his office with his holdout pistol drawn. Should the hero fail to prevent a firefight, Chu is shot at least once -- and if the PC makes a Per roll, he sees that she is unaffected by bullets or any other metal weapons.

If the PC aids Chu and the slaves with their escape (Chu has an rented van parked just outside), Chu offers him a lift to relative safety. She may tell some of her story to the hero, depending on her reaction to him.

- **Neutral:** Chu came to town a little more than two weeks ago, to try to break a people-smuggling ring that was forcing women it brought in from Asia and the former Soviet Union to work as sex slaves. She visited the docks searching for the women, but arrived too late to locate them. She has spent most of the past two weeks tracking them down to Qian Kun Imports. She has heard that a young woman, a freelance reporter, had also come down to the docks to investigate the smugglers, and was killed.
- **Good:** Chu is a member of a small group of martial arts masters known (in English) as the Society or Sentinels of the Styx. The group has no particular agenda apart from the development of the martial arts by protecting their best practitioners. It rarely meets except when a Sentinel has died and a successor must be chosen. Selection as a Sentinel is by a full-contact unarmed mixed martial arts contest. Though legend has it that this is a fight to the death, deliberate killing is not permitted and fatalities have been rare: Contestants are defeated by being forced out of the (5-yard diameter) ring, pinned for more than 22 seconds, rendered unconscious, or surrendering.
- **Very Good:** The Sentinels of the Styx know a magical formula that gives the skin DR 1 and renders it immune to the effects of any metal weapon, as well as slowing down the external appearance of aging. No one person knows the entire formula; each Sentinel knows part of it. The formula is only mixed together when a Sentinel dies and must be replaced by another master. Glanton hopes to be made a Sentinel and is rumored to know part of the formula; Chu is in town to confront him. If he was responsible for the attempt on her life, as she suspects, then the Sentinels are entitled to return the favor.
- **Excellent:** While none of the PCs are, as yet, serious contenders for membership in the society, if and when they are ready to be trained by a master, Chu gives them a hint on how to find one. See *Aftermath!* (later in this article).

Regardless of her reaction to the hero, Chu drops him off before the slaves and will not tell him where she's taking them.

Masterclass

Two weeks after Kim Song's death, Lin Chu comes to the dojo to meet the PCs. She cheerfully spars with anyone who wants to try, but her real intention is to gather backup for her meeting with Glanton the next night, when she intends to gatecrash his dojo. She is confident that she can tackle him, but he won't be alone, and she wants other fighters present in case matters get out of hand. She also fills the martial artists in on back-story (as above) depending on her most positive reaction to anyone present.

Clash of the Titans

The next night, at Glanton's dojo, Chu and anyone who has been invited because of exemplary performance at the concert (see *Acting in Concert,* above) is permitted to enter without being challenged. Anyone else must get past an unarmed heavy who is blocking the doorway.

Once inside, Chu and the PCs face an equal number of opponents. Glanton, Sabra, Volker, Ferret (if not too badly injured in previous encounters), and enough heavies to make up the numbers. Everyone is dressed in the dojo's uniform -- pants with a belt, bare feet, bare heads, bare (and empty) hands, and (except for Sabra, who wears a sports top) bare to the waist. The dojo contains fine training equipment, and the walls are lined with real and training weapons -- baseball bats, katana, machete, nunchaku, tonfa, an assortment of knives, and sticks of various lengths from yawara to quarterstaff.

Chu immediately challenges Glanton, accusing him of murdering Kim Song, as well as human trafficking. Glanton protests -- truthfully -- that he was not involved in either and knows nothing about them. If questioned, he admits to importing the cobras for their venom, having heard that it was a component of the Sentinels' formula, as well as

organizing arms smuggling. He knew that Ferret was running a brothel, but not where the women came from.

Chu then demands to know who was responsible for Kim Song's death. Successful contests of Body Language against IQ enable her (and the heroes, if they can manage it) to spot three heavies glancing at Sabra. If accused, Sabra draws knives from her pockets and charges at Chu, 15 yards away; one PC will be in a position to intercept her. Meanwhile, Glanton attempts to grapple Chu, and they fight. Ferret, Volker, and the heavies run for the weapon racks.

The room is 13 yards by 16 yards. When the fighting begins, everyone is 3d yards from the weapons rack (roll for each character). Chu and Glanton can be removed from the equation (though the GM is free to role-play their struggle if he chooses). Should Sabra defeat or evade the agent blocking her path and she reaches Chu, the older woman disarms her and Glanton grapples his associate, preventing her doing any further harm. He calls for an end to the fighting while he questions Sabra. If the PCs stop, so will the others.

Sabra admits (truthfully) to mistaking Kim Song for Chu, and killing her. She had heard that the contest for membership in the society was to the death, and she wanted to save Glanton, her lover. After Chu explains that the Sentinels are forbidden to kill, Glanton asks what Chu intends to do. Chu turns the question back to him -- what does he think she should do? -- for Ferret as well as Sabra. When Glanton offers to hand both Ferret and Volker over to the police, Ferret and Volker (if conscious and able) try to run; the heavies freeze, not knowing who they should follow, and it will be up to the PCs to try to catch the men.

Once the two slave traders are in hand, Glanton admits that he's unable to pass judgement on his lover, Sabra, and asks Chu to decide. Chu says that she's not sufficiently familiar with local laws, so she turns to the heroes and requests that they act as jury and judge.

Should the team vote to hand Sabra over to the police, Chu and Glanton comply. If they say a death sentence is appropriate, Chu insists that they kill her themselves; she calls for Glanton to release Sabra. Chu explains that if the younger woman can get past the characters and outside to her car, she's free to leave. The heavies who can be charged as accessories to Kim's death choose to run interference for her.

In the event that the heroes come up with some alternative suggestion, Chu and Glanton should accept or reject it as the GM sees fit.

Aftermath!

Provided that the PCs agree to hand Sabra over to the police, or come up with another suggestion that Chu (through the GM) thinks is just, Chu relates to them any parts of the back story that she hasn't already disclosed (see *The China Shop,* earlier in this article). She also lets them know how and where to begin their quest for a master (see **GURPS Basic Set,** p. 293, and **GURPS Martial Arts,** p. 248). Every few years (she says), there's a mixed martial arts tournament held, where all who can reach the dojo are welcome, and masters look for promising students. The next will be held on the first day of the Year of the Metal Tiger; on that day (February 14, 2010), as soon as possible after midnight but not before, they should go to the Green Dragon bar on the Singapore waterfront and ask for One-Ear Wang. Chu refuses to speak any further on the subject, and she leaves town the next day.

If Glanton is satisfied that the heroes have behaved honorably, he lets the matter rest there, though he dismisses anyone who found a job at the company. If not, he may become an Enemy. If Glanton is killed, the formidable Merrimac company could become an Enemy.

Timeline for Entire Adventure

Day -2. Lin Chu arrives in town, photographed at airport.

Day 1. Kim Song and Lin Chu, independently, investigate smuggling operations at the docks. Song films Chu defeating eight Merrimac guards, flees from gunmen. Chu defeats gunmen. Sabra Stein and heavies arrive at dock,

mistake Song for Chu, and shoot her with crossbow. Song heads for PCs' dojo, dies. Torres and Kane investigate murder, question PCs.

Day 8. Sabra and Torres return to PCs' dojo. Sabra attempts to seduce a PC, then interrogate him. Torres, attracted to a PC, offers to help their investigation.

Day 10. Cyanotix concert.

Days 11-13. If Sabra admits defeat at her seduction, Ferret breaks into home of another PC.

Day 14. Lin Chu helps women escape from Qian Kun Imports.

Day 15. Lin Chu comes to PCs' dojo, attempts to recruit them to avenge Kim Song.

Day 16. Confrontation at Glanton's dojo.

Cast

For stats for Merrimac mooks, Merrimac heavies, Sabra Stein, John Turvey, and Pieter Volker, see the *Cast* section of ["Sentinels of the Styx, Part I."](#)

Non-combatant   *Varies*

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

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 4.75 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0].

Advantages: Appearance and Wealth varies.

Disadvantages: Combat Paralysis [-15] OR Pacifism (Cannot Kill or Self-Defense Only) [-15].

Skills: Combat skills at default level only.

Gear: No weapons or armor but may carry improvised weapons (belts, bras, purses, etc.).

The GM is free to intersperse non-combatants with more experienced martial artists (such as using stats for Merrimac mooks).

Jerome "Ferret" Barrett   *175 points*

Skinny, long-nosed, and generally unpleasant-looking, with his father in jail more often than not, Jerome Barrett had an utterly miserable childhood until he learned to break into buildings through narrow gaps and buy off the school bullies with stolen cigarettes, pornography, and alcohol. A stint in juvenile detention taught him several useful tricks, including how to avoid getting caught again. For the next few years, he moderated his greed and his drug use and remained strictly small time, until a prostitute he knew persuaded him to rob a rich client of hers while she distracted him. His share of the loot enabled him to buy a an adult bookshop and peepshow, while she had cosmetic surgery and became a porn star.

A few months later, Barrett met Pieter Volker at a strip club, and they went into business together, with Barrett using his shop to sell Volker's illegal imports. When Barrett's former partner reappeared, demanding more money, Barrett gave her a job -- but when he caught her stealing from him, he killed her and fed her body to Volker's dogs.

Barrett has no real friends, and no loyalty to anyone but himself. He will, however, do favors for his associates -- even taking their side in a fight -- if it seems worth his while.

Height 5'8", Wt 105 lbs., Size Modifier 0, Age 39.

Appearance: Pale, pockmarked skin; untidy dark blond hair; hazel eyes -- a scrawny, sharp-featured, shifty-looking man with an ugly toothbrush mustache.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 13 [10]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [5]; Basic Move 7 [5].

Advantages and Perks: Contact Group (Street; Skill-15; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [10]; Danger Sense [15]; Flexibility [5]; Night Vision 8 [8]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Style Familiarity (Dagger fighting; Krav Maga) [2]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Callous [-5]; Careful [-1]; Dislikes most animals, especially dogs and cats [-1]; Greed (12) [-15]; Horrible Hangovers [-1]; Incompetence (Gambling) [-1]; Lecherousness (15) [-7]; Miserliness (12) [-10]; Overconfident when drunk [-1]; Skinny [-5]; Unattractive [-5]; Uncongenial [-1].

Skills and Techniques: Back Strike (Knife) (H) Knife-1 [2]-14; Climbing (A) DX [2]-12; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-13; Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Escape (H) DX-1 [2]-12; Fast Talk (A) IQ [2]-11; Filch (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-13; Forgery (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Garrote (E) DX [1]-13; Guns/ TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Holdout (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Karate (H) DX-1 [2]-12; Lockpicking/TL8 (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Mechanic/TL8 (Car) (A) IQ [2]-11; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Merchant (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Photography/TL8 (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Professional Skill (Bartender) (A) IQ [2]-11; Search (A) Per [2]-13; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-12; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Wrestling (A) DX [2]-13.

Gear: Holdout pistol, .380; fine-quality large knife. Usually wears leather jacket and baggy pants over ballistic TL8 vest and cup.

Donald Glanton   *325 points*

Don Glanton is the son of a Recon Marine sniper and an ESL teacher. Most of his childhood and youth was spent following his parents around the Pacific, with long stints in Okinawa, Hawaii, and the Philippines. He learned local languages with the help of his mother and, from the age of five, local martial arts with the encouragement of his father -- including Escrima, Kajukenbo, and Kobujutsu. By the time he finished school and enlisted in the USMC, he was a red belt in Kajukenbo and familiar with many other styles.

The corps supported Glanton's participation in mixed martial arts tournaments, regarding it as good publicity -- but in the 1990s, he became increasingly bored and disillusioned with military life. After his father died of cancer, Glanton decided not to re-enlist, instead devoting himself to a punishing full-time training regime. Then, after a tournament in Japan, he caught a plane to Manila and effectively vanished. He spent three years being trained by a Kajukenbo master who told him stories of the Sentinels of the Styx and sent him on missions to try to discover their secrets. Glanton was also directed fight drug lords in the Golden Triangle, former Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and Maoist rebels in Nepal. To his teacher's surprise, he always returned alive.

Glanton reappeared in the United States three years later at a tournament in Las Vegas and was recruited by Merrimac as an instructor. Though he describes himself as "indifferently honest," he uses Merrimac's already- established smuggling network to ship weapons around the world. However, he is not involved in nor aware of any of his associates' illegal sidelines.

Though still on ready reserve, Glanton is not motivated by patriotism as much as an honor code similar to Bushido, combined with wanderlust and a low tolerance for boredom.

Height 6'6", Wt 190 lbs., Size Modifier 0, Age 41.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, red-brown hair cut in hi-top fade, dark brown eyes -- a rangy, broad-shouldered, tough-looking man, with large callused hands and feet, a USMC tattoo on the right bicep and a hula girl on the left.

Languages: English (Native); Japanese (Accented) [2]; Mandarin Chinese (Accented) [2]; Spanish (Accented) [2]; Russian (Accented) [2]; Arabic (Accented) [2]; Hindi (Accented) [2]; Korean (Accented) [2]. *TL:* 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western [0], East Asian [1].

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 13 [30].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 16 [10]; Will 13 [5]; Per 13 [5]; FP 16 [9]; Basic Speed 7.00 [5]; Basic Move 8 [5].

Advantages and Perks: Combat Reflexes [15]; Enhanced Parry 1 (Bare Hands) [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Improvised Weapons (Brawling) [1]; Language Talent [10]; Less Sleep 2 [4]; Military Rank (Courtesy: reserve) 3 [3]; Night Vision 3 [3]; Penetrating Voice [1]; Rapid Healing [5], Style Familiarity (Hapkido, Jeet Kune Do, Jujutsu, Kajukenbo, Kobujutsu, Krav Maga, MCMAP, Muay Thai, Sambo, and Sumo) [10]; Style Perk (DR 1: Partial, both hands and both feet, -20%; Tough Skin, -40%) [2]; Temperature Tolerance 2 [2]; Trained by a Master [30]; Very Fit [15]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Bloodlust (15) [-5]; Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]; Doesn't take any drugs except on doctor's orders [-1]; Duty (Merrimac, 12 or less) [-10], (Dojo, 12 or less) [-10]; Incompetence (Politics) [-1]; Intolerance (smokers) [-1]; Mild dislike of flying, and really hates parachuting [-1]; Obsession (Become the ultimate unarmed fighter) (12) [-10]; Still wonders whether he could have beaten his father in a fistfight [-1].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ [2]-12; Animal Handling (Dog) (A) IQ [2]-12; Boating/TL8 (Motorboat) (A) DX [2]-13; Body Language (A) Per +1 [4]-14; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Breath Control (H) HT-1 [2]-12; Climbing (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Current Affairs (Sports) (E) IQ [1]-12; Driving (Car) (A) DX [2]-13; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security) (A) IQ [2]-12; Erotic Art (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Escape (H) DX [4]-13; Explosives/TL8 (Demolition) (A) IQ [2]-12; Fast-Draw (Ammo) (E) DX+2 [2]-15*, (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-14*, (Long Arm) (E) DX+1 [1]-14*; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Games (Go) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Guns/TL8 (Rifle) (E) DX+4 [12]-17; Hiking (A) HT [2]-13; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-14; Judo (H) DX [16]-16; Karate (H) DX [20]-17; Leadership (A) IQ +1 [4]-13; Lifting (A) HT [2]-13; Melee Weapon (Axe/ Mace) (A) DX [2]-13, (Flail) (H) DX-2 [1]-11, (Jitte/Sai) (A) DX-1 [1]-12, (Knife) (E) DX+2 [4]-15, (Shortsword) (A) DX+1 [4]-14, (Staff) (A) DX [4]-14, (Tonfa) (A) DX+1 [1]-12; Navigation/TL8 (Land) (A) IQ [2]-12; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Parachuting (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Power Blow (H) Will+1 [8]-14; Running (A) HT [2]-13; Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (E) IQ +2 [4]-14, (Military) (E) IQ [1]-12; Scuba/TL (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Soldier (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Survival (Island) (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Swimming (E) HT+2 [4]-15; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-13; Teaching (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-14.

* +1 for Combat Reflexes

Techniques: Disarming (Judo) (H) Judo+1 [2]-17; Exotic Hand Strike (A) Karate [1]-16; Lethal Kick (H) Karate-3 [2]-14; Lifesaving (H) Swimming-4 [2]-11; Rope Up (A) Climbing-1 [1]-13.

Gear: Small very fine folding knife; TL8 ballistic vest; mini flashlight; multi-tool; personal basics. Owns a modest collection of guns, but rarely carries one. Usually wears a brown leather jacket, military-style khaki clothing, combat boots. In dojo, wears camouflage cargo pants with red belt.

Lin Chu   *500 points*

Lin Chu was born in Kowloon's Walled City. She learned to fight at an early age. She was barely five when her mother died, and was sent to an orphanage run by Buddhist nuns. She fled several times over the next two years before an old nun recognized her potential and sent her to the Omei Mountain temple to be trained in Kung Fu.

When the Maoist government attacked temples during the Cultural Revolution, Lin Chu hid with many of her fellow Shaolin students on a farm and secret school far from any city. Twelve years later, she succeeded her former master as head of the school. In 1987, she escaped from China to compete for membership in the Society of the Styx.

Since becoming a Sentinel, Lin Chu has lived a nomadic life as an itinerant worker, visiting Buddhist temples and martial arts schools around the world in search of promising students. Though she thinks Westerners are too materialistic and reliant on machines, she is neither a primitive nor a Luddite: she is a fan of non-lethal and appropriate technology, and would own a wearable computer and other gadgets if her vows permitted it. She and Glanton would agree on a surprising range of issues.

While Chu strives to be compassionate to all people, she feels a particular sense of duty toward young Asian women and does what she can to protect or rescue them from human traffickers and other criminals.

Height 5'3", Wt 125 lbs., Size Modifier 0, Age 68 (looks 40-ish).

Appearance: Golden complexion, shaved head (usually covered by black wig), dark brown eyes -- a wiry, serene-looking Asian woman with brands on her wrists (usually hidden by sleeves).

Languages: Mandarin Chinese (Native); English (Accented) [4]; Cantonese (Accented) [4]; Russian (Broken) [2]. *TL:* 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Chinese [0].

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 13 [30].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 15 [10]; Per 13 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 7 [10]; Basic Move 7 [0].

Advantages and Perks: Charisma 2 [10]; Claim to Hospitality (Buddhist monasteries) [1]; Clerical Investment [5]; Damage Resistance 1 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3], 50 (Metal Only, Common, -40%; Tough Skin, -40%) [50]; Enhanced Parry 1 (all) [10]; Extra Attack 1 (Multi-Strike, +20%) [30]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Higher Purpose [5]; Less Sleep 2 [4]; Longevity [2]; Rank (Religious) 2 [10]; Reduced Consumption 1 [2]; Style Familiarity (Shaolin Kung Fu) [1]; Trained by a Master [30]; Unfazeable [15]; Wild Talent 1 [20].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1]; Disciplines of Faith (Asceticism) [-15]; Dislikes motorized vehicles, prefers to walk when possible [-1]; Enemy (Chinese Ministry of State Security: Watcher, 6 or less) [-3]; Enemy (Triad: Hunter, 6 or less) [-15]; Likes musicals, especially Bollywood movies [-1]; Mild addiction to chocolate [-1]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Humanity) [-15]; Talks to animals in Chinese [-1]; Workaholic [-5].

Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX+1 [8]-14; Artist (Calligraphy) (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Blind Fighting (VH) Per-1 [4]-12; Body Control (VH) HT [8]-13; Body Language (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Breaking Blow (H) IQ [4]-13; Breath Control (H) HT [4]-13; Climbing (A) DX [2]-13; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-13; Cooking (specialty: Vegetarian) (A) IQ [1]-13; Current Affairs (Science & Technology) (E) IQ [1]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]-13; Farming (A) IQ [2]-13; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-13; Flying Leap (H) IQ [4]-13; Judo (H) DX+4 [20]-17; Jumping (E) DX [1]-13; Karate (H) DX+4 [20]-17; Light Walk (H) DX [4]-13; Lizard Climb (H) DX [4]-13; Meditation (H) Will [4]-15; Melee Weapon (Staff) (A) DX+2 [8]-15; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Pharmacy (Herbal) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Philosophy (Zen Buddhism) (H) IQ+2 [12]-15; Power Blow (H) Will [4]-15; Pressure Points (H) IQ+2 [12]-15; Research/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Running (A) HT [2]-13; Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-13; Survival (Mountains) (A) Per [2]-13; Swimming (E) HT [1]-13; Teaching (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Urban Survival (A) Per-1 [1]-12.

Techniques: Exotic Hand Strike (A) Karate [1]-16; Pole-Vault Kick (H) Karate-3 [2]-14; Pressure-Point Strike (H) Karate [4]-17; Roll with Blow (Judo-1) [2]-16; Whirlwind Attack (Staff) (H) [2]-11.

Gear: Faded black denim jacket and jeans; black wig; shoes. Small backpack holds orange robe and change of underwear, TL8 first aid kit, mini flashlight, thermos bottle, and personal basics (including passport but no money): 11.25 lbs.