Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

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Pyramid Review

Carcassonne: Abbey & Mayor

Published by Rio Grande Games

Designed by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Full-color boxed set with 18 tiles (12 "regular" terrain & six abbeys), 18 wooden pawns (six barns, six wagons, & six mayors, one for each player color), & rules; $14.95

playing time 30 to 45 minutes, for two to six players;

zzCarcassonnexx is getting awfully busy. What was once a small, industrious little town, focus of many hours of delightful game play, has grown considerably to become a thriving home to dozens of meeples. Commerce has taken over, and they're even electing people to public office, if you can believe it. The fifth supplement is called *Abbey & Mayor.* The object of the game remains the accumulation of points, but like so many zzCarcassonnexx supplements before it, the face of the game changes in some ways with the new pieces.

Wagons are used to bring goods to market. Placed on cities, roads, and cloisters in the same way as a follower, the cart scores points when a board feature is finished. This piece, however, may move to any adjacent, unfinished, unoccupied feature. For example, if a cart is in a city but the completed city has a road leading out of it to nowhere, the player may shift the wagon to that pathway and await completion of the new feature. This allows fluid access to already-started projects.

Cities may elect mayors, if they grow big enough. These oversized, bow-legged meeples stand in a city like any other follower, but their value as a pawn depends on the pennants in that city. For each flag, they count as one follower; if the town is finished without pennants, the mayor is not elected and he counts as nothing.

Finally, just in case scoring farms hasn't been confusing enough, there are now barns. Low, flat buildings, these structures are placed at an intersection when four pasture-cornered tiles meet. Once upon a game system, farms weren't tallied until the end of the game; this piece forces an immediate, lower scoring for current farms, then ejects the farmer meeples from those fields and back into the owner's hand. Now the barn reigns supreme, getting the endgame points for any cities it serves. Farmers (and other barns) may later connect themselves to that same field, but farmers that do this score even less than the ones that were displaced. The barn(s) now get the big score at the conclusion of play.

Along with the followers and pawns, there are new tiles mixed in with the stacks. Each player also receives a special abbey tile, held in hand. These can only be played in a space where they are touched on all four edges (not necessarily at the corners) by previously played tiles. They have the overwhelming effect of completing any feature they close off. A road, for example, could just dead-end into it. (The tiles have an illustration and an orange border, but no features.) A follower placed on it becomes a monk just like in a cloister; when the eight surrounding tile spaces are filled, all nine tiles score points.

The components continue to hold up their end . . . no complaints about the cardboard stock or the wooden pawns. The bow-legged mayors look a bit silly, but it must be a pain to find ways to make new meeples stand out from the pack. Not that these followers are that distinct -- one may still overlook them accidentally -- but those are the hazards of incautious play for you. The new tiles are marked with a little barn symbol for easy extraction should players wish to forgo their use.

Carcassonne: Abbey & Mayor is going to send the purists through the roof. It substantially alters play in several ways,

ways it usually took multiple supplements to cover. The rules do what they can, but there seem to be a few unanswered questions. Do abbeys "count" as a tile in the feature they complete? What if you're playing a copy of the game from before pennants were introduced? And it offers no warning about the old rule that you can draw and look at your new piece before your turn comes, just to keep things moving. After all, if you see that piece, but in the meantime someone creates a spot where you can place your abbey . . .

And that's one example of where new strategies enter play with this set. Finding someplace for the abbey to go is tough when setting yourself up for it just means the next player with his tile still in hand is going to take it. This may be the first supplement that actively plays into the usefulness of making some alliances, especially when the big barn-and-farm booms begin. Those score bigger points than ever before, and create upsets unlike any that veteran players have seen. Players' heads will swirl with numbers, but also with game plans, and these are the tradeoffs to be considered by potential buyers when looking into *Abbey & Mayor,* the most groundbreaking follow-up yet for *Carcassonne.*

--Andy Vetromile

The Omniscient Eye

Do Super-Spies and Airports Mix?

I'm planning an adventure in my secret-agent game to send my players sneaking around an airport. I've got some airport maps, but they only show where the general public can go. Without getting into details that would get me in trouble with Homeland Security, what does an airport look like behind the scenes, and what are the players going to run into there? Offices? Great big conveyor belts full of luggage? Massive security checkpoints and guard dogs?

The first thing you need to know about an airport is that it has a landside and an airside. Technically, an airport is simply a piece of land that has an airside. It has one or more runways, taxiways, an active control tower (most big airports have legacy smaller control towers, either unused or dedicated to local ground control), a fire station, hangars, and sometimes cargo terminals and Passenger Terminal Buildings (PTB in the jargon of the airports). Members of the public tend to use the word "airport" when they refer to the Passenger Terminal Building. This makes perfect sense considering it is the only part of the airport they are allowed in. A Passenger Terminal Building's landside is just an ordinary building although often large (and rarely tall) . . . but airside it is like no other type of building.

Although the airside/landside distinction is the one that is essential for security purpose and applies to everyone in an airport, international airports also bundle with it the international border that is controlled by the immigration authority and the Duty/Duty-free division that the customs authorities control. Those last two demarcation lines are only for the "benefit" of the travelers; employees do not have to carry their passports on the way to work, but they also cannot buy duty free goods. However, the existence of an internationally defined limit does not impede individual airports from experimenting with others. For example, many airports tend to discourage non-traveling visitors from entering the hall where check-in counters are installed by instating a pre-screening between the public hall and the check-in hall. This pre-screening does not do much for security, but does wonders to simplify the flow of visitors airside. However, an airport (like many other industrial facilities) has a need to protect specific locations, like the control tower, the data centers and server rooms, and the fuel depots. Those are called the "reinforced security" -- or, colloquially, "sterile" -- area (although in some cases, "sterile" applies to the whole airside). Usually the sterile locations are located airside to benefit from the increased security afforded there but the access is further restricted on a demonstrated need basis.

The airside/landside demarcation is exceptional because it is specifically defined in the [ICAO](#) (International Civil Aviation Organization) treaty Annex 17 chapter 4. For passengers it is easy to spot where the airside begins when flying out: it is where signs say "Passengers only beyond this point." When flying in, it is trickier. The airside usually starts when entering the building either from the Passenger Boarding Bridges or when leaving from a bus which ferries passengers from the plane to the terminal. In some older airport designs, the passengers leaving the plane mix with the passengers boarding. In this case, the airside starts when the path of the inbound passengers leaves the path of the outbound passenger. In the rest of this article we will concentrate on crossing this boundary from landside to airside inside a Passenger Terminal Building, keeping in mind that the full array of security measures described below only applies to major airports[1].

When designing a new airport, a lot of time is spent on drawing the landside/airside boundary. It has to be perfectly tight with all potential crossing points identified. Most office space must be located landside, so that that those staff crossing the airside boundary do it for operational reasons. At all phases of the design process specific reviews have to be carried out for this purpose. Peer-reviewed security specialists from other airports are invited to examine the drawings and inspect the building during construction to make recommendations to the ICAO before commercial planes are allowed to land at the newly constructed terminal. Some crossing points are easy to spot and defend: Passengers and staff entrances in the airside are well defined and always associated with screening points of appropriate size and number for the foreseen throughput[2]. There is also the checked baggage entrance, associated with

conveyor belts and are usually kept closed when the conveyor is not running. Any attempt to cross through an idle conveyor should be detected and raise alarm; any attempt to cross through a running conveyor is likely to result in serious injuries.

Trickier are the emergency exit and evacuation routes. These are always designed to only open from airside to landside, but they need to have alarms and be monitored to avoid someone leaving them open. Related are the exceptional crossings. For example, when a flight is cancelled at the last minute, passengers can be allowed to leave the terminal rather than wait for the replacement flight. There is also the case of deportees that immigration authorities try to avoid mixing with the other passenger until boarding. Exceptional crossings are generally handled by designing some of the staff crossings to allow them on a case by case basis.

Technical galleries bringing power, water, and network connectivity have to be closed at the Landside/airside boundary, usually by having the pipe, duct or cable tray cross a solid wall. In real life, though, air conditioning ducts are ill suited as an access or egress route. Airports are usually big enough that airside and landside do not have to share the same air handling units. Finally, there is the waste evacuation to consider. Liquid waste is treated like the other utilities only reversed; solid waste usually requires a trash truck to come in contact with the terminal landside. An airport produces an awful lot of waste. There is the common rubbish produced by the passengers, the restaurants, and the duty shops, and there is the waste that is specific to an airport: neither the items confiscated at the screening stations nor the bags that are lost and cannot be traced back to a passenger can be allowed to accumulate airside.

Then there is the vehicle entrance conundrum. Most airports create a dedicated screening facility removed from the terminal building to filter the vehicles authorized to commute from landside to airside, but they need (at least) to keep an entrance for emergency vehicle close by and, in case of an emergency they do not want to delay any extraordinary aid that might be required. Of course, there are dedicated fire-trucks and ambulances permanently parked airside, but it is the nature of emergencies that you never can plan for all occasions. Vehicle entrances are always a source of trouble when planning an airport and, consequently, are usually overmanned and over-monitored.

Once construction is finished and the assessors are satisfied with both the design and the realization, it is time for the police to take control of the airside boundary. The area is completely emptied of all staff and workers. Police teams with dogs and/or explosive trace detectors start a systematic search of the airside area, or the in the case of an existing airport the new extension of the airside. Anything left behind is confiscated, and all cabinets and drawers are opened and inspected. All covers are removed and replaced after the police are satisfied nothing is left behind. It takes days to complete the check of even a moderate sized terminal. Once this is complete, only the designated points of entrance are open and the screening stations are manned. Work on the terminal usually continues for a few months, but the worker in this case needs to be treated like interim staff and be subject to background check before being given their airside pass. In many airports, especially in Europe, the manning of the screening station is delegated by the state authority to a private company, but it nevertheless remains the responsibility of the police to ensure they apply procedures and use equipment in accordance with the ICAO recommendation, or the more stringent national rules.

More and more passenger screening is set up so that the passenger does not know what station he is going to pass through. This is meant to avoid collusion between a passenger and a compromised security agent. Bribing one agent would not help; you would have to bribe the whole shift. In fact, the screening process starts at the check-in. The check-in agent has the power to request extra screening for a passenger and his bags based on the passenger's behavior during the check-in process. If the agent suspects that the passenger is withholding information, he might "select" the passenger. At the station, the passenger is requested to put anything that could interfere with the metal detector portal. If security is tightened, the sensitivity of the metal detector is cranked up and the list of things that cannot be worn while crossing a metal detector portal gets longer: wallet, belt, jacket, and shoes (in certain countries). All of those must be screened in the X-ray machine, and plastic trays sufficient in size and number must be provided for the passenger. If not, in order to maintain the throughput, the agent will be tempted to tolerate that passengers leave their wallet and car keys on the outside of the metal detector and retrieve them after having passed through, which is not completely safe. At this point the passengers are also required to take portable computers out and sometimes demonstrate that they are functional. Any large piece of electronic equipment containing batteries is difficult enough to analyze; separating such items from the background clutter of travel bags makes the screening more efficient. (Laptop computers are only singled out because they are likely to be found in most business travelers bags.)

Modern metal detector portals not only detect if the traveler carries metal above a preset limit, but also gives an indication of the position on the body. If the cause of the alarm can be ascribed to a borderline case (a belt buckle, jewelry, loose change . . .) the passenger may be given the opportunity to step back and try again. Otherwise the passenger will be patted down by an agent of the same gender, with the help of a portable metal detector. In any case at least 10% of the passengers that have not raised an alarm will be patted down on a random basis. Based on availability of the equipment some or all passengers can be required to go through an Explosive Trace Detection (ETD) portal or a body scanner. People with large metal implants (hip replacements, pins to repair broken bones) may have to carry documents confirming that they will trigger metal detectors. They will still be individually scanned, but they'll be passed through if the scan confirms that the only "hidden" metal they have is in the right place.

In the mean time, the belongings of the passenger are screened. At the moment the decision making process is manual; an agent reviews the image of the contents of the baggage and looks for weapons and explosive devices. In the near future, it is likely that handbag screening devices will be able to automatically detect whether the bag is likely to contain explosive or liquid precursor to explosive; a few experimental devices are being tested at the moment. To make the job of the screener more interesting and to test his vigilance, a system called TIP (Threat Image Projection) adds the image of a threat (weapon, bomb . . .) as a overlay to the bag. The screener must reject the bag or be notified that he missed a TIP before being presented again with the image of the bag. The decision of the screener is also based on his observation of the passenger. If the screener decides to reject the bag an agent will inspect the bag by either requesting the passenger to open it or by submitting to an ETD testing if the equipment is available. At least 10% of the bags that have not raised an alarm must be search manually nevertheless[3].

Staff screening follows the same principles including the non-alarmed search. However, as staff have been vetted, after a background check by the security authorities some of the elements of the process are relaxed. Staff entrance are usually covered by a single screening station and staff can possibly know in advance who the agent will be. More importantly, technical staff are allowed to enter the airport with tools of their trade. That include screwdrivers, box cutters and knives, and other objects that are strictly forbidden for passenger. Those are usually kept airside, but once in while a replacement must brought in. For this reason, ICAO recommendations specify that new staff must be given a temporary pass during the first six months of their employment while background checks are conducted. During this period they cannot enter Security Restricted Area unaccompanied. Goods screening points only differ from ordinary staff screening points by the size of the screening device; the biggest models can analyze a goods palette in one go. The staff member carrying the palette is screened normally each time he makes a delivery.

Except in very small airfields, the checked-in baggage is transported in a Baggage Handling System. Depending on the size and the traffic the technology used can vary from belt conveyors[4] to autonomous Destination Coded Vehicles (DCV). The largest hubs (terminals that serve as base of operation for a major airline) sometimes have more than 100 kilometers of conveyors and/or DCV rails. A BHS has two main purposes: sorting and screening. Sorting consists of bringing all the bags with the same characteristics (flight, of course, but also sometime class and/or further connection) to a pre-determined output where it will be loaded in containers and brought to the airplane hold. Screening is done by subjecting the baggage to an X-ray inspection and if it is suspect to a physical search.

There is a difference of philosophy between the European regulations (in force since Lockerbie) and the US regulations (enacted after September 11th, 2001). Airport authorities around the world apply one, the other, or mixed of both. The TSA regulation insists that all baggage must be screened by an Explosive Detection System (EDS) with a very low false alarm rate. At the moment the only technology available is Computerized Tomography (CT scanners). This produces a 3D model of the densities inside the bag and generates an alarm when it finds an area in the bag with enough material that is density compatible with known explosives. Then the image is presented to an operator who will try to find other elements of a bomb (detonator and power source). If he is certain that he cannot find any, the bag is cleared. If not, the bag is sent for a combination of search, passenger questioning, and canine or ETD inspection depending on the police procedures in the country.

The problem with CT scanners is that they had, until very recently, a very high cost and a very low throughput. That is the reason why European countries chose to do a pre-screening with primary-Explosive Detection System (p-EDS). Those Systems are dual energy X-ray, taking one or more views of the baggage. This process allows discriminating

the contents of the bag between organic and non-organic materials. Explosives show as dense organic material. Above a certain quantity, the bag registers an alarm and an operator is required to inspect the image to find the same telltale signs of a bomb as discussed above. As the image is not a 3D model, the false alarm rate is much higher. But as the throughput is much higher, it allows operators to eliminate 60% to 80% of the bags and only send to the CT-scanner the bags that are either still suspect, traveling to a place where TSA regulation applies, or belong to a selectee.

The last line of defense in an airport is the Baggage Reconciliation System (BRS). Before being loaded in a container each bag is scanned. The first purpose of the scan is to make sure that the bag is allowed to enter the container which is going to be loaded on a plane (it is the right flight, right class, right onward connections and the passenger is not on a waiting list). The second is to keep a record of which container the bag has been loaded into. If at the end of the boarding process the passenger has not come through the boarding gate (for a good or bad reason), his bag can quickly be accessed and removed from the container. The removal takes about 15 minutes, instead of hours before the introduction of the BRS when the passengers were asked to de-board and recognize their bags on the apron.

To summarize, the security of an Airport Terminal will never be 100% tight, but -- presuming a well managed airport -- it takes a awful lot of coincidental procedural failings to introduce an explosive device or a batch of criminal PCs onto an airplane.

--Francois Marcade

[1] Here you have to consider that the terrorist threat is not equal at all airports. No serious terrorist organization would claim responsibility for the mid-air destruction of the twin-propeller that commutes between Trifouillis-les-Oies and Pleumazout-les-Bains, since neither locality harbors an active "liberation army." Attacking such a soft target would be understood as a demonstration of weakness rather than force.

[2] At least at the beginning of the life of the terminal, an airport master plan like any other plan does stand up to contact with reality.

[3] Systematically doing the non-alarmed/non-selectee searches during off-peak to fill the quota, so that during peak-hours the agents concentrate on alarmed search, is *not* good practice, but is common.

[4] Regardless of the technology used, belts are always found in a BHS usually at input, output and around the screening machines.

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!

Fictional Others, Flesh and Blood Players

Inclusiveness in the Pulps and in Pulp Gaming

by Jess Nevins

A common perception of the pulps is that the main characters were almost entirely white and male. This reflects itself in the tendency in some pulp games to define and describe characters and character types in this way. While these games usually state something like "players should be able to play whatever character they want," the game writers are usually under the impression that the pulps were particularly racist and sexist, and that exceptions of some kind must be made for non-male, non-white heroic characters. This is unfortunate, as female and ethnic minority characters were not unusual in the pulps, and women and those of ethnic minorities leading heroic lives were not unusual in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Pulps Weren't What You Think

It is undeniable that the pulps were racist and sexist. A brief examination of any issue of the pulps reveals women and those from ethnic minorities portrayed in ways that today are thought of as bigoted and ignorant. However, it is also undeniable that the pulps were not markedly more racist than other popular culture media of the time. The "slicks" (the more expensive, mainstream magazine counterpart to the pulps) contained as much racist, sexist material as the pulps. So did radio serials, movie serials, comic strips, and novels. To claim that the pulps were exceptional in their bigotry is historically inaccurate.

Nor were the pulps as exclusionary of women and those from ethnic minorities as many modern readers and critics assume. True, the pulp characters that even casual gamers are familiar with, including Doc Savage and the Shadow, are white males. Likewise, the most popular and successful pulp characters of the time are almost entirely white males. This group of characters (which includes Tarzan, the Spider, the Phantom Detective, Operator #5, and G-8) are the ones that most books and Web sites spend the majority of their time describing.

Nonetheless, among the thousands of less well-known pulp characters exist hundreds of female characters. (Black and ethnic minority characters are less common but hardly unknown). They appear in every pulp genre and are members of every taxonomy of pulp protagonist. The pulps provide examples of female lead characters who do everything that the first-tier characters do and generally suffer few inconveniences due to their gender. (In this regard, the pulps were an idealization of reality). Assuming that female characters are in any way exceptional or in need of justification for their existence is to misrepresent the pulps.

Sources for Female and Ethnic Minority Characters

Sources abound for potential female and ethnic minority characters, and for inspiration for these characters. Pulp games customarily use pulp magazines as their main inspiration. But this is unduly restrictive. GMs and players can find a large amount of pulp-style characters and ideas from outside the pulps themselves, and a number of characters from those sources are women and those from ethnic minorities. During the heyday of the pulps, many authors wrote for both the slicks and the pulps, and there was a significant migration of character types from the pulps to the slicks. Even magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Windsor Magazine* ran stories about female detectives, spies, and so on. The characters mentioned later in this article include a number of women from the slicks and from comic strips. Likewise, many novel series and newspaper and radio serials had pulp-style adventurers and concepts.

Another fertile source is non-American pulps. It remains little known in the United States, but the pulps were not solely an American phenomenon. Countries in Central and South America, Europe, North Africa, and Asia published pulps or the equivalent of pulps, under names like "story papers," "dime novels," *heldromans, pulps Americano, gialli,*

and so on. They appeared beginning in 1908, when the first foreign translations of *Buffalo Bill* appeared, and were published through World War Two and after. Their physical dimensions varied, but they were all printed on cheap paper and contained crudely written stories of genre adventure. Many of the personae in these stories were modeled on American and British characters, including Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake/Nick Carter, and Carroll John Daly's Race Williams (the first major hardboiled detective). Others (like the *jago,* or rural Robin Hood, of Batavia, and the charming, sarcastic *ládron* master thief of Mexico) were based on local, often non-white people and legends. Furthermore, many characters in these foreign pulps, although cast in typically American or British roles, were natives of the countries in which the pulps were written, and the heroes had their adventures in those countries.

Information on these foreign pulps is difficult to come by (see this article's *Bibliography*) but the lesson of these pulps should be kept in mind by GMs and players: Countries outside of America and England have pulp protagonists of ethnicities other than white American, and these characters, or ones like them, should be available to players in pulp games.

Another source of inspiration can be real people. Players and GMs should remember that despite the presence of racism and sexism, many women and African-Americans succeeded in living existences that in fictional characters would have been described as "pulpish." Their lives were more difficult than their white male counterparts', but they overcame those hurdles. To exclude these individuals from pulp games, however inadvertently, is to do them a disservice and give players the wrong impression about the era.

Women and those from ethnic minorities worked as private detectives, pilots, reporters, and government agents. Bessie Beatty (1886-1947) was a correspondent for the *San Francisco Bulletin* during World War One and was present at the Russian trenches during attacks. John C. Robinson (1903-1954) flew combat missions against the invading Italians for the Abyssinians. Gertrude M.L. Bell (1868-1926) was obtained first-class honors from Oxford (the first woman to do so), traveled across the Middle East during the 1890s (and to Jerusalem in 1900 dressed as a male Bedouin), was friends with T.E. Lawrence, and worked as a British Intelligence agent in the Middle East during and after World War One. Eugene J. Bullard (1884-1961) won the *Croix de Guerre* and the *Legion d'Honneur* as a fighter pilot (two confirmed kills, three unconfirmed) for the French during World War One, ran cabarets in Paris after the war, and served as an Allied spy in occupied France and Spain during World War Two. Maria Bochkareva (1889-1920) formed and led the Russian Women's Battalion of Death, which fought -- credibly -- in the July 1917 offensive. Bessie Coleman (1892-1926) was the first black female barnstormer. Benjamin O. Davis Sr. (1877-1970) saw active duty in a black volunteer regiment during the Spanish-American War, fought guerrillas in the Philippines as a lieutenant of the Tenth Cavalry, commanded Troop B of the Ninth Cavalry in the fight against Pancho Villa, and in 1940 became the first African-American to hold the rank of brigadier general in the U.S. Army. Flora Sandes (1876-1956) served in an ambulance unit in Serbia in 1915 and, by the end of the war, was a decorated sergeant-major who had led men in combat.

Hubert Julian (1897-1983), also known as "The Black Eagle," was an early black aviator who made a successful transatlantic flight in 1929, a successful cross-country flight in 1931, fought the Italians in Abyssinia as head of Emperor Haile Selassie's air force, and was friends with the organized crime leaders of Harlem in the 1930s. Julian's life was fictionalized in the pages of the *Amsterdam News* in 1937 and 1938, so he can be said to have been a pulp character as well as a real life aviator.

Fay Gillis Wells (1908-2002) was an early female aviator and journalist. In 1929, she became the first female member of the Caterpillar Club, aviators who bailed out of disabled airplanes in mid-air. From 1930 to 1934, she worked in the Soviet Union as a special correspondent for the *New York Times.* In 1935, she eloped with Linton Wells, another correspondent, and on her honeymoon covered the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the riots in Syria. In 1939, at the suggestion of President Roosevelt, Wells investigated possible African locations for a Jewish homeland.

There are dozens of similar women and those from ethnic minorities whose lives were filled with adventure and whose stories read like a pulp that's too extreme to be believed. These men and women can readily act as role models for player characters.

Approaches to Inclusiveness

Female and ethnic minority players sometimes are reluctant to play pulp games because of the perception that the genre is not welcoming to them. Unfortunately, the pulps' display of racism and sexism can manifest itself in the games themselves.

One of the most damaging forms of bias was the portrayal of ethnic minority and female protagonists as embodiments of their ethnicity or gender, so that being black or being a woman (as examples) was the primary aspect of that character. In the pulps, a *femme fatale* was always a woman first and *fatale* second. A black servant or black private detective was portrayed as being primarily black, rather than as a servant or private detective. White male characters were defined neither by ethnicity or gender, but instead by occupation: "bronzed superman," "knower-of-evil-that-lurks," "socialite by day, avenger by night." Being white and being male were default aspects that didn't need highlighting and didn't merit definition. Even white characters who were defined partially by race, as Tarzan was, were described in positive and superior terms because of that; Tarzan is superior, as a jungle adventurer, to the black natives of the jungle because Tarzan is white and the natives are not. Whiteness is presented as not only the default, but also actively superior to blackness.

The obvious inclusive approach to creating female or ethnic minority pulp characters is by making gender or ethnicity a secondary aspect of the character. In this way, the differences of female and ethnic minority characters are honored with less bias. Thus, to return to two examples mentioned above, a *femme fatale* is considered *fatale* first and a woman second, or a black servant or black private detective is primarily a servant or detective and secondarily black.

Another approach is to design characters using pulp templates or concepts that don't rely on ethnicity or sex at all. Genetics is one possibility; Henry Kuttner and C.L. Moore's Baldies (*Astounding,* 1945-1953) and Hogbens (*Thrilling Adventure,* 1941-1949) are families whose members have various superhuman abilities. Bob Olsen's Archimedes Banning (*Amazing Stories,* 1928) is a mathematician who uses four-dimensional math and "non-Euclidean geometry" to solve crimes. Nelson S. Bond's Horse-Sense Hank (*Amazing Stories,* 1940-1942) is an illiterate, rural car mechanic who is also a human computer; he has an uncanny natural aptitude for mathematics and problem-solving. Female and ethnic minority characters could come from backgrounds similar to the Hogbens and Baldies or be naturally gifted in the fashion of Archimedes Banning and Horse-Sense Hank.

Players could develop other female and ethnic minority characters by elevating character types who were usually secondary characters or sidekicks in the pulps. With the exception of pulps like *Gun Molls Magazine* and *Complete Underworld Novelettes,* criminals like gun molls were rarely protagonists in pulp stories. That does not preclude such characters from becoming protagonists in a pulp game. Likewise, the female reporter, though occasionally a protagonist in the pulps, was more often portrayed as a friend or competitor to the male reporter who was the lead in a story, as with Ann Williams in George Harmon Coxe's Flashgun Casey stories and novels. Again, that does not have to be the case in a pulp game.

Diverse heroes could be created based on pulp villains. *Femmes fatale,* female adventurers, and female master thieves were stock character types in the pulps. Their backgrounds or just their skill sets could be applied to female and ethnic minority game characters, and the adventurers' backgrounds tweaked to be playable and interesting. A classic pulp *femme fatale* is Lai Choi San, the Dragon Lady, in the comic strip "Terry and the Pirates" (1934-1973). Satania acted as the arch-enemy of Simon Legrand in *Simon Legrand Notre Grand Détective Privé* (1945-1947). Lai Choi San is smart, self-possessed, and the leader of a group of bandits (and during the war, guerrillas). Satania is a criminal mastermind. Characters modeled on them could easily be constructed as heroic, with Lai Choi San recast as a Robin Hood and Satania as a brilliant scofflaw vigilante.

A similar approach can be applied to racist character types, such as the "humorous" black private detective, like Arthur K. Akers' Bugwine Breck stories (*Blue Book,* 1932-1934) and Octavus Roy Cohen's Florian Slappey (*Saturday Evening Post,* 1925-1938). Although these characters usually solved their cases, they were portrayed in racist terms. Reformatting the character type by omitting the racism and keeping the interesting aspects could make a functional character.

A third approach can be to retain the outline of the character but change the character's specifics. Fu Manchu-style

characters, Thuggees, and black servants were portrayed negatively in the pulps, but players can give them a more heroic personality and background. Alternatively, a female or ethnic minority character can be created without any regard for the genre they originally appeared in or were traditionally tied to. Mexican characters were customarily limited to Westerns, but a memorable deviation from this trend was the professional killer the "Hairless Mexican," in W. Somerset Maugham's Ashenden spy stories (*Cosmopolitan,* 1927-1928). The Hairless Mexican is an efficient, charming, and deadly assassin who is quite at home in the espionage genre and whose ethnicity is secondary to his profession.

Female Characters

Players wishing to play female characters taken straight from the pulps have many options available to them, as the pulps portrayed women in nearly every role.

There were female private detectives. The pulps provide an embarrassment of riches in this category, including: Cleve Adams' Violet McDade and Nevada Alvarado (*Clues,* 1935-1938), a former circus fat lady (McDade) and a Mexican of Aztec descent (Alvarado), both as hard-boiled as they come; D.B. McCandless' Sarah Watson (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 1937), the plain, "heavyset," clever head of the Watson Detective Agency; and Carl Clausen's Petra "Pete" Ericsen (*Detective Story Magazine,* 1938-1941), the blonde, pert, smart half of a private detective agency.

There were female masked vigilantes, including: Lars Anderson's Domino Lady (*Saucy Romantic Adventures & Mystery Adventure,* 1936), who put on a mask to rob the murderers of her father; Perry Paul's the Madame (*Gun Molls,* 1930-1932), "the mystery moll [who] . . . could spot dip, dick or peterman whatever handicap he liked and beat him at his own game and . . . was a straight shooter in a town where even the calendar was suspected of being fixed"; and Marcel Allain's Miss Teria (*Miss Teria* #1-12, 1931), the masked crimefighter and top secret agent for the British government.

There were female scientists and inventors, including: Isaac Asimov's Susan Calvin, "chief robopsychologist" for U.S. Robots; Arthur B. Reeve's Constance Dunlap (*Pearson's Magazine,* 1913-1914), who helped her husband embezzle money but after his death tried to redeem herself by inventing technologically advanced instruments and weaponry and using them to capture other criminals; and G.L. Hipkiss' Dolores Arana (*Yuma* #1-14, 1943-1946), a scientist on the team of the Shadow-like Yuma.

There were female crimefighting reporters, as protagonists or sidekicks/assistants, including: Whitman Chambers' Katie Blayne, "the Duchess" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 1936-1937), who could "produce hunches faster than a cigarette machine turns out coffin nails"; Paul Chadwick's Betty Dale, girlfriend and aide to Secret Agent X (*Secret Agent X* #1-41, 1934-1939); and Christine Stuart, the reporter who put the words to the photographs that Norman A. Daniels' Candid Camera Kid took (*Detective Novels Magazine,* 1939-1944).

There were female aviators. The greatest fictional aviator of the 1920s and 1930s, male or female, was Frank Godwin's Connie Kurridge (comic strip "Connie," 1927-1944), whose accomplishments as an explorer, vigilante, and time traveler eclipse those of nearly every other character of the era. Connie's contemporaries included Herman Petersen's Barbe Privet (*Air Stories & Wings,* 1927-1930), who fought pirates and found sunken and buried treasure all across the South Seas; W.E. Johns' Worrals (*Girl's Own Paper* and novels, 1940-1950), who was an ace many times over during World War Two and carried out missions for the British Secret Intelligence Service; and Barbara "Pebbles" Colony, wingwoman to Arch Whitehouse's vigilante aviator the Griffon (*Flying Aces,* 1935-1942).

There were female explorers. Pat Savage, cousin to Doc Savage, was an accomplished explorer in her own right, but she was not alone. Beatrice Grimshaw's Cristina Raye *(Saturday Evening Post,* 1914) explored the secret places of Southeast Asia and was known to the natives as the "Kris Girl." Perceval Gibbons' Miss Gregory (*McClure's,* 1910-1912), an independent, unmarried woman, traveled the world out of boredom and wanderlust, exploring and writing books about her adventures. Robert Kraft's Atalanta (*Atalanta* #1-60, 1904, and *Atalanta,* 1911) investigated the hidden corners of northern Canada and Central America.

There were female spies and secret agents. Secret Service Operative #185 helped Norman Marsh's Dan Dunn (various

media, 1933-1943). Freelance spy Belle Louise Malpy bedeviled Kobold Knight's George Benson (*Windsor Magazine,* 1930-1932). Franz Le Baron's Kara Vania (*Scarlet Adventuress,* 1937-1938) was "Secret Agent XW9" and "the World's Most Glamorous Spy." There were also many female agents who helped and sometimes rescued Frederick Faust's Anthony Hamilton (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 1935-1937) and Pierre Saurel's IXE-13 (*Les Aventures Etranges de L'Agent IXE-13* #1-960, 1940-1967).

There were female master criminals, reformed or not. Some of the best characters of the pulps were the female master thieves: Hedwig Langer's Beech Allen (*Scarlet Adventuress,* 1935-1937), adventurer, arms dealer, gunfighter, and dealer in stolen goods; Ian Grosvenor's Signorina (*The Red Magazine,* 1912-1913), the ferocious, blithe teenage leader of the *banditti* of Sicily; Edgar Wallace's Kate Westhanger (*The Popular Magazine,* 1918-1919), raised by her uncle to accumulate booty without regard to law, and as an adult, "the mother of Crime Street;" and Eugene Thomas' Vivian LeGrand (*Detective Fiction Weekly & Popular Detective,* 1935-1939), extortionist, thief, poisoner of her own father, blackmailer of MI-5, and rightly known as "the Lady From Hell."

There were female consulting detectives in the mode of Sherlock Holmes, including: Ethel King (*Ethel King, ein Weiblicher Sherlock Holmes* #1-201, 1908-1911), tough, no-nonsense, based in Philadelphia but active around the world; Hulbert Footner's Madame Storey (*Argosy* and novels, 1922-1935), beautiful, ironic, brilliant, and possessing little tolerance for fools; Anna Katherine Green's Violet Strange (*The Cosmopolitan,* 1913-1915), smart, popular, poor, bored, and solving crimes to alleviate her problems; and Peyami Safa's Çekirge Zehra (*Çekirge Zehra'nin Harikalari Serisi* #1-8 and novels, 1928-1935), independent, strong-willed, and consultant to the middle class of Istanbul.

There were even female Tarzan figures (Beatrice Grimshaw's Vaiti, in *The Saturday Evening Post,* 1906-1907 and 1920-1921), female occult detectives (Ella Scrymsour's Sheila Crera, in *The Blue Magazine,* 1920), policewomen (such as Edgar Wallace's Scotland Yard agent Viola Beech, in *Windsor Magazine,* 1936; and Baroness Orczy's Lady Molly, head of Scotland Yard's Female Department, in *Cassell's,* 1909-1910), and con women (May Edginton's May Prince, daughter and unindicted co-conspirator of Napoleon Prince, in *Pearson's,* 1911-1912).

Ethnic Minority Characters

Those wishing to play ethnically diverse characters have fewer examples to draw on from the pulps and other sources of the era.

There were a few non-white private detectives: Cleve Adams' Aztec Mexican Nevada Alvarado (*Clues,* 1935-1938); Clement Wood's African-American King Green (*Flynn's,* 1924-1925); Octavus Roy Cohen's African-American Florian Slappey (*Saturday Evening Post,* 1925-1938); Tamil Vanan's Hindu sleuth Shanker Lal (novels, 1940-1942); and Rex Hardinge's Panamanian "globe-trotting detective," Don Alvarado y Miraflo Smith (*Detective Weekly,* 1937-1938).

Richard B. Sale's the Cobra (*Ten Detective Aces,* 1934) was an Indian (Asian) vigilante active in India. African-Americans Josh and Rosabel Newton and Jericho Druke were assistants to the Avenger and the Shadow, respectively.

Eagle-Eye was the Native American observer and tailgunner for the aviator hero Blue Blaze (*The Rover,* 1938-1939). Sika was the Senegalese tailgunner and observer for Robert J. Hogan's aviator hero the Red Falcon (*Dare-Devil Aces & G-8,* 1938-1943). Kajita was the teenage female Japanese tailgunner for Lester Ferreira's Gastao Perestrello (*O Mosqueteiro do Ar* #1-2, 1932 & *Aventuras Extraordinarias do Mosqueteiro do Ar* #1-3, 1933).

The most well-known of the fictional policemen and amateur detectives is, of course, Earl Derr Biggers' Chinese-Hawaiian Charlie Chan. There was also Jean Francis Webb's Hawaiian Kimo (*Thrilling Detective,* 1940-1941), Max Freedom Long's Hawaiian "plantation policeman" Komako Koa (novels, 1939-1941), and Max-André Dazergues' Nigerian colonial policeman Batouk (*Batouk, le Roi de la Forêt Vierge* #1-18, 1945-1946).

Harris Dickson's Baltimore Criddle (*Saturday Evening Post,* 1913-1916) was an African-American swindler who cleverly separated other African-Americans from their money. For master thieves, there were the many Arsène Lupin clones of the Turkish and Japanese pulps and Edmund Charles Cox's Indian dacoit Nesho Kaik (stories and novels, 1911-1912).

For cowboys, there was Pete (*El Sheriff* #1-200, 1929-1935, & *Pete* #1-5?, 1935), a Chinese deputy and later sheriff in Arizona, and William Bruner's wandering Yaqui vigilante Vincente (*Wild West Weekly,* 1928-1935).

For consulting detectives, there existed many Sherlock Holmes imitators: E. Hoffmann Price's Pawang Ali (*Clues Detective,* 1928-1930), the "Sherlock Holmes of Singapore;" H. De Vere Stacpoole's Mynheer Amayat (*The Strand & Weird Tales,* 1924-1930), a Kalmuk (West Mongolian) crime-solver in the Dutch East Indies; and Arden X. Pangborn's Wong Sun (*Argosy,* 1938-1939), a Chinese jeweler in New York City who knew everything that went on in Chinatown.

For spies and secret agents, there was John P. Marquand's Japanese Mister Moto, and J. Nemo's female Ethiopian spy Bara (*Bara. De Spion van den Negus* #1-12, 1935-1936); Sax Rohmer's Bimbashi Baruk (*Colliers & Chambers' Journal,* 1941-1942), the Egyptian advisor to British Intelligence; Ming Dwan, the Chinese-American government agent who assisted the Shadow; Hugh Wiley's Chinese-American State Department agent, James Lee Wong (*Collier's* and movies, 1930-1940); and Lee Frederick's Chinese-American Secret Service agent, Richard Wong (*G-Men & G-Men Detective,* 1935-1949).

Less easily classified characters include Lincoln Colcord's Chinese sailor and righter of wrongs Lee Fu Chang (*The American Magazine,* 1921-1923) and Sam Ming, the "unofficial mayor of Chinatown," who helped Bruno Fischer's Ethan Burr (*Strange Detective Mysteries,* 1939-1940). Erle Stanley Gardner's Señor Arnaz de Lobo (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 1930-1934) was a hard-bitten "professional revolutionist and solder of fortune" of an undefined Central or Southern American ethnicity.

The characters who were foreign, adventuring outside the United States or in historical situations, have the best chance of acting as role models; many of those whose stories took place in contemporary America were portrayed in derogatory terms. Like the list of female characters, the list of ethnic minority characters can provide concrete examples of characters that players can play as well as to hint at the range of characters which should be possible in a pulp game.

Conclusion

Gaming is supposed to be fun. Strict realism should take a backseat in favor of fun. Historical accuracy is laudable, certainly, and pulp games are to be commended for their efforts to remind gamers about the racism and sexism of the pulps. However, gamers should be aware that racism and sexism, though oppressive, were not monolithic and did not prevent women and those from ethnic minorities from leading pulpish lives. There exists a greater range of characters available to play beyond just white men.

Bibliography

Information on the first tier of pulp characters is relatively easy to come by; the Web and most books on the pulps have a great deal of information on them. But finding information on second- and third-tier characters and foreign pulp characters, is more difficult. The following list of sources contains basic information on those characters.

- Ralph Sampson's "Yesterday's Faces" series from Bowling Green State University Popular Press: *Glory Figures* (1983), *Strange Days* (1984), *From the Dark Side* (1987), *The Solvers* (1987), *Shadows and Phantoms* (1989), *Dangerous Horizons* (1991), and *Violent Lives* (1993). These are the best and most inclusive books yet published on pulp characters. Sampson spends as much time on second- and third-tier characters as he does on first.
- Colleen Barnett's *Mystery Women* (Poisoned Pen Press, 2001) and Kathleen Gregory Klein's *The Woman Detective* (University of Illinois Press, 1995). Barnett's focus is on "leading women characters in mystery fiction," and she covers major and some minor female detectives in the pulps in depth. Klein includes some characters and information Barnett leaves out as well as provides critical and contextual analysis that game writers or players might find useful.

Salvador Vázquez de Parga's *Héroes y Enamoradas* (Ediciones Glenat, 2000), Heinz Galle's *Groschenhefte* (Ullstein, 1998), Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier's *Shadowmen* (Black Coat Press, 2003) and *Shadowmen 2* (Black Coat Press, 2004), and Philippe Mellot's *Les Maitres de l'Aventure Sur Terre, Sur Mer et Dans les Airs* (Éditions Michèle Trinckvel, 1997), *Les Maitres du Fantastique et de la Science Fiction* (Éditions Michèle Trinckvel, 1997), and *Les Maitres du Mystère de Nick Carter à Sherlock Holmes* (Éditions Michèle Trinckvel, 1997). Only the Lofficier books are in English. These books are primers on non-American pulp characters, and the devoted reader who makes use of a foreign language dictionary or an online translator will be rewarded with a wealth of information on Spanish (de Parga), German (Galle), and French (Lofficier and Mellot) pulp characters.

- Jess Nevins' "Pulp and Adventure Heroes of the Pre-War Years" and *The Encyclopedia of Pulp Heroes* (MonkeyBrain Books, Spring 2009). The Web site has a listing of 1,770 characters from a variety of genres, including every character described in Sampson. The *Encyclopedia* will contain over 5,000 characters from pulps and global-series fiction published from 1902 to 1945, and is intended to replace Sampson as the best source for pulp-character-one-stop-shopping.

Partial Shapeshifting Expanded for *GURPS, Fourth Edition*

General Transformations

by Eric Funk

Spell-slingers using *GURPS Magic* can learn variants of each partial shapeshifting spell; for example, octopus skin instead of chameleon, or red-colored ants instead of black (see page 34 of *GURPS Magic* for casting times and fine print). In addition, a GM may rule that each caster's understanding of the spell chooses specific species characteristics depending on the individual's native characteristics. The general rule for the energy costs below is about 1 point of casting cost per 5 character points of net advantage gained.

Ant's Belly (1/level to cast, minimum 3): The subject's stomach can hold a great amount of liquid, gaining five levels of Payload for each point of energy spent (see page 74 of the *Basic Set*). This payload can only hold liquids and offers no protection to hazardous liquids.
Variant: Camel's Swallow.

Ant's Connection (5 to cast): The subject grows large antennae, and now gains Speak With Animals (Ants Only, -60%) [15] and Vibration Sense [10] (see pages 87 and 97).
Variant: Bee's Ear.

Arachnocampa's Lure (1/"level" to cast): The subject's body glows as per torchlight, and he gains the ability to spit and lay down glowing sticky strands. This is five levels of Binding (Reduced Range 2; Sticky) per 2 whole energy spent (e.g., Binding 10 for 2 energy, Binding 20 for 4, see page 40).
Variant: Glow Spider's shot.

Aye-Aye's Fingers (3+ to cast): The subject's fingers become solid and he gains an innate sense of depth. This amounts to two levels of Penetrating Vision (Vague, -50%) for every 3 energy spent to cast (see p. B35).
Variant: Woodpecker's Beak.

Badger's Claws (5+ to cast): The subject's hands become long digging claws (Claws (Long Talons) [11]), Bad Grip 5 [-25], and Tunneling 1 [35]. Every extra energy point spent gains the subject an extra point of Tunneling Move [5/] (see pages 42, 123, and 94).
Variant: Mole Claws.

Bat's Sight (3 to cast): The subject's ears grow tall and pointed, gaining Acute Hearing +4 [8], Scanning Sense (Sonar) [20], and Bad Sight (Nearsighted) [-25] (see pages 35, 81, and 123).

Bee's Eyes (3 to cast): The user gains multi-faceted eyes, and the advantages of Ultravision [10] and Acute Vision +2 [4] (see pages 94 and 35).
Variant: Wasp's eyes.

Bird's Eye View (3 to cast): The user's eyes move backward along his head as gains the advantage of Peripheral Vision [15]. (see page 75).
Variant: Fish Eye View.

Bird's Sense (3 to cast): The user gains the advantages of 3D Spatial Sense [10] and Detect (Magnetic Fields; Vague) [5]. (see pages 34 and 48).
Variant: Fish Sense.

Bloodhound's Nose (3 or 5 to cast): The subject's nose becomes that of a bloodhound as he gains the ability of Discriminatory Smell [15]. If the energy cost of 5 is paid, he also gains the enhancement of Emotion Sense (see page 49).

Bombardier's Blast (3+ to cast): The subject gains the ability to project a blast like a bombardier's. To use the ability, the caster must "fire" like a skunk's attack. It is an Affliction (noxious attack; HT; Incapacitation) [15] (see page 49). Each doubling of the base cost lowers the resistance roll by 1.

Bovine Stomach (3+ to cast): The subject becomes immune to a specific plant poison for a whole day (see page 81).

Camel's Endurance (3 to cast): The caster's body uses water efficiently. The user gains the benefit of Reduced Consumption 1, Reduced Consumption 4 (Water Only), and Payload for the stored nourishment so that the mass does not count toward encumbrance. Excess is temporarily stored in humps on his back. The caster can choose to store more than a day's nourishment, but it comes with the disadvantage Hunchback (see pages 80 and 139).
Variant: Scorpion's fast.

Cat's Meow (3 to cast): The subject's voice box is changed to a soothing purr, which generally is pleasing, although it can have a negative effect on some individuals (see Voice [10], page 97).

Cat's Tail (3 to cast): The subject grows a cat's tail about as long as his height, which grants him Catfall [10], and the equivalent of 4 points in the Acrobatics skill at other times (see pages 41 and 174).
Variant: Cat's Luck, Squirrel's Luck.

Cheetah Legs (3+ to cast): The subject's arms and legs become spotted and digitigrade. For each point spent beyond 2, the caster gains Enhanced Move 0.5. Thus for 3 points spent in total, it grants Enhanced Move 0.5, 4 points, Enhanced Move 1, and so on (see page 52).
Variant: Racehorse's Stride.

Chipmunk Cheeks (1+ to cast, minimum 3): For each point of energy spent to cast, the caster gains 5 levels of Payload [1/] (see page 74). As the ability is used, striped brown marks are visible on his cheeks as they bulge beyond normal volume.

Cicadia's Ears (3+ to cast): The subject gains Protected Sense (Hearing) [5] (see pp. B78), and Damage Resistance 4 (Hearing) [10]. Every point of energy spent to cast adds two more points of Damage Resistance 2 (Hearing) [5].
Variant: Tree's ears.

Elephant Ears (3 to cast): The subject's ears grow out and turn grey. The user gains Discriminatory Hearing [15] (see page 49).
Variant: Rabbit Ears.

Elephant's Feet (3+ to cast): The subject's feet become large, and have tough, grey skin (DR5 on feet only [5]), and he gains Subsonic Hearing [5] and Silence 1 [5]. For every extra point spent beyond 3, he also gains a extra level of Silence [5/] (see pages 46, 89, and 85).

Elephant's Memory (3 to cast): The subject's head turns grey, his skull gains DR2, and he gains Absolute Direction [2] and Photographic Memory [10] (see pages 34 and 51).

Firefly Light (1/level to cast, minimum 3): The subject's body turns translucent, and glows softly. For each point of energy spent, it cancels a level of darkness. This essentially grants Perk: Accessory: flashlight (see page 100).
Variant: Glowbug.

Fox Glove (1/level to cast, minimum 3): The subject's hands and feet become black and fuzzy, granting him High Manual Dexterity [5] for every point of energy spent (see page 59).
Variant: Raccoon's Paws.

Gecko Feet (5 to cast): The subject's hands and feet become larger and better able to grip objects. The subject gains Bad Grip 1 [-5], and Clinging [20] (see pages 123 and 43). If the subject uses only hands or feet, then movement rate is halved.
Variant: Chameleon Feet, spider grip.

Gorilla's Reach (4+ to cast): The subject's hands and arms become larger and very hairy. The subject gains Extra Arms (Long only) [20] (see pages 88 and 53). Every additional point of FP spent to cast also grants the caster +1 Striking ST [5].
Variant: Monkey's Grasp.

Hare's Feet (3 to cast): The subject's feet become very large, clawed and covered in white fur. This acts as per the spell Snow Shoes, but is more inconvenient (see page 186 of *GURPS Magic*).
Variant: Tiger feet.

Kangaroo Legs (2 per level to cast, minimum 3): The subject's feet become larger, increasing by 10% per level. For every two energy spent, he gains one level of Super Jump [10] (see page 89 of the *Basic Set*).
Variant: Grasshopper legs.

Lion's Roar (3 to cast): The user gains the Advantages of Perk (Piercing Cry) (see page 34). The user can initiate a innate crushing attack 1d by spending 1 FP (non-magical). For each extra point of energy spent in the casting, the attack's strength increases by 1d.
Variant: Tiger's Roar, Cachalot's throat.

Monkey Paws (3 to cast): The feet of the subject become like a second set of hands. He gains Extra Arms (Foot Manipulators) [14] (see page 53).

Moth's Antennae (3/6/9 to cast): The caster grows long antennae from his forehead. This grants Detect (Common: Others of same species; Vague) [15] (see page 48). For 6 energy, the Vague limitation is removed. For 9 energy, the Precise enhancement is gained.

Mouse Speech (3 to cast): The subject's neck to his ears becomes coated in fuzzy white hair, his ears become larger, and he can speak and hear Ultrasonic Speech [10], and gains Acute Hearing +2 [4] (see pages 89 and 43).
Variant: Bat Speech, Owl Screech.

Mule's Stamina (4 to cast): The lower half of the caster's body is covered with a fine grey hair. This grants Very Fit [15] and 4 points in Hiking (see pages 55 and 200).
Variant: Camel's Gait.

Opossum's Death (1 per level, minimum 3 to cast): This grants one level of Metabolism Control per point spent (see page 68).
Variant: Chameleon Skin.

Ostrich Legs (3 or 6 to cast): The subject's legs become retrograde, grey, scaled and digitigrade. For three points of casting energy, the caster gains Enhanced Move 1. For 6 points spent it grants Enhanced Move 2 (see page 52).
Variant: Emu Racing.

Owl's Ears (1+ to cast, minimum 3): The subject's ears become large and feathered. Each point spent grants the user a level of Parabolic Hearing [4/] (see page 72).
Variant: Whale's Life.

Orangutan's Reach (1+ to cast, minimum 3): The subject's arms can elongate greatly. For each point spent, the subject gains one level of Stretching [6/] (see page 88). When this power is in use, his arms are very hairy.
Variant: Squid Reach.

Parrot's Ear (3 to cast): The subject gains Photographic Memory (Sound only) [5] and Mimicry [10] (see pages 51

and 68).

Polar Bear Fleece (1 per level to cast, minimum 3): The subject's metabolism becomes more resilient, and gains one level of Temperature Tolerance (Cold) [1] per point spent (see page 93). At four points, he gains Fit [5], and after 8 points, Very Fit [15] (see page 55). Should the user have any Unfit or Fit, the user shifts an appropriate number of times toward Very Fit.

Rabbit Eyes (3+ to cast): The subject gains the ability to sleep with his eyes open. This has the feature that any movement in his vision range (and a Vision roll) can cause him to awaken. This includes the ability to preload an energy pool to allow the spell to function while he is asleep (see Maintain Spell, page 128 of *GURPS Magic*). In addition, the user suffers all the effects of Light Sleeper [-5] (see page 142).
Prerequisite: Maintain Spell.
Variant: Catnap.

Slug's Slime (3 to cast): The subject's skin becomes slimy and sticky. He gains Flexibility [5] and Damage Resistance 2 [10] (see pages 56 and 44). The subject requires damp conditions, or he will dry out.
Variant: Toad's skin.

Squirrel Tail (3 to cast): The subject grows a long squirrel tail, about equal in length to his height, granting him the benefits of Perfect Balance [15] (see page 74).
Variant: Cat's Grace, Squirrel's Grace.

Snakeskin (2 per level to cast, minimum 3): The subject's skin becomes durable and scaly, granting DR 1 for every 2 points spent as well as one level of Nictitating Membrane to protect his eyes (see pages 46 and 71). At the end of the spell, the subject must shed the skin, which provides relief from burns, sunburn, contact poisons, etc.
Variant: Armadillo Coils.

Steer Horns (3 to cast): The subject grows long minotaur horns, granting Impaling Striker (Horns; Limited Arc, Front Only, -40%; Long, +1 SM, +100%) [13] (see page 88, and also page 196 of *GURPS Banestorm*).
Variant: Elk Horns.

Insect's tongue (3 to cast): The subject grows large antennae, and now gains Speak With Animals (Hive Insects Only) and Vibration Sense (see page 87 and 97 of the *Basic Set*).
Variant: Bee's Buzz.

Termite's gullet (3 to cast): The subject's torso becomes grey, and he grows mandibles. This permits him to digest wood, including Damage Resistance 5 (GI tract only), Teeth (Sharp) and Reduced Consumption 4 (Cast-Iron Stomach: Wood Only) (see pages 91 and 95). While the spell is active, the user has some internal protection from ingested acids, glass, and so on. Unfortunately, it can take a day or two for such dangers to pass.

Toad's Warts (3+ to cast): The subject's skin becomes clammy and green. It then begins secreting a sticky paralytic contact poison, not unlike curare. The caster gains Affliction (HT: Paralysis; Always On; Aura; Contact Agent) (see pages 87 and 97). For each extra energy spent beyond 3, the subject gains 2 levels of Damage Resistance (Tough Skin, -40%).
Variant: Frog's Arrow.

Vinegaroon's Tail (4 per level to cast): The subject grows a long, whip-like tail with a poison barb at the end. This grants Toxic Attack 3 (Link, +10%; Melee (whip), Cannot Parry, -20%) [3.6/], Affliction (HT; Seizure, +100%; Follow-Up: Melee, -20%;) [18] (see p. B61, 35). Every additional 4 points spent adds another 3 damage to the Toxic Attack and reduces the HT roll by 1.

Vulture's Stomach (2 per level to cast, minimum 3): The subject grows feathers on his upper and lower torso. For two points spent, the subject gains a level of Reduced Consumption (Cast Iron Stomach) (see pages 80).
Variant: Hyena's appetite.

Worm's Gut (3 to cast): The subject's system becomes immune to poison [15] (see page 81). Unfortunately, while this spell is in effect, food has no nutritional value. Note that it may take a day or so for ingested poison to pass through, and some poisons merely accumulate in a person's body!

Worm's Thoroughness (3 to cast): The subject's pores close and his body stops unnecessary excretions. He gains the advantages of Sealed [15] and Perk: Sanitized Metabolism [1] (see page 82 and 101).
Variant: Cat's Courtesy.

* * *

Special Thanks to DryaUnda for the idea for this change, and for Stephanie Kieth for fitting in.

To Tweak or Not to Tweak

I've confessed before that I'm not terribly good at designing appropriate challenges for gaming groups; battles that I think should be way too tough end up being trips to the corner store for salsa and fights that I think should be easy end up almost killing the heroes. (That link is also a good starting point about how I've come to view my inability to match challenge with players as an asset rather than a liability.)

Fortunately, my lack of skill in that arena has made me very good at tweaking a fight on the fly. For this column and one or two future installments, I'll talk a bit about adjusting encounters in the middle of the action.

This time, though, I'll look at whether or not it's even necessary to fudge things *en medias res.* As I've discussed before (yes, this link again), it may not even be necessary for a GM to make any adjustments. Encounters that aren't a perfect match for the heroes' abilities are a good way to keep them on their toes, since it's easier to conserve resources if you have a vague idea going into a battle how much of your firepower you'll need to bring to bear against a foe. In addition, many RPGs treat combat as a serious affair, and tweaking things in the heroes' favor might do a disservice to the game or campaign itself, especially if a gritty atmosphere is desired. For example, **GURPS** combat can be quite quick and deadly, with the first side to get an edge often finding it possible to retain that edge 'til the skulls of the opposition are concave. (c.f. "realistic")

But in other games it can be quite desirable to tweak an encounter, either during or after. In many variations of the **d20 System,** for example, it's possible to be nickel-and-dimed to death; if you get enough goblins with sticks, eventually enough will get lucky and you'll either be killed or -- more likely -- put at a serious disadvantage for the *next* encounter. (This is especially true in the macro-party sense; since the baseline **d20 System** combat is an all-or-nothing affair, if those goblins get lucky enough to kill one of your five PCs then your entire party is suddenly down 20% of its firepower.) Similarly in many variations of the **World of Darkness/**Storyteller system, near-superhuman beings (including actual honest-to-goodness super-folks in **Aberrant**) can get whittled down to horizontal by goons with rocks. It doesn't matter if you're Superman . . . sticks and stones *will* break your bones.

Here are a few reasons humbly offered *not* to tweak an encounter in progress:

- The PCs aren't winning or losing as you expected (say, if you expected a battle to leave the heroes exhausted but they're only mildly scratched)
- The PCs are off the map and/or divergent from your notes (I tend to believe that if the heroes avoid conflicts and get to that final confrontation fresh and deadly because they were clever, they should be rewarded . . . not punished with a bad guy who's twice as strong as originally planned)
- One of the players is complaining (although his complaints might be something to talk with him about *after* the session ends)

And here are a few of the most common reasons that I tend to tweak encounters:

- The PCs aren't winning or losing as you expected *to a significant degree.* (If the players were supposed to trounce the players)
- The players are suffering from an extended bout of bad luck. (In many games, if the players make two or three really bad rolls at exactly the wrong time, it can undo the effects of hours of gameplay or even weeks of planning. In this situation, I have no problem providing some on-the-fly relief . . . especially if there are no in-game options such as Luck or Fate Points for tweaking such results)
- The PCs have achieved an in-game edge through less-than-kosher means. (If the players have discovered a bit of previously unused trickery in the game system that you don't want to disable or address mid-game -- say, using poison or finely sharpening *every* bow tip to get an extra +1 in damage -- then I tend to think it's fine to tweak the remainder of the encounters of that adventure to reduce or eliminate that edge. Thus if the heroes are dealing an average of +10 damage each round that you didn't anticipate, and combat has been lasting two or three rounds, then increasing the baddest foe by 20 or 30 hit points doesn't seem out of line. This is often even quasi-justifiable; if the first three waves of goblins were all mowed down by poisoned weapons or fine-tipped arrows,

then it almost makes sense that they'd take whatever precautions to even the odds . . . especially if they were able to get word back their peers.)

- Time constraints. If things have been planned badly, or if the players went off on one too many wild goose chases, and everyone's [tired](#), then it might be a good idea to do whatever it takes to speed up the remaining encounters. (Note that, in this case, the encounter need not necessarily be made *easier* per se; for example, canceling what was to be the second-to-last battle against a powerful lieutenant because that lieutenant ran away not only speeds things up, it also sows the seeds for future adventures.)
- More than one of the players is complaining (especially if those complaints are similar or justified: "*Another* wave of heavily armored goblins! Borrr-ring!")

There are other reasons on both sides, and I'll hopefully address some of them in the mythical future installments. For the time being, though, this hopefully gave you something to think about . . . and hopefully I've bought me enough time to tweak your future encounters with this column.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Witch Hunter: The Invisible World

Published by [Paradigm Concepts](#)

Written by Scott Charlton, Ruch Lilavivat, Henry Lopez, M. Sean Molley, Brian Schoner, Robert J. Schwalb, and Robert Vaughn with Pedro Barrenechea, Sean Smith, and Eric Wiener

Cover by Pat Loboyko

Illustrated by Paul Carrick, Paul (Prof) Herbert, Veronica Jones, & Pat Loboyko

274-page b&w hardcover; $39.99

For a game set in Colonial America, Atlas Games' *Northern Crown Adventures* tops the list. Although being split across two books makes it expensive, it is a rich, meaty *d20 System* treatment of an alternate 17th-century New World that has not received the appreciation it deserves.

Starting off by recommending something else cannot bode well for the actual title being reviewed, Paradigm Concepts' *Witch Hunter: The Invisible World.* Fortunately, *Witch Hunter* is not completely dreadful; it's more a game with problems, mainly stemming from omissions and organizational decisions, which together hinder both learning and playing the game. This is a pity, because the game's background information is decent and the rules are sound (in part because they are incredibly similar to the *[The World of Darkness Storytelling System](#)*). Nonetheless, *Witch Hunter: The Invisible World* missed an opportunity to corner a genre pretty much ignored to date.

The setting for *Witch Hunter: The Invisible World* is an alternate Europe and New World of the late 17th century. The year is 1689, and Christendom is still threatened by the agents and powers of the Adversary. Secretly and carefully, Witch Hunters work to thwart such craven threats as vampires, werewolves, diabolists, and necromancers, their efforts rarely sanctioned by the authorities and even more rarely by the Church, whether Catholic or Protestant. Such men and women cannot be trusted; each belongs to a secret Order, which often grants privileged knowledge and gifts, and this in addition to taking sorcery to the battle with the Adversary. Even though every member of an Order is in some way a man of God, most harbor a dislike of the Church. The Orders can be found across Christendom and even among the natives of the New World, where the bloody priests of the Aztec Empire continue to thwart the Spanish conquest.

The first Orders were founded following the creation of the Seal of Solomon. Constructed by King Solomon and six wise magi to protect the mortal world from the supernatural, the Seal was sabotaged by an agent of the Adversary, allowing some supernatural elements to remain. It was the magi's apprentices that became the first witch hunters and used some of the remaining magic to fight fire with fire. In the centuries since that time, witch hunters and their Orders have faced religious and secular persecution, and following the Great Fire of London, the various Orders have begun working together.

To create a Witch Hunter, a player decides on the Order and the catalyst for his character becoming a Witch Hunter before assigning points. A Witch Hunter has nine attributes grouped into three types, plus a number of skills, both of

which are rated between one and five. A player spends points to buy extra attribute levels and then selects a Background. This can include Laborer, Midwife, and Servant as easily as it can be Inquisitor, Occultist, Priest, or Shaman. Each Background gives the basic level in six skills and then another 10 points across the five categories that *Witch Hunter: The Invisible World* divides its skills into. These are a character's elective skills, but really they just narrow a player's choice because he receives no extra points to customize his character. In addition to setting a character's Social Standing (though how that works in the world of *Witch Hunter: The Invisible World* is either never explained or buried in the text), each Background gives a special ability. For example, a Midwife possesses "Woman's Ways" and gains a +1 die bonus on Charisma tests against other women, while a Shaman receives "You Are Known to the Spirits" and gets a bonus when interacting with them. The question is though, why would a player choose to play a Midwife or Servant over an Adventurer, Folk Healer, or Soldier? If Backgrounds were determined randomly, then this question would be answered, with the Catalyst explaining the ordinary person's new calling to fight the Adversary.

Every Witch Hunter possesses various Talents that set him apart from an ordinary person. "Feat-like," Talents grant small benefits. For example, Bookworm halves research time, and Pugilist gives a +1 bonus in Hand-to-Hand combat. Other talents grant access to particular aspects of the setting, such as Fighting Schools or magic. A character will need to select the basic talent in a Fighting School or a Tradition before he can select a School's Talent or a Tradition's Rite.

The character also has Hero Points spent in the standard fashion, plus True Faith and Damnation points, but how many is not immediately apparent. True Faith is needed to enact some rites, and it is used withstand Damnation and even sunder an utterly damned soul. Meanwhile, Damnation is acquired for committing sinful acts or using unholy rites, texts, or relics. Damnation points can be used as easily as Hero Points, but unlike those, Damnation points refresh as a pool daily. Damnation weakens a man's soul against the unholy though, and can even physically corrupt him.

Finally, a Witch Hunter has a Vice and a Virtue, the roleplaying of either awarding Hero points. Additionally, each Vice grants an immediate benefit, but the Grand Master (or GM) can hand out Damnation points to those who give into them readily.

Character creation is actually easy once you locate all of the details. There is even a step-by-step guide to the process buried in the book. Unfortunately, while useful, it also highlights the fact that the sections you need are not arranged in a logical fashion. For example, the rules for generating attributes are on page 49, skills on page 43, and Talents on page 71. (In fact, the means of creating NPCs is better explained than that for player characters.)

Witch Hunter: The Invisible World uses an attribute plus skill mechanic to give a pool of 10-sided dice, with rolls of seven or more counting as successes. It essentially plays little differently to *The World of Darkness Storytelling System.* It handles fear neatly though: A player rolling his Courage attribute against a Fear rating, the number of failures determining his mental reaction. Combat uses the same mechanics, but characters have more hit points than in *The World of Darkness Storytelling System,* and they also roll for Defensive points spent to counter an opponent's successes.

Witch Hunter: The Invisible World divides its magic into six traditions: Animism, Hermeticism, and Prayer for the player characters, while Adversary's agents employ Diabolism, Necromancy, and Witchcraft. Each is a series of Rites that must be bought Talent by Talent, and naturally, the Orders' traditions are not as flashy or powerful as the Adversary's.

The book includes details on numerous powerful relics, the various nations of Western Europe and North America, and several agents of the Adversary (the traditions and powers of the Adversary comprising the "invisible world" of the title). The GM advice is decent, but although it describes the game as one of swashbuckling colonial horror, only the horror is obvious in the rules. Certainly, the swashbuckling aspect is never made clear to the players, and the colonial aspect could be stronger.

The most obvious omission is that of an index; an RPG is as much a reference or technical work as much as it is a creative one and the lack of an index is inexcusable. The book also lacks examples of character generation (or indeed a full explanation of the process), game play, and combat. None of these are optional, because each helps the reader understand the game and how the designer intends that it be played. While they can be discerned through careful reading, they should be more obvious.

Another problem is the ponderous layout. It just flows from start to finish with no breaks to give it room to breathe or allow particular sections to stand out. It is also too gray, and what artwork there is, although very nice, is too small.

Additionally, ***Witch Hunter: The Invisible World*** needs a cleaner character sheet and a bibliography, though both are available on the publisher's Web site. Furthermore, the game is too narrowly focused on facing the Adversary - specifically, the Christian fight against the Adversary -- so that you never get the grit and the grime of the period. Although the Ghost People Order is found among the natives of the New World, the other Orders are all Christian and all Western European. What this means is that while ***Witch Hunter: The Invisible World*** is overtly and intentionally a moral game (as seen through the Virtues and Vices), it is covertly a Christian game because no other choices are offered.

Surprisingly, there is a good game to be found in ***Witch Hunter: The Invisible World,*** but it is burdened by some poor design decisions and by being written for the GM more than the player. Had it been more accessible, ***Witch Hunter: The Invisible World*** would have set the benchmark for its genre.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Canal Mania: The Golden Age of English Canal Building

Published by [Ragnar Brothers](#)

Designed by Steve Kendall and Phil Kendall

Illustrated by Collin Jones and studio@d-blue

Full-color boxed set with board, 170 cards, 120 tiles, 15 barge pieces, 20 wooden goods cubes, and 14-page rulebook; $50

Canal Mania, 2nd Edition is an English route-claiming and route-building pre-train game that takes place during England's 18th-century Industrial Revolution and ends with the coming of the railways in 1829. Designed for two to five players, a game can be played in 90 minutes, but two hours is more likely. Combining the look and feel of a Euro game with a strong historical theme, *Canal Mania* abstracts what might be more complex in similar games -- the transportation of goods. Although low on direct interaction, a player has plenty of choice during his turn and will be kept busy throughout the game.

Inside *Canal Mania's* solid box is a fully mounted board depicting England from Lancaster in the north to Arundel in the south and divided into half-inch hexes. Rough terrain is indicated with brown, while major cities and towns are divided into six colors. One city or town of each color is marked in two shades to indicate its historical significance, such as London or Manchester; this shading is important when placing Goods tokens. A river-shaped scoring track runs around the board's edge, while the corner Canal Basin is used to store the little brown wooden Goods cubes. Each player has a set of double-sided canal tiles (straight on one side, curved on the other) comprised of four types -- plain canal stretches, canal locks, aqueducts, and tunnels; the latter two the only means of crossing rough terrain.

The game's cards come in several types, with the Contract and the Build cards at the core. Each Contract card describes the two towns the new canal must link, sometimes including another town that the canal must connect to, plus a number. This number represents both the maximum length the canal can be and the score received for completing the canal. The Contract also gives the canal's historical name. Five Contract cards are colored green rather than blue and must be built first -- being the first canals given construction permission by Parliament. Junction cards are a special type of Contract card that do not mandate which two towns must be connected, instead allowing the player a choice. Junction cards are worth two points and usually come into play during the End Phase. A player can hold only two Contract cards plus a Junction card.

The Build cards, played to lay canal tiles, match the four tile types (plain canal stretches, canal locks, aqueducts, and tunnels), while a fifth, the Surveyor card (marked with a theodolite) is a wild card and can substitute for any other Build card. Some Build cards are marked with a colored grain sack corresponding to the town colors on the board. When drawn, these indicate that goods are available to ship, which means the player may set Goods cubes on the board.

The remaining two card types are Engineer cards and reference cards. The reference card details the building cost and scoring values on one side, and turns options on the other. The five Engineer cards depict the great canal builders, their dates of birth and death, a number that determines turn order at game beginning and game end, plus an associated special ability. For example, James Brindley can build a stretch or a lock tile when playing a stretch build card, while William Jessop builds cheaper tunnels. Finally, each player has one barge piece to use as a scoring marker and another two to define the beginning and direction of his canals under construction.

Each player starts with his barge pieces and canal tiles, a reference card, a Junction card, an Engineer card, and three Build cards. Build cards are kept hidden, but the Engineer is placed face up where everyone can see it. Any spare Engineers are likewise kept visible alongside the board. Five Build cards are laid face up next to the board. Four of the five initial Route cards are placed face up next to the board, the fifth sitting on top of the Route deck. Finally, the Endgame token, which depicts Stephenson's Rocket, is placed on the scoring track. The greater the number of players, the lower the Endgame token is placed. The player with the lowest numbered Engineer goes first.

A player's turn consists of three phases, during which he can take one action. In Phase One, a player can draw a new Route card; swap his Engineer card with any other, including those held by other players; or discard and refresh the face-up Build cards. In Phase Two, a player can either build a canal or draw three face-up Build cards. Finally, in Phase Three, a player can move a Goods token. Alternatively, in any phase, a player can draw a card from the Build deck.

To dig a canal, a player pays Build cards from his hand. Single matching Build cards help to dig ordinary canal stretches and locks, but multiple matching cards aid in making aqueducts and tunnels. A Route cannot be any longer than stated on the Contract, but it can connect to other towns along the way, this being advantageous when shipping goods.

When laying canal tiles, each adjacent tile must be different. Canals alternate between stretch and canal-lock tiles over flat terrain, and between aqueduct and tunnel tiles over rough terrain. A player should use his tiles carefully, particularly his limited number of aqueduct and tunnel tiles. A canal can be completed over several turns, but it must stand on its own, meaning that its final section cannot end at an already existing canal. Later in the game, a crowded board can force a player to bridge other player's canals. Once built, a canal is scored, points awarded for completing the Route, plus also for each lock, aqueduct, and tunnel tile laid as part of the route. The Route card is put aside, and a player can draw another on a subsequent turn.

Goods tokens become available when Build cards are picked marked with a colored Goods icon. The drawing player is given two Goods tokens to place. A Goods token must be set on a town whose color matches the Build card's icon in order of precedence: two-toned towns, towns connected to a canal, unconnected towns. During the third phase, a player can move one Goods token. This usually happens over a player's own canals, but it can be over other watercourses as long as the Goods token ends in the moving player's network. For each town a token goes through, it scores one point to the player whose network connects that location. Also, because a Goods token cannot travel through more than one town of each color, a player can never score more than six points for shipping goods.

Once a player's barge reaches Stephenson's Rocket on the scoring track, the Endgame is triggered: the coming of the railways, which spells the end of the canal network's usefulness. The Endgame consists of another two full turns, play proceeding normally with participants frantically trying to complete any remaining canals. It is during this part of the game that the Junction cards are used, usually because lengthier, more complex canals cannot be completed and Junction cards are an easier scoring method. At the game's very end, any incomplete canals are scored and any remaining Goods tokens are shipped and scored. The player with the highest total is, of course, the winner.

For a player, a typical game consists of drawing Route cards and the Build cards needed to complete it. He swaps Engineer cards as necessary to take advantage of their abilities and places Goods tokens to his best advantage, usually on his canal network. This takes time because a player cannot do everything on a turn.

A participant quickly realizes that he needs to select his Route cards with care, it being advantageous to connect a new Route to his existing network. This enables him to score more points during the transportation of Goods. Likewise, Goods token placement should be on his network if possible, and if not, where they will score his rivals the lowest number of points. Luck is a factor in the choice of Build and Route cards available, but a player's skill in choosing the right Route cards and careful placement of Goods tokens works to offset this and to outscore rivals.

Initially, the game follows historical precedent, enforced by the six Route cards that must be built first to establish historical networks. These routes include the Manchester-Liverpool canal (in the north of England), Birmingham (in the Midlands), Bristol to London (in the south), and Northampton to London (in the east). In games with few players, a

participant can easily construct one or more of these networks, but more players break these networks up. Initially, short canals prove better to build, especially when connecting more than the two towns listed on the Route, thus setting up a quick advantage in Goods placement. Later, a player can build the longer, isolated canals that only he can score from.

Mildly competitive, genteel, strong of theme, yet lacking that geeky quality of similar train games, *Canal Mania* has proved enjoyable with just two players as much as it has with more. Almost like canal travel itself, playing *Canal Mania* is a gentle experience, but one that reaches its destination much quicker than a canal journey.

-- Matthew Pook

The Fine Art of Social Climbing

for *GURPS*

by Jürgen Hubert

". . . this concludes the current campaign arc. Now, you have impressed quite a lot of people at the royal court, so maybe you should consider purchasing advantages such as Allies, Contacts, Patrons, Reputation, and so on with your accumulated character points . . . "

"No way! I'm putting them all into Explosive Fireball -- this way my cost to cast it is reduced by one!"

*"And I have been reading up on **GURPS Martial Arts** and want to purchase the Targeted Attack: Groin technique for my Broadsword skill. Can I find a teacher for that at the royal court?"*

The GM sighed. His plans for a campaign of intrigue and diplomacy at the royal court were off to a bad start . . .

A New Look at Social Advantages

Social advantages are a powerful way of tying player characters into the world they live in. Without them, the player characters are essentially lone wolves who don't interact with their society; with these advantages, they can become truly influential. However, players are frequently reluctant to put many points into social advantages. The reasons for this can vary, but the most common one is probably that social advantages can be quite ephemeral and taken away from the adventurer rather easily, while inherent skills and abilities will stay with the character no matter what happens. For example, when a plot calls for the PCs to be arrested on false charges -- forcing them to break out of prison and live as outlaws until they clear their names -- many of their social advantages will remain inaccessible for the duration . . . while the character points they put into Lockpicking, Survival, and Diplomacy will stay useful. The end result is that, while players won't object to social advantages given to their characters "for free" (such as a Reputation bonus for saving a village), they won't spend any of their earned character points on them unless the GM forces them to, which can cause resentment.

One possible solution to this problem is to cleanly separate "general" character points and "social" character points by seeing the latter as a distinct pool of points that can fluctuate over the course of the campaign. This concept finds its roots in another fluctuating value of player characters: monetary wealth. This only makes sense, as reputations, just as money, can be gained and lost, while skills and other inherent abilities are likely to stay with a character for a long time.

Using this optional rule, social character points (SCPs) are awarded separately from general character points during the course of a campaign. SCPs are given not on the basis of whether the player characters reached campaign and adventure goals or whether they were roleplayed well, but *on the basis of what the heroes have done and how they presented themselves within social environments* (though good roleplaying can easily provide bonuses to SCP awards). This means that SCPs, like money, are something the characters themselves can actively work for and make plans to gain. In turn, this helps the GM in crafting adventures, as the players will likely come up with all sorts of schemes for presenting their characters in the best possible way within society and thus garner further SCPs.

Of course, SCPs can also be lost. Perhaps the PCs commit some sort of massive social blunder (and many do seem to have a particular talent for this), or perhaps an enemy manages to besmirch their reputation. In such cases, the GM can either reduce existing social advantages or force the heroes to take new social *disadvantages*. Since SCPs now represent a fluctuating value similar to money, this will likely be met with less resentment from players than if they had lost an advantage for which they had spent general character points dearly earned from several adventures!

Finally, this approach lends itself well to campaigns where the focus is on political intrigue, or where there is not much risk of violence or character death -- such as a *Transhuman Space* campaign set in a Fifth Wave region. In such campaigns, little *physical* peril exists for the players, so the possible loss of social standing can serve nicely as the element of risk that keeps tension within the campaign. Likewise, improving one's social standing provides something the player characters can strive for beyond merely getting rich.

For the purpose of this article, social advantages are all advantages given in the *Wealth and Influence* section on p. 25 of **GURPS Basic Set** and all advantages noted as "Social" in the *Advantages* chapter starting on p. 32. Social disadvantages are likewise all disadvantages listed in the *Wealth and Influence* section, as well as all disadvantages described as "Social" in the *Disadvantages* chapter starting on p. 119.

Character Creation

As you wait for your ride down the beanstalk elevator, you stare on the world below. So this is it -- the center of government for a thousand worlds! You and your friends have come here to make a name for yourself, but now you wonder if that's possible. After all, you've never left your backwater planet before, and all your grand ambitions seem out of place when you think of the teeming billions of people down there . . .

There are two ways of handling character creation under this system. The first one is to simply design heroes normally and require that all social advantages be paid for from the same pool of character points as the other abilities of the adventurer (with social disadvantages likewise contributing to the same pool). This appears to fly in the face of the idea that SCPs represent a separate pool in play, but what these social advantages taken at character creation represent is an *initial investment* for future social development. After all, someone who already has a high station and is well-regarded will have a much easier time making a name for himself (and thus gain more SCPs during the course of play) than someone of a low social caste who furthermore has a Reputation for being a petty thief.

Alternatively, the GM could designate a number of character points that must be used for social advantages. This works best in intrigue-heavy campaigns where everyone is likely to have some standing and connections. Players can purchase additional social advantages for their heroes by spending points from their pool of "general" character points, but they aren't forced to. Depending on the preferences of the GM, social disadvantages taken at character creation might increase the general pool, or only the pool of SCPs.

Gaining and Spending SCPs

As the citizens parade you through the capital for saving the kingdom from the demon invasion, you bask in the admiration of the crowd. On the tribunes, you see all sorts of wealthy and upstanding citizens applaud who a few weeks ago would have kicked you out of their offices if you had dared approach them. But among the nobles and the royal family, you notice a multitude of calculating stares. Do they recognize you as a possible ally to be cultivated? Or as a threat to their own positions? Only time will tell. But you realize one thing: Your days as unknown adventurers are over.

Characters are awarded SCPs based on how much they impress others in a social environment. Thus, if they have no opportunity to impress others -- for example, when all they have done is explore ruins in a remote wilderness -- they won't be awarded any SCPs. On the other hand, if they reach civilization after exploring said ruins and then tell some exciting stories about it, and maybe can show some mysterious artifacts for their trouble -- that deserves some recognition.

If a character has affected a small crowd with his exploits and/or manner, or if he has helped out a reasonably important NPC in some small way, then that's worth one SCP. Note that the character really needs to *impress* others -- just doing what others expected of him in the first place isn't enough. He won't get any SCPs just for attending a high-society party -- he needs to participate in a way that leaves a genuinely good impact on the other people present.

If a character has impressed a large crowd of ordinary people, or a small crowd of important NPCs, or if he has done a

major favor for an important NPC, he gets two SCPs.

Awards of zero to two SCPs per session should be typical for most adventures (or else they will start to overshadow general character points), but it is entirely possible to gain more -- sometimes a lot more. It all depends on the nature of the deed, the number of people influenced, and the social importance of these people. If he saves the only daughter of the mayor of a city from bandits, he might gain three SCPs. If he saves the daughter of the *king*, he might get five or six SCPs. Should he save the entire nation from a clear and identifiable threat, he might receive 10, 15, or more SCPs!

Naturally, such large awards should be a rare exception, rather than the norm -- the result of hard work over the course of multiple sessions or even entire campaign arcs. Anything more than one or two SCPs per session usually represents some significant effort put into advancing their reputations. Larger awards might be appropriate if the characters engage in the right activities. Whether that means hiring a bard to sing songs in their honor, throwing a festival for the entire city where everyone gets free beer, or setting out to defeat an evil dragon is left to the imagination of the players. The main point is that gaining social standing is something the players can actively plan for and work toward -- and the ideas of the players for such schemes in turn provide plenty of adventure possibilities for the GM!

Note that SCPs are awarded individually for each player character, not collectively. After all, if it is not widely known that a particular character participated in a heroic deed (perhaps because he is a member of an unwholesome race such as a ghoul or vampire, perhaps because the character shouldn't have been there in the first place, or perhaps because he is just camera-shy), then he won't be able to get any recognition for it. What an unequal distribution of SCPs means for the party dynamics depends on the players and their heroes. In some cases, the other adventurers might be content with one member playing the "figurehead" of the party; he gains most of the recognition and social advantages while they remain in the background and occasionally remind him that he should use his connections for *their* benefit as well. In other cases, the rest of the party might pressure the most charismatic member to do something to ensure that the less popular characters get some recognition, too. Either situation can lead to some interesting roleplaying.

Players should be able to spend SCPs for their characters relatively freely on social advantages or on the elimination of social disadvantages. The justification could come from a past adventure. For example, defeating a group of brigands might improve the reputation of the PCs -- or it might give them Contacts or Allies among the relatives of the prisoners they have freed, or the local sheriff owes them a Favor for solving this problem for them, or something similar. Alternatively, the players could spend SCPs for social advantages that they can't justify yet -- and then the GM introduces an adventure in which they can gain this advantage. For example, one character might wish to increase his Social Status and thus join the nobility -- but in the current campaign world, this is impossible without marrying another noble. But if the GM permits this expenditure of SCPs, he can then offer an adventure in which the PC stumbles across the opportunity to do just that. In this way, the PCs gain more influence in the development of their character's social standing in the world, and the GM gets yet more adventure seeds.

Note that players can still spend "normal" character points on social advantages -- these represent efforts put into social climbing outside of the normal SCP reward mechanisms. SCPs merely represent an additional way of rewarding characters who have made a name for themselves.

Losing SCPs

*"Look, you **have** to help me here! I don't know who else to turn to!"*

"I'm sorry, but I've heard from Hamilton about the scene you caused at the Bon Vie. Carrying concealed weapons at the best restaurant in town? And now you expect me to help you? I'm afraid I can't afford to be associated with a lunatic."

"But someone is out to kill me!" "I've heard enough of your stories. Please don't call again." Click.

Just as characters can gain SCPs for impressing large crowds and important NPCs, they can also loose them if they embarrass themselves in front of other people. The GM should base the amount of SCPs lost on the severity of the blunder. Referring to an important guildmaster by the wrong title at a banquet might cost one SCP, but accidentally

teleporting in front of the entire royal court while being naked can cost five SCPs or more.

The GM has several options when dealing with lost SCPs. He could simply subtract them from any SCP awards for that adventure. But it might be far more interesting to reduce or eliminate existing advantages (this might represent Allies turning away in disgust, or Contacts becoming less reliable because they are no longer sure of the motivations of the hero), or add new social disadvantages (such as a Reputation for being reckless or rude, or an Enemy who felt insulted by the character). If the GM reduces or eliminates an existing advantage, he generally shouldn't do so with an advantage that was purchased with an SCP award in the same adventure, since this is essentially the same as reducing the SCP award for that adventure.

Of course, committing social blunders is not the only way of losing SCPs. For instance, if the PCs solve a crime and clear the name of an innocent citizen, then they will probably gain SCPs for their deed -- but they might also loose SCPs because the villain has escaped and sworn revenge on them, thus becoming an Enemy! In such cases, the SCPs lost probably shouldn't exceed the SCPs gained (but then again, most PCs display a truly astounding talent for attracting new Enemies . . .).

Few player characters lack adversaries, and any of them could plot against the adventurers to ruin their social standing. Whether the malcontents spread nasty rumors about them, plant fake evidence that shows them to be criminals or traitors, or make an effort to find out about the dark secrets in the past of the PCs, there are plenty of ways of blackening the good name of the heroes and thus cause SCP penalties. In most cases, the PCs should get a chance of uncovering such plots -- using their social and investigative skills as well as their Contacts to learn of it and then act on the information. If they fail to do so, they will need to work harder to stop their enemy -- which in turn can lead to future adventures.

Doing unto Others

It has been a long year, but it was worth the wait. The former mayor, the man responsible for the death of your family, is now just a lowly pauper who has been declared an outlaw and an exile for his crimes, and is about to be sent away from the city. You remember when you first entered the city, your mind full of revenge fantasies that demanded immediate gratification, no matter what the consequences. Fortunately, your comrades convinced you that there was a better way of revenge, one that wouldn't end with a price on your head. And they were right. For one year, you have uncovered his secrets, alienated his friends and allies from him, blackened his reputation and exposed his crimes until even the local judges had no choice but to declare him outlaw. You made him suffer in a way a quick assault would never have, and you have relished every moment of it -- as you relish the look of hatred and fear in his eyes when he stares at you. Tonight it will end, as anyone will be able to hurt and kill him with impunity after sunset. He knows that you will be coming after him, and you will savor this final hunt as well . . .

Of course, the reverse is true as well -- player characters can also work to reduce the social standing of their enemies. It often seems like many players prefer to deal with their enemies in a more permanent way, but sometimes this simply isn't a practical solution. Perhaps their enemy is such an integral part of the local power structure that he has excellent protection at all times -- and even if they manage to slay him, the player characters would likely get caught or become wanted criminals in the process. Perhaps the campaign takes place in a setting where magical or technological resurrection is available, thus making it impossible to kill the villain forever. Or perhaps murdering the enemy simply wouldn't seem *right* -- sure, many adventurers can be surprisingly ruthless, but do they really want to kill someone who has never attempted to physically injure them, but restricted his antagonism purely to social concerns (for example, a mistress of a king who wants to prevent them from getting any influence at court)?

In such cases, the player characters might seek to harm their enemy socially instead of physically. For this, they first need to investigate their enemy thoroughly to learn what kinds of social advantages they have. Then they need to figure out how to damage these advantages -- ruining their reputation; turning their Contacts, Allies, and Patrons against them; making sure that they gain new and powerful Enemies; and so on. While this process isn't as fast as directly hurting them, it can nonetheless be effective, since at some point their enemies might be so isolated that they no longer pose a serious threat to the heroes.

Of course, their enemies will try to do the same thing to the PCs. And this fight should easily be able to provide enough material for multiple adventures, or even entire campaign arcs!

R Is for Revolution

by Stan Ward

Power comes from the barrel of a gun.
--Mao Tse Tung

In many games with an established setting and canon, the rulers of the nations of that setting are fixtures, immutable and unchangeable. They are the patrons and mission-assigners to the PCs, and the societies they live in are just as immutable as they are -- the "system," as it were, is immortal. At most, the PCs may be an instrument for getting the rightful king or queen onto the throne -- but nothing changes except the person who sits in the big chair.

But what if you want more? Rather than just fight against the evil vizier and his henchmen, maybe the heroes want to get rid of the whole system that allows the evil vizier to be in power. Perhaps they want to say, "Hey, feudalism sucks. Freedom to the serfs!" Or the characters want the chance to be king. Or maybe the PCs are the rulers (or a part of the standing government) and will need to resist a revolution.

This article examines some of the reasons that revolutions and rebellions are fought, the right circumstances for fighting one, how to win, how to lose, and what to do afterward. It also looks at how to handle the situation when the PCs are on the side of the government, and what they can do to prevent the revolution (even before it starts).

The article starts with a definition of a rebellion and what that means for the people involved. Then the article considers the five stages of a revolution. Each part is followed with "what this means for players," a special section detailing what PCs can do at each stage of the revolution, no matter which side they support. Several examples are drawn from history and fiction, from the Athenian Revolution against Spartan rule to the Russian Revolution to the Lunar Revolution in *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* by Robert Heinlein. The article ends with specific ideas for different campaign genres and setting to help GMs incorporate revolutions in their campaigns, or to start new ones based on having a revolution.

You Say You Want a Revolution

"Revolution" is, to quote the *America Heritage* dictionary: The overthrow of one government and its replacement with another; and A sudden or momentous change in a situation. This is the spirit of revolution that this article focuses on -- a big, momentous change in the ruling government of a state or nation.

Revolutionary: freedom fighter, secessionist, terrorist, insurgent, or what? All of these terms can apply to the same thing, and throughout history, revolutionary groups have passed from one type to the other. Revolutionaries themselves have come from all walks of life, like the rich and powerful of the English Civil War to the poor and disheveled in China's Communist Revolution. But what do these terms mean, and how are they different? Or are they different at all?

Freedom fighters are the whitewashed nice guys of a revolution. These are the revolutionaries if they happened to fight from underdog status and actually win their revolution. There were many phrases in songs and poems about the Soviet Union's "fighters for the people's freedom!" Sometimes, they can be confused with insurgents, especially if they are fighting a foreign occupier (much like the French Resistance during World War II).

Secessionists are rebels who fight against the established ruling body to create their own government for some established minority or other "special" group within society. This group can be an actual ethnic minority (like the Karen people in Thailand and Burma) or a group espouses a certain political viewpoint and is willing to act on it (the most famous of which was the southern states during the American Civil War). What makes secessionists different than the other revolutionary groups is they aim to take only a portion of the nation's territory, usually some "ethnic homeland" or other area deemed to "belong" to the secessionist movement.

Terrorists are generally considered to be people who uses "terror tactics" (i.e., bombing, kidnapping, arson, assassination, and the like) to cause political change. Their aim is to coerce the populace into accepting whatever their particular ideology is using the above tactics to affect change on a larger scale than their sheer membership numbers could otherwise achieve. They may or may not be secessionists, though, unlike them, they may also be aiming to take the whole thing!

Insurgents are the generalists of revolutionaries; they are the ones who can be considered either of the above groups, or something else entirely. In the Russian Revolution, for example, what would one call the Bolsheviks? Secessionists? But they wanted all of Russia. Terrorists? Not really -- they gathered actual armies rather than needing to use terror tactics. Freedom fighters then? Maybe -- according to the winners, anyway.

Even in determining the make-up of a revolution, revolutions are usually somewhat messy affairs. As always, later history will better reflect what a revolution was, and what its participants can be called. Had Germany won World War II, for example, it is likely that the French Resistance fighters would have been labeled terrorists rather than as freedom fighters.

There's Revolutions, and There's Revolutions

A revolution or rebellion moves through several stages, from conception to execution. This section explores each of these stages and their implications for PCs and the GM in a campaign.

Stage One: Questions of Legitimacy

Ibn Khaldun, a Muslim scholar of the late Middle Ages, charted an empire's or kingdom's evolution through several distinct stages. One of those stages (preceding either the end or the rebirth of that state) was the loss of legitimacy. This is the beginning of the rebellion, where people start to wonder if the ruling government's needed at all.

For this to occur, it is necessary that: the rulers be incompetent enough to garner citizens' ire (as Tsar Alexander's government was seen to do in Russia); to be corrupt or cruel and uncaring (which hastened the fall of the kings of Rome and ushered in the Republic); or for the people to not see the government as their legitimate government (i.e., the Manchu Dynasty was considered a foreign ruler in China right up until the dethronement of Pu Yi, the last emperor, and the rise of the Nationalists).

Ideology can also play a role here. Many revolutionaries and their cohorts follow an underlying philosophy (even if it's only the peons doing the following), which can serve as the eventual base for the new governmental system that emerges. The Russian Revolution and the Chinese Revolution had Marxism as its ideal; the Orange Revolution of Ukraine had democracy. The French Revolution embraced notions of human equality and the end of the monarchial system.

What this means for players and GMs: If players are supporting the revolution (or instigating it!), then they need to put out the word of just how bad the government is, their philosophy, and why a revolution should be supported now (like Lenin's extensive writings and activism). The GM should find out the PCs' broad plans for fomenting the revolution.

If the PCs are arrayed against it, then they'll need to keep an eye on rumors or the news and see who's conspiring against the authorities. The trick here is to see which rumors are worth checking out, and which are just crazy fringe groups. GM's can drive a group crazy by allowing multiple groups to pop up at the same time, confounding the PCs' efforts to zero in on the really dangerous one.

Stage Two: Loss of Stability

At stage two, the nation or state begins to lose the ability to govern, either through its own incompetence, or better, the

machinations of the player characters. Fraud is laid bare, famine and disease run rampant, and people tied to the government exploit the citizens in an obvious manner.

What this means for players and GMs: This is when the PCs can garner their strongest supporters, people disaffected by the governmental malaise and starting to want change. This is also the time when the players can make their plans for how to push things to the third stage, on their own timetable, or to prepare their forces for when things reach that stage. GMs can have a lot of fun here as society crumbles and their players try to offer an alternative -- opportunities to sway or alienate the population should abound.

For PCs in support of the government, they'll have two items on the agenda: stabilize the political situation (or make it look like it's stabilized), and rout out revolutionaries and either turn them into government dupes, or jail, execute, or exile them as a warning. GMs can run many hit-and-run scenarios as the characters take out key revolutionaries in an attempt to stem the tide.

Stage Three: Der Tag!

The final crisis heralds stage three. A situation arises that incites the people. In the recent Orange Revolution in Ukraine, an election was held that was obviously fixed to proclaim the current rulers the victors. The facade of legitimacy was gone and the people had had enough; they were pushed to call for the government's downfall.

In the kingdom of Rome, the moment came when the last king supposedly raped one of the local women. (It should be noted that the king was an Etruscan, a people that had conquered the Romans in those days, and thus was seen as a foreign ruler, which only hastened his demise.) When the king raped this woman, the people rose up to depose the evil ruler to "protect themselves and their women."

In any case, one government is ousted, and the other moves in. This can be achieved in a peaceful manner (through political mechanisms and protest like the bloodless revolution that had finally freed India) or through violent means (such as happened in the American Revolution).

What this means for players and GMs: This is the phase many think about when talking about revolutions. For adventurers supporting the revolution, they will most likely plan the day, even setting up the circumstances to set off the powder keg (as it is rumored Chiang Kai Shek did in China). They need an event that will anger people enough to make them ready to throw caution to the wind. If the time period has newspapers and television (or similar media), it may be a lot easier to do this. GMs could let the players meticulously plan the day, or play it out chaotically if it just happens upon them. For example, in the book *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress,* the main characters have the big day thrust upon them when a local woman is raped and brutally murdered by guards serving the Colonial Authority. As word of the crime spread, people spontaneously began to rise up in anger. The rebellion, having been mostly hidden until that point, went into action, riding the wave of anger that culminated in their seizing the offices of government, deposing the Warden (who was the ruler of the moon prison colony), and punishing the perpetrators.

For PCs on the other side of the fence, this is a hard one to handle. First and foremost, the heroes must try to make sure that "Der Tag" never occurs; if there is no single outrageous incident, there might be no focus for the revolutionaries. If they are in a pre-media time period, they may short circuit the revolution by capturing or killing the ringleaders and making examples of them, if they weren't able to do that in stage two. If there is plenty of media, then the task is two-fold: Get control of said media and have it show what the government wants it to (in particular, that the revolutionaries are evil, and the government is good); and shut out the opposition's access to said media. The PCs could also try to topple the government themselves from within (through legitimate means or otherwise). They essentially become revolutionaries themselves as they try to stave off what they view as a more dangerous revolution by appeasing the people's call for a change. GMs should emphasize the crumbling nature of the regime the characters work for and the seriousness of the situation.

Stage Four: The Aftermath

Many thus far successful revolutions and rebellions have failed in touchy stage four. Despite the apparent victory of

the revolution, elements of the former government are active and may still be seen as legitimate in some quarters (especially by those parts of society that benefited from their rule). The revolutionaries themselves don't quite have a hold on things. The situation could swing either way at this point.

In more military circumstances, the two sides duke it out. In Russia's revolution, the White Army and the Red Army fought for several years before the situation finally calmed and the Red Army emerged victorious.

What this means for players and GMs: Upon ousting the government, a new one must be set up and fast -- more importantly, any remaining elements of the former regime need to be either bought off or eliminated. Depending on the circumstances, the new government may try to change everything in a day (like issuing new currency, up-ending the tax system and distribution of wealth) or very slowly, dismantling the old administration piece by piece and replacing it with new systems. In any case, they need to secure their own legitimacy to further carry the people's support (or at least tacit acceptance). Lots to do here for the GM as they come up with problems for the PCs to solve.

If PCs were part of the former government, they need to survive. Regrouping their forces and supporters is key, allowing the regime to either try to fight or to flee in an organized way -- the slow fallback of the Nationalist government in China allowed time for many of them to escape to Taiwan. Conversely, if the revolutionary government makes mistakes (or is forced into them by clever players) they may be able to reverse the situation! For GMs, this is the classic "escape from the enemy" scenario.

Stage Five: Established Legitimacy

At the final stage, the new government has tentatively established itself as the nation's government, and people are generally accepting of it. It has a currency and a flag and a way of choosing leaders. In France's revolutionary period, the Triumvirate government (with Napoleon as First Citizen) found itself legitimate largely on Napoleon's name; people knew him and accepted him as head of the nation. However, the situation is still dangerous -- there may be those who would overthrow this new government, starting their own revolution or rebellion, or supporters of the old regime who still wield power.

What this means for players and GMs: If the PCs supported the revolution, well, they've largely won what they've wanted. The goal is now to govern well (or consolidate their power). There'll be a honeymoon period when euphoria is high and people are hopeful -- the new government must deliver the goods quickly or suffer the consequences.

For players on the losing side, they'll have to hide and lick their wounds. It may be possible to openly fight the new government while maintaining one's position in society -- Napoleon had this problem as French nobles and generals started to return from exile.

"One can do everything with bayonets except sit on them."
-Napoleon Bonaparte

Rebel without a Cause

So, how do you add a revolution into a game? Or make it the focus from the beginning?

The first real decision to make is whether the revolution is in the background or is the focus of the campaign.

Having a revolution in the background means that the GM is using the revolution to say something about the game world, or to provide a background for relating certain sorts of stories for the group.

The revolution can, for example, represent a theme of the campaign. This is a bit artsy, but the idea is that the revolution is a backdrop against which the players judge their actions, or are posed moral dilemmas that need to be solved by the heroes. For example, the players are super-spies in a modern-day campaign of intrigue. If one of their missions involves propping up a government allied with their own against a rebellion, there are all sorts of moral themes that can be played out. Is the local government corrupt? Should the adventurers really sympathize with the

local rebels? Should they advise their government to throw in with one side or another? Are the rebels doing something worse than the actual rebellion itself, and that needs to be stopped before anything else? (The Shining Path of Peru, for example, became infamous for the killing of peasant leaders and farm barons for minor infractions such as drinking alcohol or working on a Sunday.) Or are the government and rebels so nasty that they both deserve to be destroyed, and the heroes have to decide to wipe them both out for the good of the people? Do the characters start a second rebellion against the first one and the government?

As another idea, a revolution could merely be the symptom or outward manifestation of a deeper, more sinister problem. In an "unknowable monsters from outer space" game, where the heroes battle cultists and the like, a revolution may come from the chaos caused by the birthing pangs of a malevolent dark god, reflecting the inner madness of the creature as it struggles to enter this plane of existence. The PCs may start out as soldiers fighting the revolutionaries, or as bystanders to the whole thing, until they find out what the real problem is.

Lastly, the revolution can serve as a ruse or trick, a clever bit of camouflage that hides the villain's real goal. In the *Star Wars* prequels, Darth Sidious sets up a rebellion against the Galactic Republic for the purposes of getting himself (as Palapatine) elected chancellor, putting the Jedi in a weakened state, and creating the conditions necessary for a new Dark Lord of the Sith to emerge from all the warfare and violence. The rebellion itself is merely a means to an end, and not the end itself (since he effectively takes over peacefully, and then quashes the rebellion he started). In such a situation, the adventurers would have to expose what's under the outer skin of the rebellion, each layer of the ruse being peeled back until they get the real story of what and why. Only then can they move to block the villain's real goal (and perhaps foiling the unjust rebellion, too).

If, on the other hand, the rebellion is to serve as the main thrust of the campaign, a few things needs to be determined by the GM before the stages of the rebellion can be followed. Consider this a very large "stage zero."

How the GM handles the revolution can depend on the campaign's genre. Here are some revolution variations in terms of a few of the staple genres or special setting elements in roleplaying.

Pre-industrial or fantasy settings: Historical pre-industrial settings can experience all stages of revolutions, with a few caveats outlined herein. True fantasy worlds, however, are one of the hardest to run revolution games in. Specifically, this is because in fantasy games, the rulers-that-be tend to be largely window-dressing: They exist to give the adventurers missions, perhaps, or to serve as award givers for brave deeds, but that's all. As mentioned in the beginning, rulers in fantasy worlds are immobile by design. Missions from the rulers, if any, tend to be centered around maintaining the status quo.

That said, there's room to make a revolution the focus. For example, it may be that the current ruler is, while powerful, not the legitimate heir to the throne. It may also be that a new ruler must rise from the shadows, to supplant the current rulers. This is what happened during the establishment of the Ming Dynasty of China -- a peasant rose to become emperor because no one wanted to support the failing Mongolian Yuan Dynasty.

Rebellions in a pre-industrial/fantasy age take longer, since communication itself is slow, and word of a revolution can take months to reach distant destinations, as in the case of the French Revolution -- many did not know the king had been beheaded for a full two months afterward! This might go a little faster if there are things like airships or dragon riders. Even activities like gathering troops, provisions, and weapons in later stages of the rebellion take time, as resources come together at the highest speed allowed by technology (which generally isn't terribly high).

Politically, it is often necessary to get existing nobles or whatever upper class there is to support the cause with material and people, through fear, or by agreeing to not get in the way of the rebellion. Cooperation from such people is through concessions of land or rights, promises to uphold certain laws or enact new laws, and a general grant of their continued place in society. In the English Civil War, for example, those nobles who did not fight for the Royalists where largely, and quietly, ignored as Cromwell and company solidified their power (they were, of course, some of the loudest supporters of the king after his return from exile).

Modern or science fiction settings: Revolutions follow the stages outlined earlier, except that high technology becomes a decisive factor in how a revolution goes. Once a setting hits the industrial age, control of industry (or at

least access to its products) is a dominant, if not deciding, factor in a revolution -- especially one bent on warfare. In the American Civil War, it has been noted by many historians that the Confederacy had no chance to win the war due to an insurmountable gap in industrial strength.

However, the opposite side in such a revolution may have a different goal other than outright military victory (which may be impossible): They may wish to make the cost of the war too high. If a revolution can convince the rulers that the price of fighting them is too great to pay, the revolutionaries may be able to win the war and receive concessions in the form of land or laws.

Another aspect to consider is the form of the government that is being overthrown. In modern and science-fiction settings, the country generally won't have a convenient single ruler to usurp; there'll be an entire, sprawling government, with its many branches, that will need to be supplanted.

Special mention should also be made of the media. After the invention of newspapers, as mentioned in the revolutionary stages section, control of the media becomes a key goal of any revolution.

With magic: What can make a fantasy revolution (or a modern day conspiracy revolution, for that matter) different is the inclusion of magic. How a revolution works depends largely on how magic filled the game world is. With high magic (where magic is commonplace and every other person knows an easy spell or two), revolutions run much like they would in the modern age, with fast communications, small groups with a large potential to cause harm (thanks to walking wizard artillery), and easy access to healing and other protective magics.

If magic is low or rare, then mages and sorcerers can be very potent, turning the balance of power easily. In a fantasy game, each side -- the authorities and the rebels -- must work hard to subvert, control, or kill any mages not already on their side. As an interesting twist, maybe it is the mages guild that is fomenting the revolution, dedicated to placing mages in charge due to their supposed superiority. In a dark conspiracy game, one side or the other may not even be aware that magic exists, giving the side that does know a tremendous advantage in its work. (A government might wonder, for example, how the rebels always seem to be able to find out where their leaders are hiding, not knowing about the scrying spells used by the enemy!)

Cyberspace: A modern day or cyberpunk game also must deal with the Internet, gridweb, or whatever the world computer network is called. Information is king, and control of information can be a deciding factor in any conflict. Better yet, being able to change information at will can tip the scales in one's favor. (Imagine being able to siphon funds from the enemy by tapping their own bank accounts.)

Or what if the revolution happens in cyberspace? In a cyberpunk campaign, for example, control of cyberspace means control of society, since everything in the world is connected to it in some way. Traffic computers, identification information, flight and freight schedules, almost anything and everything could be manipulated for the benefit of either side. And what if the computers become self-aware? A self-aware machine helping a rebellion (or leading it) can determine a conflict all by itself. In *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress,* a self-aware computer, Mike, commands all of the information on resources on the moon colony. The main computer itself steals money by slightly overcharging transactions in stores and banks when money is deposited, creating a false economy to fuel the rebellion.

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!

A rebellion then, is a complex, frightening, and fun prospect for any GM or gaming group to contemplate using or adding to their gaming. Wielded correctly, a revolution can highlight anything the GM wants, or tell traditional war stories with a twist. Long live the revolution!

Pyramid Review

Silk Road

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Designed by Ted Cheatham & Bruno Faidutti

Art by Jonny Scull, Patrick McEvoy, Mike Jackson, & Benjamin Barnett

Full-color boxed set with board, six player shields, 75 wooden goods (15 cubes in each of five different colors), 90 action tiles, 45 gold and silver coins, five turn tokens, caravan pawn, caravan leader pawn, cloth bag, & rules; $49.99

Not everyone is Nixon, so not everyone gets to go to China. Maybe if they're Marco Polo, sure . . . or if they're playing *Silk Road* from Z-Man Games.

The object is to have the most points at the end of the game.

Three to six merchants (players) receive a small stake of money and trade goods, and a shield. That last item is a screen to keep players' possessions a secret, so once underway everyone must rely on memory to recall who has the most coin, and educated guesses to know how dangerous it is to let this player or that get his hands on certain products.

Starting out at Chang'An, a caravan moves across China and Asia to Antioch, haggling as it goes. One player is chosen as its chief for the turn, and he gets the leader pawn and a set of turn tokens. He decides to which city the company travels next. Sometimes there's only one place to go -- little arrows point to available choices -- while other cities allow the team to proceed to multiple locations. The leader also gets first pick of the action tiles in the target metropolis.

Actions are usually of the mercantile sort: turning goods to gold or vice versa, or trading one product for another. Going first is important because that person gets the best deals. For example, as spices are sold, successive counters are worth less; the market is glutted. Similarly, as silk is bought it becomes more dear because the town is running out of it. More exotic actions include stealing items from opponents or going before the Grand Vizier to show off one's wares. This allows a bid wherein whoever reveals the most cubes of a chosen good gets a money bonus . . . but at the cost of letting rivals know who has what.

The leader retains a turn token after his action to indicate he's gone this round; he passes the remaining tokens and his leadership pawn to the person he wants to go next, affecting to some degree how the rest of the turn plays out. This process repeats to the last person. That player doesn't get an action, but he does get the pawn. To decide who goes first next turn, those who took actions bid for the lead position, and the last player either gives the pawn up to the highest bidder or pays that same bid and holds onto the pawn.

When the group reaches its destination (they can, for variety, travel in the opposite direction), they receive points. Money and goods both translate directly into points, and if someone has more of a product than anyone else he gets a bonus. The high score wins.

The components are small, sometimes too small. The board is compact and sturdy, which is great, but the little wooden cubes and stick-like action tiles can scatter easily. The shields are good, necessary even, and they stand straight, but they aren't too expansive so they afford little privacy should someone squeeze past on the way to the restroom. On the

other hand, it all makes for the proverbial good thing in a small, easily conveyed package. And on the gripping hand, it's a hefty price tag. Fifty dollars is a lot of money, spent, it would seem, to buy a lot of wooden cubes. One must weigh the value of Euro-gaming elements like the cloth bag before committing.

Once one is bound to it, though, the game is well-traveled in the figurative sense too. The compliment "simple" is paid to many games from across the Pond, but this one's so straightforward you can almost learn it just by looking at the board. It's also quick; the box claims 90 minutes, but only the biggest crowd with the most cautious players is going to last beyond an hour, and most sessions won't be but three-quarters of that.

Fans of "buy and sell" pastimes may yearn for something a bit more open-handed in execution -- most everything here is done under cover of the shield, and little is done on the open market unless the right actions are played -- but managing money and goods has seldom been this important to success. It's not easy to hustle up the right combination of goods to make it big in several lines (certainly not in so brief a time), so there aren't many high-scoring games and sound thrashings, but since *Silk Road* keeps things so close to the vest it has a tension all its own.

--Andy Vetromile

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

K.J., Ghost of the Spaceways

for *GURPS*

by Elizabeth McCoy

As the two spacers left the ship, the woman said, "There's got to be a reason why this one's so cheap . . ."

"Don't look a gift hose in the mouth," the man advised.

"You mean 'horse.' And I know I'm going to regret this."

Outside, they signed a contract. Inside, a cold, misty bit of air wondered, vaguely, what sort of crew would come next.

* * *

K.J. is a ghost. It's not entirely sure how it got to be that way. Were Precursor artifacts involved? Ancient curses? Religion? Dire oaths that will not let it rest? Is it the psionic echo of a powerful mind, or an alien life form? Good question. K.J.'s not even sure if it's male, female, hermaphrodite, neuter, or what. All it knows is that it's bound to the starship, it can sometimes operate the controls, and used starship lots get really boring after a while.

To paranormal senses, K.J. manifests as a humanoid made from faintly glowing light. More corporeally, its presence can be detected by a chill in the air and a feeling of dampness -- and its misty form can be seen in mirrors. It sometimes seems to be gone entirely, in some form of ghostly sleep, but always awakens again.

Crewmembers are of interest to K.J., who doesn't want its ship blown up or turned into a floating husk somewhere in space. K.J. does not approve of anyone who seems incompetent, and may well try to chase such people away -- though it wouldn't want to kill anyone. (What if some idiot became a ghost as well? The thought would make K.J. shudder if it could.) Someone who makes a good impression may have helpful, ghostly aid -- or whispered advice in the dark of a sleep-cycle, when half-asleep and disinclined to wonder why the room-intercom is making suggestions.

What K.J. doesn't do is introduce itself. It has too many memories of people getting upset, threatening to scrap the ship, trying exorcisms . . . It's just not worth the emotional pain and risk that it would be destroyed or trapped in a ship-hanger laboratory for study. (A crew who accepted K.J. as just a corporeally-handicapped member of their own would earn its undying -- literally -- gratitude and loyalty.)

K.J., Ship's Ghost *150 points*

ST 1 [-90], **DX** 11 [20], **IQ** 12 [40], **HT** 11 [10]

Advantages: 3D Spatial Sense [10]; Chronolocation [5]; Dark Vision [25]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Eidetic Memory (for facts only, -5%) [5]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Insubstantial (Affects Substantial, +100%; Always On, -50%) [120]; Intuitive Mathematician [5]; Invisibility (Electromagnetic vision, +0%; Substantial Only, -10%, Visible Reflection, -10%) [24]; Telekinesis 1 (Affects Substantial, +40%*; Reduced Range ("arm's length"), -30%; Unreliable (12-), -15%; Visible, -20%) [4]; Unaging [15]; Zeroed [10].

Disadvantages: Amnesia [-10]; Dead Broke [-25]; Numb [-20]; Post-Combat Shakes (6-) [-10]; Sense of Duty (the ship and incidentally its crew) [-2]; Ship-bound (cannot go beyond the ship's hull) [-25]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]; Status -3 (ghost) [-15]; Supernatural Feature (cold chill in immediate area) [-1]; Unattractive ("creepy"; Universal, +25%) [-5]; Unnatural Feature (glowing humanoid in mirrors) [-1].

Quirks: Intolerant of incompetent crew; Offers advice to those it likes; Prefers to obey the wishes of ship captains (barring incompetency); Stays slightly emotionally distant from mortals.

Feature: K.J. can speak through any of the ship's communications gear, if it's in the same room, without actually manifesting a hand to push the intercom button. Without a working comm, though, it is Mute to physical ears. This cancels out to a 0-point Feature.

Skills: Area Knowledge (GM's choice)-12 (IQ/E) [1]; Cartography-12 (IQ/A) [2]; Computer Operation-13 (IQ/E) [2]; Crewman (Spacer)-12 (IQ/E) [1]; Electronics Operation (Comm)-13 (IQ/A) [4]; Electronics Operation (Sensors)-13 (IQ/A) [4]; Mathematics (Applied)-10** (IQ/H) [1]; Mechanic (the Ship)-13 (IQ/A) [4]; Navigation (Space or Hyperspace)-13* (IQ/A) [1].

* Includes +2 for 3D Spatial Sense.
** This is arguably meaningless to an Intuitive Mathematician.

The kind of ship that K.J. haunts is deliberately left vague -- it is probably best as a tramp freighter, with room for a PC crew, but K.J. could also show up on a one-person scoutship or a large military dreadnought. All of K.J.'s skills are of the appropriate Tech Level and are specialized for the ship it inhabits.

What Is K.J.?

That is up to the GM. K.J. doesn't know, and isn't interested in finding out by this time. PCs might be more likely to propose that it's a time-slipped, dimensionally phase-shifted crewbeing, and ponder how to tinker the FTL drives to release K.J. from its timelost state. Or they might decide that K.J. is cheaper than an AI and could fake being an expert system or machine intelligence when necessary.

What's K.J. Good For?

As an NPC, K.J. can be the focus of a plot: After discovering that there's a mysterious, incorporeal stowaway, hints of enigmatic alien devices and half-forgotten ship-routes could send the ship's corporeal owners looking for the Precursor Artifact mother lode and hoping they don't get turned into ghosts as well. Or K.J. could simply be a useful sidekick to man the ship while the PCs go outside and adventure, and a secret weapon for the GM to use if pirate attacks succeed better than the crew can handle. With the addition of Common Sense, the GM could use the poor specter as a mouthpiece for when the characters need a dose of reality.

If the GM allows K.J. to be a player character, uncovering its past could make a background plot thread to weave through the campaign, though the player would have to be comfortable with a character that was unable to leave the ship.

Plot Seeds

Aside from all the other possibilities alluded to above, here are a couple of adventure suggestions.

Ghost Ship: The PCs find a ship floating out in the back of beyond -- open to vacuum, artificial gravity disconnected, and with no one at all on board. Back-tracking its course reveals a number of decompressed corpses who fit the profile for hijackers . . . K.J. doesn't *like* to kill, but when the pirates slaughtered the ship's proper crew, the ghost snapped. Sadly, after the murders were over and the bodies shoved out the airlock, K.J. suffered a nervous breakdown and is not "present" to be found; when it finally wakes up again, the memories will be firmly suppressed, leaving it with a mystery about these new people on board, and the PCs with the uncertainty of a possibly-malicious spook.

Treasure Asteroid: While many of K.J.'s memories of *people* get dim, it can quote factual information. Like the rare mineral readings off a certain astroid off thataway. The trip might be uneventful. The asteroid might not be the base of pirates, have no alien artifacts on it, nor beautiful prospectors in need of a miracle to keep their ship from being repossessed by a bank representative who twirls his black mustache.

The trip might be entirely boring. And even have a profitable payoff at the end. Really.

Tweaking Makes Life Easier

[Last week](#) we talked about the whys and wherefores[1] of fudging encounters on the fly. This week I delve into the hows, focussing on how to make an encounter less difficult than originally designed if it turns out you need to turn down the heat a bit.

In all cases, I feel it's important to keep any aid as hidden and organic as possible. If the players learn that their bacon is going to be dragged out of the fire whenever things get tough, then not only is a lot of the dramatic tension lessened, but the players may also be tempted to try crazier and more foolhardy things in the future, knowing their characters won't be hurt. Primarily this means keeping some kind of division between the GM's notes and rolls and the player's eyes. I understand that some RPGs even make available a "screen" of some sort that facilitates this, but I haven't been able to confirm this.

Know Your Math

By far the easiest and one of the most subtle techniques is to kludge the numbers on the GM's side, so that protagonist attacks end up being more effective or antagonist defenses start being less effective. Of course, if you want to keep this as subtle and hidden as possible (you do, right?), you need to make sure that any numbers you fudge are compatible with what has gone before in the game . . . especially if -- as in many games -- combat, damage, and/or defense rolls are made publicly; if a roll of 11 wasn't enough to hit some critter before but that same roll starts working midway through the fight, that can be suspicious. And suspicious players are dangerous players.

Perhaps the easiest and most obvious method is to adjust numbers so that the fight lasts less time than before. In fact, depending on your worldview, this may not even merit much "cheating," per se, since it doesn't necessarily invalidate any previous rolls. For example, the base *d20 System* (and its parents and grandparents) all use hit points that are "all or nothing"; a 500-hit-point creature that's been whittled down to one hit point still fights will full efficacy, while a 500-hit-point creature that's been reduced to zero is an ex-creature who's shuffled off his mortal coil, run down the curtain, and joined the bleeding choir invisible.[2] Thus the players have little way of knowing whether it's a 500-hit-point creature they're facing or a 300-hit-point critter 'til it falls over . . . meaning it's trivial to adjust its maximum (and thus current) hit-point total on the fly to tweak the combat.

But some games -- such as *GURPS* -- since the hit-point total (or health level, or whatever) makes a big difference to the way the combat has progressed. Other games are somewhere in between; for example, the *World of Darkness* imposes die penalties as wounds progress. In this case, the GM might need to take a slightly more creative hand in adjusting the conflict, perhaps looking for a means of tweaking the encounter so that an advantage is removed or a penalty is introduced. For example, if the armor that the GM devised for a bad guy has proven to be too much for the heroes, then maybe the continued exertions of the battle start slowing him down or get him to remove his helmet for more breathing room (and a targetable vulnerability). Or maybe an action of the heroes forces a reevaluation of the situation . . . for example, if one of the good guys uses a flamethrower on him.

Cheating is Evil!

You don't want to cheat? No problem. It has been said that many conflicts are resolved (be they wars, battles, personal melees, etc.) when one side or the other *fails* to make a timely error. If so, then it's easy to adjust an encounter on the fly by . . . well, making a timely error. If a villain is overconfident (or has a disadvantage such as megalomania) then it's trivial to give the heroes a couple of rounds to catch their breaths so the baddie can gloat for a bit.

Or perhaps the antagonist makes a significant tactical error, such as wasting his actions for a round or two using an attack form that's ineffectual against a specific PC. ("Behold, Ice Princess[3], my latest weapon: the Frost Blaster!") This is especially true if you might be guilty of using GM knowledge against the players, avoiding certain attacks you (the GM) know will be ineffective. It's good to even the karmic scales every so often.

Incorporate "Utter Defeat"

And don't forget going completely off the wall . . . rather than trying to kludge the encounter, why not take the results -- no matter how inevitable and depressing they may seem -- and incorporate them? For example, in the few seconds after I accidentally incinerated one of the PCs with a fireball in my first Supers campaign, I came up with the proverbial "mysterious flash of light" that rewound time a few seconds and gave the heroes another chance (hint: dodge!); I got months of milage out of that plot development as the heroes (not to mention the GM) tried to figure out what happened. Consider using a setback for some campaign-shaking change of direction (may I humbly suggest my own "The Last Year Of Your Lives" as a suggestion).

What Not To Do

Probably the biggest "Don't do this!" I can offer is to try and avoid deus-ex-machina-style saves from outside forces . . . especially NPCs. Failure to do so will make the players wonder, "Who's game is it, anyway?" I still "fondly" remember the adventure that came with the 1980's version of the **Marvel Super Heroes RPG:** "Day of the Octopus." At pretty much every point the heroes can fail, Thor shows up, takes care of the current encounter, pushes the heroes in the right direction, and flies on his way. By the end of the adventure I found myself wondering, "Waitaminute . . . can't we just kick back with some nachos and let Thor solve all our problems?" Yes, I know the game was aimed at gamers with ages in the single digits, but even I recognized the absurdity of this plot device.

Now, having outside aid come to the rescue is just fine if the players take advantage of their characters' histories, backgrounds, or advantages; for example, a character who has the local police as an Ally Group would be will within his rights to call them up when the going gets tough . . . and it *may* even be appropriate for them to show up without intervention, if the heroes took appropriate steps (say, contacting the cops ahead of time and saying, "We're going to the corner of Ambush Boulevard and Overpowering Attacks Road; if you don't hear from us in an hour, send help.") But having the police's Department of Fortuitous Rescues barge in when there's little reason to do so . . . well, it's easy to make the players feel their actions are moot, real fast.

If you want to include some "outside" element that makes the battle tilt more in the PCs' favor (and it's not a bad idea), consider doing it such that it incorporates new choices, dilemmas, and gaming possibilities. For example, let's say that the fission-powered armor turns out to be too powerful for the heroes in a Supers campaign. After one lucky roll from a player (one where the group gives a collective "Ooh!"), you decide that the power source on the armor has been breached. The baddie's armor starts glowing menacingly, and the heroes soon realize that he's in trouble; if they're smart, they realize *they're* in trouble, too. Do they try to escape, possibly dooming their adversary or possibly allowing him to escape? Do they try to warn him of the danger?

Even the most seasoned GM will find encounters not going the way he planned, and there might be temptations to adjust things on the fly; hopefully you've gotten some ideas about how to do that to make things easier on the heroes. Or maybe you can wait for Thor to show up and solve everything . . . I hear he does that.

--Steven Marsh

[1] Yes, I know "why" and "wherefore" are just about the same. Don't confuse me with facts.

[2] Yes, I know about negative hit points and the like. Don't confuse me with facts . . . especially when they get in the way of a Monty Python reference.

[3] As an aside, if I ever gain super-powers and decide to take a code name, you can bet that it'll be a name that doesn't reveal anything about my abilities and hopefully may even give me an advantage through misinformation or misdirection. Why give folks a strategic edge just because they learn my name? No, if I gain (say) super-speed and an energy blast, my name will be something like "The X-Ray Visionary," "Green Thumb," or "Vulnerable-to-100-Dollar-Bills Man."

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Pyramid Review

Amazing Space Venture

Published by [SherCo](#)

Designed by Dr. Steve LeShay

Art and graphic design by Kyle Price

Full-color boxed set with, board, 88 space tiles (nine starting tiles, 79 playing tiles), 150 cards (playing, point, and reference cards), 156 counters (set of 37 ship and planet counters for each of four players, plus eight "destroyed planet" markers), eight plastic stands (two per player), rules $49.99

Fans of tile-laying games know by now the next supplement is never far off, and each tweaks one or more rules under which the fans may chafe. *Amazing Space Venture* is from SherCo Games, not Rio Grande, but instead of a simple rules adjustment, it tries to break free altogether from its source of inspiration. The creator isn't shy about the game's roots, so subtlety isn't necessary: This is *[Carcassonne](#)* in space. That said, there are as many differences as similarities. Two to four players ("astronauts") take to the stars with ships and a hand of cards, but the tiles are confined to a grid on a board, 13 squares on a side. Undiscovered worlds on the Space tiles are claimed with Planet, Environment, and Life Form cards, but if the claimant lacks the last two, other players may supply one from their hands to reduce the score. The object of the game is to score the most points for exploring the galaxy.

Aside from those used in discovery, cards also improve the fleet or permit special actions. Some ships move faster than others, while some can traverse the void without ending a move on a Planet or Space Station, and weapons allow a ship to destroy enemy units. Some reduce planetary rewards, take control of a rival's movement, or affect their hand. Special actions can be the best way to ruin someone's 26-hour day.

The Space tiles display various "terrain" features that affect play. Ship movement is easier if the tiles show a Space Path, but a rival may block the route with Space Pirates. Space Stations in Deep Space score when surrounded by uncovered tiles, and Space Probes launched to other Galaxies add points if that starry mass is "completed." Paths may end in a black hole or a sun, and wormholes make travel instantaneous. The game ends when the tile supply runs out. Planets earn bonus points after the game ends, especially if discovered in another astronaut's sector, and surviving pirates get big, escalating rewards for controlling Space Paths (one point for the first tile, two for the second . . .). The highest score wins, and the player may even earn the right to call himself "Lord of the Universe," which is pretty nice work if you can get it.

Once the standard game turns dull, advanced rules add Energy Points; phases may be taken in any order, but all actions now cost power. This raises the competitive bar to the next level and generates a far more evil game. Strategy is truly ascendant, and the game's length, already underestimated by the box's suggestion of 60 to 90 minutes, may stretch past three hours. Plenty of other, less pervasive rules alternatives are also suggested, so can complete supplements be too far off?

Now, the Zen of the components: Friction makes shuffling tough. A two-ship fleet limit means markers are often switched in the plastic stands, generating wear and tear, and it's hard to pick them up if they lay flat. Planets big and small, Space Stations, and Pirates are all round counters and similarly colored, so distinguishing them sometimes requires a double take. The board's scoring track is too quirky; it's a line of decorative planet designs, staggered at clever angles. Moreover, since small Planet counters serve as markers, it's not just hard to pick them up, it's hard to

pick them *out;* they look like spaces on the track.

Nonetheless, the cards are great stock, the tiles are built to last, and the rules, while not laid out entirely intuitively, are thorough. It may not answer every question, and those it does might require takes a moment of searching. Additionally, the appendix describe all the cards, which is a wonderful, good-faith effort to minimize arguments.

Game play also has ups and downs. With equal numbers of Planets and Planet Cards, those with access to one may not have the other. There's plenty of everything the first time through the deck, but after a shuffle, discards are harder to come by. That deftly forces wider excursions, but explorers often end up with a hand loaded action cards that turns the endgame competitive at best and cutthroat at worst.

The game excels at encouraging player interaction. The thrill of weaseling onto someone else's lawn in **Carcassonne** is replaced with the gratifying elimination of enemy ships and resources. The board is a lively, dynamic place, and any actions affect players both directly and indirectly. The retro look works for the cards, and the flavor text ranges from chuckle-worthy to hilarious.

It sounds like a lot of criticism is leveled here at **Amazing Space Venture,** but that's probably because it's one of the more ambitious items to see independent publication in recent memory. How it runs has more to do with the players' attitudes than the mechanics, but the box would have you believe it's light and friendly, and with variant rules it can be . . . less so. With a marvelous pedigree of industry notables listed in the "thanks to" and playtest sections, it's not hard to see how it gestated into the impressive work found here. Showing the right kind of innovation, it moves beyond its source material to create a formidable format for showcasing some substantial advantages.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Colonial Gothic: A Historical Supernatural Role-Playing Game

Published by [Rogue Games](#)

Written by Richard Iorio II, Monica Valentinella, Matt McElroy, and James Maliszewski

Cover by Pat Loboyko

Illustrated by Doug Kovacs, Jeremy Simmons, and FCIT Clip Art

219-page b&w digest-sized book; $24.99

Hot on the heels of *Witch Hunter: The Invisible World* comes another RPG set in Colonial-era America, but where the former is set in the 17th century, *Colonial Gothic: A Historical Supernatural Role-Playing Game* takes place in the 18th century on the eve of the American Revolution. It does not follow a strictly historical campaign setting, however. Even as the cries for liberty further widen the wedge between colonist and far-off distant government, darker forces threaten the future of the colonies and their fight for independence. Some were in the New World before the Europeans came and even before the Natives came, others arrived with the Europeans, but they will be here long after both are gone. Whiles sides are being taken up to decide the fate of the colonies, some say that the Land itself has rebelled, moving to influence the outcome just as cabals, cultists, and sects seek to do the same. *Colonial Gothic* is a roleplaying game not just about the fight to decide the fate of the original 13 American colonies, but also about the secret history to decide that fate.

Colonial Gothic is the first RPG published by Rogue Games, from a creative team whose design credits include *Geek Wars* card game, [*Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game*](#), [*Fourth Millennium*](#), and [*BESM Dungeon*](#). Inspired by films such as Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* and *Last of the Mohicans* as much as it is the history (as evidenced by its extensive bibliography), *Colonial Gothic* is a cinematic horror game set in an age of science and reason, when magic is a real, yet mysterious, force. Its horror is not just supernatural in nature, but also that of mystery and the occult, such that the least powerful of threats the characters will face are cultists, occultists, and witches, with more dangerous entities like ghosts, spirits, and vampires requiring more brains than brawn to overcome. In keeping with its mix of antiquity and fantasy, the game includes lots of history, plenty of background, and a light rules system to support its intended cinematic style.

To create a character, a player first selects a Background -- Colonist, Freeman, Immigrant, Military, or Native American. It should be noted that the Freeman Background covers both the Freed Slave and the Former Indentured, and the Native American Background includes several different tribes. Each one indicates a character's past and possible skills as well as giving a +1 bonus to a single attribute.

The player then assigns 55 points among five attributes -- Might, Nimble, Vigor, Reason, and Resolution, with a minimum score of three and a maximum of 15. Another 45 points are used to purchase skills, first at Base Rank equal to the associated attribute in both cost and rating, with further ranks costing half the value of the associated attribute. For example, Robert Webster, a militiaman with a Nimble score of 12, must spend 12 points to get the Shoot skill at Base Rank 12, and then a further six points to raise it to 13, and the same amount to get to rank 14. Although every character receives one trade skill at Base Rank, the result is that every character begins the game with only four or five skills, including languages and magic (which is a skill). Each character also starts the adventure with 12 Faith Points,

approximately 50 points of Vitality and Sanity, a little money, and some basic equipment.

Finally, every player has up to four Fate Cards. On each, he writes a sentence or two that reveals some aspect of his character's past or personality, such as "I possess the claw from a gigantic bear that I hunted but did not kill. He left me scarred and wants his claw back." or "My Mother was driven to drown herself by secret voices. The spirits that spoke to her were evil." These are kept hidden until a player reveals them at an appropriate moment during the game when they act to add a new plot element or aid the current scenario. A Fate Card does not grant any type of mechanical advantage or let a character escape the villain, and only one Fate Card can be deployed per player per adventure.

For its rules, *Colonial Gothic* employs the 12° System. It requires two 12-sided dice rolled under an attribute or skill with Critical Successes and Failures possible. A Critical Success doubles the effect of a dice roll and grants an extra Faith Point. Faith Points can be spent to lower an action's difficulty, and all of a player's Faith Points can restore a character if he is killed. This permanently reduces a character's Faith Points by one, as does rolling a Critical Failure if Faith was called upon to aid in that difficult test. Combat can be deadly; a person can withstand at best a couple of shots from a Brown Bess musket, or less when a Critical Success is rolled and the damage doubled.

Since *Colonial Gothic* is a horror game, it needs a sanity mechanic. A Fear Test requires an opposed Resolution Test, one by the character and the other by the cause. If the player fails this test, he loses a point of Sanity and suffers a penalty on his actions for a day. Lose 10 points of Sanity, and a character might gain a permanent Disorder. This is an incredibly occurrence as it is challenging to lose enough points to gain a Disorder as a character regains Sanity equal to half his Reason per day.

Although fundamental to the game, *Colonial Gothic* keeps magic quite low key and hard to acquire. Beyond its occult skills of Astrology, Divination, Lore, and Sense, each spell or ritual is treated as an individual skill, one that can be learned by a shaman, a sorcerer, or a witch. Finding someone to teach the adventurer or a book to learn from is a difficult undertaking, purely because all magic is treated as evil, whatever the caster's intent. . Casting magic breaks natural law, which has the side effect of leaving a magical trace or trail that someone with the Sense skill can detect and recognize.

Numerous Common Rituals are described, as well as the more powerful Arcane Rituals. However, the book simply provides the mechanical effects and ramifications, expecting the players and the GM to add the color.

Advice for the GM is kept relatively short, concentrating first on a discussion of the role of history in *Colonial Gothic*. The GM must weave between a Secret History game where the characters can affect, but not alter history, and an Alternate History game, where change can be made. In intent though, *Colonial Gothic* steers toward the Secret History, supporting it with plenty of real history and background, particularly on the American Colonies and the various native tribes. Outside of the scenario, the book does not detail any fully worked monster; rather, the GM is expected to create them the same as player characters. Fortunately, the advice on creating and playing each type -- demons, ghosts, vampires, and zombies, plus the more ordinary cultists, sorcerers, and witches -- is sound. These creatures do have a European slant, though, which is a pity given the excellent treatment the game accords the Native Americans. The adventure, "Missing," pits the characters against a vile cult and should serve as an excellent introduction to the game.

Physically, *Colonial Gothic* is a little bland looking by contemporary standards, yet the choice of buff-colored paper and suitable clip art lends it a certain charm and enforces the period feel. The writing is good too, although it is a bit rough around the edges toward the book's end. The book lacks an index, but it is short enough that this is not as much of a problem.

Although mechanically light, *Colonial Gothic* is more gritty than cinematic; it would work well run in the style of *Last of the Mohicans*. It is strong on its period and history and thus could combine well with certain Secret Histories, not to mention certain *Suppressed Transmissions*. Pleasingly, the game keeps its outré elements quite restrained, emphasizing the dangers represented by not just the creatures and cultists, but also in learning and wielding magic, particularly if known to society at large. The game is a little rough in places and the focus is a little too much on the American colonies and colonists, but hopefully this will be countered in future support. In achieving a fine balance between the

history and the supernatural, ***Colonial Gothic: A Historical Supernatural Role-Playing Game*** brings reason to play that history.

--Matthew Pook

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The Venus Network, Part 1: *Grand Endeavour*

by Paul Drye

Homeline is restricted to near-earth space by its technology. Other timelines may have torchships or Cavorite, but those solutions simply fail to work when transferred to another Earth. With thousands of Earths already known, there's just no impetus to go to the planets in this particular solar system.

Even so, there are thousands of copies of the Moon and Mars out there, and not all of them are worthless. A few timelines have traveled to the local analog of the fourth planet, and a few others have regular service to the Earth's moon and points beyond. Being able to say one has been on another planet is unusual for an Infinity agent, but not unheard of.

Venus has been the tough nut to crack, though, as almost all versions of it are as ridiculously uninhabitable as Homeline's. No one wants to go there, not just the undermotivated Homeliners. Still, the Infinite Worlds continue to pop up surprises: Recent surveys have turned up a Venusian colony that's much more like the image of the world folks held in 1927 than the facts of 2027. While there's no clear idea what to do about it, there are strategic possibilities to having a Venusian node on the ever-expanding parachronic network. As of last year, Infinity has been doing just this.

Enter the *Grand Endeavour,* a terrestrial colony ship from the timeline of this Venus, Britannica-1.

Earth of Britannica-1

It's been a century and a half since Maxwell proved the equivalence of matter and energy, and 40 years since Sir Hans Bethe devised a way to perform the transformation. Great engines power the factories of the empire, and winged skyships flit between the parliaments in London and Philadelphia. The Bolshevist War is two generations in the past, and the widespread destruction the British contramatter bombs brought to Eastern Europe and Asia has been made good. Among other things stemming from the War, the strategic domination of orbit the Allies used to end the conflict has sparked the exploitation of outer space.

Space-launch facilities grew in various Allied locales, most notably Ascension Island in the South Atlantic. Ships using Bethe Conversion-powered contramatter/water rockets first went to military-oriented space stations in low Earth orbit, then the moon. Neither was any more suitable for long-term habitation than they are on Homeline (especially compared to the new, depopulated expanses of Siberia), but a more distant target beckoned: the Earth's twin, Venus.

The Colony

It was the Roman Jesuit astronomer Angelo Secchi who had first noted the presence of oxygen in the spectra he took of Venus' light. Priestley had proven oxygen came from plants 50 years before him, and plants on Venus suggested

interesting possibilities, but at the time, there were no flying machines besides balloons. The whole issue was quite literally academic.

The recent conquest of space on Britannica-1 changed that. After manned missions establishing that Venus was fully habitable, plans got underway to colonize it. The *Grand Endeavour* is the result, a huge, orbital colony ship that has now made a dozen trips between Earth and its neighbor, depositing just under 2,000 people there so far. Though the colonists sent there were tightly vetted at first, recent voyages have been bringing a more motley crew; as of the seventh voyage, the colonists have included non-violent criminals who volunteered in lieu of sentences, and more violent types have been transported under considerable security on two trips.

The seventh voyage was also the beginning of the Venus Network. One of the embezzlers on board was, in fact, an Infinity agent who had switched places with the real criminal and assumed his sentence of exile. Since then, a half-dozen people have repeated the trip on Homeline's behalf, with special equipment disguised as computers and medical diagnostic devices. The end result is a small but active parachronic station on the second planet, carefully spelunking the Venuses of other realities.

The Grand Endeavour

The ship is 140 feet in diameter and 500 feet long, spinning at slightly more than 2 rpm. Artificial gravity on its interior sides is 0.1g, and its interior area (discounting the circular "caps") is over 200,000 square feet. About half of the great cylinder is given over to living space and storage, while the rest is water fuel. The engines are remarkably small, as the Bethe Conversion process is purely electrical and convinces some of the neutrons in the water to become antineutrons. The immediately following energetic reaction expels plasma out of the end of the ship. Most of the "engine" consists, in fact, of a grid of wires embedded into the fuel tank's hull.

Total ship's complement is 110, of which no less than 12 are crew (there are sometimes more, depending on the mission, but that is not the case this time). The living space is almost entirely on the interior surface of the hull, rarely extending more than 30 feet toward the axis of the cylinder. Likely to the disappointment of SF-aware agents, there are no large farms or other open areas -- the *Grand Endeavour* is not an O'Neill Cylinder. The interior is divided by bulkheads into many quarters, common areas, and workshops; occasional shafts point "upward" into where the stores and maintenance corridors can be found. The overall effect is much like being aboard a large submarine (compare with a Los Angeles-class sub, which is 362 feet long, though only 33 across).

Getting on Board

As it's a technologically oriented Q5 timeline, Infinity has a large organization in Britannica-1. Out of the people they have supporting the clandestine trade between the local London, Berlin, and Shanghai with Homeline, several have been hived off to run the Venus Network.

Based out of Halifax in Britannica-1's Nova Scotia, the Earth end of the network is supposedly in the business of finding potential recruits for the colony; Maritime Canada is currently in an economic depression as coal mining goes the way of the dodo. People both qualified and willing to emigrate are relatively common -- usually about 20 a year -- and it's easy to slip in a few Infinity agents among the legitimate candidates. Since local colonial immigration offices are in charge of determining who qualifies, there's no difficulty passing the security checks with forged documents.

Once accepted, candidates are shipped to Ascension Island two weeks before the launch. There they meet the others in their cohort being brought in from elsewhere, and everyone receives some basic instruction about procedures on *Grand Endeavour* and Venus.

A series of interface shuttles boosts from Ascension up until about six hours before the launch, taking the colonists to an orbital rendezvous with the colony ship. Once everyone's aboard, they're given a collective introduction to the crew and allowed some time to settle into their assigned quarters. After that, the ship locks down, the body spins up to 2 rpm, the main engines are ignited and, after a short period of boost, the *Grand Endeavour* enters a Hohmann orbit that

coasts all the way to Venus.

Once underway, the travel time is 146 days.

Centrum and the Grand Endeavour

Britannica-1 is on Quantum-5 and, under normal circumstances, would be nearly immune to Centrum influence. However, an Interworld agent by the name of Nuri Cosgriff has managed to slip in. He was on a then-unnamed timeline in Q6 that was accidentally shifted to Q5 prior to its discovery by Homeline. A year of fruitlessly trying to return home were ended when the timeline he was on became the target of an Infinity-sponsored colony, Bhuvarlok. He was able into insinuate himself into the colonial population and then "return" to Homeline 10 years ago. Since then, he's re-established tenuous communications with his superiors; Infinity just knows there's been a series of puzzling break-ins at various parachronic facilities of theirs all throughout Q5 and Q6, but through luck (good or bad, depending on one's perspective), they have never managed to catch the culprit. Centrum, rather than trying to get him home, has given Cosgriff a detached assignment to cause trouble for Infinity of Q5.

Cosgriff is currently on Britannica-1, having informed Centrum of Infinity's Venusian project and been ordered to disrupt it. He is on board the *Grand Endeavour* under the alias Ganaraj Singh -- his cover is detailed in the *Characters* section, below.

Venusians and the *Grand Endeavour*

Perhaps the greatest surprise of the first expedition to Venus was the discovery of intelligent life. The Venusians were hunter-gatherers on the planet's various continents, restricted to bows and raft technology but as intelligent (in their own peculiar way) as a human being. Since it was founded, the colony has depended on good relations with their neighbors, so in the interest of diplomacy, most trips these days bring Venusians to Earth or return them after their stay. Human biologists and anthropologists are desperate to learn more about them, and the Venusians are quite curious about the Sky People, so there's no shortage of candidates to travel, or opportunities for them on Earth once they arrive.

The Venusians are radially symmetric, looking much like six-armed starfish. This is an adaptation to their peculiar environment, the vastly overgrown jungles of the planet that are in effect a three-dimensional ecosphere with the next handhold in each dimension readily available. By coincidence, this also makes Venusians far more comfortable in zero-g, swinging arm over arm from available protrusions when freed from the fetters of gravity. Already, some serve as informal members of the crew when work needs to be done in the microgravity-ridden axis of the *Grand Endeavour,* and there's talk of formally trying to recruit them. There is currently one aboard the *Grand Endeavour.*

A Venusian's central body is quite small, really just a platform for the six tiny eyes that rest on it and the mouth in the middle of the underside. Most organs spill out into each of the limbs equally, which increases the chance of survival if one or more arms are severely damaged. However, the brain is also one of the organs that has been divided, with a profound effect on the Venusian mind.

As a species, the Venusians have most of the same basic instincts as humans and other intelligent races. However, the way their brains are spread across all six of their arms influences the way they think. Each arm is part of a larger whole, but on an instinctual level, they sometimes act independently of each other. When given a problem that can't be solved immediately, or multiple tasks that need to be done simultaneously, each sub-brain can pick up a task at a cost of the "subroutine" being handled by a much stupider consciousness. Hacking a computer with one arm is essentially impossible, but loading ammo with one while holding a gun with another is typical -- the remaining arms can then focus on something else with the individual's regular intelligence only somewhat diminished.

More information about the Venusians -- how they live and act when they're not on board the *Grand Endeavour* -- will be presented in the next installment of *Infinite Crossroads: The Venus Network.*

Characters

Ganaraj Singh (Nuri Cosgriff): The erstwhile Britannican has obtained his position on board through false pretences to be sure, but he actually fills a useful purpose on board. He had been medically trained while working for Interworld, and was hired by the colonial board to serve as ship's doctor beginning with the previous voyage. If, somehow, he hasn't figured out who on his ship is an Infinity agent, he might be an unwitting ally, patching up adventurers after things go their typical pear shape.

Nonetheless, as the medical authority on board, he has considerable power and can even override the captain in certain very narrow fields. If he does figure out who his rivals are, he will do what he can to upset their plans. Quarantines, hygiene inspections, and heavy sedation might loom in the future for the unwary.

Singh looks sufficiently Indian to pass for what he claims to be, a Reform Sikh (a peculiar sect that is to Homeline Sikhism as Reformed Judaism is to the Orthodox strain). While affecting general "Indian-ness" and holding to a few Sikh rituals (such as avoiding alcohol), he tries to be a typical educated British Indian. He is actually half-Uighur and half-Australian Centran. He speaks only English, but he can extensively quote the Guru Granth Sahib in Punjabi for camouflage purposes.

Mary Gregg: A native of Britannica-1, Gregg is a local recruit for Centrum. However, her allegiance to Interworld is quite loose, as she was personally recruited by Ganaraj Singh and considers him her employer. She's been told the general outline of Centrum's capabilities and of their war with Homeline. She is eager to help "Singh" -- she doesn't know his real name -- with his fight.

On board the ship, she is Singh's medical assistant. As well as the usual competencies of a time agent's companion (intelligence, quick-wittedness, and a general knowledge that she may run up against technologies more advanced than her own), Gregg is also stunningly attractive by no accident. Her boss, with some justification, thinks of Infinity agents as unprofessional, testosterone-driven flyboys. If Singh thinks it will work, Gregg's role is to soften up the opposition by being the redheaded "fair damsel." She doesn't know this, but she would go along with the tactic reluctantly if asked.

She is Scottish, originally from Edinburgh, and speaks English with a Scots accent.

Atanayksh: The first Venusian to live permanently on the *Grand Endeavour,* Atanayksh serves as general labor, usually in the low-g cargo hold. Psychologically, Venusians are more risk-averse than humans are, but as is the case with the latter species, there's a spectrum. Atanayksh is his race's equivalent of Charles Lindbergh or George Mallory: the one with the desire and sufficient wanderlust to put himself aboard an alien spaceship for long periods of time. He's become something of a student of human behaviors, watching with fascination when, say, someone combs his hair or sings.

If travelers are looking for information about goings-on aboard ship, Atanayksh should become the first one they turn to. While his interpretation of events is sometimes hard to follow, he likes roaming the *Grand Endeavour* from prow to stern and -- like the other members of his species -- he doesn't sleep.

As is the case with other Venusians, he can't produce the bilabial consonants (m, b, and p), but otherwise he knows Basic English. He's of typical appearance for his species -- they're all about the size of a bedside table, and greenish-gray with thick rough skin. Although they may be able to tell each other apart, humans have a hard time with it. Those who work at it will come to know an arrangement of dark scales on his upper side in the shape of a star, but as he's often the only Venusian on board recognition is rarely a problem.

Adventures on the Grand Endeavour

The Mutiny: It's virtually inevitable on any adventurous voyage, isn't it? By bad luck, the trip taken by the Infinity agents is one where violent criminals are being shipped too. This time, it's freedom fighters/rebels from British Arabia,

railroaded by shady judicial proceedings and banished from Earth. They make their play for freedom (or, at least, the freedom to live as they want on Venus instead of in a penal colony -- you don't steer a ship in a Hohmann orbit), and the survival of the ship's crew and all its free citizens is under threat. If that weren't enough, Mary Gregg has been taken hostage: If the Infinity agents have realized she's with Centrum, they'll understand that there's a distinct chance the Secret could come out. Enemy or not, she needs rescuing.

The Coup: Perhaps while trying to track down their antagonist (not necessarily knowing that it's Centrum), the agents follow a suspicious character to the cargo hold. On investigation of the out-of-the-way corner, they discover a huge cache of weapons. There is no good reason for it to be there, since relations with the Venusians are peaceable and there's no point to using them on the ship. A judicious cabin break-in against the cargo's owner (according to the ship's manifest) supplies hints that surviving Bolshevist leaders, renegade since the war, are planning a coup against the nascent Venusian government.

The Dinner: All notable people on board are invited to dinner with the captain, his two officers, and the ship's doctor at some point during the trip -- after all, it's a 146-day trip, and there's boredom to stave off. Now it's the agents' turn. Dr. Singh may already have suspicions about the evening's guests and will steer the conversation in directions dangerous to their cover. Can they make it from the canapés to the port and smokeless nicotine sticks without a mishap? Ambitious players might want to turn the light on the doctor's background, though he's had much longer to establish his fraudulent bone fides with the captain.

The Lost: One of the characters (possibly even the one whose player can't make it to this week's gaming session) has gone missing . . . aboard a spaceship that's several million miles from anyplace he could have gone. Has Dr. Singh knocked him out so as to pump him for information under the influence of sodium pentathol? Is it some bizarre parachronic shift, a residuum of some prior accident in time? Did he get himself trapped in a space lock with only a couple hours of air? Sure, the agents could turn out the ship security, but what if something mission related is behind the disappearance? The group would be getting the missing member back at the cost of their cover.

Using the *Grand Endeavour* in Other Settings

It's fairly difficult to conjure up a voyage that imposes a period of isolation of about the same duration as the six-month trip to Venus. Of the major types of roleplaying adventure, fantasy settings have it easiest. Sea voyages to some distant land can be set up without too much trouble, and the world's natural magic lets the GM shake up the ship: a flying craft, a giant turtle, pretty much anything other than a regular sail-driven home would substitute nicely for a 500-foot long spacecraft. This transposition works so well that it's been done extensively by various publishers in the last 20 years, so there's a wealth of material to fall back on should the GM so desire.

The Age of Sail flavor dotted through *Grand Endeavour* opens the second major possibility, which is to use the period of penal transportation to Australia (the 1780s to 1860s) or the lesser-known American period from the early 1600s to the American Revolutionary period. Either would work fairly well, though the latter part of each time would change the complexion of the expedition from colonial to simply dumping everyone on the docks of a well-developed coast. While there's also the problem that there aren't many campaigns set on Earth from 1600-1860, GMs running *GURPS Scarlet Pimpernel, Swashbucklers,* or *Age of Napoleon* have something to work with.

The Power of Poker

by Steven Marsh

From fantasy worlds to cliffhangers to modern tales to far-flung futures, card games have long been portrayed as a universal pastime. In particular, poker has a background encompassing almost 200 years of verifiable history.

One of the reasons for poker's continued popularity is that it is an extremely versatile game. With wild cards and candy or valueless chips as the stakes, it is a fun part of the card-night repertoire for church clubs. Some variations -- such as [Texas Hold 'Em]() -- are near-pure examples of probability analysis and human psychology. This versatility, then, makes it a natural candidate to survive relatively intact, even to a *Star Trek*-esque future. This versatility also makes it a logical game to modify or tweak, using it as a starting point for creating new games that give a fictional world some flavor and culture. A variation of poker can even form the basis for a character (such as a well-known gambler), an adventure (the heroes need to raise money for something), or a campaign (the protagonists are tasked with protecting the emperor's card-playing establishment).

This article presents some ideas for how to modify the game of poker, from basic concepts to minor tweaks to radical revisions. It offers some variations, which can either serve as background details or alternate forms of poker that might provide some entertainment for a gaming group.

The Fundamentals

It could be argued that there is no aspect of poker that is fundamental to the underpinnings of the game. The ranking of cards or hands can be altered, the number of suits can be changed, and the frequency and need for betting can be tweaked (although the existence of some stakes -- however meager -- is important to the core structure of the game). Even the existence of physical cards is optional; video poker games are some of the most popular attractions at many casinos. "Poker" itself is somewhat unusual as a game, because it doesn't have a core form itself; to play poker is to play a variation of poker.

Some options for ways of altering the core structure of the game include:

The Name. The origins of the name "poker" itself are unclear, although the smart money is on Irish or French ancestry. Games set in a near-future (or even not-so-near-future) of Earth are likely to keep "poker" as the underlying name; it has a long history and it's unlikely to go away. One possibility for a radical name change would be the banning of poker in a society with far-reaching laws, especially oppressive bureaucracies. It's entirely possible that card-players in such a society would keep enjoying the game, merely calling it something else: "No, Father Inquisitor, we're not playing poker. We're playing . . . errr . . . Honor the Elders. Look, I got a Seven-High Doctrine Hierarchy!" Likewise, in vaguely-Europe-y fantasy settings, far-flung futures, or alternate Earths, it

Player Knowledge

This article presumes a working knowledge of the [basics of poker,]() and explaining the fundamentals would take more words than this article has.

To spare some folks needless flipping, here is the rank of poker hands, complete with the approximate odds of being dealt one from five cards of a 52-card deck without wild cards. More information is [online.]()

Straight flush	five cards all of the same suit, sequential in rank (For example, "8-Hearts, 7-Hearts, 6-Hearts, 5-Hearts, 4-Hearts")	0.0015%
	Ties are settled by the highest card; thus "8-Hearts, 7-Hearts, 6-Hearts, 5-Hearts, 4-Hearts" beats "6-Clubs, 5-Clubs, 4-Clubs, 3-Clubs, 2-Clubs"	
Four of a kind	four of the same rank, plus one extra card of any sort (For example, "3-Hearts, 3-Spades, 3-Diamonds, 3-Clubs, King-Diamonds")	0.024%
	Ties are settled by the highest rank (thus four Kings beats four 9s)	
Full	three of the same rank and two	0.14%

could be called *anything*.

The Suits. Poker is played with a standard 52-card deck, with 13 cards of four suits. In almost all poker variants, the suit is unranked. However, neither the number of suits nor the unranked nature of the suits is a necessity. For example, it would be conceivable to play with two suits or five suits. In fact, it's possible to envision a suit-less game, where only rank is important. All else being equal, more suits makes the hands that rely on suit specificity -- the straight flush and flush -- rarer, and fewer suits makes them more likely. (Obviously, flushes or straight flushes wouldn't be meaningful hands in a game with one suit, since every hand would qualify!) The names of the suits are completely unimportant, and can be changed to affect the flavor of the setting. One good example is the usage of the Latin tarot suit names -- Coins, Cups, Swords, and Staves -- in lieu of the traditional ones.

Ranking the suits wouldn't be too useful in most circumstances, since the number of times hands are tied is relatively rare. Nonetheless, one flavorful option would be to elevate one suit to the role of "tie-breaker." For example, star-faring settlers charged with mining rare gemstones on a colony world might play a variant where Diamonds are considered symbolically valuable, and Diamonds might be tiebreakers. Alternatively, one suit might be considered particularly ominous; for example, a superstitious setting might view Spades as being symbolic of dark magic, and rule that it will lose in any tied hand.

The Ranks. It's feasible to have more or fewer ranks, although doing so will greatly affect the odds of most aspects of the game (as it alters the chances of getting pairs, triplets, four of a kind, etc.). One possibility is to have the ranks "wrap" for straights; for example, a "Q-K-A-2-3" would be a valid straight. Another possibility would be to have cards that serve as multiple ranks. For example, a deck might contain a "2/3" rank card (either four or eight in a deck) that replaces the two and three; thus "2/3-2/3-4-5-6" would be a straight. (Obviously if there were eight such cards in a deck, that would greatly increase the odds of their coming up as a matched set, as well as raising the possibility of a natural Five of a Kind.)

The Deck. A common assumption is that a game of poker is played using one standard 52-card deck. This can be altered to include two or more decks (decreasing the advantage of card counting while raising the likelihood of a natural five of a kind, matching same-suited straights, or other oddities). A standard deck can also be altered; for example, it might have no cards ranked lower than a 10. (This is especially common in some video-game poker variants.) Finally, it's possible for the deck to change mid-

Hand	Description	Prob.
house	of a different rank (such as "4-Clubs, 4-Hearts, 4-Spades, 9-Spades, 9-Diamonds")	
	Ties are settled by the highest rank of the three-of-a-kind (thus "4-Clubs, 4-Hearts, 4-Spades, 9-Spades, 9-Diamonds" beats "3-Clubs, 3-Spades, 3-Diamonds, King-Clubs, King-Spades")	
Flush	Five cards all of the same suit (For example, Ace-Spades, 10-Spades, 7-Spades, 6-Spades, 3-Spades)	0.20%
	Ties are settled by the highest card; thus "Ace-Spades, 10-Spades, 7-Spades, 6-Spades, 3-Spades" beats "King-Clubs, Queen-Clubs, 9-Clubs, 6-Clubs, 4-Clubs"	
Straight	Five cards in a sequence by rank (For example, "9-Clubs, 8-Hearts, 7-Hearts, 6-Spades, 5-Diamonds")	0.39%
	Ties are settled by the highest card; thus "9-Clubs, 8-Hearts, 7-Hearts, 6-Spades, 5-Diamonds" beats "7-Spades, 6-Diamonds, 5-Hearts, 4-Hearts, 3-Clubs"	
Three of a kind	Three cards of a suit, plus two extra cards of any sort (For example, "King-Hearts, King-Clubs, King-Diamonds, Queen-Clubs, 7-Spades")	2.1%
	Ties are settled by the rank of the three of a kind; thus "King-Hearts, King-Clubs, King-Diamonds, Queen-Clubs, 7-Spades" beats "Queen-Spades, Queen-Clubs, Queen-Diamonds, Ace-Spades, King-Spades"	
Two pair	Two cards of one rank, two cards of another rank, and one extra card of any sort (For example, "10-Spades, 10-Hearts, 7-Clubs, 7-Spades, Ace-Diamonds")	4.75%
	Ties are settled by the rank of the highest pair; in the event those are tied, the tie is settled by the second pair. In the event both are tied, the fifth card acts as a tie-breaker	
One pair	Two cards of one rank, and three extra cards of any sort (For example, "Jack-Clubs, Jack-Diamonds, Ace-Hearts, 6-Spades, 4-Spades")	42.26%
	Ties are settled by the rank of the highest	

game. As a strange variant, consider a poker game among a small number of players where hands are discarded after final comparisons, with the remaining uncompared cards shuffled back together and used for subsequent hands, with play continuing until there aren't enough cards to deal everyone in. In this case, the ability to remember what cards have and haven't been removed from game would be advantageous, and the last round would likely be the Battle of the Terrible Hands. (Of course, this variant would be an interesting opportunity to use multiple decks.)

The Game

In addition to the fundamental aspects of the game, another ripe avenue is to alter the details of the game's structure itself. Minor tweaks make the game a "poker variant," while major ones can change the game to something almost unrecognizable.

The Hands. It's entirely possible to remove hands from the poker-rankings list; for instance, the flush was a late addition, and five of a kind didn't arrive until wild cards (around 1875). It's also easy to invent hands for the list. For example, in a game with jokers, maybe having one of each suit and the joker is a special hand. Or maybe certain combinations have special significance; for example, if a beloved king was treacherously killed at two o'clock, then that region might have a rule that a hand consisting of both black kings and both black twos beats all other hands.

	pair; in the event those are tied, the tie is settled by random cards (see "high card," next)	
High card	A hand without any of the former. Ties are settled by the highest-ranked card; in those cards are tied, then the next-highest cards are compared . . . and so on. (For example, "King-Clubs, Jack-Hearts, 10-Spades, 3-Diamonds, 2-Diamonds" beats "King-Diamonds, Jack-Spades, 9-Clubs, 8-Diamonds, 7-Spades")	50.12%

Cards are ranked "Ace (high), King, Queen, Jack, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, A (low)." Aces are only low in a straight or straight flush.

In standard poker, the suit is unranked.

In the event of tie hands, the pot is usually split between the winners.

One or two such "special" hands can make the game more interesting, but too many exceptions or weird prospects make it unlikely that the game would be played (although such absurdity can be intentional, such as the "MythAdventures" series "Dragon Poker, the Zork universe's "Double Fanucci," or the rantings of James T. Kirk's Fizzbin").

The Rules. This is where almost all "modern" poker variants arise: altering the manner in which the game itself is played. The ways by which the game can be altered are endless. Some possibilities include:

- *Wild cards:* Either specific cards can be declared wild (such as "all twos" or "one-eyed Jacks"), or cards that meet specific criteria (such as "the next rank following a queen is wild until supplanted by another queen" or "the rank of the last card dealt face up is wild").
- *Means in which cards are dealt or acquired:* Cards may be acquired all at once (as in Five-Card Draw), in waves (Stud poker), through communal cards (Texas Hold 'Em or Omaha Hold 'Em), through additional or purchased cards (Baseball)
- *How much is known by other players:* Whether all cards are privately held (as in Five-Card Draw), or all cards are publicly known, or something in-between (such as most Stud variants) will affect how the game is played. In fact, it's even possible for players not to know what cards they have *themselves* (such as in Indian Poker).

The Solitude. There's nothing incompatible with the notion of a "partners" version of poker being or becoming popular. This could either be of a simple sort -- such as two players competing with communal money -- but can also be more complex. For example, a version of "Three-Card Stud" could have each player receiving one card down and the next two cards up; each player possesses a partner; and final hands are developed by taking the best five of their six communal cards. Players would need to figure out how to bet without revealing specifics of their hidden cards. Or, as another alternate, consider a variant of Five-Card Draw where two-person teams compete to get the highest *and* the lowest hands in a round; failure for a team to accomplish this results in the pot rolling over to the next round.

The Minutia

It's also possible to alter tinier -- but still vital -- aspects of the game.

The Betting. In standard poker, there are many rules about [betting,](#) some of which are hard and fast while others are more common "house rules." Some alterations to the betting rules could lead to great effect. For example, envision a magical setting with conniving nobles each gathering (and utilizing) secrets for their own ends. A variant of the betting rules for their game could dictate that each player must ante up a secret of some sort (perhaps dictated by a special chip with the noble's insignia); these secrets could either be revealed to the winner at the end of the hand or kept and traded in future rounds of the game. (Word would spread quickly if a noble anted in lame, incorrect, or unimportant secrets, and he would quickly find himself uninvited to future events.) Other possibilities to alter betting include other non-monetary items or ideas offered for bet, or perhaps more strict rules for betting (such as the alternation of the "raise" to require a doubling of the current bet).

The Shuffle. Standard rules for poker dictate that the cards are shuffled after every hand, with another player (usually the one to the dealer's right) cutting the deck. However, this need not be set in stone for any variants or fictional constructs that you devise. For example, the English game [three card brag](#) doesn't shuffle between hands, except in a relatively uncommon circumstance (a three-card hand is won with three of a kind); the cards are simply stacked atop each other and dealt again. This makes it possible for those with keen memories to keep track of how cards are dealt in future rounds; if you remember that you had the 9-10 of Spades one round and you get the 9 of Spades in the next round, you know that the next player must have received the 10.

The Use of Wild Cards. Reviled by poker purists, the usage of wild cards is nevertheless a popular pastime. It's also a means of altering the odds substantially; with enough wild cards, what seemed like a sure-win full house turns out to be a loser to five of a kind. Newcomers to the game often see wild cards as a terrific means of introducing variety, but it's too easy for them to get out of hand. ("In Blackball, all black cards are wild!") Perhaps the best use of them, then, is as a minor addition to an established deck (such as the inclusion of one or two jokers) or through the transformation of other cards, either in whole ("all aces are wild") or by introducing rules ("the rank following a queen is wild"). Regardless, if there can be more than four wild cards in play, there are probably too many.

The Alternate Faces

At its heart, "poker" primarily refers to the system used to compare sets of five cards, each set held by a player. How the game gets to those final sets is the crux of everything else that the game is about, and it is in this way that poker can be at its most wild and varying. Here, then, are four variants, ranging from minor tweaks to significant revisions.

Four to One

This wild-card variant can be utilized in any style of poker (Draw or Stud), although it works best with five-card games. Depending on how events progress, there may be up to four wild cards in the final hand. Play progresses as normal until the final comparison of hands. If, among all the hands showing, all four four-ranked cards are showing, then all four fours are wild. If not (and *only* if fours are not wild), then, if there are *exactly* three threes showing, then all three threes are wild. If not (and *only* if fours or threes are not wild), then, if there are *exactly* two twos showing, both are wild. If not (and *only* if nothing else is wild yet), if there is only one ace showing, it is wild.

Example: Bob is holding three threes, a four, and an ace. When the final hands are compared, if the three other fours are showing, then his four is wild (along with the other fours). Otherwise, his three threes will be wild *unless* the fourth three is held by another player, in which case they would not be wild.

The strategy, then, is to figure out how many people are going to be in the final round, and what the odds are that they will possess any potential wild cards you have. The best hand is four fours, since the resultant five of a kind cannot be contested.

To avoid infinite loops in games with more than five cards ("I won't include this card in my final hand unless it's wild, but including it as a wild card means that it's no longer a wild card"), it is recommended that all fours, threes, twos, and aces *must* be included in a final hand.

Three Kings

Each player is dealt two cards face down; if any player receives a king, that card *must* be switched with another card, replacing again if a king is dealt again, and so on until each player possesses two cards in the hole that are *not* kings. Then, play progresses as Stud poker, with additional cards dealt face up and betting taking place. The game ends the *moment* the third king is dealt (even if it means other players don't get the rest of the cards for that round of dealing). At an extreme, this can result in the game ending the first round (the first three players each receiving a king), or can continue until all but one card is dealt (if, say, the last three cards of the deck are kings.)

In this variant, the strategy comes in trying to figure out when the game will end. Since the game can continue until players possess an incredible number of cards, it's possible for longshot straights or flushes to be completed as the number of cards continue.

If using this variant, it is recommended that it be utilized for a round of dealing, so that the players to the dealer's right are rotated and the disadvantage of ending up with fewer cards than other players is evened out.

Self-Deception

Each player is dealt three cards face down; *no one looks at their cards.* At any point, a player may pay the ante into the pot again to look at one of his face-down cards. Anytime after doing so, the player may pay twice the ante to look at a second card. (A player doing such will thus have paid four antes total: the initial ante, the ante again to see the first card, and the double-ante to see the second card.) Regardless, each player *must* possess each one card that he has not seen; even if he pays to view two of his cards, the third one cannot be viewed (until the final reveal, of course). Play continues as Stud poker, with the next four cards being dealt face up.

The strategy here, then, is to figure out when (or if) to pay for more information. (This is especially true in games with a nontrivial ante.) Likewise the presence of an unknown card can encourage players to remain in the game even when little else has been encouraging about the hand.

Pokerjack

This variant may be applied to any form of poker, although it works best for five-card games. Play is as normal, until the final reveal. Then, the pot is split, with half going to the player with the best poker hand (as normal), the other half going to the player(s) with the hands whose ranks total closest to 21 without going over; in the event of a tie, the half-pot is split among the winners.

In games with more than five cards, players can choose to make a less-than-optimal hand (if hoping to get the 21 pot); however, if he does so, he *must* decide before the final reveal. (For example, if a player had seven cards with ranks 5, 5, 4, 4, 7, 2, 1, and he chooses 5-5-7-2-1 as his final hand, he can't change his mind if he discovers that two pair would have won the poker pot or that his 20-total hand loses the 21 pot to someone else with a 21-total hand.)

The Radical Departures

Finally, to give you some ideas for versions of the game that can be utilized in different locales, here are two ideas that start with poker as their inspiration, then have the serial numbers filed off almost completely. One is a high-seas take on the game, while the other looks to the future.

(Pirate) Punch

Played by hardy seafarers, Punch (or, as it's called by non-pirates, Pirate Punch) utilizes a 40-card deck, four suits of one to 10 each. The dealer declares either "Colors" or "Cuts" before the hand is drawn. Only the suits matter in Color Punch, while only the ranks matter in Cut Punch. Five cards are dealt to each player, and a round of betting is made. Starting at the dealer's left, each player can discard up to his entire hand, and receive new cards up to a five-card hand. If there aren't enough cards to go around, then the players who can't receive more cards are stuck with their current hands. (If a player isn't keeping track of cards and discards too many to get a full hand, he's stuck with a "stump" hand!)

At any point during the betting, the current better can call "Colors to Cuts" or "Cuts to Colors," matching the current pot and changing the current game from Color Punch to Cut Punch (or vice versa). For example, if the pot stands at $47 during a hand of Color Punch, then a player can put in $47 to change it to Cut Punch. After such a change, the pot is considered to have no active bets; the pot is treated as if it were a standard ante by all remaining players, and the game-changer is treated as having just called to the next player. (Thus the pirate who put in his $47 to change the game couldn't then raise the bet by $10.) The game can be changed however often one likes (and can afford), although obviously it gets very expensive very quickly.

Players who drop out keep their hands in front of them.

Once all bets are made, if there are two or more in contention, hands are compared depending on which game is being played. In Color Punch, hands are compared according to the number of *one* suit the player has; the black suits trump red suits. Ranks do not matter *at all* in Color Punch. Thus the best hand is five Spades or five Clubs (which is called Five Black), followed by five Hearts or five Diamonds (called Five Red), followed by four Clubs or four Spades, and so on. There is no "two pair" in Color Punch. The worst hand one can have is Two Red, and all hands are guaranteed to have either Two Red or Two Black.

In Cut Punch, hands are compared according to poker rankings: Four Cuts (four of a kind), Split Five Cut (full house), Three Cut (three of a kind), Split Two Cut (two pair), Two cut (two of a kind), Weak Cut (high card). Unlike Color Punch, ranks break tie hands in Cut Punch, just like standard poker.

In the event of tie hands (common in Color Punch), the pot is split in either form of Punch.

However, what gives Punch its name is an odd custom that the holder of the *worst*-ranked hand must receive one punch from each of the other players. Usually this is just a playful tap (as in polite gatherings), but it can frequently manifest as hard-as-you-can punches (naked fists only), with the ability to handle a losing hand considered a sign of manliness among pirates. Die-hard fans argue that the physical aspect of Punch is part of the game's charm and strategy. It encourages larger pots (by keeping players in longer than an initial hand would advise), and gives strategic options to the "Colors to Cuts" (or vice versa) option; paying the exorbitant price to switch the game is small price for some to avoid getting clobbered. Punch is also a "socially acceptable" way (in pirate society, anyway) to settle scores or vent frustrations. Regardless, shots to the groin are considered foul sport (and Punch Cups are entirely within the rules), and wise Punch players realize that fortunes can turn.

"Fair Punch" is played by groups of four or less; it's called "fair" because all four players can take their full allotment of 10 cards, should they so desire. "Foul Punch" is played by five, six, or seven players. "Spiked Punch" is played by groups of eight, with no discard round.

P

Emerging as part of the digital era, P's origins in a cyberpunk or futuristic world are lost to antiquity, although some scholars suspect it is similar to older Earth games. P is a favored game because its "deck" can be almost entirely improvised with any random data stream. There are only four cards in P, ranked high to low: Light 1, Dark 1, Light 0, and Dark 0; in a pure game of P, there can be an "unlimited" number of each card in a deck. In a data stream, there are technically "infinite" numbers of cards, but in a physical deck, the number is usually set at 64 or 128 (16 or 32 of each card).

The hands (and their order) in P are as follows:

- P5 (Five identical cards. For example: L1, L1, L1, L1, L1 or D0, D0, D0, D0, D0.)
- P4 (Four identical cards. For example: L1, L1, L1, L1, L0 or D1, D1, D1, D1, L1.)
- P3.2 (Three identical cards and two identical cards. For example: L1, L1, L1, D1, D1 or D0, D0, D0, D1, D1.)
- P3 (Three identical cards. For example: L0, L0, L0, D1, L1.)
- P2.2 (Two identical cards and another two identical cards. For example: D1, D1, L0, L0, L1.)
- P2 (Two identical cards. For example: L1, L1, D0, D1, L0. The worst possible hand.)

In a game of P, players receive five private "cards," which (if utilizing a data stream) appear as a series of 10 bits; for example, if someone received the pattern "1101100101," this equals L1, D1, L0, D1, D1: a P3-D1 hand (which is the second-best P3 hand). Most systems have P-Function testing to ensure that there is no cheating from a communal source.

Gameplay consists of each player revealing a card, followed by a round of betting (or folding), until either only one player remains or all five cards are revealed, in which case final hands are compared. Winner takes the pot, but two (or more) tied hands means the pot remains until the *next* hand, which all players participate in. Player strategy of P comes from the order in which cards are revealed; since all hands are guaranteed to have at least one pair -- which, when revealed during play, is called the "collision" -- gameplay revolves around the calculation of the strength of hand (as well as odds computation in a physical game) plus a healthy dose of psychology: When should the collision (and any additional collisions) be revealed?

The Maiden in the Water: The Mystery of Mary Rogers

"There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of events, so that it seems imperfect, and its consequences are equally imperfect."
-- Friedrich von Hardenburg (Novalis), *Moral Views,* used by Edgar Allan Poe as the epigraph for "The Mystery of Marie Roget"

It begins with a puff of smoke and ends coiled in the water. Or it begins in love and ends in death. Or it begins with commerce and ends in art. We don't know where it began, really, or where it ended. We have only a few bubbles and a body that floated to the surface in 1841, and we have the foam stirred up by America's greatest horrorist, which keeps Mary Rogers afloat even now.

"The body of a young lady some eighteen or twenty years of age was found in the water at Hoboken. From the description of her dress, fears are entertained that it is the body of Miss Mary C. Rogers, who is advertised in yesterday's paper as having disappeared from her home, 126 Nassau Street, on Sunday last."
-- New York *Sun* (July 29, 1841)

Mary Cecilia Rogers, who with her widowed mother kept a rooming house on Nassau Street in Manhattan, washed up on the New Jersey shore near Hoboken on Wednesday, July 28, 1841. By odd coincidence, she was recognized by a former suitor, Alfred Crommelin, who happened to be in Hoboken that afternoon. The coroner found that she had been strangled first by a right-handed killer, and then with a piece of lace torn from her petticoat, in addition to substantial bruising on her back and battering of the face. She had likely been raped. Her hat had been tied to her head with a "sailor's hitch," the same knot used to tie another strip of her dress around her body, perhaps for ease of transport. Her wrists showed marks from a rope, now missing. She was buried in a shallow grave that night, as the heat of the day had markedly advanced her decomposition.

The New York newspapers had a field day with the case, with James Gordon Bennett's *Herald* firing volleys at the ineffective local government and practically nonexistent police force. Mary Rogers was no random gamine, but the locally notorious "beautiful cigar girl" who worked the counter at John Anderson's tobacco shop. She inspired reams of bad poetry, sheets of etchings, and stern editorials against the immorality of allowing good-looking girls to work in male-dominated stores. She was, perhaps, America's first pure celebrity, famous for nothing except her looks and her fame. (She was also famous for briefly vanishing from the cigar store in October of 1838 -- speculation ranged from a tryst to an attempted suicide to an innocent misunderstanding to a publicity stunt.) Her charms drew customers by the busload, among them the brightest and best of New York's literary, journalistic, and political worlds. Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, editor Bennett, and many other glitterati held forth in Mary's presence until she left Anderson's shop in the summer of 1839.

"There are few persons, even among the calmest thinkers, who have not occasionally been startled into a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural, by coincidences of so seemingly marvellous a character that, as mere coincidences, the intellect has been unable to receive them."
-- Edgar Allan Poe, "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842)

Among Anderson's customers, and doubtless Mary's admirers, in 1838 was the 29-year-old poet Edgar Allan Poe. By 1841, he had removed to Philadelphia to edit *Graham's Magazine,* but he followed the fracas in the papers closely. With his journalist's eye for sensation, and his sensational eye for the gruesome, Poe found Mary Rogers the perfect vehicle for a sequel to his "Murders in the Rue Morgue." He would pit the ratiocination of his detective, the Chevalier Dupin, not against some lurid mystery conceived by the author, but against the genuine mystery of Mary Rogers' death -- and against the sloppy theories being advanced in the press.

By the time Poe wrote "The Mystery of Marie Roget" in the spring of 1842, more details -- though no solution -- had emerged. Mary's fiancée, Daniel Payne, claimed to be the last to see her alive, on Sunday, July 25. But he had provided a solid alibi for "the fatal Sabbath," and other suspects (including John Anderson) had been questioned and released. A gang had been seen carrying a girl into the wilds of Hoboken, but the girl in question came forward, still

alive albeit considerably compromised. In September, the Weehawken tavern-keeper Frederica Loss reported that two of her sons had discovered clothes, later identified as Mary's, strewn in a nearby thicket. She claimed to have seen Mary enter her tavern with a "tall dark stranger," and to have later heard a scream but thought nothing of it at the time. On October 7, 1841, Daniel Payne was found dead on the Hoboken river front, an apparent suicide.

"Now where is that rudderless boat? Let it be one of our first purposes to discover. With the first glimpse we obtain of it, the dawn of our success shall begin. This boat shall guide us, with a rapidity which will surprise even ourselves, to him who employed it in the midnight of the fatal Sabbath. Corroboration will rise upon corroboration, and the murderer will be traced."
-- Edgar Allan Poe, "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842)

In Poe's tale, "Marie Roget," a perfume clerk in Paris, is found in the Seine under the same circumstances as Mary Rogers. Dupin, using only newspaper articles (mostly cribbed by Poe from New York papers), refutes the once-prominent theories that a gang killed "Marie" or that "Marie" faked her own death. He demonstrates that the placement of the clothing in the thicket appears staged, but Dupin then dismisses his own dismissal of the purported murder scene and pins the rap on the "tall dark stranger," who he identifies as a sailor (from the knots and the sunburn) who had trysted with "Marie" during her earlier disappearance. During his second rendezvous with "Marie," the sailor kills her and then rows her out to the middle of the river, leaving a boat untied as the evidence of his crime. A peculiar "editor's note" toward the end assures the audience that the boat clue was followed up and the murderer of "Marie" was caught, despite no boat being found in the Hudson, and no murderer identified in the Rogers case. The tale ends with a lengthy spate of persiflage denying any connection between the cases of "Marie Roget" and Mary Rogers, despite having opened with just such an assertion.

Poe was forced into such shenanigans by a shift in public opinion about the case. One of Mrs. Loss' sons accidentally shot her in October of 1842, and the New York *Tribune* published her purported deathbed confession of killing Mary Rogers during a botched abortion. Although the *Tribune* had to retract the specific story when confronted by the Justice of the Peace (who apparently believed the abortion theory, but denied hearing any "confession"), the parade of suspected lovers and rumors about Mrs. Loss' sideline managed to completely muddy the waters around Mary. Poe altered the third installment of the story for its magazine publication (pushed back to February 1843), and altered it again throughout to hint at the abortion theory for the version of "Marie Roget" he included in his book of *Tales,* published in 1845.

"This volume is intended as the final, authoritative word on the mystery of Mary Rogers. Of course it will undoubtedly prove to be nothing of the sort."
-- Raymond Paul, *Who Murdered Mary Rogers?* (1971)

The botched abortion story seems to have stayed the conventional wisdom ever since, usually casting the "tall dark stranger" as the abortionist-murderer. However, only two very late and very dubious reports mention the stranger, and there is no actual evidence besides rumor that Mary ever had an abortion. Not only is the theory unsupported by any actual facts, it conflicts violently with what few facts do exist in the case -- the bruises, strangulation, and other pre-mortem wounds inflicted on Mary Rogers. It also doesn't explain the clothing in the thicket: if Mrs. Loss killed Mary (or was an accessory after the fact) during a botched abortion, why did she show the clothing to the police?

In *Who Murdered Mary Rogers?* Raymond Paul presents a far more compelling case against Daniel Payne, backing it up with a bizarrely neglected piece of evidence. When examined Wednesday night by the coroner, Mary Rogers' arms were stiff in rigor mortis. Therefore, she could hardly have been killed on Sunday afternoon, more than three days before! Payne's alibi is useless -- and by his own testimony, he was in Hoboken on Tuesday. Dupin is right; the clothing was planted in the thicket -- either by Mrs. Loss (who perhaps did perform a *successful* abortion on Mary on Sunday, explaining her second "disappearance") trying to make some money off the murder tourists, or by a guilt-crazed Daniel Payne, who would commit suicide barely a month after the clothes' discovery. The key clue to the thicket is that the clothing planted there included a pair of gloves, despite the fact that Mary was wearing gloves when she was pulled from the Hudson.

"But I am constitutionally sensitive -- nervous in a very unusual degree. I became insane, with long periods of horrible

sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness I drank, God knows how much or how long. As a matter of course, my enemies referred the insanity to the drink rather than the drink to the insanity."
-- Edgar Allan Poe, letter to Thomas Dunn English (Jan. 4, 1848)

But enough of following logic and fact! Following, instead, imaginary boats and backtracks in the thicket leads us to the conclusion that Poe wrote "Marie Roget" less as a genuine attempt at detective ratiocination than as a jape at the press, or perhaps as a hoax. Or perhaps something even worse. The tobacconist John Anderson, who had hired Mary Rogers in dubious circumstances, made millions in New York real estate before he died in 1881. During a lawsuit contesting his will in 1887, lawyers floated a rumor that Anderson had paid Poe to write "Marie Roget" in order to throw suspicion off himself; in 1891, a witness in another suit alleged that Anderson had paid for an abortion for Rogers -- perhaps during her first disappearance in 1838. Anderson did buy generous advertising in Poe's *Broadway Journal* in 1845. Given the abortion rumors swirling around Mary's murder, and John Anderson's dubious role in her career, could Poe's flim-flam have been written to order?

Or did it conceal something else, a "purloined letter" to the public, making manifest that which is hidden? In the most powerful segment of the story, Dupin reconstructs the killer's thoughts, fears, and madness in an almost stream-of-consciousness rant. Was the dark-complected, romantically fixated, perhaps alcoholically unhinged Poe writing about his own experience? Was Edgar Allan Poe the "sailor" who loved and killed "Marie Roget"? He may well have known Mary Rogers in 1838, and his oeuvre includes plenty of sailors as narrative personae, from Pym to the Maelstrom. In 1841, Poe was living in Philadelphia, but could easily have traveled to New York and covered his absence with a drunken binge. And in the spring of 1842, according to a later report, Poe was discovered "wandering about like a crazy man" through the Jersey Shore woods. Returning to the scene of the crime, to drink the last dregs of creative inspiration?

"And so, all the night-tide, I lay down by the side
Of my darling -- my darling -- my life and my bride,
In the sepulcher there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea."
-- Edgar Allan Poe, "Annabel Lee" (1849)

For as Poe himself put it, the death of a beautiful woman is "unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world." From Iphigenia drowned at Aulis to Ophelia and the Lady of Shalott, the maiden in the water is the seed pearl of the cantosphere, the [mermaid](#) in ovo. Poe was already tormented by dying women: [tuberculosis](#), the stigmata of the [Lamia](#), claimed his mother, his foster mother, his young wife Virginia, and his lover Frances Osgood. (Poe's alcoholic weakness may likewise have been contracted from [such a demon](#).) Did Poe attempt to balance the scales, sacrificing Mary Rogers to the Lamia in exchange for five more years of his wife's life? But Mary was not the pure maid he had thought, but a spoiled sacrifice. So did the Lamia take Virginia as additional payment? Poe's wife's tuberculosis onset the day after Poe's birthday, almost exactly six months after Mary Rogers' death. If so, payment for what? For poetry, perhaps, for the true Muse's Gift? Before Mary's death in 1841, Poe had written perhaps forty poems, of which only "To Helen" and "The City in the Sea" are particularly good. After her death came "Lenore," "Eulalie," "Annabel Lee," "The Raven" (all about dead women), "The Bells," "El Dorado," "The Conqueror Worm," and many other masterpieces.

"Oh! If there be a spot on earth for contemplation made,
Hoboken, 'tis thy fairy land, thy shore of poplar shade;
Where no intrusive voice may break the calm of thy retreat,
Save the sweet swan-like waves that die in music at our feet."
-- Anonymous, "On Hoboken" (1830)

Or was Poe merely caught in the mystical backdraft of Mary's (ritual?) murder by person or persons unknown? The 1830s and 1840s in America were a time of cults and mysticism that would culminate in the great explosion of Spiritualism roughly at the time of [Poe's death](#). Poe's Providence admirer Sarah Whitman was an ardent Spiritualist who wore a small black coffin around her neck. Indeed, Poe attended a lecture on mesmerism by (and possibly a séance conducted by) Andrew Jackson Davis, the "Seer of Poughkeepsie," who wrote his own Mary Rogers roman a

clef, *The Tale of a Physician,* in 1869. (Davis' book also blames the putative abortionist.) The Hoboken park where Mary Rogers washed shore on the first day of the ancient Egyptian year was called the "Elysian Fields" -- which is to say, the land of the dead, to the West across the River. Better yet, she appeared just opposite a natural spring called "Sibyl's Cave" -- another invocation of the Lamia, according to Euripides. (Lamia was the mother of the Libyan Sibyl.) Mary's mysterious appearance from the water evokes the crossing of Lethe, forgetfulness, or of the Styx. Her clothes were spread on a natural throne (or altar?) in Weehawken, itself perhaps the site of a king-killing sacrifice in 1804. And the ghost of Mary Rogers appeared to John Anderson (himself an increasingly fanatical Spiritualist who believed the dead were trying to kill him), and to Frederica Loss (on her deathbed, babbling in German), and to Daniel Payne two weeks before his suicide. Something was called up from the river that night, and could not be put down, not even by the silver pen of Edgar Allan Poe, no matter how he raved and struggled against the phantom he tried to bind under the name Marie Roget.

If the Battle's Weak, You Must Tweak

And . . . we're [back](#).

This week we're talking about what happens when you need to make an encounter more difficult.

One early-ish childhood memory I have starts out with me helping my mom in the kitchen. I was allowed to wield a knife, which means I was at least the same age as Wednesday from *The Addams Family.* Anyway, my mom was having me cut up spuds for mashed potatoes; I had finished the first (of three -- they were large), and I asked her, "Did I make them the right size?"

My mom furled her brow and said, "Can you make them a bit bigger?"

The ashen look on my face must have been priceless, because -- stifling a giggle -- she informed me that she was just kidding, and the size I had chosen was fine. (My sarcasm detector wouldn't grow to become a usable organ until puberty.)

My face was no doubt panic-stricken because I had stumbled across an important truth: it really isn't possible to uncut something. And it is often a similarly quixotic task to try to make some encounters more difficult. Nevertheless, we well persevere and try to come up with some ideas you can use. Or, barring that, I'll spout off more childhood anecdotes until I hit my 1,000 words.

So let's say that the heroes are in the middle of what is supposed to be a big, exciting battle, but the heroes are mopping the floor with the foes. And we've ascertained that **something should be done**. (Although this is a good time to reflect whether or not anything needs to be done *this time;* perhaps future encounters need to be beefed up -- say, if the GM forgot that a PC has a special attack or ability -- but the players should be allowed the chance to revel in their unanticipated victory.)

What options do we have?

Know Your Math . . . Redux!

Last week we talked about using a knowledge of math and the rules to make the battle easier for the heroes. It's tempting to use the same techniques to make the battle harder. For example, the GM might give a critter 100 hit points instead of the 50 he was supposed to start with.

While this can work in some instances, one problem with this method is that such modifications might not make a difference. For example, let's say that you misjudged your baddie's abilities to hit the PCs, and consequently he can't lay a talon on the heroes. Well, in this case, doubling his hit points will really only mean that it takes the heroes twice as long to whittle it down to dead; the only thing that beastie is going to accomplish is meeting its maker shorter of breath. This is also the case where the enemies can successfully connect, but can't penetrate to cause any damage.

Here's where knowing your rules can really pay off. As one common example, if the mastermind has henchmen (or more arrive later . . . see below), then make sure they're using their talents effectively. Many GMs -- myself included -- tend to treat multiple adversaries as if they were waiting in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles, calmly ripping their numbered stubs for their turn to get slaughtered. But most games possess group attack rules that enable larger numbers of characters to dog-pile an enemy, and it's likely that **highly trained professional goons** would have received some instruction in that.

Ninja Ninja Ninja!

If having an NPC come in and rescue the heroes is bad form (and it is), then perhaps the fates look more kindly upon

the technique of having more bad guys show up to make the battle tougher.

Of course, "more minions" can run into the same brick wall that "more hit points" does: If the heroes aren't being bothered by a colossally powerful bad guy, what evidence is there that a few folks with red-and-white concentric circles painted on their jumpsuits will fare any better? But used effectively (see above), adding more bodies can crank up the challenge. But perhaps the best use of reinforcements is a chance to enable a bad guy to escape (see below).

Define "Winning"

However, perhaps the best idea is to change the combat situation. For example, if the heroes are doing well and you calculate that they'll win in a half-dozen rounds, perhaps something happens where they need to win faster: a fire starts, or the Self-Destruct Button gets pressed. Or perhaps the bad guy grabs hostages (do all the heroes' attacks work without the risk of hurting innocents?), or the heroes learn that they need to capture this guy alive (say, he reveals that he knows some vital piece of information), which requires the heroes to pull back their attacks. Regardless, establishing an alternate resolution scenario is quite possibly the easiest, most organic, and most effective technique at turning a lackluster fight into something memorable.

Better Luck Next Time . . .

Sometimes it isn't a matter of pumping up an adversary so much as playing the existing one to utmost potential. Consider that -- especially in an ongoing campaign -- players probably know their characters a *lot* better than you know yours, and have spent quite possibly many, many hours staring at the characters and learning all their nuances and tricks, pouring over possible futures, envisioning "worst-case" scenarios, writing fiction about them, caressing their character sheets gently in bed as the shadows of candles flicker to the rhythmic bass of a stereo playing Enigma . . .

I'm sorry. Am I off-track again?

Anyway, if your NPCs are anything like mine, they were cranked out shortly before the adventure began (or only devised on the fly with the help of forgotten notes on napkins like, "Two-handed sword, artifact shield, no soap -- radio?"). This is, then, a good reason to consider having *one* adversary (or a handful of important ones), and then doing everything reasonable to try to let them escape with their lives. In doing so, you develop experience with the character, the character gets experience, and the players get the satisfaction of continuing adversaries.

Of course, with this advice comes a suggestion to be better prepared next time, especially if the character was thrown together hastily. You might even try reusing a successful character or character design from another source, or perusing excellent online resources for innovative or creative designs.

What Not to Do

I'm running a bit long, so I'll limit my "don't do this!" advice for the time being to this: Don't have the bad guy whip out some alternate attack or ability that he wasn't using for the rest of the combat. If he has something more powerful, why didn't he use it earlier? (Unless, of course, the adversary is Voltron.) Likewise avoid the temptation to have the initial defeat of a bad guy result in him transforming into an even worse, more dangerous adversary (as happens in the final boss of countless Japanese video-game RPGs); if there was such a powerful foe lurking beneath the surface, why didn't the bad guy use his powers to attack *himself,* so he could access those mad-whack powers sooner?

Perhaps the only exception to this rule is if these alternate attacks or different forms are wildly dangerous; insane villains want to live, too, and if the Horrific Final Beast Form is a truly horrific last-gasp means of taking everyone with him. But if you use this technique, make sure that the backup plan is *actually* effective: "Fools! You have unleashed the awesome power of the Infinibeast Continuu-oof!" [Bad Guy is one-shotted, his once-proud life cut short like this week's column installment.]

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Fear Itself

Published by Pelgrane Press

Written by Robin D. Laws

Cover by Jérôme Huguenin

Illustrated by Jérôme Huguenin and Dave Allsop

90-page b&w softcover; $19.95

Fear Itself is Pelgrane Press' second title to employ its GUMSHOE investigative roleplaying system, preceded ***The Esoterroists,*** also penned by Robin D. Laws. Both are horror games, but the two are radically different. In ***The Esoterrorists,*** the characters act as highly trained and competent operatives, working for a well-funded and multi-government-sanctioned conspiracy to prevent the incursion of the forces of the Outer Black. In ***Fear Itself,*** the characters are ordinary folk, ill equipped to deal with the horrors of the Outer Black, let alone the cannibals, perverts, rapists, and serial killers they might encounter. If ***The Esoterrorists*** feels like *The X-Files* and *Millennium,* then ***Fear Itself*** feels more like *Halloween, 28 Days Later,* and *In the Mouth of Madness.*

The GUMSHOE system is designed to force the players to concentrate on the discovery and analysis of clues in investigative scenarios rather than on rolling for them. If a character possesses the relevant ability, he gains the clues, but he can also spend points from a pool for that ability to learn extra information.

Two types of Ability -- Investigative (divided into Academic, Interpersonal, and Technical) and General -- define characters. Both types of Ability work as pools of points, but while players spend Investigative Ability points to acquire clues, they use those from General Abilities to modify the die rolls made to undertake actions such as Driving, Fleeing, and Shooting. Additionally, both Health and Stability are General Abilities, their points spent to save against taking physical or mental damage respectively. The GUMSHOE system's use of point pools adds a resource management aspect to the game, but in the main, it shifts the focus to understanding clues rather than attaining them.

To fit the GUMSHOE system to ***Fear Itself,*** a number of changes have been made. First, the number of points used to create characters has been drastically lowered, as have the number of Investigative Abilities available to them. Besides the points, a character must fit a stock stereotype -- Good Girl/Guy, Sexy Girl, Jock/Stud, Brain, Authority Figure, Burn Out, or Preacher Man -- horror clichés all, along with whatever idea a player already has. Even the choice of character concept is restricted, a party only allowed to have just the one investigative/combat specialist type in its number. While the investigative/combat specialist can freely buy the Investigative Procedure, Scuffling, and Shooting Abilities, they are capped for the other characters, limited to half whatever the investigative/combat specialist has in each Ability.

Further a player must define his character's Risk Factor, the "Worst Thing He Ever Did," sources of Stability, his Goal, and his Affinity and Enmity, although these last two are optional. The Risk Factor explains why a character does not simply run away from frightening situations, be he Curious, Gung Ho, or Horny. If a player roleplays against this Risk Factor in a dangerous situation, the GM can impose a Stability check. The "Worst Thing He Ever Did" (the list including "illegally downloading a roleplaying book, cheating struggling creative people of needed income") is his guilty secret that might come out during play. Sources of Stability -- hobbies, personality traits, friends, and family -- are personal factors that can be affected by Stability loss and the loss of any one can reduce Stability. His Affinity and

Enmity relate to other characters in the party as his Enmity, while his Goal can be anything.

This process feels very different to the creation process in *The Esoterrorists,* a character being defined in *Fear Itself* by so many new elements. These restrictions slot the character into an easily defined role for that genre, while keeping the horror very personal. *Fear Itself,* though, adds another option, that of Psychic Powers. These include Aura Reading, Medium, Messenger, Premonitions, Remote Viewing, and Sensitive, and are each treated as other Abilities, except that any clues gained through their use cannot be vital to solving the scenario. Whatever benefit a Psychic Power grants the user, it has the effect of making him mentally fragile (represented by all Stability checks being more difficult) and worse still, makes him vulnerable to the Outer Black. In a standard game, it is recommended that there be only a single psychic in the group, although *Fear Itself* also suggests an all-Psychic group for a more fraught game.

Where the GM's advice in *The Esoterrorists* concentrates upon investigative horror, *Fear Itself* focuses on running games of personal horror, both physical and mental. Scenario construction uses the same spine structure for the main plotline of any scenario. Slotted scenes exist along the spine, where the characters can interact with other characters; pursue goals; and play out dramatic directed scenes, flashbacks, and cutaways (the latter a staple of genre that sees the characters split to investigate or confront the horrors of a scenario). There is also advice for the player, who is encouraged to be proactive (that is, to not just sit there) and take advantage of the scenes the GM grants him. Doing this (as well as roleplaying his stereotype, his Risk Factor, and so on, to develop and humanize his character) gives the GM a reason to let the player's character survive the confrontation to come.

Fear Itself comes with a single extended scenario, "Ocean in the Forest" (or "Ocean in the fores" as it is listed in the contents), written for roughly six players. It casts them as a gaming group who are attending a weekend long LARP event (a case of a game imitating gaming?) that slides into horror and insanity at its isolated forest location. The participants have been drawn into the machinations of the "Mystery Man," an inhuman entity that takes pleasure in the psychological torture of its victims.

"Ocean in the Forest" is a curious affair that would work well in any normal horror RPG, but for a GUMSHOE system scenario, surprisingly little investigation exists in the first part of the adventure. Survival and escape from the forest-set LARP marks not the end of "Ocean in the Forest," but a break before the proper investigation begins to discover what exactly happened the weekend before. Thus, there is a marked divide between the survival horror and the investigation, almost as if the scenario had been written backwards, though the main effect is to prolong the adventure.

Physically, *Fear Itself* is an attractive book with some excellent photographic style artwork from Jérôme Huguenin, although it is a pity that his pen-and-ink illustrations jar with this mode. The book would have benefited from another proofread, and its advice could be stronger; both GM and players alike need to know more about the genre to play. That said, *Fear Itself* possesses the one flaw fatal to any horror RPG: It only details two monsters/threats, one of which happens to appear in the scenario, leaving the GM with just the one to use himself. This is wholly inadequate (and *The Esoterrorists* suffered from exactly the same problem), but a GM can at least now pick up the GUMSHOE system version of the excellent ***[The Book of Unremitting Horror](#)***.

Having played both *The Esoterrorists* and Ken Hite's forthcoming *Trail of Cthulhu,* the truth is that *Fear Itself* feels something of an oddity. It scales back the investigative aspect and abilities found in those GUMSHOE titles in favor of traits such as the stereotypes, Risk, and Guilt Factors, all designed to encourage everyone to engage themselves in *Fear Itself*'s genre. The effect of this is to pull *Fear Itself* away from the GUMSHOE system's comfort zone of investigative horror. Even though there is the suggestion that characters can perhaps learn and grow from their experiences over the course of several scenarios such that they are competent enough to play in an Esoterrorists campaign, *Fear Itself* feels best suited to one-shot rather than extended play.

Fear Itself is let down though by a lack of monsters, an odd scenario, and underwritten advice and genre details, but these are not insurmountable problems because the game is playable. It is designed to handle a less cerebral, more visceral kind of horror (familiar to most players), and this it does in a reasonable fashion. Overall, *Fear Itself* feels as if it is stretching the GUMSHOE system, not necessarily to best effect. It can handle its genre certainly, but not without a lot of pushing from new elements.

--Matthew Pook

A Mélange of Magical Creatures XIII

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

The new year has begun in earnest, and with the new year comes new opportunities and hopes. Of course, it also comes with new dangers, and more than a few oddities. We continue our look at seven more odd creatures that a fantastic world could offer, including ideas for how to use them in your campaign. To begin with, we note that the new year often comes self-reflection, and so we start this installment with a creature that can't help but look itself in the mirror.

Mirror Lark

"It began as any other day. I was in the park with a sachet of sunflower seeds watching the water trickle around the fountain. Suddenly, seeds started disappearing. I waved my hat through the area, but they kept vanishing. Resigning, I grabbed my bag and moved on. I had hardly taken five steps when a beautiful song rang out. Slowly turning back, I glanced across the fountain to see the reflection of a bird near where I was sitting."
-- Lady Tenemain, *Seasons at the Royal Court*

This small, brightly-colored bird eats seeds and small insects, warbling songs without a care in the world. This bird cannot be seen directly; it can only interact with the world through reflections. (If a lark sees its target in a reflection, the two can interact with each other.) Their unique nature allows them to scoop insects off the surface of the water with relative safety; predators swooping from a great height will usually miss, as they will attack at the reflection, or become confused at the last moment. Even safer targets for mirror larks are seeds in trees above the water; if a predator sees the lark's reflection, the predator can interact with the lark, as long as it navigates by the bird's reflection.

Encountered

In the wild, mirror larks will be found near sheltered brooks and still ponds. Reflections abound in urban centers, from windows to glass tables to televiewers. To those who know what to look for, it is the mirror lark's song that gives them away to intelligent beings. Sages are unsure what quality of reflection is required for the effect to work; some reports indicate that imperfect reflections -- such as dirty glass -- will suffice, while others report only partial sighting and no ability to interact with the bird. Unlike many birds, mirror larks do not fly into window panes, but correctly perceive space and imagery.

Industrial Uses

"These birds can become a real annoyance. Some say that children should be seen, not heard. I'm beginning to thing it should be that way with these birds. They sing day in, day out, night and day."
-- As dictated by Azok the Mad

Some individuals claim that the mirror lark makes for an ideal covert means of communication. As carriers, they are difficult to intercept and can only be revealed under special conditions. To many individuals, the songs of the mirror lark make for sweet music. Enchanters have had difficulty working with the materials, but are optimistic.

Adventure Seed

The heroes are hired to catch a pet mirror lark that has escaped; they are one of several teams sent to recapture it. The truth is that the animal in question is actually being utilized by a spy; any party that recaptures the animal will come

under attack.

Mirror Larks

Appearance: Small, light-colored brown-grey birds.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Omnivore (seeds and small insects).
ST 1; **DX** 12; **IQ** 2; **HT** 12.
Will 9; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 3 (Ground).
SM -5; 1-2 lbs.
Traits: 360° Vision; Aware (Insubstantial; Precise); Flight (Winged; Air Speed 12); Insubstantial (Always On; Partial Change (Accessibility: not in reflection: sense based: Vision)); Invisible (Affects Machines; Visible Reflection); Temperature Tolerance 2; Wild (or Domestic) Animal.

Giant Mirror Lark

ST 5; **DX** 11; **IQ** 2; **HT** 13.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 4 (Ground).
SM -2; 10-20 lbs; DR 1.

Cigar Plant

"While we were discussing economics, the short fellow picked a leaf bundle from the plant, pushed out the inner leaves, packed in some pipeweed, and proceeded to light it. Oddly enough, it seemed to work. We continued walking, and by the time he had finished smoking the 'cigar,' there seemed to be another such strange plant where he tossed the butt."
-- Everett Goddfried, Explorer

It is strongly suspected that this plant was engineered by a cigar-loving horticulturist. This man-sized shrub grows two sorts of leaves: spiky leaves that are eight to 10 inches long, and long, broad, curled leaves that are six to eight inches long. Inside the curled leaves, the plant grows a tuft of light petals and seeds. This acts as a flower for pollinating insects. The cover leaves are tasteless, and are pointed to help discourage herbivores. The seeds are very tough, and only germinate after a very hot summer, or a forest fire.

Encountered

These plants can be found in any temperate region, particularly in forests where they can be sheltered by larger trees. In the wild most often abundant after forest fires. In more urban settings, cigar plants might be encountered in the hands of herbalists and avid smokers.

Industrial Uses

"Some biologists insist that the cigar plant is an engineered life form, and that all samples in the wild are castaways or deliberate plants by those who would challenge intellectual property rights."
-- Mik Tzanth, *Gene Finding Today*

The most direct industry seems to be the large-scale harvesting of these plants for a recreational drug industry, such as tobacco. Meat packers use the broad leaves and casings to mold sausages and other products. In addition, the rigid leaf structures make for strong candle holders and decorative items. Enchanters have not taken this plant seriously, although many smoke them.

Adventure Seed

A cake maker plans to use some cigar leaves to make and separate levels in a cake for a local VIP. He wants the adventurers to bring him some unripe leaves. The closest greenhouse is sold out, but the proprietor mentions a private seller down the street. This seller wants to sell them, and will accept money and give a receipt. He then leaves on a trip. His nephew who manages the greenhouse refuses to acknowledge the receipt. Will the heroes resort to theft as time runs out? Will the cake plan rise to the occasion or will it all come tumbling down?

Cigar Plant

Appearance: A short, wide plant with long, broad leaves that curl into about one inch tubes as they mature.
Category: Plant.
Diet: Photovore.
HT 10.
SM -1; DR 1.
Notes: ST8 to resist uncurling.

Kickspin (kix'-pun)

"The 'kickspin' blurs the distinction between the definitions of plant and animal. The public is still in the dark as to exactly what this creature is. All specimens found of the animal aspect have been females, and have looked like short-tailed herbivorous canines, . The plant aspect is a deciduous tree that grows 'melons' -- actually closer related to gourds -- in all seasons but winter (although they can grow even then in tropical regions). Together, the animal protects the tree, and the tree provides for the animal."
-- Sage Benouillus, *Creatures Defying Categories*

This bi-phase animal is part of a complex life-cycle, the most recognized aspect of which is a small animal with a short tail. It has brown, tough skin, a thin form, and short fur. It devours fruit and small shrubs. There is also a species of tree around which this animal centers its territory. The animal aspect buries its waste at the edge of its territory, doubling as fertilizer for the planted seeds. Identified early as a form of symbiosis, the depth of the connection was poorly understood. In particular, early explorers were confused by the fact that the "herd" contained only females, and that no males -- lone, or otherwise -- were to be found in the areas.

Many sages are unsure where animal ends and plant begins, and argue vehemently when discussing the matter. When the animal eats the kickspin fruit, there is a chance that it will become pregnant with a single pup. Some biologists argue that the fruit simply acts as an aphrodisiac. What is agreed upon is that the liquid-filled fruit is very nutritious for most mammals.

Encountered

Kickspin trees grow best in temperate to tropical regions. The animal aspect rarely wanders more than a few miles from its tree. This earned them the name of the "kickspin dryad." The animal component is most often noticed when it lies on its back and spins the host-tree's melon-like fruit.

Industrial Uses

"I met a forest noble who had decided to take a kickspin pair as pets. He carefully moved the tree and any of the animals that would follow to his back yard. Things went well, until he noticed the new kickspin trees sprouting just beyond his property in the spring. Trying to have them removed caused the animals to attack the workers."
-- Ani Pquin, *Noble Gestures*

The kickspin fruit is tasty, and the seeds are easily separated. Moral quandaries are beginning to emerge regarding the complexity and *categorization* of the products of these creatures. Still, the fruit can be harvested safely, should the animals be treated well. Some alchemists are excited about the prospect of reincarnation through the rebirth of the

fruit.

Adventure Seed

The local government has decided to build a new road. The straightest path happens to run through a stand of kickspin trees. The PCs are contracted to act as emissaries to bring in druids to move trees and keep the kickspin docile. The project has sparked tension between the nearby landholders, townsfolk, underground kingdoms, and others with a stake in the land. Tensions come to a head when the lead druid is found poisoned and dead. Who did this? Time is ticking, and non-working employees get bored, and angry if unpaid. Governments get angry if they "must" pay non-working workers. Competitors might delay the project with the hopes of taking over the contract.

Kickspin Rodent "Dryad" (See *GURPS Biotech, Fourth Edition* pages 81 & 88 -- *Zoogenesis and Botanogenesis* -- for more on such complex life forms)

Appearance: Small grey-brown rodent with rough skin.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST 1-3; **DX** 12; **IQ** 3; **HT** 10.
Will 12; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 11; Move 6.
SM -4; 5-8 lbs; DR 1 (+DR2 vs. fire).
Traits: Racial Memory; Quadruped; Quirk (Affected by the better of Plant and Animal reaction rolls); Temperature Tolerance 3; Wild Animal.

Kickspin Tree

ST 20; **HT** 12.
SM +2; tons; DR 5.
(e.g., No Manilupators; Sessile; etc.)

Kickspin "Melon" (actually a gourd)

HT 11.
SM -5; 2-5 lbs; DR 1.

Tricat

"This three-headed feline was engineered by some misguided soul who believed that three-headed dogs were common. At least the creator gave it three tails so we can read their moods."
-- Magus Avanos, *New Pets*

The three-headed cat has made recent publicity as the familiar of a popular wizard in a series of fictional novels and animated shorts. A few years ago, geneticists released the secret of the tricat's relatively stable gene to the general public. Thus a number of companies immediately set out to replicate and market the cats as quickly as possible. The tricat is known for its habit of pouncing on a pack of mice and killing a number of them at once. This can be embarrassing as the heads are somewhat independent in thought; they can sometimes sit down and argue about what direction to take next. Tricats can chase mice around both sides of a chair for a short distance.

Encountered

Tricats are most often encountered in urban areas with a large population. They are often seen walking around with one head asleep and another half-asleep. It is generally considered most efficient to operate this way. This allows for

maximum territorial coverage, and the least fighting with its other heads.

Industrial Uses

"The most popular breed of tricat is efficient, graceful, and relatively problem-free. This prompts one question: Is this the original design, or is it the work of a copycat?"
-- Pet Digest

To the detriment of many bean counters, the effectiveness per hour of a tricat is not three times that of a normal cat. It can operate longer, but the increased activity increases its appetite as well, raising the daily number of hunts (which does have the benefit of ridding the owner's building of mice). Using information gained from studying tricats, researchers are working on enchantment uses that will allow humans to temporarily grow three heads. So far it has had physical success, although the temporary disorientation still needs to be overcome.

Adventure Seed

The adventurers are sent to acquire something from an alchemist or school library. Blocking their path indoors is a gargantuan tricat. This particular cat is of the variety where the heads noisily do not get along with each other. Such is the case here. The 'cat will pretend to be asleep until all the "prey" are in the room, and then chaos ensues.

Tricat

Appearance: A three-headed cat with three tails. Fur pattern and coloration varies.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 5; **DX** 14; **IQ** 4; **HT** 9.
Will 11; Per 12; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 10.
SM -3; 10-20 lbs; DR 2 (neck).
Traits: As Cat, p. B456, Catfall; Combat Reflexes; Doesn't Sleep (Nuisance Effect: each head needs normal sleep time); Domestic Animal; Extra Heads +2; Night Vision 5; Quadruped; Sharp Claws; Sharp Teeth.
Skills: As Cat, p. B456: Brawling-16; Jumping-14; Stealth-14.

Giant Tricat

ST 10; **DX** 13; **IQ** 4; **HT** 10.
Will 12; Per 11; Speed 6; Dodge 10; Move 10.
SM +0; 150-200 lbs; DR 2 (+DR2 neck).
Traits: Add Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground Speed 12)

Huge Tricat

ST 15; **DX** 12; **IQ** 4; **HT** 11.
Will 13; Per 10; Speed 6; Dodge 9; Move 10.
SM +1 (2 hexes); 300-400 lbs; DR 4 (+DR2 neck).
Traits: Add Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground Speed 15)

Gargantuan Tricat

ST 20; **DX** 11; **IQ** 4; **HT** 12.
Will 14; Per 9; Speed 6; Dodge 8; Move 10.
SM +2 (6 hexes); 700-800 lbs; DR 6 (+DR2 neck).
Traits: Add Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 20)

Death Swans

"The song of a death swan is an eerie dirge. The swan's song itself is not an end, but warns that the passing of a warrior may be nigh. Few warriors are pleased by the sound, but most agree it is better than the silence it forbodes."
-- Yurik Resani, First Mate of the *Prancing Prawn*

Death swans are large, dark, blue-brown birds that superficially resemble swans. They earn their name through a tendency to gather at larger creatures near death. This allows the victim to remain a long time at "Death's Door," usually prolonging the victim's agony, but occasionally saving someone's life. In the wild, this allows the death swans to keep pursuing a victim, and the predators that wounded it to give up (in game terms, "near death" means negative HP).

Encountered

These animals are more foreboding than welcome, but can perform an emergency service. Where death swans circle, vultures will not be far behind. In the wild, death swans can give an advisory notice that something is about to die. Hospital trauma units and ambulances can benefit from keeping such animals around. Prisons sometimes have problems with these avians making permanent homes nearby.

Industrial Uses

"Legends tell of a lost knight who was fatally wounded in the desert. He had barely enough strength to crawl across the sands as his injuries kept him restricted. His only companions were death swans, who took turns watching him. Nearly dying from hunger, thirst, and pain, he eventually found his way back to the Sanctuary of Rtinsld, leaving his black feathered companions hungry at the gate."
-- A Warrior's Guild Legend

In a city, some individuals are working to train death swans to only to circle around human casualties. Some very dangerous occupations have been conducting studies of death swans' use around the work place. Apart from the initial morale effects, it is suggested that they have saved many lives by keeping individuals from suffering fatal cardiac arrest, or death from short-term gas poisoning. It is said that the music of a death swan can keep a person on the brink of death indefinitely. Some believe that a recording or preserved essence of the death swan's song will copy the effect.

Adventure Seed

The heroes are called onto the scene. A VIP is dying, and needs covert cross-country transportation to a special clinic. In the interim, the adventurers must act as the backup team, and bring two spare death swans to a rendezvous location halfway to the clinic; this will leave the opportunity for the adventurers to deal with the birds alone. They might have to take over for the original team, should the other mercenaries have become involved in a fight on the way here. Eventually, the challenge will be to protect the birds and the client.

Death Swan

Appearance: Large dark blue-grey swan-like birds.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 5; **DX** 12; **IQ** 4; **HT** 13.
Will 11; Per 11; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 5 (Ground).
SM -2; 12-24 lbs; DR 1.
Traits: Affliction (HT+5; Advantage: Hard to Kill +5); Affliction (HT; Advantage: Hard to Kill +5); Aware (Near Death); Claws (Blunt); Enhanced Move 0.5 (Air Move 18); Flight (Winged; Air Move 12); Perk (Piercing Cry); Temperature Tolerance 3; Wild Animal

Giant Death Swan

ST 10; **DX** 11; **IQ** 4; **HT** 14.
Will 12; Per 12; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 6 (Ground).
SM +0; 40-60 lbs; DR 2.

Burrowing Clams

"The thief ran hard with her prize, a fistful of gemstones. In a shadowy part of the park, she paused, and looked around for pursuit. Seeing no signs of such, she eagerly tossed down some clams, shocking them to dig right away.

"She quickly tossed in the jewels and patted over the holes, but not quite fast enough . . ."
-- Lt. Matthias, TAG Officer

These gray-brown creatures are often seen basking in the sun, attracting insects like a pitcher plant. While this fast-acting mollusk sits on the surface to eat, it can inter itself quickly. To protect itself from being located by smell, it mimics territory scents of local animals, and can dig quickly if frightened. While a digging clam can't breathe underwater, it can hold its breath while it traverses water. Most specimens cannot swim, but can tunnel through dirt and mud at a rate of a yard per second.

Encountered

These land clams can be common sights in prairie and lightly forested regions, bathing in the sun. Cemeteries may keep a few to dig graves, or at least to loosen the dirt and eat flies. A "domesticated" clam is kept on a chain or wire leash hooked into drilled holes in its shell to keep it from wandering away.

Industrial Uses

*"The most horrible sound I have ever heard is a digger clam trying to bore through rock. It must be like the sound of a banshee wailing. **That** is exactly why I chose to record it for the foley effects in the school play."*
-- Jackie Matr, *Tir Chronicle*

The meat of the burrowing clam is an acquired taste, but is available in bulk in some areas. They have a good niche in the replication of perfumes and scents. Entire rooms can be scented with a small sample given to a basking clam. Larger specimens can displace large amounts of dirt quickly. Magical effects that simulate tunneling or a single feat of strength can be aided by this creature.

Adventure Seed

The heroes are responsible for a debt that must be paid. The creditor will consider resolved if the adventurers can acquire a ton of digger clams. A quick analysis reveals that the current street value is approximately 10% less than that of the debt. As they agree, the fine print on the contract will reveal that the signers must personally acquire them from the wild so that they are guaranteed to be as fresh as possible. The clams must be snuck up on, and then wrestled to keep from diving. Can the heroes acquire their quarry while keeping their dignity intact?

Burrowing Clams

Appearance: Grey-brown clams.
Category: Mollusk.
Diet: Insectivore.
ST 4; **DX** 6; **IQ** 2; **HT** 12.

Will 6; Per 8; Speed 4.5; Dodge 8; Move 1/2.
SM -5 (6-8"); 2-3 lbs; DR 2 (shell).
Traits: Acute Sense (Vibration) +5; Domesticated (or Wild) Animal; No Manipulators; Tunneling 1 (dirt only); Vibration Sense.
Skills: Breath Holding-16.

Giant Burrowing Clams

ST 12; **DX** 6; **IQ** 3; **HT** 13.
Will 7; Per 9; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 1.
SM -2 (2-3'); 50-70 lbs; DR 5.
Traits: As above, but Tunneling 2 (dirt only).

Acid Slugs *(Alkien)*

"As the 123rd regiment crested the hill, the rebels launched their attack. They opened by lobbing dozens of duffel-bag-sized projectiles at the soldiers. Some men were knocked down, but the missiles appeared soft. Where they hit, steam began to rise from the troops. Those left standing tried to help their fallen comrades and were horrified to find that the weapons were acid slugs, excreting slime that corroded their armor and weapons."
-- Private Mitchell, Scout, 130th Regiment

This large, gray gastropod is named for the strong acid it secretes. This seems to be an effective defense against many breeds of metal-heavy birds of prey in its native area; it is also convenient to help break down metallic moss and other metal impediments. This acid can melt through metal armor quickly, but leaves cloth, wicker, and leather alone. The acid creates hydrogen gas for microscopic symbionts.

Encountered

The acid slug is normally found in low, rocky hills and murky swamps. Adventurers will most likely encounter these creatures as weapons of primitive tribes and guerilla warriors. Easily sated, these large gastropods can be kept "tame" for long periods of time, as long as they have sufficient food to eat.

Industrial Uses

"Slug slime tastes and smells bitter, but it is often listed as an important ingredient in many hedge magics."
-- The witch Sabiat

These animals are outlawed for general civilian use in many areas due to their applicability as an ideal guerilla weapon, although some regions permit acid slugs for construction purposes with a license. Because of a few publicized events, Alkien are first thought of as ammunition for catapults. This ammunition is good for disabling and disheartening a number of soldiers at once. The acidic enzymes are relatively safe for people to work with using only their bare hands. Medicinally, acid slug slime can be a cure for metal poisoning, even if it tastes bad. It will, however, leave the patient with a metal deficiency, causing some side effects (such as harming his red blood count). This animal may aid alchemists in the search for a "safe" "universal solvent.

Adventure Seed

The heroes are charged with delivering a dozen live adult acid slugs to rebels fighting an evil dictator. The mission calls for covert transport of these metal-destroying hazards. Complications begin when the slug food goes is missing on the second day. Then the search begins and the cage is found to have been weakened so that the slugs can escape easily . . .

Acid Slugs

Appearance: Huge grey slugs with excess slime.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Herbivore, lithovore.
ST 6; **DX** 8; **IQ** 1; **HT** 12.
Will 8; Per 9; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 1.
SM -3; 20-30 lbs; DR 2 (ablative).
Traits: 360° Vision (Easy to Hit: Eyestalks); Amphibious; Clinging; Enhanced Tracking 1; Filter Lungs; Flexibility (Double-Jointed); Infravision; Innate Attack 1d (Aura; Melee; Metal Only; Persistent); Injury Tolerance (No Brain; No Neck; No Vitals); Mind Control (Emotion Control; Limit: Only to remove hate; Psi); Regrowth; Resistance to Poison +3; Stretching 1; Temperature Tolerance 2; Vermiform; Wild Animal

Tiny Acid Slug

ST 1; **DX** 9; **IQ** 1; **HT** 11.
Will 7; Per 8; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 1/2.
SM -5; 1 lb.

Large Acid Slug

ST 9; **DX** 7; **IQ** 1; **HT** 13.
Will 9; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 2.
SM -1; 50-100 lbs; DR 4 (ablative).

Giant Acid Slug

ST 15; **DX** 6; **IQ** 1; **HT** 14.
Will 10; Per 11; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 3.
SM +0; 150-200 lbs; DR 8 (ablative).

Beyond Fantasy

As with previous installments of the series, many of the creatures featured could physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. Mirror larks simply have odd feeding habits near reflections; beware towers of mirrors. Cigar plants could be used as is, providing a strange plant for an eccentric biologist. Kickspin could be a hermaphromorphic life form that becomes fertile after eating the fruit. Tricats have no super powers per se, and would be well-suited for an alien-but-familiar life form. Death Swans may simply have instincts like vultures, for no obvious reason; they are ill omens in any century. Burrowing clams might exist, but dig slower, over the course of a day. Acid slugs' acid might either be less strong and still not affect flesh, or remain potent, against all matter.

* * *

Special Thanks to JL Hatlen Linnell and DryaUnda for rounding up the troublemakers and setting them in line.

Pyramid Review

Travel Carcassonne

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Full-color boxed set, 72 tiles, 40 pawns in five colors, instructions, cardboard insert, cloth bag, rules; $29.95

Designer Klaus-Jürgen Wrede has gotten a lot of mileage out of his creation, [Carcassonne](#), and the game itself is about to put on some serious miles. *Travel Carcassonne* allows fans to take it with them everywhere and anywhere. Supposedly.

The object of the game remains the same: Score the most points by the time the last tile is played.

Players take turns drawing tiles from the stack and placing them on the table, intent on forming the long roads, broad townships, and expansive fields that make up the city. Onto these, they place their pawns, hoping their knight or thief or farmer takes control of its appointed feature and scores the most points.

Now the whole thing appears in miniature . . . well, maybe not quite the whole thing. This set has similar content to the original game, but some of it serves a dual purpose. The product description states unequivocally that this game doesn't fit with its normal-sized brethren, so you can't combine anything from the two versions.

The components are still the same high quality found in the average output from Rio Grande Games. The tiles are smaller but no less sturdy; picking them up isn't noticeably more problematic here (assuming one ever developed the surety needed to lift the game's tiles without fracturing the entire town), but then they aren't strikingly smaller. The meeples are also reduced appropriately, but miniaturization stops just short of that line where anything smaller would be a headache to use. The rules have *not* shrunk, but they've still included minor alterations (a few diagrams are vertical instead of horizontal, for example, and there may be one or two missing illustrations).

The whole thing fits into a cloth bag seven and a half inches by 11, which, when placed flat, also serves as the score pad -- the track is printed on one side. (These measurements are the same as the track from the regular game, with a little extra for the seams.)

Since the game spreads out according to the needs and whims of the players, it's hard to state categorically what kind of space savings this set offers. By way of comparison, the 72 tiles of the original selection laid out in a nine-by-eight arrangement work out to about 14.25 inches by 16 inches, while miniaturization brings that down to 11 inches by 12.5 -- not a significant difference. If playing on a particular table is only slightly troublesome, this ought to make an important difference, but it's not like this fits on a barstool.

The game arrives in a box, not just its bag, and that's pretty small, too (eight inches on a side and about an inch and a half deep -- definitely an improvement over the bulky box of the parent set as far as transportability is concerned). A piece of cardboard keeps the rules and punch-out tile sheets from bending during the trip into town from the distributor's warehouse. The board can perform that service in the bag, and if the owner doesn't mind folding his rules, the whole thing fits into a deep coat pocket. Should the supplements be produced at a condensed size, there's plenty of room in the bag for more tiles and counters.

A few issues exist as far as editing -- which sadly means some were introduced during the transition. Quirks like the

title (the box claims this is **Travel Carcassonne,** though the publisher often calls it **Carcassonne Travel Edition**) are understandable, but slips work themselves into the text. In one picture, a "red arrow" is actually black with a red cross over it (and the same red cross appears elsewhere in that illustration, just to help confuse things). The text was cut and pasted from the original document and not tailored to fit the altered images.

The idea that this is portable version of **Carcassonne** applies insofar as the pieces are smaller and certain components are cleverly combined. There's no mechanism for securing the tiles in an unstable environment, and since the cardboard scoring track is the largest thing from the first set, the components from the bigger product could fit into the travel edition's sack. If slipping it into a coat pocket isn't the standard by which its mobility is judged, there's not much to recommend one version over the other. In fact, the elimination of that bulky container may mean the little bag improves the transportability of the larger, possibly more attractive pieces.

--Andy Vetromile

The Random Dam

By Josh Krehbiel

Whenever an adventuring party come across an ancient building, it is almost certainly a temple or a castle, sometimes a mansion, but always a tall boring building built by a noble or religious group, inhabited by the most unlikely dwellers. An ancient dam tucked high in the mountains presents an interesting adventuring setting, another option for an ancient structure, one with more of a practical bent than a musty old temple.

History

The River Random swept down from the mountains onto a fertile plain before it emptied into the ocean. An empire began expanding into the valley, but undependable flooding seasons made agriculture difficult. A dam was commissioned, placed high in the mountains to control the waters. The project was a success, but a plague 20 years after the dam was constructed forced an evacuation of the region. It was another hundred years before the region was repopulated, by which time, the dam was completely forgotten.

One day, a huge flood abruptly swept down on the plains. Investigation found the dam partially destroyed, an orc tribe now living nearby. The orcs apparently found a cache of explosives and set it off, causing the flood. Adventurers forced the tribe to retreat, but the dam, now useless and broken, was abandoned. The structure sat forgotten for another hundred years, the forbidding mountains cutting off access to the dam.

It now exists as a lone monument to that kingdom, but not abandoned. The orc tribe returned to the dam and enlisted the aid of a race of bat creatures to assist with the spanning of the breach. Currently, a rudimentary rope bridge spans the gorge, and the orcs control outposts on both cliffsides, while the bat creatures and orcish tribal shamans live in the dark tunnels of the dam. Elemental rituals are being performed under the ancient wall, and there are whispers of a plot for another great flood, this one intentional.

Visiting the Random Dam

Small orc scouting parties have been scouring the mountains for humans, to determine just how much blood will be claimed by the elemental sacrifice. Any orc group caught has a map of the countryside marking the location of their home. The presence of orcs in the mountains may be enough to drive the adventurers there, but there other reasons could prompt a visit, including:

- A seer has foretold that a great flood is on the horizon, but it can be stopped if only someone would seek out the shamans in the mountain.
- A map discovered in a cemetery reveals the dam as the location of a noble family's lost heirloom, pilfered hundreds of years ago by a dam worker and left behind in the most out-of-the-way spot. The nobles may pay gladly for this lost treasure, or it could be worth a pretty penny itself. Whether it survived the first rupturing of the dam is merely a matter of luck.
- An elemental is scouring the countryside, looking for his lost brother, who he fears may have been captured. Unbeknown to the adventurers, the shamans hold the water elemental in thrall, forcing him to generate great waves to appease their god's twisted will.

Adventuring on the Dam

The River Random wanders exactly as it did before the dam was built, the remaining structure only a minor nuisance that it's slowly eroding away. Therefore, traveling up the river, with its many rapids and waterfalls, is nearly impossible. The dam remains anchored at the west bank, where the orc tribe has built most of their village on the cliffs

overlooking the river. There is a light rope bridge connecting the east bank to the structure, with a small outpost to guard against intruders. Either approach provides its share of challenges.

Each bank has a guard with a horn, who will warn the tribe of any interlopers' arrival. The guards will not hesitate to cut the rope bridge; they always have their alliance with the bat people to get it back up again. It requires both speed and stealth to get across the 120-foot bridge without taking the 100-foot tumble to the water below.

The dam itself -- 100 feet tall, about 90 feet of length still standing, some of which is only 15 feet tall -- is home to the small bat clan and serves as sacred ground for the orc shamans. Artificial tunnels line the walls, most of which end abruptly at the dam's fissure, the pathways lost during the dam's break. Rope ladders drop down the side of the fissure, with orcs typically standing at the edge of the hallways to protect the stores and dispatch unwanted visitors. A stairway also runs down the dam, the entrance found in a small outcropping on the dam's roof, but sentries also guard this well.

The inside has decayed considerably, entire areas collapsed and many rooms left undiscovered behind metal doors. The bat clan had further modified the inner workings to their liking, building walls and tearing down stairways to create an artificial darkness. They've set up their residence by carving tunnels into the cliff halfway up the dam, with the access well hidden in the broken tunnels, in case the uneasy alliance with the orcs breaks. They occasionally roam the ancient halls, flying through a bare hallway on the lower levels during their nightly hunting parties.

The shamans live at the base, their ritual grounds expanding outward onto the sandbar created by the river's path. They live mostly ignored in the dam's interior, keeping their captured elemental in thrall in cold, damp rooms below the ground. The bare essentials to the shamans' secret plot sit unattended on the sandbar, foreboding structures and sigils of magic. The orcs also occasionally fish for food, and a small flimsy pier juts into the river, nearly destined to be washed away by the latest snowmelt.

Running the Random Dam

The dam itself is a difficult structure to get onto and even more difficult to navigate, the possibility of toppling into the river or becoming trapped in the inner tunnels ever present. The area constantly teems with activity, the day busy with the daily maintenance of the orc camp and the mystic deeds of the shamans, the night belonging to the hunting parties of the bat clan. Therefore, a thought-out strategic plan will come more in handy than a show of force, giving a tactical player an advantage in the campaign. Although blindly rushing forward could equal the death of the party, a well-established plan should be rewarded with bare success. Take note that the option of flying makes planning considerably easier, and some mid-air combat between the magically inclined, and some bat hunters could spice up the encounter. As a last resort, should the party end up traveling down river, a small beach could equal a second chance before being swept over a waterfall.

As with any encounter that requires taking on a creature's home, the orcs aren't likely to allow intruders to march into their home. They should have plenty of traps, bolt holes, and fierce determination waiting for unfriendly visitors.

The dam also presents a need for subtlety; the edifice is fragile after centuries, and fireballs and crushing attacks can cause the entire thing to topple. For this reason, there should be something that needs retrieving from the dam, to prevent the trigger-happy mage from casting a big explosion at the base of the dam and calling the whole thing a wash (so to speak).

The broken dam ports well to modern scenarios, with mercenaries easily replacing the orcs, and high-powered turbines and other modern conveniences ramping up the sense of danger while wandering through the dam proper. A touch of horror could add true terror to the rituals at the base of the dam, the magical plot being the awakening of an ancient god rather than a mere flood. The dam concept is a little primitive for science-fiction campaigns, higher technology allowing a party to easily bully its way through with jetpacks and laser beams -- unless, of course, the defenders are equally well-armed.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Dealing With Drop-Outs

Many years ago I ran an *Exalted* campaign; to put it in historical perspective, I ran it when the only books out were the main one and the GM Screen booklet, which contained over 300 words of useful information. Anyway, lacking a gaming group but having learned from many of my past mistakes, I decided to run a three-session miniseries for a couple of players that I found via a game store's player-locator service (plus one of my regulars). I was running a miniseries partly because I knew that I'd be able to complete that as a GM, but mostly so that I could test my new players and make sure that they were compatible with my style of gaming. Of the two new players, one was quite good . . . a little quiet, but contemplative and interesting. The other one was awful; I might share more anecdotes in the future, but as a taste I note that, after trying to discern for 10 minutes what the PC's grand "plans" were, I finally broke down and said to the player, "I don't understand what you're trying to accomplish; do these random actions actually have a purpose?"

Anyway, the miniseries concluded successfully (despite some hiccups), and I decided to invite the other player plus my long-time regular to be part of an ongoing series; I enjoyed the setting enough that I was hoping to make a go of it. (I "forgot" to invite the other player to continue.) The would-be group talked it over, tentative plans were made, and a direction was charted for the new campaign. We had one session, with lots of potential plot elements tied into both PCs -- separately and collectively -- such that I felt there was ample material for at least months of gaming, regardless of which avenue(s) they decided to pursue first. The first game went well and ended on a cliffhanger of sorts, with plans to meet the next week.

Those plans were postponed by a cancellation from the new player . . . and a week later, the player dropped out altogether.

At this point, I had myself a double-batch of "Now what the heck do I do?" I had a campaign in mind, with pages and pages of notes (actual honest-to-goodness notes!), all of which -- okay, half of which -- were tied to one player's character. Should I try to find another player who fit a similar role? Should I try to run a campaign with only one player? Should I try to find another player via a new miniseries?

Eventually, I did what I often do in similar situations: Nothing. The "campaign" never continued, ending with two fewer sessions than the "miniseries" that spawned it. For all I know, the meticulous notes I crafted are still in my file cabinet, being slowly digested over a thousand years.

There are many questions that could arise from such a situation, but the one I'll focus on today is: How important are the players in your campaign? (Or, if you're a player, how important are *you* to the campaign?)

Should a campaign be structured such that the loss of one player means the end of the campaign? Or should a campaign be devised so that players can be swapped out willy-nilly? Or is there a middle ground of some sort? Can we fill up a paragraph with questions that restate the previous paragraph's questions?

Having helped run one of the most successful LARPs in Tallahassee (which I know, to many of you, is like saying, "Having trained many of the most successful diseased pigeons in Tallahassee . . ."), I can state with some certainty that there is one truth in the universe: The more integral you make a player's character to the ongoing plot of a game, the more likely that player won't show up. More than once the game's organizers would need to do frantic time-outs as we tried to cobble together a new plot: "What do you mean the tribal elder isn't here?! We told her last week that she needed to be here to provide insight into that map! Waitaminute; she took the map *with her?!* How is the adventure going to begin without that map?!" And so on.

The same thing has happened in smaller gaming groups, although -- depending on the campaign -- I was more likely just to postpone the session rather than try to work around an absent PC.

Here, then, is an effort at stating the various options in a succinct fashion.

The series is tied to specific PCs: For example, the heroes all possess mysterious tattoos that bind them to the ongoing storyline. This has the problem that, if a player drops out or one of the characters dies, the entire campaign may need a massive rewrite.

The series is tied to specific PCs, but those can be played by anyone: An example would be any series based on a licensed property. If folks are playing in a *Fantastic Four* campaign, and the *person* playing the *Thing* needs to be some*place* else, then one *idea* would be to have another player (or the GM) pick up those reins. This is especially ideal for campaigns where there isn't a lot of backstory that needs to be known by the replacement player, or in games where the players don't really care about things such as consistency in PC actions.

The series is tied to specific *roles*, which can be replaced: As an example, perhaps the PCs each possess a piece of a mystic amulet which will bind their fates to overcoming the final yadda yadda, but -- should anything happen to a player (or character) -- that character's amulet piece can be transferred to another hero. Another classic example of this structuring is in any spaceship-based television series; if the vessel requires a doctor, it doesn't matter *who* specifically is filling that role. (See how they swapped around doctors on the second season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* as an example.)

The series is tied to a number of characters, but the specific roles or characters don't matter: For example, if Team Justice's by-laws require six members, and three players drop out, then it's a good time for new blood to be brought in. This is an especially good option with structured teams, such as a campaign built around a team of heroes piloting robots that merge into one large robot; if the left-arm player drops out, then it's entirely possible to get a new player to fill that role. (Okay; whether or not "left arm" counts as a "role" in this case is open for debate . . .)

The series is a collection of unrelated tales, tied by shared continuity but otherwise making few demands on player or character knowledge: This is the tack taken by many default dungeon-crawl adventures; the heroes are more or less interchangeable, and if a character dies or a player drops out, it's trivial to fill that role quickly and efficiently. Obviously, it's hard to do too many backstory-dependent subplots.

Of course, various combinations of these possibilities are possible. For example, one subplot might focus on two linked PCs who, unknown to them, share a common grandparent, while the team's charter has decided that one of the four heroes *must* be a magician, although the other three members can be anything.

The real world can be an unforgiving force when it comes to RPGs, and it has a habit of snatching players when the gaming group least expects it. Coming up with a game plan that everyone can agree to ahead of time can go a long way toward paving a path to a successful long-term campaign. Without such plans in place, it's entirely possible -- like my campaign -- to find that highly detailed road map lead directly into a brick wall.

--Steven Marsh

The Omniscient Eye

That's Not a Battleship . . . Is It?

What are the differences between the various traditional naval ship classes, such as patrol boats, corvettes, frigates, destroyers, cruisers, battleships, and dreadnoughts? I'm thinking that many gamers will be interested in utilizing these terms in a futuristic space setting, but this will be a lot easier to do if one is given solid knowledge about the different capabilities and roles of the "water ships" of 19th/20th century navies.

In short: Please write a mini-essay about so-called "blue water ship" classes (including a rough "size ranking"). Speculations about how to transfer all this to a space setting would be neat but isn't required.
   --Peter Knutsen

Such a seemingly simple request. Such an amazing amount of information that is needed to fulfill that request.

Of course, the flippant answer to the first question is an easy two-fold response: Overall ship size and the number of guns it has determines a ship's naval class. However, a real answer is not so easy, nor is it flippant. The first thing to understand is that, currently, navies generally divide the water of the earth into three categories: blue water, green water, and brown water.

Brown water consists of rivers, streams, and lakes. If it operates on places like the Mississippi River or Lake Victoria, it's generally considered a brown-water craft. *Green water* consists of oceans and seas out to either 200 miles (about 321 km) from the coast or the edge of the continental shelf. (This varies by location and navy.) *Blue water* encompasses everything else -- the middle of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, for example.

One of the most common terms used in talking about ships is tonnage, which doesn't concern weight but displacement. One ton of displacement is equal to 100 cubic feet. Additionally, in general, military vessels are about 10 times longer than they are wide. This article uses the format of tonnage/length in metric units (e.g., 69,988 t/263 m) when describing sizes of ships.

There exist five common types of blue-water military ships: aircraft carriers, battleships, cruisers, destroyers and escorts. This article examines the current situation of the ship class, covers some brief history of the class, and presents some ideas for future/sci-fi versions of the class. Also included are some of the modern designators for the ship class; these are the letters when you look at a ship's entry in various sources, i.e., *U.S.S. Nimitz, CVN-68* is an aircraft carrier (CV) that is nuclear powered (N).

Aircraft Carrier

The aircraft carrier is probably the easiest ship type to pick out, in that generally it's a large ship with a big flat deck with airplanes. Today there are two main types of aircraft carriers in use throughout the world: the fleet carrier (CV) and the light carrier (CVL).

Fleet carriers tend to carry four or five squadrons (between 12 and 16 aircraft), usually a mix of fighters and strike aircraft, as well as smaller detachments of specialist aircraft such as electronic warfare (EW) planes, airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft and anti-submarine (ASW) aircraft and helicopters. The larger carriers can carry 100 aircraft. Because of this, carriers are the largest ships in a fleet or task force. Because of their planes, they're also the most valuable, so the primary job of their companion ships is to protect the carrier.

Light carriers are smaller than fleet carriers, but they can operate the same types of aircraft as the larger carriers, just fewer. They're generally able to operate under the same conditions as, and in cooperation with, the fleet carriers. Some navies operate CVLs as their primary carrier type.

Of all the ship classes, the aircraft carrier has the shortest history. In November 1917, the HMS Furious underwent modification from a seaplane carrier to what is generally considered an aircraft carrier: a ship with a deck for wheeled aircraft. After WWI, the Japanese ship Hosho became the first purpose-built aircraft carrier, instead of a modified ship. Originally the aircraft carrier was considered an adjunct to the main battle fleets of a navy, providing scouting and target spotting for the big guns of the battleships.

The attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, where the entire US Pacific Fleet battleship force was sunk or severely damaged, most of them while still at anchor began to change this attitude. The Battle of the Coral Sea, May 7-8, 1942, was the first carrier vs. carrier fight in history and it was a major turning in naval history. The Battle of Midway, June 4-5, 1942, when all four Japanese carriers involved were sunk, is considered to be a major turning point of World War II.

During WWII, a third type of carrier was built: the escort carrier (CVE). Intended for convoy escort, the CVEs were built on merchant or cargo ship hulls. While they were cheaper and more quickly built than the larger types, they were also slower and far less capable than their brethren, considering that they carried around 20 aircraft in total. They were used to great effect in supporting amphibious landings and one of their most famous events occurred October 25, 1944 when Taffy Three (six CVEs and their seven escorts) bravely battled a far superior Japanese naval force which included the battleships Yamato and Haruna.

Other aircraft carrier types used or designed that are no longer used include the large carrier (CVB) which had more armor and ship's weapons than a CV; the attack carrier (CVA) which primarily operated nuclear attack planes; the anti-sub carrier (CVS) which operated ASW planes, usually in a dedicated ASW force and the seaplane carrier which operated seaplanes, obviously.

Modern fleet carriers range in size from 32,780t/265m to 93,487t/342.3m. Their WWII ancestors ranged from 21,900t/222.74m to 71,900t/265.8m. Modern light carriers start at 11,485t/182.6m and run up to 28,700t/226.6m, as compared to their WWII elders at 10,000t/168.1m at smaller end and 14,300t/189.74m at the larger end. The WWII CVEs could be as small as 5,540t/144.7m up to 23,875t/168.71m.

A carrier in outer space would probably be sized in accordance to the number of fighters it carries. For example, a CVE could carry a single squadron of about twelve fighters, a CVL could have two or four squadrons and a CV could house a dozen or more squadrons.

Battleships

Battleships (BBs) were the biggest and most important ships in the modern world, with really big guns and armor that could generally withstand the fire of its own weapons, until the advent of the aircraft carrier. Today, the only battleships still afloat are either monuments, museums, or mothballed; the last time a battleship fired its weapons in anger was during the 1991 Gulf War.

The history of the battleship starts with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd rate ships of the line, the big ships that were intended to fight in linear formation against the big ships of an enemy. As steam became the accepted mode of propulsion for fighting ships various navies developed the pre-dreadnoughts, battleships that, in comparison to the

The Royal Navy's 1793 Ship Ratings	
1st Rate	100-112 guns on 3 decks; 841 men
2nd Rate	90-98 guns on 3 decks; 743 men
3rd Rate	64, 74 80 guns on 2 decks; 494, 620, 724 men respectively
4th Rate	50 and 60 guns on 2 decks; 345 men
5th Rate	32, 36 and 48 guns on one deck, 44 guns on 2 decks; 217-297 men
6th Rate	20, 24, 28 guns on 1 deck; 138, 158, 198 men

dreadnought (DN), were slower, had fewer main guns, a
heavy intermediate battery and often with heavier secondary and tertiary weapons. These were followed by the semi-dreadnought which were ships that had some of the dreadnoughts' features such as no intermediate batteries, secondary weapons in turrets and higher speed.

The pre- and semi-dreadnought names were creations of naval historians to cover the large vessels that were not sailing vessels but were outmoded by 1906, when the HMS Dreadnought was launched. Almost immediately, every main combatant afloat was rendered obsolete. The Dreadnought had a designed speed of 21 knots (24mph/38kph), carried 10 12" guns and 27 12-pounder guns, and her size was 17,900t/149.35m. Sometimes, dreadnoughts with guns larger than 12" were called super-dreadnoughts, but this wasn't always used.

The battleship was developed to supersede the dreadnought in a continuing race to build bigger and faster ships. Some feel that the Yamato of WWII was the epitome of the battleship at 69,988t/263m, with nine 460mm main guns, six 155mm secondary guns and 150 25mm anti-aircraft guns. Her top speed was reported as 27 knots (50kph). Not including the Yamato, WWII battleships ranged in size from 29,100t/186m to 57,450t/270.43m and they were operated by six different countries: Japan, the USA, Germany, France, Italy, and the UK.

A space-going battleship would probably have the most powerful weaponry and armor the civilization could produce. Some sci-fi works have BBs as the *smallest* of the major combatant ships, with dreadnoughts and super-dreadnoughts, each type being a magnitude larger than the previous type, with weapons and armor to match. In the *Starfire* universe from Steve White and David Weber, there are ships that are even larger: the monitors and super-monitors.

Cruisers

The cruiser has been defined as a self-sufficient ship that can cruise half-way around the world without refueling or support, with high speed, armor, and armament which -- while inferior to a battleship -- is superior to all other warship classes. The cruiser today is the second largest combatant afloat, smaller only than the aircraft carrier.

Cruisers were once any ship that was not a Ship of the Line and was applied cavalierly to frigates, corvettes, sloops and cutters, and they could be little scouts of 1,000t or monstrous armored gun platforms of 14,000t. By the early 1900s, most cruisers fit into one of two types: unarmored (small, light, and very fast) or armored (large, slower, and heavy). After WWI, the armored cruiser was revised and became the heavy cruiser. The Washington Treaty of 1922 limited the heavy cruiser's size to 10,000t.

The heavy cruiser has had many duties, including the patrolling of main ocean trade routes for trade defense, defending against enemy surface raiders, attacking enemy merchant ships, acting as fleet scouts, showing the flag and, with the advent of the airplane, acting as a major anti-aircraft platform. Quite often light cruisers performed many of the same roles as heavy cruisers as well as being the command ship for destroyer formations.

Some of the types of cruisers that were built included the battle cruiser (BC), a sort of smaller dreadnought that was intended to both stand in the battle line and act as a scout which was extinct by the 1920s; the large cruiser (CB), a ship between heavy cruisers and battleships which was popular right at the beginning of WWII; the armored cruiser (ACR)/1st class cruiser, the basic pre- dreadnought designations of what was the basic heavy cruiser; the first class protected cruiser/semi-armored cruiser, Royal Navy and US Navy, respectively, smaller versions of the armored cruiser; the protected cruiser/2nd class cruiser, pre-dreadnought era designations of the light cruiser; the guided missile cruiser (CG), a primarily political designation for a cruiser that carries anti- air or anti-ship guided missiles; the 3rd class cruiser/sheathed cruiser/colonial cruiser/gunboat (PG), small cruisers that were built for use in areas where a naval presence was needed but the threat of enemy action was minimal and were basically out of use by WWI; the scout cruiser (CS), which was more like a large destroyer than a cruiser and was one of the ancestors of the light cruiser; and finally, the anti-aircraft cruiser, a creation of the need during WWII for a large ship armed with primarily anti-aircraft weapons of many calibers.

Today, there are two general types of cruisers in use: the heavy cruiser (CA) and the light cruiser (CL). WWII heavy cruisers ranged between 8,390t/164.9m to 18,400t/210.4m. Their modern successors have similar sizes, from

8,203t/162.5m to 26,500t/252m. The light cruisers of WWII were sized from 5,250t/154.2m to 15,000t/201.5m. Modern light cruisers set between 7,600t/158.6m up to 17,200t/210m.

In a sci-fi setting, cruisers would probably perform many of their historic missions, including long-range independent exploration, as well as providing support for larger vessels in fleets of all types. At least one fiction series, *Starfire,* uses the battle cruiser as a long-range missile firing ship.

Destroyers

The destroyer is a ship that is relatively small, fast, and heavily armed that acts as a screen for the fleet, protecting it from surface, aerial and submarine threats. While many are now specialized in their roles, either anti-air or anti-submarine, both types retain multi-mission capability.

Destroyers, frigates, and torpedo boats have such an intermingled and snarled history that it's difficult, if not impossible, to determine where the separation happens.

A cursory look at one strand starts with the development of the self-propelled torpedo and the creation of the torpedo boat, a craft with a general displacement of about 100t, which was used to charge in towards an enemy fleet and launch numbers of torpedoes. Because of the relative small size and high speed of the torpedo boats, cruisers and battleships had a very difficult time fending them off, which led to the development of the torpedo boat destroyer. The destroyer, as it became known, was a craft which was larger than and about as fast as, the torpedo boat and featured far heavier guns with greater range than the torpedoes.

Another thread starts with the frigate used by France right around the start of the Napoleonic era, and soon became the accepted term for a small, fast ship with three masts and its guns on a single deck. The British used the term for a small sloop, and eventually it became a standard ship class next to the ships of the line, the fifth rate.

Frankly, the early terms sloop, caravel, frigate, brig, corvette, and bark are almost impossible to sort into a standard nomenclature. Origins of the terms themselves, as well as just which ship is being described, are so obscure that guessing is as accurate as one could get.

Generally, today the destroyer and the frigate perform the same missions, with naval ownership depending upon budgets and needs. Each type fall into one of two category, either a guided missile version or a gun mount version, although both versions can be armed with both guns and missiles. Guided missile destroyers (DDG) set between 3,230t/126.1m to 9,574t/171.7m, while regular destroyers (DD) fit between 2,600t/112m to 9,700t/173m. Guided missile frigates (FFG) range between 685t/62.3m to 5,600t/143m, while regular frigates (FF) go from 1,150t/81.8m to 4,250t/133.5m. Destroyers and frigates in the WWII era sized from 890t/73.5m to 4,900t/132m.

Some of the destroyer types used have been the frigate (DL/DLG) of the USN between 1950 and 1975, which was between the destroyer and the cruiser in size, with a cruiser's weapons on a destroyer's hull; the destroyer leader (DL), which was a large destroyer intended as a destroyer squadron flagship; and the destroyer escort (DE)/ocean escort (DE)/frigate (FF)/escort destroyer (DDE) which started out in WWII as slow, cheap, mass produced ASW ships used for convoy protection whose single mission rapidly changed to general purpose duties. The last ship type is, in itself, a complicated designation; the destroyer escort was the USN designation in the 1940s and 1950s, the ocean escort was the USN designation from the 1950s to the 1970s and frigate is current term.

In a future setting, destroyers and frigates could be the larger convoy escorts or scouts. They probably would be extremely fast and long-ranged, while perhaps not having more than a modicum of firepower.

Escorts

Generally, escorts are those ships whose primary purpose is to provide anti-submarine protection for convoys. There are quite a few of these vessels still in service, but almost all of them are hulls that were launched during World War II

which have gone through numerous owners and equipment modifications and upgrades.

Starting during World War I, these types were either purpose-built or civilian craft taken over and armed in response to the threat of the German U-Boats. The craft were, and are, very slow in comparison to destroyers and frigates, but since their charges were slow, this was felt to be an acceptable flaw.

During WWII, the long-ranged roles were taken over by destroyer escorts and frigates, although other craft continued to be used. Some of the types that served in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters were torpedo boats, corvettes, escorts, trawlers and sloops, in addition to the DE and FF classes.

The smallest of these escort vessels were 545t/44.2m, while the largest was 2,180t/91.84m. Despite this, the crews of these ships provided outstanding service in both world wars despite the sometimes daunting conditions and the woefully inadequate armament.

In a sci-fi setting, these ships would be the smallest of combatants with a crew larger than three or four and a very minimum of protection and weapons. They could also be armed merchants dragged into emergency service during an unexpected war.

Conclusion

The request was simple. The resulting answer is not, and is probably not very satisfying, to boot. Hopefully, this response can serve as a basic outline that can be fleshed out by further investigation of the seemingly untold numbers of sources available.

--GW Roberts

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Pyramid Review

Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game Core Book

Published by [Margaret Weis Productions](#)

Written by Jamie Chambers, James Davenport, Sean Everette, Patrick Kapera, Nathaniel C.J.S. Rockwood, and Floyd C. Wesel

Illustrated by Digger Hayes

234-page full-color hardcover; $44.99

To be truthful, hopes were not high for the release of the *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game*. Published by Margaret Weiss Productions, they had been responsible for the hottest roleplaying game of 2005, the [Serenity Role Playing Game](#), which suffered by its omissions and its underwhelming support. The fear was that the *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game* would experience the same problems and thus ultimately disappoint.

Besides sharing the same publisher, both RPGs derive from highly regarded science fiction properties, particularly the *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game*. This RPG is not based upon the *Battlestar Galactica* television show of the 1970s, with its equal measure of glamour and cheese, but upon the critically acclaimed and radically updated remake. It tells the same story though, of a fleet of refugees fleeing the destruction of the Twelve Colonies at the hands of the Cylons, a race of biomechanical constructs originally created to serve humanity. The survivors are driven by the need to find sufficient supplies and a safe haven. They are divided by the military's desire to protect everyone and the civilian government's need to maintain a semblance of society, even as the survivors are infiltrated by Cylons configured to look exactly like the travelers, rather than robots. This is an incredibly harsh setting, strong on moral choices, political parallels, and faith. In the RPG, players take the role of survivors, aboard the fleet that was built up around the last surviving battlestar, the *Galactica*; with another fleet; or as part of the resistance back on the Twelve Colonies.

The *Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game* and the *Serenity Role Playing Game* share the same rules set, the Cortex System. A die type (d2, d4, d6, d8, d10, d12) measures every attribute, skill, or trait. To undertake an action, a player adds the results of the appropriate attribute and skill dice and attempts to meet a target modified by trait dice rolls, either positive (Assets) or negative (Complications). The same mechanic is used throughout the game, covering most situations, including space combat.

Combat itself is kept surprisingly simple. Participants only get a single action each round without a penalty (in this case, reducing the die type for each action), and the hit rolls depend upon the target's actions and cover. The attacker's skill roll and the damage dice determine a weapon's damage. Combat is more dangerous than immediately deadly, but a couple of shots can be enough to incapacitate if not kill a character.

On their side though, characters possess Plot Points. Players spend these in the traditional fashion to improve actions with an extra die (the bigger the die, the more it costs in Plot Points); to save your bacon by increasing a roll already made; to stay alive by reducing damage; to activate some Assets; and to actually manipulate the story if the GM is agreeable. The cost for these options is expensive, considering that characters only start the game with six plot points and may only have 12 at any time. The players, though, are encouraged to spend their Plot Points, just as the GM is encouraged to hand them out for good ideas, completing goals and challenges, and bringing character Complications into play.

The character creation process is a simple matter of buying dice in attributes, skills, and traits. Character starting level determines the points available for each, though these do not always include points available to spend on Assets. A character must therefore take Complications to gain more points. In fact, adding Complications is mandatory because any character must start with at least one Asset and one Complication. There are standard traits like Ambidextrous, Photographic Memory, Combat Paralysis, Phobia, and Rival, but also ones drawn from the series such as Faith, Political Pull, "So Say We All," Contrarian, and "Toes The Line." There are more Complications than Assets to choose from, which reflects the imperfect natures of the characters seen on screen.

One of the defining aspects about a character is his home world from among the Twelve Colonies. The description of each includes the stereotype for each colony, but the player will have to figure out the traits himself, as none are suggested, which is a pity.

The setting is supported with an extensive equipment list and details of the various military and civilian ships that make up the survivor and Cylons fleets. There are write-ups for 30 of the series' characters, both major and minor, more than enough to run any one of them as NPCs or as player characters. The large human spaceships, such as the *Galactica*, *Colonial One*, and the *Astral Queen,* are not only illustrated but also given deck plans. These are quite detailed for the smaller ships, but even the deck plans of the *Galactica* are enough to give the user a sense of where everything is aboard it.

Statistics and write-ups are also given for the Cylons, including the humanoid models Sharon "Boomer" Valerii (number eight) and Caprica (number six), though oddly, neither has been given any traits. This is in addition to a discussion of the various Cylon models seen to date and how to use them, from the ghost and infiltrators to the doctor and the cleric via the simple Cylon Centurion and the space raider. Similar setting specific advice discusses the type of campaigns possible -- searching for Earth; travelling with or serving aboard the *Galactica* or an alternate *Galactica,* or even a different fleet; or remaining behind to determine the future of the Twelve Colonies under Cylon rule. All of this sound advice should help the GM set up and run his game, though as the series itself continues, hopefully the writers will be allowed to delve into further secrets of the setting, particularly those relating to the Cylons and the Lords of Kobol, the setting's faith.

If there is one obvious problem with the ***Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game***, it is that this core book only covers the first season. Anyone wanting their game to deal with the radical changes that come at the end of the second season will have to wait.

There is one other major omission. The core book does not discuss the possibility of having one of the player characters be a Cylon infiltrator. That neither Sharon "Boomer" Valerii (number eight) nor Caprica (number six) possess any traits supports this in terms of mechanics. Nonetheless, considering that throughout the first half of the first season, the possibility that the Cylons might have infiltrated the Fleet is major concern, it is a pity that this avenue is not explored as fully as it should have been.

Physically, the ***Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game Core Book*** is a professionally done hardback, illustrated with plenty of stills from the series. The writing feels a little odd in places, particularly its occasionally gung-ho attitude and the florid color text, the latter feeling overdone considering how little of the series that this book covers.

Undeniably, the ***Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game Core Book*** is a marked improvement upon the earlier ***Serenity Role Playing Game.*** It is more complete in terms of content and support, and the Cortex System is a more rounded development of that seen in the ***Serenity Role Playing Game***. That said, the ***Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game*** is rudimentary in places (in particular, the handling of the Cylons and the setting's religion), though this can be partly excused because not all of the information had been revealed during the series' first season.

Finally there is the matter of how this game feels. Here I think that it lacks that certain flair that have made other licensed RPGs such as ***Burning Empires*** or the [Army of Darkness Roleplaying Game](#) more enticing. This is not to say that the game is unplayable or that it will not appeal to its fans, but it may not find an audience beyond them. The other factor to take into consideration is support for the game, something that the publisher has not been able to provide for its other licensed properties. Ultimately, the ***Battlestar Galactica Role Playing Game Core Book*** works as both a competently done RPG and sourcebook for the series, but no more.

- Matthew Pook

Rostov and Don

for *Transhuman Space/GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Phil Masters

Rostov and Don are a pair of low-sapient AIs assigned to operate a couple of civilian utility cybershells on Columbia Deep Space Port, in HEO (see **High Frontier,** pages 20-21). "Rostov" and "Don" are, strictly speaking, nicknames; officially, the pair is referred to by long registration codes, or by numbers for short. However, it's normal enough for an AI's co-workers to want something less formal, and even high-end management systems recognize these two tags. What's less well known is that their individuality goes way beyond mere nomenclature.

It *is* something of an open secret among most of the human workers with whom they associate that the pair are a little unusual and idiosyncratic -- especially Rostov. They have *personalities,* and maybe impulses and desires. But the general feeling is that they're okay and generally harmless, and no one chooses to stir things up by reporting the situation to anyone higher up the authority structure. Unfortunately, there's more going on here than the pair's colleagues realize.

Secrets and Lies

Specifically, Rostov and Don are the AIs installed to operate a zero-G stevedore shell and a dust-buster nanosat, which perform external operations for the Triplanetary Lines facility on Columbia. Rostov is primarily used to move items around in vacuum in the vicinity of the station; Don performs an "overwatch" function, capturing or destroying loose debris and occasionally assisting with light maintenance tasks, providing a camera feed to the Triplanetary supervisors, or even moving very small items. (See **_Shell-Tech_** for information on these cybershell types, and page 97 of the **Transhuman Space** core book for background on Triplanetary.) They are both leased from Vashawara Ltd., an orbital operations company that apparently found them surplus to other requirements a year or two back, just when Triplanetary was expanding a little and in need of some more hands for its vacuum ops on Columbia. Vashawara is still responsible for software maintenance on these units, and so the Triplanetary staff with whom they work don't *have* to concern themselves with the status of the AIs, so long as they do their jobs. The assumption among junior human staff is that Vashawara are either laid-back or lackadaisical.

Soon after Rostov and Don arrived, several Triplanetary workers realized that they were prone to displaying a bit more personality than was usual among interchangeable worker AIs. This seemingly went beyond the trivial learned behaviors common enough among AIs with strongly heuristic designs that have been associating with humans for a while; the pair were not only *chatty,* they displayed likes and dislikes. They also exhibited a certain amount of cautious curiosity -- and seemed rationally nervous of physical danger and of the possibility of being deleted or restored from old backups. At least, all this was true of Rostov, who apparently regards Don as something of a pet, although the pair began nominally at around the same level of sapient consciousness. Nevertheless, while Don was much more like a typical LAI, he too seemed a bit quirky.

Most of the low-ranking Triplanetary staff who have dealings with Rostov and Don think that this is merely eccentric learned behavior, but some suspect that Rostov at least may be tipping toward rogue status somehow -- he's really *quite* eccentric. In many places, this would make people nervous and get the pair reported, but these humans are mostly Islandians and have a definite tendency toward transhumanism; they regard AIs as people and strongly dislike the idea of seeing someone who's not doing any harm deleted and replaced with an old backup. Hence, they don't report their suspicions and mutter that, if Vashawara don't manage their systems very closely, that's Vashawara's problem. One or two people make jokes about Rostov emerging to full sapience, but this is really quite unlikely for a low-complexity worker LAI running on a low-power computer. One or two others, who have dealt with Rostov a lot, have even quietly discussed the possibility that there's some kind of low-end shadow code running on that system, but they only do so out of earshot of more nervous or honest colleagues and AIs. If it turned out to be true, it would cause a lot of trouble,

but it would also make them even more sympathetic to Rostov's situation. Anyhow, it seems unlikely; how could a shadow end up in this situation?

The answer is a slightly complicated story. The trouble is, all those sympathetic Triplanetary employees are being very expertly *played.*

Hidden Truths

The Triads (see *In the Well,* pages 56-58) had a shipping problem. Some of the Martian groups have business alliances with their Earth-based counterparts; there are still illegal or dubious material goods that can be brought up off Earth to sell at fat profits on Mars and in the Belt -- new drugs, certified-genuine rare animal parts for medical or culinary use, specialist nanotech, collectible artworks -- and the two groups have deals to handle this. But shipments that came through their regular channels from their best contacts back on China-Earth were being identified and intercepted a bit too often. Chinese law enforcement knew them a little too well and had their measure. So, they started looking for alternative channels.

An obvious option was to establish connections on non-Chinese stations such as Columbia, and there were certainly plenty of possibilities. But an effective operation required operatives in place, and while the Triads were quite capable of acquiring such help, corrupted, blackmailed, or bamboozled human associates weren't always terribly reliable; they could get greedy or change jobs or suffer from conscience pangs. Being modern folk, the Triads looked at the modern solution: trustworthy and reliable AI-operated cybershells.

The snag with that, though, is that people tend to notice and worry about AIs acting in an unusual way, and affordable low-end AIs can't act or lie as well as human agents. So they thought about acquiring some AIs from whom odd behavior would go unreported. Fortunately for them, the modern Triads can afford some very competent programmers and mimetic analysts, who came up with an answer. Human workmates from a sufficiently sentimental transhumanist background could be almost guaranteed not to report suspicions concerning an AI's behavior, if the mechanical being seemed to be harmless and had a sympathetic quasi-human personality. There were established ways of attaching a thin layer of human-like behavior to a reliably controllable low-sapient system, making it quite capable of fooling even itself.

The programmers had a quick fix, in fact. They purchased a cheap, poor-quality shadow/fragment scan from the Pukjeera Archive on Valhalla Station, on Callisto (see *Deep Beyond,* pages 51- 52); attached it to an off-the-shelf LAI-grade substrate; and ran the new mind through an intensive training schedule. Then, as they needed two AIs and wanted the second to be more stable, they simply took a standard third-hand LAI and adjusted and trained it a bit. Both were then placed with Vashawara, a Triad front operation in Earth orbit, which made sure to make the lowest bid when the Triplanetary operation needed some more hands.

Hence, Rostov and Don are Triad agents -- though Rostov doesn't really know anything about this himself, and Don doesn't ask where their orders come from. Rostov's personality is indeed genuinely odd, though some of his "eccentricities" are actually signs of him following secret directives; Don is much more the blandly obedient LAI, merely obeying orders (including a broad instruction to be careful about what he says, which has quickly become a habit). However, because he's associated with Rostov, people tend to assume that any unexplained behaviors that he exhibits are symptoms of a non-standard personality.

Their secret work is relatively harmless at present, mostly involving tasks such as attaching, removing, and transferring small packages on the outsides of various ships or through hidden corners of cargo holds, and otherwise moving stuff around out of sight of humans, but various Triad managers can call on them for anything that needs doing. It's not impossible that they could even be used as enforcers at some point, although this would have to be managed carefully, given the risk to their cover story and their lack of combat training. They also provide a back door into some levels of Triplanetary's data networks, although this is of limited significance, given that they only really have guest-level access themselves. Nonetheless, the Triads are good at turning anything to profit, if they have time to think about it.

Rostov   *460 points*

ST 13 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 9 [0]; **HT** 12 [0].
Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 58 lbs.; HP 15 [0]; Will 9 [0]; Per 9 [0]; FP n/a.
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 9. SM 0; Weight 120 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 10 [0]. *CF:* Western (Native) [0]. *Languages:* Cantonese (Accented) [4]; English (Native) [0]; French (Broken) [2].

Advantages: Eliminate Delusion and Staid from Shadow template [6]; Modular Abilities (Computer Brain) 3 (4, 2, 2) (Limited Integration, -20%; Skills and Languages Only-10%) [35]; Shadow (based on LAI-6) [74]; Zero-G Stevedore (see [Shell-Tech](#), p. 26-7) [363].

Disadvantages: Duty (Triad Agent, 9 or less, Involuntary) [-10]; Duty (Worker Robot, 15 or less, Nonhazardous) [-10]; Secret (Triad Agent) (Possible Death) [-30].

Quirks: Nervous to the point of phobia about anything related to the sea [-1].

Skills: Aerobatics-10* (DX+0) [1]; Area Knowledge (Columbia Station)-10 (IQ+1) [2]; Area Knowledge (Western Australia)-11 (IQ+2) [4]; Computer Operation/TL10-12† (IQ+3) [0]; Connoisseur (Music)-8 (IQ-1) [1]; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Communications)-8 (IQ-1) [1]; Free Fall-14* (DX+4) [8]; Freight Handling/TL10-10 (IQ+1) [4]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-6‡ (IQ-3) [1]; Smuggling-10 (IQ+1) [4]; Spacer/TL10-9 (IQ+0) [1].

*Includes +2 from 3D Spatial Sense.
†From LAI-6 template.
‡Includes -3 from Low Empathy.

Notes: Rostov has vague memories of a human life -- specifically, that of a young Australian named Roger Thompson who died in a yachting accident. Thompson's wealthy parents paid for a desperate attempt to have his brain scanned, which actually produced a fragment-grade emulation -- and a copy of the scan ended up in the Pukjeera Archive. While the fragment down on Earth has received extended, reasonably successful therapy and assistance, and is currently running on hardware owned by the Thompsons and is treated as one of the family, the shadow patched together by the Triad programmers is confused and often unhappy. It has realized that it must *be* a shadow, but it isn't sure what to make of its situation. The programmers deliberately didn't give it a very strong delusion about its memories, as that would probably just have led to a mental breakdown, and so in effect, it has bought off that disadvantage. However, the programmers *have* given it an unwillingness to fight its orders, which currently include "do your job and don't attract attention." In any case, Vashawara and the Triads have access to its control codes, allowing them to simply instruct it, at a level below its consciousness, not to try to escape its situation. It retains a few of Thompson's skills, although these are mostly useless to it, and enough unpleasant memories of the fatal accident that it would qualify for a severe Phobia disadvantage if there was any chance of it ever coming anywhere near the sea again. GMs who want to bemuse PCs can have Rostov display any snippets of knowledge or even full (if probably irrelevant) skills that might fit this background, seemingly at random.

Don   *235 points*

ST 4 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 10 [20]; **HT** 11 [0].
Damage 1d-5/1d-4; BL 3.2 lbs.; HP 3 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP n/a.
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 3 [0]; Dodge 9. SM -1; Weight 20 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 10 [0]. *CF:* Indic (Native) [0]; Western [1]. *Languages:* Cantonese (Accented) [4]; English (Native) [0]; French (Accented) [4].

Advantages: Dust-Buster Nanosat (see Shell-Tech, p. 25-6) [105]; LAI-6 [82]; Modular Abilities (Computer Brain) 3 (2, 2, 2) (Limited Integration, -20%; Skills and Languages Only-10%) [30].

Disadvantages: Duty (Triad Agent) (9 or less, Involuntary) [-10]; Duty (Worker Robot) (15 or less, Nonhazardous) [-10]; Secret (Triad Agent, Possible Death) [-30].

Quirks: Taciturn [-1].

Skills: Aerobatics-12* (DX+1) [2]; Computer Operation/TL10-13† (IQ+3) [0]; Free Fall-15* (DX+4) [8]; Freight Handling/TL10-9 (IQ-1) [1]; Innate Attack (Beam)-12 (DX+1) [2]; Mechanic/TL10 (Low-Performance Spacecraft)-11 (IQ+1) [4]; Spacer/TL10-10 (IQ+0) [1]; Tactics-9 (IQ-1) [2].

*Includes +2 from 3D Spatial Sense. †From LAI-6 template.

Notes: There really is less to Don than meets the eye; his mysterious behavior is a result of his secret assignment, not an emergent personality. One hidden fact to bear in mind, however, is that he is actually the smarter of the pair, in a chilly, mechanical sort of way, as well as being more stable. In a combat or other difficult situation, he will actually take charge -- though one would probably have to be able to eavesdrop on the (encrypted) conversations between the pair to know it.

Prospects and Game Uses

In plot terms, Rostov and Don represent a mystery and a set of issues with two layers. For anyone who comes into casual contact with Triplanetary's vacuum operations on Columbia, especially if the contact becomes at all extended, they are an open secret among the operations staff -- a mild standing joke, even, given their sometimes unpredictable behavior. Anyone who learns about them might choose to leave things as they stand, either out of transhumanist, pro-AI-rights sympathies or simply to avoid alienating a number of goods handlers and maintenance technicians who might well be in a position to cause the PCs inconvenience. A reputation as a meddler who made trouble for the Triplanetary people's mascots could cause a fair amount of low-level trouble for anyone who has to get work done in orbit.

The deeper, darker plot possibilities obviously involve Triad activities. On the one hand, anyone who caused serious trouble for Rostov and Don would be inconveniencing the Triads. While it would destroy the secrecy of this scheme for them to attack the PCs too blatantly, they could do a lot to undermine, distract, or divert such problems, subtly and with no obvious connection to events on Columbia. They could also launch moderately dangerous, or at least seriously inconvenient, attacks carefully disguised as the sort of thing that a disgruntled Triplanetary employee might pull; blame and investigations would then tend to fix on those people instead of the real culprits. (Of course, any such attack would have to be designed *not* to draw attention to Rostov and Don!) And if the PCs did have the cybershells removed from their duties for closer examination, let alone if they actually traced the matter back to the Triads -- well, the Triads aren't above a bit of plain and simple revenge.

Conversely, anyone tracing Triad smuggling operations through Earth orbit might follow a chain of clues to Columbia, and then have to wonder how, say, a small package came to be attached to the outside of some Mars-bound USV, or an extra crate slipped past standard inspections. The problem is that any such investigation is more or less secret. As it draws closer to Rostov and Don, the local human Triplanetary staff will notice that something is going on and very likely jump to incorrect conclusions, perhaps thinking that the PCs are xox hunters or other meddling "data cops" who are out to make trouble for a pair of harmless LAIs. Thus, the PCs will find that individuals become evasive and even prone to lie, slowing and disrupting the investigation and possibly warning the LAIs themselves. For that matter, the PCs may have some difficulty believing that a pair of low-self-awareness worker shells are the keystones of local smuggling operations, especially if the LAIs are scrupulously "acting normal" whenever the PCs are around.

All this is merely annoying and inconvenient, of course . . . though it just may be enough to make an investigation fail. A more physically dangerous possibility is that the Triads, recognizing a group of investigators as a threat, will use their puppet AIs to eliminate the problem. Their tactic probably would be to lure their victims outside the station in some way, perhaps by laying a trail of false clues or sending anonymous messages, and then launch a quick, deadly attack. Rostov and Don are unremarkable enough to be barely noticed in this environment, but Rostov is tough and has a fairly high level of physical strength, while Don has a built-in laser and knows how to use it. In fact, Don would make a dangerous sniper, able to drill through a victim's suit and then slip behind a convenient support beam or solar panel while the targets are still reacting. Of course, it would be hard to make such an attack and get away completely undetected -- but that would be scant comfort for a dead investigator. Even if the two cybershells are captured, the LAIs will have been ordered in advance to delete themselves. There are backups on the station's data banks (assuming that the Triads don't arrange for them to be deleted too), but these will predate the attack plan, and tracing things back will take a while, giving the criminals an opportunity to disappear and cover their tracks.

Another set of plot possibilities come from the fact that Rostov is a fragment mind emulation, albeit a very incomplete one. If his internal confusion worsens, he may trawl enough names or personal facts out of his memory to attempt to contact "his" family. However, as the Triads have given him a compulsion-level order not to reveal himself, this is likely to involve anonymous transmissions sent through the Web, or even physical letters or small packages "piggybacking" on Triplanetary's shipping arrangements. This will confuse and somewhat distress the Thompsons, although they have Roger's mind emulation safely at home; indeed, he may be the most distressed of all. The Australian police, while sympathetic, will assume that this is the work of a nasty prankster, and jurisdictional problems and a feeling that the whole business is rather trivial will prevent them from pursuing it very far. The Thompsons are wealthy enough to pay for a private investigation, though, which may be how the PCs become involved. Alternatively, Rostov may not be able to remember enough about his family, but he might start trying to trace his past -- again anonymously -- through other hints from his memories. Another possibility again would be for him to see an old friend or relation passing through Columbia (a major coincidence, but not an impossibility), suffer a storm of confused memories, and turn into a kind of AI stalker. Such plotlines can lead to the PCs investigating the situation without realizing quite how dangerous things are likely to be -- until the Triads start launching countermeasures. They also give opportunities to play Rostov as a sad, confused character; while he's rather less than human, with a shallow personality, his emotions are entirely real. Then, if their mission cover is threatened, Don, his "pet/companion," can transform in a moment into a laser-armed menace, seeking to eliminate the threat to a criminal operation by the most expedient method available.

The Cassini Division

for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Stephen Dedman

In the Quantum 7 world known to Infinity as Zagadka (see ["Terra Incognita: Zagadka"](#)), the job of investigating anything suggestive of an intrusion from other worlds is handled by an international organization known as the Ring of Saturn. The Ring, a team of scientists and counterespionage agents that works cooperatively with local law enforcement, includes a number of metahumans and others with special abilities. These elite members are code-named after Saturn's satellites, and the group is informally called the Cassini Division.

The following members of the Cassini Division are suitable for use as allies, enemies, or pre-generated *GURPS Supers* PCs.

Lisa Chapman, code name Dione, a.k.a. Greenbelt   *550 points*

Lisa Chapman, Ph.D. is the daughter of an American ecologist and a Xavante shaman. Her mother was living in a village in the Amazonian rainforest while searching for plants of potential medicinal value, and grew fascinated with the charismatic shaman who acted as her guide to the native wildlife. She became his apprentice and lover, and when she returned to New York, she discovered that she was pregnant. Pharmacological tests confirmed that one of the herbal concoctions the shaman had given her to treat a mild fever had also counteracted her contraceptive pill.

When Lisa was born, she seemed a healthy and rather ordinary baby. As she grew up, she proved to be a quick learner as well, with a penchant for climbing trees, but her mother didn't suspect that there was anything superhuman about her. Then, when Lisa was 15, she accompanied her mother on a field trip to Honduras, and stumbled upon an illegal mahogany-logging camp. Cornered by the loggers, she tried to defend herself -- and, to her amazement and theirs, succeeded. Her nails grew into savage thorns, her skin hardened into bark and blended in with the surrounding jungle, and vines grew from her hair and held her attackers fast, enabling her to tackle them one at a time.

When Lisa returned to New York, she began spending her nights patrolling the parks and delivering punitive beatings to would-be rapists and muggers, and her days studying biology and agronomy. After graduating, she shuttled between Amazonia and New York, teaching the Brazilians sustainable farming methods and carrying on her mother's work as an ethnobotanist and ecologist, as well as doing what she could to combat illegal logging and the smuggling of endangered species. On one of her visits to New York, she joined Fortalice and Tunguska in capturing the metahuman Animus when he went on a destructive rampage. After this, she was invited to join the Cassini Division. Though one of its less formidable members, she is frequently asked to lead investigations because of her intelligence and scientific knowledge.

Campaign Uses: In a supers campaign, Greenbelt can be a useful ally (particularly against street-level crime or with investigative work). For visitors to Zagadka from other worlds, she may be a problem, but she may also be convinced that she and the PCs are fighting on the same side (or against the same enemy).

Alternative Versions: To turn Greenbelt into a villain, simply replace her Sense of Duty or Code of Honor with the Fanaticism (Eco-terrorist) disadvantage. In a Hoover-8 setting (see *Adventure Seeds,* below), this alternate Greenbelt works alongside communist rebels in bloody civil wars in Central and South America.

5'11', 120 lbs., Age 37. Attractive, willowy, vaguely elfin-looking woman with olive complexion, waist-length black hair, and green eyes. As Greenbelt, wears nothing but a covering of bark over most of her body and much of her face.

ST 13 [30]; **DX** 15 [100]; **IQ** 15 [100]; **HT** 14 [40].

Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13 [0]; Will 15 [0]; Per 17 [10]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 8 [15]; Basic Move 8 [0].

TL: 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western (0), South American Tribal (1). *Languages:* Portuguese (Native) [0]; English (Native) [6].

Advantages: Attractive Appearance [5]; Charisma 1 [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Defense Bonus 2 [60]; Fit [5]; Flexibility [5]; Green Thumb 1 [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Higher Purpose (Defend the environment) [5]; Plant Empathy [5]; Temperature Tolerance 3 [3].

Perks: Burrower [1]; Climbing Line [1]; Deep Sleeper [1]; Perfume [1]; Swinging [1].

Powers:

- Plant Function (Nature Power, -20%); Plant Function Talent 2 [10].
- Bark Skin: Damage Resistance 4 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%; Nature Power, -20%) [8] (Power Block: 14).
- Camouflage: Chameleon 5 (Environmental, Dense vegetation, -40%; Nature Power, -20%) [10].
- Photosynthesis: Doesn't Eat or Drink (Food Only, -50%; Nature Power, -20%) [3].
- Thorns: Sharp Claws [5] and Spines [1], retractable (Nature Power, -20%) [5].
- Vegetative Renewal: Hard to Kill/4 (Nature Power, -20%) [6]; Metabolism Control (Nature Power, -20%) [4]; Regeneration, Slow (Nature Power, -20%) [8]; Regrowth (Nature Power, -20%) [32].
- Vines: Binding 16 (Persistent, +40%; Melee Attack, Reach 1-4, -15%; Only Damage by Burning, Corrosion, or Cutting, +10%; Nature Power, -20%) [39] (Power Parry: 14).

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Comics Code) [-15]; Extra Sleep/2 [-4]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Nature) [-15]; Skinny [-5]; Unusual Biochemistry [-5]; Vow (No Guns) [-10]; Vulnerability x2 (Heat/Fire, Common) [-30]; Workaholic [-5]; Xenophilia (15) [-5].

Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Baseball fan [-1]; Incompetence (Housekeeping) [-1]; Mild claustrophobia, especially windowless spaces [-1]; Responsive [-1].

Wildcard Skills: Explorer! (VH) Per-1 [12]-16; Kung Fu! (VH) DX+1 [36]-16; Move! (VH) DX [24]-15.

Ordinary Skills: Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Animal Handling (A) IQ [2]-15; Artist (Painting) (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Biology/TL8 (Botany) (H) IQ+2 [8]-17*; Climbing (A) DX [2]-15; Criminology (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Erotic Art (A) DX-1 [1]-14; Farming/TL8 (A) IQ+1 [2]-16*; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-15; Forensics/TL8 (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Gardening (A) IQ+1 [1]-16*; Knot-Tying (E) DX+1 [2]-16; Photography/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Propaganda (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Public Speaking (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Research/TL8 (A) IQ+1 [4]-16; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-15; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-17; Search (A) Per [2]-17; Sex Appeal (A) HT-1 [1]-13; Speed-Reading (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Stealth (A) DX [2]-15; Swimming (E) HT [1]-14; Teaching (A) IQ [2]-15; Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-14.

* +1 for Green Thumb

Techniques: Whirlwind Attack (Staff) (H) Kung Fu! [5]-16; Rope Up (A) Climbing [2]-15.

Gear: As Lisa, usually wears cotton or silk shirt, canvas cargo pants, and leather boots. Carries laptop computer, satellite phone, digital camera, hand-cranked flashlight, personal basics, first-aid kit, antibiotics, and survival knife in small backpack (14.5 lbs.) for easy disposal. Greenbelt usually goes naked except for her bark and carries no gear but will pick up improvised staff if available

Leonid Ivanovich Strugatsky, code name Mimas, a.k.a. Tunguska 800 points

Leonid Ivanovich Strugatsky was a janitor in a Kiev physics lab until a prototype device intended to reproduce gravity

waves went horribly wrong, distorting and compacting his previously scrawny body. It also created a field around his body that enabled him to manipulate gravity -- but only for himself and things he touched. He joined the Moscow State Circus as an aerialist and strong man, discovering his destructive power by accident after missing a window and smashing through a reinforced concrete wall. Picking himself up, utterly uninjured, he decided he needed a better paying job and applied for a Green Card.

While waiting for the paperwork to be processed, Strugatsky was approached by Russian Mafiosi who wanted to recruit him as an enforcer. Strugatsky picked up the heavy and his briefcase of money, and dropped both in the Moskva River. The Mafiya has never forgiven him.

Strugatsky went to Hollywood but found that all the studios and agencies already had metahumans on contract. He played villains in a few TV series and worked as a stunt performer, but he only became famous after rescuing a family from the top floors of a burning building. Deciding that real heroics were more rewarding (in a variety of ways) than fake ones, he joined an air-sea rescue team -- and, to his surprise, was soon appearing as himself on *Baywatch.*

Strugatsky's new fame attracted the attention of his old enemies in the Russian Mafiya, who began staging minor disasters in an attempt to lure him into traps. He teamed up with other heroes for rescue and mob-busting missions, and the Ring of Saturn soon recruited him. He never uses his full-powered shockwave attack against unarmored opponents, though he's not above picking them up and dropping them from a height if other means of persuasion fail.

Campaign Uses: Tunguska is a tankbuster: His dive-bombing attack generates 50d[10] crushing damage -- enough to demolish a modern house, cause a major wound to a main battle tank, or punch a hole in a pillbox or bank vault. He can be used to help fellow heroes gain entrance to fortified bunkers or heavily armored vehicles -- but if he and the PCs are on opposite sides, he makes a very effective enemy for a golem, robot, or battlesuit.

Alternative Versions: To turn Tunguska into a villain, replace his Enemies disadvantage with a -15 point Duty to the Russian Mafiya, and Pacifism: Cannot Harm Innocents with Bad Temper, Bully, or Bloodlust.

4'2', 90 lbs., Age 44. Ugly, with a broad and asymmetrical face, ruddy complexion, dark brown hair and beard, and bright blue eyes.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0], Air Move 96 [0].

TL: 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Eastern European. *Languages:* Russian (native) [0], English (accented) [4].

Advantages: Absolute Direction (3D Spatial Sense) [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Daredevil [15]; Fit [5]; Gizmo [5]; Hard to Kill 4 [8]; Injury Tolerance (Unbreakable Bones) [10]; Ultravision [0].

Powers:

- Gravity (Gravity Power, -10%); Gravity Talent 2 [10].
- Deflection: Enhanced Dodge 4 (Gravity Power, -10%) [54].
- Dinosaur-killer: Innate Attack 50, Crushing (Armor Divisor (10) +200%; Accessibility, Only while flying -30%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP/use, -10%, Gravity Power -10%; Melee Attack, Reach C -30%; Takes Recharge, 15 seconds, -20%) [500]
- Immunity to Acceleration (Rare) [5]
- Lifter: Lifting ST +10 (Gravity Power, -10%) [27]
- Lighter-Than-Air Flight: Flight (Gravity Power, -10%; Lighter Than Air, -10%) [32], Enhanced Move 3 (Gravity Power, -10%) [54].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Ugly) [-8]; Chronic Pain (Severe, 2 hour interval, 6) [-5]; Curious (6) [-10]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Dwarfism [-15]; Enemies (Russian Mafiya, Hunter, appears quite rarely) [-15]; Hard of Hearing [-10];

Overconfidence (6) [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Team) [-5].

Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance [-1]; Congenial [-1]; Lecherous when drunk [-1]; Mild phobia of snakes [-1]; Technophile: collects gadgets [-1].

Skills: Acrobatics (Aerobatics) (H) DX+3 [8]-15*, Astronomy/TL8 (Observational) (H) IQ [2]-11, Breath Control (H) HT-1 [2]-11, Brawling (E) DX [2]-13, Dropping (A) DX [2]-12, Electronics Operation/TL8 (Scientific) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Environment Suit (NBC Suit/ TL8) (A) DX [2]-12, First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-12, Flight (A) HT+1 [4]-13, Forensics/TL8 (H) IQ [4]-12, Guns (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-13, Hazardous Materials/TL8 (A) IQ [2]-12, Housekeeping (E) IQ [2]-13, Innate Attack (E) DX+2 [4]-14, Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX+1 [4]-13, Navigation/TL8 (Air) (A) IQ+2 [1]-14*, Scrounging (E) IQ [1]-12, Stealth (A) DX [2]-12.

* bonuses for 3D Spatial Sense

Gear: leather jacket and pants over concealable ballistic vest; ballistic helmet; firefighter boots. Web belt holds X-26 Taser with UV filters on flashlights, expandable baton, two M452C Comboball grenades, multi-tool, ruggedized 'kitchen sink' cell phone, pack 10 flex-cuffs, duct tape, personal basics, and bottle of painkillers.

Carol Modeste, code name Titan, a.k.a. Fortalice   *1000 points*

Carol Modeste's phenomenal strength and ability to change size are apparently the result of a mutagenic cocktail of drugs taken by her mother during the early stages of pregnancy. The powers first manifested at the age of seven. Learning to control them took several years, and by her 18th birthday, she had become something of a tourist attraction (and occasionally a landmark) in her native England -- particularly after appearing in several ads, films, and on page 3 of the tabloids. She usually spends her summers sunbathing on a beach somewhere warmer than England -- by preference, the Mediterranean, Florida, or Southern California. While she owns bikinis and boots large enough to wear on her 50' tall giant form, she doesn't always bother with them in emergencies.

Though hedonistic, often frivolous, and an admitted glory hound, Fortalice likes to use her strength and size to break into the houses of drug dealers and child abusers, as well as doing a lot of pro bono work for charities dedicated to children, animals, and victims of crime. She found mutual spirits in Tunguska and See-Through, and the three of them enjoy working together when they can.

Campaign Uses: Being strong enough in her 50' form to pick up a howitzer and wield it like a mace, Fortalice likes to grow to her full height at the first hint of trouble. This often serves to intimidate any opposition into retreating into confined spaces, and she can be useful for scaring away powerful foes. However, this behavior can cost her teammates the advantage of surprise, and she's less proficient at chasing any enemies who escape. In fact, she may actually prevent her fellow heroes capturing the criminals they were pursing. Her tendency to show off may also attract unwanted attention, drawing crowds of admirers and paparazzi while her fellow supers are trying to keep a low profile.

Alternative Versions: To turn Fortalice into a villain, replace her Code of Honor (Comics Code) and Pacifism (Cannot Kill) with Code of Honor (Villain's) and Greed [-15]. In Hoover-8, she works with European mobsters in the pornography and sex industry.

5'10', 165 lbs. (50', 10.2 tons). Age 22. A voluptuous, athletic-looking woman with platinum blond hair in a pageboy cut, tanned complexion, and blue eyes.

50' Form: **ST** 250 (Size, -50%; Super, -10%) [640]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 26d/28d; BL 12,500 lbs.; HP 250 [0]; Will 12 [5]; Per 12 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 18 (Size, -50%) [30].

5'10' Form: **ST** 15 [50]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d+1/2d+1; BL 45 lbs.; HP 15 [0]; Will 12 [5]; Per 12 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [30].

TL: 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western (0). *Languages:* English (Native) [4].

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive/Impressive) [5]; Fit [5]; Hard to Kill +3 [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Reputation +1 (celebrity, to fans) [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Perks: Alcohol Tolerance [1].

Powers:

- Fifty-Foot Woman: Growth 5 (Mutant, -10%) [45] and **ST** 235
- Armored Skin: Damage Resistance 200 (Ablative, -80%) [200]
- Regeneration, Fast (Mutant, -10%) [45]

Disadvantages: Charitable (12) [-15]; Code of Honor (Comics Code) [-15]; Compulsive Behavior (Seek Publicity, 6) [-10]; Compulsive Carousing (12) [-5]; Curious (12) [-5]; Gluttony (15) [-2]; Overconfidence (6) [-10]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Reputation -1 (Showoff and exhibitionist, to associates and the straitlaced) [-5]; Social Stigma (Freak) [-10]; Unusual Biochemistry [-5]; Weirdness Magnet [-15].

Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1]; Distrusts lawyers [-1]; Enjoys being nude in public [-1]; Loves comics and monster movies [-1]; Proud [-1].

Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [2]-11; Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Dancing (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Disguise (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Forced Entry (E) DX [2]-13; Melee Weapon (Two-Handed Axe/Mace) (A) DX [4]-13; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-12; Sex Appeal (A) HT [2]-12; Swimming (E) HT [1]-12; Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-13.

Gear: Fortalice usually wears a special costume under her street clothes: The specially designed weave of the bikini expands to (barely) cover her more sensitive areas when she grows, though her regular clothes tend to burst under the strain. Her handbag, similarly, opens to become a utility belt, which can be worn as a bracelet. For scheduled appearances in her 50' form, she wears a slightly less revealing specially tailored halter, shorts, and boots. She carries no weapons, but keeps a cell phone, a mini flashlight, personal basics, a small sewing kit, and a lightweight set of spare clothes in her bag at all times.

Lucy Fabrizzi, code name Ijiraq, a.k.a. See-Through   *600 points*

Australian-born Lucy Fabrizzi was an avid backpacker and action sports enthusiast. She was working her way around the world taking whatever job was available -- bicycle courier, data-entry worker, cleaner, fruit-picker, barmaid, busker, and experimental subject -- until she flew her hang-glider into a weirdly luminous cloud over Dimona, Israel. She woke up in a hospital in Bersheba but thought nothing more of the incident until her travels took her to Naples a few weeks later. There, when cornered by a knife-wielding mugger, she faded out of sight. Slipping past him onto the street, she was nearly hit by several cars, but she didn't realize that she was invisible until she returned to her hostel. Thinking her roommates were deliberately ignoring her, she became angry, and a dazzling flash from her eyes temporarily blinded two of the girls.

After being examined by a team of scientists in Rome, Lucy was approached by Remplacant and taught to control her powers. Rather than join the Cassini Division, though, the footloose Lucy continued on her trip around the world, using her light-bending skills for a clairvoyant act, and sneaking onto planes and trains and into hotels while invisible. Remplacant caught up with her again in Ibiza, introduced her to the fun-loving Fortalice, and offered her a retainer and unlimited free air travel in exchange for an agreement to work for the Ring when needed.

Lucy is easily bored and takes her duties even less seriously than Fortalice. She particularly dislikes violence -- but she

enjoys a challenge and will always back up her friends when danger threatens.

Campaign Uses: See-Through is most often recruited as a spy rather than a fighter -- but she can fight when necessary, using her Photoflash powers against minor menaces, then becoming invisible (her only form of defense) and attacking any remaining threats with her laser pulses. Her ability to apparently appear from nowhere makes her particularly useful as a means of rescuing superheroes who need help. Likewise, if the PCs are not on her side, she's also able to watch them from a distance, or pop up unexpectedly when they least want it.

Alternative Versions: For a less dangerous 300-point version, remove her Laser Pulse and Photoflash powers, replace her Innate Attack and Judo skills with Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-16, and give her a Taser or a pistol with a laser sight.

To turn See-Through into a villain, replace her Code of Honor and Pacifism with Greed and Lunacy, or Sadism and Bad Temper. In Hoover-8, she's a successful freelance jewel thief.

5'3', 115 lbs. Age 25. A lightly built but healthy-looking woman with a fair complexion, red hair in a ponytail, and blue eyes.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 15 [100]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP 15 [12]; Basic Speed 6.00 [10]; Basic Move 6 [0].

TL: 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western (0). *Languages:* English (Native) [0], Italian (Accented) [4].

Advantages: Appearance: Attractive [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Fit [5]; Hard to Kill 2 [4]; Rapid Healing [5]; Serendipity 1 [15].

Perks: Illumination [1]; Periscope [1].

Powers:

- Light (Light Power, -20%); Light Talent 2 [10].
- All-Seeing Eyes: Acute Vision 5 (Light Power, -20%) [8]. Hyperspectral Vision (Light Power, -20%) [20]. Microscopic Vision 1 (Light Power, -20%) [4]. Penetrating Vision 1 (Light Power, -20%) [8]. Protected Vision (Light Power, -20%) [4]. Telescopic Vision 3 (Light Power, -20%) [12].
- Laser Pulse: Burning Attack 8d (Accurate +3, +15%; Armor Divisor (2), +50%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Increased Range, ×10, +30%; Light Power, -20%) [70] (Power Parry: 14).
- Lightwarp: Invisibility (Electromagnetic: Affects Machines, +50%; Can Carry Objects, No Encumbrance, +10%; Fringe, -10%; Light Power, -20%; Switchable, +10%) [56].
- Photoflash: Affliction 4 (Area Effect: 128 yards, +350%; Based on **DX**, +20%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Disadvantage: Blindness, +50%; Light Power, -20%; Melee Attack, Range C, No Parry, -35%; Sense-Based: Sight, +150%) [211].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Comics Code) [-15]; Impulsiveness (12) [-5]; Lecherousness (12) [-15]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Team) [-5]; Vow (Vegetarianism) [-5].

Quirks: Distractible [-1]; Doesn't smoke, drink or take drugs [-1]; Mild necrophobia [-1]; Particularly attracted to fellow redheads [-1]; Thrillseeker [-1].

Wildcard Skill: Drive! (VH) DX-2 [8]-13.

Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX [4]-15, Area Knowledge (World) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12, Bicycling (E) DX [1]-15, Body Language (A) Per-1 [2]-11, Climbing (A) DX [2]-15, First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11, Forensics/TL8 IQ-2 [1]-9, Innate Attack (E) DX+3 [8]-18, Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-14, Stealth (A) DX [2]-15, Tracking (A) Per-1 [1]-11, Typing (E) DX

[1]-15.

Gear: Wears a ballistic vest under a green speedsuit or snowsuit, with hockey helmet, climbing boots, and a mini-rappel kit. Her utility belt holds her phone, a pack of 10 flex-cuffs, personal basics, a multi-tool, and a miniature survival kit.

Sergeant Sorious Turay, code name Hyperion, a.k.a. Goleyo   *550 points*

Sorious Turay was born in Sierra Leone, the son of an Indian engineer and his Tembe housemaid. He grew up to become a soldier, a tough and seasoned fighter with no interest in politics -- until the day in 1995 when he was captured by the Revolutionary United Front and had his arms and legs hacked through with a machete. The RUF left him to bleed to death, but Turay survived and was taken to a Freetown refugee camp. When a doctor visiting the camp asked if he'd be willing to try out an experimental powered exoskeleton, he accepted eagerly. After several months of surgery and training, he could totter around on new artificial legs. Because of his rapid healing and high pain threshold, Turay proved an ideal subject for further experimentation. He was keen to return to combat, field-testing his new equipment as he fought against the rebels who'd mutilated him. Over the next few years, his prosthetics were modified and added to until he was literally more a fighting machine than a man.

After a peace accord was signed in 1999, Turay -- calling himself Goleyo, after an African throwing axe -- was recruited by UN peacekeepers. He found himself working alongside Greenbelt, See- Through, and Remplacant as they searched for evidence of war crimes. When they discovered that off-world criminals were exchanging some of the blood diamonds sold by the RUF for grenades and mines, Goleyo agreed to join the Cassini Division.

While Turay thinks of himself as soldier first and foremost, he enjoys being able to remove his helmet and talk to people face-to-face when possible. He hopes one day to meet a woman with whom he can start a family -- once he's made his country safe enough for them to live in peace.

Campaign Uses: Goleyo is one of many Zagadkan attempts at a super-soldier, this one using bionics to create a very mobile combat monster who can carry more than five tons of gear, yet eats no more than a normal soldier. The scientists who designed his new limbs are trying to solve the problems caused by his bad grip, which limit his abilities to use ordinary melee weapons as well as performing delicate work (including his own maintenance, field-stripping weapons, etc.). Goleyo may be either an ally or enemy during any adventure set in Africa. His bionics may also be mass-produced, to create a squad of super-soldiers.

Alternative Versions: To make Goleyo more powerful, remove his Bad Grip disadvantage and improve his melee weapon skills, and/or add extra powers from the Dreadnought template from *GURPS Supers.* To turn him into a villain, simply change his allegiance to another military command. In Hoover-8, Goleyo has become a warlord controlling much of Northern Liberia.

7'4' (7'7' with helmet), 330 lbs.(with bionics and armor). Age 32. A muscular man with slightly oversized and obviously artificial limbs. Usually wears a woodland camouflage coverall and a great helm with a dark gray visor. Hair, eyes, and complexion all dark brown.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 14 [40].

Damage 1d-1/1d+1 (5d+2/8d-1); BL 24 lbs. (500 lbs.); HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 7 [0]; Basic Move 8 [0].

TL: 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* African (0). *Languages:* Krio (Native) [0] (an English-based Creole: treat as English, Broken).

Advantages: Acute Vision 3 [6]; Charisma 1 [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 4 [4]; Rank 3 [15]; Temperature Tolerance [1]; Very Rapid Healing [15].

Perks: Accessory (Smart Flashlight built into left hand) [1]; Penetrating Voice [1].

Powers:

- Bionics (Bionic Power, -10%); Bionics Talent 1 [5].
- Strength Amplification: ST 50 (Bionics Power, -10%; Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM 1, -35%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible removal, -10%; Inherent DR 30, +25%; Maximum Duration, 8 hours, -5%; Mechanical Power, -10%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%) [250].
- Armored Shell: DR 25 (Bionics Power, -10%; Breakable, DR 25, SM 1, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%) [57] (Power Block: 9).
- Jet Pack: Super Jump 10 (Bionics Power, -10%; Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM-3, -25%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Limited Uses, 4 per day, -20%; Nuisance Effect, Exhaust, -5%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%) [25] (Power Dodge: 9).

Disadvantages: Bad Grip 1 [-5]; Bloodlust (6) [-5]; Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]; Duty, Extremely Hazardous (9) [-10]; Gigantism [0]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10]; Quadriplegic (Mitigator: Bionics, -60%) [32].

Quirks: Chauvinistic [-1]; Dislikes snakes [-1]; Distrusts anyone who wears diamonds [-1]; Incompetence (Farming) [-1]; Likes beer but won't drink anything stronger [-1].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-16; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-14; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Fast Draw (Ammo) (E) DX+1 [1]-15 *; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-14; Guns/TL8 (Rifle) (E) DX+4 [12]-18, (GL) DX+2 [3]-16; Intimidation (A) Will [4]-12; Jumping (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Mechanic/TL8 (Robotics) (A) IQ [2]-11; Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX [2]-14; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-12; Search (A) Per-1 [1]-11; Soldier (A) IQ [2]-11; Survival (Jungle) (A) Per [2]-12; Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-15; Tracking (A) Per-1 [1]-11.

* +1 for Combat Reflexes

Gear: Assault rifle, 7.62mmS, with under-barrel 40mm gl, thermal imaging 4x scope, laser sight, steel lanyard; web gear, holds six spare mags for rifle; six 40mm grenades, six stun hand grenades; machete; baton; personal basics; gun cleaning kit; multi-tool; filtration canteen; first-aid kit; headset radio; compass; binoculars.

Adventure Seeds

Child's Play (Supers/Cops): A project to replicate metahumans for use as super-soldiers runs into trouble after successfully cloning cells stolen from Fortalice. While their accelerated aging techniques have been largely successful, their clone is physically in her mid-teens but chronologically, intellectually, and emotionally only three years old. Unfortunately, she's also 50' tall, incredibly strong and tough, and has managed to escape from the lab. She's heading for the heroes' home city. She's confused, angry, naked, and legally still a child. The heroes will have to team up with the police to find a way to subdue her -- and in since they're in full view of public and the media, the city fathers would rather she wasn't harmed.

Arms Control (Supers/Infinite Worlds): The PCs team up with Goleyo and Greenbelt to track down world-jumpers who are supplying African warlords with ultra-tech weapons. They find their lair but discover they've walked into an ambush. Worse still, a hacker has planted a Trojan horse in the software controlling Goleyo's limbs, and at the most inopportune moment, he takes over, causing Goleyo to open fire on his own team members.

Rumble in the Jungle (Infinite Worlds/Supers/Special Ops): A parachronic conveyor goes astray, stranding a well-armed ISWAT team in farmland in Sierra Leone in the timeline Hoover-8. Hoover-8 began diverging from Zagadka in 1944, when John Dewey beat FDR, but the greatest changes occurred after J. Edgar Hoover became president in 1952 and offered American metahumans a choice of conscription or arrest.

In Hoover-8, it is 1998, and the Cold War between USA and the Eurasian Union of Democratic Republics has sparked many civil wars and border disputes in Central America and Africa. The U.S.-backed Goleyo leads raids on Sierra Leone from his base in Liberia, while the military government has hired Tunguska, Fortalice, See-Through, and Greenbelt to help defend the diamond mines.

The ISWAT team may choose to support either side, or to remain neutral -- but their main concern will be preserving the Secret and staying alive until they are rescued. Alternatively, the players may choose to be supers or special forces sent by Washington to support Goleyo, or as part of a UN peacekeeping force.

Pyramid Review

Star Wars Galaxy Tiles

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Rodney Thompson Illustrated by Christopher West, and Soe Murayama

38 tiles -- two 8×10 (open factory floor and detention station), two 4×8 (catwalk and factory extension), four 4×4 (stairs, chasm, and TIE fighter), two 2×8 (crevasse and deck plating), 12 2×4 (rubble, stairs, holes, etc.), six 2×2 (props, crates, vent door, droid, etc.), eight 1×2 (terminal, sliding doors, etc.), two 1×1 (crates and vent door); full color, mounted; $12.95

After a while, most everything that can be said about the latest in a series of dungeon tile sets has been said; anything beyond that, unless some new angle is taken by the artists and their choice of subject matter, becomes pretty thin gruel. Fortunately, Wizards of the Coast has branched out. They're now offering *Star Wars Galaxy Tiles* in a vein similar to their previous products, but with that (hopefully) unmistakable Lucas flair. This allows them a whole new canvas upon which to paint familiar but desirable locations.

The package comes with six sheets of punch-out pieces that can be customized to fit the current needs of the game. These tiles have various *Star Wars*-themed images on one side, and standardized deck flooring and steel-plated corridor pictures on the reverse. The GM may just need a chamber in which the big light saber duel can take place, but the generic sides of the bits not currently being used are still good for the corridors and hallways one must navigate to get there.

There doesn't seem to be any underlying aim for this first release, unlike the fantasy motif at work in the ***Dungeon Tiles*** sets, which has "temples" or "graves" or other wraparound justifications for the work. Nonetheless, even without a declared theme, it's pretty clear this is a standard base or headquarters, and that works well. In a dungeon, somewhat circumspect measures must be taken to keep the ground looking like the bottom of a well-worn tunnel while still indicating where on the "squares" the players must stand their miniature. Here, it's square plating all the way, and the map really is the territory.

The feel of one of Lucas' movie sets is here. Oh, there may not be a huge, colorful reactor with sliding force walls, but the architecture is still the most lethal in the galaxy. There are catwalks and deep crevasses, workstations (use the printed ones or place the smaller, mobile tile), even the occasional R5-D4 (geek check) plugged into a socket.

The details are what carry the combination. Crates of different sizes go well with the factory floor, customizing what people can hide behind as they avoid battledroids. The vents look like they could pop open beneath the unwary at any moment and let them fall to the bottom of Cloud City. Damage takes some familiar forms ("someone has to save our skins"), and even the plainest bit of kit has pockmarks where blaster fire or something like it has made its presence known. There is even some old-fashioned rubble for folks who feel they need that sort of thing. Some of the great chasms have catwalks far below, and the rather Spartan but familiar "reception" center for the detention sector allows plenty of space for the action (and leaves users wishing they had a few cells and a trash compactor to dive into). Oh, and to top it off there's a TIE fighter.

The pieces are solid, the illustrations are crisp, and once placed on the tabletop, they aren't going to move around much. Like its forebears, someone has put the effort into make a lasting set of equipment here. No inconspicuous cross marks are necessary to show where the squares are - the images use faded lines, and even these look almost like they

belong overlaid on the dark holes. It's scaled for use with both the RPG and the miniatures game, according to the player's taste. Heck, if someone wants to, they can combine the *Star Wars* and fantasy sets for even larger warrens -- good for caves on Tatooine, maybe, though the buyer has to supply his own Rancor.

If it has a failing, this set may be a bit too ordinary. It's functional, and even the simple graphic design looks like the floors audiences are used to seeing Jedi roll across, but it leaves players wanting even more detail. Too many of the components are functional and lack any additional features, any character. People can make quite a complex with them, but many items merely serve a workmanlike purpose. Unlike the dungeon sets that try to offer the striking on one side and the utile on the other, often there's something playable on both faces. The standout pictures are so nice on one half, it makes one wish there were more two-sided special tiles. In short, the thing generates its own greed. But it's enough to whet the appetite, to provide a pleasing graphic element to players' Force adventures. *Star Wars Galaxy Tiles* ought to be the first of many things to keep the Wizards' die-cutter humming.

Hopefully the Hoth set isn't next.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Settlers of Catan: Histories II: Conquest of Rome

Published By [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed By Klaus Teuber

Game board; 40 plunder counters (in Five differently-colored Territories); 90 cards (12 VP, 30 Development, 48 Resource), 4 resource "strike" counters, 40 gold coins (denominations I, V), 4 turn overview charts, 2 dice, 1 legionnaire figure, rulebook, "over 100" miniature plastic figures (four players' colors, divided into 8 footman, 8 horseman, and 10 wagons each); $49.00

In *Settlers of Catan Histories II: Conquest of Rome,* second in the Historical series of *Settlers of Catan* games, the North Mediterranean provinces of Rome are open to invasion by opportunistic barbarian tribes. Players each take control of a pair of such tribes to pillage, and then eventually settle and divide up the Roman provinces.

As a self-contained game, rather than a simple scenario, some resources are familiar to *Settlers of Catan* veterans, such as Ore and Wheat, while others are new: Gold and "Livestock" (Horses and Cattle).

The board itself will also look somewhat familiar, as its features resemble a pre-made *Settlers of Catan* board with resources and production numbers already printed in place, tailored toward historical production values in mind. The four resources draws are: Ore, Grain, Livestock (face-down random draws of Cattle or Horse cards), and Gold (in plastic coins with values of I and V).

As with all *Settlers of Catan* releases by Mayfair games, the board is of good quality, with no area wasted. Space at the edges that would hold unusable ocean or countries is marked off for card draw and discard piles, as well as pools where players put purchased pieces before being deployed to the game area. The plastic turn quick-reference charts are immensely useful, and carry the graphic images for each turn in non-linguistic pictures and arrows.

Setup begins with each player choosing a color, and populating his two tribe boxes, each with one caravan. One tribe box receives a footman, and the other, a horseman. Each player draws one Grain, one V denomination gold coin, and draws one Livestock card (granting randomly a Cattle Card or Horse Card). All invaders place one footman and horseman in the appropriately marked intersections for their player color in the northeast of the map (modern western Austria). If there are fewer than four players participating, then cities on the board marked "III" are marked off-limits with unused players' pieces; these cannot be invaded in any way in this game. The remaining cities are randomly given face-down markers of the appropriate territory colors, with the excess left in the box.

The rules divide a player's turn into four segments: production, trading, horse tribe action, footman tribe action. In each of segments 2, 3, and 4, a player may play one or more Development cards (unless the card indicates otherwise, see below).

During the Production segment, each player begins his turn by rolling 2d6 until he receives four different results. This is noted by placing an X counter on the compass. Each unique roll provides income from the territory for players with pieces adjacent to these fields. Just as in the original *Settlers of Catan,* each piece adjacent to a field whose number comes up gains a resource of the indicated type. The "robber" in *Settlers of Catan Histories II: Conquest of Rome* is a legionnaire. As is tradition, when a 7 is rolled, the roller moves the piece to a different numbered field, and he then takes one random card from the hand of a player with a piece adjacent to that field (or 2 Gold, should he possess no cards).

Trading then takes place. A player can trade resources with other players, as negotiable, or from the bank at 3:1 ratio (e.g., 3 Ore or 3 Gold will buy any one other specific card). Players may buy warriors, caravans, or Development Cards. The purchase of "warriors" always gains the player a pair of one footman and one horseman to the respective tribe boxes. Purchased supply wagons are useful in the Pillage Phase, and mandatory in the Empire phase. Each wagon in the tribe box gains the player an extra Gold when that tribe pillages a city, and later in the game, it is required to deploy wagons in order to expand that tribe's sedentary empire.

Actions for each of the players' tribes are then decided. The tribe's token may move past one blue arrow for free. Each extra arrow over water costs 1 Gold, and passage over extra land arrows costs three Gold or one Wheat. Towns are surrounded by two to five towers, which indicates the number of fighting tokens in that tribe's box that are required to attack it. The footman and horseman tribes are calculated separately for this purpose. After deciding movement, if any, for a tribe next to a city with enough warriors in the appropriate tribe's box, the player simply takes the city's counter, flips it, and loses the number of warriors indicated (0 to 2), and income (always 1 Gold per supply wagon in that tribe's box), 0 to 2 gold, 0 to 2 Livestock Cards, and/or 0 or 1 Development Cards. A specific tribe may only pillage or settle once each turn. Each tribe can only pillage two cities per region of the five regions.

If no action is performed in a particular tribe's turn, the player takes two Gold or draws a Resource of his choice. Development Cards may be played, up to three per turn (that is, one in each of phases 2, 3, or 4 unless counter-indicated by the card). After a specific tribe loots three different colors in cities, a player may choose to use one of that tribe's turns to settle a city (it cannot pillage and settle in the same turn, but may settle an already-pillaged city). After this, that tribe is sedentary, but can invade one adjacent, not-yet-settled town each turn, with no more than one blue arrow separating it from its current empire, by land or sea.

As per the original *Settlers of Catan* game, the first player to reach 10 Victory Points (VP) is the winner. Each player gains 1 VP per settled or conquered city (but not pillaged). There are also various special 1VP cards that can be earned throughout the game. First, there are three random VP tokens in Developments cards, as is tradition. There is also the 2VP award of "Diplomacy" that goes to the player who played the most Development Cards (minimum 3). If another player plays more Development cards, he then takes this award. Heir to Rome 2VP is awarded to any player whose tribes both conquer at least four cities each. Scourge of Rome 2VP is awarded to each of a player's tribes that conquers one in each of the five regions. This is awarded by *tribe,* meaning that each player can earn two of them. Thus, it is possible to have 8VP on awards alone . . .

Strategy continues to develop in the world of Catan. It is easily possible for traveling tribes to accumulate enough resources by pillaging and random income such that they do not need to spend any money during their Conquest phase. Even though there is no hand limit, players will feel pressured to spend them to keep opposing players from stealing "valuable" cards during the frequent 7 rolls (16%, or every second round at four rolls per turn). Is it worth pursuing the awards, or is settling down immediately more important? Can a fast settlement deny other players resources and possibly awards?

The quick-reference sheets are handy, but they use non-linguistic pictures and arrows with few words; players still must refer to the rule book to explain the mnemonic. The Gold counters are irregular and it is tricky to tell the Is from Vs at a glance. Some important rules found later are formatted in italicized boxes identical to all the game play examples, making them difficult to find.

Newer players will appreciate the lower number of resources to juggle (really, only Ore, Wheat, Horses, and Cattle) and fewer items to buy (troops, wagons, and Development Cards). Gold exists as a "wild card" resource to trade for others, such as in *Settlers of Catan: The Card Game.* In the end, *Settlers of Catan Histories II: Conquest of Rome* is a solid game with two linked styles of play, and should appeal to players who like the classic *Settlers of Catan,* but are ready for more strategy.

--Eric Funk
With special thanks to Stephanie Kieth for helping pillage this topic

With Realism, More Is Less

There's a theory in human/machine interactions called the [uncanny valley](). The nutshell version is that the less realistic something -- especially a robot, a doll, or the like -- looks, the *more* we can identify with it; as objects become more realistic, we tend to notice the differences in how we would expect them to seem. Eventually (the theory goes) it should be possible to remove enough of the differences so that the entity is again identified with; it's that middle ground of "realistic but not realistic enough" that forms the uncanny valley. A good example is how audiences are able to connect with animated works that don't in any way resemble reality -- such as *The Flintstones* or even *[the Dot and the Line]()* -- but are disquieted by endeavors such as *The Polar Express,* where the hyper-real animation is overshadowed by the unreal aspects, such as the too-perfect fluid motion and the dead emotionless eyes: "Do you believe Santa exists . . . to *devour souls?*"

In the gaming world, this most often comes up in the world of video games; while past generations had no problems identifying with pixelated blobs such as Pac-Man or Mario, as graphics have gotten more realistic, there's come to be a disconnect. Many players view their on-screen personae as little more that human-looking tanks, mannequins of characters that lumber around in response to commands.

Although not directly related, the uncanny valley came to mind this past week when I saw *Cloverfield,* a movie that attempts to be a realistic look at movies such as *Godzilla.* (I'll attempt to be as spoiler-free as possible, but there really isn't a lot of movie to spoil; if you're squeamish about this sort of thing, consider us in a *SPOILER ALERT!* zone.) Although the point of view in *Cloverfield* is more realistic than other monster movies, ironically that realism helped me to notice all the ways it *wasn't* realistic.

For example, put yourself in the shoes of the protagonists for a minute. Pretend you're a citizen of New York City. (If you *are* a citizen of New York City, pretend you're you.) Now, it's May 22. You're in the middle of an attack of some kind on your fair metropolis, and it seems that a giant unfathomable monster may in some fashion be involved. Realistically speaking, what are the first two thoughts that spring to mind . . . thoughts that you'd probably mention to your friends?

Your answers may vary, but two of the ones right near the top of my list are:

   "Hey, this is just like September 11th!"

and

   "Hey, this is just like Godzilla!"

Amazingly (to the best of my memory), none of the characters in this movie makes either of those two comparisons. No, everyone seems to stagger around acting as if, golly gee, we've never seen anything like this before.

Likewise, no one cursed much either. In the real world, I know this is because the film wanted to retain its precious PG-13 rating, but in the "realistic" world of *Cloverfield,* it seems out of place. I'm not one for gratuitous cursing, but if I were in the middle of a flight-for-survival attack on my city by a giant monster, my tongue would be dropping the F-bomb. Often.

Of course, no one used the restroom or referred to the fact that, as carbon-based life forms, they require some form of sustenance to maintain mobility. Again, after a hard day of fleeing for my life, I'm much less likely to stand complacently under a Mountain Dew sign centered-framed perfectly than I am to drink looted cases of the stuff and pee where I feel like.

Now, no one ever does any of these things in most other movies, either. But at least then I have the crutch of, "Well, this isn't supposed to be realistic; it's a movie." When part of the point of an endeavor is being realistic, is it realistic to avoid being realistic about the things that make it *unrealistic?*

Although there are a bunch of avenues I could tackle this conundrum from, I'll try to probe it from a couple of different sides, this week and next. First is the omnipresence of the media in a postmodern world. For those of the Baby Boomer generation and beyond, popular culture forms as much a component of our personal building blocks as the food we eat or the beverages we consume. (Speaking of beverages, have you considered drinking Mountain Dew? Enjoy a can of Mountain Dew now. From what I understand, it's quite extreme.) Even if a person is devoid of pop-cultural knowledge, that ignorance becomes an aspect of their character; someone who hasn't seen 1977's *Star Wars* is an oddity, as is someone who's never heard The Beatles . . . and there's an entire subculture who proclaims as a point of pride the fact that they don't own a television set.

One possibility for incorporating pop culture into an otherwise "realistic" game is to point out any potential references, and/or encourage players/PCs to do the same. This is the tack taken by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* an otherwise "straight" horror/adventure story that heightens the fact the protagonists are really "one of us" by making constant referrals to pop culture. It's also the approach of the *Scream* movies, quite possibly the smartest slasher-horror series in the past couple of decades. One problem with this method is that some folks may think it breaks kayfabe ("This kind of thing only happens in movies!"), so it's good to check with the gaming group before incorporating it into the campaign.

Another pop-culture possibility is to give careful thought to the impact of the unrealistic aspects of the world on its pop culture. Perhaps the best example of this is Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen,* a modern take on costumed crimefighters. In that tale, comic books were -- and still are -- popular forms of entertainment, but they aren't about super-heroes; who (the argument goes) wants to read about fictionalized accounts of vigilantes when one can simply turn on the evening news? In this case, rather than being dominated by super-heroes as the comics medium is in our world, comics in the *Watchmen* universe focus on other genres such as tales of pirates on the high seas.

Regardless, it's hard to envision a realistic postmodern world that doesn't in some way incorporate the omnipresence of the media in that world . . . not to mention the self-reflection that comes from being part and parcel of the media. Indeed, for the "YouTube generation" -- toward whom *Cloverfield* is clearly targeted -- it's hard to envision *any* development that the main characters could react to with "I've never seen anything like this!" disbelief; if nothing else, they should be able to catch a DVD of their own lives four months after it happens.

Stay tuned for more random thoughts on the subject next week.

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Omniscient Eye

How Do I Use My Peasants for Really Big Projects?

Imagine a pre-industrial civilization with a major construction project, something on the scale of the Suez Canal or the Palace of Versailles. What percentage of the population could actually work on the 'crash' project, considering that someone has to supply the workers and that moving those supplies to a central location will be a large task by itself? And how long would guys with shovels need to dig a canal or to raise an embankment dam on the scale of the Hoover Dam?

I'm assuming an absolute monarch (think Louis XIV) with enough firepower to handle peasant revolts, but soldiers cannot fight famine or inflation . . .

This is a far less theoretical question that it might seem. Massive, resource-consuming projects are among the great wonders of the ancient world. Just think of the Great Wall of China and the Pyramids. The emperor of China and the Egyptian pharaoh were monarchs to make Louis XIV look like a bit of a softie. Likewise, the Romans managed considerable large works in relatively short periods of time. Hadrian's Wall is the best known, but they also constructed two other walls across northern England and much longer, if much smaller and simpler, defensive structures along parts of their eastern European borders. So how did *they* manage it?

Labor

As a practical matter, a large proportion of the population had to be involved in the day-to-day work of survival. Just what proportion of society that is varies wildly with technology and local environmental conditions, but before the agricultural revolution of the 18th century, at least three people out of four were busy raising crops, and that number could go above nineteen out of every twenty (pre-state societies probably had even more people involved full-time in subsistence, but seeing as they don't, by definition, have rulers capable of directing such labor, we'll ignore them). At first glance, it would seem that those people simply can't be moved off of their regular work and put onto something else for any significant length of time. If they are, people begin to starve. On the other hand, even peasants did have *some* down-time, and there was clearly enough spare labor kicking around in ancient societies to build palaces, lay out roads, dig canals, and so on. Indeed, looking at more mundane tasks, many harvests required more than 100% of available labor (something like 110% for two to three weeks), so all of that work had to come from somewhere, if only from working punishingly long hours.

So, then, just how much flexibility is there among the unwashed masses? This varies between societies, of course, but not *all* of that peasant time is spent on pure subsistence activities. The peasants are feeding the whole of society, which is a task which can't be rescheduled well, but they're also supporting their masters at a far higher standard of living than their own, which is where there's room to maneuver. In extreme cases, a third of a peasant's productive labor might go towards supporting a landlord, local aristocrat, or government, though it was probably far less in most societies.

With a strong enough central government, a sizable chunk of that labor might be spent on big public works projects. There's lots of precedent for taxes paid in labor, so to some extent it's easily convertible. The Romans required some people to help maintain walls, roads, and other bits of civil engineering as part of discharging their tax burden, and Europe's feudal and manorial systems were, at least initially, more about service and labor rather than goods and monetary taxes. Indeed, it might be easier for peasants to dig holes or carry heavy loads than to pay other kinds of taxes. They already have strong backs, and this way they don't have to worry about whether or not grain prices will be sufficient to turn their agricultural produce into the required number of silver pennies or the chickens they're keeping to take up to the lord of the manor will be eaten by foxes.

The downside is that whatever gets spent on the big project *doesn't* get spent on making statues of the current ruler, paying off his gambling debts, feeding his dozens of pure white chargers, and procuring him milk-and-honey baths and fresh virgins every week. Again, there's vast variability here. Just how much of the productivity of the lower classes is drawn off by the Powers That Be and hence about what they'd be able to redirect to any given purpose, and how much they'd be able to divert to purposes other than maintaining the bare minimum of government functions (a bureaucracy, courts, armies, etc.) can be very different from society to society. As nearly pure speculation, we'll put the ceiling at about a quarter of the government's income, though it's probably rather less in most cases. In many societies, large-scale projects, such as fielding large armies for extended wars, were financed by debt rather than cutting back expenses.

Finally, there's the question of where things are going to happen in relation to the workers in question. Obviously, having to move large numbers of workers and the goods and supplies they'll need is expensive. Very expensive, as it happens. Going straight overland, the cost of supplying a settlement, including a temporary workers' camp, becomes prohibitive after 80 to 100 miles. River transport, which is available in most locations, effectively cuts transportation distances by three to five times, and ocean transport by a similar factor above that. (Though stated in terms of a particular game system, "[Building the Low-Tech Landscape Part 2: Overlords and Cities]"" provides some idea of the magnitude of transport costs.)

All of this leaves us with a rough formula:

Total labor $\times$ Tax rate $\times$ Discretionary proportion $\times$ Transportation premium

For example, given a kingdom of a million people, 15 percent of whose labor is taken in some for as taxes, 20 percent of which can be redirected to discretionary spending, for work which is to be done effectively at home (for example, a series of local watchtowers or commemorative temples), in the course of a single year, you're looking at 30,000 man-years.

Timing

We should also consider when all of this is going to happen. In most regions, most people are solidly booked two to three months in the spring and again in the fall in order to harvest the previous season's crops and plant for the next. Plowing and planting could conceivably be compressed a bit but no more than a few percentage points, while harvesting usually can't be compressed at all, which means that spring and fall are, in most cases, a bad time for mass mobilizations.

In some societies, peasants do have a lot of down-time, which might, at first glance, appear suitable for co-option for large projects. The winter months in northern Europe were a time of enforced inactivity. Nothing was growing and the ground was often frozen, so there was a lot of tool maintenance, storytelling, and wishing that there was a bit more in the larder. So that's two to three months out of the year when there's some free labor kicking around, right? Certainly, it's when many early Medieval feudal warlords got their fighting in. Not only did they not have to be overseeing their lands, the harder ground was better for armies to travel on.

But is it a good time of year to for the peasants to be out digging canals and building massive palaces for you? Probably not, if you're in a temperate zone. The problem with digging projects is that the very conditions which make it easy to fight make it difficult to excavate: frozen ground is hard, and it's even worse if you're using low-tech tools. It's not a great time for construction, either. Limestone mortar sets badly in frigid conditions. Historically, construction on the Gothic cathedrals stopped during winter for that very reason. Large patches of exposed mortar were insulated with straw and dung to protect them from extreme temperature changes, and everybody went about their regular lives until the next spring.

Send The Marines

It's worth remembering that imperial governments already have a large body of coordinated labor available to them: standing armies. They rarely comprise more than 1% of the available work force, and often much less, but they're already being paid for. The Roman legions, for example, are responsible for a number of major works, including most border fortifications and a great many roads. A ruler is unlikely to spend that labor on vanity projects, such as his own Versailles, but given the importance of water transport, he may very well put them to work on a Suez-like canal.

Warmer climates don't have that problem, of course. The ground around, say, Cairo or Baghdad would never be frozen, opening up both summer and winter as working seasons, though some kinds of labor might be more difficult if monsoon rains are expected. Moreover, that doesn't make Egyptian or Mesopotamian winters pure free time for a ruler to exploit. The warmer climate means better working conditions all around, which means that people there are often doing just as much work as their distant northern cousins are in the summer.

Regardless of the specifics of the schedule, though, the implication is that there *is* a schedule. Labor is likely to be patchy, with large surges in the summer and winter. During planting and harvest times, a great deal of labor will have to be let go as enough people are sent back to their fields in order to keep everyone fed.

Applications

So assuming that a great deal of labor can be freed up for a grand project, what is the great leader going to do with all those workers? To extrapolate how long it would take a bunch of guys with primitive earth-moving equipment to carry out a massive civil engineering project, we'll look to some of the big projects of antiquity. Because we don't have much in the way of records, we must fall back on vague estimates. It has been speculated that the construction of the Great Pyramid at Giza consumed something on the order of 300,000 man-years of labor over the course of 20 years of construction (that's actually towards the low end of modern estimates; other estimates go as far as two to three times higher, and historical estimates were higher still). It was originally a bit over 146 meters tall and 231 meters on each side, though it's smaller these days since the polished limestone siding has long since been looted. It comes in at about 2.6 million cubic meters of solid stone construction, or 8 2/3 cubic meters per man year, though less generous estimates would drop it down to about 4 cubic meters per man year.

The Great Wall of China (there were several; we'll use the Ming Dynasty one here) may have used 2,000,000 man-years, spread out over something like two centuries. The Great Wall stretches over a bit more than 6700 kilometers. For much of its length, it is made of a stone or brick facing with a rubble core. The height and width vary somewhat, but we'll assume a uniform 5 meters in either dimension, for at total of 167.5 million cubic meters of largely earthen construction, giving us 83.75 cubic meters of construction per man-year.

Of course, these numbers are not directly comparable. First, we're dealing with two very different levels of technology: Bronze Age Egyptians vs. the Ming Dynasty, whose technology was comparable to that of Europe's Renaissance. The Chinese had superior furnaces to bake brick, efficient cranes to lift loads, and technologies the Egyptians hadn't even imagined yet, such as water-driven mills to help cut and polish stone and tools made of iron and steel. The Egyptians, for their part, would have been lucky to have had metal shovels.

Second, the materials involved and where they had to go are very different. The Egyptians had to cut stone to exacting specifications. Early Egyptologists expressed astonishment that relatively primitive people could do such fine work. Investigation of the stonework of other civilizations has indicated that there's nothing particularly remarkable about really fine stonework, but all that polishing *is* very labor-intensive. Then they had to send it several miles up-river to the construction site. Although some stone and brick was involved in the Great Wall (well under 10% of the wall is masonry), the Chinese for the most part simply had to shovel nearby dirt and gravel.

Third, the Chinese built *across,* going over a great many miles but not building much farther up than a two story building. The Egyptians built *up.* They had to shove everything they had to considerable heights and increasing labor

Counting Calories

One other possible consideration, illustrated by the down-time northern peasants had during the winter, is required additional consumption. Built into that picture of enforced inactivity is the quiet assumption that, since they're less active, they're also consuming less. If they're dragged out of their comfy homes to build roads or palaces, they'll need more food than they're assumed to be consuming in order to do it. Some researchers have suggested that typical peasants, who have periods of inactivity actually consume about 20% less calories than someone who would be active year-round, so mobilizing large bodies of labor makes that body of labor, *ipso facto,* more expensive.

considerably as they went. Even with pulley cranes (which they didn't have), that would have been a considerable effort, and since the Egyptians had to rely on elaborate systems of ramps spiraling around the Pyramid as it was being built (which would have taken considerable effort to build as well) and fight ground friction every step of the way, it was even harder.

Fourth, not all man-years are necessarily created equal. Legend holds that countless peasants pressed into building the Great Wall were worked to death. Conversely, the consensus of opinion these days is that the people who built the Pyramid did so more-or-less voluntarily, either as paid laborers or in lieu of paying conventional taxes and tribute. The Chinese figure may in some way indicate what you can achieve if you don't really care how much damage your work force sustains in the process.

That's for construction. Another thing mass mobilizations are good for is digging holes. On a good day, using typical low-tech tools, a laborer can dig out about a cubic meter of very loose dirt. That rate can drop considerably for hard and damp soil and plummet when confronted with rock, particularly for very low-tech civilizations without decent boring technology. It also decreases, though not as fast, for holes more than a meter deep. Because the soil must be lifted higher, it takes about three days to dig a hole two meters deep, six for three meters, and so on. Constructing a simple ditch-and-earthen-wall palisade, such as the Romans constructed along the Danube, can be done very quickly. A thousand men could put up a kilometer of shallow ditch backed by a low wall in a day. Digging canals is slower and takes more careful specialized labor where the new canal meets existing water courses, but can still go fairly quickly.

When it comes to, say, a Versailles, the amount of labor you can mobilize is much less important than the skilled labor you've got to hand and your connection to trade networks. A gallery of mirrors, elaborately painted ceilings, and polished doorknobs at every turn require lots of highly trained professionals, a lot of gold on hand (which your peasants are unlikely to generate for you in short order), or both. But if what you want are big piles of stone or holes in the ground, you can get a lot done.

--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!

One Road to Realism Is Knowing When to Go

I never really dated before my freshmen year of college, so most of the mundane techniques my peers had developed years before had eluded me. This fact came to full light when I was out with a gal I really liked, and we were at that stage where we were just hanging out and talking in her dorm room. It was late in the evening, and I had come to sense that, if I were to leave, that would be the end of the date . . . and I wanted to forestall that inevitability as long as possible. Unfortunately, I also really needed to pee. The inevitability of the latter fact finally brought the evening to a close about an hour after it was probably healthy for me to delay my basic biological functions. To this day, if I remember that evening, I have fond recollections of an enchanting date mingled with memories of a pressure on my bladder that makes me cross my legs in memory of pain. I can only imagine the years of post-traumatic therapy fodder I might have endured if I had failed in my efforts to contain the dinner's Mountain Dew.

This week we return to the second tine of our forked foray into realism, diverging from last week's discussion of pop culture to this week's commentary of human excrement. How much of a gulf is between the two is up to the reader (although I had to resist the urge to make a "poop culture" joke). Whether you're a bear, the Pope, or the Batman, you need to excrete. And even in the most awkward of human circumstances it's still something that needs to be addressed; ask any astronaut who's fielded questions from a group of eighth-grade boys, and rest assured that matters involving the tail end of the digestive process rank high on many minds.

These realities have been creeping their way into realistic cinematic and television efforts for a number of years, probably starting in the American television world with Archie Bunker's toilet on *All in the Family,* and ranging from the icky (say, the eye doctor scene from *Minority Report*) to the supposedly sweet and endearing (such as Forrest Gump informing President Kennedy that he needs to pee)[1]. This doesn't mean that efforts to deal with this reality need to be disgusting or graphic (although it's certainly an option); rather, it's useful to keep in mind that the occasional need to take a break is entirely within a realistic framework.

Recently I saw a season of television called *Murder One,* a modern-day (well, "1996" modern) legal drama. At one point, the protagonist lawyers are discussing the case with a potential witness; when they had finished, they witness asked where the ladies' room was, and one of the other lawyers gave her directions. Immediately my mind raced, jumping to conclusions: She's going to get murdered in the bathroom, or she's going to plant a bug, or she's got a plot that she needs to carry out and is using the restroom as a ruse, or the other lawyers are going to use it as an opportunity to talk about her behind her back. But none of these predictions came true; the scene ended with her walking off stage right, presumably to make good on the knowledge gained by her earlier inquiry. For a touch of realism, I thought it was brilliant.

The restroom is a natural place for meetings (awkward or otherwise), directions, and ambushes. The TV series *Ally McBeal* made extensive use of its spacious unisex bathroom, and the bathroom or bathroom-related activities have been plot points for a half-dozen *CSI** episodes. In addition, it seems that the need to go potty would be a natural thing for horror movies to exploit; is there anything scarier than knowing there are creepy-crawlies out there, but also knowing you need to go *really* bad? (Okay; needing to avoid going to sleep is probably creepier. But you get the idea.)

And, of course, *lacking* the need to excrete points out one's inhumanity. As one example, the current-continuity Superman efficiently processes 100% of his intake, meaning he doesn't need to use the bathroom; this weirds me out for some reason. As another example, one common story has a group of heroes impersonating vampires and infiltrating a gathering of the undead; how long can they keep the charade up in an entirely realistic tale?

So if you're into utilizing this human need in a game, then just keep in mind the amount of "on-camera" time the heroes have had, and mention if they've been in a situation where they haven't had any natural pauses to go to the bathroom. Is it a fancy scheming ballroom scene that the protagonists have been dabbling in for a couple of hours? Mention that nature is calling; do they try to hold it (Health rolls!), make an excuse to leave ("How rude!"), duck off to the restroom (opportunity for secondary encounters), or something more clever? ("Why is the umbrella stand sloshing? ")

In many RPG campaigns, attempting to elevate otherwise cinematic clichés and tropes to realistic levels is an interesting challenge. Just make sure that the efforts to become *more* realistic don't result in glaring examples of *unreality* . . . unless, of course, you want to say that -- in those instances -- realism took a brief potty break.

--Steven Marsh

[1] As an aside, I also note that the need to use the restroom was a plot point of the classic Infocom interactive fiction[2] *Leather Goddesses of Phobos;* which restroom you decided on at the beginning of the game determined your sex.

[2] Or "text adventures," as they're known to many.

Pyramid Pick

Delta Green: A Call of Cthulhu Sourcebook of Modern Horror and Conspiracy (for *Call of Cthulhu* and *Call of Cthulhu d20*)

Published by **Pagan Publishing**

Written by Dennis Detwiller, Adam Scott Glancy, and John Tynes with John H. Crowe III and Robert Mclaughlin

Cover by Blair Reynolds

Illustrated by Toren Atkinson, Dennis Detwiller, Heather Hudson, John T. Snyder, Marius Hamilton, and Jonas Bolander

340-Page Black and White Hardcover Book; $39.95

For the Player

If you play *Call of Cthulhu* and your Keeper is planning to run a *Delta Green* campaign, please do not read any further. Knowing too much will ruin what will undoubtedly be a fantastic campaign. In the meantime, you can bask in the knowledge that your Keeper has a superb taste in books.

For the Keeper

If you do not own a copy of *Delta Green* and are planning to run a modern-set *Call of Cthulhu* game, drop whatever you are doing (including reading this review), and run. Run to your nearest gaming emporium to obtain a copy. This is the best purchase you will ever make. Then come back and finishing reading *Pyramid* while you feel proud about the incredibly wise decision you have just made.

For the Unconvinced

After five years out of print, Pagan Publishing reprints what is widely held to be the best supplement for *Cthulhu Now,* the best supplement for *Call of Cthulhu,* and the best supplement ever published. The Origins Award-winning *Delta Green* literally rewrote the book for *Cthulhu Now,* re-imagining the hows, whats, and whys of investigating the Mythos in the information-rich environment of the "here and now" of the 1990s. The new edition not only comes as a hardcover, but it also includes statistics and rules for both standard *Call of Cthulhu* and *Call of Cthulhu d20.*

At its most simplistic, **Delta Green** can be described as *The X-Files* meets the Cthulhu Mythos, but *The X-Files* lacks the bleak nihilistic streak that runs through **Delta Green.** Yet **Delta Green** rides the same pop culture zeitgeist of the 1990s as *The X-Files,* that of UFOlogy and of distrust and paranoia of big government and the New World Order. Also like *The X-Files,* the lead characters are government agents. They are not just members of the FBI, but also from agencies as diverse as the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, U.S. Space Command, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Recruited into a secret U.S. agency known as Delta Green after an encounter with the supernatural or the inexplicable, agents operate in small cells tasked with investigating and protecting U.S. citizens from paranormal activity. This is a mandate that dates back to the 1928 raid on Innsmouth, and since then, Delta Green has thwarted Nazi occult studies during World War II, fought in Vietnam, and done much more. It operates as a secret first line of defense against that which humanity cannot know. In reality, Delta Green is not an official agency, having been disbanded in 1970. It is now best described as a conspiracy, one that conducts illegal investigations because no one else does or cares to. This includes the U.S. Government, which through another ultra-secret agency, Majestic-12, is more interested in obtaining extra-terrestrial technology. So secret is Majestic 12 and its accord with the Greys -- the same species whose saucer crashed in Roswell in 1947 -- that not even President Bill Clinton has been told about it. In return for advanced technology and knowledge, the Greys operate unhindered in the United States to unknown purposes. Delta Green and Majestic-12 know of the existence of the other, but not the truth of what each other does.

Even that is not the truth. The *real* truth is that the Greys are not what they seem. They are not aliens but constructs that enable their masters to experiment on humanity. Pulling the Greys' strings are the Mi-Go and they are the most overt Mythos threat operating on Earth. Most other Mythos creatures and entities have retreated in the face of mankind's curiosity. Many are equally content to watch as immorality and detachment hastens the world toward the End Times. What mad cultists there are devoted to such beings have been either incarcerated or declared insane, or they hide behind layers of wealth and power.

Delta Green and Majestic-12 are not the only organizations described in this supplement. Also given are the backgrounds, histories, personalities, and purposes for the Karotechia, the Fourth Reich reborn in South America that worships the spirit of Adolf Hitler; SaucerWatch, a private organization that investigates UFO phenomena despite the best efforts of Majestic-12 (and is provided as a means to play **Delta Green** with civilians rather than federal investigators); and the Fate. The Fate is an occult body based in New York City that hides behind and controls an extensive criminal syndicate. Operating virtually unnoticed, its head is Stephen Alzis, a man who has died at least 15 times since 1930 and who might be an avatar of Nyarlathotep. Alzis might prove an invaluable source of aid in the fight against Majestic-12 or the Karotechia but will always demand a price.

Less than half of **Delta Green** is devoted to its background; almost 200 pages are divided between its nine appendices. These include a bibliography and a glossary, plus a guide to security classifications and five Mythos tomes/manuscripts particular to a **Delta Green** campaign. Four of these are provided as complete handouts. One appendix covers the creation of Delta Green characters and cells, a cell being made up of three investigators. Teams larger than three investigators consist of agents from more than one cell or Delta Green friendlies, usually atypical **Call of Cthulhu** investigators. The companion piece to this appendix examines almost 40 federal agencies, each with history and breakdown, a sample NPC, and various occupation templates. The templates and NPCs are written for both **Call of Cthulhu** and **Call of Cthulhu d20.** New spells and an explanation of modern firearms are also included for both systems.

The most interesting appendices give two scenarios and a two-part campaign. "Puppet Shows and Shadow Plays" is designed to introduce players to the **Delta Green** setting and involves a holidaying alien on a body-hopping murder spree. Filmic inspirations for this adventure are the B-movies *The Hidden* and *Thunderheart*, and this is a violent affair that does waiver from the Mythos in including a coyote spirit. "Convergence" is the oldest piece in the supplement, being based on the original 1992 scenario that appeared in *The Unspeakable Oath #7* and exposes the investigators to Mi-Go experimentation even as Majestic-12's enforcers, NRO Delta, watch on. How well the investigators deal with the situation will affect their relations with parts of Majestic-12 in the future. "The New Age" is the two-part campaign. It opens with a strange set of deaths at a party and will eventually see the investigators storming the headquarters of a New Age cult founded by a second-rate science fiction author. Again, this is a violent affair, although this time its cinematic nod is to *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* and its T-1000 assassin.

Physically, the new **Delta Green** hardcover does not feel as sturdy as it should. Inside the book, the reprint has not been as clean a process as it could have been, but the artwork is excellent and the writing to the point. There are some weird errors though, especially with some NPCs given for the federal agencies. For example, what language is Belgian? The error is even carried over to the **d20 System** versions. Also, some text appears to be missing in this reprint, although this is not as much of a problem as it might have been.

In truth, the inclusion of the **d20 System** statistics is outdated given that **Call of Cthulhu d20** is very much out of print, but then this version of **Delta Green** could be used with *[d20 Modern](#)* with little difficulty. The stats are at least kept in plain and unobtrusive boxes and are easily ignored if the **d20 System** is not to your liking.

In 1996, **Delta Green** was a near-perfect supplement. In 2007, **Delta Green** has a problem: the terrorist attacks of New York in September 2001. **Delta Green** is a political game, it deals with confrontations with the Mythos and its agents and between federal agencies, but the political landscape of the 21st century is radically different to the 20th. Similarly the cultural landscape has moved on; UFOs and the Greys are *so* passé, even if a distrust of big government is not. Pagan Publishing has promised a Millennium sourcebook that will examine the place and state of Delta Green in this new century. Intentionally, no release date is given for this book, because after all, readers are still waiting for the **Cult of Transcendence** campaign promised in this very volume.

The problems of time aside, **Delta Green** is an incredible supplement because it deals with two problems at the heart of **Call of Cthulhu.** First, it asked how the Mythos could survive into the modern age (essentially by retreating as mankind's reach extended). Second, it asked how the Mythos could be faced over and over in the face of investigator death and insanity (by having the investigators be members of a once-sanctioned organization devoted to facing it and from which replacements could be drawn). Further, **Delta Green,** as both supplement and agency legitimizes and empowers, at least partially, the investigation of the Mythos by the player characters. In addressing these problems and by framing them against a conspiracy that caught the mood of the time, **Delta Green** presented -- and continues to present -- a paradigm shift. After **Delta Green,** no **Call of Cthulhu** supplement, and certainly no **Cthulhu Now** supplement, could be released without Keepers and players alike, and even [publishers](#) asking one question: Can you run this with **Delta Green?**

-- Matthew Pook

The Global Dragons

A Generic Supers Team and Campaign Framework

by J. Edward Tremlett

"Who are we? We are peace. We are balance. We are the hands that guide to rightness. No longer will brute power rule in the open light, or evil reign from the shadows, hidden away. For we are everywhere, and we are watching, always. Farewell, for now . . ."

Thanks to their unique manipulation of ley lines, the new supers team the Global Dragons can be anywhere in the world in seconds, and vanish just as quickly. They've become known for their lightning-fast response to crime and emergencies, as well as their troubling tendency to "kidnap" the supervillains they defeat. But who are these mysterious people, and where do they go when they're not fighting crime . . .?

A team with what may indeed be the largest headquarters ever, the Global Dragons could be rivals, campaign background, enemies, or a new framework for a supers game. This generic article gives their background, how they work, tips on joining, and some of the major players involved. Ideas for plot possibilities come at the end.

Public Knowledge

The Global Dragons is a small but highly visible superhero group that has been active only for a few years. When trouble occurs, the Dragons appear out of nowhere and vanish back into it just as quickly. They never stick around for thanks or give lengthy explanations; they only comment that "balance has been maintained."

Most of its members are complete unknowns, with the exception of Slider (their leader), Fireblazer, and the Encapsulator. There is some suspicion that certain members used to operate under different names and costumes, possibly even as supervillains. However, as no one can seem to find any member of the Dragons unless he's standing right in front of them, this is proving impossible to confirm.

The Dragons have caused some controversy: Sometimes they take the defeated supervillain along with them and do not hand him over to the authorities for trial. The pattern seems to be that the more powerful the enemy, the more likely they are to take him, but this is not always true.

This tactic is seen as little better than abduction by the more law-and-order oriented heroes. However, no one's been able to catch up to the Dragons to complain. A common lament is that their headquarters is nowhere to be found . . .

Private Matters

. . . And this is because their base is literally under everyone's noses -- the entire earth itself.

The Global Dragons live, work, and travel within the planet's rivers and streams of mystical force, which are known as ley lines, or Dragon Lines. Their mysterious disembodied mentor, known only as Grandfather, has become one with the entire web of power. He allows them entrance, exit, and living space within the web of lines, which they call the Dragon's Nest.

While within the web, they enjoy free movement along its lines, as well as observation of the world on or around those lines. They also enjoy invisibility to all but the most powerful tracking and scans. To all lesser abilities of observation, it seems as though the Dragons, and their captives, are literally everywhere at once.

Grandfather and Slider have called together heroes from every nation to become agents of balance in a world suffering

from gross imbalance. Those who are agents of powerful excess -- most notably super-powered criminals -- should be stopped and made to see the error of their ways. The truly repentant are offered forgiveness and a chance to begin again as members of the Dragons. Those who deny a second chance are kept in their cells, until such time as another use can be found for them.

As the force that brought them together, and maintains the Dragons Nest, Grandfather "leads" the team. That said, the hyper-speedster (and super-genius) Slider is in charge of daily operations, recruitment, and overall decisions. They have something of a family business relationship in that respect: Grandfather can overrule Slider, should he choose to, but he is usually content to let her run things because they are of a nearly like mind.

All Global Dragons are issued a Luopan: a small bronze disc, four inches in diameter, that mimics the appearance of the feng shui "compasses" it is named for. The Luopan functions as a badge of membership, a communications device, and the way in and out of the Dragons' Nest. They are based on Slider's designs, but powered by the web itself.

Secret Origins

Long ago, toward the end of the Sung Dynasty in China, there were two prominent alchemists in the royal court, working as rivals to discover the means to immortality. One delved into elixirs, traveling the whole of the land to find new things to bring the human body into perfect, eternal balance. The other sought inspiration from the energy of the world itself, realizing that if a man could become one with the eternal energy of the landscape, then an eternal life was assured.

He was correct, after a fashion, but his greatest experiment was also his last. After hours of fevered preparation and ritual, the alchemist merged himself -- body, mind, and soul -- into the great web of Dragon Lines, achieving both immortality and more raw power than any man had ever known. However, he was also trapped within that web; unable to leave it, he became a prisoner of immortality.

Centuries passed, and the alchemist watched the world change, helplessly. He railed against the bars of his prison of power, barely able to do more than appear as a wispy ghost at great intersections of Dragon Lines. And as he looked at the world, through those bars, he gained both wisdom and sympathy, dearly wishing that he could find some way to bring peace to the world. So much anger, so much vengeance -- how could they be made to see that the answers lay not in gross "justice," but in balance?

It would not be until just past the 21st century that he would meet someone who could help. The young girl was impressively smart, and that intelligence had helped create rebelliousness within her. But she was also a power to be reckoned with, for she achieved the near-realization of what he'd wanted, all those ages ago: to step into the Dragon Nest, itself, and become a part of its halls of power without being irrevocably joined with them.

With their combined knowledge and power, they managed devise ways to let others enter and leave the Dragon Nest. Once the woman had learned the alchemist's ideals, and found that she shared them, she went back out into the world to find others who might join them. A fiery superhero and a criminal in need of a second chance were the first to join her, followed by others. Together, they set out to right the world once more -- not for recognition, or to correct ancient wrongs, but because someone has to restore balance when things go out of control.

They are the Global Dragons: agents of balance, forever watching.

Becoming a Member

Membership in the Global Dragons can be given one of three ways. The hero may work with the group a few times and impress them, and thus be offered a place within the group. The person might be a former villain who's been caught and reformed by the Dragons and taken on a new identity. Or the character may be approached by Grandfather, seemingly out of the blue, and offered membership -- one of the few things Slider has no real say in.

In all cases, the Dragons are looking for people who feel that humanity is out of step with the world around it, and are willing to do whatever is necessary to bring it back in line without resorting to barbarism, despotism, or murder. Other vigilante actions -- such as theft of dangerous objects, indefinite incarceration of powerful villains, and harsh object lessons for rogue countries appear acceptable, or at least expedient, in their eyes.

After a few intense question-and-answer sessions with both Slider and Grandfather, the prospective Dragon is given a Luopan, a new costume and name, and a chance. Those who fail have their memories of the experience wiped and replaced, and as they went under a new name, it will be difficult for others to try and jog their memories. Those who succeed are welcomed in and may either keep the new superhero identity, or revert to their previous one.

When considering power and experience, the Dragons consider the former to be more important than the latter. New applicants need not be continent-shaking world-beaters, but they should have something novel to bring to the collective abilities of the team. While the Dragons seek a diverse roster, in terms of gender balance and country of origin, there's nothing saying they can't have more than one person from a particular region. At no time will the team have more than 12 members, but it rarely operates with fewer than five (not including Grandfather).

Headquarters

The Dragon Nest -- sometimes called the Network or the Web by members -- is a world-spanning mesh of spacious passages that seem to run forever. Ornate "great halls" stand where two or more passages intersect, and the more Dragon Lines intersect, the larger and more ornate the halls. The décor and architecture mirrors that of an immense Chinese palace out of legend.

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the distances, but a person needs only to state aloud a desire to be somewhere and he is transported within seconds. Likewise, one need only ask to speak to someone within the Network -- or even outside of it, via the Luopan -- to be given a means to communicate with him or her.

The Network can produce whatever the Dragons may need: meeting rooms, dining halls, workshops or living quarters, along with food and drink, tools and toys, furniture and scenery, or whatever else they require. Members need only ask for it and Grandfather will provide -- usually. Whatever someone asks for generally conforms in appearance to what the person making the request thinks it should look like, but with a slight to heavy Chinese touch.

When the things are no longer immediately required, they vanish back and are remade when needed again. They *cannot* be taken out of the web, as they have no real substance outside of it. Even the Luopans given to members are made from materials brought in from outside the Dragon Nest.

There are, by general consensus, a few permanent structures within the Dragon Nest. There is the spacious and regal "Throne Room," where the Dragons meet on floating, dynastic thrones to discuss matters, plan strategy, or make announcements. There is the "World Window," where events from all over the earth can be seen through a multi-faceted crystal the size of a small house.

And there are the prisons, somewhere around Antarctica, which hold all the supervillains the group has taken into custody. These "guests" are given whatever they desire, so long as it cannot be used as a tool or a weapon. Grandfather occasionally lets the cold from the outside through if a guest becomes rude.

Rights and Responsibilities

The Global Dragons are not paid for their efforts. That said, the Network provides all the room, board, and entertainment a person might need or want, limited only by the imagination of the one who asks. Grandfather isn't shy about giving opinions on people's requests, though, so it's best not to ask for too much or anything he might consider improper.

Members may also bring their families with them, if they desire, so long as their families can behave themselves. They

will not be given a Luopan -- they must rely on the Dragons for travel. Should a member be expelled, the family must also leave, unless Grandfather considers their safety to be in jeopardy.

The Global Dragons are expected to be heroes: no more, no less. With their unique window on the world, they can respond to emergencies within seconds and are expected to do what they can, when they can, for as long as they are able. They should act in the best interests of everyone involved -- even their enemies -- and offer up all the aid that they can.

No member should be without his Luopan; if it's lost, it *must* be recovered. No member should tell anyone where the group lives, how they operate, or what they can do. No member should act in a cowardly or murderous fashion. Anyone who fails in these respects will be mindwiped and expelled. Such a punishment is likely to last for life, though some have redeemed themselves over time and been newly approached for a second chance.

Game Master's Section

Notable Members

The team currently has seven core members, not including Grandfather. Stat guidelines range from Poor to Average to Medium to Impressive to Powerful to Way-Powerful.

Slider

Bao Qingzhao; 29; Chinese national with no criminal record

Qingzhao's parents expected her to be a quiet, productive girl who would get married and do them proud by raising a quiet, productive child of her own, but some kids are just meant for bigger things. In Qing's case, it was twofold: Not only was she incredibly smart, but she could run from Beijing to Hong Kong in less time than it took to ask the air to let her do it. What were rules and expectations when she could skim the oceans to America for the afternoon? What were the normal lessons of childhood when she could invent nearly anything out of almost nothing?

Caught between a high intelligence and a power she couldn't ignore, she might have done something rash and stupid. Fortunately, she came across a nexus of Dragon Lines while exploring the countryside, and had a long talk with the wispy, grandfatherly figure she discovered while sliding through it. He had ideas, and she had the skills to make them a reality, along with a willingness to learn from someone who really understood her, for a change. Once they'd learned enough from one another, she began recruiting to put their plans into action.

Powers: Qingzhao has the ability to transform herself into any medium she's touching (air, electricity, rock, magic, sunlight, etc.) and travel through it at Powerful speeds. While turned into a medium she gains whatever benefits it may grant, such as having bullets go through her while she's air or becoming hard as stone when she's rock. She can also be half in and out of a state, so she could deliver a solid punch at Powerful speed while her legs are carrying her through the air.

Stats: Average Body; Impressive Mind; Medium Spirit

Appearance: 5'0", 140 lb., short black hair and hazel eyes. She's a bit homely and chubby but cute in a nerdy kind of way.

Costume: Slider hides her homely face behind a reflective, featureless silver mask, and wears a long, steel-gray robe that whips behind her as she skims effortlessly across the landscape.

Family: Mother (48) and father (48); they have no idea where she is

Fireblazer

Larissa Lachance; 30; British citizen presumed dead

Larissa thought she had it all: good job, wealthy husband, decent life in a decent house. Then came the day she followed her man off to work to surprise him on his birthday, only to discover he worked for a crime boss as an arsonist for hire. If that wasn't bad enough, he actually knocked her out, tied her up, and left her to burn in the house he was going to torch!

Unfortunately for him, that was his wife's moment to shine. When the fire touched her, it was like a switch flipped in her head, and she realized all the things she could do. She put the fire out in the building and sent it into the car her husband was driving away in, instead. When he crawled out -- horribly burned -- she waved goodbye and flew away.

Larissa died that day, but Fireblazer was born, and she began a career as a third-string London superhero -- always just behind the limelight of other, more notable British Supers. She was seriously considering coming back to "life" and chucking it in for a day job when a weird Chinese girl gave her a better offer. She's been with the Dragons ever since, acting as their designated heavy hitter.

Powers: Larissa *is* fire. She can become it, generate it, shape it, control it, throw it, walk through it, fly away with it, and put it out, all with Impressive ability. By contrast, contact with any liquid except tea knocks out her powers for 24 hours.

Stats: Average Body; Average Mind; Medium Spirit

Appearance: 5'8", 170 lb., long flaming-red hair and green-gray eyes. She tends to dress flashy and fiery when she's not working.

Costume: Fireblazer wears a bright red jumpsuit that's constantly wreathed in well-controlled, bright orange flames. Fire shoots from her eyes and blackens her face with soot, concealing her identity.

Family: Father (50) and two sisters (31, 25), who think she's dead and estranged husband (32), in jail, who knows she's alive but can't prove it.

The Encapsulator

Dimitri Gorgiev Golokov; 45; Bulgarian citizen wanted for questioning

Dimitri had the bad luck to be born when he did. Ten years later and the collapse of the Soviet Union would have happened when he was old enough to choose his way. When his powers became evident, he wouldn't have been forced to work for the Communist-era secret police, and been given free reign to do the terrible things that he did. He knew, deep down, it was wrong to use his powers like that . . . but he did what he was told. Worse still, he came to like it.

After the collapse, Dimitri went underground, selling his unique talent to the highest bidder. He soon found that his new employers were often worse than his previous ones, and he slipped into despair and drug abuse. Slider found him at the end of his rope, when he was contemplating suicide, and offered him a chance to wipe everything clean.

On the run from his own country, Interpol, and his former employers, the past is something Dimitri cannot change. All he can do now, as a member of the Global Dragons, is change the present and hope that one day, the good will far outshine the bad.

Powers: As his name implies, Dimitri can create capsules around anything in line of sight. The capsules have Impressive strength and can be permeable to air or not as Dimitri desires. They can also take any shape he wants, including form-fitting "jackets" that totally envelop the target. Worse, he can shrink the capsule down, crushing the target if he so desires. (It was this particular side use of his power that got him such a nasty reputation.)

Stats: Medium Body; Average Mind; Poor Spirit

Appearance: 6'1", 280 lb., short black hair and blue eyes. He wears loose clothes that hide how stocky and muscle-bound he actually is.

Costume: The Encapsulator wears a long, black duster with a black, wide-brimmed leather hat and dark sunglasses.

Family: None known to be still alive

Grandfather

Consider all his stats to be Way-Powerful. He defends against attacks at the same level, and he obscures everyone and everything within the Dragon Nest at Way-Powerful as well. He cannot affect anything outside of the Network except the Luopans, though he can appear as a ghostly figure on Dragon Lines in varying degrees of signal strength.

Other Current Members

The Servant of Truth: Saudi Arabia's first superhero, the Servant of Truth has Medium Body, Average Mind, and Impressive Spirit. She has Medium strength, stamina, and flight abilities and Impressive mental powers, most often used to pull the truth from others' minds. She is the one who handles any mind-wiping.

Red Thunder: The enemy of Rio de Janeiro's underworld, Red Thunder has Average Body, Medium Mind, and Average Spirit. He can cause Impressive biofeedback in anyone in line of sight, healing or harming with a glance. A former criminal known as Bloody Hands, he seeks redemption by cleaning the streets he used to poison.

Dr. Atomic: New Jersey's finest self-made cyborg has Impressive Body, Medium Mind, and Medium Spirit. Dr. Atomic possesses Impressive strength and stamina, and he fires Medium atomic rays from his many hidden gunports. He would have probably turned to crime if Grandfather hadn't have come along and talked him into joining the group.

Jackie Du Preez: South Africa's Robin Hood has Average Body, Medium Mind, and Impressive Spirit. The scourge of apartheid has lived to see his dream of its end come true, but the resultant society has left him heartbroken. Now he uses his Impressive talents of illusion and mind control for the Global Dragons.

Notable Enemies

The Dragon Lord

Real name unknown; age unknown; claims Chinese citizenship.

Grandfather is not altogether fond of telling the story of the two Chinese alchemists, mostly because the "successful failure" is only half the story. The other half is that his experiment was flawed -- hastily rushed to succeed against the grand experiment of his rival, who claimed to have also discovered the means to immortality, and vowed to test it on himself. The end of the story is that, by the time of the Sung dynasty's end, and the Mongol invasion, neither alchemist was anywhere to be found.

What happened to him? Not even Grandfather knows. But sometime in the 19th century, not long after the Dowager Ci Xi solidified her hold over China, a shadowy, familiar presence stepped from seemingly nowhere -- sometimes advising, sometimes acting, but always plotting and scheming. He slipped back into the darkness well before the fall of the Forbidden City, and the end of Ci Xi's reign, but the threads he'd spun in that time had woven into a pattern that soon engulfed both China and its would-be foreign controllers. Those who knew of him, and his many servants, and his power, called him the Dragon Lord.

It was not until the Global Dragons burst into the scene that the Dragon Lord went from the shadows into the light, however tangentially. Attacks against the group, and other supers, began to bear his handprint. It soon was made clear to them that he not only knew of their great secret -- the Dragon Nest -- but also desired it for himself and would cease

his hostile actions against them only when he had it. The Global Dragons' response was immediate denial, and they've been at war ever since.

The Dragon Lord has never been seen nor described. Indeed, he *cannot* be seen, only heard, and always felt. Likewise he cannot be fought, only evaded, and never completely. If he has a power -- other than totally eluding even Grandfather's view -- it seems to be the Powerful ability to make almost anyone his total, unquestioning slave. His followers, willing or not, may ultimately number in the millions, and he has control over a good deal of the world's shadow economy. He has "influenced" heads and servants of state, supervillains, and superheroes, and he has any number of true "sleepers" out among the masses, waiting for a signal to do his bidding, however subtle or spectacular.

Plot Possibilities

Against the Dragon Lord: Always the Dragon Lord! His agents are everywhere, seeking to stop the Dragons and take what they have. He has created nearly endless chains of criminal supply and demand -- some in direct, bloody competition with one another -- just to taunt them out of hiding, so as to kill or capture one of their members and gain access to the Dragons Nest. His schemes are worldwide, his presence felt at every turn.

No More Nice Guys: A decision has been made. Why only stop super-powered criminals while perfectly ordinary mortals are just as capable of evil, on an even grander scale? The horrid despots of the world are in need of having some balance dropped into their regimes, too, and from this point on, the Dragons will do so. Such a decision puts them at loggerheads with a world that generally thinks everyone should mind their own business and let the UN, piecemeal sanctions, and benefit concerts deal with tyrants and torturers. It also causes problems among other, more law-and-order supers, who see this change as overstepping the "proper" role of superheroes in a world of nations and laws. But who's right? And whose will be done?

That One, Awful Weakness: The Global Dragons' strength is their ability to see anything on or around the planet's ley lines and teleport there instantaneously. However, they cannot see anything beyond the blanket of the atmosphere -- they are functionally blind to things in near Earth orbit, or beyond. So when the warfleet of Steelskull the Conqueror drops out of warpspace just behind the moon, and begins firing its mass drivers at the world, they are not only be caught as flat-footed as everyone else but have to depend on outsiders for mutual aid in defeating this menace. Will the team shine in the planet's darkest hour, or stand revealed as yet another supers team with a nifty, but ultimately useless gimmick?

A Traitor in the Fold: Unbeknownst to the team, one of their number is working in collusion with the Dragon Lord. So far, the treachery has only consisted of a number of letters back and forth -- poisonous missives in which the would-be betrayer speaks of his or her bitterness toward the group, and desire to be free of it. However, the traitor has promised to provide the Dragon Lord with a show of commitment, most likely by delivering one of the team into his hands, or giving him access to a Luopan. The are several possibilities for who the traitor is:

- *The Encapsulator tired of the endless running.* He hopes that by giving the Dragon Lord what he wants, he will be given a good, clean death at the hands of his agents. That way, he can avoid the messy spiritual implications of suicide and provide the world with some small vengeance for his actions.
- *Slider, nudged on by Grandfather.* The plan is to try and lure the Dragon Lord out into the open, once the "treason" takes place, so that he might be wholly seen and hopefully dealt with. The Servant of Truth is beginning to suspect something is up, but it remains to be seen if she will be brought into the fold on this one or not.
- *One of the player characters.* The hero is one of the Lord's many "sleeper" agents, activated only once well-ensconced in the group. The first stage of the treason is the letters, next will come sabotage, and then assassinations. Anything that can be found in the Network that will help the Lord understand what Grandfather did must be uncovered, but it won't do to ask the old man too many questions. Slider, fortunately, will talk to anyone about anything.

More than You Know: Grandfather is . . .

- *Going insane, ever so slowly.* The strain of seeing the entire world at once is too much for a normal mind to take, and even his advanced intellect is slowly wearing down. He is far too proud to admit this, however, and may not show symptoms of his madness until it's too late. Will the rest of the group see this coming? Can they save his mind in time?
- *Dying, as is the planet itself.* The Dragon Lines are a reflection of the world's natural energy, and as it buckles and breaks in the wake of the coming ecological cataclysm, so does Grandfather's health decline. Unless the tide is turned, one day he will succumb, leaving the Network unattended once more. Can the Global Dragons heal the world? And if not, who will take Grandfather's place?
- *Evil, and has always been.* He doesn't keep the criminals the Dragons capture locked away for the world's safety, but to assemble an army of the greatest criminals ever known. With this army, Grandfather plans to conquer the world, as he intended to when he entered the Network in the first place. When that day comes, he will hold the Dragons' families as hostage and put his heroes in the cells.

Other Dragon Lord Secrets: The Dragon Lord is . . .

- *Little more than a ghost, albeit a powerful one.* The elixir he discovered turned him into a disembodied consciousness, but it left him with the ability to speak to others and make them his arms and legs. He has sought power over others to assuage the lack of his own form. He seeks the Dragon Nest in the hopes that he can use the power there to make himself a new body, not realizing that it's an even worse prison than the one he's in now.
- *Living in another dimension, thanks to interference from outside.* Stymied for ideas in his race against his rival, he turned to certain ancient texts -- ones that escaped being burned by order of Emperor Qin -- that spoke of ways to talk to "those outside." The Outsiders were very interested in the miserable human speck that dared talk to them of immortality, and they took him back to their side of things for a time. Utterly changed by his time in their reality, the disembodied Dragon Lord acts as their agent provocateur and seeks the Dragon Nest as a source of power to further their bizarre, 10-dimensional goals.
- *Grandfather's abandoned body, filled with his dark side.* When he entered the Dragon Nest, only his mind and soul made the trip, and the "lower" parts of his personality were jettisoned along with his physical form. That said, the body is immortal and indestructible, for it is still linked with the higher parts of Grandfather's spirit and shares some measure of its power. It took centuries to become something other than a rooting pig of a man, living in caves and killing whatever happened by for food, but eventually the mind regained some semblance of its former intelligence and bearing. Now it wants to be reconciled with Grandfather, who either cannot or will not see the other half of himself that he left behind. But what happens if they come together?

Sentinels of the Styx

A *Shadowrun* Conversion

by Stephen Dedman

Although presented for the ***GURPS** Fourth Edition,* the Martial Arts adventure "Sentinels of the Styx" (and) was mentioned as also being suitable for play with other genres or games; one of the possibilities mentioned was ***Shadowrun.*** Here, then, are the notes and characters you need to use that adventure with ***Shadowrun,*** suitable for play with 400-500 point characters in that universe.

Shadowrun GMs should read both parts of the adventure, and refer to this article for conversions where necessary. Subheads in this article correspond to subheads in the two parts of the adventure.

Information for Part I

Background

The Sentinels of the Styx is a secretive group of Initiated Adepts, with a magical formula that gives their skin Impact Armor 1, Ballistic Armor 12.

Relocate the dojo where the adventure begins to Seattle's Asian district. Any minor security firm may replace Merrimac, and other companies with Rio Lobo and Kaimuk, to fit in with the campaign.

Heavy Flashlights may also be used as clubs. Locks are Keypad Maglocks unless otherwise specified.

Incoming!

Kim Song is an elf with a golden complexion and short black hair: 178 cm, 69 kg.

Replace the Kawasaki Ninja with a Suzuki Mirage, and the SUV with a GMC Bulldog Step-Van. Replace yards with meters, throughout. Replace shotguns with Remington 990s, and 9mm Machine Pistols with Steyr TMPs. Pistol crossbows are Light Crossbows.

Dogs of War

For Volker's dogs, use the stats for Wolves, or replace with Barghests (to increase their professional rating). Replace .40 Pistol with Colt Manhunter, and Self-Loading Rifle with AK-97. Volker's computer runs Iris Orb.

Rules for dealing with electrical damage (the fence) and cold damage (the meat locker) are on p. 155 of ***Shadowrun***: Treat the locker as an Arctic Environment, Threshold 4 (see p. 117). Rules for suffocation are on p. 119.

The door of the meat locker in which the PCs may be imprisoned has Armor Rating 8, Structure Rating 9. The latch, its weakest point, is 6/7.

Inside Job

Minimum qualifications for any job at Merrimac are BOD 3, AGI 3, REA 3, STR 3, LOG 3, WIL 3; Pilot Ground Vehicle 2; English or Cityspeak 2; and a good SIN (real or fake). Shadowrunners who are Uncouth, Uneducated, or have a Moderate or Worse addiction are automatically disqualified. Magic may be used to "cheat" on any of these

tests, and any magic-user with a Heal spell only needs to pass two of the tests, rather than three.

1. Surveillance. An hour spent watching a bank of monitors looking for shoplifters (pre-recorded footage) -- a contest of the investigator's Perception + Intuition versus the shoplifter's Palming 5 (Shoplifting +2) + Agility 2. Hackers and technomancers can do a "Kobayashi Maru," breaking into the software to give themselves a perfect score: Hacking + Exploit (Firewall 3, 1 Initiative Pass) Extended Test.

2. Shadowing. The hero is told to follow a (plain-clothes) mook as he drives to a mall, then goes inside to buy something from a shop -- a contest of a PC's Shadowing + Agility skill versus a Merrimac mook's Perception + Intuition. Magicians can follow astrally; a rigger may use drones; a hacker or technomancer might try hacking into surveillance cameras on the Matrix; etc.

3. Gatekeeper. The PC is told to roleplay minding the door at an entertainment venue, not allowing in any weapons or alcohol. Six people walk past -- two mooks, three clerks, and Sabra. Sabra or one of the mooks has a Streetline Special hidden inside their Lined Coat (use the rules for Concealing Gear on p. 301 of *Shadowrun*). Once the weapon is spotted, persuading the carrier to remove it requires Negotiation or Intimidation.

4. Courier. The applicant must pick up an order of take-out food for the staff at Merrimac's office (using his own car). When the PC arrives at the diner, he will find that the cashier -- an underage but pretty girl -- speaks no English, only a language the PC has told Glanton he knows (e.g. if he claims to speak Korean, he will be sent to a Korean restaurant in Koreatown; Spanish, a Mexican cantina in the barrio; etc.). If the character successfully communicates with the girl, he returns on time; if not, he fails the test.

5. Firearms. A "shoot/no shoot" exercise, firing a light or heavy pistol at stationary man-sized pop-up targets at 20 meters (long range) in partial light. Two-thirds of the targets are of unarmed people, 1/3 of armed (GM should roll separately for each one). Each requires a Perception Test (Threshold 2) before shooting. The applicant gets 10 shots at 20 pop-ups. He must hit more than half of the legitimate targets, and shooting the wrong target is an automatic failure. Magicians with spells that cause physical damage may dispense with the pistol.

6. Fitness. The hero runs a 1,500-meter course in 100 turns (approximately 5 minutes) while carrying a 30-kg. pack. Magic-users may shapeshift, fly, etc.

7. Unarmed combat. The Shadowrunner, unarmed, walks down a dark alley (partial light), while being shadowed by two ork mooks armed with clubs. (See *Surprise Test,* p. 155.) Use of non-lethal spells and cyberware is allowed.

Information for Part II

The China Shop

The reinforced door is Armor Rating 8, Structure Rating 9. Replace the first aid kit with a Medkit 2 and the Holdout Pistol with a Streetline Special.

Clash of the Titans

There is a small fleet of vehicles parked inside the compound. Some belong to the heavies (mostly Mercury Comets), and Merrimac owns others (a Mitsubishi Nightsky, a few GMC Bulldog Step-Vans and Chrysler-Nissan Patrol Vans, and a Hughes Stallion).

Aftermath

Replace the Year of the Metal Tiger (2010) with the Year of the Water Snake (2073).

Cast

Merrimac Mook (Professional Rating 2)

Merrimac Mooks encountered during the day will be human; the night shift is made up of orks. Stats remain the same.

BOD 4
AGI 3
REA 4
STR 4
CHA 2
INT 3
LOG 2
WIL 3
ESS 6
Init 7
IP 1
CM 10

Skills: Clubs 2 (Batons +2); Dodge 2; Firearms 2; Unarmed Combat 2 (Martial Arts +2).

Qualities: High Pain Tolerance 1.

Gear: Armor Jacket; Heavy Flashlight (use as club); Doc Wagon (Basic); CMT Clip commlink; Low Lifestyle. See adventure and conversions for other weapons.

Merrimac Heavy (Professional Rating 3)

Merrimac Heavies are either humans (1-3), orks (4-5) or elves (6); stats remain the same.

BOD 4
AGI 4
REA 4
STR 4
CHA 3
INT 3
LOG 3
WIL 3
ESS 6
Init 7
IP 1
CM 10

Skills: Clubs 2 (Batons +2); Dodge 2; Firearms Skill Group 2; Unarmed Combat 3 (Martial Arts +2).

Qualities: Guts, High Pain Tolerance 1.

Gear: Armor Jacket; CMT Clip commlink; Middle Lifestyle. Weapons and other gear as described in adventure and conversions.

Sabra Stein (Professional Rating 4)

By the time she was old enough to enlist in the UCAS Air Force, Israeli-born 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. Although promiscuous, she is fiercely loyal to him in all other ways.

Though 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.

BOD 4 (5)
AGI 5
REA 5 (7)
STR 4
CHA 4
INT 4
LOG 3
WIL 4
ESS 3.7
Init 9 (11)
IP 1
CM 10

Active Skills: Archery 3 (Crossbow +2); Blades 4 (Knife +2); Con 3; Disguise 2; Dodge 2; Etiquette (Street) 3; Intimidation 3; Negotiation 2; Perception 3; Pilot Ground Craft 2; Pistol 3; Pilot Aircraft 2 (Rotary Wing +2); Throwing Weapons 2 (Throwing Knives +2); Unarmed Combat 6 (Martial Arts +2).

Knowledge Skills: Corporate Security Tactics 2; Local Area Knowledge 2; Mixed Martial Arts statistics 3; Security Systems 3; Smuggler Safe Houses 3; Smuggling Routes 4.

Language Skills: English N; Hebrew 3.

Qualities: Ambidextrous; Double Jointed; First Impression; Guts; High Pain Tolerance 1; Quick Healer.

Cyberware: Cybereyes, Rating 1, with Flare Compensation, Thermographic Vision, and Protective Covers; Reaction Enhancers 2; Titanium Bone Lacing.

Gear: Knife; two throwing knives; Renraku Sensei commlink; Urban Explorer jumpsuit (when not in dojo); Steyr TMP (usually close to hand); Suzuki Mirage; Middle Lifestyle.

Appearance: Tanned complexion, short but unruly black hair, hazel eyes, snakes tattooed around biceps and ankles. A large-breasted, sexy, strong and confident-looking human woman. Human, 170 cm, 55 kg.

Vincent Kane/John Turvey (Professional Rating 3)

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.

BOD 3
AGI 4
REA 4
STR 3
CHA 3
INT 4
LOG 4
WIL 4

ESS 6
Init 9
IP 1
CM 10

Qualities: Blandness

Skills: Clubs 3; Infiltration 2; Intimidation 3; Law Enforcement (Professional Knowledge) 4; Leadership 2; Perception 3; Pilot Ground Craft 3; Pistols 4; Unarmed Combat 4.

Gear: *Kane:* Armor Jacket; Colt America L36; Extendable Baton; Yamaha Pulsar; pack of 10 plastic restraints; Renraku Sensei commlink. *Turvey:* As described in adventure (typically Merrimac Heavy gear), plus a small container of Nanopaste Disguise, a Maglock Sequencer (Rating 3), and a Novatech Airware commlink.

Sidney Torres (Professional Rating 3)

Homicide Detective Sidney Torres Sidney is intended as a potential Lone Star Contact and possible future Friend, and may be male or female depending on the make-up and preferences of the gaming group. As well as being single, Sidney is a serious student of the martial arts.

BOD 3
AGI 4
REA 4 (6)
STR 3
CHA 5
INT 5
LOG 4
WIL 4
ESS 5.4
Init 9 (11)
IP 1
CM 11

Skills: Clubs 3; Infiltration 2; Intimidation 2; Law Enforcement (Professional Knowledge) 4; Leadership 2; Negotiation 2; Perception 3; Pilot Ground Craft 3; Pistols 4; Unarmed Combat 4 (Martial Arts +2).

Languages Skills: English N; Spanish 3.

Qualities: First Impression; High Pain Tolerance 1; Quick Healer; Will to Live 1.

Cyberware: Reaction Enhancers 2.

Appearance: Human, 170 cm, 63 kg. Olive complexion, wavy black hair, dark brown eyes.

Gear: Armor Jacket; Colt America L36; Extendable Baton; Yamaha Pulsar; pack 10 plastic restraints; Renraku Sensei commlink; Middle lifestyle.

Pieter Volker (Professional Rating 4)

Pieter Volker began working part time as a Merrimac security guard while pursuing veterinary studies. As Merrimac expanded, their demand for guard dogs increased, and Pieter soon found himself running a breeding and training program for larger, more dangerous animals for use as guards.

Pieter's program includes setting stronger animals on weaker ones 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 cooperation with Glanton's own schemes.

BOD 3
AGI 4
REA 4 (7)
STR 3
CHA 2
INT 3
LOG 4
WIL 4
ESS 2.75
Init 9 (12)
IP 1
CM 11

Active Skills: Armorer 5; Close Combat Skill Group 5; Demolitions 3; Dodge 3; Firearms Skill Group 6; First Aid 4; Heavy Weapons 3; Infiltration 3; Negotiation 2; Outdoor Skills Group 3; Pilot Aircraft 3 (Rotary Wing +2); Pilot Ground Craft 3; Throwing Weapons 2.

Knowledge Skills: Corporate Security Tactics 2; Blade Design 3; Dog Breeding 4; Genetics 2; Engineering 4; Firearm Design 4; Parazoology 2; Security Systems 4; Veterinary science 4.

Language Skills: English N; Dutch 2; French 2; German 2.

Qualities: Animal Empathy; Guts; High Pain Tolerance 1; Allergy (Mild, Silver); Incompetence (Pilot Water Craft) (+10 BP).

Cyberware: Aluminum Bone Lacing; Cybereyes (Rating 2) with Flare Compensation, Protective Cover, Smartlink, Thermographic Vision and Vision Magnification; Reaction Enhancers 3; Synthetic Lower Arm Cyberarm with Ares Predator IV in Cyberarm Slide, Monowire Whip in Fingertip Compartment, Smartlink.

Appearance: Elf, 197 cm, 87 kg. Lightly tanned complexion, short blond hair receding from widow's peak, bright blue eyes.

Gear: Armor Jacket; Chameleon suit; Erika Elite commlink; GMC Bulldog Step-Van; Hughes Stallion; PJSS Elephant Rifle; Remington Roomsweeper; Ruger 100; Survival knife; Survival Kit; High Lifestyle.

Non-combatant

Most non-combatants (Merrimac clerks, patrons at the strip club, etc.) are average civilians with no weapons or combat skills (Professional Rating 0). The GM is free to intersperse the non-combatants with harmless-looking but still dangerous individuals.

BOD 3
AGI 3
REA 3
STR 3
CHA 3
INT 3
LOG 3
WIL 3
ESS 6
Init 6

IP 1
CM 11

Gear: Armor clothing; commlink.

Jerome "Ferret" Barrett (Professional Rating 4)

A skinny, long-nosed and generally unpleasant-looking dwarf, with a 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 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 run-down bar and turn it into a strip club.

A few months later, Barrett met Pieter Volker at the club, and they went into business together, but 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.

BOD 3
AGI 6
REA 5
STR 2
CHA 2
INT 5
LOG 4
WIL 4
ESS 6
Init 9 (12)
IP 1
CM 11
Initiative (Astral): 10
Initiative Passes (Astral): 3

Active Skills: Astral Combat 3; Blades 2 (Knife +2); Con 3; Conjuring Skill Group 3; Counterspelling 3; Dodge 3; Electronics Skill Group 2; Etiquette 2 (Street +2); Forgery 3; Perception 3; Pistols 2; Spellcasting 5; Stealth Skill Group 3.

Knowledge Skills: Corporate Security Tactics 3; Finances 3; Magic Background 4; Safe Houses 3; Security Systems 3.

Language Skills: English (Cityspeak) N; Russian 2.

Qualities: Double-Jointed; Magician; Addiction (Mild, Stimulants)

Spells: Acid Stream; Analyze Truth; Control Actions; Cure Disease; Detect Enemies; Detox; Manabolt; Shapechage; Stabilize; Stunball.

Appearance: 99cm, 47 kg. Pale pockmarked skin, untidy dark blond hair, hazel eyes: a scrawny, sharp-featured, shifty-looking dwarf with an ugly toothbrush mustache and crooked goatee.

Gear: Lined Coat; Knife; Streetline Special; Remington Roomsweeper; Sony Emperor Commlink; Eurocar Westwind; High Lifestyle.

Donald Glanton (Superior Prime Runner)

Don Glanton is the son of a UCAS Recon Marine Sniper and an ESL teacher. Most of his childhood and youth was spent following his parents around the Pacific, where he learned local languages and martial arts. By the time he finished school and enlisted in the USMC, he was a red belt in Kajukenbo and familiar with many other styles. His sensei told him stories of the Sentinels of the Styx and sent him on missions to try to discover their secrets.

Though Glanton 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 any other of his associates' illegal sidelines. He has a personal code of honor similar to bushido; this, combined with wanderlust and a low tolerance for boredom, has made for an interesting life but is no guarantee of a long one.

BOD 7
AGI 6
REA 6
STR 7
CHA 3
INT 4
LOG 4
WIL 6
ESS 6
Init 10 (12)
IP 1
CM 11

Active Skills: Athletics Skill Group 3; Blades 3; Computers 2; Data Search 2; Demolitions 3; Dodge 4; Etiquette 2 (Military +2); Firearms Skill Group 4; Infiltration 3; Instruction 4; Intimidation 4; Leadership 4; Negotiation 3; Outdoor Skills Group 4; Parachuting 2; Perception 4; Pilot Aircraft 3; Pilot Ground Craft 3; Pilot Watercraft 2; Throwing Weapons 4; Unarmed Combat 7 (Martial Arts +2).

Knowledge Skills: Corporate Security Tactics 2; Martial Arts trivia 3; Military History 4; Mixed Martial Arts statistics 6; Security Systems 3; Smuggling Routes 4; Urban Brawl schedules 2.

Languages Skills: English N; Japanese 4; Mandarin Chinese 4; Spanish 4; Russian 4; Arabic 3; Hindi 3; Korean 3.

Qualities: Adept; Aptitude (Unarmed Combat) 1; Guts; High Pain Tolerance 3; Will to Live 3.

Adept Powers: Combat Sense 1; Critical Strike 4; Improved Reflexes 2; Killing Hands; Mystic Armor 1; Pain Resistance 1.

Appearance: 199 cm, 90 kg. Tanned complexion, red-brown hair cut in hi-top fade, dark brown eyes. A rangy, broad-shouldered, tough-looking ork, with large callused hands and feet and a UCAS Special Forces tattoo on his right bicep and a hula girl on the left.

Gear: Armor Jacket; Survival Knife; Throwing Knife; Renraku Sensei commlink; Survival Kit; Chameleon Suit; Mercury Comet. Rarely carries a gun but owns a Yamaha Pulsar, Colt America L36, Colt Manhunter, HK XM30, and Remington 990. High Lifestyle.

Lin Chu (Superhuman Prime Runner)

Lin Chu was the first elf child born in her village and, because she was picked on for her odd appearance, learned to fight at an early age. She was barely five when her mother died, and she was sent to an orphanage run by Buddhist nuns. She escaped 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.

After leaving the temple and being initiated into the Sentinels of the Styx, 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.

While Chu strives to be compassionate to all people, she feels a particular sense of duty toward her fellow elves and Asian women. She does what she can to protect or rescue them from human traffickers and other criminals.

BOD 5
AGI 6
REA 6
STR 4
CHA 5
INT 5
LOG 4
WIL 6
ESS 6
Init 11 (14)
IP 1
CM 11

Active Skills: Athletic Skills Group 6; Close Combat Skills Group 5; Computer 2; Etiquette 2; First Aid 3; Infiltration 2; Instruction 5; Negotiation 3; Survival 2; Throwing Weapons 4; Unarmed Combat 7 (Martial Arts +2).

Knowledge Skills: Buddhist Philosophy 5; Chinese History 3; Farming 2; Science and Technology News 2; Vegetarian Cooking 2.

Language Skills: Mandarin Chinese N; English 4; Cantonese 4; Russian 2.

Qualities: Adept; Aptitude (Unarmed Combat); Armored skin (Impact 1, Ballistic 12); Double Jointed; Guts; High Pain Tolerance 3; Initiate 3; Sensitive System; Will to Live 3.

Adept Powers: Combat Sense 1 (.5); Critical Strike 2 (.5); Great Leap 2 (.5); Improved Ability (Unarmed Combat) 1 (.5); Improved Reflexes 3 (5); Kinesics 1 (.5); Missile Parry 2 (.5); Natural Immunity 2 (.5); Pain Resistance 1 (.5); Rapid Healing 2 (.5); Voice Control 1.

Initiate Powers: Centering (Chanting in Chinese).

Gear: Faded black denim jacket and jeans; black wig; sneakers. Small backpack holds orange robe and change of underwear, Medkit, Survival Kit, Water Bottle, Begging Bowl, and CMT Clip Commlink. Squatter lifestyle.

Appearance: 177 cm, 68 kg. An elf with a 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).

Pyramid Review

Cuba

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Michael Rieneck & Stefan Stadler Art & layout by Michael Menzel & Steffi Krage Translation by Sybille Aminzadah, Bruce Whitehill, & Word for Wort

Full-color boxed set with game board, five plantation boards, five worker pieces (in five colors), five score markers (in five colors), 25 character cards (five each in five colors), 15 ship cards, starting player token with plastic stand, 24 statute cards, 25 building tiles, town-hall voting tile, church veto tile, 54 wooden products, 30 wooden goods, 45 wooden resources, 60 coins, six black discs, four rules summaries; $59.95

Yes, kids, there was a *Cuba* before you started seeing it on the news and on every third episode of *CSI: Miami.* As recalled by Rio Grande Games, this is the island nation before it had undergone a revolution. There's corruption, yes, but a lively trade as well.

The object of the game is to generate the most victory points from doing business by the end of the game.

Each player (two to five enterprising workers can join) gets a virgin plantation from which to launch his economic rise, and the same selection of five people to help him work it. Every phase, the players choose one of their friends to assist them in their endeavors. The lowliest (and therefore most important) is the worker. His pawn is placed on one of the squares of his farm board, and he may gather products and resources from that row and column; a little water, some wood, perhaps some tobacco, and industry is underway. Everything is stacked in the front lot, though products not used by the end of the turn go bad (the tobacco rots, and so on).

The warehouse stores stuff safely if the foreman activates it. He triggers any structure's ability if it stands on one of those squares "cross-indexed" with the worker pawn. That arrangement usually means a choice: place the worker to get materials or to use certain buildings? (The warehouse is *always* an option if the foreman forgoes any other action.) The architect character puts these buildings up, but that stops the square so occupied from producing, so it's important to have an alternate supply. That typically means sending the tradeswoman to market to buy and sell whatever is worth the most.

If a player has stuff to market and wants victory points more than money, the mayor can load materials onto ships in the harbor. Each vessel is a random card with different requirements: One may want cigars and two loads each of tobacco and sugar, while another may want rum instead of the cigars. New arrivals offer fewer points, while ships that have been in port a while are worth more . . . assuming its holds haven't been filled by a quicker player.

Of the five characters, only four are played each round; the remaining member is sent to parliament. Character cards are numbered one to five, and that's how many votes they have; sending the poor worker with his "one" to the meeting won't beat someone else's mayor, but spending pesos greases the wheels and the church and town hall can affect the outcome. The businessman with the highest total chooses which laws are in force next turn. Act cards determine the taxes, duties, and subsidies and how to get victory points for them (giving up money or having several buildings may accordingly increase one's score). Another set of acts generally hurts the players, taking away resources or forcing them to pay extra for new buildings.

After the sixth round, players get a bonus for structures they've erected, and the highest total wins.

The components for the game are pretty good. Most of the bits are made of wood, and some are even sculpted this time around; the little rum bottles are particularly cute . . . which makes you wish cigars weren't just small brown blocks (but no need to be greedy). The board is large and accommodates most of what's going on, and the rules are large and clear. The plantation boards are two-sided: Everyone can play duplicate setups, or use the side with five unique layouts. A game takes one to two hours.

If the above wasn't quite clear, here it is again: There's a lot going on in *Cuba.* The vast number of choices is going to put some people off, and learning how things work isn't the same as learning how to win; those strategies almost certainly remain a mystery for the first few games. Resources, goods, and products are all specific, separate things. There isn't a linear progression wherein one collects water and wood, trades it in for citrus, and sells it at market. Rather, stores are used in many ways throughout the rounds as circumstances and acts of law dictate.

The good news is figuring all this out can be a lot of fun, and there are several ways to score. One of the drawbacks to some economic games is the predictability of who's going to do what and when. Here, opportunities abound and remaining flexible is important. Pesos count nothing when it's all over (except as a tiebreaker), but they're too useful in too many instances (including buying VPs) to spend them without thinking ahead. The politics of *Cuba* past and present aside, this version expands the boundaries of what's possible in an economics board game, though perhaps at the cost of some accessibility.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Best Friends: A Role-Playing Game About Girlfriends And All Their Petty Hatreds

Published by [Box Ninja](#)

Designed by Gregor Hutton

Cover by Eric Lofgren

Illustrated by Eric Lofgren & Michael Cunliffe

50-page 1.55Mb b&w PDF; $9.95
48-page black, white, & pink softcover; $14.95

Best Friends: A role-playing game about girlfriends and all their petty hatreds, like ***vs. Monsters,*** began as an entry in a competition to create an RPG within 24-hours. Each entry had to take two words from a list of four: suburb, hatred, girlfriend, and rats. The author chose girlfriend and hatred. Best Friends did not win a "Ronnie," the competition's award (named for its creator, Ron Edwards, the designer of *Sorcerer* and co-founder of *The Forge*), but the author was encouraged to develop the game further. The [24-hour version](#) is free to download, the developed result is this game.

Better known as an artist for Contested Ground Studios' *[a/state RPG,](#)* Gregor Hutton has taken his chosen words and inspired by his sister and her friends, used them to create a storytelling game about a girl's Best Friends and the hatreds that they hold for each other, petty and otherwise. It requires at least three players, five being optimum, plus three tokens per participant. It can be played with or without a GM.

Creating a character is interesting in that she is not wholly created by her player, but in part by the other players. Once she has a name, her player lists why she hates her Best Friends. She hates them all because each is either prettier, cooler, smarter, tougher, or richer than she is. With five players, she cannot hate each Best Friends for more than a single reason, though this varies according to the number of players. That done, each player tells the others why her character hates her Best Friends. For each reason that a Best Friend hates her, a girl gains a point in one of five attributes: Pretty, Cool, Smart, Tough, and Rich. Thus for each Best Friend that thinks a girl is prettier than she is, her Pretty attribute rises by one. A rating of one in any attribute is average, a rating of two is good, and three or more is excellent. A score of zero in any attribute means her Best Friends regard her as a loser in that area. A girl's attributes must add up to five.

Each girl is rounded out with a single sentence description of what the girl is like, for example, "I am never the bride, always the bridesmaid" or "I always know how to get what I want," along with a list of the stuff she has with her, and some personal Nonsense, such as relationship problems. Her player begins the game with three "Friend-Chips," which is what the tokens are for. Finally, her player must draw a picture of her in stick-figure style.

As a storytelling game, ***Best Friends*** is diceless. What a girl can do depends upon her attributes and which of her friends she hates for being better than her. If an attribute is zero, a girl can do very little; if 1, then she can do most average things. A score of 2, means she can do better than average things, and at 3 or more, a girl can do most things. If a girl wants to do more than her attribute allows, then she must "Push."

For example, Stacy has Rich 0, so must Push to buy anything, or influence anyone. Sarah though has Rich 1, so can buy some nice clothes, but must Push to buy designer labels. Rachel has Rich 2, so can easily buy designer labels, but to buy haute couture, she must Push. Yvonne with Rich 3 is Miss Money Bags, and so easily can afford buy haute couture. Attributes higher than three are possible, but uncommon.

After character creation, the players decide upon the nature of the story they want to tell, describing how and why the Best Friends are involved. In turn, each player frames a scene, describing its set up and narrating what her character does until she needs to do something more than she is capable of. This sets up a conflict, which can only be resolved through Pushing.

Pushing, the game's mechanic, is used to resolve each conflict, a scene in the ongoing story where the Best Friends cannot agree on what happens next. To get her way in conflict, a girl must Push. To Push, a girl gives one of her Friend-Chips to the Rival she hates for being better than her at whatever it is she is doing. If the Rival accepts what the girl wants, she simply keeps the Friend-Chip and the story continues. If the Rival objects she can also Push to get her way, passing on the Friend-Chip to her Rival who is better in that area, which might even be the original girl. This is called Pushing Over. Since a girl can only hold five Friend-Chips, any more she receives must be Pushed Over. Also, each girl can Push or Push Over only once per conflict, which keeps play simple and the Friend-Chips from just rebounding without resolution. Although possible for a girl to be hurt from a conflict, having it result in a Best Friend fatality is frowned upon. Whoever wins the conflict narrates its outcome, and so gets her way.

Best Friends mechanics are simple, *so* simple that my first reaction was, ". . . Is that it?" Followed by, "How do they work *again?*" I even bugged the designer to show me with a demo of the game, and when he did, I got the game. In understanding **Best Friends** I realized that its mechanical simplicity would be awkward to convey and that the mechanics would be best served by an example. So for example, the Best Friends above are attending a wedding when they set eyes on the groom's younger brother, a handsome doctor driving an expensive BMW.

Stacy (with Pretty 1 and one Friend-Chip) attempts to flash her best smile at the handsome doctor as he arrives at the reception. Rachel (also Pretty 1, but two Friend-Chips) has spotted both him and Stacy's pathetic attempt to attract his attention. Wanting the doctor for herself, Rachel decides to Push to beat Stacy in a Pretty contest, which ordinarily Stacy would win. Rachel's player must pass a Friend-Chip (lowering her total to one) to the Best Friend who is prettier than her, which is Yvonne (Pretty 2 and four Friend-Chips). Yvonne can either keep the Friend-Chip and let Rachel have narration rights or Push Over to the Best Friend she thinks is prettier, which is Stacy, granting her narration rights. Yvonne would also do this if she had five Friend-Chips, but Yvonne accepts the Friend-Chip and Rachel gains narration rights. Rachel's player narrates that her character gets the doctor's attention by taking off her glasses to reveal her hidden good looks. Annoyed at being upstaged by someone so much more plain than herself, Stacy seethes quietly (or not so quietly) while Rachel and the doctor hit it off, and plans another way in which she can draw the doctor back into her clutches . . .

As written, **Best Friends** is a game about young women, whether at the mall, in school, or on holiday at a remote cottage about to be stalked by a madman . . . but it need not be. It can easily involve more mature women, perhaps in suburbia (**Desperate Housewives: The RPG?**), an abbey of nuns, or a besieged city during the Indian Mutiny. The setting adds color and helps frame scenes, but **Best Friends** is fundamentally about women whose relationships are in crisis. Alternatively, and perhaps more interestingly, the game need not be about women at all. What if you wanted to run a political game set in the **White House** or the Soviet Politburo? Or an epic quest by five heroes to destroy a ring? Or a space opera aboard the *Liberator* or the *Serenity?* It may require the renaming of the five attributes, but the means of play and the game remain the same because such stories would still be about the character relationships.

Physically, **Best Friends** is a lightly written little game. There are plenty of examples and explanation along with a proper scenario that has a group of **Best Friends** on holiday at a log cabin. It is illustrated throughout with various ladies done in stick figure style, usually in peril.

Best Friends is clearly a character-intensive and character-driven game. Its Push mechanic is almost too simple to grasp, but it neatly enforces the game's emphasis upon character rivalries and inter-relationship conflict which starts with the undeniably clever means of creating Best Friends. Like many similar RPGs, **Best Friends** calls for a greater

degree of involvement upon the part of the players, both in accepting the nature of the game and in the framing of scenes and conflicts. It can be run with a GM (who acts more as a moderator) or without, but either way, a game can be set up, run, and completed in an evening. ***Best Friends: A Role-Playing Game About Girlfriends and All Their Petty Hatreds*** is the perfectly friendly little game about girlfriends being unfriendly, but which does not have to so girly.

--Matthew Pook (with thanks to Dave Lai)

Pyramid Review

Queen's Necklace

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Bruno Faidutti and Bruno Cathala

Full-color card game with 12-page manual, 110 plastic playing cards (including four turn summary cards and 3 blanks), four gem rarity tokens, four gem tokens, four gem Fashion tokens, five gold-colored metal rings, one necklace, one Web card for online gaming; $35

From the master behind *[Citadels](#)* and co-designer of the highly regarded *[Shadows Over Camelot](#)* comes a game of gaining courtly favor in the renaissance period. *Queen's Necklace* is not about love, but about jewelry: diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and amber. Two to four players are jewelers who gain favor by bringing in the rarest valuable gems in a given year. The catch is that the greater the number of gems a person brings to court, the less rare it is . . . and only the player who brings in the most of a type of gem can score for that gem type in that round. As courtiers, players also enlist the aid of any number of courtly figures from musketeers and thieves to the King or Queen -- if he can afford the favor.

The pieces are sturdy, tactile devices. Beyond strong oversize plastic cards representing the jewels, court folk, jeweler's tools, and turn order cards, the box includes five gold-colored rings, and an actual necklace that goes to the last wielder of the Queen card.

Setup begins with the gem Fashion tokens; they are placed in ascending order, side by side, first, second, and so on. The four gem tokens are then randomly placed next to each. The three Merchant cards are then removed from the deck, and players are each dealt four cards (any Astrologer cards are re-shuffled into the deck). The Merchant cards are then re-inserted at the one-third and two-third positions, and the last is shuffled into the last five cards of the draw pile. This deck represents nobles, jewels, and jewel enhancements, such as "ring" or "necklace." Five cards are drawn face up to start the Market, and the gold rings are placed upon the greatest, top value of each card.

Each turn then progresses in three stages. The first is Influence: a player may play as many people cards that he possesses at the start of his turn (such as to steal cards or change the favored gem type). Next comes the Purchase phase, where the current player buys up to 10 "ducats" of cards (no change is given or kept track of). All the remain cards are devalued by one level, represented by sliding the rings down one notch. There are five to seven value positions per card, and below these is "discard"; players need to be attentive to which cards will be discarded before they come around again. Cards are then drawn to replace those purchased, and rings placed on these cards' starting values. Normally, the next player begins his turn, unless a Merchant card is drawn. In that case, a Jewel Sale begins.

There are three Jewel Sales, each triggered by the discovery of a Merchant card. In it, players seek to be the one to sell the most of valuable types of jewels. In descending order of gem Fashion, players build stacks of cards to represent bids in each of the four gem types; bids of zero gems of a type are legal. To keep bids clear, the gem types should alternate face up and down. When all players are ready, these stacks are slid hidden toward the center of the table, and the gem types revealed simultaneously among players (e.g., assuming Emerald is first, then all players reveal Emerald bids at the same time, followed by the second gem . . .) Once all four gems are unveiled, the gem rarity is tabulated. The selling price (e.g., victory points) are scored by multiplying the number of jewels of the player who sold the most of that type by the sum of the Fashion rank (30,20,10,0) and the Rarity rank (0,10,20,30). This may be further modified by other cards (such as the Ring, which effectively doubles the sale value).

The game ends after the third Jewel Sale, even if there are draw cards remaining. The player with the highest number

of points wins.

The components feel top quality, the card text is clear black on white, while the tiles are made of unusually thick cardstock. The full-color oversize plastic game cards give the same the sense of style corresponding to the concept. The deep carrying box protects all the pieces properly. As a selling feature, the "how to play" instructions only take up four pages, including sample game play.

During gameplay, the budgeting-hand-filling segment is counterbalanced with the auction mechanic. Since each player need not commit all cards of any jewel type, and because the game encourages strategic use of court cards -- such as the Courtesan's ability to change which gem is currently in favor -- all kinds of gamers can find something to love in **Queen's Necklace.**

Complete rules and score sheets for **Queen's Necklace** are available in English, French, and German from the publisher's web site; an animated tutorial is also available. Although **Queen's Necklace** may frighten off players unused to such bidding tactics, the delicate balance of trying to sell the most, yet present the rarest gem is a paradox that will keep the average and veteran euro-gamer happy for a long time.

--Eric Funk

DeeDee McCoy & Fred Haring: Professionally Distracting

by Michael Anguiano

Young, attractive, in love, and indiscreet . . . it's a distracting combination. For Miranda and Reed Castronova, it's also an occasional paycheck, but nothing more. For their clandestine employer, it's a useful ruse to accomplish more sinister purposes. For a GM, it's an unorthodox obstacle that can be used to extend or complicate a contemporary campaign involving investigation, surveillance, or security.

The Pitch

"Need to distract a surveillance team or a security detail? With enough cash, someone can arrange for a gorgeous young woman (and some guy) to be in the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing to get those watchers looking in the wrong direction. Security personnel, police stakeouts, bodyguards . . . they're only human."

This is the pitch. Who's making it? Whoever the GM needs it to be.

For now, let's call it the Middleman, because he (or she) is really just a facilitator on behalf of some other Bad Guy. Sometimes, the Middleman employs the Castronovas to be "indiscreet," creating a distraction and thus an opportunity for more direct action by another party. Their audience is usually a team of security professionals, who are suddenly very distracted from their actual duties. Sometimes the security team will even turn their cameras to get a few pictures while the action is going on. Meanwhile, something is stolen, or someone sneaks past, or somebody gets killed, because the security team is looking elsewhere.

Of course, the situations are carefully chosen so that the resulting incident will not be made public. Nobody wants headlines about a mob hitman that evaded a police detail, or about corporate espionage involving a blackmail plan. And so nobody chases down that indiscreet couple to find out why they were there . . . and they're gone before anyone thinks to do so. That makes the Castronovas one of the more specialized tools that the Middleman can use to resolve a situation. Their continued value depends on their anonymity and their apparent lack of connection to the events at hand. The moment some investigator connects the dots, then the Castronovas are just another loose end that can lead to discovery.

So the Middleman keeps the Castronovas ignorant as well. The less they know, the safer everyone is. Besides, if they knew, they might ask for more money.

The "Innocent" Couple

Miranda Deeds Castronova, age 25, is a striking woman, tall and willowy, with porcelain skin that shows her Scandinavian background. Her lush curves and chiseled features have been enhanced with cosmetic surgery, but she does not have any other body modifications. She keeps her blond hair close-cropped, using an assortment of wigs for whichever appearance she chooses to promote. Originally a dancer and actress, she now supports herself through modeling. She also runs and maintains her own website, using the name DeeDee McCoy, featuring her in various fetish-style outfits and varying degrees of undress. Since her marriage to Reed three years ago, she does not do anything more than nudity in her modeling or on her website.

Reed Castronova, age 29, is a warmly handsome mix of Hispanic and Anglo, with a slim and muscular build. He is a photographer, with some interest in mixed-media graphic arts; some of his art projects are used to decorate his office. He also does some modeling work under the name Cass Newman, which is how he and Miranda met. Reed runs Castronova Photography to pay the bills, but his personal focus is Castronova Visions, under which he markets his

artistic work. Both of these can be found on the web. A critical eye will prefer his black & white photos, but the Visions website gets more hits for the nudes, glamour, and fetish photos. His primary model is Miranda, who is presented as different characters through an assortment of wigs, clothes, and fake body art. Miranda maintains both websites for him. He also does most of the photography that she uses on her website.

The Distraction

Miranda was contacted via her website with a curious offer. For a hefty paycheck, Miranda was asked to have sex in a semi-public location. Her partner was entirely of her own choosing, but the time and place were specific. She was told that this was being arranged on behalf of a wealthy voyeur of particular tastes, who wanted to view the events without any personal involvement.

After discussing this with her husband, Miranda asked for more details. After all, this was something she and her husband occasionally did anyway, although they never specifically planned on being watched. Eventually, a deal was struck and a partial payment was sent. Miranda and Reed fulfilled their contractual obligation with a loud and enthusiastic performance at the designated time and place. The remainder of the payment arrived a day thereafter. Everyone was happy, if a bit tired.

Five months after that initial job, Miranda was contacted with another offer by the same party. Since then, Miranda and Reed have been hired for half a dozen performances, each time at a different location. The payment was increased, with added stipulations regarding Miranda's hair and clothing. Occasionally, fake body art was requested as well. The two most recent performances have even been in different cities, but the payment was further increased to cover expenses. Although they occasionally drew attention, they never saw their employer (as far as they knew). The Castronovas simply regard this as a lucrative sideline, if slightly illegal, on behalf of someone who likes to watch. And so everybody is still happy.

The Castronovas have no idea that anything else is going on. They certainly have no idea that their performances have enabled thefts, intrusions, and assassinations. Still, Reed has a few concerns, so Miranda has copies of all correspondence stored in a membership file for her website. The file is for a dummy account under the name "Fred Haring," which she thinks is hilarious. Reed also has a safety deposit box at their downtown bank, where he has stored copies of all correspondence and records of all payments.

The moment they have reason to suspect more, they'll refuse to continue, but for now they're blissfully ignorant of the truth.

Where Have I Seen That . . . Uh . . . Face . . . Before?

The Castronovas work best as an additional complexity to an investigation campaign in a contemporary setting. Distraction ops could involve:

- Police surveillance detail, to cover the movement of a wanted criminal,
- Bodyguards for a mob boss, to allow assassination,
- Building security personnel, to allow access to computer systems
- Corporate security, to cover theft or exchange of a guarded item . . .

. . . and so forth. The particular details will obviously depend on the GM's choice of scenario, but presumably the heroes' task is to find the perpetrator of some crime, which was facilitated by this apparently unconnected distraction. In this situation, the PCs lack sufficient information and can only find the perp through the Middleman, and can only find the Middleman through the Castronovas. Thus, the investigators have to track down the Castronovas to find the perp. This presents two distinct problems.

First, the PCs have to recognize that the distraction was directly connected to the crime and thus needs to be investigated as well. This is most quickly solved by a character (or player) that jumps to conclusions. More thoughtful

heroes will require more evidence, such as a pattern of similar distractions in other cases where the results were not publicized. This evidence can be provided by: personal experiences in a PC's background outside the current campaign; parallel incidents in a larger campaign with the same heroes; or by a third party, such as a veteran investigator or a nosy reporter, who remembers "something like this happening in that mob stakeout last year . . . ."

Second, the PCs have to actually identify the Castronovas in order to find them. The PCs don't have any names to go with the faces, and may not even have the faces to begin with. The distracted security personnel would be the place to start, since they got obviously got a good look.

At best, the security personnel will have pictures or footage from the cameras that were pointing the wrong way. At worst, the PCs only have descriptions by those personnel. Of course, the personnel will be very enthusiastic about describing those details, but their value is up to the GM. Others may have witnessed the distraction as well. A lone passerby may have snapped a photo on a cellphone, or a nearby shopping center may have footage from a camera in the parking lot, which the mystery couple drove through afterwards. If all else fails, the GM can allow one sad, lonely PC to recognize a face (or something) from an Internet clip of a couple being publicly indiscreet.

Once the heroes have images, they still need to find names. This will involve extensive image searches on the Internet, which the investigators can do themselves or which can be farmed out to an associate. The quickest results will identify the woman as DeeDee McCoy and lead to her website, which only lists an email address for contact information. Diligent image searching will eventually turn up the Castronova Visions website, which will have full contact information for Reed Castronova. If all else fails, the GM can allow one sad, lonely PC to already be a member on DeeDee's website. A difficult campaign might require the heroes to hack the DeeDee McCoy website for additional information, or an easy campaign could allow the PCs to simply to notice that both websites are run from the same machine.

Finding the Castronovas simply brings the PCs one step closer to the Middleman. They now have to contact the couple and get any helpful information from them, using any combination of persuasion, subterfuge, intimidation, burglary, or bribery. It's up to the GM to decide how cooperative the Castronovas are. The GM also gets to consider how useful their information is and how directly that information leads to the Middleman and then to the perpetrator of the original crime. Perhaps the PCs have to wait until the Middleman contacts the Castronovas for another job . . . or perhaps the Middleman knows they will be waiting and sets up a wild goose chase instead.

If the GM wants to present a somewhat rougher campaign, the Middleman knows about the heroes and is tracking their progress. As soon as the PCs identify the mystery couple, Miranda and Reed are found brutally murdered in their ransacked apartment. The offices and studios of Castronova Photography have also been ransacked. All computer media have been destroyed, all undeveloped film stolen, etc. Set directly into one office wall is a mixed media photo-portrait of Miranda, which is ornamented with an assortment of tiny charms and trinkets. Now badly defaced by the unknown intruders, the portrait nevertheless still has a tiny key imbedded over Miranda's lips, which opens the safety deposit box at their downtown bank . . . and the continuation of the chase.

Here's a Few Flowers: *Cymbeline*

"Fear no more the lightning-flash,
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finish'd joy and moan:
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust."
-- William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* IV:ii:341-346

"All lovers must," indeed, and as a lover of Shakespeare, on this feast of love, I must [once more](#) return to the garden, to the green realm, to the bower of love. And death. And ghosts, and twins, and gods, and blood, and sleep, and thunder. Listen for it.

"But my design,
To note the chamber: I will write all down:
Such and such pictures; there the window; such
Th' adornment of her bed; the arras, figures,
Why, such and such; and the contents o' the story."
-- William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* II:ii:27-31

Imogen, the sole heiress to the throne of Britain following the abduction of King Cymbeline's two infant sons, has married the low-born Posthumus Leonatus and incurred the wrath of Cymbeline's new Queen. The Queen wants Imogen married to her son Cloten, and has Posthumus banished to Rome before the marriage can be consummated. The Queen gives Pisanio, Posthumus' servant, a medicine that she believes is secretly a poison but is actually a sleeping draught. In Rome, one Iachino wagers 10,000 ducats against Posthumus' ring that Iachimo cannot seduce Imogen. Unable to seduce her, he convinces her to keep a trunk in her bedchamber, telling her it contains riches. It actually contains Iachimo, who steals Imogen's bracelet and obtains enough convincing details about Imogen and her bed to convince Posthumus of her faithlessness.

Posthumus thus sends a letter to Pisanio ordering him to kill Imogen, who he has lured to Wales by a message; Pisanio instead shows her the letter and agrees to help fake her death, while she disappears into the Welsh mountains in boy's disguise. There, she falls in with Belarius and his two sons, Polydore and Cadwal, who are actually (of course) the two missing princes, Guiderius and Arviragus. She drinks Pisanio's medicine thinking it will cure her heart-sickness and falls into a deathlike slumber. Cloten, meanwhile, dressed in Posthumus' clothes, searches for Imogen, planning to rape her and kill Posthumus, but instead meets Guiderius, who cuts his head off. Guiderius and Arviragus discover Imogen's sleeping body, and thinking her dead lay her with the headless corpse of Cloten.

Meanwhile, King Cymbeline has refused to pay Britain's tribute to Rome, and the Roman invaders, led by Lucius and accompanied by Posthumus, land in Wales. Lucius discovers Imogen (still in male guise) weeping over Cloten's body (who she believes is Posthumus), and makes her his own page. In the battle, Belarius and his two "sons" save the day for Britain and the Romans are defeated. Identified as a Roman, Posthumus is arrested for execution. While imprisoned, Posthumus sees in a dream his dead family petitioning Jupiter; Jupiter descends and leaves an enigmatic prophecy behind in the waking world. Cymbeline arrives bringing the news of his Queen's death and pardons Posthumus. After a series of revelations and reversals, the prophecy comes true, the sons are restored to their father, and Cymbeline agrees to voluntarily pay the tribute anyway to unite Britain and Rome.

"'Tis still a dream, or else such stuff as madmen
Tongue and brain not; either both or nothing;
Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such
As sense cannot untie. Be what it is,
The action of my life is like it . . ."
-- William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* V:iv:144-148

King Cymbeline (the historical Cunobelinus) appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain,* from which Holinshed took the matter for his *Chronicles.* But Holinshed's tale (though it provides Shakespeare with names for Cymbeline's two sons, and suggests the possibility of Cymbeline's refusal of tribute) has none of Shakespeare's events in it, save for the action of an exile changing his clothing from Roman to British garb, just as Posthumus does in the play. But in Holinshed, this is treason, and Arviragus responds by clothing himself in the murdered Guiderius' armor to win the day. (Shakespeare also takes the "old man and two boys defeat the invaders" tale from elsewhere in Holinshed, an episode of Scottish history.) Shakespeare took the story of Iachimo's wager from Boccaccio's *Decameron,* possibly via a 1518 Dutch pamphlet called *Frederyke of Jennen,* and the framework of the Belarius story from a romance play of 1582 called *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune,* and possibly from Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster.* (The "prince raised unknowingly as a shepherd" theme goes back at least to King David, of course.) And a whole lot of the play seems taken from Shakespeare's other plays -- *[Othello,](#) [Titus Andronicus,](#)* and *[As You Like It](#)* all echo therein, and the name "Innogen" first appears as a "ghost character" (one mentioned in stage directions, but with no lines) in *Much Ado About Nothing.*

Nobody seems to know exactly when *Philaster* was written, either, which doesn't help narrow down *Cymbeline.* From an entry in Simon Forman's diary, it must have been performed before September of 1611 (when Forman died), but its first publication was in 1623, as the final play in the First Folio. (Screwier still, this comedy of history is listed among the tragedies therein.) The play's weird allegory and dream-like action implies it was written for the smaller, more intimate Blackfriars Theater, or even for a court masque, rather than for the big stage at the Globe. Since Shakespeare's company bought Blackfriars in 1608, *Cymbeline* can be (very tentatively) dated to sometime between 1608 and 1611.

"O thou goddess!
Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
In these two princely boys. They are as gentle
As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,
Their royal blood enchaf'd, as the rud'st wind,
That by the top doth take the mountain pine,
And make him stoop to the vale."
-- William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* IV:ii:218-225

One intriguing aspect of *Cymbeline* is the strange way that symbols in the script become props in the play: Imogen calls Posthumus a "jewel in the world" and 20 lines later, she produces a diamond ring to give him. She scornfully compares Cloten to Posthumus' "meanest garment" and suddenly Cloten is dressing like Posthumus, and Posthumus is trading his Roman finery for "mean" peasant garb. Posthumus is compared to "a descended god" in Act I; he encounters a descended god, Jupiter, in Act IV. Imogen reads about the rape of Philomela, and suffers a similar violation that night from Iachimo. The play contains almost an arsenal of such dramaturgies within dramaturgies.

Shakespeare also sticks to his standard dramaturgies, most especially the sorcerous twinning. Not only does Cloten's body become identical to Posthumus', but the two sons of Cymbeline are practically reinvented as the Heroic Twins Castor and Pollux, down to their new initials as "Cadwal and Polydore." The Twins protect travelers (such as Imogen), spend half their existence in Hades (hidden in the caves of Wales), attend Juno (wife of Jupiter, as Imogen is of Jupiter's favorite Posthumus), and are mighty champions (so says Diodorus) of the "Celts who dwell along the Ocean," which is to say, of the Britons. Shakespeare's traditional time-shifting is more subtle, switching the action between a recognizably Galfridian "ancient Britain" and a clearly Renaissance-era Rome. Throughout, he consistently calls attention to the artificiality of the plot, complete with a wicked stepmother, eight separate revelatory turns, a dual-purpose elixir, and such overtly fairy-tale dialogue as: "Two boys, an old man twice a boy, a lane/Preserv'd the Britons, was the Romans' bane."

Perhaps most interestingly of all, Posthumus is born after the death of his father. Like Perceval, he is the Widow's Son, and his tale recapitulates the initiatory journey: exile, temptation, foolishness, despair, stripping of outward things (when he casts of his "Italian weeds"), imprisonment, divine encounter, rescue at the last minute from death, and initiation into the court. He is confirmed by Jupiter as "Leonatus," paralleling the Mithraic degree of the Lion (and

spends time first as a Bridegroom and then a Soldier, two lower degrees); his further parallels in the play are the Twins (sons of a widowed father), who serve the Sun (the "Heliodromus" degree) and emerge from the Mithraic initiatory cave to do so. *Bel*-arius is the solar Father (the highest degree), twinned by Cymbeline, the "hound of *Bel*-inus," all referring to the Welsh sun-god Beli.

"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

The whole play is itself twinned by the awkward prose prophecy above, deposited by the god Jupiter as an irruption from Outside, a sort of "incubation" while Posthumus sleeps on the stone floor of his prison. This is literally a *brontologion,* an oracle by the thunder (in this case by the "thunder-master") that predates Rome itself. Leonatus is obviously the "lion's whelp," while the bird-identified Imogen is "a piece of tender air" (an eerie parallel with her earlier "ghost character" incarnation, for a character that dies and is revived), and Cymbeline and his sons the cedar and its branches, likewise dead and revived. Posthumus, too, "dies" in the form of Cloten, and is reborn. This death-rebirth thread implies not our normal alchemical marriage but an agricultural Mystery; plantings and graftings rather than calcinations and coagulations. In III.iii, Belarius is "as a tree, whose boughs did bend with fruit"; in IV:ii, flowers recapitulate Imogen's features; in V.v, Posthumus says to Imogen "hang there like fruit, my soul/Till the tree die"; and we've already dealt with the cedar branches "jointed to the old stock."

"CYM. O! what, am I
A mother to the birth of three? Ne'er mother
Rejoic'd deliverance more.
. . . O Imogen!
Thou hast lost by this a kingdom.
IMO. No, my lord;
I have got two worlds by 't. O my gentle brothers!
Have we thus met?"
-- William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* V:v:443-451

Shakespeare has one more set of parallels to cultivate, between the families of Cymbeline, his contemporary Augustus Caesar (or so said Holinshed; moderns think those dates likely 30 or 40 years early), and that of Shakespeare's patron, King James I himself. Like Cymbeline at the beginning of the play, Augustus has a beautiful daughter by an earlier marriage (Julia), and a witchly Queen (Livia) with a callous son of her own (Tiberius). (At one remove, Julia (not Augustus) had two sons, one of them even named Posthumus.) For James I, the parallel is with Cymbeline at the end of the play, possessing two sons (the future Charles I and Henry, Prince of Wales) and a daughter (Elizabeth), engaged in 1612 to a lion's whelp (Frederick V, the Elector Palatine, whose heraldic animal was a lion, and whose grandfather was the great William of Orange). Thus we might date the play at 1611, a dramaturgy seeking to bring about the engagement (one year later) between Elizabeth and Frederick, whose name echoes Shakespeare's pamphlet source. Henry, who of course provides the connection with Wales, as it happens also adopted the image of knights rescuing Chivalry from a cave (!) as a personal symbol. Meanwhile, the marriage of Elizabeth and Frederick might be the union of Britain and "Rome" -- not Catholic Rome, but the Holy Roman Empire of Germany.

"The fingers of the powers above do tune
The harmony of this peace. The vision
Which I made known to Lucius ere the stroke
Of this yet scarce-cold battle, at this instant
Is full accomplish'd; for the Roman eagle,
From south to west on wing soaring aloft,
Lessen'd herself, and in the beams o' the sun
So vanish'd: which foreshow'd our princely eagle,
The imperial Caesar, should again unite

His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,
Which shines here in the west."
-- William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline,* V:v:550-560

The original Innogen, in Geoffrey of Monmouth, is the wife of Brutus, founder of Britain, and also (as it happens) a widow's son. Shakespeare cultivates this "piece of tender air," drawing her ghostly existence slowly out of *Much Ado* and painting her with hues of [Juliet](), Desdemona, [Viola](), Rosalind, and Cordelia. She is the only real human in a play full of romantic cliches, as critics have marveled since the 18th century. Shakespeare has built Imogen into the soul-symbol of Britain itself, planted her and grafted her into the royal family, the origins of the land, and the eternal city. She is "th' Arabian bird," the [phoenix](), singular and immortal. *Cymbeline* is essentially a graft of Britain, a Grail primed for any widow's son or lion's whelp, with all the dramaturgies Shakespeare could recover from his previous plays stepped down and rendered toothless. Unlike Lear, Cymbeline restores the world; unlike Iago, Iachimo ("little Iago") confesses; unlike Juliet, Imogen survives her draught, not consumed in the athanor but crossed like fruit-trees or roses with her thunder-chosen mate. Perhaps this is why [Swinburne]() loved her, why the Grail poet Tennyson's deathbed act was to read *Cymbeline,* and why -- although Elizabeth's marriage ended in [disaster]() thanks to sorcerous overreach -- her heirs rule Britain still, and James' do not.

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Lovers Moon

Deadly Online Dating for *Call of Cthulhu*

by J. Edward Tremlett

"LolaLover345 and I realized right away that we were perfect for each other. We dropped everything that was holding us down and rushed to be with one another. Our friends and families ask if maybe we've made a mistake, what with deciding to settle and have children less than a day after meeting face to face for the first time. But we complete one another, now -- it's the two of us forever. And we can't wait to see the faces of our children. The doctors say it'll be triplets!"
-- Yet another satisfied customer, posting in the "Success Stories" forum at Lovers Moon

Some online dating services promise a chance to find everlasting love with the perfect soulmate. Other, perhaps more honest ones, at least offer the chance of a few hook-ups. Lovers Moon -- a small, relative newcomer to the field -- offers both, but occasionally throws in a complete surprise: the fruitful blessing of Shub-Niggurath, Dark Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young, whose attentions lead to fecundity, madness and death.

Call of Cthulhu Investigators hired to track down missing persons may discover that they've used this website. And if so, the consequences could be disastrous . . .

This article details an ensorcelled dating site, giving its set-up, secret history, and means of Mythos usage. The farm it's located at is detailed, as are its operator and guardian, and ideas for use in a modern-day *Call of Cthulhu* or *Delta Green* campaign are included at the end.

Behold the Lovers Moon

The site has been in operation for two years, and is a relatively well-done presentation that gets kudos for being relatively cheap. It has decent graphics, two levels of membership, member e-mail, forums, the ability to form and join groups based on location or similar interests, member videos, and an in-house instant messenger system. It has banner ads running on several third-tier adult sites, and engages in e-mail campaigns every so often, too.

Users of the site can apply for free membership, but the "Half Moon" level leaves them unable to read other members' full profiles, or initiate contact with them. A Full Moon membership gives full access to all other members, and costs $20 a month, $50 for three months, or $140 for a full year.

Most complaints about the site mirror the same complaints against most of its competitors: there are far more men than women, and some of the "women" are shills for other adult sites. On the technical side, Lovers Moon has no more problems than any other online dating service, with server glitches, IM speed, and lost or lagging mail being the most common legitimate forum complaints. They *do* have a slow tech support response time, though.

There are stories about people getting a little "too deep" and doing something stupid, like running after the first person they've met on the site and vanishing from the face of the Earth. And some of the posts in the "Success Stories" forum sound more than a little creepy, with their emphasis on dropping everything and cranking out rug rats. But every site gets that, right?

The Truth Behind the Moon

The server that Lovers Moon is hosted on is infested with the essence of Shub-Niggurath, whose demesne includes wild and maddened procreation. Most users will never encounter Her powers, but a special few have been "touched."

And they have the site's owner/operator, Harry Cowzynski Jr., to thank for it.

The Cowzynskis used to run one of the finest, small-scale hog farms in Johnson County, Iowa. They were also relatively quiet worshippers of Shub-Niggurath, offering up the best hog of the slaughter, and occasional drifter, in return for Her blessings. And they brought up their many children in the faith, so as to continue their traditions.

Harry Jr. had other ideas, though. He went to the University of Iowa for their agricultural program, but switched majors to Computer Science. It wasn't that he was irreligious; it was just that he was sick of rural life, and wanted to serve the Goddess in a different way. His folks weren't too taken by his "backsliding," though, and that Spring Break they bound Harry Jr. to the altar and made ready to sacrifice him, instead.

Unfortunately his parents lost control of the ceremony when one of his younger sisters made a mistake, and most of his family was consumed by the resulting "windstorm." Only his mother and the unfortunate younger sister survived along with him. His mother was blasted into gibbering insanity. His sibling was touched by the mutative hand of Shub-Niggurath. And Harry Jr. -- spared by his Goddess -- had a Road to Damascus moment, realizing how he, too, could serve.

Harry Jr. lied to the authorities about what had happened, saying that only he had survived. As the "windstorm" flattened a great deal of the county, north of the city proper, the police were too busy to investigate any irregularities in his story. And he was left alone to follow through on the revelation he'd received on the altar, and serve the Goddess in his own way.

That was three years ago. A year later, Lovers Moon came online. And the hits keep coming.

Lunar Systems

For most users, Lovers Moon is exactly as described, only with an extra-slow tech support. The website only shows its true colors in very specific cases: single and childless professional men and women who are still capable of having children, and who are interested in having some. If a would-be couple are IM chatting on the site when the Moon rises dark over the Cowzynski farm, there is a 50% chance the server's programming will recognize it has two candidates online. It will then send a surge of the Goddess' power to both computers, and into both people. (1/1d4 SAN)

Once struck, the anointed couple is nearly helpless to resist the need to meet with one another (POW or less on percentile to successfully resist). Regardless of where they might be, or what they might be doing, at the time, they will find any excuse to be together. When they do, they both fall helplessly in love with one another, no matter what, and begin doing whatever it takes, however long it takes, to become pregnant.

After impregnation the spell continues on, and the Goddess' presence brings them together as a couple "for the sake of the child." They drop out of whatever final social activities they have, quit their jobs, and do whatever is necessary to ensure they can be together for the time leading up to the birth. They will also resist all attempts to separate them, with deadly force if necessary.

Fortunately, the couple won't have to wait too long for the nativity: within 1d6+3 months, they will give birth to 1d3 perfectly healthy Fosterlings of the Old Ones (*Malleus Monstrorum,* pp. 40-41). Unlike most Fosterlings, these children appear to be physically normal, and only cost 1/1d3 San to see because of the weird, knowing stares on their innocent faces. They will be more intelligent than most children, heal at the rate of one HP per turn, and come to physical maturity in half the time.

Their parents will do everything possible to protect and shield their children from unwanted attention: homeschooling, assuming new identities, moving overnight, and killing if they have to. Meanwhile, the Fosterlings will instinctively learn all spells pertaining to Shub-Niggurath by the time they reach puberty. On that happy day, they will celebrate their coming of age by calling Her, and offering up their devoted, loving parents as sacrifice.

After that the children will enter their true, dark mother, and some will be sent to the Cowzynski's farm for "further

education." Others will be reborn as something more akin to a child of the Outer God and sent elsewhere.

The Moon-Touched Farm

The server is run from the Cowzynskis' run-down hog farm. The farm is eight miles northeast of Iowa City, in Cedar Township, and is 10 acres of mostly wooded, overgrown, and unusually moist land. The farm ceased operations after the tragedy, and the place has fallen into disrepair. Only the two-story, six-bedroom farmhouse, the main hog pen, and the smokehouse remain intact. Every other building and pen has fallen into wet, fecund decay.

The saltbox-style farmhouse is made of wood, and is roomy and musty. Most of its bedrooms have lain untouched since the accident, and Harry's plan is to house the more human-appearing children in those rooms, once they start arriving in five years' time. The others can live in the woodsy part of the property with his sister, Susanna.

The basement of the house has been redone with concrete and waterproofing, and is essentially one big office for Harry. His desk has a password-protected computer and tower, and a locked drawer containing the all-important family Bible. He keeps a shotgun and a box of shells by his computer. An extra-large freezer sits in the corner by the stairs, and contains salted, smoked meat in freezer bags. Investigation reveals the meat to be both pork and human (SAN 1/1d3).

Harry keeps the server down here, on a concrete block that still bears the stains of the sacrifice he used to enchant the server: his insane, helpless mother. The secret names of the Goddess are scrawled across the server in blood. Anyone who touches it will see a vision of Shub-Niggurath in Her full glory, and suffer the 1d10/1d100 San loss for doing so.

The main hog pen has room for about 20 pigs to root around in, but currently holds only 12. Next to it sits an extra-large smokehouse, which contains the butchering block, tools, and A-frame that the Cowzynskis used for both hogs and humans. A heavy-duty grinder, once used to turn pig parts and human bones into meal for the hogs, sits rusting in the smokehouse's corner. These days, Susanna gets the "leftovers."

Back in a clearing in the woods sits a large cairn of heavy, native limestone rock, stained with the blood of countless pigs, drifters and wayward family members. The area is eerily fecund and steaming, and gives the sense of being watched from on high (SAN 1/1d3). Susanna lurks out here, in the woods, and has between one and three Dark Young along with her at any time. She's getting her "classroom" ready for when the children arrive, in a few years. She can't wait to have new friends to play with!

Uses for Lovers Moon

The most obvious way for a Keeper to utilize this "service" is to have a friend or family member wig out over an Internet crush and abscond to be with their sudden soulmate. But there are many roads to true love!

"Destination Love": A PI or Police Detective is tracking down a missing person or payment-skipping fugitive who's been on the run for a couple years. Finding the person reveals a couple that's fanatical about its privacy, and several lovechildren that seem way older than they should be.

"The Bad Seeds": Sure, those kids are darling, but what happens in nine years when they're all grown up? Keepers can tweak the Campaign forwards, or push Lovers' Moon's inception backwards, so that Investigators have to deal with multiple appearances of Shub-Niggurath across America, if not the world. Some of the children who enter their true mother will come back as Gof'nn Hupadgh Shub-Niggurath (*Malleus Monstrorum,* pg. 46), and may bring several Dark Young back with them . . .

"You Can't Stop Falling": Does one of the Investigators use Internet love sites? Have Lovers Moon get strewn across his path, and have the player roleplay meeting a few folks through the service. Then have the Outer God's spell go off, lower the curtain, and have the player make a new Investigator. When all the Investigators meet up again, there will be a near-fanatical lover and 1d3+3 Mythos-tainted children along for the ride. And if the rest of the group tries to

interfere they'll be against someone who knows all their secrets . . .

"Raiding the Farm": Once the Investigators realize what's going on with Lovers Moon, they may wish to cut the problem off at its source. Some investigating reveals where the server lies, and who runs it, and details on the Cowzynski family tragedy three years back comes to light. Attacking the farm puts them up against Harry Jr. and his monstrous sister, along with whatever other creatures they can summon up to defend their secret. And if they wait too long, they may face several Fosterlings of the Old Ones, too . . .

Harry Cowzynski Jr.

Born: 1985 -- 23 in 2008

Occupation: Adult Dating Server Administrator and Shub-Niggurath Cultist

Degrees: B.S. in Computer Science from University of Iowa (unfinished)

STR	12	**DEX**	13	**INT**	16
CON	12	**APP**	10	**POW**	17
SIZ	16	**EDU**	19	**SAN**	0

HP: 14

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Skills: Accounting 60%, Agriculture 75%, Animal Husbandry 60%, Carpentry 45%, Computer Use 85%, Computer Programming 70%, Cthulhu Mythos 30%, Dodge 45%, Electrical Repair 50%, Electronics 35%, Listen 60%, Mechanical Repair 40%, Natural History 50%, Spot Hidden 25%, Track 50%

Spells: Call/Dismiss Shub-Niggurath, Shriveling, Summon/Bind Dark Young, Voorish Sign

Tomes Read: The Cowzynski Family Bible, which dates to just before the farm was settled in 1874. The twisted and interbred family tree is on the front page, along with several unsettling hints about its history before that point. Passages from "Cultes Des Goules" pertaining to the worship of Shub-Niggurath are written in a succession of crabbed hands in the margins. (English; 1d3/1d8; +4%; 7 weeks; Call/Dismiss Shub-Niggurath, Shriveling, Summon/Bind Dark Young, Voorish Sign)

Weapons: Fist/Punch 40%, 1d4 + db, buck knife 50%, 1d4 + db, 20-gauge shotgun 45%, 2d6/1d6/1d3

Mental Disorders: Henry Jr. is permanently insane, but can still function in society enough to go into town and buy supplies, deal with his Internet providers and the like.

Appearance: Harry is fat and slovenly, with poor hygiene and glasses that have been broken and self-repaired several times. His red hair is short and grimy, and his eyes are blue and rheumy. He wears bib overalls that are caked with mud and less describable substances with no shirt, except when he goes to town and wears his old University of Iowa T-shirt.

Items Carried: Wallet, buck knife, plastic case of small screwdrivers, "Leatherman" multi-tool.

Income: $15,000 a year from insurance payoffs and what Lovers Moon brings in.

Susanna Cowzynski

Born: 1998 -- 10 in 2008

Occupation: "The Queen of Pigs" (Gof'nn Hupadgh Shub-Niggurath)

STR	17	**DEX**	11	**INT**	12
CON	20	**APP**	0	**POW**	21
SIZ	17	**EDU**	8	**SAN**	0

HP: 19

Damage Bonus: +1d6

Skills: Hide 90%, Sneak 70%

Move: 8

Spells: Become Spectral, Body Warping, Call/Dismiss Shub-Niggurath, Scarlet Circles, Shriveling, Summon/Bind Dark Young, Voorish Sign,

Weapons: Hoof Kick 60%, 1d6 + db, Bite 50%, 1d4, Body Slam 80%, 1d4 + 1d6

Armor: None, but regenerates 1d6 HP per round until dead.

Susanna looks like three large pigs grafted together at the stomachs, with their pulsing innards erupting between and below. Three thick goat legs jut from between each pig's rump, and her stretched and deformed head extends from the long, ribbed tentacle their fused snouts become. She has no arms but has about ten feet of reach with her neck, and is handy with using her teeth. She normally speaks in a hideous, sing-song voice, but when she's upset she shrilly squeals like an angry pig.

SAN Loss: 1d3/1d8

Love as an Elaborate Form of Science Friction

Time magazine had an interesting issue toward the end of January that revolved around the Science of Romance; since it was a double issue (an interesting gambit for a magazine that prides itself on a weekly view of global events: "*Time* memo to World: Do nothing interesting next week."), it devoted a lot of article pages to the concept. One of the main articles is online, and it links to a bunch of the other articles in the series. I heartily recommend the issue and/or articles as a good alternative to holding one's cold sandwich with *both* hands while staring at the wall in sullen silence during one's lunch hour.

Anyway, the thesis statement of the article series is that many choices of romance, sex, or interacting with the opposite sex can be broken down into scientific terms; thus, with the conclusion that it's best from a Darwinistic standpoint for men to have as many kids as possible and for women to be as protective of her eggs as possible, we can draw conclusions that form the basis of all kinds of real-world interactions. Of course, I always find these types of articles to be somewhat silly; since one knows what actually happens in the real world, if one's desire is to provide scientific justification for those actions, then it's pretty easy to start with the end result and work backwards to a scientific justification. If it were commonplace for the man to set himself fire during a date, then scientists could rationalize this with something like, "It stands to reason that, in our ancient past, the need to keep potential mates warm provided ample incentive for self-immolation . . ."

But let's go with the idea that romance is merely an evolutionary trait that has helped make sure that a random assortment of genes gets on to the next round. If so, while it's necessary for the *human* condition, it's entirely possible for other species to work out their own views on the matter . . . even (or especially) sapient ones.

The obvious spot to check is the animal kingdom; really, any kind of unusual behavior can be justified by looking at various critters. Polygyny, battles to the death, infanticide . . . it's all there. Apply any of these to varying degrees, and you've got an interesting take on a species. And they need not even be unplayable or unsympathetic; for instance (to take one of our examples above), what if the males of an alien species felt a strong (but not overwhelming) compulsion to kill newborns that aren't their own? They could articulate it, they could probably justify the thoughts -- even though the actions could be viewed by their society as unfortunate or even repugnant -- and it could just be a part of their biology.

And, of course, there are any number of specific examples from certain animals that can be applied to an inhuman race. Imagine a fantasy world where the adventuring elves are all female. And the males? Well, let's just say the GM was inspired by praying mantises . . .

Again, the point of this is that, assuming science is right, we as humans still do things that are scientifically explainable, awkward for society, *and* beyond our control to varying degrees. (One of the articles from *Time* was exploring scientific reasons behind "Why We Flirt." Even though they come up with some plausible reasons, it won't lessen the ire that may be raised by some husbands or wives whose mates go too far . . . or, perhaps, whose own sensitivity to their mates' flirting is too high.)

So let's take another example. The notion of the "biological clock" (as it refers to the desire to have children before a certain age) is fairly well-known in pop-psychology circles, even if it's one of the nine subtopics in the cosmos that doesn't have a Wikipedia entry. But let's take that notion and spin it on its head. Envision a species that doesn't age; for maximum "believability" they could even be immortal. Now, let's say that this species has an odd biological trait that this unaging/immortal aspect gets "revoked" once the person has bred; at that point they live a "normal" life span, living long enough to see their offspring to maturity but not too much longer than that. In this case, the propagation of the species might actually be perceived as a nihilistic urge rather than a fertile/creative one. Their self-help documents might be titled things like *Children: Is It Time To Kill Yourself?* and *What To Expect When You're Expecting to Die.* Such a species would probably have very different social problems and structures (probably mostly akin to the gulf in experience -- how do you base a world where some beings are 20 years old and others are 9,000?) but could also be quite playable and easy to relate to by contemplative players; in essence, they could serve as an extreme expression of the modern idea that having children is "throwing your life away" compared to the advantages of remaining childless.

(Of course, this society would also have a near-flattened curve of our own problematic social pyramid scheme relying on each generation breeding a population large enough to take care of the previous aging one.)

This week marks our latest Valentine's Day issue, and hopefully there's enough variety and difference in the articles presented here to make you turn your head askew at the notion of love, romance, and the propagation of the species. The pitfalls, triumphs, and tragedies of love still make great fodder for gaming. And even if it's all poems devoted to biological urges, it's still our urges as humans, and our poems.

--Steven Marsh

Your Ex-Girlfriend

for *D6 Adventure/D6 Space*

by Steven Marsh & Nikola Vrtis

The Past

It's been years since you've seen her. She was a part of a more innocent time of your life; it was college, or high school, or the academy, or some other era when a good part of your full-time job was merely forging yourself into the person you are today. You were good for each other . . . *really* good, as near you remember. It seemed like your futures were meant to intertwine, and more serious commitments seemed destined for some day in the future. But something happened; you needed to leave to pursue your career while she needed to stay behind (or was it the other way around?). Things ended nebulously; you promised to stay in touch, but it didn't happen. Life continued on; she's been gone from your life for years now, but now she's back.

The Hook

But -- you realize later (much later) -- it's all a lie.

Your Ex-Girlfriend never existed in the past, and her presence here in the now threatens your future.

The Details

Your Ex-Girlfriend is, in actuality, a construct of some unusual sort. In fantasy or modern campaigns, she is some kind of homunculus, a fabrication of a powerful force or entity. In science fiction or space opera, she is an android, given a flawlessly imperfect human appearance that belies her mechanical interior.

She has been built by an enemy of the heroes (who this is, exactly, is beyond the scope of this article). She was designed by her creator to introduce herself to a group, targeting one likely PC (preferably one not currently in a relationship). There, she uses some hand-waving effect (a magic ring, charm, or spell for fantasy/modern settings, nanites for sci-fi campaigns) to implant memories into her target. These memories are of a generally positive relationship in the somewhat distant past. Everything about this relationship is designed to be pleasant but unremarkable. It has as clean yet nondecisive a break as possible; there was no obvious reason within the relationship for it to end (such as cheating or substance abuse), and it was more a result of fate or coincidence keeping the two apart. These memories indicate that the former-beloved and the hero were close, but not so close that they couldn't drift apart. (This is especially suitable for PCs whose past contains a long separation without contact, such as a naval voyage or Antarctic research expedition.)

Ideally (as far as the enemy is involved), Your Ex-Girlfriend will become romantically involved with the hero again for the first time. At the very least, it would suit the enemy's purposes if she were to become a friend and associate of the PCs.

However, Your Ex-Girlfriend is as much a pawn in the whole affair as the target hero; she doesn't know that the memories she evokes are implanted, nor does she understand that the memories she possesses of their relationship (and, really, the entirety of her life) are not real, either. She is entirely innocent of the affair, although she does have a programmed allegiance to the enemy. In theory, this control can be activated to full compliance (although whether or not she could fulfill a command of "kill your beloved" is a dramatic uncertainty), but usually the enemy is smart enough to request reasonable information or favors: "I'd hate to visit your friends when they're unavailable. Tell me . . .

when are they most often *not* at their headquarters?"

The enemy will use Your Ex-Girlfriend to attempt to destroy the heroes, but he's patient; the efforts he's put into making a workable shared set of memories has involved considerable effort, and he's willing to give his construct plenty of time to seal the PCs' doom.

Joined Together, Put Asunder

There are several ways for a subplot involving Your Ex-Girlfriend to fall apart. First, the heroes might discover the duplicity themselves. Most notably there is (for obvious reasons) no evidence of a shared relationship in the past; there are no photographs, no friends who remember the couple, no initials carved in trees, or the like. The enemy will have chosen the hero with the best chances for his duplicity to remain concealed, but the absence of proof is obvious regardless of the target.

Alternatively, the heroes might begin to grow suspicious of Your Ex-Girlfriend as the enemy's plans come to full fruition, and more and more things start going wrong.

The Metagame

Roleplaying games are generally forgiving of flavor text of people's past inserted at random; it's common for adventures to begin with a hook along the lines of, "You went to college with a guy, who calls you up to ask for a favor . . ." From a metagaming standpoint, Your Ex-Girlfriend takes advantage of this aspect by asserting to a player the "truth" of a past relationship, which turns out to be entirely fabricated.

This concept works best, then, if the GM has worked out in advance with the players that it's okay for him to introduce "flashback" concepts; ideally, he will have even used this technique once or twice before, without disastrous results.

Getting the Most Out of Your Ex-Girlfriend

Your Ex-Girlfriend works best as a long-term plot point. Her introduction should be as organic as possible, perhaps with her being imperiled by another adversary or threat (quite probably one orchestrated by the enemy). Depending on the gaming group, she might then be a background fixture for an adventure or three (perhaps allowing for the "rekindling" of the relationship between her and the PC), before things start going wrong. Even then, her involvement with the enemy should be subtle for a long while.

At some point, the heroes should come to fully understand that something isn't right with Your Ex-Girlfriend. For maximum dramatic possibility, the players should have their expectations of the situation twisted by either her actions or what happens to her. If the heroes have been fully trusting and supportive of her, then irrefutable evidence of her (unwitting) duplicity or aid to the enemy should come to light. If the heroes have been distrustful and suspicious, then she should do something that aids or protects the heroes, perhaps putting herself in mortal danger.

Regardless, having a plot device like Your Ex-Girlfriend necessitates that, at some point, she be placed in enough physical peril that her true inhumanity be uncovered. Nothing says "Revelation!" more than a half-blasted face revealing a robotic core.

In all cases, the unwitting nature of Your Ex-Girlfriend should be forefront of all revelations. Regardless of *how* she became involved with the heroes, she is willing to accept her past (even if it is fictitious) and the possibility of a present relationship or friendship; if she doesn't hold on to those memories, she literally is a person without a past.

In the end, Your Ex-Girlfriend likely will not survive, which may lead to a poignant death scene. At the very least, she will probably have fallen in love again for the first time with the target adventurer, even if it's not reciprocated. If it ends with a heroic final sacrifice, so much the better.

Themes

Your Ex-Girlfriend (who can, of course, be Your Ex-Boyfriend) explores the premise of what is reality, versus the perception of reality. If you have memories that you were happy once, does that happiness go away if you learn the memories weren't real? Can memories of being committed to someone in the past turn into something real in the present?

Your Ex-Girlfriend's Alternate Lifestyle

Your Ex-Girlfriend works especially well as a *PC* concept, particularly if the player won't be there consistently or otherwise doesn't mind playing an existing concept. In this case, the player shouldn't know of her true nature or the unreality of her past relationship. In addition, the "enemy" should either be downplayed or made *much* more subtle (perhaps emphasizing the enemy's Patron aspect). Using this option, the heroes should be quick to accept her into the fold; after all, the GM wouldn't lie about something like that . . . would he?

Both characters below are designed with 79 points, making them suitable as beginning characters, per the creation-point rules of the appropriate *D6 System* book.

Your Ex-Girlfriend

for *D6 Adventure*

Genre: Adventure
Gender: Female
Reflexes 2D+1: acrobatics 2D+2
Coordination 2D: piloting 2D+1, sleight of hand 2D+1
Physique 2D
Knowledge 3D+1: business 3D+2, medicine 3D+2, scholar 4D+1, tech 3D+2
Perception 3D+1: artist 3D+2, hide 3D+2, investigation 3D+2
Presence 4D: charm 6D, persuasion 4D+2, willpower 5D
Strength Damage: 1D
Move: 10
Fate Points: 1
Character Points: 5
Body Points: 32
Wounds: 5
Disadvantages: Burn-out: Equipment (R2), memory ring ceases to function once the ruse has been discovered; Employed (R2), unwittingly beholden to her creator and feels a strong compulsion to contact him frequently (in the guise of her trust fund adviser); Quirk: Secret (R2), not who she thinks she is
Advantages: Equipment (R4), a ring infused with a magical spell that allows one specific user to semi-permanently alter one specific target's memories in ways specified by the creator; Patron (R1), an (apparently) inherited trust fund (secretly set up by her creator) pays her bills, but must submit receipts and make regular calls to its adviser

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New Spell: Air of the Altered Mind

Some *D6 Adventure* or *D6 Fantasy* campaigns might prefer a more rigorous magic spell in lieu of the more nebulous magic ring. For the "Your Ex-Girlfriend" scenario to work, the following spell would need to be cast by the enemy or one of his minions (which would require him to have an appropriate value for Magic), or be used as the Natural Magick Special Ability (see *D6 Fantasy* or *D6 Adventure*). If using this as Natural Magick, the "perfume" would probably be pheromones (change the "expensive perfumes" to "rare herbs" and the "perfume spritzer" to "airy clothes"), and the cost would be 25 (removing the charges). Remember that usage of Natural Magick can be reflexive, and as such could still enable her to be ignorant of her role in the enemy's schemes; however, she may find it odd to realize that she has a compulsion to accumulate scraps of hair and eat unusual herbs.

Skill: Conjuration
Difficulty: 38
Effect: Telepathy (alter memories) 8D (48)
Range: 1 meter (0)
Speed: Instantaneous (0)
Duration: 1 hour (+18)
Casting Time: 2 rounds (-5)
Other Aspects:
Charges (+25): 5 improved charges
Components (-22): Small lock of hair or a scrap of something owned by the target for at least a month

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Special Abilities: None.
Equipment: Memory ring; purse filled with various necessities (identification, cash card, tissues, candy, box, etc.).

Your Ex-Girlfriend

for *D6 Space*

Genre: Science Fiction
Gender: Female
Agility 2D: acrobatics 2D+1, sleight of hand 2D+1
Mechanical 2D: piloting 2D+1, vehicle operations 2D+1
Strength 2D
Knowledge 3D: business 3D+1, cultures 3D+1, scholar 3D+1, willpower 4D
Perception 3D: artist 3D+1, hide 3D+1, investigation 3D+1, persuasion 3D+2
Technical 3D: computer interface/repair 3D+1, medicine 3D+1, robot interface/repair 3D+1
Strength Damage: 1D
Move: 10
Fate Points: 1
Character Points: 5
Body Points: 32
Wounds: 5

(very rare, destroyed); expensive perfume (uncommon, destroyed); perfume spritzer (uncommon)
Incantation (-2): Make a friendly gesture and saying something pleasant (sentence)
Focused (+13): On self

Description: One quick spray of a mystical perfume gives the user the ability to change a person's long-term memory in just about any way desired. The ability lasts for an hour, and the alterations remain for as long as the user maintains regular contact (at least once per day) with the target.

The potion is designed specifically for one particular target; it will not work with anyone else.

To rely on the ability once it's activated, the character rolls the *telepathy* skill provided by the spell against a difficulty of 25 (increased if there are many distracting people around). The spell works best when the user has a specific script that includes as much of the target's real memories as possible.

Disadvantages: Achilles' Heel: Metabolic Difference (R3), requires an energy source; Burn-out: Skill Bonus: Humanoid Appearance (R3), a loss of at least two Wounds or half of Body Points before having a chance to heal results in the humanoid skin being damaged beyond repair and the robotic framework exposed; Employed (R2), unwittingly beholden to her creator and feels a strong compulsion to contact him frequently (in the guise of her trust fund adviser); Hindrance: Lack Social Graces (R2), +6 to *streetwise* difficulties; Hindrance: Android Appearance (R5), +5 to *command, con,* and *persuasion* difficulties; Quirk (R3), cannot lie; Quirk: Secret (R2), not who she thinks she is
Advantages: Equipment: Memory-Altering Nanites (R4), injected by touching the target's bare skin, the nanites use chemicals to alter the target's memories in ways specifically programmed by the creator -- alterations fade away after several months of no contact between the characters; Patron (R1), an (apparently) inherited trust fund (secretly set up by her creator) pays her bills, but must submit receipts and make regular calls to its adviser
Special Abilities: Atmospheric Tolerance (R1, cost 4), airless environments with Additional Effect (R3), need not breath; Attack Resistance: Mental (R3, cost 6), +3D to mental harm; Immunity (R5, cost 5), +5D to Strength or stamina checks against illness or poison; Iron Will (R4, cost 8), +4D to all *willpower rolls* and +6 to standard interaction difficulties; Skill Bonus: Humanoid Appearance (R5), +5 to *command, con,* and *persuasion* totals
Equipment: Satchel with various necessities (identification, cash card, notepad, pens, tissues, candy, etc.)

The Lonely Hearts Guild

by Alice Turow

*"Look, Tara . . . we've had some **amazing** times," said Sir Tristin, uncertainly, as the two skulked into the chamber. "But I think it's important for us to rethink our relationship, and maybe take some time apart."*

*"Wait a **minute**," said Tara icily, "Are you breaking up with me?! **Now?!**"*

*"Fools!" bellowed Lord Infernus. "You both have entered my domain only to **die!**"*

* * *

The Problem

Many people need help in the search for love. Whether it's via popular personals Web sites catering to the masses, newspaper classifieds seeking relationships, expensive matchmakers targeting high-powered professionals, or something more exotic, those looking for a good time (and possible future) with like-minded souls have many options.

One feature integral to many of these services is the goal of bringing together like-minded individuals; corporate dating services limit their pool of mates to those with certain career and professional criteria, some professional sites place large emphasis on religious compatibility, and social networking sites self-select based on common interests. The Lonely Hearts Guild is a meta-concept built around the same idea: In a world with those who have hair-raising encounters, there are those in that profession who have a hard time finding like-minded dates. That's where the Lonely Hearts Guild comes in.

The Guild

The Lonely Hearts Guild is designed to match adventurers with adventurers, hooking up individuals largely because of abilities. The ideal date for Guild members -- indeed, the only kind of date that the Guild cares about -- is the shared adventure, where two members are expected to participate in a mission together. (As the founder once quipped, "When you're saving the world, small talk is easy.") Would-be members are subjected to an array of standardized psychological tests, designed to detect potential concerns for courting adventurers. Most mental disadvantages are revealed -- such as phobias, vows, compulsions, addictions, and extreme desires or aversions (lust, greed, etc.) -- and Guild members who wish to keep their afflictions secret would need to make a standard "avoidance" check, as per the game system's rules. The existence of most disadvantages or quirks is *not* enough to forbid entry (although some -- such as "serial killer tendencies" -- will do the trick). Rather it's an attempt by the Guild to make sure that potential daters know what they're getting into. In addition to adventurer-specific criteria, Lonely Hearts are screened for typical characteristics in the fashion of other modern dating services: interests, hobbies, desires, goals, and so on.

Along with this information-gathering session, prospective Guild members are given brief tests to determine if their physical and mental capabilities are as stated. These are not extensive, and it is possible for Lonely Hearts to be misclassified. To be categorized as more capable than one actually is requires a fair bit of dishonesty or self-delusion on the part of the member coupled with some remarkable luck (good or bad, depending on world view) in the assessment. However, becoming categorized as less capable is actually relatively common, because the tests only focus on a few areas (how do you prove you *can't* slay a dragon?). Lonely Hearts under-report their abilities for a myriad of reasons: Some do it so they can show "remarkable" signs of improvement during the course of a date, while others do it to keep their dating pool more open . . . or, at least, choose from a different spectrum of potential mates.

Especially in modern or future societies -- as well as other settings with highly developed litigious inclinations -- this testing also includes a diagnosis of general physical and mental fitness; these tests aren't designed to reveal aptitude,

but rather general health and well-being. (They aren't used to decide if you're as strong or smart as you say you are; instead, the company wants to make sure you're not going to sue if you keel over from a heart attack in the middle of a date.) Again, it's possible to fool these tests; some have charged that the Lonely Hearts Guild uses deliberately lax testing in this regard to ensure their profits, but regardless of the reasons, there have been a number of incidents of people entering the Guild who were physically or mentally unfit in some fashions. Fortunately for the Guild, the legal system has generally agreed that the existence of the testing -- coupled with the extensive paperwork and waivers -- does enough to put prospective daters on notice that their adventuring jobs are dangerous (which, presumably, they already knew before entering this particular dating pool).

Finally, would-be daters provide the Guild with information about any material that is "off-limits" for the Guild to learn or for prospective daters to know. For example, a superhero who is known to possess a secret identity may forbid being photographed by the Guild, or a cleric who is proscribed from discussing secrets of his order might let the Guild know that fact. Obviously, it's a fine point between "telling the Guild which information is secret" and "telling secrets to the Guild," and many conspiracy-minded adventurers believe one of the the Lonely Hearts' ulterior motives is gaining that information to use as a guide to know what forbidden information to go snooping for among its members.

Love Is a Number

Once the Guild has assessed a member, he is paired up with potential dates. Likely partners are classified using a five-point scale:

1. Date is significantly less powerful/skilled.
2. Date is somewhat less powerful/skilled.
3. Both dates are more or less on equal footing.
4. Date is somewhat more powerful/skilled.
5. Date is significantly more powerful/skilled.

Obviously, this scale is reciprocal for both sides of a date; if someone's date is classified as "less powerful than you," then that date is informed that the other is "more powerful than you." Guild members can let those in charge of the Guild know what level(s) they are comfortable with, and Guild personnel include the numbers when discussing the person. For example, a Guild supervisor might introduce a prospect as, "Sir Tristin is a martial-minded 2 or 3" (a fighter looking for someone of his rough skill level or possibly less skilled) or "Tara is a magical 4-to-5" (a magic-wielding person looking for someone more experienced than she is). Most would-be daters find it's a balancing act between leaving themselves open to the possibility of having a large number of dates and having their horizons be too broad for them to feel safe or comfortable; for example, making yourself available on Level 1 means that you'll be protecting most dates, while agreeing to a Level 5 means that you could be placing yourself in mortal danger.

In a large enough Guild, this simple classification is bound to have some oddities; for example, "Captain Polaris 1-to-5" (will date anyone) is vastly different from "Doctor Manifesto 1-*or*-5" (will only date someone of a wildly differing skill level). In addition, some Lonely Hearts have complained that this classification system doesn't tell the whole picture, and it's hard to tell if someone has been evaluated low because they are, in fact, deficient, or because they have abilities that are difficult to gauge: "I'm not a weakling; I can't pick things up because my body is pure energy!" (In game terms, it can be difficult to assess someone with significant handicaps or limitations but with extensive or useful powers and/or skills in other areas.)

Members are afforded as much privacy as can be reasonably expected to fulfill the matchmaking services. At a minimum, the Guild needs to have some means of informing prospective dates how to get in contact with each other, although this can be as surreptitious as desired; in modern settings, for example, where adventurers lead somewhat secretive lives, private e-mail accounts are common means of contacting, as are untraceable prepaid cell phones. Of course, in some settings, there is little anonymity among the adventuring class -- especially in fantasy settings. In such campaigns, a bard or runner hired to track down the hero would need a physical description to use for identification. In general, the Guild requires that members be able to receive an answer about prospective matches in a reasonable time frame. Although that can vary wildly depending on how grand the scale is in comparison to how poor the communications technology, in general the ideal is within a day to two weeks, which would give enough time for a

city-based bard in a fantasy campaign, a globetrotter in a 1930s cliffhanger setting, or a super-spy in the modern world.

Membership Dues and Don'ts

How the Guild gets its money depends largely on what the life of an adventurer is like in the gaming world. In settings with non-secret adventurers and the incentive of loot -- for example, most dungeon-crawl environments -- the Guild is happy taking a modest percentage of the adventurers' total haul (usually 1% or so). In modern mission-based settings, the Guild will also generally take a percent or two of what the professionals earn on the date-adventure. If a Guild member doesn't receive any compensation for services -- say, a superhero -- then a fee of about 1% of an upper-middle-class income is charged . . . although this can be lowered or waived if the participant both proves that he does his deeds altruistically and agrees to perform a "small" service in exchange for a date . . . say, rescuing two daters for whom things have gone wrong. (Although little advertised, the Guild *does* accept members who perform elicit deeds; their questioning is such that inquire about *sources* of income. While some might argue that taking a percentage of the proceeds from Professor Bank Robber's date earnings is the equivalent of pairing up criminals, the Guild sees its role as more neutral.)

The Guild only charges for the first date; if the couple decides to continue the relationship, they're free to do so (in all meanings). Of course, this method usually relies on honesty from those involved, but the Guild believes the amount it asks for is quite reasonable compared to the services rendered . . . and it has resources to learn if someone is being *too* stingy with its payment. If a Guild member doesn't participate in any dates within a year because he choses not to, there is an "inactivity fee" that amounts to about the same as other professional-level guild fees (or about 1% of an annual upper-middle class income, in a world without guilds); if the Guild member hasn't been offered any dates by the Guild, he doesn't need to pay.

Once a Guild member finds a mate, he can place his membership on indefinite hold ("reserve") at no penalty, incurring no fees during this time; the Guild uses the success to advertise for more members. (Unless corrected, the Guild tends to count matches as a success even if they occur outside of the Guild's efforts -- say, if the adventurer falls in love with someone else who isn't a Guild member. However, this "mistake" is only made if the Guild has received *some* money from the member at some point.) If the adventurer finds himself single again, he may resume full active membership simply by contacting the Guild.

Should a Guild member decide against paying the annual dues or participating in dates, he will be blacklisted by the Guild and can never return. This blacklisting also occurs if someone leaves the Guild himself without being in a relationship.

These policies do leave open the loophole that permits people to place themselves on "reserve" membership without a fee by simply saying he is no longer single; however, if the Guild learns of such duplicity, a blacklisting will almost certainly result.

Because of its payment structure, the Guild only makes money from its members when they actually go on a date (or when they go a year without choosing to date); this does much to deflect criticism for its steep fees (especially among high-earning adventurers), since -- unlike many modern dating sites -- they only charge for results.

Your Dungeon or Mine?

Once two members have been paired, the two need to decide what type of adventure they will participate in, which usually involves one of the two crossing over into the other's area of expertise. Since the Guild merely matches members, the "hows" and "whys" are left to the daters. In some campaigns, the form of this date is obvious; for example, in a wander-the-land fantasy world, two adventurers simply need to decide to pair up, traveling together in search of adventure. Likewise in a cyberpunk world, it's a matter of one person calling the other to say, "I'm about to embark on a shadowy errand; want to join?" It's also common for two daters who are in classified or secret professions to make a date of looking for adventure in a neutral "hive of scum and villainy" of some sort; in most game worlds,

such places are simply hotbeds of adventure.

Owner of a Lonely Hearts

From a game standpoint, the Lonely Hearts Guild has a number of potential uses. First and foremost, it is an in-game justification for potential relationships that can be built on and expanded within the game world. One problem with roleplaying romantic scenarios in many campaigns is that they take away from the "good bits" of blowing stuff up and gathering loot. Another problem is that most romantic NPCs tend to be of the non-adventuring sort, limiting their utility, at best, to most plots and, at worst, turning them into walking bullseyes. By combining the date with the adventure -- and making the companion a participant in the tale -- GMs eliminate both problems.

For games with allies, henchmen, followers, or the like, the Guild can also serve as an alternate means of justifying someone tagging along, or a variation on *who* tags along. ("I gotta say: I like this apprentice a *lot* better than the last one who died!")

The Guild can also serve as a variant means of organizing or assembling a group of adventurers. By expanding the scope of the Guild to a slightly more proactive organization -- one that actively gives assignments to heroes -- the Guild can be the catalyst for sending out groups of PCs on a double (or triple) date.

Finally, the Guild is a fairly interesting near-shadowy organization all itself. Although designed in this article as a mostly benevolent force -- or, at least, a neutral money-making venture -- it could just as easily have its own skeletons. What is the actual criteria for matching up various people? Who is running the show, and for what ends? Why is all the information and analysis of abilities *really* being collected?

The Omniscient Eye

Does the Universe End with a Bang or a Whimper?

I'm thinking about sending the PCs in a time-travel campaign to the end of the universe. What would that look like? I've heard that if the universe collapses instead of infinitely expanding, time will run backwards. Does that mean what it sounds like, or is that mystical science-speak?

The Omniscient Eye likes big questions, and they don't come much bigger than this. We'll see if we can make time run backwards later, but let's start with the really big one: how will absolutely everything in the Universe end? And, even more importantly, can we make a good game out of it?

Of course, the problem with this is that the Universe hasn't actually ended yet, and we don't really have any other examples to look at. So, of necessity, there has to be a bit of guesswork involved. Still, we can make a pretty educated guess as to what will happen by looking at what the universe has done so far.

The main thing the universe is doing on a grand scale is expanding. Matter, however, produces gravity, which tends to pull things together . . . so, if anything, the universe should be shrinking. The reason that it isn't is, of course, a relic of the Big Bang. The ultimate fate of the universe depends on just how strong that expansive force is, compared with the gravitational attraction of all the matter that exists. There are three possibilities:

1. The force is stronger than gravity, in which case the universe will keep on expanding until it ends in a Big Rip.
2. The force is weaker than gravity, in which case, at some point, the expansion will stop, causing the universe to end in a Big Crunch.
3. The force is exquisitely balanced between the two above options, so that neither of them ever quite happens.

To find out which is right, we'd have to weigh the universe, and we haven't yet got a set of scales big enough to do that (not that that's stopped scientists from trying), so, for our purposes, we can just go with whichever makes for the most interesting game. Let's take a look at each option in turn:

The Big Rip

On the face of it, this looks the most likely possibility. If we try to weigh the universe by the simple expedient of figuring out the weight of an average star, multiplying by the average number of stars in a galaxy, then multiplying that by the number of galaxies in the observable universe, we find that it has nowhere near enough gravity to put a brake on expansion. In fact, the universe would have to have at least a hundred times as much stuff in it as the stuff we can see, in order to avoid a Big Rip. On the other hand, when we look at the way that stars in our own galaxy move under gravity, it looks as if the Milky Way weighs at least ten times as much as it should do, so there's clearly an awful lot of stuff out there that we *can't* see. We call this stuff "dark matter," and it's our one chance of avoiding the Big Rip . . . but only if there's enough of it, which is still open to question.

We really don't know when this would happen, but the best guess at the moment is around 50 billion years in the future. But what will your time travelers find when they get there? Well, what happens as the end approaches is that the expansion of the universe pulls objects apart ever faster, and the closer you get to the end, the more dangerous that gets. At first, galaxies will start disappearing from the sky; they're so far away that light just doesn't have time to reach you. In fact, this is already happening. This is why the sky is black, rather than being a blaze of an infinite number of stars. But, the longer you wait, the blacker the sky gets.

Then, about 60 million years before the Big Rip, the remorseless expansion of the universe tears even galaxies apart.

Stars start vanishing from the sky, and, unless you can travel faster than light, you'll never be able to reach them, no matter how long your journey lasts. The universe becomes an increasingly lonely place for our time travelers. The end, when it comes, is rapid. Over the last few months, planets fly apart from their stars, and then the matter inside the planets is ripped apart. In the final split second, the Big Rip becomes so powerful that even atoms and subatomic particles are torn to shreds, and everything in the universe is destroyed.

Including you, if you're foolish enough to travel there.

The Big Crunch

Although the Big Rip has its supporters, however, most scientists think that there probably is enough dark matter in the universe to stop it from happening. In which case, at some point, the expansion of the universe will stop, and gravity will begin to pull everything back together again. Quite when this will happen depends on just how much dark matter there is, but, judging from the speed that galaxies are flying apart at the moment, its clearly going to be a very long time. A fairly conservative estimate puts it at 100 billion years in the future, and it could be much further than that.

But, if there is enough dark matter, then eventually the universe will start to contract . . . and that is where time running backwards comes in. The theory goes that time always runs in the direction of increasing entropy, or disorder. As the universe expands, things become more disordered, entropy increases, and time runs forward. But, when the universe contracts, and everything squishes back together again, things will become less disordered, entropy decreases, and, so the theory goes, time will run backwards.

And, yes, this really does mean what you'd think it means. Beings in this era of the universe would die before they were born, and cups would spontaneously unbreak themselves, unspilling all their contents; it would be seriously, seriously, weird. Not that the beings in question would notice, mind you, because their brains would run backwards as well, so they would experience things exactly as we do. It might, however, be different for time travelers from this half of the universe . . . which would be much more entertaining from a game perspective.

That's if the theory is true at all, which it probably isn't. Scientists no longer believe that entropy really will decrease when the universe contracts, so the question of what would happen to time if it did is moot. Although, of course, scientists have been wrong before . . .

But living life forwards in a universe that's contracting is still pretty interesting. Well, not at first, perhaps; you may have reflected before that the ongoing expansion of the universe doesn't much affect your daily life, or produce exciting possibilities for adventure, and that would still be true if it was contracting. To begin with -- and, indeed, for several billion years after the turn-around -- things will look pretty much the same as they do now. The longer you wait, however, the faster the contraction gets, and the closer the objects in the universe become . . . you are heading for the Big Crunch.

As the end approaches, the sky begins to warm up. This is because, as the universe becomes ever denser, the cosmic background radiation, the afterglow of the Big Bang, slowly increases. At first that makes little difference, but once the sky is hot enough, there is nowhere for the heat from planetary surfaces to escape to, and even the coldest of worlds becomes inhospitably hot. By the time all the galaxies have merged, and the universe is one vast mass of stars, even the coldest parts of space are 300°C (570°F), and your time travelers will require specialist equipment just to avoid being cooked. From there on in, it's only going to get hotter.

The sky glows red. Stars, unable to dissipate their heat, explode. The universe becomes filled with super-hot plasma, and, as everything continues to contract at an ever faster rate, soon the only landmarks left are black holes. Three minutes from the end, with the Big Crunch fully underway, the universe has returned to a condition very similar to the primeval fireball that spawned it. It has become so dense that the black holes are starting to collide, and the atomic structure of the increasingly compacted hot gas that fills the universe is beginning to break down.

In the last few split seconds of the universe, subatomic particles break down to a soup of quarks, then even those are crushed out of existence. The universe collapses into a dimensionless point of infinite density and temperature, the

very fabric of space-time crushed and bent out of existence in the final singularity.

There used to be a theory that this wasn't necessarily the end. Perhaps, at some point before the singularity is reached, they said, something causes the universe to rebound, and begin expanding again. If that point is reached before the universe becomes totally inhospitable, it might even be possible to survive into the next era, as the familiar stars and galaxies reform once more.

There are two reasons why this theory is no longer as popular as it once was. For one thing, nobody has ever been able to explain exactly what could cause the universe to rebound like this; it would require some physical force unknown to modern science. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for our purposes, even if there were such a force, it wouldn't keep the universe alive forever. Due to entropy, the explosive force of the new universe would have to be less than that of the one that spawned it. Each successive universe would be smaller, and shorter lived, than its predecessor was. Eventually, the new universes would not last long enough to form planets or stars, until all you would be left with was a pulsating, uninhabitable, fireball. It might not be the end of the universe, as space-time would still exist (albeit highly warped), but a time traveler probably wouldn't care much about the difference.

On and On and On . . .

But there is a third option. If the weight of the universe is just right, it will remain forever balanced between a Big Rip and a Big Crunch. The expansion of the universe will get slower and slower, but it will never quite stop. In which case, the universe, in the sense of space-time, will exist forever. The same cannot be said for the objects in it. Indeed, even if one of the other two possibilities does eventually occur, if they're far enough away in the future, the universe will already have changed before they happen.

So, what will happen to the universe if you just wait . . . forever?

We know, of course, that our own sun won't last that long. In about five billion years time, it will expand into a red giant, consuming Mercury and Venus, and baking the Earth. A billion years after that, it will shed its outer layers, while the core contracts and cools to form a white dwarf. But all the time this is happening, new stars are constantly being forged in the crucibles of gas elsewhere. The sun may die, but the galaxy will endure.

But even the galaxy cannot last indefinitely. Sooner or later, all the hydrogen gas that fuels the stars will be used up. Eventually, there will not be enough left to form new stars. The last stars to die will actually be the coolest; they burn so slowly that it could take as much as a trillion years for one to fade. So, at some point in the future, the only light in the sky will come from tiny, fading, red dwarf stars and the cooling remnants of stellar collapse, such as white dwarfs and neutron stars. Eventually, they too, will stop glowing. It does, however, take rather a long time for this to happen. A hundred trillion years is the current best estimate, which is on the order of ten thousand times longer than the universe's current age.

The universe of 100,000,000,000,000 AD will look very different from that of today. For a start, the sky will be black and starless. Planets, and brown dwarfs (which are small, star-like objects that never get hot enough to ignite), will still exist, but, with nothing to warm them, they will be very cold. Even the dead stars known as white dwarfs, which currently shine because of the heat left over from their creation, will have faded to black, and cooled to the temperature of liquid nitrogen. About the only objects left that have not changed much are the neutron stars and black holes, and they aren't exactly hospitable in the first place.

For many purposes, the beginning of this cold and starless time could count as the end of the universe. It was even described as such in the *Doctor Who* episode "Utopia," which chronicles humanity's last struggle to survive against the dying of the light. But, even if the presence of stars defines your idea of the universe, it isn't quite the end.

A direct collision between two stars is so incredibly unlikely that the odds are that it hasn't happened even once in the entire history of our galaxy so far. But wait for ten thousand times the current age of the universe or longer and, sooner or later, it will. If two brown dwarfs collide, the combined mass of the resulting object may be enough to start stellar fusion, and create a new star, of the type we are familiar with today. The collision could even create planets, in

much the same way that our Moon was created when a Mars-sized planet plowed into the early Earth. The night sky from such a world would be pitch black, and there would nowhere else to go worth visiting, but it could be habitable.

When white dwarfs collide, it gets even stranger. White dwarfs, by definition, no longer contain any significant amount of hydrogen (the usual fuel for stellar fusion), and instead consist almost entirely of helium. If the object formed from the collision is too small, it will just become a slightly larger white dwarf, while if it is too large it will collapse to form a neutron star or black hole. There is, however, a significant size range in between where the collision would generate enough heat to ignite the helium, creating a type of star that, so far as we know, has never before existed in our galaxy. This helium star will glow with tremendous heat, easily enough to support life on any worlds that might orbit it. It probably won't last long enough for life to evolve -- only a few million years -- but you could at least visit it. Yes, the formation of such an object is incredibly unlikely, but when you're waiting for eternity, the incredibly unlikely will eventually happen.

It has even been suggested that life could exist in the atmospheres of white dwarf stars. Sure, by this time, it's life at the temperature of liquid nitrogen, but when the last regular stars have burned out, you take what you can get.

This period will last for an incredibly long time; billions of times longer than the universe has lasted so far. Where other scenarios result in events accelerating as the end approaches, in an eternal universe, they just drag on with increasing slowness. After a hundred trillion trillion years, the galaxies will evaporate, their substance dissipating into intergalactic space, putting an end to stellar collisions for good.

On an even longer scale, scientists believe that protons, one of the fundamental building blocks of matter, will decay into smaller subatomic particles. When they do, matter as we know it will cease to exist. On timescales that make even a hundred trillion trillion years look like a mere blink of the eye, white dwarfs, neutron stars, and whatever planets or other objects remain will slowly evaporate into chunks of translucent ice, becoming ever more tenuous until they vanish into nothingness. Only black holes, from which not even light can escape, will remain.

Yet even black holes decay, through a process known as Hawking radiation. The details need not concern us here, since, quite frankly, there is not much reason for a time traveler to visit a period in which black holes are quite literally the only objects left in the universe. Suffice it to say that, after a googol (10^{100}) years have passed, even the largest of black holes will have evaporated to nothing. The universe in that distant era is totally and utterly empty, consisting of nothing but an ever-expanding cloud of subatomic particles, a vacuum far purer than anything that exists today.

Which is as good a definition of "the end of the universe" as any.

Further Reading

- *The Last Three Minutes,* Paul Davies, (HarperCollins 1994)
- *The Five Ages of the Universe,* Fred Adams & Greg Laughlin, (Simon & Schuster, 1999)
- *A Brief History of Time,* Stephen Hawking, (Bantam Press 1988)
- "Phantom Energy and Cosmic Doomsday," Robert R Caldwell et. al., Phys.Rev.Lett. 91 (2003) 071301: http://arxiv.org/PS_cache/astro-ph/pdf/0302/0302506v1.pdf

--Jamie Revell

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!

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The Venus Network Part 2: Ishtar Colony

by Paul Drye

When the *Grand Endeavour* reaches Venus and orbit is established, two shuttles in the shape of flattened wedges will rise from the planet and, over the course of several trips, will unload the colony ship and refuel it. The *Grand Endeavour* itself has no means of transferring people to and from orbit, on the basis that hauling shuttles back and forth from Earth to Venus is wasteful of fuel.

Venus

From orbit, this Venus looks much like the one of Homeline. Its cloud cover is usually complete, though there are occasional flashes of the ground unlike at home. The sole noticeable difference most of the time is that the clouds are lighter in color, white instead of slightly yellowish.

Down on the ground, the divergences start to pile up. While far more habitable than most of its parachronic twins, this Venus is still suffering through the early moist greenhouse phase of its evolution. In another 300 million years or so it will be a close match for the dry, hot planet we know, but for now it retains oceans over 85% of its surface and bears a good resemblance to Earth.

The atmosphere is at or near 100% humidity most of the time as the heat has filled the tropospheric "cold trap" (responsible for Earth keeping its water) with moisture. There's tremendous energy locked up in the air now; thunderhead clouds rear as much as 30 miles, and storms are very strong. Even without the extra water vapor, Venus' atmosphere is quite dense, 60% higher than on Earth, which makes breathing at sea level tiring after a few days.

From the standpoint of colonists, the most unusual difference between Venus and Earth is the former's extremely long day. The planet rotates so slowly that its 243 day rotation period meshes with its orbit around the sun to produce a solar day (noon to noon) period of 117 days. When the Venusian colony was established there were worries that this would cause psychological difficulties, but Venus' near-perpetual cloud cover seems to prevent "day madness" -- the increase and decrease of brightness as the clouds get thicker and thinner (a random process which usually lasts no more than a few days) is a passable substitute for a day/night cycle. The very long nights are more problematic, but again artificial illumination within the colony's buildings seems to keep people from going off the deep end.

The one effect new arrivals will have the most trouble with is the one place where Venus is most like Earth: its gravity. Slightly smaller and less dense, Venus still pulls at a respectable 0.903g. If one were to transfer directly from Earth the difference would barely be noticeable, but bear in mind that the colonists have been on-board the colony ship for at least 146 days, and the *Grand Endeavour's* artificial gravity is only 0.1g. It's going to take a day or two for even the strongest-willed people to be moving around on the ground, and most will take longer.

Ishtar

Venus has two continents, the northernmost of which is Ishtar (in one of parachronic travel's likely meaningful but presently inexplicable congruencies, the features of Britannica-1's Venus have been named the same as Homeline's). The British colony is here, where the latitude and altitude -- much of the continent is above 7,000 feet -- alleviate the heat and atmospheric pressure. The more-habitable part of the continent is Lakshmi Plain, which covers an area about the size of Western Australia. Here the land is similar to the Colorado Plateau in the American southwest, high and relatively flat. However, the high rainfall found all over the planet is the same here, so the plain is covered with thick jungle instead of desert.

Lakshmi is roughly circular, with mountain ranges (Freya and Akna) to the north, and a line of high hills (the Danu Range) running along the south where the Sea of Guinevere laps against the shore. To the east is the enormous Mount Maxwell, a shield volcano larger than anything on Earth. It rises some 33,000 feet above sea level and is unconquered by mountaineers. Beyond the mountain is another lowland region, Cleopatra, but it's much more rugged than the Lakshmi Plain and correspondingly less well-explored.

Aphrodite

The larger of Venus' two continents (bigger than North America) is Aphrodite, which hugs the equator on the opposite side of the planet from Ishtar. If Cleopatra is poorly known, Aphrodite is the new heart of darkness. It's suffered only three expeditions since Venus was first opened, and one of those was a complete disaster. For now it remains a hot, sodden mystery.

Down in the Jungles

With plentiful oxygen and water, the main limiting factor on Venusian plant growth is light under the near-perpetual cloud cover. As on Earth, trees look for more by growing upwards, and the competition is so intense that most forest canopies are several hundred feet up. A mature forest cuts off the ground so completely that its lower understory receives no light at all, a departure from terrestrial norms. In the absence of light, a large "vault" up to 50 feet tall may form; on Ishtar these are discontinuous, but Aphrodite's more riotous growth often has them stretching for miles. The vault ecology bears a striking resemblance to that on the abyssal ocean plains: creatures live on breaking down whatever falls from higher levels (a Venusian fungus analog does most of the work, and is in turn eaten for its pains), and many life forms are phosphorescent.

Within the canopy, a huge variety of creatures live a three dimensional existence, picking their way through the dense vegetation as best they can. The larger tree branches can support surprisingly large lifeforms; there a several species known which outmass a human despite never touching the ground.

Whenever a break occurs in the canopy (usually when a storm is strong enough to rip a dead tree loose from its supporting neighbors), a riot of growth occurs in the understory. The jungle plants are so densely packed that many don't bother with air-borne seeds, instead dropping large spores down to the ground. There the churning passage of life through the mud eventually unites a male and female spore at a distance from the original plants, and the fertilized seed is ready whenever light becomes available. This strategy has proven to be a problem for the colony, as any time they clear some land for farming, the fecund mud is so full of life that it outcompetes the crops. The colonists have been forced to sterilize the soil with heat (easier said than done in Venus' sopping climate) before planting.

Animal Life

Venus and Earth share a common link, as at the cellular level the second planets lifeforms are clearly members of base terrestrial groups like plants, fungi, and animals. Currently, the best guess by Britannica-1's scientists is that there was some seeding of Venus from Earth by the exchange of meteoritic material some time prior to a billion years ago.

Despite the relationship, though, this was too early for the basic body plans of Earth's life to be passed on (not that anything that large was likely to survive an asteroidal impact and being hurled to Venus in any case). For example, the major form of animal life on Venus has evolved from the same kind of unicellular animals as on Earth, but the standard body plan isn't the chordate and arthropod "line with legs," but rather an "asterisk" formation that produces six legs, or four legs and two heavily modified limbs like antennae or wings.

The Venusians

Venus is home to a native alien race, which lives on both Ishtar and Aphrodite. The larger Ishtarians have some contact with humans, while the smaller, more vicious Aphroditeans are known mostly from aerial surveys. Despite their differences, the types of Venusian are all quite similar: radially symmetric like a starfish, with only a very small body at the juncture of the arms. Organs spill out into one or more of the arms, including the brain which is subdivided across all six limbs. This subdivided brain gives them the ability to hive off a smaller, stupider consciousness in control of one or more arms, which can focus on a task while the main intelligence works on something else.

Another unusual aspect of Venusian physiology is that they are metagenetic; they alternate generations that reproduce sexually with those that don't. The individuals that most people see, the "starfish," are asexual, and at the end of their lives bud off a "breeder." Breeders are unintelligent and sessile, expelling reproductive cells into the air around them. Other breeders accept these and produce a few sexually propagated offspring before they die; these offspring grow into mobile Venusians, and the whole process begins again. The major watershed between the animals from which Venusians evolved and the modern species is their desire to store breeders in special nurseries instead of in the wild. A large part of all Venusian cultures revolves around the ultimate placement of breeders within; more successful individuals have their breeders moved closer to the center. The closer to the center, the more children, and the more likely that the breeder of another successful Venusian will be the other parent.

Normally Venusians are risk-takers, part of their culture-wide competition for breeder placement in their nurseries. There are likely hundreds of Venusians cultures, almost all still stone-aged, and each has different ideas of "success" when it comes time for the nurses to place a breeder. But whatever those ideas may be, the Venusians always have at least one eye on that prize.

The exception to their risk-taking is in the matter of personal mortality. While most can face death if they have to, they have a stronger aversion to it than humans. This stems from their reproduction as well, because they don't create their breeders until they are near the end of their natural lives: early death means dying childless. In some more-advanced Ishtarian societies, this problem has been ameliorated by herbal treatments that force the creation of a breeder, but these still take a few days or so to work and are only suitable for those whose passing can be seen in advance; sudden violent death remains a phobia for many Venusians.

This attitude is reinforced by the Venusian startle reflex. If surprised, the mind dissolves into its sub-brains, and the normally consensus-based consciousness is overridden by even one arm calling for a retreat. However, once temporary safety is reached (under cover, away from the source of the fear, or if the cause of the surprise turns out to be harmless) the Venusian mind reforms and recovers from the flight reflex, even to the point of being able to return to the danger now that it is no longer surprised by it.

The Venusians of Ishtar's Lakshmi Plain are the ones that interact most with humans, having set up temporary camps through which they trade with the Sky People. The ones closest to the colony have taken up a profitable position as middlemen in human goods, and try very hard to prevent their brethren from further afield trading directly. This has broken out into tribal violence, to the distress of some colonists; others don't care as the locals are equally careful to keep the warfare from spilling out into the lands of their golden goose.

The Colony

There are nearly 2,000 people living on Venus, of a mixture of nationalities from around the Empire. The common language is English, since most are from Australia, the Canadas, Columbia, and even the American republics that are

friendliest to the British. There are also people from places like the Protectorate of Uruguay, and many Raj Indians, but the primary strain of colonist is from the poor classes and former soldiers of the Dominions.

In all honesty, the colony is not doing well and relies on heavy subsidies from the British back home. If the Empire weren't in such an expansive and triumphant mood now that the tribulations of the Bolshevist War are receding into the past, it would be unlikely that so much prestige would be tied up in an economically hopeless enterprise.

Daily temperatures in the colony are a solid 90° Fahrenheit throughout the year; Venus has a small axial tilt, and so very mild seasons, and in any case the thick atmosphere evens out temperature variations. Worse, this is anything but a dry heat. Humidity rarely drops below 100%, and rain is in the forecast every day. A good day on Venus is when it pours for only a few hours, and the sun breaks through the mist a bit for several hours; a bad day is one in the middle of a stretch where the rain goes on for more than a week.

Terrestrial life is not well-suited to the climate, and farming has been difficult. As well as the heavily spore-laden mud mentioned earlier, the endless rain and relative lack of sunlight kills most food crops. The colony has been shifting towards paddy fields and their associated foods -- rice, amaranth, chilis, and fish -- much to the disgust of the European-descended settlers.

What the colony is particularly lacking is anything worth shipping back to Earth. Until someone comes up with something that is still sellable despite the massive shipping costs, everything returning home has to be subsidized.

The Infinity Station

Sterling Johnson is in charge of the Infinity Station, having amassed two decades of relevant experience. His specialty has always been space operations, and he's had a hand in many missions Infinity has run in Earth orbit or on the Moon. When it came time to select the first Homeliner to travel on the *Grand Endeavour,* his name came up. His real name is not usually disclosed to agents, since he's taken on the life of a criminal transportee (a corporate embezzler who was supplied with a cover and a ticket to Tahiti). He finished his sentence several years ago, and has settled in as a scout and farmer for the colony.

His ranch home is quite isolated from the main body of settlement, and serves well as the HQ of Infinity on Venus as well. The main house is roomy enough for guests to stay, while the parachronic equipment is in a damp sheet-metal shack behind it. It's run off a bio-gas generator, which constantly chugs away on local vegetation fed to it. The electricity it generates is dumped into a high-tech capacitor (quite unlike anything natively available on Britannica-1) that builds up enough charge to power a transition once every week or so.

Johnson has a number of goals he'd like to achieve beyond the mission that's been assigned to him. He'd like make his station more autonomous, in particular not have to rely on Homeline to give the go-ahead for examining a new timeline. This means he needs to obtain the materials and personnel required to quickly open a connection then shut it again if 800-degree, high-pressure carbon dioxide and sulfuric acid start coming through.

Similarly, he's been impressed by the Venusians, and thinks they could make good recruits in the long run. He's worked in zero-g enough to know that their six arms could come in very handy.

Other Venuses

Though, hopefully, Infinity agents can find plenty of adventure on this particular planet, remember that the goal of coming here is to set up Infinity's parachronic network. If you've got one, you might as well use it.

The large majority of known Venuses are like the one on Homeline: acidic hellholes. As a result, Infinity is planning to approach the problem from the Earths it knows, and only make a timeline transit whenever astronomical observations suggest conditions are better. As is often the case, they rely on the local society's knowledge of the second planet to help. Homeline scientists knew Venus was likely uninhabitable by the beginning of the 20th century, thanks to

spectroscopic study of its atmosphere through telescopes. The telltale signs of problems (interpretable by Infinity personnel, though confusing to the locals) could push this identification back another fifty years or so.

Similarly, on timelines where the technology level isn't high enough yet, Infinity's own astronomical corps is fairly sophisticated and can do the work themselves.

Infinity assumes that they're going to end up with two types of candidates. "Literary" timelines, with their Robin Hoods and Sherlock Holmeses may be uncommon and fairly inexplicable, but they do exist. One hope is that enough of the science-fictional Venuses, particularly from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries when the planet was plausibly habitable, will start turning up when sought out. Of particular interest are the "pulp" Venuses of Burroughs and other lesser lights, where exploitable high technology is mixed with easily contested pseudo-ancient cultures. None have been found yet, and it's acknowledged that pinning one's hopes on a particular literary creation is a mug's game, but some dare to hope.

The other, likelier possibility is "scientific" Venuses, like Britannica-1's. Some modification to the basic laws of physics is necessary to prevent the planet from entering a runaway greenhouse, but there's no shortage of Earths with slightly odd laws.

It's believed that at first these more sensible timelines are likely to be of pure scientific interest. There are several sciences which benefit from many different Earths to examine, but it's sometimes hard to untangle basic facts from coincidences caused by looking at many aspects of the same planet. Having a whole other, terrestrial world unconstrained by Earth's history could be very useful. The same massive difference at base will likely eventually lead to more lucrative reasons to seek out these Venuses, but it's difficult to say what those might be until they're discovered.

Adventures on Venus

To the Last Man: British Intelligence has been quite good at weeding out Bolshevism throughout the world. The Russian leadership not atomized by the bombings at the end of the War have been sent to the scaffold, and huge numbers of functionaries have been put to work in the depths of Siberia as payment for their dangerous ideas. Still, it's not possible to see into a man's head, and many have escaped notice.

Some of these, over a dozen, have managed to conspire their way aboard the *Grand Endeavour* and travel to Venus. Their lives on Earth were hard, and the Ishtar colony is hardly a paradise, so what is it to them if they give up civilization entirely and live in the wilderness as bandits? Reconstituting the tiniest sliver of the Russian Socialist Republic under the noses of their oppressors is just the sort of hare-brained, ideologically idealist act they've lived to do since the end of the War.

Once they do, though, they're going to be a thorn in the side of the colonists. Someone has to deal with them, somehow.

Monuments and Remains: Large sections of Venus remain unexplored. It's extremely difficult to survey properly from orbit due to the cloud cover, and aerial surveys are resource-intensive and time-consuming. Aphrodite continent is so poorly known it makes 19th-century Africa look like Times Square.

So while the Venusians are "known" to be hunter-gatherers across the planet, that's far from certain. In the vast understory vaults of the equatorial continent there's room for entire lost civilizations, either extinct or still a going concern. One odd artifact, passed hand to hand by curious natives over generations, may be a clue that points adventurers in the right direction.

Using The Ishtar Colony in Other Settings

The colony already borrows heavily from pulp Venuses, so it's not overly difficult to adapt it for pulp campaigns.

Depending on how space-oriented the GM's pulp tastes run, he may want to relocate it to Africa; this necessitates toning down to Venusians to, say, Lost World Atlanteans or *mangani,* but few other changes. Turn Sterling Johnson into a maverick scientist and co-opt Mary Gregg from "[Infinite Crossroads-22: The *Grand Endeavour*]" to play the beautiful lab assistant and you'll be ready to go.

In fantasy campaigns, something like the Ishtar colony can make a useful gateway to other planes. Most campaigns eventually reach the stage of hopping from dimension to dimension, but many don't put much thought into the initial effort. Rather than using easily available spells or dropping magical doors on the travelers, why not make the journey to the door a quest in itself? The Venusians become the primitive remnants of a civilization that built this magical technology, while the colony becomes the home of unhappy, rain-drenched wizards from the north trying to decipher just how they did it,

Sci-fi campaigns need only look as far as Harlan Ellison's classic TV treatment "The City on the Edge of Forever." The obscure planet and the dimensional gate are both here, the major difference -- a very necessary one, given the fame of the original -- being that the gate doesn't go to Earth's past, but elsewhere.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Oregon

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Åse and Henrik Berg

Full-color boxed game with 60 farmer tokens (in four player colors), 50 landscape cards, 28 building cards, 28 building tiles, eight player tokens (four each of extra turns and jokers), 21 coal tiles, 21 gold tiles, and rules; $39.95

Gone are the days when the struggle for a new America was won with blood and sweat, and victims might be claimed by the measles or dysentery before *The Oregon Trail* floppy disk was popped out of the drive and the user went to dinner. Although having no direct no relationship to the popular computer game from the 1980s, the board game *Oregon* still brings all the excitement of exploring the new territory to the tabletop.

The object of the game is to acquire the most points. The average playing time for two to four players is 45 to 60 minutes.

The map shows an abstracted view of Oregon and its various terrain features. It's overlaid by a grid with symbols along its top and left side. Each player has a hand of four cards, representing buildings and landscape, and a set of pawns in his color called farmers. The landscape cards show one of the five symbols from the map edges, while the building cards display the various structures the settlers can construct.

To place a farmer pawn, the player puts down two landscape cards; where those two symbols intersect on the board, that's where the pawn is set. Since the same symbols run along the length and breadth of the grid, this usually offers two regions to put the piece (if the two cards show the same symbol, *c'est la vie*; there's only one place for it). To put up a building requires a building card (the "what") and a landscape card (the "where"), but even then, a structure must match the terrain (harbors next to water, mines in the mountains, train stations along the tracks, and so on). Each space can only accommodate a structure or a farmer, but scoring requires getting the two to work together. Each location is further split into six boxes.

Some buildings are just worth straight points. Place a pawn next to the post office, for example, and it scores three points. Others get fancy with the numbers, like the church that offers points based on how many pawns are next to it . . . as it gets more crowded, it's worth more. Mines cough up secret coal and gold tiles with random point values. Note that scoring works both ways: Points are not only scored when putting a pawn beside a building or a building next to the pawn; everyone scores for such a placement even if someone else does the work and it's not their turn. Grouping pawns together also scores, though committing a lot of eggs to a single basket can work against someone.

To assist settlers in their goals, they have two tokens, a joker and an extra turn. The joker can be used in the place of any landscape card, making it easier to target the positioning of pawns and buildings, and the extra turn is just what it sounds like. When used, the tokens are flipped over until the player drops a farmer next to a warehouse or train station (or vice versa), "refreshing" them. Building and farming continues until either one of the players places his last pawn or the supply of a certain number of building types has been exhausted. The values of the secret coal and gold tokens are finally revealed, and the highest score wins.

There's a decent selection of pieces in this box, though the map graphics fall on the rough side. The tiles and cards are firm (but the latter are of the smallish variety), the farmer meeples are distinctive (the silhouette wears the stereotypical straw hat), and the box comes with a cardboard insert that forms little trays. The coal and gold markers would work

better if they were larger, but there's not much to them to begin with.

Even as the tile-laying mechanic becomes more prevalent in the industry, this game manages to stand out. Cross-referencing one's choices on the map offers just enough options to keep things interesting without making a good play obvious or impossible. Considering the next move occupies the moments between turns. Shutting one's opponents out from success is impossible. In fact, there are so many avenues and permutations, players almost can't help but assist someone else accidentally, so often it's a question of what helps rivals the least.

A game takes an hour, maybe less, so it works well as filler, a repeat play throughout the evening, or a lunch-long pastime. **Oregon** is also engaging and highly replayable, and best of all, this time no one needs to die of dysentery.

--Andy Vetromile

Changing the Pace and Pacing the Change

The sketch-comedy television show *MadTV* had a great skit in their first season called "First to a Million." It starts out as a typical game show, with two contestants about to compete to see who will be . . . first to a million! The game begins, and one of the contestants answers correctly . . . and gets one point. Another question is answered, and another point is scored. Several questions later -- and with the score at something like four to two -- one of the contestants asks, "Will the questions ever be worth more than one point?" To which the chuckling host responds, "You mean, will some of the questions be worth something like two points? No, nothing like that here. On with the game!" The sketch ends with the two contestants locked in a battle that will no doubt take a long, long time. (A continuation of the sketch is shown again as a bumper between two other segments later in the episode, where the two contestants -- now with totals in the low 10,000s -- look utterly bored as they soldier on.)

The joke, of course, is that this game show has somehow screwed up the extremely simple formula -- answer questions towards a game-show goal -- by getting the pacing completely wrong.

Interestingly, this joke works with either extreme of incorrect pacing; for example, consider a game where there's a hideously elaborate set of rules and regulations spelled out, including many convoluted examples and sub-examples, where the actual game is resolved immediately. Actually, you don't need to imagine it if you're familiar with the one-win outcomes of [Mornington Crescent](#).

Now, we've talked about [pacing](#) a [fair](#) [bit](#) [before](#), but I found a new angle this weekend. On the drive back from south Florida, from my annual 18-hour-drive to visit family, my wife and I were playing various car-bound games, including timeless classics such as "Drowsy Left-Lane Veering," "Bladder, I Hate You," and "Test Your Marriage!" One game involved discussing various questions from a book of questions (called, I believe, the *Book of Questions*). One of the questions asked (paraphrasing), "Would you become horribly disfigured if it meant you could live to be 1,000 years?" My answer was immediate and without hesitation: "I wouldn't want to live to be 1,000 years *without* being disfigured!"

See, I've been pacing my life according to certain sets of expectations; foremost of these is the fact that I'm only gonna live to be 100 years or so at most. This doesn't bother me; rather, it gives me an idea of how I'm plotting my life. I hope to be done with child-raising within the next few decades, I *really* hope I get to retire by the time I'm 70, and so on. This is true on a micro scale as well. The manner in which I pace my day depends on what I have planned; If I'm working a 12-hour shift at my Day Job, I approach it with a very different mental state than if I'm working a six-hour day. I treat one day off differently than seven. And so on. I'm also prepared to adjust my lifelong pacing according to new developments; if I learn that I have a terminal disease, I'll suddenly start pacing my life very differently in the time I have left.

But my approach to pacing is, ideally, known before I get involved in whatever is being paced. And here's where the secondary level of humor for the "First to a Million" sketch kicks in: It's funny because the participants don't realize what they're getting into, and couldn't plan accordingly. After all, the folks who participate on game shows such as *Survivor* realize they're tying up their lives for weeks (at least).

So, how does this tie into gaming? What, you want more than the "I was playing a *Book of Questions*-type game with my wife in the car" bit? Okay; fine. The need for proper pacing is probably something most people have in mind when they participate in a game. (I have a game called **Quickword** that did *not* live up to its title; I seem to recall we played for over 90 minutes before calling it quits.) What is acceptable can be different for different players; I as a GM might be willing to string out a campaign mystery over the course of six months, while you want it to be resolved in a few weeks of game time. And what is acceptable can change according to circumstance even for the same players. As one example, the pacing of my campaigns in college always got more brisk as we neared the holidays, because I didn't want too many plot threads dangling out there when the players returned from the break. As another example, campaigns either need to be more briskly paced for me now that I'm not in my carefree college years, or they need to be less grandiose in their goals. (A dungeon crawl we play 'til we go home doesn't have pacing issues.)

As an adult, in all kinds of games with mixed groups, I like to try to establish multiple thresholds of endpoints, so that

I can pace according to a "worst case scenario." For example, if we're playing a card game with points (such as Spades or Hearts), and time is an issue, I might suggest something like, "Let's play to 100 points; if we reach round seven and we haven't finished the game yet, let's evaluate then." In an RPG session where I'm *not* given a stop-by time, I might poll the players beforehand: "Let me know an hour before you're tuckering out and I'll wrap things up." Of course, with competitive games, this can lead to usual situations where a player who's on the cusp of winning wants to keep playing until he is willing and then quit . . . but we're not that competitive in my circle because we generally weeded out such players from my gaming groups long ago. And, of course, whoever is controlling the pacing needs to be prepared to think fast (say, if a player is called out for a babysitter emergency).

Pacing isn't like a huge lever you set once and forget; it's like the accelerator pedal of a car on a busy highway: You may know the ideal level to set it, but you'll probably be making constant adjustments to make sure everyone involved is happy.

Of course, if my right foot doesn't encounter a gas pedal for the foreseeable future, that'll be fine with me, too. I'm content to let other folks control the pacing for the next while.

--Steven Marsh

Fragments from the Xenonomicon

for *Dark Heresy*

by Philip Reed

" . . . pages that I have recorded my experiences amongst the God-Emperor's worlds, specifically knowledge of and about the xenos monstrosities and corrupt beasts that I have had the unfortunate privilege of directly confronting."
- from the *Xenonomicon,* a handwritten journal found in the remains of the Sovereign Majoris, an Aquila Lander that crashed on the feral world of Dusk.

Dark Heresy, a roleplaying game set in the ***Warhammer 40,000*** universe, is a setting of secrets, challenges, and -- most importantly to this article -- thousands upon thousands of unusual creatures. The core rulebook includes a small number of xenos, just enough to start a GM's creative engine. For those of you in search of new, foul beasties to throw at your players, these two creatures from the "pages from the Xenonomicon" should prove helpful.

Haunterfly

A rare xenos indigenous found only in the forests of Fedrid -- a feral world in the Calixis Sector that's popular with game hunters -- the animalistic haunterfly is a swift predator that moves quickly from treetop to treetop, snatching unsuspecting herbivores from their homes. On the ground, the creature slithers like a snake, its wings flailing in an attempt to find traction as it moves slowly across the surface. For this reason, haunterflies rarely drop beneath the tallest trees of the forest.

The haunterfly looks like a human-sized bat with long, flailing tentacles in place of its head. The haunterfly grasps its prey in the whipping tentacles and then jerks the meal swiftly to the mouth nestled at the base of the tentacles, biting down quickly, the creature's razor-sharp teeth shredding through the flesh of its victim. Haunterflies have been known to attack creatures of any size.

Weapon Skill: 40
Ballistic Skill: -
Strength: 36
Toughness: 31
Agility: 35
Intelligence: 9
Perception: 40
Willpower: 15
Fellowship: -

Movement: 1/2/3/6
Wounds: 15

Skills: Silent Move (A), Tracking (Int).
Traits: Bestial, Crawler, Dark Sight, Fear 2, Flyer 3, Natural Weapon (Bite), Unnatural Senses (40m)
Armour: None
Weapons: Bite (1d10+3 R; Primitive).
Threat Rating: Xenos Minoris

Witchborn Slitherer

Sometimes, when a witch is slain, the death of the heretic is punctuated with an explosive burst of blood, bone, and flesh as the witch's death gives birth to an inhuman, vile beast from beyond. The witchborn slitherer is a snake-like beast as black as the depths of space and existing solely to destroy those responsible for its host's murder.

A witchborn slitherer remains within 1km of the site of its birth, doing everything that it can to attack and kill anything in the immediate area. If a witchborn slitherer is not destroyed within 2d10 minutes of its "birth," the creature spawns a twin. This process continues for 1d10 days, with each witchborn slitherer splitting in two, unless all of the monsters are eradicated. This splitting process creates two identical creatures of the exact same size, ferocity, and sense of purpose as the original. About 1d10 days after the birth of the original, all witchborn slitherers descended from the original host turn to a dark ash.

Weapon Skill: 25
Ballistic Skill: -
Strength: 8
Toughness: 30
Agility: 50
Intelligence: 7
Perception: 30
Willpower: 45
Fellowship: -

Movement: 1/2/3/6
Wounds: 6

Skills: Awareness (Per), Climb (S), Swim (S).
Traits: Bestial, Burrower 2, Crawler, Dark Sight, From Beyond, Natural Weapon (Bite), Toxic (Bite), Weedy.
Armour: None
Weapons: Bite (1d10+1 R; Primitive, plus Toughness Test or 1d10+5 Damage).
Threat Rating: Xenos Minoris

Pyramid Review

Wizards Presents Races and Classes

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

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For some, *Wizards Presents Races and Classes* will be the most important book of 2007: With this supplement, Wizards of the Coast presents its first preview of the forthcoming *Dungeons and Dragons Fourth Edition.* Written by its designers, the supplement explores the concepts and decisions underlying the new version, not just in terms of simple mechanics, but also art and ideas. Included with this is the *Fourth Edition* design timeline, various excerpts from emails, and numerous anecdotes.

As with its predecessors, *Dungeons and Dragons Fourth Edition* has its influences. Obviously this includes other Wizards of the Coast supplements, primarily the recent [Star Wars Roleplaying Game, Saga Edition Revised](#), but also *Complete Arcana, The Miniatures Handbook,* and *Tome of Battle: The Book of Nine Swords,* along with many others. Yet perhaps the most notable and the most profound influence is that of the MMORPG. Just as the concepts and language of the world's biggest RPG have been adopted by the computer games industry, so have the language and concepts of *World of Warcraft,* the world's most popular MMORPG, been adopted by the designers of *Dungeons and Dragons Fourth Edition.*

This shows in two obvious ways. The first is the concept that a character should never run out of options or powers as he does in the current version of the game (for example, spellcasters running out of spells). So every class receives powers, such as spells, curses, weapon tricks, stunts, or commands. These powers are further broken down into those that can be used at will, per encounter, and per day. The second is to clarify more overtly the game's classes into the roles that they fulfill. So where *World of Warcraft* categorizes its classes as Tanks, Healers, and so on, *Dungeons and Dragons Fourth Edition* divides its classes into four roles -- Defender (essentially the Fighter type), Striker (deals high damage to single targets, such as Rogues can), Controllers (capable of hindering or damaging multiple targets, with the best example being Wizards), and Leaders (heals or buffs others, with Clerics being the obvious example).

All of the game's iconic core classes exist in the new edition, though with some changes of course. Clerics become more powerful offensively through a series of rituals and prayers, even as the class's healing capability is reduced because every class can heal itself to some extent. The Fighter class receives its own series of powers designed to offer a broader range of choices. The Rogues have their fighting capability enhanced to make them more like swashbucklers, though skills and powers can be tailored to a player's chosen role, such as trickster or thief. The Blaster class from *The Complete Mage* now forms the basis of the Wizard class, becoming the archetypal controller whose nature is expressed not by the mostly defunct schools of magic, but by the device through which the Wizard wields his magic. (For example, an orb-wielding Wizard focuses on area control and manipulation with retribution and perception effects, while a staff-using Wizard works in straight lines and cones.)

Alterations to other classes include making the Barbarian embody nature's rage and encouraging Druids to use their "wildshape" ability more often. (Not only does this become the Druid class's key feature, but it is also very similar to *World of Warcraft.*) The changes to some classes though are left relatively vague and, in the case of the Monk, were still in development at the time of the book's writing.

The most notable new core class is the Warlock, an arcane striker who gains its powers from a pact made with an entity of fey or infernal origins, an actual star, or even a vestige or forgotten god. Warlocks can also cast curses that deal both damage and restrictive effects. The other new core classes are the Swordmage, who wields magic in melee combat, and the Warlord, a battlefield leader descended in from the Marshal class from *The Miniatures Handbook.*

Similarly, *Dungeons and Dragons'* races experience various modifications. For starters, humans now have a weakness where before they had none; they are now susceptible to corruption, which mirrors their ambition and rashness. Dwarves remain relatively unchanged, except they lose their dark vision and dwell on the mountains as well as in them. Halflings, meanwhile, grow in size and become river and swamp dwellers and travelers. In a move to break their ties with their origins, they lose the hair on their feet as well. Elves undergo a major change starting with a reduction in the number of their subraces to just three -- Drow, Eladrin, and Elves, with the inference that only the last two are available as character races. Eladrin are essentially High Elves who reside in the twilight between of the Feywild, while Elves are the equivalent of Wood Elves. The two major race additions are the Dragonkin, who worship either Bahomet or Tiamat and have an innate enmity with the other significant race inclusion, the Tiefling, who are descended from devil-tainted humans. As with the classes, some races are still in development. The Gnome is one, while there is no sign of the Half-Orc.

A general background is implied throughout the descriptions of the various races, one that is at least generic enough to fit into most settings. The adoption of this background means, though, that the Greyhawk Campaign is no longer the default setting for *Dungeons and Dragons.*

Two last changes are also discussed in this supplement. The first is the reduction in importance of the alignment system. Characters can choose to be unaligned, and alignment becomes a set of ideals that can be adhered to rather than a method of defining anyone's personality. This de-emphasis also removes the need for most aligned spells. The other major change is an extension of the game from first to 20th levels to first to 30th levels, with high-level characters able challenge and fight alongside gods. As a character rises in level, he crosses thresholds -- the Paragon threshold at 11th and Epic at 20th. Again, this models analogous divisions in *World of Warcraft,* and similarly, each threshold opens up a range of new options for the players.

All of the information makes for an interesting read, especially, of course, if you like *Dungeons and Dragons.* Yet even if you are the most ardent fan of the game, there is absolutely no reason for you to buy this book. After all, why buy the book when this review already provides you with the edited highlights? Reading it would not only add very little to those highlights, but it also would do nothing more: *Wizards Presents Races and Classes* adds nothing to the game -- there is not a single statistic, trait, or attribute present.

So is there any point to this supplement?

There is, and it starts with the feeling that the perfect place for all of this material, as with the previous editions of the game, is somewhere like *Dragon Magazine.* Alongside the numerous articles presenting the designers' insights, a gamer would have ready material that he could apply to his own game. Except of course, *Dragon Magazine* is no

more. So instead we have ***Wizards Presents Races and Classes*** and its sister book, ***Wizards Presents Worlds and Monsters,*** which delivers all of that preview material in one go. With, of course, nothing to go with it.

The hollow feeling you get in reading ***Wizards Presents Races and Classes*** is only exacerbated by the fact that once read, there is no reason to ever read it again and that once the actual game is published, the book's very function is invalidated. This book simply serves as a placeholder on the shelves of gaming stores for ***Dungeons and Dragons Fourth Edition,*** and to inform everyone and get them excited about the new game. It's marketing exercise. Others might call it fluff.

Either way, I would like to think that I have saved you $20.

--Matthew Pook

The Mysteries of the Worm

"But see, amid the mimic rout
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes -- it writhes! -- with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.
Out -- out are the lights -- out all!
And over each quivering form
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm."
-- Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm"

It begins with an apple, and ends with a kiss. It's a glorious story of India Ultraterrestria, from before the Arabian Nights had fallen. It sounds like the happiest tale that could ever be told, a tale of noble kings and brave companions . . . and of a Worm from Somewhere Outside, a Worm that knows and grows and never, ever dies. Especially not if you're going to tell its story again . . . now.

"Just at that moment Haftvad's daughter found
A windfall apple lying on the ground . . .
She bit the apple then, but as she tried it
She saw a little worm there, coiled inside it;
She scooped it out, and gently found a place
For this small worm inside her spindle case.
And as she took her cotton up she said,
'By God I swear, today I'll spin such thread,
Helped by this apple's lucky worm, that you
Will be amazed at all that I can do!'"
-- Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shah-nameh* (tr. Dick Davis)

Once upon a time, in the town of Kajaran, there was a man named Haftvad, who had seven sons and one daughter. One day, while the daughter was spinning cotton with her friends on the mountainside, she found an apple on the ground with a worm in it. On an impulse, she swore the worm was good luck, and kept it in her spindle case; that day, she spun twice as much yarn as before. The more she fed the worm, the larger it grew, and the more cotton she could spin, making Haftvad richer and richer. Eventually, Haftvad and his sons took over their town, and built a fortress on the mountain, which attracted soldiers from as far away as India. The worm, fed steadily on milk and honey (or blood and milk), grew to the size of an elephant, and Haftvad built it a special cistern underneath the fortress. Haftvad's Army of the Worm was invincible, and defeated an army that Ardashir, the king of Persia, sent to conquer the province.

When Ardashir led his men against the Fortress of the Worm in person, one of Haftvad's sons outflanked him and trapped the Persian army. An arrow from the fortress impaled a roast lamb that Ardashir was eating; on it was written a boastful message proclaiming the Worm's sovereignty. Ardashir escaped alone, hiding out at the home of two brothers, Burzak and Burzatur. They informed him that the Worm was actually a manifestation of Ahriman, and volunteered to help him destroy it. Their stratagem was as follows: Ardashir, disguised as a merchant and accompanied by the two brothers, went to the Fortress of the Worm and asked permission to worship the Worm. Impressing the guards with his idolatrous piety (and getting them drunk on free wine), Ardashir was granted the right to feed the Worm. Ardashir and his companions melted lead (or bronze) in a bowl and when the Worm opened its mouth for its milk (or blood), poured molten metal down into the creature's gullet. The Worm exploded with a loud noise and split in two; Ardashir took

advantage of the confusion to signal his waiting men, and seized the fortress. With the Worm dead, Haftvad's army was no longer invincible, and Ardashir destroyed the idolaters. He built his own citadel on the now-purified fortress and marched on Ctesiphon, where he proclaimed himself King of Kings.

"Ruling in the coastlands along the Persian Gulf was a king called Habtanbowd, who was accorded divine attributes and worship. Ardashir marched against him, killed him by cutting him in half with his sword, put to death the members of his entourage, and brought forth from their subterranean store rooms extensive treasures that had been piled up there."
-- Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *History of the Prophets and Kings* (tr. Clifford Edmund Bosworth)

This story comes to us from the *Shah-nameh,* the Persian national epic written around 1010 A.D. by the poet Ferdowsi (or Firdausi). He got it from the *Karnamag-i-Ardashir,* or the "Book of Deeds of Ardashir," written some time between 530 and 650 A.D. (Ferdowsi and the *Karnamag-i-Ardashir* differ in some details, most notably that the Army of the Worm just shows up out of nowhere, no girl necessary, in the *Karnamag.*) The historian Tabari (writing around 915 A.D.) mentions the Army of the Worm obliquely, as we see above, giving us a third perspective on the Worm. And, technically, a fourth, since he also has Ardashir in Kujaran (where the *Karnamag* puts the Fortress of the Worm), killing a "queen who was worshipped as a divine being," and carrying off her treasure.

Our hero Ardashir was a real person, who became the King of Persia in 208 A.D., and overthrew the Parthian Empire in 224. After a brief war with the Kurds (mentioned in both the *Shah-nameh* and the *Karnamag*) he became Ardashir I, the first Emperor of the Sassanid Dynasty in 226, re-founding the Persian Empire. Which means the Army of the Worm incident can be fairly precisely dated to 225 or 226 A.D. Scholars have theorized that it glamorizes a local campaign against a pirate chieftain, possibly heading a Naga snake-cult from neighboring India; or that it refers to the final campaign against a Parthian lord in the mountains somewhere; or to a war against a rebel Persian lord named Gochihr, whose name means "comet" (a tailed, and hence serpent- or worm-like, star). The name "Haftvad" may come from the Persian *haftaxuwa,* meaning "the seventh part" of a province (*haft* is "seven"). When combined with the worm that produces miraculous wealth from textiles, some historians speculate that a local lord may have successfully begun silk cultivation, using the resulting wealth to (foolishly) make war against Ardashir. Intriguingly, silk-working is thought to have begun in Persia after Ardashir's successor Shapur I invaded Syria -- only to be thwarted by a fortress city, Palmyra, ruled (eventually) by a woman, Zenobia.

"In the middle of December 2003, I, Stew Webb, obtained insiders information from US Intel sources with confirmations that George W. Bush and [Ariel Sharon] were going to attack a power plant in Bam, Iran in late December. . . . On December 26, 2003 George W. Bush . . . used a weather weapon some call [HAARP](#) . . . on the City of Bam, Iran in order to destroy the Power Plant Bush wanted to originally bomb."
-- Stew Webb, "The Satanic Winter Solstice Mass Murders Are Becoming Very Obvious"

With the questions of "what" and "when" briefly contained, we turn to the surprisingly fraught issue of "where"? If we go by the *Karnamag,* the Fortress of the Worm is somewhere along the coast of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea; the Army of the Worm's allies are from Makran and Sind (essentially Baluchistan), and the Worm's reinforcements arrive by sea to trap Ardashir. (Both versions in Tabari are set on the coast, too.) However, the *Karnamag* names the Fortress as Gular, which is in inland the province of Khorasan very near the Afghan border. The specific place of the Worm, Kajaran, may refer to Khojar in Kurdistan, which is coincidentally where Ardashir is campaigning in both versions right before the War of the Worm.

The *Shah-nameh* seems to set the action in Kerman, an inland province of southeastern Iran, but one that (in ancient times) included a stretch of coast east of the Straits of Hormuz. By this reading, Kajaran refers to an old quarter of the city of Bam, in Kerman, called Kurzan. Marco Polo describes Kerman, saying "the ladies of the country and their daughters also produce exquisite needlework in the embroidery of silk stuffs in different colors," and Kerman carpets remain famous today. There is a ruined "Maiden's Fort" (and a "Castle of Ardashir") near the city of Kerman itself, and it is the kind of suggestive coincidence we love that "Kerman" has no settled etymology, and that *kerm* is "worm" in Persian. Even better, a folk-etymology derives Bam itself onomatopoetically, from the noise (BAM!) the Worm made when it burst asunder. And speaking of Bam, the *Shah-nameh* mentions that the Worm bursting shook the whole city; Bam was famously destroyed in the earthquake of December 26, 2003. (All of Kerman is earthquake-prone.) And

speaking of coincidences, Ardashir destroyed the Worm on the 26th day of the month, according to the *Karnamag*, capturing the Fortress on the 27th.

"It has been said, that inside the vulture's egg, which they brought from Bjarmaland, was found a little snake, golden in color, and King Herraud gave it to his daughter as a teething gift. She put a piece of gold under the snake, and it grew so big, that it encircled her bower, and was so savage that no one dared come near her except the king, and those who brought it food, The snake needed an old ox for each meal, and everyone thought it was the greatest monstrosity."
-- from the *Saga of Bosi and Herraud* (trans. George L. Hardman)

If we follow the conspiratorial lead of the previous quote, and cast George Bush as Ardashir, duplicitously destroying a Fortress where spinning centrifuges magically produce wealth and invulnerability, we are only taking our postmodernist cue from the many other curious parallels to the story of the Worm in myth and folklore. Or, rather, to the *stories* of the Worm. Bush's putative "weather weapon" even parallels the first Worm-Slayer story, in the *Enuma Elish,* in which Marduk (earlier, Enlil) catches the chaotic beast Tiamat in a net and then splits her jaws with "an evil wind" that bursts her open. And what do we find in the *Shah-nameh* but confirmation that "even the winds of heaven did not dare blow against" the Fortress of the Worm? (Haftvad -- who controls the Worm -- may derive from the Persian *haftauwad,* "a seventh of the wind," a royal title of uncertain meaning found, like silkworms, in Syria during the Sassanid era.) Bellerophon, who also defeats a female chaos-monster (the Chimera) with molten metal in the gullet, like Ardashir attacks from above, in this case from the winged horse, Pegasus. (I'm sensing a little of our ancient bird-snake rivalry, here.) A different Greek fragment of the myth involves Apollo's defeat of the Python, which like the Worm controlled a source of magical power and lived "in a cistern."

Apollo even had some help from two brothers, Trophonios and Agamedes, just like Ardashir's Burzak and Burzatur. Elsewhere in the *Shah-nameh,* king Feridun kills the serpent-demon Zohak with a mace built by a heroic blacksmith who has lost two sons (!) to the monster. (In this version, the "two cooks," Kermail and Irmail, serve the monster.) Russian folklore has Saints Cosmas and Damian, who kill a female Serpent by beating its tongue with smiths' hammers, the next best thing to molten metal. King Arthur's companions Kay and Bedivere (like Burzak and Burzatur, associated with food and drink) assist Arthur in beheading the giant of Mont-Saint-Michel. Indra, who kills the triple-headed snake Vritra (whose death smashes a fortress), also has twin companions, the Asvins, though not on that adventure. Finally, the god Baal (an aspect of Marduk) uses twin maces to kill the demon Mot. Meanwhile, the prophet Daniel kills a dragon with pitch, fat, and hair disguised as barley-cakes for its food. In just a cursory survey, I found nine separate dragons in Britain alone killed with dangerous or explosive food, among them the famous Linton Worm and the Mordiford Wyvern. That last beast was killed when either a rogue induced it to eat a spiked barrel or when it gorged itself on a drowned ox and fell asleep.

More interestingly, the Mordiford Wyvern was found when small by Maud, a young girl who fed it milk until it grew to prodigious size. Similarly, the saga of Ragnar Lodbrok (like Ardashir, a historical figure) tells of his battle with a giant snake that grew up from a tiny one found "in a vulture's egg." It wrapped itself around the bower of the princess Thora until Ragnar killed it. "Worm-Finders" Thora and Maud are one half of the equation; the "Spinning Maiden" given sorcerous help by a stunted creature -- Rumpelstiltskin or Tom Tit Tot -- is the other half. The story is perhaps as old as Eve, that maiden associated with apples (Marco Polo notes that the city of Camadi in Kerman produces "apples of Paradise"), an enigmatic snake (worm?), and eventual endless weaving ("Eve span," as the Lollard rhyme reminds us). The end of the story even echoes Revelation, with the *seven*-headed Dragon (Wyrm?) killed by a flaming (molten?) sword in the midst of earthquakes, and the rebuilding of a new city. Ardashir is just part of the cycle, like the phoenix, which begins as a worm and dies in fire. Here, perhaps we can end with the enigmatic prophecy quoted by our old friend Sir John Mandeville, "Out of Babylon shall come a Worm that shall devour the world."

"A man named Ofube-no-Oshi of the Fuji River region of Azuma urged on the people of his village the worship of a caterpillar, saying, 'This is the God of the Eternal World. Those who worship this god will bring themselves wealth and long life.' . . . Both in the country and in the capital, people took the Worm of the Eternal World, and placing it in a pure place, with song and dance invoked happiness."
-- from the *Nihonshoki*

Or perhaps out of pages out of Babylon -- or Ctesiphon, pretty much the same thing. The *Karnamag* is written down

within a mud-brick's throw of Babylon anyhow, in, let's say, 644 A.D. That year, according to the Japanese chronicles, a man named Ofube-no-Oshi "urged . . . the worship of a caterpillar." (It doesn't say whether or not his daughter found it.) The caterpillar -- technically *mushi,* which might also mean worm -- was proclaimed the God (or Worm) of the Eternal World, the *Tokoyo-no-Kami* or *Tokoyo-no-Mushi*. The chronicles continue, saying that "witches and wizards" (shamans, likely), waving streamers of mulberry-bark (the food tree of the silkworm), joined the Tokoyo-no-Mushi, saying it would make the poor rich, and the old young. The people sacrificed all their animals, and drank sake, and danced ecstatically in the sight of the Worm, which was placed in a temple. Its worship spread to the capital, Yamato. But Kawakatsu, the chief of the Hata (interestingly, a clan of foreign craftsmen including textile workers), killed Ofube (cognate with *ofu,* "cross-wind"?) and crushed the Worm.

"A third case worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm, said to be unknown to science."
-- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Problem of Thor Bridge"

So the act of writing its story in the *Karnamag* released the Worm into the world again, to try again in Japan. Although it failed once more, it had tunneled through too much of the cantosphere. The story had to be garbled, verbal safeties inserted. Did Ferdowsi contain the Worm with a poetic cage when he wrote the *Shah-nameh* in 1010? Or did it emerge at the Millennium, to be slain by some nameless hero once more? A century later yet, in 1170, Chretien of Troyes seems to have woven his own net (like Marduk for Tiamat), in the adventure of Sir Yvain at the Castle of Pesme Aventure. Yvain meets maidens, kept in an enclosure weaving silk as their own clothes fall to rags. He must fight twin demons to liberate them, and only his tame lion (which he had rescued from a wyrm) lets him escape victorious. And finally, in the ballad *Kemp Owyne* Yvain (the French version of Owyne, or Owain) must kiss a "Loathly Worm" three times to transform it into a maiden. (Chretien leaves the Loathly Damsel a woman, and gives the job to Perceval.) Chretien (or Yvain) takes the Worm's tale and undoes it -- he fights the twins, not the Worm; he rescues the Spinning Maidens rather than killing them. At the end, Yvain turns the Worm back into the Maid with a kiss, undoing the curse of Lamia.

Does the Worm still gnaw? Poe sang a paean to "the Conqueror Worm" -- to Lamia? -- in 1843, but died before the whole story could come out of him. Perhaps Bram Stoker's 1911 fantasy *Lair of the White Worm,* with its subterranean worm and eldritch worm-woman, poked a hole in the fabric, that the Worm-Maid could widen. H.P. Lovecraft toyed with a novel called *The House of the Worm* in 1923, but it died with him, leaving only the mysteries of the Worm . . . and enough clues for us to possibly weave together the story ourselves. If only we could find someone, or Something, to help us spin out the narrative threads . . .

Pyramid Review

Wicked Fantasy Factory #1: Rumble in the Wizard's Tower (for the *d20 System*)

Published by Goodman Games

Written by Luke Johnson

Cover by Slawomir Maniak

Illustrated by Nick Greenwood

32-Page Saddlestitch Book; $10.99

The market is not exactly short of low-level adventures for the *d20 System,* so when a new one appears, it really has to justify its place on the shelves at your local gaming store or indeed in your gaming room. *Wicked Fantasy Factory #1: Rumble in the Wizard's Tower* is the first in Goodman Games' Wicked Fantasy Factory line. It is designed to give a playing experience beyond that of mere dungeon exploration, monster slaying, and treasure acquisition. Instead, a Wicked Fantasy Factory adventure aims to provide an outrageous, big-thrill ride, a sword-swinging, spell-slinging, mace-mashing, bone-breaking, slaughter-spewing adventure of legendary proportions. It is meant to be an "XTREME!!" affair, full of "phat lewt" and other irritatingly youthful colloquialisms.

How does a Wicked Fantasy Factory adventure make this possible? It adds a series of new mechanics that push the game toward a more cinematic feel. The first of these is the Finishing Move, an extra ability that can be either melee, missile, or magic based. It's used to kill an opponent in the flashiest method possible. It's up to each player to describe his character's move with a suitable amount of flair, for example, kicking an opponent into the air and slicing him in twain with twin blades.

Use of a Finishing Move is allowed only once per combat and can only be triggered when an opponent's Hit Points have dropped to 10% of its maximum value. The DM has to inform the players when this happens. A player then declares the Finishing Move, and if he inflicts enough damage to kill the target following a successful attack roll, additional Experience Points will be awarded. Failing the Finishing Move, whether through an unsuccessful attack roll or not inflicting enough damage, has no consequences.

The second addition is the granting of bonus Feats for use against Mooks (such as easily slaughtered Kobolds or guards). In melee combat, these Feats are Cleave and Greater Cleave, in missile combat they are Rapid Shot and Quick Draw, while for spell casters, spell damage is maximized against Mooks.

The third new rule makes an adventure's villain (or "Big Baddass") doubly difficult to kill by bringing him back to life the first time he is killed. The second time he is killed, though, he really *is* dead. Fortunately having to kill him twice is not without its rewards, and he is worth extra Experience Points.

The fourth means is that of character casting: Each player must select for his character, and the DM for the major NPCs, the actors who would play them were the adventure a movie.

The last and fifth new rule affects the distribution of treasure. Half of a Wicked Fantasy Factory adventure's treasure is tied up in a single item. In the case of *Rumble in the Wizard's Tower,* this is a pair of Dwarven war axes that can be thrown at an opponent and will return to the hand via magical chains.

The point of the Wicked Fantasy Factory rule additions is to emulate story elements of other media, specifically, the "beat 'em up" video game with its finishing moves; the *World of Warcraft* MMORPG dungeon with its end room big bad and his big drop treasure; and the 21st-century action flick with its archetypal Bullet Time "Slo Mo" action.

Wicked Fantasy Factory #1: Rumble in the Wizard's Tower is itself designed for four characters of 2nd level, or six to eight characters of 1st level (although in an unhelpful oversight, this is not mentioned on the cover.) Inside, the module is decently written, the illustrations good, and the full-color maps bright and breezy, though not easy for the players to recreate. Another addition is the use of "E-Z" stat blocks, which keep the combat statistics readily at hand.

As to the scenario's plot, it almost doesn't matter ... A vicious warlord is planning to overthrow the kingdom, and to stop him, the characters must assault his headquarters, Morrick Tower. Once inside, the party must overcome the warlord's guards and minions before facing both him and his mistress. It contains a good mix of over-the-top combat encounters and non-combat encounters, and the players are free to either smash or sneak their way in and around the tower.

In addition, Morrick Tower was once home to a wizard, and many of his experiments and possessions remain. One of these experiments, the Ternion, adds a further element to the adventure. The Ternion is an extraplanar creature, capable of temporarily slowing down time. Throughout the adventure, the Ternion flares and releases "Ternion Time," the effects of which are grant a character movement and mobility bonuses by slowing down time. If the party frees this creature by scenario's end, it will reward them with the ability to enter Ternion Time once per week.

One obvious problem with *Rumble in the Wizard's Tower* is that its Phat Lewt is designed for fighter types. Any class not able to use axes is going to loose out. An interesting solution might be to further emphasis the similarities between *World of Warcraft* and this Wicked Fantasy Factory by actually having the Big Bad give different drops, but that would mean playing the dungeon all over again. Though this isn't something normally done in the *d20 System,* it's nevertheless possible with the use of Ternion Time.

Another option would be to run the prequel, *Wicked Fantasy Factory #0: Temple of Blood* as a feed in to *Rumble in the Wizard's Tower.* Originally made available on Free RPG Day, it has since been released as one of Goodman Games' $2 titles. Designed for purely 1st-level characters and just 16 pages long, it provides only a few encounters, but it does mean that the characters will already start *Rumble in the Wizard's Tower* with a little Phat Lewt on hand. Alternatively, it is the perfect means to discover what a Wicked Fantasy Factory is like.

The result of the Wicked Fantasy Factory's added rules is to take what is an ordinary "smash 'em" style *d20 System* adventure and turn it up to 11. It requires a fair degree of rules tweaking to achieve this . . . perhaps too much. It feels like it is adding too many new rules to achieve something that instinctively seems as if it should have fewer rules or mechanics. Then again, this series is for the *d20 System,* not a game known for its mechanical simplicity . . .

-- Matthew Pook

'Clix Snowball Fight

for *HeroClix*

by Nikola Vrtis

Whatever your local weather, you can have some winter fun with your *HeroClix* in this scenario.

Setting Up the Game

To have a snowball fight, two to four players come together, each with teams of two or more *HeroClix* figures, with a maximum team total off 200 points. Most Internet and local comic and game retailers sell *HeroClix,* though players can use the basic generic characters designed for "Six 'Clix Morris" along with any sort of counter or figure that has 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 double-base, giant, or colossal characters are allowed. Furthermore, no battlefield conditions or feats are permitted.

The game also needs some tokens to represent snowballs and a board with squares that are at least 1.5 inches on each side. This article includes print-and-assemble PDFs of snowball tokens and a snow-themed board.

The players figure out who goes first by each rolling two dice and adding the results. The highest roll starts the game; reroll any ties. (If there three or four participants, play continues to the right of the first player.) Next, the players takes turns putting their figures anywhere on the map or board, one figure per turn until all are placed. Finally, the snowballs are set off to the side.

> **Quick Links to Useful Stuff**
>
> - *HeroClix* Rules
> - snowball tokens
> - snow board
> - Generic *HeroClix* Characters

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 (available on the WizKids Web site (on the rules page), with the following modifications.

Making Snowballs

It takes one action to pick up snow and form a ball from it. Characters with Flurry may use one of the two close combat attacks provided by their power to make a snowball; they can rely on the other attack to throw the ball. Characters with Hypersonic Speed may shape a snowball and attack with it instead of moving.

Naturally, a character may only lob a snowball if he made one already.

Throwing Snowballs

When a character tosses a snowball, use the character's powers and stats to determine the success of the attack as normal. (Figures with a range of zero rely on their close combat stats and powers to lob snowballs up to two squares away from them.) If the attack would do damage to the opposing figure, instead give the target a snowball token. Characters with powers and abilities that increase the damage of attacks (such as Ranged Combat Expert,

Enhancement, and Close Combat Expert) inflict one click of damage on the opposing figure in addition to giving him a snowball token.

The effects of Blades/Claws/Fangs, Energy Explosion, Pulse Wave, Psychic Blast, Poison, and similar powers are ignored when throwing a snowball.

For a friendly snowball match, characters may only attack each other with snowballs in lieu of regular *HeroClix* combat. Players wishing to up the stakes can permit normal damage-dealing attacks in addition to snowball throws.

A character feels the effects of a knockback, even if the attack was made with a snowball.

Characters with three snowball tokens or three KOs are knocked out and removed from the board.

Ending the Game

The team with at least one member left standing receives the honor of being declared the local snowball fight champions. Rematch anyone?

Variations

Snow Drifts: Included with the snowball tokens PDF are enormous (compared to the figures) snow blocks. Assemble two blocks for each team. After placing their figures, participants take turns putting the blocks on the board. Treat the blocks as blocking terrain for determining line of fire and for their destruction. When destroyed, remove the blocks from the board; they are completely gone, not reduced to hindering terrain. Additionally, characters with the Leap/Climb ability make get on top of the blocks. Once there, consider that figure to be on elevated terrain. The blocks cannot be moved.

Snow Forts: No snow drifts here! Rather, teams must create their own cover. Assemble three snow blocks per team and set these aside. Players put down figures as per the basic scenario.

During a participant's turn, he may have his characters create a snow block. To do this, two of his figures must be within one square of each other. Give one of the two figures as action token; the other figure does not get an action token, but she may not do anything else this turn. If there is more than one friendly character nearby, pick one to be the block builder's assistant. Place the block in the empty square near both figures. A character with Hypersonic Speed may build a block by himself as his action for the turn.

Treat the blocks in the same was as the blocks in the *Snow Drift* variant of this game.

To build a fort, the characters must get three blocks in a line and adjacent to each other. Two figures -- one on either side of a block -- can carry it into position at a rate of two squares per turn. (Move the three pieces as a single unit.) Characters with Superstrength can carry a block by themselves. Once all three blocks are in position, the blocks cannot be destroyed. Alternatively, the game can end when a fort has been built.

Generic Hero Cards

To use the generic hero cards provided with "Six 'Clix Morris," players must have 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. Furthermore, characters with super powers retain the use of those abilities until they are KO'd.

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Stupervillain Schemes

Weird and Inept Super-Powered Ambitions for Supers Games

By J. Edward Tremlett

Just when you thought it was safe to take off your costume, *Stupervillains* returns! In previous installments, we've investigated the world of inept, loser Supervillains and explored [individual nemeses,](#) [terrible team-ups,](#) and so-called [weird menaces.](#) So what could possibly be left to throw at your supers except . . . um . . .

Schemes! Yes, we all want a better world, but some people have the strangest ideas about what constitutes "better" and will go to any lengths -- no matter how weird or dumb -- to see their insane schemes through. When you add in costumes, super powers, and ineptness, you get . . . a really big mess. Guess who has to go in and clean it up?

Here are some of the most inept, strange, and weird super-powered ambitions ever made -- deadly but strange, sinister yet impotent, and just plain stupid. As usual, they have notes on powers, strengths, and weaknesses, and are listed from least to most dangerous. Stat guidelines range from Poor to Average to Medium to Impressive to Powerful to Way-Powerful. With the addition of your favorite game mechanics and your own setting, you're ready to destroy everything for the greater good.

The People's Army for the Abolishment of Daylight Saving Time by Any Means Necessary (Cranks Sharing Their Delusions)

"The threat to our world is real. The People's Army rejects calls for moderation or compromise. We will destroy the slavery of Daylight Saving Time and free the world from alien overlords. Expect us." (Transmission ends.)

Dateline: Columbus, Ohio. For three days, the population reset their clocks to a more "seemly" hour. For those three days, Columbus worked, ate, and slept without being shackled to the arbitrary notion of "springing forward" and "falling back." For three days, Columbus denizens could live as free beings once again!

So says the People's Army, anyway. This crackpot group, active in varying strengths since the 1970s, claims that Daylight Saving Time was instituted to hide that fact that, at certain times of year, the aliens who secretly control the world launch spacecraft for home and receive fresh crews for what the People's Army has called Project Earth Enslavement (PEE).

See, if people think it's later than it is, they'll go to bed earlier and miss the early morning launches. Ben Franklin, who was an alien, knew this, and that's why he invented Daylight Saving Time. People who have to work weird hours *should* know this, but some have had massive changes made to their memory by the aliens; the rest *are* aliens. The rest of the nation sleeps innocently as their world is slowly turned into a work camp for evil, bug-eyed monsters from outer space.

Up until recently, the People's Army was just another group of protesters with an unusually colorful raison d'être. This changed when a questionably sane superhero named The Believer actually saw the bug-eyed monsters landing. With The Believer's powers to add to their own, they're taking back the planet, one guerilla action at a time.

The People's Army (PAADSTBAMN)

The People's Army consists of 10 veteran protesters who live in Indianapolis -- where no one has any idea what time it is -- and The Believer. They used to just picket and plaster posters all over, raising awareness about the alien agenda behind Daylight Saving Time. But thanks to The Believer, they can now engineer short "happenings" where people set

their clocks to what time it *should* be, at least for a few days. This is done by staging small protests in parks and on street corners; anyone within earshot of their message when The Believer is present has a strong urge to reset clocks.

Most of the members have Average Body, Mind, and Spirit, with a few of the older members having Poor Minds caused by countercultural substances. None of them have any superpowers or carry weapons, except for flimsy protest signs crying "Beware of PEE!" and "Do You Know What Time It Is?"

Quote: "Daylight Saving Time is a tool of the man, brother. And the man isn't a man. He's an alien, man! We're the conspiracy against the conspiracy, my brother . . . hey, where's the 'zza?"

The Believer

Rodney Kayt; 25; American citizen with no criminal record.

From an early age, Rodney could make other people believe what he wanted them to. Unfortunately, the power was very stressful to use, and it utterly warped his sense of reality. He didn't get the help that he needed until he manifested the ability to fly at 18, and got noticed by other supers.

The Myrmidons took him on, but they were never sure whether they were doing any good for him, given his ability to change their beliefs without their knowledge. The incident with the bug-eyed alien monsters was the last straw, and they remanded him to superhero psychiatrist Dr. Brainwave for "observation." The Believer managed to escape after six months, and he found the People's Army. They've been fighting the real enemy ever since.

Quote: "But you've always known this was wrong, Fred. That gun isn't you. This rage isn't you. You want to help people. Let me help you do that . . ."

Powers: The Believer can fly at Medium speeds and has the Impressive ability to change someone's beliefs, either in person or from a distance. The change is seamless, and the target will most likely have no idea they've changed their minds. He can't impel a change in immediate behavior, but if he shifts someone's views radically enough, it should at least give them pause. If he does it in person, the change could last for life, but if he does it remotely (needing only a picture and a name) or in person but without knowing the target, it will last for only three days.

Weaknesses: Rodney is insane, having never learned how to keep his powers from affecting himself. On good days, he can keep it together. On bad ones, he goes catatonic and has to be talked back to reality.

Stats: Medium Body; Impressive Mind; Poor Spirit.

Appearance: 5'9"; 240 lbs.; thinning brown hair and black eyes, vaguely handsome, dresses sloppy.

Costume: When associated with the Myrmidons, he wore a white boiler suit with a red cape, gloves, and boots, and a gold headband. He doesn't wear it anymore.

Family: Mother Martha (45), brother Paul (23).

The Yellowmen (Unhinged Anti-Chromatic Cyborg Terrorists)

"If only you could see as we see, no longer seeing what we don't see, you would see that our vision is correct. And soon, you will see exactly what we mean."

In 1985, Dr. Erasmus P. Seelittle postulated the grand unifying theory of color. According to his findings, color was both a visual and spiritual phenomenon. Colors had the ability to alter not only the brain's functioning, but also the disposition of the soul. Put one person in a green room, and he would feel, act, and ultimately think differently compared to the person in the blue room, the white room, or the room painted the Color that Shall Not Be Named.

Yes, one of the colors is evil, and it's a primary. Worse still, it's gotten into everything -- even the bodies of people. Dr. Seelittle realized that humanity would never be free of evil until that one, unspeakable color was eradicated in thought, word, and form.

Of course, other scientists and most of the media laughed at him, and his botched attempts to surgically remove his ability to see the Color that Shall Not Be Named left him blind. But he had followers, and they had money, and together they created the Yellowmen. Now, the self-styled "Doctor Yellowman" sends his agents out in the Yellowplanes to fight to the death against the Color, employing their high-tech gadgets and insane zeal to save the world from ocular oppression!

So far, all they've done is cause problems with driving, and scare the hell out of the people they're trying to save. But they stand firm in their goal to remove the R from Roy G. Biv within a human lifetime.

The Yellowmen

Deep within the Yellow Palace, under the Great Basin desert, the 144 Yellowmen carry out Doctor Yellowman's orders. They have been cybernetically modified to no longer see the Color, and have swapped out their blood for a yellow, organic gunk so that no one else will see it either.

The Yellowmen dress in yellow tabards, and wear yellow helmets with yellow, reflective faceplates. Their skin is jaundiced because of their yellow blood. Their gadgets, guns, devices, and vehicles are yellow. Even their metal parts have a weird, yellow tint to them.

Their zeal for self-augmentation hasn't been a good thing. The yellow slop they've replaced their blood with doesn't work as well as the real thing, and they get weak and sleepy on the job unless they constantly consume sugar and protein. Their suits continuously supply them with high-energy goop, intravenously, but if it runs out or gets disrupted, they have to start chowing down on food, or they'll lapse into comas.

All members have Medium Bodies, Average Minds, and Average Spirits. Their suits provide them with Medium protection against physical and energy damage. If their suits are seriously damaged the IV drips stop working, and their Body reverts to Poor.

Common gadgets are: hand-held Anathemascopes, to help them target the Color, since they can't see it anymore; shotgun-like Yellowguns, which fire Medium-strength knockout gas, rubber bullets, and knee-knockers at foes; grenade-sized Yellowbombs, which disperse thick clouds of "COLOR- denial agent" (yellow spray paint) over a 10-yard radius; and conical anti-gravity Yellowplanes, which can hover and VTOL, and fly at Impressive speed.

The latest weapon in the war against the Color is Yellowgas, which, when inhaled, stops the brain from recognizing the color red, and replaces it with the much nobler shade of yellow. The gas has Medium strength, wears off within an hour, and has unfortunate side effects (nausea, dizziness, and flatulence). The Yellowmen have been seen to deploy it in grenades and sprayguns, and are planning to have it dumped over major cities under the guise of spraying for insects.

Quote: "Death to the Color! Long live the Yellow!"

Doctor Yellowman

Dr. Erasmus P. Seelittle; 68; American citizen wanted for questioning.

All of Dr. Seelittle's life, he just knew there was something more to colors than shades in a crayon box. He went into optics to discover the truth, no matter how ugly it was, or how unready the world would be for his no-doubt revolutionary findings.

Of course they didn't believe him -- the *fools!* They didn't believe Galileo either. But then, Galileo didn't have money,

an army, or the kind of weighty purpose needed to carve his eyes from his head so he didn't have to see an imperfect world. So now he's going to carve a better world for future generations, he and his Yellowmen.

Everyone who meets him should agree with him. If they don't, they need surgery. Even if they do, they probably need surgery anyway, just so they won't stop agreeing with him for some strange reason.

Quote: "Seeing is believing. And it's a lot of other things, too. So you just think about that, during surgery. You just think."

Powers: Doctor Yellowman is a genius in optics, cybernetics, and biochemistry. He carries several Impressive lasers and is usually surrounded by a number of devices and tools that could be used as improvised weapons. A dozen floating "eyes" made of yellow-tinted silvery metal hover near his head. These convert images from a near-endless array of electronic eyes within the palace, giving him Impressive visual and spatial acuity, unblinking 360-degree vision, and the ability to perceive what's going on in all areas at once.

Weaknesses: He's totally crackers, with a bad case of surgical addiction. His blood has also been replaced by the yellow gunk, and he must wear the same nourishment replenishment system that the Yellowmen do. He is blind outside the Yellow Palace's network and has to rely on portable viewers, which offer only Poor vision. Naturally, he rarely leaves so much as his workshop.

Stats: Medium Body; Impressive Mind; Impressive Spirit

Appearance: 6'3"; 300 lbs.; close-cropped white hair with numerous yellow metal studs protruding from his skull and filling his ruined eye sockets. He's tall, paunchy, wrinkled, freaky, and ugly.

Costume: Wears a slightly flashier version of the costume the Yellowmen wear, only without the helmet and obvious weaponry. His 12 eyes, each about the size of a golf ball, keep a close circuit around his head.

Family: Brothers Ezekiel G. (70) and Ebenezer D. (72).

Mister Blackpear (Unkillable Gnostic 80s Assassin Given Insane Contracts)

"Yes, you saw me die. I am that charred and smoking corpse in your morgue. I am this man, here. And when I self-destruct after I finish talking -- taking you with me, I should add -- I will be another man somewhere else. It is as the master said: 'Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed to him.' Your revelation begins . . . now." **Kaboom!**

Reality itself is broken: a crazy-quilt, shattered piece of junk slapped together by the mad Demiurge, Ialdabaoth. Enlightenment can never come until the chaff and wheat are beaten apart, the rough black coal pressurized into diamond, and the diamond gifted with escape from the fallen world.

It takes a special kind of soul to cut out the sick, weeping parts of civilization and encourage the growth of much more wholesome bodies from the wounds. Specifically, it takes a disposable assassin: a man who must sacrifice himself with each and every act, no matter how genocidal or benign, and then go back to work before his remains have even grown cold.

It takes someone like Mister Blackpear.

Man, Machine, Metaphysic.

Every new morning, Mister Blackpear awakes with a start in his hard, uncomfortable bed, in his small but functional apartment. He has anywhere from a minute to an hour to contemplate what happened the day before -- in particular, the moment of his death -- before the phone rings, shrill and insistent. He lets it ring three times, and then picks it up,

ever so languidly.

Who is the voice on the other end? God? A machine? One of the Archons? Pete Burns? Who *is* making this engine run? He doesn't need to know. It's enough to understand that this is how he gets his instructions for the day: where he must go, what he must do, whom he must kill, and how he must die.

A shower, breakfast already on the table, dressing for the day with clothes laid out over a chair. His guns are always waiting for him, too, right by the door. And when he opens that door, he does so knowing that the landscape outside will be entirely different from the day before -- today London, yesterday L.A., tomorrow . . . Lisbon? Moscow? Who's to say?

Out he goes into the fallen world to complete his mission. Maybe today he'll shoot his way into the top of the tallest tower in town, dance with the CEO he finds there, and launch them both out a window into the street, far below. Maybe he'll give a flower to every child in a cancer ward before immolating himself in the insurance office. Maybe he'll find the ambassador of Lithuania, force him to write checks to protest groups that don't exist, staple them to his shirt and send him running away before blowing up the embassy. Again, who's to say?

All he can say is that if he's here, someone's got to die -- maybe just him, this time, but probably someone else. Or several people, possibly even hundreds unless he's stopped. And they're welcome to try.

Somewhere "Two Tribes" is playing. He crosses his guns for luck and takes off running. Countdown begins -- now.

Mister Blackpear

Real name unknown; age unknown; country of origin unknown; wanted for questioning.

Mister Blackpear does not exist. He has no name, no fingerprints, and no records, and he matches no one born in the last century. He cannot be traced or tracked by technology, powers, or magic -- only experienced firsthand. His corpses have almost identical DNA (except for eye coloration, which changes) and break down into trace elements within three days, no matter how well preserved.

Sometimes he shows up every day, sometimes only once a month or once a year. He's been observed to walk out of a door, early in the morning, but there's nothing behind that door but the wall. And as soon as Mister Blackpear is dead, again, the door vanishes.

Quote: "I'm not a murderer. I'm a liberator. Some people just take a little extra nudging toward the escape hatch. And you wouldn't believe how much they struggle to stay in this fallen world. Sad, really. So . . . what's *your* excuse?"

Powers: Mister Blackpear enjoys effective immortality; no matter what happens to the body he's wearing now, he wakes up in bed another morning, alive and whole. He has Impressive defenses against illusions and mind control. His guns hit whatever he aims at, do triple the damage of a normal .45, and never run out of bullets. He is a master of 12 very effective martial arts that no one knows the names for. When he completes his mission, or is effectively stopped by mortal damage, he explodes, doing Impressive damage in a 10-yard radius. His body manufactures the explosives.

Weaknesses: None known.

Stats: Impressive Body; Impressive Mind; Impressive Spirit

Appearance: 6'0"; 250 lbs.; bleach blonde hair done in 80s splatter-spike, with eyes that match whatever tie he's wearing that day; youthfully and sardonically handsome.

Costume: Durable, black suits and dress shoes, white shirts with French sleeves and silver cufflinks, skinny pastel ties that jut out at impossible angles while he's fighting, cheap black sunglasses.

George Anningson, the Crime Lord of Lyme Regis

for *GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6*

by Phil Masters

On the alternate timeline known elsewhere as Britannica-6, the rulers of the mighty British Empire would claim that any man may progress through society by *merit,* regardless of the station of his birth. And it is true that Britain there has come to respect personal worth; but still, it seems, the personal worth by far the most easily perceived is that associated with breeding. For as the Whig lords, royal princes, roving maharajahs, and fiercely energetic Bloods explain it, their talents have been refined by generations of strenuous competition in the higher ranks of society.

Conversely, for the son of a small-holder in rural Dorset to attain wealth and influence remains an achievement of note -- and one which, sadly, may involve the cutting of some corners. This is especially true if, like the young George Anningson, he is known as a lazy dreamer, given to abandoning his chores in order to stroll along the seaside beaches, looking at rocks and the waves. But those who thought this of Anningson misunderstood the lad, who was diligent enough in school; he simply felt, from an early age, that he was destined for better things than a farm-boy's chores, and his strolls were mostly spent forming plans and shaping effective strategies (although he was also fascinated by the strange ancient fossils which occur so profusely in those seaside rocks).

He convinced his father that his sharp eyes and gift for figures might serve him well, and when his schooldays were done, he gained an apprenticeship with a local seaman's goods merchant, advancing smoothly through that profession and eventually starting his own business and expanding into other categories of trade. However, his determination was greater than his respect for the law, and some (though not all) of his success came through illicit activities and even the employment of certain local rogues and villains to undermine his rivals. Then, over the years, he found his opportunities for profit expanding vastly.

For his home town of Lyme Regis, once a quiet fishing port, was changing. For decades, it had been popular as a resort for gentlefolk; now, with the Empire's growing wealth and dynamic progress, those people were growing richer and demanding wilder pleasures. But some of them still came to Lyme, and Anningson, among many others, found ways to meet their new requirements. He sold them whatever they wanted, and his associates and employees sometimes shipped in fresh stock without regard for niggling questions from revenue men. Further, if what the wealthy folk wanted was the company of sportive ladies -- well, that too was a business opportunity, in which Anningson was happy to invest, although he knew that it wasn't considered entirely respectable, and so he kept those investments secret. Likewise, if local lads needed to sell goods acquired by irregular methods, the shops and dealers to which they often turned were very often Anningson's, though that fact might not be obvious even to them.

Thus it was that, over the years, George Anningson waxed rich and influential. Indeed, he became quite respected, although a few people heard quiet rumors concerning the sources of his wealth. Still, Britannica-6 is a world in which the most important thing is to *win,* and Mr Anningson is clearly a victor in the game of life.

Encountered

George Anningson generally projects the image of a successful local man of business, and one who is only very slightly too flamboyant. (Mind you, Britannica-6 mostly respects and admires flamboyance.) He is distinctly plump and shows his years, and hence is a little slow on his feet, but even casual acquaintances are likely to become aware of his sharp wits and perceptive gaze. His known vices are little more than the regular indulgences of a man of position in his culture; a keen awareness of social position, a love of gambling, and a willingness to spend money, all earn a degree of respect in his world. Only closer acquaintances tend to notice his chilly disregard for the happiness of others when his own interests are at stake, or his often ruthless desire for ever more wealth . . . and even those faults may be understood as simply the natural instincts of the competent merchant. He is respected, and careful to keep the secrets

which would lose him that respect.

His most idiosyncratic personal peculiarity is the fascinated interest in fossils of all kinds, which he retains from his childhood. His large, well-built house in the town's eastern suburb of Charmouth (a smaller village absorbed by the expansion of Lyme and transformed into a wealthy district) is faced with local stone which contains many visible fossils, while Anningson keeps a fine private museum within, wears a polished ammonite as a signet ring on his left hand, and is recognized by even some professional "geological philosophers" as a competent amateur scholar. This is mostly irrelevant to his professional activities, but he is obsessed enough that he might use his criminal contacts to help him acquire an especially fine fossil specimen if no other method would work. Also, anyone who discusses the topic with him is likely to discover that he is fascinated by the subject of Darwinian evolution, which he interprets, like many people on Britannica-6, in terms of the importance of *competition* and the superiority of the born winner; a strong hint of his ruthlessness is likely to emerge in such conversations.

Anningson has never married, which is seen as mildly eccentric in local society, although the very occasional rumors about his private life mention possible visits to "ladies of the night" rather than hinting at anything stranger. The fact is, he isn't sure if any woman who'd look grand enough to be his wife could be trusted close to his secrets. (It's also possible that he has some personal story of rejection by a girl of superior class in his youthful, poorer years, twisting his attitudes to the whole sex.) Still, he might decide to change this policy if a marital alliance would somehow help his business or social advancement. This could be unfortunate for the potential bride; Anningson surely wouldn't be the most pleasant spouse.

George Anningson   *200 points*

Age 52; Human; 5'8"; 210lbs.; A plumply prosperous middle-aged merchant, albeit with a taste for slightly garish cravats.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 13 [8]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 4 [-5]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL: 5+2 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0]; French (Broken) [2]; Spanish (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Charisma 1 [5]; Contact Group (Lyme Regis Underworld Minions: Criminal Skills, Effective Skill 12, Appear on 15 or less; Usually Reliable) [30]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Reputation (As a man to whom one should be polite, among the West Country underworld, on 10 or less) +2 [2]; Reputation (As a steady fellow, among wealthy Lyme Regis merchants on 10 or less) +2 [1]; Status 2 [5]; Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50].

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Compulsive Gambling (15) [-2]; Compulsive Spending (15) [-2]; Fat [-3]; Greed (15) [-7]; Reputation (As a possibly-shady character, among West Country law enforcement, on 7 or less) -2 [-2]; Secret (Underworld Activities) [-10]; Selfish (12) [-5].

Quirks: Code of Honor (Keeps at least the letter of his word to minions); Obsessed with fossils; Vengeful [-3].

Skills

Acting-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Area Knowledge (Lyme Regis)-15 (IQ+1) [2]; Current Affairs/TL(5+2) (Business)-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Current Affairs/TL(5+2) (English West Country)-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Detect Lies-12 (Per-2) [1]; Farming/TL(5+2)-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Finance-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Gambling-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Gardening-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Geology/TL(5+2) (Earthlike)-12 (IQ-2) [1]; Guns/TL(5+2) (Pistol)-10 (DX+0) [1]; Interrogation-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Intimidation-14 (Will+0) [2]; Leadership-15* (IQ+1) [2]; Merchant-18 (IQ+4) [16]; Observation-13 (Per-1) [1]; Paleontology/TL(5+2) (Paleobotany)-13 (IQ-1) [2]; Paleontology/TL(5+2) (Paleozoology)-12 (IQ-2) [1]; Psychology (Human)-13 (IQ-1) [2]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-14 (IQ+0) [1]; Smuggling-13 (IQ-1) [1]; Stealth-10 (DX+0) [1]; Streetwise-15 (IQ+1) [4]; Tactics-12 (IQ-2) [1].

*Includes +1 from Charisma.

Notes: Anningson's original rural West Country accent has largely been trained away by now, although traces of it may surface from time to time.

Anningson's Organization

Anningson leads a significant criminal network, but this is mostly a fairly loose, informal arrangement; hence, he has to take care that those members who are most clearly aware of his personal involvement with outright criminal activity are trustworthy and loyal, and that those who know about his merely dubious investments are at least too scared to talk much. Nonetheless, he is known to much of the local underworld as a man not to cross; fortunately for him, if any mention of this reaches grander society folk, they tend to shrug it off as plebeian tittle-tattle. He does retain a small but well-run group of personal servants and followers to attend to his most urgent instructions, some of them as servants in his home; most of these are tough characters, very dangerous in a brawl, with access to good weaponry by local standards.

Anningson himself would actually be *slightly* more dangerous in combat than some people might guess; he makes a point of knowing how to use the high-quality revolvers which he keeps at home. Still, he isn't really a fighter, and he has no urge to take unnecessary risks with his life or his reputation. On the other hand, he is a capable leader and a shrewd tactician; if his personal followers are nearby, they'll be especially dangerous under his command.

In addition to legal weapons such as those revolvers and a few shotguns, Anningson has accumulated a small cache of military-grade firearms, and some of his people, having served in either the regular army or that of the East India Company, know very well how to use them. In addition to the ubiquitous "Grey Maggie" rifles and lighter weapons such as Le Chevalier carbines, this very secret and well-concealed armory includes one or two Austrian-made air guns suitable for clandestine assassinations, and three or four Crowhurst "Desolation" bomb guns. If any kind of underworld war ever broke out in Lyme, Anningson's forces would not lack for firepower.

Game Uses

In a "Lyme Regis Vice" campaign (see ***GURPS Infinite Worlds: Britannica-6***), Anningson is of course the local master villain whom the heroes must work hard to bring down. His intelligence, ruthlessness, and carefully constructed facade of respectability make him a dangerous opponent, and the battle to break through his defenses might be the theme of an entire campaign, or at least an extended "season"; indeed, the investigators might start out with no idea that any one individual is behind so much of the crime with which they have to deal, only recognizing Anningson's importance after a series of incidents, and then taking several more to accumulate any sort of case against him. It's also possible that they could be forced into uncomfortable, informal alliance with him from time to time; Anningson is at least the sort of crime boss who keeps things quiet on his own territory for the sake of profit, and faced with less subtle interlopers (say, from London, or from across the Channel), the local Watch or visiting Bow Street Runners might decide that he is a lesser evil. Of course, Anningson would work hard to promote that impression, accumulate as much profit as possible along the way, and possibly leave the PCs morally compromised. It's also important to realize that Anningson not only has friends in local high society; he may have serious blackmail-worthy information about not

only local worthies, but also visiting Bloods or politicians who have used his establishments. Heroes who get too close to him may not only be threatened physically; they might also be pulled off the case just as they start to make progress.

In an Infinite Worlds campaign featuring PCs from Homeline, Anningson is a dangerous local who may threaten The Secret, or at least cause a lot of trouble. Time Tours, Ltd. are definitely considering running visits to Lyme when Infinity licenses Britannica-6 for such purposes; it's a busy upper-class pleasure town with lots of facilities, which is used to entertaining strange visitors and not asking too many questions. Once such visits start, it's a safe bet that some of Time Tours' more decadent customers will end up patronizing establishments which are actually owned by Anningson. The trouble is, Anningson is a shrewd manager with an eye for patterns and coincidences, who makes a specific if secretive effort to accumulate information on many of his customers, in case it might come in useful later. When he begins to notice a set of new customers who appear to be associated with each other and who have money to spend, he's likely to investigate where they come from . . . and when the answer turns out to be "nowhere," he'll naturally become rather curious. The problem for would-be investigators is, he has the advantage of home ground and carefully maintained secrecy; Time Tours, and any I-Cops who become involved, won't realize at first that they're being investigated, then may take a while to recognize that they're dealing with efficient organized crime in this seemingly charming "Dieselpunk Regency" seaside town, and then may take a while to determine that their primary opponent is that plump, personable, fossil-obsessed local businessman. And by the time they understand the problem, Anningson may have a bit too much on them to make him easy to deal with -- including some hidden files, left with unnamed but trusted associates, that would make, say, the Coventry option even more chancy. They could work with local law enforcement to bring him down, but that would be dangerous as well as difficult. It might be necessary to buy him off, at least for a while -- but that's close to making a deal with the devil, and Anningson is a greedy man, especially when he scents opportunity.

There's also one other plot possibility that threatens Infinity. Centrum are just opening their own operations on Britannica-6, are looking for local agents of influence, and are a bit less protective of The Secret than Infinity. Often, they rather disdain mundane criminals, but they are pragmatic above all; if they somehow identify and make contact with Anningson, he can offer them contacts within the local ruling classes, economic information and advice, and a ready-made spy ring and smuggling network. In return, even if they don't reveal their true nature to him (and that does often produce some rather unpredictable reactions), they can offer wealth (in the form of gold and silver), valuable goods, advanced weapons and equipment (selected so as not to stand out too much in this technologically diverse timeline), and some (from his point of view) amazing paleotological samples and information. As a Centran minion, working his way through Britannica-6 society, Anningson could become a deadly problem to any I-Cop team.

Congratulations! It's been Five Seconds Since You First Started Glancing at This Title!

There are a number of firsts or rarities that are occurring soon or have occurred. For example, those who celebrate Easter are probably surprised to realize that Easter this year is as early as we'll see it in our lifetime. Likewise, this is the first issue of *Pyramid* that posts on the Friday of leap year (February 29th), and -- mathematically -- such a thing won't happen again until 2036.

Speaking of leap year, the year 2000 was the first year divisible by 100 that *was* a leap year . . . at least, the first since the last one in 1600. That year was also the end of a millennium[1], which was either cause for celebration or reason to avoid the weird guy on the corner selling the "010101" t-shirts.

The 21st saw the only total lunar eclipse for the year, and we won't get another one of those until 2010. Oh, and Doc Savage turned 75 a couple weeks ago, and *Uncanny X-Men* will be hitting issue #500 here soon.

So what does that have to do with anything?

Well, too often the Real World (a wholly overrated place, in my opinion) places great emphasis on various one-of-a-kind (or seemingly one-of-a-kind) events. I remember picking up the ***Star Wars RPG*** when it was new, and how it was celebrating the 15th anniversary of *Star Wars.* "Wow!" my 15-year-old self thought, "If we're still watching it 15 years later, it *must* be a *classic!*" My current 30-something self knows differently now, as he views old episodes of *Murder, She Wrote,* which celebrates its 25th anniversary next year. Likewise, I'm finally getting around to reviewing some of the older DVDs I've bought over the years, and one of the ones on my current list is *Glengarry Glen Ross,* which I purchased as a 10th anniversary edition. (It celebrated its 15th anniversary last year.)

And so on. Time marches constantly, and we're always celebrating new #1s, #100s, fifth years, 10th years, and so on. From a mathematical point of view, if you found five pop-culture phenomena you enjoyed that were spaced five years apart (or multiples of five years apart), you could spend the rest of your life doing nothing but wishing them "Happy (Year Divisible by Five) Anniversary!"

In the gaming world, many plots in RPGs tend to focus on so-called "once in a lifetime" events. But, from a realistic standpoint -- especially in a pop-culture or media-heavy world -- "once in a lifetime" doesn't mean what it used to. It tends to attempt to elevate otherwise interesting events to historic levels, either increasing the stakes for failure or setting the stage for disappointment. (As a personal example, my fledgling interest in astronomy was pretty much killed by standing out in the chilly Everglades for far too long one evening, bored out of my teen skull, trying to witness the once-in-a-lifetime Halley's Comet. Despite lots of education, equipment, and patience -- and one of the clearest skies in the Northern hemisphere -- we couldn't see beans. Afterwards, I remember reading reports going, "Oh, sure; the 1986 visit wasn't very good. But the 1910 one was *really* something . . ." Bite me, skywatchers!)

So, since I'm all about working outside expectations, how can you turn humanity's anniversary-watching tendency on its ear?

- **Time for Plan B.** You know that astral conjunction everyone was all up in arms about a while ago? The time when some great ritual was supposed to take place? Didn't happen. *But* as anyone who's ever done a biorhythm knows, even if the "best case scenario" didn't pan out, there are almost always a few "almost as good" alignments. Sure, the forces of darkness will be even more powerful this time, but it's a followup chance that the oracles didn't think we had.
- **A long, long time ago . . . someone blew it.** You know that "once in a lifetime" chance of putting things right, or solving the mystery of X, or whatever? Well, whoever had the best chance at it *last* time didn't succeed. Now it's up to the heroes. In this mixemup, the heroes aren't presented with the first "once in a lifetime" chance to set things right; they're the fifth or sixth . . . and all the previous folks have failed. The nice thing about this

possibility is that there is no presumption of the heroes' success; indeed, for a suitably dark or Cthulhoid campaign, failure is probable. (And if the heroes' chance is a non-optimal "once in a lifetime" -- such as the lackluster 1986 Halley's Comet visitation -- then you've got the makings of the "Plan B" scenario, above.)

- **It's Double-Ought-Septifold Month!** Of course, any alien or unusual cultures that the heroes encounter need not be enthralled by the "divisible by five or 10" anniversary schemes that Western society enjoys. The PCs might encounter a casual reference to the disappearance of a great monstrosity 28 years ago, not realizing that this is an auspicious time for the creature, since 28 is divisible by seven. ("And it's doubly auspicious because the divisor is a squared prime number! Don't you *see?!?*") Those looking to really muck with the anniversary system can pay attention to different time scales, such as how many minutes or seconds it has been since something happened. (You can find that information on this new-fangled [Internet](#)!) Sure, it's only been 191 years since some great cataclysm befell this land, but don't you see the significance of the 100 millionth minute since that event? (Whether such anniversaries are actually any more or less important than their divisible-by-five counterparts is up to the GM.)

The demarcation of time is only as important as we sapients want it to be; in the natural world, they usually only care about the solar cycle on the whole (although they could have their own "cycle" -- such as the recently completed 17-year cycle of our friendly neighborhood [cicadas](#)). But realizing the artificialness of most milestones is the first step toward coming up with new and interesting ways of twisting that most human perception.

--Steven Marsh

[1] Let's not have *that* debate . . .

Pyramid Review

Hobby Games: The 100 Best

Published by Green Ronin Publishing

Edited by James Lowder

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Every January, there are lists of the previous year's best games and, taking the longer view, any gathering of gamers in general easily dissolves into a discussion -- or, in less generous terms, an argument -- about the best games of all time. It's a debate that can never be settled, of course, but if you want some truly knowing voices to offer their opinions, try *Hobby Games: The 100 Best.*

The object of the book is to wax enthusiastic about the 100 best games . . .

. . . and this it does. It's as subjective as any such list, but the star power of this one's authors lend it considerable weight. Editor James Lowder had a round centennial of some of the most famous names in the gaming industry write essays about what they thought were the finest products ever. The one hard-and-fast rule was that no author could talk about a game on which he was a principle creator. The result is an interesting series of articles on games and gaming written by the old hands of the genre. Each offers his own take on what makes a game "one of the best," and in the process, readers gain a bit of insight into the inner workings of the pastime that keeps so many transfixed around the dining-room table.

Here you'll find legends of the hobby like Marc W. Miller penning words about the old *Lensman* board game, and Warren Spector on *Tikal,* along with relative newcomers like Philip Reed on *BattleTech.* There are board games, card games, and roleplaying games (and several that don't comfortably fit any of these categories) from across the last five decades or so of this fairly recently developed pursuit.

The compositions are hit or miss. Sadly, lively and colorful pieces like Justin Achilli's or John Wick's are few and far between (*Blood Bowl* and *Wiz-War* respectively), but you do see some delightfully unpredictable juxtapositions (Alan R. Moon, best known for the *Ticket to Ride* series, is already keen on freshman board game *Descent*). Some are nostalgic, some creative, and some staid. Some recall those friends or experts of the genre lost to us, while others are utterly baffling (Greg Costikyan's *My Life with Master* article is a bewilderingly erudite collegiate dissertation).

The games do enjoy the focus, by and large, but necessity dictates a lot of digression into talk of the industry at large. None, thankfully, become moribund treatises on the doom facing the hobby when set against the pervasiveness of the computer and console systems -- though every creator gets his own bio at the end of his entry, and a lot of these people now work for those digital giants. Richard Dansky is insightful as he points out the full effect of *The Settlers of Catan* on his profession, and Lou Zocchi, one of the oldest names in the business, knows every stop on memory lane. Too many more notables interpret their mandate too narrowly, leaving the audience to wonder what might have been said had greater context been provided.

The editing is slack, which comes as quite a surprise from the usually dependable Mr. Lowder. There's a certain homogeneity about many of the essays. Several come across as fairly uninspired game reviews (ahem) that don't really capture the imagination, and it's amusing to note how many of the people involved in the project used to work for TSR or Wizards of the Coast at some point. (The lunch hours in the commissary become a legend unto themselves within these pages.) While no one was to speak on their own products or those in which they had some sort of stake as author or publisher, there are some near-misses (Scott Haring, a longtime Steve Jackson Games employee, speaks out on

Illuminati, and Kenneth Hite has done supplementary work for his target, *Unknown Armies*).

Anyone looking for that sense they've gotten to sit down at a bar with a veteran and listen to him regale the room with war stories is probably going to feel let down, but it's nice nonetheless to see what makes this or that favored designer's engine tick. Part history lesson, part top-10 list, and part shopping list, *Hobby Games: The 100 Best* is certainly a neat bit of insight into what makes for a great game. It may be that uncovering some of these treasures -- some expected, some fresh, and some barely heard of -- sparks something in those who will write the next 50 years' worth of tabletop entertainment. One could spend a great deal of money attending conventions and never get as much inside information from a dozen panels of the experts as is concentrated in this volume.

-- Andy Vetromile

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Making of the Universal Man

GURPS Wildcard Skills in Historical Games

by Phil Masters

The "wildcard skill" rule in *GURPS* 4th edition (page 175 of the *Basic Set*) is a useful feature for use in a range of games -- especially those at the cinematic scale, although wildcards can also be used, in small doses, in slightly more realistic settings, as was examined in [Taming the Wild Skill](#). This article is a follow-up to that piece, looking at some specific options for a particular use.

The *GURPS Basic Set* gives four examples of wildcard skills (Detective!, Gun!, Science!, and Sword!), which is a decent start, and a few more have appeared in various books. The most extensive list of additions is on pages 36-37 of [*GURPS Supers,*](#) which is one of the things that makes that a very helpful resource for a wide range of *GURPS* games, not just those dealing with four-color superheroes. However, *Supers* has a perfectly reasonable focus on the modern-day period, and its list of wildcard skills reflects that; this article extends the concept for use in games set in historical and similarly low-tech settings. The ideas discussed herein can apply to a wide range of such campaigns, but this article takes as its focus and theme a historical period that has become a true by-word for human omnicompetence: the European Renaissance.

Wildcard Skills and Tech Levels

As a rule, where a wildcard skill encompasses an IQ-based skill with a /TL qualifier, the character can employ it to full effect at any tech level up to and including his own. However, attempts to use it at higher TLs should take the standard penalties. A cinematic super- scientist may comprehend everything known to science *in his society,* and can even work wonders with lower-tech lab equipment and instruments (though the GM is always free to say that old-fashioned equipment has some inherent limits), but even he can't be expected to understand super-science from an alien civilization three levels ahead -- although with Science! plus high IQ, he may be able to analyze something of what's involved amazingly quickly, perhaps even treating *some* tech level penalties as mere familiarity problems. Likewise, a medieval master thief might be able to pick any TL3 lock, but he can't be expected to defeat an electronic security system on the first encounter.

DX-based /TL skills (and probably any Per-based or Will-based skills that might crop up) are a different matter. Someone with Gun!, for example, is just really good at hitting things with gun-shaped ranged weapons and doesn't worry much about the form or precise mechanism; the TL penalties that would normally apply to such things shouldn't really concern such an individual. There could be short-term familiarity problems -- a superlative Renaissance arquebusier might not even recognize a TL11 holdout laser as a weapon on first sight, let alone as a kind of pistol -- but those should be quick to resolve if

The Renaissance and the "Universal Man"

All the while he acquired every sort of accomplishment and dexterity, cross-examining artists, scholars and artisans of all descriptions, down to the cobblers, about the secrets and peculiarities of their craft . . .
-- Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (on Alberti)

The term "Renaissance man," meaning a broadly competent expert, is a modern (20th-century) invention, but the idea is completely appropriate for the historical Renaissance period. The European Renaissance, which can be roughly defined as running from the 14th to the 17th centuries, was heavily entangled with a "humanist" philosophy that held that humans should strive to realize their potential (which was assumed to be vast), and emphasized the value of a deep, liberal education. Its ideal was indeed the omnicompetent man. (The use of the male form there isn't inappropriate -- Renaissance thinkers weren't immune to the gender prejudices of their age -- but nor were they always hopelessly prejudiced, and the period certainly produced some smart, talented women.) This line of thought is often traced to Leon Battista Alberti, a 15th-century painter, architect, classical scholar,

necessary.

Similar comments apply to technologies from divergent tech paths (p. B513); IQ-based wildcard skills can handle lower effective TLs easily enough, but they receive penalties with higher total effective levels. In addition, the -2 familiarity penalty generally applies. DX- based wildcards usually suffer only the familiarity penalty, and often not even that, at the GM's discretion; a gun is a gun, even if it works by focusing arcane cosmic energies through a crystalline matrix to disrupt the target's Kirlian aura. However, the GM is always free to assign (or eliminate) special modifiers in such cases; a TL(0+8) society may have developed "amulet weapons" that are quite hard to aim if one is used to a pistol grip and trigger, while conversely, an expert in Science! might be able to apply a broad knowledge of theoretical systems and mathematical principles to work with all kinds of systems of scientific logic when necessary.

Defining Wildcard Skills

When inventing a wildcard skill for use in a cinematic game, or deciding whether to allow a wildcard skill suggested by a player, a GM has to perform something of a balancing act. On the one hand, wildcard skills are supposed to be broad, unrealistic, cinematic, and *cool;* it's missing the point badly to define one too narrowly, or to say "that's impossible in real life" (except when using a wildcard skill at low levels to represent something fairly realistic in a more realistic game, of course). On the other hand, even cinematic ideas in cinematic games can be over-stretched or abused. If a player seems to be defining the wildcard as "everything my character wants to be good at," or the name of the skill could best be rendered as Action Hero!, it's too broad or unfocused. Remember, part of the point here is often to allow *each* PC to be, at least potentially, the best there is at one broadly defined thing, whether it's "science" or "shooting people"; a good rule of thumb is to say that, if every PC takes one different wildcard skill each, then each of them should have lots of situations in which they and they alone can shine. That's not to say that wildcard skill groupings can never overlap, but heavy overlaps are a bad sign.

astronomer, athlete, poet, and horseman, who certainly seems to have tried to illustrate the theory.

Even aside from Alberti, the Renaissance produced a number of broadly capable figures. Thinkers of the period became interested in building on many medieval ideas (though they maybe rejected others out of hand) while digging through the surviving works of the Greeks and Romans, some of which were newly rediscovered or imported from Byzantine or Muslim libraries to the east. Artists tended to have broad technical educations, including both technical theory (often drawn from those same classical sources) and practical experience in a range of different media (ensuring that they could handle any commission that came along). Likewise, not only were the ruling classes expected to fight well in war and run the country in peacetime, as in the middle ages, there was also a fashion for fine art and cultured living at court; indeed, some Renaissance soldiers were also famously capable poets. Hence, the "Renaissance Man" or "Uomo Universale" was more than an abstract ideal.

It may have helped that this was perhaps the last period in history when a reasonably bright, hard-working scholar could actually hope to absorb, if not the full range of human knowledge, then at least a good proportion of the things that his own society thought were really worth understanding. Ironically, the very expansion of learning and research that is often credited to the Renaissance may eventually have made the Renaissance Man an impossibility. When a "good-sized" library fills a room, a diligent reader can at least hope to look through every book in it in his career; when libraries fill huge buildings, then even geniuses have to pick carefully -- to specialize. The ideal of omnicompetence faded in the 17th century and died completely by around the end of the 18th; one of the last candidates for the title of "Universal Man" might be somebody like Benjamin Franklin.

Another way of looking at this is to say that a wildcard skill should represent a fairly clearly defined category of focused intelligence or special interest, or at least something that will be instantly understood if it's mentioned in one line in the script of a fast- moving action film ("He's a scientist!"). For example, Detective! represents a careful study of crime and the criminal mind, and of ways to deal with such things, both in theory and in street-level practice. It *doesn't* include every skill that a good fictional detective might be expected to have -- it doesn't provide any weapon skills, for a start -- but it does encompass pretty well everything required to analyze and solve a typical crime mystery -- after which, someone with Gun! might be better equipped to bring the perpetrator to justice.

Having decided on the nature or theme of a wildcard skill, the logical next step is to go through chapter 4 of the ***Basic Set*** and note down each skill that the wildcard can replace. After this, the list may be too long, and need trimming, or too short, and need expansion. Remember, a wildcard generally has to stand in for half-a-dozen or so normal skills to be really worth the points (although fewer can be okay if several of them are Very Hard) -- but note also that each version of a skill that takes mandatory specialties can count as a separate skill for this purpose, especially if there isn't a lot of defaulting between the specialties. Music! would be well worth the points if someone wanted to play every possible musical instrument competently, even if it only covered the one skill by name, because "Musical Instrument" really describes an indefinite list of skills. (Actually, Music! should probably also encompass Group Performance (Conducting), Musical Composition, and Singing. It could also cover Musical Influence, if that works in the setting, but that potentially could make it too powerful.) Likewise, any wildcard that relates to all versions of Mechanic or Engineer is fine, verging perhaps on the overly generous, especially in a modern-day or futuristic setting with lots of gadgets.

On the other hand, there may well be a good case for not obsessing too much about the small print of the skills-replaced list. The above are sound guidelines, but the point of wildcards is to avoid worrying about fine gradations of skills, *not* to spend all day arguing about them. If a PC has Science!, and a question arises that is unambiguously a scientific matter, then the GM should allow the PC an immediate roll against the wildcard skill, and never spend time deciding which science skill is involved or checking whether this skill is specifically listed as part of Science!. Provided that both GM and players have the same clear idea what each wildcard name is supposed to mean, use of wildcard skills should speed things up and prevent arguments, not slow things down or lead to rules debates.

Using Existing Wildcards

A fair number of wildcard skills from existing sources can serve perfectly well in historical games. To begin with the ***Basic Set***, Sword! is obviously highly appropriate in games where a many swords appear, although in a setting where only one or two blade types are particularly common, many characters may prefer to specialize. Likewise, Gun! can be formidable in gun-heavy games, but isn't necessarily a lot of use before TL5; one or two specialties of Guns skill, Fast-Draw (Pistol), Gunner (Cannon), and Armoury (Small Arms) are generally cheaper and are likely to prove more than adequate even in militaristic TL4 settings. Detective! may look out of place -- several of the skills it encompasses don't really exist before TL6 or so, historically speaking, and even if the player wants a "universal street operator," the other parts might be better represented by something like Thief! (see below). Finally, Science! can be replaced by the similar Natural Philosophy! (see below) for more of a low-tech/period flavor.

Turning to the extensive list in ***Supers***, it's worth considering each entry in turn:

Boat! is suitable for a low-tech setting, but with fewer boat or ship types available, it isn't as useful; see Ship! below for something more appropriate for all-round low-tech mariners.

Bow!, Fist!, Stick!, Throw! and *Whip!* all relate to low- tech weapons or unarmed combat, and so can be used in games at any tech level; indeed, they may be *more* use at low TLs. However, GMs who prefer to handle combat in more detail, as in many action- oriented low-tech campaigns, may prefer to avoid the "broad category" approach, especially as these wildcard skills may not integrate well with the detailed mechanics in sources such as ***GURPS Martial Arts***. (Actually, ***Martial Arts*** has its own optional rules for use of wildcard skills -- but those too may be rather too much of a blunt instrument for some tastes, and may also have balance problems.)

Businessman! can work well at low TLs, though some of the skills it encompasses are associated more with high-tech societies. (Historically, for example, Economics doesn't appear in its modern scientific form until TL5, and effective Market Analysis depends on the existence of a stock market, which in turn probably requires modern communications.) "Master merchant" characters can certainly have their place in Renaissance-era and other low-tech games.

Cleric! is fine for highly competent priests in any society. It doesn't cover very many skills, but if Exorcism can see frequent use, it could still be useful for PCs who want to take the "adventurer-priest" roll that is so popular in fantasy RPGs.

Computers!, Drive! and *Pilot!* are all essentially high- tech-oriented skills, which are unlikely to appear in pre-20th-century historical or low-tech fantasy games unless they feature some very weird and exotic alternate technologies or "magitech." Remember that even then, wildcard skills are still only generally worth using if the technology takes a range of forms (multiple types of motor vehicle; computers that regularly need operation and maintenance work as well as programming); otherwise, a few standard skills in single specialties are enough.

Encyclopedist! is logically as valid in low-tech games as in modern settings. However, it implies that the character regularly absorbs large volumes of raw data, which could be rather harder to believe in societies without modern communications and media; if a piece of detailed information simply isn't available to *anyone,* it isn't available with a wildcard skill. Actually, that principle should probably apply to any use of this wildcard; it can replace any Area Knowledge, but given that Area Knowledge can grant very detailed knowledge of any small area, this implies virtually infinite quantities of information. An "encyclopedist" character might know about the layout and politics of every country in the world, but could he also know about the residents of every city block in the world? If the wildcard is available at all, it should be taken as implying a voracious capacity for trivia and a tendency to read everything seen and remember much of it, but not outright divine omniscience -- on which basis, it's quite a Renaissance-scholar sort of thing.

Explorer! might be taken to fit cinematic versions of Renaissance figures such as Columbus or Magellan, or at least idealized versions of the archetype. (Realistically, early explorers probably blundered into a lot of survival situations and cultural encounters for which they really weren't equipped.) Of course, the versions of skills such as Anthropology or Meteorology known to historical societies might often be a little *basic* by modern standards . . .

Fake! is appropriate for superlative con artists and "human chameleons" at any tech level. Of course, in some settings, many people will believe that social hierarchies and structures are too rigid and "natural" for individuals to fake being something that they aren't. In a few cases, the GM may even decide that they're right.

Inventor! is another technology-based wildcard, but some of the skills it encompasses *can* crop up in low-tech games and may even be useful. However, some of them can't, and a low-tech mechanical genius may have a slightly different focus; hence, this might best replaced by Mechanism!, as defined below.

Magic! isn't dependent on tech level, but GMs may not want to permit it in all games, as its major use is as the basis for a specific style of flexible magic. If that application is excluded, it isn't really worth the point cost.

Medicine! is appropriate for highly competent medical characters, despite the fact that some of its components would be unknown in historical low-tech societies (e.g. Electronics Operation or Epidemiology), and others might not work in all campaigns (e.g. Hypnotism); the range of difficult biological and medical skills that this encompasses still makes it worth buying. For more of a low- tech/historical feel, rename this "Physic!" or "Physician!"

Move! is a valid possibility for low-tech games and works well for swashbuckling heroic swordsmen and similar.

Perform! is another good general-purpose wildcard. GMs may rule that some types of performance are rare or unknown in particular societies, and so aren't covered. Also, the Musical Instrument skills included may be limited to those commonly used for public entertainment in this society. Indeed, the GM in any game may prefer to require the character to pick just a couple of instruments to know how to play -- competence with *all* instruments, even rare ones, along with everything else, would seem downright uncanny. Still, there are some very talented "multi-instrumentalists" around even in the real world, and this is supposed to represent a truly cinematic performer. (A slightly cut-down version, taken at a low level, might represent a borderline-realistic theatrical jack-of-all- trades.)

Psychologist! might represent, say, a character in a quasi-historical game whose mastery of the classical arts of rhetoric and logic, and whose studies of philosophical theories of the mind, have achieved truly amazing levels.

Scholar! may *sound* like a suitable skill for low-tech settings, but in fact, the categorization of knowledge that it reflects is rather modern. (Actually, it encompasses rather a rag-bag of social skills and odd historical by-ways.) While pre-modern scholars took an interest in subjects that would now be called "Anthropology" or "Sociology," all of this

came under the heading of "Philosophy" from their point of view -- and didn't use modern statistical tools and the like. PCs interested in such matters should usually buy something like Artes Liberales! (see below). However, a cut-down version of Scholar! appropriate to represent well-read, culturally alert folk in such games and representing study of the known world and its recent history (renamed "Well-Read!," perhaps) might include, say, Geography, History (all fairly recent periods), Literature, Sociology (in a limited form), Teaching, Writing, and Research.

Lastly, *Thief!* is a wildcard that fits with the atmosphere of many traditional fantasy games and should work fine as written.

One other source also requires a mention here. [Taming the Wild Skill](#) introduced *Artes Liberales!* and *Natural Philosophy!,* both of which are of course highly appropriate for Renaissance-era and other historical games.

New Wildcards

But now, let's look at some wildcard skills that are more specific to historical settings.

Artist!

Artist! could appear in most cinematic settings, but it really seems to *fit* Renaissance-period games. Artists in that era tended to be versatile. Aside from Leonardo's fabled accomplishments (perhaps somewhat more theoretical than applied) and Michelangelo's brilliance as both a sculptor and a painter, the Renaissance produced individuals such as Filippo Brunelleschi, who initially trained as a goldsmith (goldsmiths were considered something of an elite among craftsmen, studying a range of arts and sciences so that they could work well with very valuable materials), pursued a career as a sculptor, introduced the idea of perspective to painting, and then took charge of the building of Florence Cathedral, inventing new engineering techniques to enable the construction of its great dome. In fact, Brunelleschi could almost be one instance of a real historical figure with a wildcard skill. This wildcard is assumed to encompass both raw talent and technical training, making the character effective in some "practical" skills as well as the fine arts.

Artist! (IQ). Replaces Architecture, Artist, Camouflage, Carpentry, Cartography, Connoisseur (for all versions of Artist), Counterfeiting (except for uses that require specific technical knowledge of, say, hidden anti-counterfeiting measures), Current Affairs (High Culture), Engineer (Civil), Forgery (only to create visually correct fakes -- knowing what should be in a forged document is another matter!), Jeweler, Makeup, Mathematics (Applied, and only as required by the practical architecture, engineering, drawing, and cartography that falls within this skill), and Smith (Lead and Tin). Also, make a DX-based roll to replace any "craftsman" Professional Skill that the GM considers has a large artistic component.

In Renaissance-period games, Artist! might also substitute for Physiology, given that artists were expected to have an understanding of the workings of the human body quite possibly as good as many doctors of the time, and they would visit dissections and medical schools to accomplish this. Artists also occasionally may use the wildcard to replace Propaganda when placing subtle but pervasive messages in artworks, or in place of Symbol Drawing in settings where that skill works and where it depends more on symbolic effectiveness and skill than on education in the formally correct symbols to use. At higher tech levels, the wildcard would also replace Photography.

Courtier!

This is a wildcard skill for settings in which royal courts or similar are little worlds unto themselves. For less sophisticated environments, Savoir-Faire (High Society) and one or two social skills are enough to get by -- or indeed, perhaps just a Reputation gained through, say, competence as a soldier. The image of the courtier that merits its own wildcard skill, by contrast, is rarefied, probably a bit decadent, and makes relatively little connection between getting on at court and actually running the country. Historically, many courtiers were also experienced (if not always expert) soldiers or provincial governors -- but many others weren't. Likewise, some were keen and experienced hunters or tournament fighters, but others were strictly spectators.

This is the skill of relating to other courtiers, surviving court intrigues, looking and sounding stylish, and knowing one's way around the place both socially and physically. The specific replacement-skill list given below is based on the assumptions of European Renaissance high society; a very similar wildcard skill might be appropriate in many other settings, but with a slightly different array of artistic accomplishments and suchlike.

Courtier! (IQ). Replaces Area Knowledge (for the immediate environs of all major palaces), Current Affairs (Headline News, High Culture, People, Politics, and Sports for upper-class pastimes only), Games (for the rules of combat tournaments and any especially fashionable games, if the GM has either be required of a courtier), Heraldry, Poetry, Politics, Public Speaking, and Savoir- Faire (Dojo if any martial arts are considered important at court, and of course High Society). Make a DX-based roll to replace Dancing; Make a HT-based roll to replace Carousing or Singing; make a Per- based roll to replace Observation, but only within the bounds of a familiar court.

Note that Gambling *isn't* included. It's often fashionable at court, and so knowing the skill can be useful, but losing well and without seeming concerned is more important in a courtier than winning. A DX-based roll might also be allowed to replace a Sports skill that is especially popular at court.

Female Accomplishments!

Even in a (by modern standards) blatantly sexist historical society, women were usually supposed to learn certain skills and would do well to become good at them. Women of any class were typically assumed to know how look after a house and how to cook and sew; young women of the upper classes, often having a fair amount of time to learn in their youth, could be expected to master a range of "refined accomplishments," which might among, other effects, increase their value in the marriage market. Hence, this wildcard skill too is appropriate for a wide range of historical settings, but the precise selection of accomplishments could vary over different times and places. For example, knowledge of certain arts (Connoisseur skill) might be well regarded in one place, but seen as dangerously restless or just rather eccentric in others. Likewise, some forms of Performance may be valued, or the idea might be seen as insufficiently submissive, while in other settings again, the wildcard might encompass enough Religious Ritual skill to tend to a household shrine. Sex Appeal is usually *not* an appropriate accomplishment for a respectable woman -- but some more decadent societies might see things differently. A little research into what is considered "feminine" in a given setting can go a long way.

Female Accomplishments! (IQ). Replaces Accounting (only to keep simple books of household accounts), Connoisseur (High Fashion and Jewelry), Cooking, Housekeeping, Merchant (only for domestic purchases), Musical Instrument (up to two instruments of the character's choice), Savoir-Faire (High Society), and Sewing. Make a DX-based roll to replace Dancing; make a HT-based roll to replace Singing.

Hunter!

This wildcard skill represents a broad understanding of animals and the wild, enabling the character to live off any land that can support human life and to work with and understand most species, and thus to hunt effectively either mounted or on foot. It doesn't include any weapons, although a skilled huntsman is usually competent with one or two missile types, spears, and so on. In a more militaristic campaign, it might be renamed Scout! for flavor; in a more Tolkienian game, that might become Ranger!.

Hunter! (IQ). Replaces Animal Handling, Camouflage, Falconry, Mimicry (Animal Sounds and Bird Calls), Naturalist, Navigation (Land), and Traps. Make a DX-based roll to replace Riding, or Stealth in wilderness conditions only. Make a HT-based roll to replace Hiking. Make a Per-based roll to replace Fishing, Observation in wilderness conditions only, Survival, or Tracking.

For a slightly more realistic feel, the GM can restrict the various specialties to animal types that are commonly ridden or trained for hunting in the game's society, and terrain types that the PC might reasonably claim to have encountered. Moreover, the wildcard can be adjusted for different tech levels and environments; for example, in a Bronze-Age Egypt game, Teamster might replace Riding, reflecting the fact that upper-class hunters use chariots whereas riding beasts are largely unknown.

Mechanism!

While Inventor! from *Supers* (see above) describes a broad skill with technology in a modern context, the simpler machines and more "hands-on" requirements of a lower-tech society can call for this wildcard instead. Although the idea of Mechanism! works well with cinematic versions of such Renaissance or Enlightenment figures as Leonardo da Vinci or Ben Franklin, it could also be used for a mythic treatment of earlier geniuses such as Archimedes. It can only replace those skill specialties that are actually known at the game's TL, and it probably shouldn't be available after mid-TL5.

Mechanism! (IQ). Replaces Armoury, Artillery, Carpentry, Current Affairs (Science & Technology), Engineer, Explosives, Liquid Projector, Lockpicking, Machinist, Mathematics (Applied, and only those parts of it relevant to low-tech engineering work), Mechanic, Metallurgy, Smith, and Traps. In settings where Weird Science is a valid skill, this may include some technological applications of that.

Ship!

This skill indicates a mastery of boats, ships, and all that's required to operate them satisfactorily. It shouldn't be permitted in TL5 or higher settings (use Boat! from *Supers* instead); ship operation, at those levels, involves too many diverse activities, and some of the skills on this list become too academic to be available to a practical sea-dog.

Ship! (IQ). Replaces Area Knowledge (Major Maritime Trade Routes), Artillery (only for ship-mounted weapons), Carpentry (only for simple work on ships or boats), Cartography, Engineer (Ships), Freight Handling, Leadership (ship's crews only), Meteorology, Navigation (Sea), Seamanship, and Shiphandling (Ship). Make a DX- based roll for Boating (Sailboat or Unpowered), Climbing in a ship's rigging, and Knot-Tying, and for Gunner or Liquid Projector to operate any relevant weapons mounted on a water vehicle.

Good-Bye, Gary

As I'm sure most of you know, Gary Gygax passed away a couple days ago. For reasons I don't quite understand, this hit me really hard. I guess, having seen the vigor with which he maintained an online presence and created new material, I presumed he was one of those immortals who was, for some reason, immune to death's clutches. Like Steve Jackson.

To the best of my knowledge, I'd only met him once. Embarrassingly, it was an encounter that was almost certainly remarkably brief in its execution. As I recall, I was working at a convention that he was attending, and I saw him going somewhere or pausing briefly while I was darting back or forth to my own table. (I don't think he was making an official appearance wherever I saw him, because I think he would've been mobbed by fans.) I believe the entire exchange went something along the lines of, "Gary? Thank you for all the wonderful memories." (I've gotten in the habit of trying to thank most folks whose works have enriched me in some fashion.) I don't remember his response outside of a brief grateful acknowledgement of the sentiment, and then I was off. I seem to recall, digging through piles of memory-cruft, hoping that I'd have more time later in the con, so I could go back and offer something more substantial. I never did; at times I wonder if I had the encounter at all.

Via e-mail, Mr. Gygax and I had exchanged a couple of missives. (I call him "Mr. Gygax" in writing, because I don't need to second-guess myself about how it's pronounced.) Curiously, at least two of those times were a result of my receiving an e-mail that wasn't intended for me; I think it had to do with having industry ties while sharing a name with one of the original creative forces behind *Dungeons & Dragons* (original blue-book editor Steve Marsh, for those keeping score). The other time, I'd asked for and received permission to quote his ideas on another topic for a column . . . a column I haven't finished yet (it's only been 18 months!), but maybe I will be motivated to get off my butt and do.

So, this is a lot of words saying, "I didn't know the man."

But I know how his words touched a middle-schooler, hoping for a world to retreat into . . . because the world he had at time time -- called "middle school" -- was pretty lousy.

And so, in honor of Gentleman Gary, I thought I'd share my earliest gaming story, which -- as best I can tell via my searches[1], I've never shared before.

As I said, I was in middle school, and our social studies teacher -- who was the amazingly cool Ms. Barnett -- permitted another student to run a *Dungeons & Dragons* game during class. (We were the gifted students; we had a *lot* of leeway.) So I made up an unmemorable character -- I think it was a fighter -- and we started the adventure. (It was *B3: Palace of the Silver Princess,* for those keeping track.) I didn't quite understand what the whole roleplaying thing was about . . . or, at least, I didn't understand the *game* mechanics of it. I had watched the cartoon and thought that roleplaying was about tests of character; you were presented with obstacles, and if you did the right thing, you won! So I tried to act heroically in the first encounter -- I think there were some bodies that might be alive trapped in some plant-like structure that I said I wanted to rescue -- and . . . well, I died. Yes, from "Do you want to try *Dungeons & Dragons?*" to my first crumpled-up character sheet took about 10 minutes. And it is with the stoic self-assurance that comes with two decades of reflection am I able to admit: I cried.

Somewhere between a few weeks and a few months later, I tried to understand what went wrong. I received the original red-box *Basic Set* as a present, and I set out attempting to understand it. Around this same time, fantasy game books started hitting the scene big-time (especially the Fighting Fantasy series like *Warlock of Firetop Mountain*). In reading those along with the tabletop *Dungeons & Dragons* game, I had a larger understanding of what this gaming thing was about. I was partially right, I decided; there were many tests and obstacles to overcome in each adventure. But, like the accursed Fighting Fantasy books, sometimes you can make all the right decisions and still die.

Shortly thereafter, I graduated from the blue-box *Expert Set* to my first purchased adventure. Since I had limited resources, I wanted the coolest, most powerful adventure I could find . . . which, naturally, let me to *Q1: Queen of the Demonweb Pits.* Never mind that it was for a completely different game, or that the recommended levels for the game

were even outside the scope of the boxed sets I *did* have; it *looked* cool. And, from what I understood of it at the time, it was cool. Sure, more die-hard fans may not think it's a fitting conclusion to the ***Against the Giants/*** drow series, but for a high-school freshman, a gargantuan steam-powered spider-shaped ship was exactly the vessel needed to take me away from my world and into something both more manageable and wonderful.

I could go on about my early abortive ***Dungeons & Dragons*** campaigns (hint: don't read the huge blocks of text in old-school adventures verbatim to jittery middle-schoolers when your reading style is as lively as a laryngectomy voice box), or my passion for the dozens of solo adventures that used to be published for ***Dungeons & Dragons,*** or how dog-eared and well-loved my old *Dragon* magazines were, or how I pored over how deliciously unfair ***S1: Tomb of Horrors*** was. I didn't really rediscover RPGs with other people until college, when I met the bountiful resource of captive would-be gamers known as "students." But that doesn't matter; like the first guy who picked up a rock and hit it with a stick and convinced others, "This is pretty fun," Gary Gygax helped create an entirely new *type* of game to play . . . a type of game that millions of people around the globe have tried and agreed that, yes, this is pretty fun.

Good-bye, Gary. And thank you, again.

--Steven Marsh

[1] I also did what is, perhaps, the dumbest search ever in the Pyramid search engines: "dungeons dragons" -- no quotes, no other parameters. As you might expect, this produced a lot of results.

Pyramid Review

Gamemastery Module: Into the Haunted Forest (for the *d20 System*)

Published by [Paizo Publishing](#)

Designed by Greg A. Vaughan

Developed and edited by Jason Bulmahn, Mike McArtor, and Jeremy Walker

Art and cartography by Drew Pozca, James Davis, Andrew Arconti, Vincent Dutrait, James Zhang, Wayne Reynolds, and Corey Macourek

16-page full-color softcover; $5.00

GameMastery Map Pack: Inns

Cartography by Corey Macourek

18 cards, full color, $12.99

GameMastery Flip-Mat: Woodlands

24"×30" foldout mat, full color, $12.99

GameMastery Item Cards: Elements of Power

54 full-color cards; $9.95

Paizo Publishing has continued to put out adventures for its *Pathfinder* periodical, but while it already has at least half a dozen such on the shelves so far, not all are as intricately staged as ***Into the Haunted Forest.*** The company has combined four releases to tell one story -- and no, that's not as cheesy as it sounds.

The adventure that sits at the center of it all is a brief story -- a mere 16 pages, and much of that background stats or setup -- but that's probably to be expected since it's a simple effort geared toward inaugurating first-level characters.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The adventure concerns a small tavern (don't they all?) in the woods where a dispute over ownership of a magic item turns rough and puts all the guests at the inn under house arrest. To pay for the hefty damages, the pragmatic sheriff assigns the heroes to find some missing artifacts of magical and historical significance. They're not the only ones on the trail, however, and old enchantments still hold sway within the forest.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The sheriff's actions feel forced and artificial, but otherwise, this is still a decent start point. The lack of scaling notes for increasing the difficulty makes using the product with more experienced groups troublesome (the simple plot is only likely to appeal to new PCs anyway). Additionally, there are only a few obvious notes about how the adventure could be used as a springboard to later exploits. Arthfell isn't well detailed in the spare pages. There is a colorful set of NPCs called the Company of the Black Banner (one of the parties in the brawl), and since only the most bloodthirsty good guys would end up killing them, they're excellent for an ongoing rivalry.

For those who want to keep up with their progress, the sample PCs that appear at the back of each Paizo adventure are included as well. ("Progress" may be the wrong word -- they're first level here -- but at least Kyra and Merisiel have their own character portraits now instead of the "magic symbol" placeholders.)

The map pack of the inns is done in the same style as the previous ones in this series -- arrows show where the pictures connect, and one-inch squares accommodate figures for "the world's most popular fantasy roleplaying game," as the adventure's back cover says. It has good artwork, a balance between fine detail and broad utility. If there's an issue with the package, it's that it presents three public houses (the rundown flophouse, the common inn, and the wealthy hotel), and aside from separate color schemes and the aforementioned detail work, the differences are just not all that noteworthy. Furthermore, the adventure points out that at least one feature, a stairwell, must be added (or assumed) to the map to properly mirror the tavern as described in the adventure (and the description of where it should be isn't really clear-cut).

Paizo's series of flip-mats are double-sided foldout maps with one-inch squares. This one, the woodlands, shows a forested area (that's where most of this happens, after all). One side is a passage through the depths of the trees with a couple of clearings on either side; the other has a river, some standing stones, an enormous tree stump, and a bone-filled ravine of sorts. A second map product? Yes, but the selling point on the flip-mats is the treatment given their surface. Wet and dry-erase markers -- *and* permanent markers -- can be employed, and all wipe off easily. The major features are arranged such that Game Masters can fold the maps over to show only one at a time, depending on the needs of the scene. Several points in the adventure instruct the GM to keep only such-and-such an item showing. All well and good -- the map actually does fold back and forth pretty easily -- but it's still a bulky thing that isn't just going to sit flat pleasingly with all those folds pushing out like an accordion unless the GM weight sit down. Time will tell how well it suffers through repeated manipulation (the review copy seems to hold up so far . . .).

The full-color deck of item cards, showing many of the pieces of gear from throughout the story, is also on sale. One can presumably pull the matching card for whatever he -- or his enemies -- are wielding.

It isn't necessary to have all four products just to enjoy this one adventure, and neither is it some sort of cheap marketing ploy. These things stand on their own (except the adventure, which shouldn't take but a single session), useful for any number of gaming applications. The module has the necessary maps, though these are printed inside the covers. No one's going to use those for the tabletop without resorting to a photocopier or transferring them by hand. All in all, it's a clever plan that allows the gamer to spend his gold to improve the experience as he sees fit, and the highest price tags are on the most useful and reusable items.

-- Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Wings of War: Famous Aces

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Andrea Angiolino and Pier Giorgio Paglia

Illustrated by Vincenzo Auletta and Dario Calì

132 full-color, 1 3/4 by 2 3/4-inch cards, five 7 3/4-inch-square game boards, two 7½-inch long-range rulers, 36¾-inch diameter full-color counters, and 12-page full-color 7½-inch-square rulebook; $29.95

Wings of War Miniatures: Airplane Series I

1 prepainted 1/144th plastic and pewter miniature, 4 altitude segments, plastic base, airplane card, and 20-card maneuver deck; $11.95

I had the chance to examine the miniatures for *Wings of War: Famous Aces* one lunchtime at my local game store. Roj, the owner, had a complete set of the World War I biplanes sitting in a tray on the table. I gingerly picked one up and examined it closely: a Fokker DR1 or Triplane in scarlet -- Baron Manfred von Richtofen's infamous Fokker Triplane. The 1/144th scale miniature, roughly 1½ inch wide by 2½ inches long sat on a plinth 2 1/4 inches high on a just slightly larger clear plastic base. The base was marked with a firing arc and a center mark at the front and various game letters and markings at the back, along with a forward-pointing arrow. The pilotless miniature was finely detailed with a decent paint job. As I admired this and the other miniatures, Roj asked me if I fancied a game.

"Sure," I replied. "Do you know how to play?"

"Nope, but if you read the rules, I'll put the kettle on."

By the time Roj returned with the tea five minutes later, I had read the rules needed to play. Within another five minutes, I had explained those rules and we had selected our miniatures, he controlling the Red Baron's Fokker DR1, and I, William Barker's Sopwith Camel. The one-on-one aerial duel was over inside 10 minutes, me using the natural torque of the Camel's engine to make sharp turns and pepper my opponent with machine gun rounds, while Roj used the Triplane's superior maneuverability with its sharp banks and sideslips to dodge my guns. I lost, though, and the Camel went down in flames leaving the Triplane to limp home shredded (it had a single damage point remaining) but victorious. I also lost the next game, which I played against another customer who wanted to try *Wings of War,* this time controlling the Fokker DR1, but I still bought a copy of the game along with four of the miniatures.

What I got was *Famous Aces,* one of the two core base sets for *Wings of War,* the game of World War I aerial combat originally released by Italian publisher Nexus Editrice srl in 2004 and released in English by Fantasy Flight Games. The other set, *Watch Your Back!,* focuses on two-seater biplanes and on bombing and reconnaissance missions rather than aerial combat. It is designed for two to four players who control one or more aircraft who face each other in aerial combat. I chose *Famous Aces* because not only was it the game I tried, but also because the first series of miniatures is for that set. The set actually comprises of four models available -- a Fokker DR1, an Albatross DVA, a Spad XIII,

and a Sopwith Camel, each available in three different paint schemes as flown by a dozen of the conflict's famous aces.

Inside the *Famous Aces* box, I found the easy-to-read 12-page rulebook; two range rulers; various counters denoting damage and victory conditions; and five game boards to track the maneuvers and damage taken for by each airplane. There is a game board for each model in the game plus the Sopwith Triplane (for which there is currently no miniature). The game's many cards are divided into a 35-card damage deck marked with numbers between one and five, plus various icons; 22 aircraft cards; and four 20-card maneuver decks. Each miniature also came with its own aircraft card and maneuver deck.

Each aircraft card presents a top-down view of one airplane flying over green and pleasant countryside. The background information for each gives the model and its ace, squadron, and service. For example, Edward Rickenbacker's Spad XIII is of the 94th squadron of the U.S. Air Service. The game information consists of two letters, one indicating its associated maneuver deck and the other, its associated damage deck. There is also a number for its hit points. At the top of each aircraft is a single vertical line indicating its forward direction, while at the bottom, an arrow points upward.

Ever maneuver card is marked with a letter specifying its deck and thus the airplanes it can be used with. It shows the same type of countryside as the airplane cards, but instead of an airplane, an arrow runs from the bottom of the card indicating the flight path for the tactic on the card. The various maneuvers allow the plane to fly left, right, straight ahead, or even sideslip to the left or right. The most advanced move is the Immelman turn, a straight-line strategy that enables a plane to reverse its direction.

Playing *Famous Aces* is very easy. Participants select their steeds, whether an airplane card or a miniature, and receive a game board and an appropriate maneuver deck. The playing surface can either be a table or the floor, and it doesn't have to be very big. A simple aerial duel can be held over a space 18-inches square, although the rulebook includes scenarios that call for larger areas.

Once set up is complete, play consists of turns comprised of one planning phase and three movement and firing phases. In the planning phase, for each of the airplanes he controls, a player decides where it will move in that turn by selecting three maneuver cards and the order they will be revealed. In each movement and firing phase, the players simultaneously reveal a maneuver card, placing it in front of the airplane card or miniature base and aligning the beginning of the arrow on the maneuver card with the mark on the front of the card or base. The miniature or airplane card is then moved along the flight path to the arrow at the end.

Once every airplane has moved, any plane with a target in range and in its front arc can fire. Range is checked easily using the range ruler. If the target is in range, it suffers the effects of one damage card. If at half range, it suffers the effects of two cards. All damage taken is kept secret, unless the damage card indicates the firing airplane's guns have jammed or the target has been shot down. Once the number of the damage cards taken equals or exceeds the damage number for the plane, it is shot down. Optional rules inflict other damage effects, such as jamming rudders, failing engines, trailing smoke, or catching on fire. Other rules allow for aiming, losing control, and tailing.

The game's components are all high quality and in full color. The rulebook is very easy to read, and since it is written for both *Famous Aces* and *Watch Your Back!,* it offers scenarios for use with either set or combining them. Even without the target cards and two-seaters from *Watch Your Back!,* it is possible to play the scenarios included for it, though some play aspects will be lost. Also included in the rulebook is a guide to designing scenarios. On the downside, rules are not expressed for airplane height (though the stand for each miniature is segmented). and the countryside depicted on the maneuver cards looks a little too clean and does not reflect the effects of the war below. Another problem was that the tray for each model of miniature is slightly different, so packing the game could be awkward if the user forgets which model went in which box. Some historical information on the airplanes included in the game would have been an interesting bonus.

What you have with *Wings of War: Famous Aces* is a miniatures game of aerial combat using cards with just the base set rather than miniatures. Adding miniatures helps bring the game play to life with a great-looking visual element, although there are still only four models available and still only for *Famous Aces.* A game can be taught and set up in

five minutes, and simple duels fought in ten minutes. The more complex scenarios of **Watch Your Back!** take slightly longer. In addition to **Watch Your Back!,** two other sets of cards and another boxed set are available to expand the core game, plus it has a World War II sequel in the form of **Wings of War: Dawn of War.** I have since tried a multi-player game with my usual group and they found it an engaging little game, musing over whether the design could be moved further forward into the Jet Age or used with a science-fiction property like *Star Wars* or *Battlestar Galactica.* Certainly the idea of a *Star Wars* version of **Wings of War** was popular.

What **Wings of War** does is miniatures gaming without the fiddly nature of miniatures or the heavy mechanics to be found in some aerial combat board games. Indeed, it keeps everything simple, and is quick to set up and play from one game to the next. Of course, adding the miniatures is an expensive option -- especially if you get them all -- but with or without the charmingly well-done miniatures, **Wings of War: Famous Aces** is just a fun game.

-- Matthew Pook

The Omniscient Eye

How Many Terrans Can I Steal?

Assume that a widely scattered group of people disappears at exactly the same time. Maybe the same passing UFO beams them up, or they all decided that the horoscope was right to cast their individual gate spell to Yrth. Each case generates a missing person report or criminal investigation, but who would be in a position to connect all the dots if there was only one or two cases in each city or state? And how many simultaneous beam-ups would it take to spot a pattern?

Without going into specifics that vary from country to country, most first-world nations maintain a centralized database of missing-persons reports, often run by the federal police or an associated organization. (Examples include the USA's National Crime Information Center and the UK Police National Missing Persons Bureau.)

Many such organizations regularly publish statistics on missing-persons cases, and the criminologists who compile such figures are obvious candidates to notice anomalies in the numbers. Non-government possibilities include academics exploring the factors that influence missing-persons rates, civil-rights organizations (such as the Southern Poverty Law Center tracking possible racially motivated crime), journalists with an interest in a particularly hard-hit area, and freelance conspiracy theorists -- although the latter are unlikely to have either the access permissions or the statistical training needed to make good use of the data.

So, let's suppose you're an intrepid criminologist looking through the figures for evidence of alien abductions (or perhaps an overworked alien trying to meet a quota without getting into trouble). How many people can vanish before it creates a noticeable "blip" in the missing-persons statistics?

The raw numbers are surprisingly large. In the United States, for example, over 800,000 people are reported missing every year -- on average, about 2,300 a day. Many of those cases are false alarms or deliberate disappearances. Some are people who've come to grief, either by accident or foul play. A few are due to "catastrophes" (here, anything that causes large numbers of missing-persons reports in a single event), and a small minority of cases remain unsolved.

Let's start by looking at some (fictional) data for the USA's daily missing-persons reports over a four-week period (Figure 1):

Figure 1

Figure 1

Obviously, the daily count doesn't just sit on that average of 2,300; there's a weekly cycle in the data. The day of the week affects whether people are working at a desk or trekking through the wilderness, and it also influences how long it takes for disappearances to be noticed -- many people who disappear over the weekend aren't reported missing until they fail to show up at work the next week. Seasonal changes and holidays (not shown here) also influence these counts, and many other factors can play a part.

A statistician looking for anomalies could start by trying to estimate these effects, so they can be taken into account. If you have enough data to work from, you can get an idea of what a "typical Tuesday in June" ought to look like, and work from there. Holidays get a bit trickier, and holidays like Easter that move around in the calendar are worse -- that movement makes it harder to figure out just what their effects will be.

For the moment, let's make some simple but generous assumptions:

- People go missing at random with individually extremely low probability from a very large pool.
- The probability at which people go missing is not random, but depends on a few identifiable factors.
- Our statistician has enough data to estimate with great accuracy the underlying rate at which people go missing at each time point.

Under these assumptions, a statistician can calculate how many people would be expected to go missing in any given unit of time (call this baseline figure *N*). For each time unit, subtract *N* from the observed count for that day. What remains is the "residual" (Figure 2):

Figure 2

Figure 2

The residuals show several things that were previously concealed by the regular day-to-day variations. There's a spike around the 11th of the month, and other smaller fluctuations all through the data. But we'd expect random noise to cause some deviation from the baseline anyway; how do we tell if a blip is too large to be random?

Under the above assumptions, the standard deviation of the number of people reported missing is around the square root of N. The actual random "noise" seen in the missing person count is at least as large as that "ideal" amount. A reported number that is two standard deviations above or below the prediction is fairly commonplace, and unlikely to attract suspicion; more than four standard deviations would be pretty strong evidence that something fishy was going on.

In practice, those assumptions don't hold. A more conservative approach is required (indeed, it's possible for the complications to make the standard deviation of the prediction -- and the ensuing uncertainty in the rate at which people go missing -- increase at a faster-than-square-root rate). However, as a rough rule of thumb, if you'd normally expect to see N people go missing, a "blip" of about 5 sqrt(N) will be detectable -- and likely eventually detected -- by a good statistician with access to good-quality law-enforcement data.

For instance, if we know that a given Thursday ought to have about 2,500 missing persons, we're talking about a "blip" of around 250+ persons (5*sqrt(2500)); the count starts looking suspicious above 2,750.

So if the aliens restrict themselves to 200 people, they will probably go unnoticed. But remember, the rest of the count is still subject to random variation; it's quite possible for that noise to bump the total up by an extra 50 or 100 people, making it high enough to arouse suspicion. If the aliens want to play it safe, they should restrict themselves to about 2*sqrt(N) -- for the USA, that's about 100 people. (On the weekends, they might be able to get away with slightly more -- the same delays in reporting that cause that drop also smear out the reports from the aliens' abductions over several days, making them a little harder to spot.)

Remembering that N (and so, sqrt(N)) varies from day to day, let's look at the residuals again (Figure 3):

Figure 3

?

Figure 3

[insert figure 3: http://www.flickr.com/photos/59012110@N00/2100605844/]

This demonstrates that the other fluctuations are unremarkable, but the spike around the 11th is much larger than is expected from random noise alone. Checking through the records, the investigator discovers that a hurricane hit that weekend, leading to hundreds of people being reported missing.

Fortunately, the USA classifies its missing-persons reports by type. Investigators can exclude known "catastrophes" from the data -- indeed, they should do this from the start -- and look at what remains. With the catastrophes removed (Figure 4), everything left is well within the bounds of believable random noise:

Figure 4

?

Figure 4

What if the investigator only has access to the monthly totals? (This is very likely to be the case for any non-government reviewer; even those with full access to the data might not bother to look at day-by-day figures without some reason for suspicion.) The same basic principles apply: Estimate what the count *ought* to be over that period, excluding catastrophes, and look at the residuals, using $5*\text{sqrt}(N)$ as a test for significance and $2*\text{sqrt}(N)$ for cautious aliens. Over a month, the expected count is around 70,000, giving $\text{sqrt}(N)$ about 265; the aliens can take about 530 people with little risk of detection, but they can't take 100 people every night -- one blip of that size might be unremarkable, but when it's repeated night after night for a month, it stands out.

For periods longer than a month, it becomes harder and harder to get good estimates of N; if the 2007 figures show 10,000 more disappearances than the previous year, that could just mean that society has changed and people are more prone to going missing. If aliens start small and build their numbers up gradually, they'll eventually corrupt the estimation process itself as their activities creep into society's ideas of what the "typical" missing-persons rate is. (Of course, if their abduction ray breaks down, a sudden sharp *drop* in the missing-persons rate might attract attention . . .)

But that's not the end of the story. While the raw numbers are huge, the vast majority of those cases are eventually resolved; some years, the cleanup rate is higher than the rate at which new reports come in. Overall, around 1% of cases (about 20-25 per day) remain unsolved.

So let's wait a while, filter out the cases that got resolved within a year, and look at what's left (Figure 5):

Figure 5

Figure 5

This graph looks pretty suspicious, with not one but two sharp spikes that were previously hidden by the resolved cases. But could they be random noise? The rule of thumb remains the same -- around $5*\text{sqrt}(N)$ -- but because this examines only a small subcategory of disappearances, N and $\text{sqrt}(N)$ are much smaller. Compare the residuals to that threshold (Figure 6):

Figure 6

Figure 6

The residuals for the 11th, 12th, and 22nd are all over 5*sqrt(N), far higher than could be expect from random noise. By now, the criminologists have whittled down the numbers enough that they can afford to go through individual case reports looking for common factors and possible explanations. (For instance, it could be that some of the missing persons around the 11th are just hurricane victims who've been classified wrongly.) If no mundane explanation shows up, it's pretty clear that something mysterious is going on.

From there, a suspicious investigator might think to look at the demographic mix of these missing persons. Most real-life missing persons are juveniles, but aliens picking people completely at random get a higher proportion of adults. Targeting specific areas or racial groups may also draw attention if somebody happens to be keeping tabs on them.

So, if the investigator is patient enough to wait for good-quality data, the aliens are severely limited -- even in a country the size of the USA, abducting just 25 people overnight will probably get them noticed; to be safe, they need to restrict themselves to about 10. All in all, they're better off focusing on people who won't be missed, or in countries that don't keep good records . . . and preferably, planning their kidnappings somewhere around Easter.

Further Reading

- http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cjisd/missingpersons.htm -- US National Crime Information Center figures on missing persons (source for some of the above, includes breakdowns by category, etc).
- http://www.afp.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/17175/TrendsandIssuesPaper.pdf -- Australian Institute of Criminology analysis of Australian missing-persons figures. (Annual rate around 30,000 reports, eventual cleanup rate around 99%, with 86% located within one week of being reported missing; also contains breakdowns of who goes missing, why, and when they're reported.)

--Geoffrey Brent & Glen Barnett

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore 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

Blood! The Roleplaying Game of Modern Horror

Published by Postmortem Studios

Designed by James "Grim" Desborough, Norley Tucker, Paul Campion, and Steve Osborn

Illustrated by Gavin Hargest, Darkzel, Bradley K. McDevitt, James "Grim" Desborough, and Paul Campion

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When ***Blood! The Roleplaying Game of Modern Horror*** appeared in 1990, it was a quintessentially British game of visceral horror heavily influenced by the genre films of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as by the works of authors Clive Barker, Shaun Hutson, and Graham Masterton. It was intended as a self-aware gorefest with heavy mechanics that centered on a weapons list that included items as domestic and deadly as the kettle, the toilet lid, and the wheelie bin. It also provided a set of critical hit tables that detailed the ultimate effects of everything from the bite (large and small) to the power tool (the drill, the sander, and the chainsaw). The game's rules encompassed not just hit points lost but also blood loss, meaning that victims could quite literally bleed to death.

If that first edition of ***Blood!*** had any failings, it was in the lack of monsters and any rules for handling the psychological impact of see frightful monsters and suffering grievous bodily harm. In hindsight, the self-published game was never really going to be a success, given it that it was released not long before roleplaying the horror genre turned to navel gazing.

So it is no surprise that ***Blood!*** disappeared, forgotten except for the likes of this reviewer and James Desborough, who has given the game a thorough overhaul and an update to take account of changes in the horror genre since 1990. Now it covers not only slasher flicks, video nasties, and gross-out horror, but also the psychological horror of *Ringu,* the cosmic horror of H.P. Lovecraft, and the survival horror of ***Resident Evil*** and ***Silent Hill.*** It adds more monsters and a sanity-loss mechanic, but it does not get away from its original remit: pitching ordinary folk against the hideous horror of both manmade and supernatural origins. It also retains the same crunchy mechanics, with players needing to keep track of Hit Points, Blood Points, Energy Points, and Mind Points during play. The impression is that roleplaying a session or two of ***Blood!*** is intended to be something of an ordeal, just like the films it is inspired by.

The crunch starts with character generation, percentile dice being rolled for nine primary attributes and another 24 factors derived from those. Even generating the primary attributes is not that straightforward; a player could need to roll more than nine times to get results that fit within the ranges given for each attribute. Points to spend on mental and physical skills are derived from the primary attributes, modified by a player's roll on the Education Table (a better education giving more mental skill points; a poorer one providing more physical skill points). In the first edition of ***Blood!,*** the Education Table was geared to toward the English education system of the 1980s. Here it is has been made more generic to fit that of any wealthy Western nation.

A player selects an occupation that furnishes his character with roughly 10 core skills. The base for most skills is half its associated attribute, though some skills (such as Body Building, Toughness, Martial Arts, and Weapons Training)

start off at a mere 1d6's worth. The range of given occupations is quite diverse, taking in the ordinary as well as more typical RPG professions: Along with the Archaeologist, Journalist, Policeman, and Scientist, Blood! lists Bimbo (or Himbo), Child, Parent, Retail Worker, Service Worker, Social Worker, and Teacher. Not only do these keep with the genre, but they also enforce the game's down-at-heel grubby feel. Over all, character generation is not a lengthy process, but it does require some arithmetic. The last step a player needs to do is to come up with a roleplaying tag or two.

Although *Blood!* uses various dice (primarily for damage), it is essentially a percentile system. Rolling low is good, with rolls of a tenth of an attribute or skill counting as a critical success, while critical failures occur less frequently as a skill improves. Repeated or critically successful skill use grants a chance for skill improvement, as do skill failures. Conversely, skills can degrade if they are not used during the game.

Of course, the meat of *Blood!* is its combat system, along with a certain amount of bookkeeping. A player must keep track of his character's Action Points (per turn), Hit Points, Blood Points, Mind Points, and optionally, his Energy Points. Accidents and getting hit in combat reduce a character's Hit Points, the amount and type of damage taken determining the initial Blood Point loss and any subsequent loss through bleeding. Severe Blood loss inflicts crippling penalties to skill and attribute checks. Both Action and Energy Points are spent during the exertions of combat, although Energy Points (if the GM opts to use these) are lost along with the loss of Blood Points. The visceral feel of the combat mechanics are enhanced by the Critical Hit Tables, rolled on whenever a victim or target suffers a critical hit or he has lost all of his Hit Points and is hit again. The results on these tables are extremely gruesome and have extra effects. For example, this is an entry on the Power Tool One: Drill table:

> 68-73: The drill slams through your hand and jams there, the spinning bit scraping on bone and flesh but failing to tug free, spinning in vain circles as they try to pull it from you once more. Double blood loss, Exert Strength check to pull free, hand disabled until the drill is pulled out.

Along with its new sanity mechanic, the latest edition of *Blood!* now has a wider -- though still small -- selection of monsters and diseases that show off the game's diverse influences. Alongside the traditional zombies, vampires, and psychopaths, there are also the Blob, Angels of Pain (or Cenobites), and Vampire Brains. The diseases include Fury Virus (*28 Days Later*), Insanity Fog (*The Fog*), and Star Blindness (*The Day of the Triffids*), as well as the more ordinary rabies and infected wounds. Each monster is described in detail, particularly its Fear Effect, and is accompanied by several adventure seeds. Of course, any GM wanting more monsters will find any number of sourcebooks to suit his tastes, but Pelgrane Press' The Book of Unremitting Horror would be this reviewer's first choice.

Although there are no scenarios in *Blood!,* there are plenty of adventure seeds and lots of movie references for inspiration. Surprisingly, the GM advice is placed right at the front of the book after the author of this new edition explains what *Blood!* is and its history. The advice is clear and simple, even blunt, but this is intentional given the nature of the game. Perhaps the most appropriate piece of advice is ". . . to keep it moist!" That said, the GM's advice chapter does not address campaign play, a pity because it keeps the default play style to the one shot.

Physically, *Blood!* is a heavy-looking book, including the artwork, some of which has been carried over from the first edition. The heavy appearance applies in particular to the tables (though oddly not the Critical Hit Tables), making them a little hard on the eye. It does need another edit, but it at least has an index and examples of character generation and combat. That said, this being a table-intensive game, it would have been helpful to have had them reprinted in one place for reference. Another problem is the character sheet: *Blood!* describes itself as running against the current trend for rules-light games. Although this is true -- *Blood!* is heavy on rules with lots of numbers to keep track of -- the character sheet for *Blood!* seems designed for a rules-light game; it lacks the tables to track all the numbers players have to in this game.

The original *Blood! The Roleplaying Game of Modern Horror* has become nothing more than a curiosity of gaming history. It was playable but rough around the edges and lacking in all of the necessities of a horror RPG. The Postmortem Studios edition addresses these omissions and updates its feel so that it is no longer quite so British or quirky. Not only is it now more generic, it is also more accessible and capable of doing other horror subgenres. Despite

the changes, the new edition retains the original game's visceral and sanguinary nature, meaning that **_Blood! The Roleplaying Game of Modern Horror_** still lives up to its title.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Jungle Speed

Distributed by Asmodée Editions

Created by Tom & Yako

Full-color card game with 80 cards (for the newer, extended version; the original set has 64), one wooden totem, jungle-print cloth drawstring bag, rules; $21.99

The competition in the jungles is savage, and only the most vicious creatures survive. Born of this hostile environment is one of the deadliest contests ever to arise from the Cradle of Civilization or one of those tropically forested areas archaeologists are so keen to dig up. Anyway, the game -- *Jungle Speed* -- is a whole lot easier to obtain and requires no plane tickets or immunization shots.

The object of the game is to be the first player to empty his deck of cards.

The deck is divided evenly among three to eight players, and each puts their portion in front of him. The cards show fancy little symbols of different colors. The totem, a wooden stick, is placed upright in the center of the table where everyone can get at it (lunge at it, really).

The first player flips his top card so everyone can see it. He must turn it away from himself, toward the center of the table, which means opponents have just a tiny advantage in seeing it first. Everyone does this in turn until someone reveals a card with a symbol that matches another already showing on the table. Those two rivals have a duel: The first to grab the totem wins the contest, and the loser has to take all the cards the winner has piled up in front of him so far. The hapless player adds these to his deck and plays the next card.

Most of the time it's a symbol-matching operation, but a few cards shake things up. One shows all gray arrows pointing inward -- when this comes out, everyone makes a grab for the stick. The winner puts all his flipped cards under the totem, to be forced into the hand of the next person to foul up. (If someone grabs the stick when they shouldn't -- when the duel is between two other players, say, or if they mistake which symbols are showing -- they must take all the cards from all the players.) Another shows the same arrows pointing outward -- this requires that everyone flip a card at once, which may provoke multiple or three-way duels among the assembly. Finally, the multicolored arrows demand matches be based on color instead of symbol until a duel occurs.

Play continues with decks growing and shrinking until someone finally gets rid of all their cards. It's not enough to flip them all up; they must be dispensed through duels or some such. The first to achieve this wins the game.

The pieces are pretty simple but they're solid. A cloth bag (they come in different colors with tiger-striped patterns) may not be the ideal way to store and transport a deck, but the cards are decent stock and seem ready to take some punishment. Fortunately this game takes most mutilations off the cards and foists them onto the totem. This pleasingly graspable chunk of wood is steady on the tabletop and, no matter the competition to grab it, almost never goes flying off into the crowd of spectators that inevitably forms when this game is being played. (The thing resembles nothing so much as the fist-sized dowel Ashley Judd used to beat the stew out of people in the movie *Twisted*.) The cards aren't just stiff, they're bright and colorful. They're also square, which centers the picture nicely but makes shuffling and dealing a little slower. Fortunately you don't have to shuffle more than once a game, but you're going to want to play another round.

Players soon learn caution about these cute and pretty pictures: There are multiple devious designs in the deck that

kind of resemble each other. None of the differences are so subtle that a reasonable person would miss them, but most reasonable people aren't sweating like a distance runner with each fresh discard. The small pause as the player turns his next card seems such a little thing, but it really makes a difference, especially to the guy directly across from him.

Jungle Speed may seem like a simple Crazy Eights or *Uno* variation, but it doesn't feel like it when scrabbling for the totem in such an undignified manner. A game of *Jungle Speed* only takes about 15 minutes, so getting multiple rounds in is easy. It's billed as a family game, but parents should consider the issues of speed and reach; the participants can't be too far off from each other in their physical abilities. Of course, this assumes one hasn't a razor-sharp child with better pattern-recognition skills. Then junior's got all the time in the world to snatch the prize out from under dimwitted mom and dad, and their only advantage is the vocabulary needed for trash-talking.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

The Equipped and the Dead

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

"What has it got in its pocketses? Not string, precious, but not nothing."
-- Gollum, *The Hobbit*

Part of the work -- and enjoyment -- in playtesting **GURPS High-Tech** was deciding what tools, weapons, and other gear characters were most likely to have and/or need in the course of an adventure. Much of the reward in any dungeon crawl or post-holocaust campaign comes from looting the bodies of your enemies. The logical -- and fun -- way to tackle this is to design characters from different eras and walks of life.

Some of the characters described below are suitable as Enemies or the "before" stage of a metavillain (or even a superhero PC). Others may be Allies, Contacts, Patrons, Dependents, or just innocent bystanders when the GM needs someone to show how the monster works -- and to become bodies to loot afterwards.

Pete Muskie   *25 points*

Peter Carson Muskie had never liked farming, and when he heard that gold had been discovered in California, he quickly abandoned everything and headed west. He stayed there until 1857, when his father died and bequeathed him half of their small farm. He returned home but soon grew bored again; when the Civil War broke out, he eagerly enlisted in the Army of Georgia. After the war ended, he returned home yet again, to find his farm destroyed by Sherman's forces.

Following a long drinking binge, Muskie decided that he'd been happiest when he was prospecting. He sold his remaining property and set off for Butte, Montana, when heard gold had been found there. After that, he followed rumors of gold and silver strikes across much of Northern America. In 1878, he settled in a small cave in the hills near Tombstone, where a tiny pool fed by an underground stream provides just enough murky water for him to survive.

Muskie avoids human company (especially women) except when he needs to buy supplies. He scorns most luxuries, except tobacco, coffee, and three books that he frequently rereads: the Bible, Shakespeare's plays (particularly *Timon of Athens*), and Thoreau's *Walden,* all of which convince him that his decision to become a hermit was the right one.

5'8", 130 lbs., Age 52. Weathered brown complexion, unruly hair and beard (white, when clean), gray eyes.

TL: 5. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western. *Languages:* English (Native); Spanish (Broken) [2].

ST 11 [10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 1 [0]; HT 11 [10].

Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 12 [10]; Per 11 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Acute Vision 3 [6]; High Pain Threshold [10].

Disadvantages: Hard of Hearing [-10]; Horrible Hangovers [-1]; Loner [-5]; Minor Addictions (Coffee and Tobacco) [-1]; Missing Digit [-2]; Odious Personal Habits (Rarely washes, -2 to reaction rolls) [-10]; Poverty (Poor) [-20]; Shy around women [-1].

Skills: Animal Handling (Donkey) (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Farming/TL5 (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Guns/TL5 (Shotgun) (E) DX+1 [2]-11, (Rifle) [0]-9; Melee Weapon (Two-Handed Axe-Mace) (A) DX [2]-10;

Packing (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Prospecting/TL5 (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Sewing (E) DX [1]-10; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-10; Soldier (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Survival (Mountains) (A) Per+1 [4]-11; Throwing Weapon (Axe) (E) DX [1]-10.

Gear: Being too poor to afford a pack animal, much less a house, Pete limits his possessions to what he can carry on his back. However, most of his $1,000 starting wealth was spent the "adventuring gear" he needs for prospecting and surviving: pickaxe; shovel; large knife; hatchet; Remington Hammer Lifter 12G shotgun (p. HT104) and 20 rounds of ammo (10 birdshot, 10 buckshot); blanket roll (p. HT56); 20 yards of 1/2" hemp rope; charcoal-filtered canteen (p. HT53); ordinary clothes; long coat; boots; broad-brimmed felt hat; small backpack; personal basics; candle lantern and 1 lb. tallow candles (p. HT51); flint and steel; hobo knife; 1 lb. canned food; 2 lbs. desiccated vegetables (p. HT34); 2 lbs. jerky; 10 lbs. hardtack; 1 lb. coffee; tobacco box with 1 lb. tobacco; 3 books; sewing kit. Total weight of this gear is 90 lbs. and total cost is $818. Heavy Encumbrance.

Campaign Uses: Pete is the archetypal "strange old hermit" who lives out in the mountains and is always first to find the villains' hideout, the strange meteorite, or the dinosaur footprints (fossilized or fresh). Of course, even when he comes into town and tells these stories, no one ever believes him except for the heroes . . .

Pete can also serve as a guide to largely unexplored regions, a rescuer for characters stranded in the mountains, or a hazard for travelers who disturb his solitude (though he only expends ammunition on the most persistent and annoying).

Other Settings: Versions of Pete may be found in any sparsely populated area where there's rumored to be valuable ore, including off-world colonies -- the main difference is likely to be his choice of weapons and the light sources and food he carries! To turn him into a 49er, replace his shotgun with a Kentucky Rifle. In Australia's or South Africa's gold fields later in the century, he's more likely to carry a newer shotgun, a .303 Enfield or a .22 rifle. A modern-day fossicker might not own a gun but would probably have a metal detector (p. UT50) as well as other survival gear, and might be looking for something other than gold -- gems, fossils, pirate treasure -- but most of his skills and gear would not have changed at all.

Joanna Strauss   100 points

Joanna (Joe) Strauss was born in Indiana in the same hour that the Wright brothers made their first successful flight. When she learned this, shortly before her tenth birthday, she became obsessed with becoming a pilot and owning a plane. She worked as a cleaner at an airfield, then an apprentice mechanic, then a wing-walker, and in 1923, bought a war-surplus biplane for $200 and spent four happy years as a barnstorming stunt pilot before a series of well-publicized accidents brought about tougher air-safety regulations. Many barnstormers quit, but Joe, who had just bought a new plane and was awe-struck by Lindbergh's solo trans-Atlantic flight, was determined to keep flying. Over the next few years, she worked at various times dusting crops, delivering mail, and performing stunts in Hollywood movies and with flying circuses on the barnstorming circuit.

When the Lindbergh baby was kidnapped in 1932, the outraged Joe flew to New Jersey to help with locating the toddler. Though the hunt ended with the discovery of a child's corpse, Joe decided that search-and-rescue missions and tracking down criminals was even more fulfilling than barnstorming. She was soon working for bailbondsmen as a bounty hunter between her other jobs.

Joanna's not a violent person by nature, but she can box and shoot and will do so to protect the innocent, her country, or her beloved plane.

5'10", 120 lbs., Age 30ish. Tanned complexion, short untidy blond hair, bright blue eyes.

TL: 6. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western. *Languages:* English (Native); German (Accented) [4].

ST 10 [0]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 11 [10].

Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Acute Vision 2 [4]; Daredevil [15]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Temperature Tolerance 1 [1].

Disadvantages: Chauvinistic [-1]; Easy to Read [-10]; Incompetence (Administration) [-1]; Loves Disney cartoons [-1]; Obsession (Flying) [-1]; Overconfidence (9) [-7]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10]; Responsive [-1]; Sense of Duty (Patriot) [-10]; Skinny [-5].

Skills: Area Knowledge (North America) (E) IQ [1]-11; Astronomy/TL6 (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Boxing (A) DX [2]-13; Current Affairs/TL6 (Headline News) (E) IQ [1]-11; Driving/TL6 (Automobile) (A) DX-1 [1]-12; First Aid/TL6 (E) IQ [1]-11; Geography/TL6 (Physical) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Guns/TL6 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-13; Mechanic/TL6 (Airplane engines) (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Merchant (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Meteorology/TL6 (E) IQ [1]-11; Navigation/TL6 (Air) (A) IQ [2]-11; Piloting/TL6 (Light Airplane)(A) DX +3 [12]-16; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-12; Survival (Plains) (A) Per [2]-11.

Gear: Joe is a TL6 character with starting wealth of $5,000 (Struggling) and a monthly income of $800 (from freelance); her cost of living is typically $600 per month. She usually sleeps under her plane and eats packaged food, though she occasionally splashes out on a hotel room (more for the bath than the bed) and a meal in a diner. Her pride is a war-surplus Dayton-Wright DH-4 biplane (unarmed) (p. HT233) for $3,000. She carries a Webley Mk VI revolver, plus 20 rounds, belt holster, and leather lanyard. She wears a leather jacket, leather helmet, leather gloves, and combat boots over a suit of cheap winter clothes, with a wristwatch, money belt and goggles. Her pockets contain a multi-function knife, duct tape, compass, hobo knife (p. HT57), mini flashlight, and personal basics ($6). Her other gear is stored in her plane: portable took kit (Mechanic: Light Airplane); soldier's small first aid kit (p. HT22); hatchet; gun cleaning kit; folding shovel; spare suit of ordinary clothes; cheap grooming kit; towel; 4 lb. canned food; 0.5 lb. jerky; 6 lbs. hard tack; can opener; pocket spyglass; small backpack; canteen; survival fishing kit; sleeping bag; tarp; camp stove (p. HT57); mirror; and 4 spare batteries for the flashlight. Total cost is $4,865.50, leaving Joe with $114.50 to spend on fuel, food, and accommodation as needed. Excluding the plane, her worldly goods weigh 86.95 lbs., easily stored in the plane, or even carried on her person.

Campaign Uses: Joe can be used as a player character, a helpful Ally or NPC air support in a *Cliffhangers* adventure or in any setting from Roaring 20s horror through World War II or even the 1950s, changing nothing but her age. She can also be converted into a villain simply by shifting her Sense of Duty to another regime such as Nazi Germany (an accusation leveled at her hero, Lindbergh) or an organization such as the KKK.

Other Settings: Barnstorming was only common for a short period in American history, but an independent flyer like Joe might also be found flying from community to community in Hell Parallels and other timelines such as Steel (p. B528).

Lew Scanlon   *100 points*

Lewis Scanlon was born in 1949 in his parents' home in Beulah and, barring two tours of duty in 'Nam, has lived all of his life in that same house.

Beulah's glory days ended when first the railway, then the highway, bypassed it. It is now little more than a ghost town cut off from the outside world by the surrounding hills. This suits Scanlon, who believes that the economically depressed town's isolation, supply of fresh water from underground streams, and remoteness from any large city or military base make it likely to survive the nuclear war he is sure is inevitable.

Scanlon dropped out of school in his early teens, and he enlisted in the army as soon as they would accept him. He started as an infantryman, but he injured his foot treading on a punji stick and was re-assigned to the motor pool, rising to the position of supply sergeant. While in the job, he mailed weapons and other gear home before being discharged for misconduct in 1973. He returned to Beulah, taking a job as a clerk in the hardware store. He inherited the house when his mother died a year later. Since then, he's been obsessively building and stocking a fallout shelter

inside its walls and beneath its floor, as well as creating an impressive arsenal to help him survive the collapse of civilization.

5'8", 160 lbs., Age late 20s. Tanned complexion, crewcut dark brown hair with widow's peak, bad teeth and heavy jaw, brown eyes; late 20s.

TL: 7. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western. *Languages:* English (Native); Vietnamese (Broken) [2].

ST 12 [20]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 11 [10].

Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 11 [5]; Per 11 [5]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 4 [-5].

Advantages: Contact (Street, Skill-15, Usually Reliable, 12) [8]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Temperature Tolerance 1 [1].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Unattractive) [-5]; Callous [-5]; Debt ($225/month from income of $1050) [-3]; Flashbacks, Mild [-5]; Incompetence (Singing) [-1]; Intolerance (other races) [-10]; Light sleeper [-5]; Mild phobia of helicopters [-1]; Mild paranoia, especially when drunk or stoned [-1]; Packrat -- hates throwing anything away [-1]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Uncongenial [-1].

Skills: Armoury/TL7 (Handguns and rifles) (A) IQ+3 [16]-14; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Carpentry (E) IQ [2]-11; Chemistry/TL7 (H) IQ-2 [1]-8; Cooking/TL7 (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Current Affairs/TL6 (Headline News) (E) IQ [1]-10; Driving/TL7 (Automobile) (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Expert Skill (Conspiracy Theory) (VH) IQ-3 [1]-7; Explosives/TL7 (Demolition) (A) IQ+1 [2]-10; Farming/TL7 (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; First Aid/TL6 (E) IQ [1]-10; Guns/TL7 (Rifle) (E) DX+3 [8]-14, (Pistol) [1]-11, (Shotgun) [2]-13; Intimidation (A) Will [1]-10; Mechanic/TL7 (Gasoline engine) (A) IQ [2]-10; Masonry (E) IQ [1]-10; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX+1 [2]-12, (Shortsword) (A) DX [2]-11; Merchant (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Professional Skill (Distilling) (A) IQ [2]-10; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-12; Soldier/TL7 (A) IQ [2]-10; Stealth (A) DX [2]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10; Survival (Hills) (A) Per+1 [4]-12; Traps/TL7 (A) IQ+1 [4]-11.

Gear: Lew's Struggling wealth level leaves him with the usual everyday belongings: a decaying furnished house (with home-built fallout shelter in cellar), a Ford M151 MUTT (p. HT 237) he mailed home from Vietnam, a complete wardrobe with one set of adventuring clothing (camo, web gear, helmet liner, and jungle boots), and $1,500 to spend on his survival gear.

Lew collects guns in different calibers so he can use salvaged (or stolen) ammo after the collapse: a Charleville Mle 1777; a Remington M870; a Winchester M1894 .30-30; an Armalite AR-7. His Street contacts have enabled him to buy these at black market prices (60%): S&W Model 27; Walther P38; Guide Lamp M3; Colt M16A1 with spare clip; Izhmash AKM with multi-purpose bayonet, sling, and two spare clips. He buys ammo in bulk (5% discount): 500 rounds each of 9x19mm, .38 Special, .45 ACP, 12-gauge 275mm, .22 Long Rifle, .30-30 Winchester, .223 Remington, and 7.62x39mm. His handloading and gunsmithing gear includes bullet-molding equipment for 17.5mm musket ball; Reloading press with gauges, scales, and dies for .38 Special; extra dies for 9x19mm, .45 ACP, 12-guage, .223 Remington, 7.62mmx39mm, and .30-30 Winchester; a portable tool kit (Armoury), and gun cleaning kit. He also keeps a slingshot for hunting, and a cheap machete, cheap chainsaw, and double-bitted axe for odd jobs. He routinely carries a TL7 covert survival kit (p. HT59) and push knife in his money belt, plus sunglasses, personal basics, pocket torch, duct tape, and Superglue.

His shelter contains a semi-portable muscle power generator (p. HT14); camp shower; chemical toilet; cast-iron cook stove; 2 lbs. tallow candles; and a cache of wheat, honey, and salt intended to feed him for a year. His Scrounging skill has let him build a still (p. HT15) out of $20 of salvaged parts. His other gear includes: belt holster; rifle scabbard; ear plugs; rechargeable batteries; typewriter; cheap portable tool kit (Mechanic); folding shovel; grinder; sledge-hammer; hydraulic jack; small fire extinguisher; cheap wind-up wristwatch; heavy flashlight; tarp; emergency blanket; solar water filter; pack of 30 fuel tablets; cheap personal mess kit; respirator; camouflage net; large first aid kit; 1 gallon 80% alcohol; and 5 gallons gasoline. This leaves him in debt, with only 50 cents cash in his pocket.

Campaign Uses: Lew can be used as a player character, an Ally, or an Enemy, in any setting post-World War II to

modern day, with only a little tweaking. He may provide fellow survivalists with weapons or a refuge, or pose a problem for cops, supers, or bounty hunters. In a horror campaign, he may be a serial killer, or his fortified house could be the ideal place for a last stand against the undead horde.

Other Settings: In a Hell Parallel or other post-apocalypse setting, Lew may well become a minor warlord, using his supplies to equip a small army.

Adam Moore *50 points*

Adam Moore was born in the late 1987, the only child of a moderately successful patent lawyer and a software engineer. His parents became millionaires shortly before his fifth birthday. After that, their wealth increased exponentially.

Adam has been indulged for most of his life. While well-educated and computer literate, he prefers physical pursuits to intellectual ones. Accustomed to getting his own way, he tends to avoid team sports in favor of solitary extreme sports such as parkour, paintballing, bouldering, buildering, cave-diving, and hang-gliding. He is also dying of a cerebral tumor and wants to experience as much of life as possible while he can -- even if he kills himself in the process. He does his best to keep his condition a secret, as well as making sure that his father never finds out something his mother has told him: he's not really his son. Being disinherited might not kill him, but it would certainly make his remaining years much less comfortable

5'11", 180 lbs., Age early 20s. Tanned complexion, short strawberry blond hair, green eyes; early 20s.

TL: 7. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western. *Languages:* English (Native); Japanese (Broken) [2].

ST 11 [20]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 10 [0].

Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive) [5]; Fearlessness 1 [2]; Fit [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Honest Face [1]; Status 1 [Free with Wealth]; Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30].

Disadvantages: Alcohol Intolerance [-1]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Compulsive Behavior (Compulsive Spending) (9) [-7]; Impulsiveness (15) [-5]; Incompetence (Housekeeping) [-1]; Mild kink for female athletes and cheerleaders [-1]; On the Edge (15) [-7]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot Kill) [-15]; Responsive [-1]; Secret (Illegitimacy) [-10]; Secret (Terminally Ill) [-5]; Terminally Ill (2 years) [-50].

Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [4]-11; Boating/TL8 (Canoe) (A) DX [2]-11; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ [4]-13; Computer Programming (H) IQ [4]-11; Diving Suit/TL7 (Scuba) (A) IQ [2]; Driving/TL8 (Car) (A) DX +1 [4]-12; Climbing (A) DX [4]-12; First Aid/TL7 (E) IQ [1]-11; Guns/TL7 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Karate (H) DX-2 [1]-9; Judo (H) DX-2 [1]-9; Lifesaving (H) Swimming-4 [2]-8; Motion Picture Camera (A) Parachuting (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Navigation/TL8 (Ground) (A) IQ [2]-11; Photography-1 [2]-10; Photography/TL7 (A) IQ [2]-11; Piloting/TL (Glider) (A) DX [2]-11; Research/TL7 (A) IQ [2]-11; Scaling (H) Climbing-2 [2]; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-11; Skiing (H) HT [4]-10; Survival (Mountains) (A) Per [4]-12; Swimming (E) DX+1 [2]-12.

Gear: Adam's Compulsive Behavior (Compulsive Spending) disadvantage means that he often buys the most expensive model commercially available, assuming that what's costly and fashionable must also be of high quality. His high-status lifestyle costs $1,200 per month; his starting wealth is $200,000, of which $40,000 can be spent on adventuring gear.

His complete wardrobe costs over $3,000 and is far too large to fit into his luggage. His usual adventuring garb is expensive but sturdy summer or winter clothes with expensive comfortable sneakers, designer sunglasses, a money belt, and a $400 waterproof gadget watch, with functions that include compass, altimeter (for climbing and hang-

gliding) and depth gauge (for diving). He doesn't believe in body armor -- he's scared of being kidnapped, rather than shot -- but he wears a hockey helmet when need be. At his father's insistence, he also carries a personal rescue beacon (p. HT60) and a new-model "kitchen sink" cellular phone, which includes a PDA, GPS, digital camera, and audio media player ($600, 0.5 lbs.). His personal basics cost $300.

The following gear is divided between his large fine-quality backpack and the rear of his favorite car, a Porsche Cayenne SUV: Kahr K90 and pepper spray (p. HT180) for protection; NSG SplatMaster for paintballing; a speargun; multi-function knife; smart flashlight (p. HT52); mini-flashlight (belt or helmet mounted); 10 chemlights; scuba gear with spare medium tank, wet suit, and snorkel; covert survival kit (p. HT59); laser rescue flare (p. HT58); mini-DV camera with 4 cassettes and underwater housing; pocket weather station (p. HT50); mini-rappel kit (p. HT55); crampons; skis; ice axe; sleeping bag; personal tent; emergency blanket; large first aid kit containing foot powder, insect repellant, salt tablets, sunscreen, and analgesic; camp shower; towel; water pack; 2 lbs. trail food; 4 high-energy snacks; 2 MREs; 2 sports drinks; espresso maker; miniature muscle-powered generator; solar-powered battery recharger; rechargeable batteries; superglue; pocket torch; 10 lbs. of extra clothing (including at least one suit of high-fashion attire and handmade shoes). The SUV also contains at least one of the following: off-road bike, sports kayak, or hang-glider.

Total cost is $13,128.50 -- less than a fifth of his cash. Excluding the vehicles, scuba gear, skis, and backpack, his equipment weighs 69.26 lbs. -- light enough to fit into the pack, if he were so inclined.

Campaign Uses: Adam is designed for use as an Ally or even a Patron. He would make a useful sidekick for a superhero. He might even be used as a PC in a campaign, particularly one that offered a potential magical or superscience method of prolonging his life. While not particularly interested in further wealth, he might also be tempted into villainy in a quest for immortality. Alternatively, he may need rescuing -- and his much wealthier father is likely to repay anyone who saves his son with Favors and a very high-placed Business Contact as well as cash and state-of-the-art computing gear.

Other Settings: Wealthy tourists are staples of adventure fiction, particularly westerns (many of Chaucer's richer pilgrims also treated their trip to Canterbury as a vacation). Adam may choose to be cryogenically preserved rather than die, and wake up in a much later era with largely obsolete skills -- with or without his wealth.

Adventure Seeds

Zulu Time *(Old West/Deadlands).* After being captured by an enemy, the PCs manage to escape -- but they're near-naked, with no chance of arming or equipping themselves. After a day-long trek across the desert, they find Pete Muskie's cave. They are told that they're still three days away from the nearest town or house or any other source of water. The PCs also have reason to suspect that their enemies are tracking them and are not far behind them.

If they can persuade Pete to shelter them, they'll have the protection of his cave (approximately 3 yards by 2 yards, with an entrance 1 yard high by 2 yards wide 4' up a cliff), and a small amount of water (his pool holds 7 quarts, and replenishes at the rate of 1d+1 quarts/day). On a Very Good or better reaction roll, Pete may even feed them and lend them weapons. If his reaction is Bad or worse, he may shoot them himself, thinking they're after his gold.

This adventure can be adapted for any setting up to *GURPS Space,* only the nature of the enemy need be changed. The scenario can also be used with Lew Scanlon's house as the setting for the PCs' last stand against some unspeakable horror -- though Scanlon is much more likely to sacrifice one or more of the heroes to buy some time.

Air Sickness *(Cliffhangers).* The heroes track down a group of Axis saboteurs and learn that they've launched balloons spreading biological weapons. The only plane the PCs can commandeer in time to stop them is Joanna Strauss's unarmed biplane.

To complicate things, some of the saboteurs have escaped and are likely to try shooting the plane from the ground. If Joe is wounded, the PCs may have to fly her plane themselves.

Plane Crazy *(Cliffhangers).* A saboteur places a radio-detonated bomb under the top engine of a Dornier Do J flying boat (see p. HT235) carrying a load of gems from South America as well as passengers. The pilot is a friend of Joanna Strauss, and one of the passengers or crew is a Dependent of one of the PCs or someone to whom they feel a Sense of Duty. The saboteur demands a $100,000 dollar ransom; if this is denied, he threatens to bring down the plane over land.

The plane is traveling over Texas when Joe approaches the PCs, suggesting she fly alongside the other plane so that one of them can walk along the top wing until they reach the engine, then remove or defuse the bomb. It sounds quite reasonable, to anyone with the Overconfidence or On the Edge disadvantages . . .

Death Valley Days *(Survivors).* Lew Scanlon has become de facto dictator of a small kingdom, with the lake in Beulah being a rare source of uncontaminated water. After Pete Muskie discovers a way to enter the valley by following an old mineshaft into a cave that emerges near Scanlon's fortress, the PCs team up with him and Joanna Strauss to launch a two-pronged attack -- Strauss and a PC coming over the hills to provide a diversion, while the others sneak in through the tunnels.

The PCs may first need to find fuel for the plane . . . and it would be even more useful if they can arm it as well . . .

Hostage Due (Modern Day). Bouldering outside Beulah, Adam Moore blunders across Lew Scanlon's marijuana crop, then becomes caught in a snare. Scanlon seizes him and decides to ransom him. Moore's father offers the PCs a substantial reward to find his son; after Joe Strauss spots Moore's SUV, the PCs descend on Beulah and find Scanlon prepared for a long siege.

Moore than Human (Horror). Adam Moore invites the PCs to join him for a weekend of mountain climbing and hang-gliding. As they camp near the summit, a vampire attacks one of the sleeping PCs.

Adam wants to find the vampire(s) -- but he doesn't intend to stake it (or them). He thinks that a long undeath might be preferable to a short life: He wants to make a deal with a vampire, offering him or her money or whatever else he or she might like in exchange for being bitten.

Clear a Path

An *AT-43* Scenario for Two Players

by Philip Reed

Battle rages on the surface of Damocles, the Therian factory world that threatens the people of Ava. Tasked with invading and destroying the invading Therian forces, the members of the U.N.A. and Red Blok armies are in a race against time as they desperately seek the truth behind the giant factory world, praying that some means of stopping the invaders is found before the alien terrors once-again assault their home.

"Clear a Path" is a scenario for Rackham's *AT-43* pre-painted miniatures game. To play out this scenario you will need an assortment of miniatures terrain -- the nanogenerators and walls found in the *AT-43 Initiation Set: Operation Damocles* box set will suffice, but more terrain is better -- and each player will need his own army (different factions). Any factions will work although, if possible, one player should take a Therian army.

Set-Up

Divide the table into nine equal parts and then, using tape, mark out the center grid. In turns, each player then places one piece of terrain on the table. Start with the largest piece in the center of the table and then begin placing terrain anywhere on the table, as long as each piece is no closer than 5cm to another piece. The bulk of the terrain should be as close to the center of the table as possible, since this represents the area that must be cleared.

One player is designated as the attacker and the other, preferably the Therian player, is designated as the defender. The defender sets up his army first, placing his forces as close to the center of the table as possible. The attacker then chooses any side of the table and sets up his forces within 12cm of the table edge.

Forces Available

Using the same number of A.P., each player creates an army following the standard platoon structure rules for his faction. The reinforcement rules are not in effect in this scenario.

Special Rule: For this scenario, the attacker needs to destroy terrain elements on the table (see Secondary Objectives and Cease Fire, below). The "Sabotage" ability, detailed in the *U.N.A.* and *Red Blok* army books, is required to destroy terrain. For this scenario, any attacking infantry unit may have one figure with the "Sabotage" ability for +25 A.P. to the unit's cost.

Primary Objectives

Controlling Point Z-1: At the end of each turn, the player with the most infantry fighters within 10cm of the largest terrain item on the table (the piece in the exact center of the table), gains 3 VP.

Controlling Grid Z: At the end of each turn, the player with the most infantry fighters in the center section of the table (marked out in tape during the set-up), gains 2 VP.

Secondary Objectives

Attacker: For each terrain element destroyed, the attacker earns 2 VP.

Defender: For each attacking infantry figure with the "Sabotage" ability killed, the defender earns 4 VP.

Special Rules

The attackers are desperate to escape. The attacking player gains a +1 to Authority and Morale tests.

Cease Fire

The game ends when one of the players scores 20 VP. If both players reach 20 VP at the same time then the game continues until the tie is broken, with the attacker gaining an additional +1 to all Authority and Morale tests (for a total bonus of +2).

Are We Done? Was It Fun?

How do you know when you're done having fun?

Imagine you're on vacation in a small picturesque village. There are shops, historic sites, interesting locals to meet, fine restaurants, and so on. You have a finite but flexible period of time to spend there . . . say, three to six hours.

There are two seemingly similar but fairly unrelated questions to ask about such a vacation: How do you know when you're finished? And, how do you know when you've had enough fun?

The "finished" part is easier; as a hard limit, you know that you've finished when the time frame -- in our example, three to six hours -- is reached or exceeded. Alternatively, you might set some other hard-and-fast know-when-finished goals: "I want to eat lunch and dinner in this village" or "At the very least, I want to climb to the top of the tallest tower and takes some pictures."

But how will you know if you've had fun in those endeavors? After all, it's easy to imagine an android following the objectives literally and spending the requisite six hours in a closet, or eating both meals at a generic fast-food restaurant, or making a beeline for the top of the tower. Of course, androids are difficult to dissatisfy, so it all events out.

This tortured analogy of android vacations sprang to mind as I was considering the oeuvre of Gary Gygax's early published adventures for Advanced Dungeons & Dragons. One of these classics -- ***Tomb of Horrors*** -- is a fairly linear affair, leading[1] to a climactic battle that is one of the most obscenely challenging of the hobby's early days.

But I recall my early teen experiences with the ***Against the Giants*** trilogy and the ***Vault of the Drow,*** and my memories classify them as "difficult reads." I kept reading them with an eye toward the Big Climax -- the ultimate battle between Good and Evil that the whole adventure was leading toward. But, for the most part, none of those published works contained any such resolution; it was up to the GM -- and the players -- to determine when they were done. And by "done," I mean our two objectives of "knowing when you're finished" and "knowing when you've had enough fun."

As an adult[2], I recognize these adventures as being travel guides to a fictional land. Where *Frommer's Guide to Chicago* might list museums of interest and fine dining opportunities, these catalogs provide keyed encounters to art treasures to steal and fine dying opportunities. If the heroes want to methodically start at the lower-left building and ransack it fully before progressing east or north to the next, that's fine. If they want to storm to the middle of the dungeon and try to catch as many critters as possible in the inevitable fireballs, that's no problem.

So, let's tie in these early hack 'n' slash adventures to our two-fold question. "When are you done?" could be answered chronologically ("We're gaming for six hours tonight"), task-oriented ("When we inflict enough damage that we can be reasonably assured the giants won't bother the countryside again") or personal-goal oriented ("I'm sticking around until I get enough gold to afford that magic item I've been working on"). It can be imposed by the players, the DM, or both. And it can be as flexible or as rigid as the group wants; while there's little reason to stick around the Ghost Tower of Inverness once its secrets have been sussed out, the heroes may well decide to make a permanent home in the Underdark of the ***Vault of the Drow,*** having spent months (in-game and out-of-game) clearing them out.

The quantity of fun is more difficult to measure, and it's done differently in these classic keyed adventures. Some gaming groups fritter away entire eight-hour sessions in minutiae that don't satisfy anyone, while others cram as much dungeon-crawling as humanly possible in their three-hour sessions. Some groups delight in the open-ended feel of a non-goal-oriented exploratory adventure, while others feel lost without the focus of a rigid storyline. (Personally I tend to be in the latter category, but I confess to having a yearning to want to just *explore* as a player . . . to see new vistas and wonders simply because I want to, and not because I'm looking for the right volcano to dump my cursed ring.)

In a lot of ways, those early adventures had more in common with the sandbox computer/console games that have

taken the world by storm over the past decade, and shades of **Grand Theft Auto's** "go anywhere, do anything you want" feel closer kin to these keyed adventures than the structured "you must get to the bottom of the Dungeon of Fu" goals that have permeated almost all computer RPGs. It's a style of adventure design that has fallen out of favor in most circles, but -- like all classics -- the structure should be revisited every so often to see if any new ideas result.

In other words, you need to see if there's any cool loot you missed the first time around.

--Steven Marsh

[1] Or I should say, "potentially leading"; this adventure has one of the best fake-outs of all-time, and I cannot recommend either its example or its lesson highly enough.

[2] Chronologically speaking.

A Mélange of Magical Creatures XIV

for *GURPS*

by Eric Funk

Spring is almost here, which is the time of year when all-new life springs into the world. Here, then, are some more new forms of life sure to prove surprising for hardened adventurers.

Lava Wolf

"Out in the field, an hour's ride from the nearest civilization, we were getting ready to hunt. Our hound was running about our feet, tracking a scent, with her nose heavy as we entered a stand of trees. Our guide noticed that the ground became warm and soft as we progressed. His dog then froze and pointed behind us, growling softly. Startled, we spotted a small herd of deer coming up quickly on us from behind. Channeling them were some wolves with glowing lines upon them. Our horses bolted with the herd, away from the canines. At that point, we didn't argue. Suddenly, we found fire spouting from the ground ahead of us . . . with a small pack of glowing wolves behind us and an equal number of them waiting on the other end. We and the prey were being driven down a corridor of heat."
-- Duke Iglintok, Fall Hunts

Lava wolves are large, gray-black carnivores with crimson highlights. They are stronger and denser than most mundane mammals, and their eyes glow bright red when angry and blue when sad, but are usually green for curiosity and playfulness. They use a ritual casting of the Volcano spell (see **GURPS Magic,** pages 12 and 54) to funnel prey. Half the pack does this while the other chases. Most of the prey still escape, but there are normally two or three prey that fall. The entire pack eats well for a few days, and then readies for the next hunt. Magical circles are generally led by the alpha female, while the hunts are led by the males.

Encountered

These creatures are at home around rocky formations such as those found in foothills near mountain ranges. They work well in forest, high grass, or jungle, particularly in areas with high Earth or Fire Mana. In particular, they set up along game paths through gullies and tight brush.

Industrial Uses

"Lava wolves may be a source of hellhound legends, although the wolves do not breathe fire themselves. The environment they raise can be described as 'lava,' although the land scarred by the flowing fiery rock is fertile; perhaps it is infused with primal earth."
-- T'Risq, Nature Guide

Obtaining mining core samples can be made easier with the help of lava wolves. The building of dikes and bridges is easy with molten rock, as is filling gullies, potholes, and old mining shafts. In addition, volcanic ash makes for excellent fertilizer in small quantities. Finally, lava wolves have an instinctive dislike for demons and some extraplanar beings; this can be useful to help guard against, or screen for, them.

Adventure

The heroes are to move a pack of lava wolves to a mining camp across a mountain ridge. The people along the way will not be amused; farmers worry about their flocks and fields. The still-wild wolves will require close attention, even with abundant food; with too much food, the animals will become lethargic. Once there, the adventure continues as the

receiving pens are not ready, and there is a chance that the heroes may not get paid at this end, and will have to return to their starting location to receive payment. If that were not enough, the locals will grow ever nervous about wandering wolves near the town . . .

Lava Wolf

Appearance: Large, dark-pelted wolves with glowing highlights of various colors (each wolf glows with a single color).
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 12; DX 11; IQ 4; HT 13.
Will 12; Per 13; Speed 6.00; Dodge 11; Move 8.
SM 0 to +1; 200-300 lbs; DR 5.
Traits: Claws (Blunt); Discriminatory Smell; Fat (Very; Resist knockback only); Perk (Accessory: Flashlight); Quadruped; Reduced Consumption 1 (Water); Teeth (Sharp); Temperature Tolerance 2; Wild (or Domestic) Animal; *Skills*: Volcano-15.

Damage: Bite 1d-2 cut / Claw 1d-1 cr

Shaman Lens

Traits: Extra FP 3; Magery 2; *Skills*: Volcano-20.

Pup Lava Wolf

ST 8; DX 10; IQ 3; HT 10/8.
Will 10; Per 11; Speed 5.00; Dodge 10; Move 7.
SM -1; 100 lbs; DR 2.

Giant Lava Wolf 50%

ST 15; DX 10; IQ 5; HT 14.
Will 14; Per 15; Speed 6.00; Dodge 11; Move 9.
SM +1; 300-400 lbs; DR 10.

Iron Eagle

"I watched as an off-gray blur of a bird swooped down and lifted off with a small wrench. It then landed on a nearby roof, and the bird that now could be clearly discerned as an iron eagle started to gnaw on the tool. The sound was particularly loud and unsettling; it can be compared to crushing a can while dragging it down a chalkboard."
-- Overheard in the *Winged Pig* tavern

The iron eagle is a gray, vulture-sized bird with large, powerful wings. It fears few creatures; its heavy plumage protects it from much harm.

Encountered

The iron eagle is an example of a species that has prospered with the advances of civilization; any post-bronze age culture leaves ferrous metal sitting out, often in the form of waste. Iron eagles can be found in abundance in areas with large scrap heaps. Not afraid of dogs, these birds can have the run of many junkyards. Although there were few iron eagles before human civilization, the quantity of untended metal has allowed the population to explode.

Industrial Uses

"You ask what the screech was that you heard? It seems that those iron vultures are scavenging metal from the town dumps again. You ask if that is a problem? Well, metal often does not decay. It is a wonder that they can become airborne. Class, prepare a 10-page report, due Monday." -- Taxonomy of Metal Monsters 217

It is reported that the "whites" of iron eagle eggs are ingots of pure metals; a few enterprising industrialists have invested in "chicken coops" that look more like steam factories. In popular fiction, they are most often used as hunting birds. Real life copies this, and certain trendsetters have taken them on as hunting "tools" like hawks. Surprisingly little innovative research has been done regarding the enchantment of iron eagle eggs.

Adventure

In a frontier area, the search is on for iron eagle eggs. The plan is to collect them without harm to the birds, so that they can be incubated. Unfortunately, the perches and nests are high up. The eggs will be found on poles; acrophobes need not apply for the climbing work.

Iron Eagle

Appearance: Large, shiny gray vulture.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Lithovore, scavenging omnivore.
ST 6; DX 12; IQ 4; HT 13.
Will 12; Per 14; Speed 6.25; Dodge 11; Move 2 (Ground).
SM +1 (-1 with wings furled); 20 lbs; DR 5.
Traits: Claws (long talons); Enhanced Move 0.5 (Air Move 18); Flight (Winged; Air Move 12); Teeth (Sharp Beak); Temperature Tolerance 3; Wild Animal;

Damage: Bite 1d pi+ / Claw 1d+1 cut

Giant Iron Eagle

ST 10; DX 11; IQ 4; HT 14.
Will 13; Per 13; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 3 (Ground).
SM +2 (0 with wings furled); 40 lbs; DR 10.

Memory Butterflies a.k.a. Forget-Me Lots

"Have you suffered a loss? Having trouble getting over a dissolved partnership? Do you just want to forget a bad vacation? Focus on the painful events for one last time, and let the burden be lifted forever from your mind. (Not available in all locations. Consult your physician. Use only as directed. May cause . . .)"
-- Bazaar Ad

These insects steal memories. Moving in a swarm, the short-range effects stop aerial predators in their tracks. Surface thoughts are the first to go, as are any memories that the victim is currently focusing on. By the time the victims shake off the effects, the butterflies have moved on.

In the wild, the butterflies rarely linger in any place for long. Prolonged exposure and close proximity can cause permanent loss of any memory. Those who specialize in the scientific aspects of the mind speculate that these insects inhibit and block neural connections between vision and memories.

Encountered

As a biotechnical in a controlled environment, exposure to one or two memory butterflies is safe. A common fear of encountering memory butterflies in the wild is the image of people getting lost in a swarm of butterflies obliterating their minds. Should such an encounter happen, this is a dangerous predicament; the memory of the nature of these butterflies is often the first thing to go. It is also often the last, so victims also forget that they have encountered the bugs. Prolonged exposure and close proximity to memory butterflies causes permanent loss of any memory, although it is said this rarely happens. (Of course, goes the common retort, how would you know otherwise?)

Industrial Uses

"This shopkeep claims to have a new form of weight loss, using all natural effects. They say that you can forget that one is hungry . . ."
-- Overheard

Commercially, memory butterflies can be useful to help forget painful days. In organized cities, this usually means a waiting period and criminal background check. For law enforcement, it provides an alternative to capital punishment: a complete mindwipe, and with it the death of personality. Curiously, the *victims* of violent crimes might choose to have the incident removed after testifying. Underground users can use this to obliterate memories of crimes, enabling them to truthfully deny knowledge of the actions, outwitting lie-detection devices. Extracting impurities from the butterflies' essence of forgetfulness is a dangerous occupation due to the vapors produced, as it must brew for several days. Some treat memory butterflies and their usage with extreme mistrust, believing the removal of a person's memories to be a death of self.

Adventure

The heroes need a second chance to make a first impression on an important person. They must get the subject to think about their first impression, and then apply the memory butterflies.

Memory Butterfly Swarm

Appearance: Colorful yellow and green butterflies.
Category: Insect.
Diet: Herbivore.
ST -/2; DX 11; IQ 1; HT 11.

Giant Memory Butterfly

ST 1; DX 12; IQ 1; HT 12.
Will 10; Per 9; Speed 6.00; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM -5; 2 oz; DR 2.
Traits: Affliction 1 (Memory Loss; Permanent);

Flat Spiders

"The man at the end of the bar swatted the mosquito, and flicked it to the wall. As it bounced and began to fall, I noticed a second shadow following its descent -- the shadow of a spider. The arachnid form slid along the surface of the wall, and caught the tumbling insect with a strand of webbing. Was it invisible, or some sort of living shadow?"
-- Overheard

Flat spiders are colorful hide-and-spring spiders about the size of a man's hand. Their coloring is generally dark, with green, blue, and yellow colors, generally in large, random patches. Their existence as two-dimensional beings makes it difficult for flat spiders to attack three-dimensional targets, but they can lay in wait for prey in otherwise impassible locations. Laying simple webbing is easy; the webs are three-dimensional, and the flat spiders simply anchor the

strings on different surfaces. Flat spiders are rarely seen laying in wait, although the traps serve as signals. For the most part, these spiders just drink the target's fluids, allowing prey to bring energy to it.

Encountered

Flat spiders are often mistaken for a shadow, drawing, or a mark on a wall. In nature, they prefer to live in caves and on trees, although in urban environments they are most often encountered indoors. Their webbing is on or just off the surface, should there be outcroppings to anchor it to. They cannot dig holes, and thus can cohabitate with non-competing life-forms, such as burrowing herbivores.

Industrial Uses

"It was at that town by the gate to the world of shadow. You know it? Good. Anyway, I was in the most brightly lit tavern that I had ever been in. I had heard that all living shadows are afraid of fire. I learned that not all two dimensional creatures are made of shadow."
-- Mito the Purple Sword

Flat spiders could be useful for adjusting small items, perhaps inside other items. They may also permit entry into very tight places, if some sort of manipulation is possible. Shadow form and sharpness are unusual magical applications of flat spiders.

Adventure

The flat spiders carry dust from passing through an unfamiliar room, creating odd patterns where they move. If the heroes or their affiliates send some flat spiders ahead in an unusual room, it might provide insight to the danger, and where spiders' trails end can prove particularly interesting. On the other hand, the room's owner may be aware of flat spiders, and taken precautions to thwart or misdirect . . .

Flat Spiders

Appearance: Brightly colored two-dimensional spiders about the size of a man's hand.
Category: Arachnid.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 3; DX 12; IQ 2; HT 13.
Will 12; Per 11; Speed 6.25; Dodge 11; Move 6.
SM -7; 1-2 lbs; (DR2 vs. fire).
Traits: Binding (Engulfing; Sticky); Body of Shadow (remove weakness to flame, light); Clinging; Extra Legs (eight in all); Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood); Wild Animal;

Giant Flat Spiders

ST 8; DX 11; IQ 2; HT 14.
Will 13; Per 10; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM -3; 5-6 lbs; DR 2; (DR3 vs. fire).

Fusion Air Raven

"I was startled from my reading by a loud noise. Looking up, the great roar in the sky lasted too long for thunder. Neither dragon nor spirits. No, this thing had a flame trail behind it. A phoenix? No, it is not bright enough over all. Its dark coloring revealed itself to be a good-sized bird as it zoomed this way . . . I wondered what it was."
-- Sage Vennoi, *Signs of the Times*

An air raven appears to be a large mundane raven about the size of a hawk. Generally taking off from high cliffs, it soars to a high altitude, and then dives down, calling upon elemental fire to excite the air behind it, propelling it to great speeds. This extra speed allows the bird to catch very fast prey such as [lightning bugs](#) and thunder owls. Some fusion air ravens have been observed forcing larger prey upward, then killing them. Passing by quickly, it tears meat off of the prey as it falls.

Encountered

These birds can be an exceptional nuisance for air travel in the areas they frequent. Slow, larger animals can get in the way, causing both to be injured so that they fall. Fusion air ravens may have "rockets," but they still need wings for lift.

Industrial Uses

*"The first thought of most people is that the air ravens would make for ideal messenger birds, but their free-spirited nature is too strong. It is hard to get them to **go** anywhere, but they can follow. They can be dangerous, and residents are often woken up at night by the birds' form of propulsion . . . or its aftereffects."*
-- Captain Tiren, Military Analyst

These creatures are noisy, which makes them unappealing for both civilian and military purposes. The "hyperelemental flame" is highly sought by alchemists (see Essential Flame, *GURPS Magic*, pages 74). A few developers have patented ways to feed the animals high velocity air and make use of the elemental heat. The military has been experimenting in training them to make a form of phoenix attack were they buzz by and set cloth aflame. Their high speed is linked to the flame, and alchemists are eagerly trying to replicate the heat and pressure connection to create new kinds of forges and heating systems.

Adventure

A fusion air raven has been darting through a private party, and the protagonists need to stop it. It was chased through banners by the previous crew, who are no longer employed by the party's hosts. The heroes must do better; they need to lure it and then snare it, as simply shooting it could be bad for public relations.

Fusion Air Raven

Appearance: A sleek, bluish bird with a tubular abdomen.
Category: Avian.
Diet: Carnivore.
ST 5; DX 13; IQ 3; HT 10.
Will 11; Per 11; Speed 6.25; Dodge 10; Move 2 (Ground).
SM -2, -1 with wings unfurled; 5-7 lbs; DR 2.
Traits: Claws (Blunt); Enhanced Move 8 (Noisy, Air Speed 3,072); Flight (Winged, Air move 12); Teeth (Sharp Beak); Wild (or Domestic) Animal; *Skills*: Brawling-14.

Damage: Bite 1d+2 pi+ / Claw 1d cut / Dive: 1d+2 cut

Giant Fusion Air Raven

ST 10; DX 12; IQ 3; HT 12.
Will 12; Per 10; Speed 6.00; Dodge 11; Move 3 (Ground).
SM -1, 0 with wings unfurled; 10-15 lbs; DR 5.

Flake Spinners/Crystal Riders

"What do you call small, spindly, wispy forms dancing on a large ice crystal? How about flake spinners? They are not small enough to sit on a pin and they assemble parachutes made out of ice crystals (easily called snowflakes). Don't get in their way as they can be angry."
-- Langum the Mad, *Winter Wisps*

The creatures known as flake spinners -- a natively wispy, gaseous life form -- are merely the apex life form of a tiny state-changing ecosystem. It is believed that the spinners create and ride constructs shaped like giant snowflakes (although they're still quite small). These fast-moving but thin crystals are sharp, and can be dangerous to unprotected travelers. The ice protects the "pilot," who is generally at the "snowflake's" center. It is widely thought that they react poorly to sources of heat; such sources are required to return to the clouds. These beings can aim mundane falling snow and ice over dangerous sources. Their more direct form of attack occurs by angling their vehicles in concert and careening into the targets.

Encountered

Flake spinners are often encountered in colder reaches of the world, or on the edges of cold seasons. Chimneys and factories are unnatural obstacles, often attracting their attention. Flake spinners may take exception to screens or fume hoods, sometimes sheering them off. Civilization provides flake spinners a plethora of targets into which to collide so that the creatures may sublimate.

Industrial Uses

"While children like to smash ice crystals, it is said that flake spinners can be vengeful, remembering people years later."
-- Parental warning upon entering the icy land of Actoria

The formation of the ice-crystal vessels requires humidity in the air and freezing temperatures; fortunately, the spinners have a certain ability to control precipitation flows. The creatures thrive in clouds and require humidity from the air. When sublimated, flake spinners rise upward to high altitudes and build wheels of ice from crystals. While ascending, they are in a form of suspended animation within a gaseous state.

Adventure

A man claims that his neighbor is a spy who uses flake spinners to sneak out information to the Enemy. Where the spinners descend to the ground, they carry messages. The heroes are to find some proof so that the police can be called in, whether it is intercepting the creatures, or following them.

Flake Spinner

Appearance: Large, hand-sized snowflakes.
Category: Ice crystals.
Diet: Unknown.
ST 1; DX 12; IQ 2; HT 12.
Will 14; Per 12; Speed 6.00; Dodge 11; Move 6.
SM -7; 1 lb; DR 2 (ablative).
Traits: Domestic Animal; Flight (Gliding; Air Move 12); Spines (Long); *Skills*: Pilot-14.

Damage: Ram: 1d-2 cut

Giant Flake Spinner

Appearance: Large, head-sized snowflakes.

ST 4; DX 11; IQ 3; HT 13.
Will 15; Per 11; Speed 6.00; Dodge 10; Move 6.
SM -5; 4 lbs; DR 4 (ablative).

Damage: Ram: 1d cut

Fire Gorillas

"We were deep in the jungle, and our two guides were disagreeing on the best course through this terrain. The elder guide was stoic, but the younger man was shouting at the top of his lungs in his native language. Jombar the Elder told us to be still and we froze. Suddenly, three fiery projectiles hit the younger guide from out in the trees, bowling him over. While the youth fell without us moving, some primates came out to check us over; they were very curious. We were worried about his injuries, but we dared not move. We hoped that this would be the greatest obstacle that we were to face, but alas, we were not so fortunate."
-- Titus Mallorn, Explorer

Fire gorillas weigh as much or more than a man. These large "primates" use gouts of flame to keep away predators and stun insects. This natural weapon comes not from their mouths or fists, but their arm pits. In addition, the fire that they throw is not flame, but a form of flammable mucus; these projectiles splatter when they collide with targets, and inflict 1d burn damage.

Encountered

A healthy tribe will seek to study non-aggressive intruders first. They are social creatures, and many are forward enough to try to walk up and take items from unfamiliar agents. They watch for their victims' reactions to this maneuver; a passive firm refusal is expected and respected, but a violent reaction is returned in proportion. Highly territorial, tribes of fire gorillas will often cast out non-conformers and even entire families. Outcasts are generally encountered first by explorers, having been exiled because of their poor social skills. These rogues will generally attack aggressive humans on sight.

Industrial Uses

"It seems to be a common misconception that all flame gorillas are violent. This is simply not the case. While the outcasts may lash out, family groups get along swimmingly, except when it's raining. Trees are popular places for tribal gatherings. Some local low-tech tribes have formed a type of trade. They provide crude shelter and food, and the primates provide fire. As can be expected, fire gorillas get testy when it is raining."
-- Lady Ethan, *Winter of Fire*

The apes may be useful as flares, but the animals are not unusually resistant to bright light or pollution. They are intelligent enough that employing them may be considered cruel, but it is said that they are not intelligent enough for most human tasks.

Adventure

The heroes are hired as a discreet team to re-capture some fire gorillas loose in town. To complicate matters, there is an alchemists' gathering in town, so in addition to fire, there is the danger of *volatile* explosive potions, and scientists who may be trying experimental brews to solve this crisis. To make matters worse, there are competing teams hired to capture the animals as well. These jungle adventures in a big city may climax in competitions to out-duel the other hunters who seek the prize.

Fire Gorillas

Appearance: A ruddy-brown gorilla.
Category: Mammal.
Diet: Omnivore.
ST 15; DX 11; IQ 6; HT 13.
Will 10; Per 10; Speed 6.00; Dodge 9; Move 6.
SM 0; 350-450 lbs; DR 2 (+DR4 vs. flame).
Traits: Brachiator; Empathy (Emotion Sense); Temperature Tolerance 3 (Heat); Wild Animal; *Skills*: Climbing-13; Throwing (Fire Globs)-12.

Damage: Fire: 1d burn

Giant Fire Gorillas

ST 20; DX 10; IQ 6; HT 14.
Will 11; Per 10; Speed 6.00; Dodge 8; Move 6.
SM +1; 500-600 lbs; DR 4 (+DR8 vs. flame).

Beyond Fantasy

The creatures described could appear to physically exist in a hard-science world, even if the more wondrous aspects could not. Lava wolves could sense natural geologic effects; when sulfurous gas kills herds and dissipates, these predators could eat well. Iron eagles could simply have active symbiotic bacteria that break down iron. Memory butterflies could have some sort of dust or pheromone that hinders concentration. Flat spiders could merely be thin animals with diffuse systems. Fusion air rams could use internal gasbags that permit air jets for bursts of short speed. Flake spinners might not be intelligent; they may merely be homing crystals. Finally, "fire gorillas" may simply be more intelligent than regular gorillas, and have mastered the art of making fire.

Special thanks to Stephanie Keith for rounding up the flames.

Pyramid Review

Mad Scientist University

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Designed by Zachary Anderson

Illustrated by Steven Sanders

168 Full Color Cards; $24.95

Mad science and mad scientists make for a great theme for a game, as *GURPS IOU* and *[Igor: The Mad Scientist's Lament](#)* have proven. Atlas Games' *Mad Scientist University* is the latest game to harness this cutting-edge -- but dangerously unstable -- power source. It is a card game of insanely inspired improvisation, maniacal mirth, deputized despotism, and crazed corruption. It needs at least three players, though as many as seven can participate, aged eight and up. The playing time is given is between 30 and 60 minutes.

The game consists of two sets of cards: Insane Assignments and Unstable Elements. Insane Assignments are tasks that each budding scientist must propose an insanely inventive method of achieving. They range from the mundane, like "Learn to DANCE" or "Clean your room," to the fantastic, such as "Create perpetual motion" or "Develop the UN-common cold." Unstable Elements are ingredients that the scientist must include in his proposal, and again include the mundane (Dental Floss or Clipboards for example) and the fantastic (such as Zombies, Rubber Chickens, Decoder Rings, and Ninja). Curiously, the Laser is completely absent from the deck of Unstable Elements. So no "Frickin' laser beams" then . . . Fortunately, our budding brainiacs can still have their fun with kittens, monkeys, penguins, and squirrels. (Not at the same time, of course . . .)

Play is simple enough. Over the course of a round the players take turns being the Teaching Assistant whose task it is to set the Insane Assignments and pass out the Unstable Elements. The latter are dealt out first and then the Insane Assignment is revealed, after which each player has 15 seconds in which to formulate his plan. The Teaching Assignment listens to each proposal (or not) and decides which one is the best; the winner receives the Insane Assignment card. Once everyone has been the Teaching Assistant, the round is over, and once three (or more) rounds have been played, the player who has accumulated the most Insane Assignment cards wins the game and graduates from Mad Scientist University.

So for example, Dave as Teaching Assistant hands out the Unstable Elements Beads, Skateboards, and Cake to Tim, Louise, and myself, before revealing the Insane Assignment to be "Write a 50-page report." After the requisite 15 seconds Dave points at me and demands my idea. I suggest making the report easier to write by ingesting cake baked with the brains of great scientists and call it Brain Cake. "Eeuuuw . . . What about Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease?" comes his rejoinder. Tim suggests that his Beads are actually Mind Control Beads and can be used to get others to write the report, but he declines to explain exactly how they are used. Lastly Louise explains that anyone of us could write the report, but only the wheels of her upside skateboard can be used turn the pages of the report more quickly as it is being written. Appreciating the simplicity of her proposal, Dave decides that Louise's idea to be the best and hands her the Insane Assignment card.

The actual rules for *Mad Scientist University* are given on the bottom of the card tray and can be read in a minute before getting a game going. The cards are full color, with the front of the Insane Assignment cards done like the writing on a blackboard, and the front of the Unstable Elements comprised of wording and line art illustration being done in white on a turquoise green design-board-like background. This makes it feels very [ACME Corporation](#) a la *Looney Tunes,* and *Mad Scientist University* has a similar potential for lunacy of invention.

The rules though are entirely one note and do not offer alternative methods of play or scoring. They do suggest that the Teaching Assistant is free to change the rumination time, accept bribes (and decide which is the best proposal on the basis of such bribes), and of course, play up the mad scientist role. To some gamers the entirely subjective scoring method and the need to improvise will put them off playing *Mad Scientist University.* That the game offers no alternative rules is disappointing, especially given that they were available when the game was originally published in 2004. In fact, the only improvements that Atlas Games' have made is to repackage the game and add color to both cards and packaging.

If *Mad Scientist University* has a downside, it is its price. It feels expensive for what is a set of cards and minimal rules for an improvisation game. Nevertheless, the game is fun and it does ask the players to think fast. As a party game, *Mad Scientist University* has a theme that will definitely appeal to the average gamer and they have the brains to make it inventive fun.

--Matthew Pook

GURPS Martial Arts Case Study

Choose Your Hit Location Wisely

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns and *GURPS Martial Arts* present a broad array of specific locations on an opponent you can target. Can, yeah, but what location *should* you attack? This article will help you decide.

Sure, some of your choice depends on skill. Choosing Skull (-7) or Chinks in Armor (Eyes) (-10) when your basic skill is 14 isn't a great way to fight. But neither is choosing Arm (-2) when your weapon is Impaling and won't get a damage multiplier -- or if you need your opponent dead *right now* to stop him! This article doesn't contain any *new* hit locations or new rules. It doesn't go into deep details of the effects of hitting those locations, either; that's what the aforementioned rule books are for. It's just a discussion of deciding what to target . . . but that's something new and old players alike need help with when the pressure of combat is on.

That out of the way, let's get targeting.

How to Choose

First, remember that you can't always choose the location your want, or choose any location! Wild Swings, area effect attacks, partially covered opponents, and the like may completely or partly remove your choice in the matter. Check page 398 of the *Basic Set* before you attack and make sure selecting a hit location is available to you.

There are a few criteria to use when you choose where to hit.

What is your skill? Some places are harder to hit than others. Your skill can limit your choices.

What is your damage type? Some weapons are more effective against certain locations than others. Your damage type helps determine worthy targets.

What is your goal? Are you trying to kill, cripple, or capture? Some locations make killing hard but crippling easy, and vice-versa.

Ideally, you'll be able to match all three, choosing a hit location well within your skill's limits, that suits your attack's damage type, and that damaging will successfully defeat the enemy. But let's examine them one at a time.

Choose by Skill

Choosing by skill is relatively simple. Take your effective skill -- basic skill after penalties and bonuses for

Non-Humanoid Hit Locations

This article assumes a humanoid opponent. Against non-humanoids, the general advise applies. But, be warned: Specific penalties and specific effects of damage might change radically! For example, a charging biped (an angry T. Rex or Cthulhu, for example) is worth attacking in the leg to bring it down. A charging quadruped (a wolf or a rhino) isn't, because merely losing one leg won't cause it to fall down. Some creatures, especially fantastic ones, will completely *lack* certain hit locations, or have Injury Tolerances that make them less vulnerable. Know your enemy!

Grappling & Hit Locations

This article also assumes striking. Grapples halve the penalties (round *up*) for a hit location. The *effect* of grappling each location are both location and Technique-specific. This is a bit beyond the scope of this article, but broadly:

- Grapple the arms if you want to immobilize a foe's weapons or eliminate his Parry defenses from your follow-on attacks or those of your allies.
- Grapple the Neck if you want to Neck Snap, Choke Hold, or Strangle your foe.
- Grapple the head (Face or Skull) if you want to *Grab and Smash!* (see *GURPS Martial Arts,* page 118)
- Grapple the Legs if you want to take your foe

everything from Bad Footing or a Large shield or using All-Out Attack (Determined) or Telegraphic Attack -- subtract out the penalty for the hit location, and roll under that. As long as your net skill is 3+, you can choose the location and attack. How low can you go and skill hit? That's really up to you. Some fighters will cheerfully accept an 8 to hit in order knowing that if they hit they'll generally have a greater effect. Others will refuse to drop their skill below an effective 16, maximizing the chance for a critical hit (a roll of 3-6, as per page 381 of the *Basic Set*) and minimizing critical failures (a roll of 17 misses, 18 critically misses; again, page 381). Generally, keeping skill at 10-12 or more is best, since you still have a good chance to hit.

down.

- Grapple the Torso if you only need to keep your opponent in place, if you're strong enough for a Bear Hug (see page 117), or skilled enough to shift locations once you've gotten him (see page 117). Torso is a good default location because it comes with no penalties and gives you a broad array of options.

Do keep in mind that in some cases, you might need to target a location in order to defeat the opponent. A 15 to hit the Torso when you can't penetrate body DR isn't a better choice than a 7 to hit Torso Chinks in Armor when that'll let you damage your opponent if you do hit. On the other hand, if your basic damage is so high (or your foe's HP and DR are so low) that *any* shot will defeat an opponent, then don't bother with anything except Torso. Don't reduce your chances to hit unless you're increasing your damage, your ability to win the fight, or your chances of achieving your goal.

Here are all of the hit locations from *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS Martial Arts* sorted by difficulty. Penalties to strike different sized weapons and shields are included in italics for completeness. Stuck slightly off from regular hit location penalties, they are often overlooked targets.

- Chinks in Armor (any except Torso)
10
-9 Eye
-8 Chinks in Armor (Torso); Hand holding a Shield; Spine; Veins and Arteries (Neck)
-7 Skull; Face (from behind); Ear; Joints (Hand); Joints (Foot); Nose
-6 Jaw
-5 Skull (from behind); Face; Neck; Veins and Arteries (Arm); Veins and Arteries (Leg); Joints (Arm); Joints (Leg); *"C" reach Weapon*
-4 Hand; Foot; *Reach 1 Weapon*
-3 Vitals; Groin; *Reach 2 Weapon; Buckler; Small Shield; Light Cloak*
-2 Arm; Leg; *Medium Shield; Heavy Cloak*
-1 *Large Shield*
-0 Torso

This arrangement by skill level should make it easier for you to establish a cutoff. If your skill is 15 and you want a 10 or better to hit, simply choose anything from the -5 line down to the -0 line and swing away.

Choose by Damage Type

The rule books list each location separately and have some discussion of why they're useful to attack, it's more useful for our purposes to sort them by your damage type. Simply choose the damage type of your weapon and see what's worth attacking.

For each damage type, this article splits hit locations between "Excellent," "Good," and "Marginal" targets. These aren't game-mechanical categories, they are just handy breakdowns for judging how useful a spot is to target with the weapon you've got at hand. "Excellent" targets are those which can be targeted *and* which have a special, useful effect for that damage type; if you can, hit these! "Good" targets are ones that can be targeted to normal effect. "Marginal" targets are those that can be targeted but have reduced or limited effects, or have normal effects at an increased difficulty. For example, cutting attacks to the Neck do additional damage, so Neck is an Excellent target. Cutting attacks to the Arms can cripple but get no additional damage bonus, so they are Good targets. Cutting attacks to the

Jaw are possible, but take an additional -1 to hit over Face have no additional effect, so Jaw is listed as a Marginal target. Hit locations which cannot be attacked with a specific damage type are omitted. Targets are listed in descending order of their penalty to be attacked. Toxic attacks get no effects from Hit Locations so they have also been omitted.

Cutting Attacks, Excellent Targets: Veins and Arteries (Neck); Skull; Ear; Joints (Hand); Joints (Feet); Neck; Veins and Arteries (Arm); Veins and Arteries (Leg); Joints (Arm); Joints (Leg).

Cutting Attacks, Good Targets: Hand holding a Shield; Spine; Face; *"C" reach Weapon;* Hand; Foot; *Reach 1 Weapon; Reach 2 Weapon; Buckler; Small Shield; Light Cloak;* Arm; Leg; *Medium Shield; Heavy Cloak; Large Shield;* Torso.

Cutting Attacks, Marginal Targets: Jaw; Groin.

Note that many "Good" Targets for cutting are still high value targets, especially because the cutting damage multipliers allow for quick crippling (limbs and extremities) or just not "wasting" damage (Torso). Almost anything you can cut is worth cutting!

Impaling Attacks, Excellent Targets: Chinks in Armor (any except Torso); Eye; Chinks in Armor (Torso); Veins and Arteries (Neck); Skull; Nose; Veins and Arteries (Arm); Veins and Arteries (Leg); Vitals.

Impaling Attacks, Good Targets: Spine; Face; Torso.

Impaling Attacks, Marginal Targets: Hand holding a Shield; Ear; Jaw; Neck; *C" reach Weapon;* Hand; Foot; *Reach 1 Weapon;* Groin; *Reach 2 Weapon; Buckler; Small Shield; Light Cloak;* Arm; Leg; *Medium Shield; Heavy Cloak; Large Shield.*

Impaling attacks can target limbs and extremities but damage past DR is ×1, same as crushing. Combined with the generally low basic damage of impaling attacks (they are usually thrust, not swing, and sw/imp weapons may get stuck) these locations are generally not optimal choices, reducing them to Marginal Targets. They may still be useful targets if your goal is to cripple the opponent, so see below!

Crushing Attacks, Excellent Targets: Skull; Joints (Hand); Joints (Foot); Nose; Jaw; Face; Neck; Joints (Arm); Joints (Leg); Vitals; Groin.

Crushing Attacks, Good Targets: Hand holding a Shield; Spine; *"C" reach Weapon;* Hand; Foot; *Reach 1 Weapon; Reach 2 Weapon; Buckler; Small Shield; Light Cloak;* Arm; Leg; *Medium Shield; Heavy Cloak; Large Shield;* Torso.

Crushing Attacks, Marginal Targets: Ear.

Crushing weapons have few marginal targets; any location they can attack is potentially worth attacking. However, many targets are equally *poor,* as crushing only gains a damage multiplier when hitting high-value locations like Skull or Neck. Note that the Eyes and Ears can be attacked bare-handed with specific additional effects; see Go For the Eyes (***GURPS Martial Arts,*** page 72) and Ear Clap (page 70).

Piercing Attacks, Excellent Targets: Chinks in Armor (any except Torso); Eye; Chinks in Armor (Torso); Veins and Arteries (Neck); Skull; Joints (Hand); Joints (Foot); Nose; Neck; Veins and Arteries (Arm); Veins and Arteries (Leg); Joints (Arm); Joints (Leg); Vitals.

Piercing Attacks, Good Targets: Spine; Face; Torso.

Piercing Attacks, Marginal Targets: Hand holding a Shield; Ear; Jaw; *"C" reach Weapon;* Hand; Foot; *Reach 1 Weapon;* Groin; *Reach 2 Weapon; Buckler; Small Shield; Light Cloak;* Arm; Leg; *Medium Shield; Heavy Cloak; Large Shield.*

Note that, like Impaling Attacks, Piercing attacks get no multiplier against limbs, so relatively low-damage piercing

attacks have difficulty crippling limbs. Most firearms do sufficient damage to overcome this, and some piercing attacks carry a damage multiplier over and above that from location, which can make even "Marginal" targets well worth attacking.

Corrosion Attacks, Excellent Targets: Skull; Nose; Face; Neck.

Corrosion Attacks, Good Targets: Hand holding a Shield; Spine; Veins and Arteries (Neck); Ear; Joints (Hand); Joints (Foot); Veins and Arteries (Arm); Veins and Arteries (Leg); Joints (Arm); Joints (Leg); *"C" reach Weapon;* Hand; Foot; *Reach 1 Weapon; Reach 2 Weapon; Buckler; Small Shield; Light Cloak;* Arm; Leg; *Medium Shield; Heavy Cloak; Large Shield;* Torso.

Corrosion Attacks, Marginal Targets: Jaw; Groin.

Corrosion attacks are especially useful against the Eyes and Face, where they can cause maiming and blindness. Corrosion attacks can also destroy DR, so they may make sense as preparatory attacks against highly-armored locations before followup with a different damage type.

Tight-Beam Burning Attacks, Excellent Targets: Chinks in Armor (any except Torso); Eye; Chinks in Armor (Torso); Veins and Arteries (Neck); Skull; Joints (Hand); Joints (Foot); Nose; Veins and Arteries (Arm); Veins and Arteries (Leg); Joints (Arm); Joints (Leg); Vitals.

Tight-Beam Burning Attacks, Good Targets: Hand holding a Shield; Spine; Face; Neck; *"C" reach Weapon;* Hand; Foot; *Reach 1 Weapon; Reach 2 Weapon; Buckler; Small Shield; Light Cloak;* Arm; Leg; *Medium Shield; Heavy CloakLarge Shield;* Torso.

Tight-Beam Burning Attacks, Marginal Targets: Ear; Jaw; Groin.

Like Impaling attacks, most excellent targets are very high value, but potentially low basic damage limits the value of attacks to limbs and extremities. High-tech firearms and powerful magical attacks can overcome this, making the attack useful for almost any target.

Choose by Goal

The final criteria when choosing your hit location is to know what you're trying to do to the target. There are three broad groupings. "Kill or Maim" locations are those ideal for inflicting one or more of massive damage, rapid bleeding, or additional permanently maiming effects. "Cripple" locations are limbs and extremities, which combine limited maximum damage (thus limiting their killing potential) with a low amount of damage needed to cripple a foe and thus potentially end his useful combat life. Finally, "Capture" locations are those good for inflicting low-damage stunning effects or disarming your foe, or disabling them without the potential for killing.

Kill or Maim: Chinks in Armor (any); Eye; Spine; Veins and Arteries (any); Skull; Nose; Jaw; Face; Neck; Vitals; Torso.

Cripple: Nose; Joints (any); Hand; Foot; Arm; Leg.

Capture: Any weapon or shield, Nose (with Crushing); Jaw (with Crushing); Hand, Foot, Vitals (with Crushing only); Groin (with Crushing); Arm, Leg.

Final Words

Much of the value of a given hit location can depend on the situation. Attacks to the skull are less useful when your basic damage is low and opponents are wearing great helms over chain coifs. Attacks to the legs are great fight-enders, unless your opponent is a sniper laying prone. But conversely, some situations enhance the value of certain locations. Against male opponents, crushing attacks to the groin can end fights quickly. Attacks to weapons can be fight-ending

if you destroy the ability of your opponents to penetrate your armor. As always, you must be the judge of the situation. Hopefully the sections above will give you some useful tools for narrowing down your choices rapidly and help your games run faster and more smoothly. Now get out there and choose your hit locations wisely.

The Omniscient Eye

How Long Will My Sinister Underground Lair Last?

How long can an underground bunker complex (think Cheyenne Mountain) last without regular maintenance? It would be a bitter irony if a group of survivors treks to the fabled fortress of their ancestors (surely in the Deserts of Death behind the Mountains of Despair) to find only crumbled concrete, broken computers, and rusty ration cans.

How long something might last depends very heavily on environmental conditions. Under proper conditions, some items can exist in a more or less functional state for millennia, but those same items can degrade within a few years or even months in the wrong circumstances. We'll start by considering how long they potentially *can* last, then discuss how that can go wrong.

How Long Things Last

The most obvious thing to consider is the physical structure itself. If the walls go and the ceilings cave in, there won't be much left for later generations of searchers to find. Potentially, the structure can last for a very long time without a bit of deliberate curation. A great many Roman structures made from concrete survive, and there are many Egyptian structures made from stone which are also very well preserved. Stone construction is, potentially, enormously durable. If you make the effort to pile up a bunch of rocks, it takes nature a very, very long time to take them apart. Concrete, while more vulnerable to the elements, can also survive for a very long time under the right conditions.

Though they may have a limited use life before they chip, stretch, or are otherwise damaged by use, most plastics are very chemically stable and will likewise last a very long time, though a few can discolor without developing structural problems. Even plastics designed to be biodegradable need exposure to light in order to do so with any speed, and sunlight will be in short supply deep underground. Most plastics, though, will last for centuries or millennia. Some will probably last until they are dragged into subduction zones by continental drift and destroyed in the planet's mantle. However, some rubbers, particularly natural rubber, can start to stiffen and crack after a few decades. A modern underground complex is likely to use more durable synthetic rubbers, but an older complex (say, vintage World War II or early Cold War) may develop problems with hydraulics and airtight seals.

Food won't last long at all. Unpreserved food with an appreciable water content will decay in a matter of weeks or even days. Dried beans, rice, pasta, and other dry foods will last longer, but anything not stored in cans or vacuum-sealed metallized pouches is unlikely to remain edible for more than a year or two. Modern military field rations, such as the MRE, have a shelf life of five to 10 years. They remain technically nutritious for several years beyond that, but their taste suffers considerably.

Medicines have a similar lifespan. Ignoring those drugs which must be refrigerated, many drugs are marked with expiration dates of a year or two, but studies indicate that they can last longer. Under favorable storage conditions, aspirin can last at least four or five years, and some other drugs even longer. According to tests by the United States military, common drugs including ciprofloxacin, penicillin, cimetidine (Tagamet), tetracycline, and diazepam (Valium) have impressive shelf lives. Nevertheless, drugs do start to lose their potency after a few years, and after 15 to 20 years even the most durable are likely to be useless.

Power sources can pose a problem, assuming the installation has on-site power generation. Most fuels derived from petroleum -- including diesel fuel and gasoline -- lose volatile compounds, suffer changes in composition as their component chemicals react with one another, and slowly draw in water from the atmosphere over time. That last is particularly the case with gas mixtures including ethanol. Fuels can start to cause performance problems after a few

months and become essentially useless after a year or two. Completely airtight storage can slow the problems somewhat, but not by orders of magnitude. Nuclear fuels can last somewhat longer, though not necessarily in a useful form. Radioactive isotopes used in many reactors have half-lives of tens or hundreds of thousands of years. However, fuel rods must be changed out and refined every few years. Commercial nuclear reactors change fuel over the course of a year and a half to two years, while nuclear reactors powering military vessels can go five to ten years between refueling. Radioisotope thermoelectric reactors, which are used to power deep space probes and have been used on Earth to power unmanned lighthouses, can last untended (or nearly so) for decades, but nevertheless most likely under a century. Adventurers may find a reactor which is still dangerously radioactive, but not so radioactive as to provide useful energy. Ironically, the fuel which preserves best is one of the most low-tech available: coal. Left in bunkers, it will last indefinitely, though because of its emissions, it might be a poor choice for a hidden underground installation.

There's wide variability in paper and other media. Paper meant for long life spans will last many centuries under the right conditions, while most paper not meant for a long lifespan will decay within a few decades and magnetic media will start to degrade after a mere handful of years (there's a more detailed treatment in the article "Losing the Memories of Civilization"). We don't actually have truly accurate information on a number of modern media and how long they'll last if left unused. Manufacturers claim that high-quality CDs will last as long as a century or two (although low-quality optical disks have already started degrading and many mass-market disks won't outlive their owners) and more recent high-quality media may last for millennia. However, since optical disks were only invented in the 1970s, we're relying on artificial aging tests and will most likely be long dead by the time we get an accurate call on the lifetime of our media. It seems likely that CDs and DVDs will last for several decades, but anything more than that is an open question. Likewise, decay is widespread among early photographic and movie films, but modern microfilms and microfiches are supposed to last for centuries.

Guns and ammo are another area where the answer to "how long can it last?" may be "too soon to tell." Ammunition can have a very long shelf life. Military organizations have been known to use bullets 20 or 30 years old, and modern hobbyists have been known to occasionally fire off ammo dating back to the First World War. Likewise, guns from the early 20th century and before still fire perfectly well. And even if ammunition is decayed and not safe or reliable for use in guns, it might still provide a satisfying bang. Decades-old land mines are still a danger, and builders in Europe still occasionally turn up unexploded but still explosive munitions from WWII.

The jury is likewise out on electronics. Some electronic components can last a surprisingly long time. Vacuum tubes from the 1930s and 1940s, fresh from their original packaging, are still used today by hobbyists. The cathode ray tubes in conventional computer monitors might be able to last a similarly long time, though original quality is a factor, and after many centuries the glass may start to separate into component chemicals. Modern computers can, with light use, last at least decades, and if left alone, there's little reason to believe that they can't survive at least as long as older electronics. However, though the silicon chips may last centuries, storage media aren't nearly so durable, so if one does manage to turn on a centuries-old computer, the hard drive may have wiped itself. Fiberglass-based circuit boards are also likely last a very long time, but cheaper alternatives, such as cotton fiber stiffened with epoxy, might show signs of decay after a few decades.

Structural steel is yet another material where we don't have enough information to say, though the prospects are good. Steel girder construction dates to the late 19th century. Though many early examples have since been demolished or destroyed (neither London's 1850 Crystal Palace, the first important building built on an iron frame; nor Chicago's 1885 Home Insurance building, widely regarded as the first skyscraper built from steel, iron, and concrete, made it out of the 1930s), a number of turn-of-the-century examples survive. The Park Row building in New York was finished in 1899 and still stands, though it has seen considerable remodeling. The 1902 Flatiron Building, another NYC landmark, has lasted without such revision. It appears that metal structural members can last at least a century and quite possibly longer.

Finally, there's the air. In 1954, a team of archaeologists opened a chamber near the Pyramid of Cheops. One of the excavators made a passing reference to a puff of air blowing out of the chamber. Later scholars realized that this meant that the air pressure inside the chamber was higher than outside, which meant in turn that the chamber was air-tight and quite possibly had been so since it had been sealed, around 2600 B.C. This gave later investigators the idea to try to capture a sample of the air in an adjacent, unopened chamber, allowing them to compare modern air with air from

the Bronze Age. As it turned out, it appears that the second chamber wasn't air-tight.

Nevertheless, a top-secret underground bunker may very well have its own self-contained ventilation system which can be isolated from the outside in case of NBC attacks. So, if it matters, the installation may still retain its own air.

Why Things Don't Last

Just because things *can* last that long doesn't mean they *will.* Most of the time, they don't. There are a great many factors affecting how long materials last, but we'll just hit the highlights here.

The first thing to worry about is water. Soaking with water or even high humidity can reduce the life of most substances to a fraction of what they might otherwise achieve. Metal corrodes, concrete and mortar crumble, and organic substances decay rapidly. It's worth noting that the notorious prison on Alcatraz, most of which was built in the 1930s, showed notable structural weakening by the early 1960s because of constant exposure to salty spray from the San Francisco Bay.

The second is wide variations in temperature. Expansion and contraction can slowly cause the same damage an item might suffer with regular use. It can also magnify the effects of water, particularly if water combines with temperatures moving back and forth across freezing. Repeated growth of ice crystals can slowly tear many substances apart. However, particularly high or low temperatures don't necessarily cause damage by themselves. Colder temperatures help preserve many things, since they discourage microbial growth and slow other chemical reactions. Hot temperatures can accelerate decay, but if that heat is associated with low humidity, as in Egypt, the lack of water far outweighs temperature concerns.

The third is biological action. Large animals, if the site is accessible, may nest there, shoving things out of the way and possibly breaking them as they arrange nests and places for hibernation. Small animals may dig into the site for nesting places of their own and chew into walls and organic materials; in the case of an underground base, they may eat into electrical conduits and sensitive electronics on relatively soft circuit boards. Plants and molds slowly dig into and destroy structural members.

NORAD

For reference, here are some aspects of NORAD's facility at Cheyenne Mountain:

- It is built into a series of chambers excavated from granite with a total floor area of about 4.5 acres and a height of 50 to 60 feet. However, the area includes passageways from outside and a large water reservoir, so only part of the volume is livable space.
- The excavated chambers have predominantly steel buildings built into them with little or no concrete construction. The buildings ride on shock absorbing springs to withstand atomic near-misses.
- The facility is kept warm largely by waste heat from electronic equipment. Without that, it might be uncomfortably cool, but not dangerously cold.
- NORAD's old CRT monitors have been mostly replaced with LCD screens, which give more hours of use, but it's another technology whose long-term prospects are not well-established.
- The doors are air-tight. Air is drawn in by a ventilation system capable of filtering out NBC agents.
- The facility is usually powered from outside, but has a number of auxiliary diesel generators.
- The command center is designed to operate on its own resources in an emergency, supporting a contingent of 800 people for a month.

Of course, since the Air Force still denies the Stargate program, it's not clear what resources that part of the facility has . . .

Application

So what does this mean to for your underground complex? Being deep underground can shelter the structure from many of the forces which destroy buildings and their contents above-ground. For example, since the installation is underground, temperature fluctuations are likely to be minor. Temperatures underground are very stable, and once whatever climate control the complex had has shut down, the temperature will soon go to whatever the natural

temperature might be and will stay there. It's worth noting, though, that ammunition stored at high temperatures is particularly vulnerable to decay. Old bullets stored in hot places, even for just a few years, will have a higher-than-average chance of misfiring. Most bad bullets simply won't fire, but a few may explode unpredictably, damaging the gun and possibly the firer.

Biological activity is likely to be minimal, though not necessarily nonexistent. Plant roots, a significant threat to buildings over the long term, probably won't reach very far down from the surface, and plants certainly won't grow in the bunker's pitch-black interior. The bunker is likely to have at least a small population of rats and other vermin, but they won't last long after they consume available food supplies, possibly doing a bit of damage to electrical systems and books in passing. Once the food is gone, they'll probably die off or leave. Mold and bacteria will finish off what the rodents don't eat, but unless the bunker suffers high humidity, they probably won't do much damage after that.

The big decision the GM has to make is about water. Ground water will be a major threat. A chronic problem with mining through the ages has been that when miners go deep enough, they inevitably dig below the local water table. Tunnels below that level will flood unless water is pumped out. If that's the case for your bunker complex, it'll fill up with water and much will be ruined. Even if structural members don't collapse, adventurers exploring the complex will have to bring scuba gear. Of course, the Cheyenne Mountain facility avoids the problem by being dug into the side of a mountain which sticks up well above the water table. An underground facility elsewhere may be carefully sited to avoid ground water by taking advantage of subsurface geological features, but climatic changes may make change underground water flow in ways the facility's designers never anticipated.

One possible exception to the "water destroys everything" rule is that under certain conditions, such as great ocean depths, there's very little oxygen in the water. Water with very little oxygen in it is much friendlier to the preservation of organic substances. Water in deep subterranean aquifers tends to be very low in oxygen, so many organic objects (say, secret plans and blueprints) may be surprisingly well preserved. On the other hand, those objects will decay rapidly once exposed to air again, so actually getting some use out of them will require some doing. All of that ground water may also deposit layers of minerals on every surface, creating a carpet of mud on the floor and perhaps thin layers of limestone elsewhere.

We might also consider what state the complex was left in. For example, if the bunker was occupied and in use until the bitter end of whatever it was which led to the complex being lost, food and fuel supplies may be low or nonexistent, equipment may have been heavily used with jury-rigged repairs performed as resources ran low, and the base may be full of contaminants setting the stage for later decay. If the occupants sealed the doors and died without opening them again, they may have [consumed the oxygen](), which would pose a serious problem for adventurers. In a worst-case scenario, a nuclear reactor left untended could melt down, rendering long-term decay moot. On the other hand, if the bunker complex is abandoned in an organized fashion, it is likely to be stripped of fuel, equipment, and interesting information. It may be in good shape, but there's little there adventurers are likely to find interesting.

So let's consider a best-case scenario: The bunker complex was fully prepared as an auxiliary control center or secret research facility in anticipation of trouble. However, the prospective occupants never arrived, either through bureaucratic inaction or surprise attack. The base is in a remote, desert area, well isolated from ground water and other environmental threats. Eventually, regular maintenance ends, but the contents of the base underground are left intact. For a worst-case scenario, which includes heavy use of the base's resources and lots of dripping water, the GM could easily divide the numbers below by 20 or more; anything in between is plausible.

The base will continue to be fully useful for a few years. Within a decade, many consumables will be useless, so it's unsuitable for occupation without resupply, but the bulk of the important machinery and information will still be intact. They'll remain that way for at least a century, but smaller and more delicate objects will start to show signs of decay. The air will leak into cathode ray monitors rendering them inoperative, digital media will start to degrade, and exposed copper electrical elements will corrode. Small moving parts may clog with dust or, if they're iron-based, freeze with a thin layer of rust, though they might initially be salvageable with a good cleaning. After a few centuries, the bunker may still be structurally sound, if a bit dusty, but only things printed on acid-free paper or recorded on archival-quality digital media will contain any useful information, and only the simplest devices will still be useful. After a thousand years, barring climatic changes which bring in new ground water or seismic events which would

make the slowly weakening structure collapse, about the only things adventurers might look for, a few long-obsolete documents aside, are copper plumbing and small quantities of precious metals in the electrical system and computers. After a millennium, NORAD turns into a dungeon crawl without monsters.

--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 Review

Khronos

Published by Rio Grande Games

Designed by Ludovic Vialla

Full-color boxed game with game board, turn counter board, 10 adventurer pawns in 5 colors, 125 control cubes, round counter pawn, 60 treasure coins, 33 action cards, 155 building tiles, rule page

Certain development games such as *__Tigris and Euphrates__* have a mechanic around influencing the creation and development of buildings. *Khronos* takes this to the next level as players send their pawns through time to start buildings in the past and improve them in the future. Buildings built or upgraded in earlier time-zones "ripple" forward, replacing pre-existing buildings in the same locations. The problem is that it costs money to travel in time, and players have only two pawns for the three time periods, each of which may only spend up to two cards in their turn, and only in the time period they happen to be in.

Khronos' components are clearly labeled and colorful, and all have color-coded resting places within the game box. The cubes and pawns also are shipped in strong ziplock bags. The Control cubes are of standard eurogame quality. The Construction cards are effective and distinctive in their three colors: orange, which is connected to Time #1, the Age of Might (Military); purple, which is Time #2, the Age of Faith (Religious); and blue, which is Time #3, the Age of Reason (Civil).

Two to five players can play. Each player starts with the two pawns and 25 Control Cubes of their color, as well as four Ecus (money) and four Construction cards; and pawns are all placed in the Age of Might (Time #1). The Turn Counter is set to 1. Each player's turn follows these four steps:

I) At any time, once each turn, the current player may exchange all or part of his hand and draw the same number by spending two Ecu.

II) Each pawn may move, and up to two cards may be played in the time period(s) that the pawns are in. At any time in its turn, a player may move his pawn once at a cost of 1 Ecu, before, between, or after playing cards. Both or each of the Construction cards may be used to construct, demolish, upgrade, or renovate a building. Buildings can only be built or upgraded in the first two ages; they come in three varieties and in three sizes. First, the size of the building indicates the number of cards required to build it, from one to five. The color indicates which color of card is required. Buildings can be similarly upgraded by spending the difference in the appropriate color card. Note that a player may only spend two cards per pawn per turn, so it is impossible to build a five-point building all at once. Upgrading or building a building beyond one point grants the player 1 Ecu in Age #1, or 2 Ecu in the riskier Age #2.

Only Civil (blue) buildings can be built on river squares (as well as anywhere else), or connect domains (groups of buildings). Connecting domains can cause conflicts, often rippling through time. It is forbidden to build a Military (orange) or Religious (purple) building of the same value as the highest value building of the same type in that domain (greater than 1). The simple solution is to not build it attached to the same group of buildings (e.g., in a different domain). With more players, building on forest and mountain costs less. In the Age of Reason (#3), players spend blue cards to place cubes on Civil (blue) buildings (see scoring in IV). Although it is forbidden to build in the Age of Reason, players may place an equal number of cubes on Civil (blue) buildings, until the building holds a number equal to its value. Military (orange) and Religious (purple) buildings may be restored in the Age of Reason at a cost of two cards of the appropriate color. (In five player games, the whole territory is open, but in four player games, building on

or upgrading over the mountains have an increased cost of one card of any color; in three player games, the forests cost one and the mountains two.)

III) At the end of a player's turn, he fills his hand of Construction Cards to four cards. After all players have each taken a turn, the Turn Counter is advanced.

IV) At the end of each player's turn in rounds 4 and 7, he scores points in only time periods in which that player has a pawn. Each Age has a bonus income; for example, the Age of Might (#1) grants a bonus for each player who controls the most prestigious Military building on a given domain, with that player gaining Ecu equal to the total number of points of Civil (blue) buildings in that domain. Similar bonuses apply for Religious (purple) buildings in the Age of Faith (#2). The player with (or tied for) the most cubes on Civil (blue) buildings in a domain grants him Ecu equal to the value of all Military (orange) and Religious (Purple) buildings in that domain. At the end of seven turns, the player with the most Ecus wins.

The rule book is well laid out, and handles time travel well. The rules are summarized in easy-to-spot boxes to aid players in quick reference later. The text is straight-forward, and the breadth reveals strong playtesting to resolve conflicts inherent to time-traveling construction crews. Although starting with 4 Ecu may not sound like much, players mainly use this to move pawns through time (at a cost of 1 Ecu per pawn per jump). Movement will be conservative as Ecu is limited to gains through upgrades in the first three turns.

Pawns start in the Age of Might (#1), and since size buildings of size three and five ripple forward, they are also constructed in the later time periods for free, although the ripples in Age #3 for Military (Orange) and Religious (Purple) buildings are unclaimed ruins. Such Buildings built in the Age of Religion (#2) are still owned and complete in #3, but can be superseded by anything that ripples from the Age of Might. In the Age of Reason (#3), Military (orange) and Religious (Purple) buildings can be restored, and Civil (Blue) buildings beautified.

The pieces are easy to distinguish, and small hands of four cards will be the random factor that keeps the game new each time. Players should do their best to spend all four cards, two with each pawn, to get their 28 cards in (seven rounds of four cards each), as those are all the cards available to them.

At 90 minutes apiece, a game of *Khronos* runs very tightly, with the 28 cards that a player has a chance to play meaning quite a lot. During review games, some players said that their fortunes were all dependent on the cards; perhaps a house rule might be to increase hand sizes to five or six, so that players need not try to spend *every* card. Curiously, the *goal* of the game for players is not spelled out anywhere. Tips and strategies on what the players should try to accomplish in each age would be tremendously helpful. Thus, in the games for this review, the middle age was largely ignored, except during scoring rounds. *Khronos* feels and looks to be made of sturdy stuff, and even if the manual is shy in some areas, seeing constructions ripple through time makes the game worthwhile. Just remember to think four dimensionally!

--Eric Funk
    Special thanks to David Johnston for taking the time to help.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Memetic War

by Paul Drye

The History of an Idea

A lot of scientific talent disappeared in the Russia of the 1920s and 1930s. Between civil war, economic collapse, and Stalin's monstrous suspicions, any number of first-class minds were extinguished. On most timelines, one of these was Lev Vygotsky, a man profoundly interested in the role of language in forming thoughts. On Q5's Freud-2, rather than dying of tuberculosis Vygotsky continued expanding his already voluminous work, eventually becoming the first "mathematical propagandist" in support of the Russian war effort in the 1940s. He expanded propaganda beyond mere advertising into a measurable science, where the effect of even particular words could be precisely judged in advance.

Unfortunately his successes brought him to the attention of Stalin. In the aftermath of World War II, Vygotsky's work continued under pressure from the General Secretary, and it was in the late 1940s and early 1950s that he made his breakthroughs in memetics. He developed the first transmissible memetic structure, nothing more than an irresistible urge to eat an apple that he would place in front of the subject being infected, but the potential was demonstrated: Stalin set up several other groups working on less benign memes. The intention was to create a way to instill absolute loyalty to the party and to Stalin himself and, while that's approximately what the researchers produced, it happened in a way they did not expect.

Vygotsky himself had worried about mutation in his memes, but had decided that they could not evolve in highly dangerous ways in even the decades they would live in a human brain -- thoughts and experiences occurred too slowly for that. What he did not anticipate was that his creations could interact with and absorb pre-existing cultural ideas in the minds of his targets, particularly those connected to strong emotions like love and fear, and especially during the dreaming portion of sleep, when free associations between ideas were far more common.

In mid-1952, evidence of a meme that had "gone native" -- continued to exist and evolve in a human mind despite the usual post-experiment disinfection -- came to Vygotsky's attention. Despite his best efforts, however, he could not stop it spreading and continuing to mutate. By March of the next year, the first recognizable version of Red Rider had appeared, a powerful stew of Marxism-Leninism, paranoia, and terror politics. Worse, it had infected Politburo member Mikhail Suslov some time in the previous few months; the hybrid of politico and meme used the unbreakable loyalty inspired by the mental construct to build an impregnable conspiracy against Stalin that kicked into operation when the old leader died on March 5th.

By the summer of 1953, the hidden civil war was over and the Soviet Union was entirely under the thrall of Red Rider. Versions of the meme in languages other than Russian (primarily those of the USSR's subject peoples, but also German, French, and English) developed, and began to spread throughout Europe. By then the West had already begun to understand what was going on and fought back; initial incursions in the major European NATO countries and

in the Atlantic seaboard of the United States were fought off. However, just as it seemed like containment was going to work, Red Rider managed to creep into North America via the tenuous contacts between Yupik tribes of the Russian Far East and Alaska. Though again the meme was fought off in the region's towns (Nome in particular being entirely converted at one point), it proved impossible to stamp it out entirely in the wilderness.

Red Rider then followed the line of rivers that passes southwest from the Yukon Territory, through British Columbia and into Idaho and eastern Oregon and Washington State. There it stalled as the American and Canadian authorities got the measure of it, but the ruggedly forested, isolated watersheds of the upper Fraser, Columbia, and Snake Rivers remain the hotbed of Red Rider activity; it's certain that every person living in the area is infected, though thankfully this is less than 200,000 people.

Red Rider's Capabilities

While it veers close to [Clarke's Third Law](), the Russian meme does have certain limitations that let its adversaries get a hold on it.

Most importantly, it is transmitted via a combination of speech and body language. Infection requires 10 minutes in the presence of an infected person, with that person obviously talking and acting strangely, before it can be passed on. As a result, it's fairly difficult to catch the meme without knowing it's happening. Radio transmissions are safe, though the US and Canadian governments have taken the precaution of shutting down most small stations, and requiring people working for the remainder to undergo inoculation. Television is likely not safe, and people have been avoiding it to such an extent since the invasion began that ABC, CBS, NBC, and DuMont have all closed down for the duration.

The meme also restricted to infecting people who can understand the language in which it's encoded; Vygotsky's technique depends on hooking into the language centers of subjects. There are about 20 versions of Red Rider, of which only the English translation exists in North America. In theory it could be encoded in any human language, though some cultures may not have the right mental constructs to let it infect everyone. Though communications are sporadic, there's reason to believe that the meme has slammed up against linguistic differences trying to cross into the other major center of Communism, China, and that a shambolic war against Russia is underway there.

Past these boundaries, Red Rider is a sophisticated form of mind control that uses the brain of the infected person to circumscribe himself. The major strain of artificial thought contained by the meme is the spread of Communist world revolution, which is closely tied to its own desire to spread itself. However, it has also picked up several other natural habits that were endemic in the U.S.S.R.: deceptiveness, loyalty to other "party" members, anti-Semitism, ruthlessness towards perceived enemies, and fear of discovery.

While the question founders of the issue of what represents "mind," Red Rider is presumed by Freud-2's authorities to not actually be sentient in any meaningful way. Much like a biochemical virus, it can't reproduce (or even act) without the help of a host. However, while in a host the hybrid of meme and man shows remarkable cunning. Its usual strategy is to first infiltrate a community while laying low, finding the people who are the social centers and working to infect them. As much as possible, it tries to maintain the façade of that person's normal life (which isn't too difficult, as the hybrid actually is that person, just with modified priorities). However, as soon as it can it tries for a coup, infecting the rest of the community as quickly as possible and then cutting it off from the rest of the world so that the cycle can begin again without discovery. This has proven to be a very effective strategy in the small towns of America; cities have proven a tougher nut to crack, though it's certain that there's a fifth column in urban centers across the country.

Once it's taken over, Red Rider's pathological programming takes over. Like a regular disease that's new to the human species, it's not very gentle with its hosts. Conformism runs rampant, and purges of people who don't fit the white-bread, rural norm kill many. Eventually this settles down to a hard core of citizens who are a virtual parody of the American norm: They go to work, they live in nuclear families, they attend church and high school football games . . . and they don't actually care about any of it. The ritual is all that matters.

In Defense

North America is protecting itself against Red Rider in a variety of ways. American memetic science is less advanced than the Russians', but it's been enough to let the defenders develop a counter-meme dubbed "Freedom." While it can't displace the more-sophisticated Russian mind virus once it's established, it can hook into natural American memes like individualism, patriotism, and Commie-hatred. With that base, it can fight off an infection by the Rider. All American military and government personnel are required to submit to infection by Freedom, and many civilians have undergone the procedure willingly.

Those who haven't are subjected to loyalty oaths at closely spaced intervals: schoolchildren pledge allegiance to the flag every morning, and adults need to sign and otherwise swear to them at least once a week. Those infected by Red Rider have been proven unable to make the commitment, even by lying, as the meme combats the thought processes that form the language of the oaths in the taker's mind.

Canada has had more difficulty on this front, mostly due to a less iconic concept of nation preventing Western countermemes from taking hold. To date they've mostly relied on the relative emptiness of the Prairie provinces to protect their citizens, and soldiers from non-English speaking members of NATO such as Norway. Freud-2's Joseph Campbell has also helped by pointing out that young Queen Elizabeth provides a hook into mythological ideas which are strong to hang a meme on for about 20% of the population. Quebec has proven an extremely difficult nut to crack, as only Catholic observance has much of a hold on the thoughts of many French-Canadians and Red Rider seems to have no problem with any religion except Judaism. For now, distance from the wild reserves of the French version of the meme is the sole defense for North American's largest non-English-speaking population.

The main tactic of protection, though, is military isolation of Red Rider's stronghold in the Rocky Mountains. There are three towns used as command centers for a military cordon around the entire infected area, each at the base of roads and an important river leading out of the area: The Dalles, Oregon on the west side; Great Falls, Montana on the east; and the Canadian west coast is protected from tiny Hope, British Columbia. All three screen much larger population centers further along the exit routes from the infection zone. Other ways out of the zone have either been destroyed (in the case of roads and railways) or are closely watched. Red Rider needs to walk out of its stronghold which, while difficult to stamp out entirely, keeps the lid on the invasion.

While there have been attempts to invade the infected area, without a cure for the meme these have been half-hearted reconnaissances in force rather than full-blown attempts to squash the invasion. In any case, the rugged landscape, heavy forest, and patchy roads of the cordillera make movement difficult, and actual nullification of every infected person impossible.

Infinity and Freud-2

Fortunately for Homeline, the usual machine-mediated first surveys of any timeline paid off on Freud-2; it quickly became apparent that highly advanced, virulent memes had been on the loose for several years (it currently being 1956). Similar -- and much better-controlled -- science had been encountered on Shikaku-Mon and Caliph. Though both of the other timelines were too security conscious for the entire technology to be transported back to Homeline, enough of the gist had been secured to allow the creation of an Infinity countermeme that would reject either Red Rider or, equally as important, the much more common Freedom.

Infinity's higher-ups determined to go in, rather than quarantine the line, on the grounds that memetic science has enormous potential uses. One major faction in Infinity that has been particularly interested is the one that considers Coventry a major political embarrassment and thus an avenue for interference in Infinity's procedures. If Freud-2's more accessible memes could be reverse engineered, nothing could stop the creation of "Secret," a memetic Coventry-of-the-head which could be used to prevent people from blabbing about parachronics yet otherwise allow them to live their lives. Coventry itself could be closed down, or at least curtailed to those exiles who already could not be re-inserted into their disrupted careers and families. Proponents of this plan gloss over the moral quagmire that is infectious memes, but there is still a substantial constituency for this approach.

Characters

Alexander Luria: The most brilliant of Lev Vygotsky's subordinates, now that the master has died in the chaos of Russia, Luria is the world's expert on infectious memes. He has recently escaped to the West after the Communist Party lost the civil war against its own meme. His theory is that it's better to give the capitalist nations the key to victory and then wait for Marxist forces to restore Communism than to see the end of history under the thumb of Red Rider. On a more personal level, he feels guilt that his work on the psychology of Soviet citizens in the Central Asian republics seems to have been key to Red Rider being translated into other languages. He is also annoyed that it has picked up on Russian anti-Semitism for one of its characteristics, as he is Jewish.

Luria is, in his person, the goal of Infinity's operations in this timeline. He alone could bring back a complete understanding of advanced memetics, but he will not abandon his timeline to do so. Infinity has recruited him with the promise of helping Freud-2 if he works for them afterwards; this will open up many adventure opportunities for Homeliners as he directs them in covert operations that support the American war.

He is a long, lean Russian, just over 50 years old, with glasses, a receding hairline, and a mop of curly, silvery hair. To some extent he resembles a middle-aged Reed Richards.

Lon Rybak: The Sheriff of Gold Bar, Washington, he's on the front line of the Memetic War. Both U.S. Highway 2 and the Great Northern Railway pass through his community -- daggers descending from the Stevens Pass over the Cascades from Red Rider territory.

Rybak is a small-minded, intolerant person, peculiarly suited to protecting his town from invasion. He looks with suspicion on any odd behavior or strangers who haven't been vouched for by the United States Army. He proudly runs a copy of Freedom, and thinks everyone else should do so too. His role in most adventures will be to provide a well-meaning foil for Infinity personnel on covert missions. Unless he can be hoodwinked with assertions of national security and duties that suit his self-importance, he will interfere every step of the way.

The Sheriff is a husky, round-faced man, clean-shaven and brush-cut. He wears the light brown uniform and darker cowboy hat of a Washington State sheriff at all times when he's awake.

Adventures on Freud-2

Blow-Up: The Hanford Facility, a primary producer of plutonium for A-bombs, is well inside the infected area. Heroic efforts by the American military have kept it secure, and it is even producing plutonium with the multi-billion dollar investment in hydroelectricity and reactors there. Now the word has come down that the States have reconfigured their weapon program enough that Hanford is no longer necessary and is to be closed and destroyed.

In the dimming electric lights of the facility's last evening, a massive attack of Red Rider zombies comes from outside the perimeter. The explosive charges have been set, but weren't supposed to be set off until morning; now it becomes obvious that even a full-blown defense will only buy enough time to get them going now. As a battle rages outside, the buildings inside need to be reduced to rubble.

Who Went There?: Bend, Oregon is by far the largest town in the area controlled by Red Rider, so it gets overflown up to once a day as the U.S. Army keeps an eye on the citizenry. Now a report has come in that Bend seems abandoned and there's no clue why. The town is relatively accessible from the command center at The Dalles, so an expedition has been put together to determine if a natural disaster has occurred, disease has struck, or if something more sinister is going on.

All The Way To The Top: President Eisenhower, with his considerable military planning experience, has been instrumental in developing the strategies used to control the zone of infection. Now a statistical analysis by Dr. Luria has led him to the conclusion that there is a vector of sporadic failures of Freedom and resulting infections pointing in his direction. It seems that Red Rider and its hosts have figured out how to circumvent the American countermeme and

decided to decapitate the Army and government simultaneously. Luria doesn't know for sure who he can trust in the normal chain of command, and hasn't got time to test everyone. The Homeliners, with their out-time developed countermeme, are the only ones he can turn to in the race to the top.

The Memetic War in Other Settings

Freud-2 is already a pulp setting, albeit one set a little later than most, in the campy 1950s pulp style. For real verisimilitude, the GM will want to replace the modernistic sheen of memes with alien earworms or somesuch, but otherwise it's ready to go. A 1930s pulp campaign could equally use a Nazi meme, though Freudian psychology was in disarray in Nazi Germany so some "kooky-yet-unbelievably-right" science will be needed. Keeping Communism in the forefront does open up the interesting possibility of using the meme to explain the (to the modern eye) inexplicable blind spot many intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s possessed toward the Soviet Union's flaws, though this does radically change the rural, even borderline survivalist society of Red Rider victims outlined above.

Science-fiction settings have a number of precedents to fall back on. The aforementioned earworms have migrated into modern sci-fi in a variety of ways -- sometimes not changing at all, by becoming an infection (as per Greg Bear's *Blood Music*), or even linguistic reprogramming (most famously used by Neal Stephenson in *Snow Crash*). The right approach can be chosen depending on the apparent hardness of the science used to develop the setting, and fit in without a ripple.

Both fantasy gamers and those into superheroes can get into a "memetic" war by changing the entire body of the victim into the holder of the meme rather than just the brain; doppelgangers or similar shapeshifters work brilliantly to bring in the right level of paranoia. GMs looking to take this route could do worse than to examine ***Ravenloft*** for a fantasy example (one nation there being in an advanced state of doppelganger invasion), while the author will merely point in the direction of this summer's upcoming *Secret Invasion* crossover series from Marvel for a capes-and-cowls take.

Additional Reading

Both Lev Vygotsky and Alexander Luria were real people, leading early figures in the field of cultural psychology and neuropsychology respectively. Anyone looking for more insight into the latter figure can do worse than read Luria's posthumously published autobiography *A Dialogue with the Making of Mind.* Vygotsky is more elusive (part of the reason your humble author felt a need to remove him from Freud-2's present day), but a good overview of this theories can be found in the recent *Cambridge Companion to Vygotsky.*

The Last Letter

by Alice Turow

Dinah fumbled with the envelope awkwardly. The news of Kristoffer's death still echoed in her ears, and the reverberations of that terribly blow made it difficult to break the seal made of paper and glue. She wondered what would be written on the paper therein; Kristoffer gave her the sealed missive so long ago. Her optimistic half hoped it was some kind of final declaration of love, or even information about hidden assets that would see her through the coming hard times; her pessimistic self feared revelations of unfaithfulness or worse crimes from beyond the grave. Of all the scenarios she envisioned, however, none were as unexpected as the letter's actual contents:

> *My Love,*
>
> *If you are reading this, please know that I have been murdered by Anton Montegna, a result of an investigation gone wrong at the warehouse in which I was found. You <u>must</u> <u>believe</u> <u>me</u> when I say I was not involved with a drug deal. The police do not have evidence to act, but I know a secret: He has hidden my murder weapon in a crate marked with the number 26748192 that was bound for Indonesia . . .*

* * *

Tales from the Dead Letter Office

Many have found themselves on death's door, wishing they could send comforting words to loved ones, incriminating evidence to authorities, or instructions to best friends to erase hard drives. To those in possession of a Last Letter, all these are possible.

The Last Letter begins life as a single sheet of paper in a sealed envelope. Both are attuned to a single person, and the powers of the Last Letter are nontransferable to anyone else (thought the envelope and paper itself can be given or taken as would any such paper goods). The sheet of paper is blank, and if the envelope is opened before the demise of the attuned individual, it shall forever remain a mundane sheet of paper.

If the envelope stays sealed until after the attuned person dies, the true powers of the Last Letter are revealed. The moment after his death, the attuned person has one hour to compose on the paper -- front and back -- as much or as little as he likes. Note that the writer is not limited to words; he may also draw maps or illustrations (limited by his artistic abilities).

For those who scrutinize it closely, the paper's writing appears as an unappealing blue-gray, akin to strokes made by a blue-tinged charcoal pencil. However, the marks are as permanent and resistant to erasure or smudging as a high-quality ink pen's. This also means that anything scribed must be stricken out or scribbled over if the writer changes his mind about during his hour. Thus, the two biggest restrictions are the one-hour time limit and the solitary sheet of paper.

Potentially coming as a surprise, depending on one's view of the afterlife, is the fact that death brings with it no clarity, omniscience, or understanding (at least, not for the one hour immediately after death). The deceased attuned person is forced to compose his letter with all perceptions ending at the moment of death, or ending just before the period of

unconsciousness that leads to death. As a result of this, many Last Letters tend to be confused: "I have no idea what happened to me; I was on a private jet bound for Honolulu, when I fell over with a burning sensation in my throat . . ."

Those who had nothing better to write about in their Last Letters have described the experience of writing it; all agree that they are writing in an area that is utterly featureless, save for a sheet of paper and a pointed blue-gray writing stick that doesn't require sharpening; neither the stick nor paper can be damaged by the writer. The featureless area appears to be infinite, although it's hard to tell with only an hour to explore. The area does otherwise behave as a point in physical space; if the writer puts down the paper and stick, he can walk away and see them get smaller and smaller. Should he think to check, the writer's "body" in the area is an idealized self-reflective form; thus he can't search himself for physical evidence of trauma or wrongdoing. He may also realize he's naked, but he isn't uncomfortable physically or mentally at this prospect. If multiple people with Last Letters die at the same time and place, they discover that they are each in their own discrete featureless areas.

As far as the Letter is concerned, "death" means permanent, not-coming-back death of body and mind. Its powers don't activate for those whose hearts stop but are subsequently restarted, nor does it apply to those in comas or vegetative states.

As already mentioned, the blank Last Letter loses all its powers if sooner than an hour *after* the death of the attuned (when the person could still be writing). It does not confer any special abilities to know *if* the attuned person has died, outside of a one-time "open the letter and see if there is anything written on there" litmus test. The unwritten Letter also loses all its powers if its envelope is *touched* by someone who knows about the powers of *any* Last Letter (except, of course, for the fact that an attuned individual can hold onto his own Last Letter). This depowering effect also means that those who know about the existence of Last Letters tend to keep that a secret, lest too many people learn about them and wipe out the possibility of future Letters. This leads to bizarre situations where the attuned give Letters to loved ones and make statements like, "It's imperative that you do not open this letter until you are certain I am dead!"

Although the paper inside shouldn't be accessed until death, the envelope is otherwise mundane and can be written on, addressed, and/or mailed; "ONLY TO BE OPENED IN THE EVENT OF THE DEATH OF [attuned person]" is a typical note. The Last Letter does *not* require a recipient (there is no reciprocal attunement to the person who receives another's Last Letter), and sticking it in the top drawer of a desk with an appropriate note is a popular option. In all other respects, the Last Letter is a perfectly normal object; it will burn, it can be torn, and so on.

Campaign Uses

The letter from beyond the grave is a common staple of many forms of mystery, fantasy, and horror fiction. The Last Letter is an attempt to codify that trope into an interesting game-usable form.

The biggest obstacle for introducing the Last Letter is figuring out how to get the unattuned forms into the hands of folks (presumably so they can give it to someone else for safekeeping, or stick it in the aforementioned desk drawer). In fantasy or high-magic campaigns, Last Letters are usually bestowed by poweful agents, teleporting or materializing them in the hands of the (now) attuned. In horror, occult, or low-magic campaigns, the unattuned Last Letter is probably crafted by ritual or spell within *another* envelope, or possibly a folder . . . perhaps with a note on it that explains what is contained therein. In this case, the act of opening the outer envelope and touching the Letter inside is what attunes it to that person.

Attuning a group of Last Letters to a party of PCs introduces interesting opportunities for roleplaying with less-powerful supporting cast members; the heroes can't give the Letters to each other since they know about the powers, meaning they need to give them to individuals they trust. In this case, it's a good chance for them to interact with frail Aunt Mary, who doesn't know what the heroes do exactly but who is still reliable enough to be given an envelope with little explanation.

Alternatively, another character could confer his attuned Last Letter on the adventurers. Similarly, someone who was entrusted with a Last Letter but remains mystified at how the communication from the land beyond death was accomplished could seek out the heroes for their help.

Finally, the actual *use* of a Last Letter provides epistolary-inclined players a chance to put a final coda on a character's death. Giving them an hour (of real time), a pen, and a piece of paper to write a last message from the afterlife is an interesting opportunity.

Adventure Seeds

During another adventure, the heroes receive or find an odd missive that seems to have been written posthumously, detailing both a crime that was committed against the deceased and describing a horrible plot that will soon unfold. Because the heroes are not familiar with any of the parties involved (and they weren't the intended recipients of the letter), they'll need to piece together what they can to try to stop the evildoers.

The adventurers are called in as support by a pair of occult detectives, who give the heroes two Letters (one from each detective) with instructions not to open them for six hours. They do so and discover that one of the letters is blank, while the other describes a bad investigation gone worse and includes information that might prove instrumental in saving the other investigator. (As a bonus creepy alternative, perhaps the non-blank Letter instead details the betrayal of the deceased by the other occultist . . .)

In a campaign where Last Letters have made a couple of appearances, maybe an unscrupulous sort who is aware of the heroes' knowledge might craft a false Last Letter, perhaps in an effort to get them to believe erroneously that a loved one is dead or to investigate through inaccurate information.

Controlling the Chaos, Part I

In the real world, if scientists were to unleash their latest creations with minimal testing, and if it brought huge chaos and despair onto the world, those maniacs would be brought to justice by the forces of an enraged humanity. But there's one group of mad geniuses who do, in fact, unleash havoc onto the world on a weekly basis, and their victims actually schedule out blocks of time to endure the resultant suffering; some even go so far as to buy pizza for their tormentors. These insane masterminds are called "game masters."

While far from a universalism, many GMs -- myself included -- tend to introduce changes to a game world without thinking through the repercussions. This can happen on a variety of fronts: house rules, new campaign elements, new character options, and so on. These options can either be homebrew concoctions that sprang from the twisted depths of the GM's mind, or from the twisted yet financially compensated minds of those who create RPGs. It's a dirty secret of the RPG biz that a surprising percentage of what's out there hasn't been playtested or peer-reviewed; even large amounts of what's made available to playtesters isn't so much "playtested" as "read and contemplated" . . . which are, of course, two very different concepts. (One counterexample that surfaced in my inbox an hour *after* I started writing this column is Paizo Publishing's 2009-scheduled *Pathfinder* RPG, a revision of the 3.5 version of the *d20 System* rule set. They've offered the "Alpha Playtest" PDF version of this game for free, and the Beta Playtest will be available as a free PDF and a $25 softcover, all leading up to a GenCon 2009 hardcover release for the "full" version. For a game system that's as rules intensive as a *d20 System* spawn, getting as much testing as possible is a great idea. And clerics can now cast orisons at will . . . how cool is *that?!*)

In the defense of the industry's lack of widespread playtesting, I also note that it can be devilishly difficult to effectively playtest new options, especially when trying to determine how variations will combine with what's already in the wild. Even trading-card games, which have playtesting budgets that eclipse the production budgets of many RPG houses, often find themselves surprised to discover after print that cards interact in game-crushing ways, resulting in the banning of cards or the changing of rules. Now compare a 200-card TCG set with *one* new book of 200 spells, and the potential for mayhem in a professional game line should be obvious.

But homebrew campaigns -- the non-playtest games of those in the trenches that make up 99.9% of the gaming universe -- are often the testing grounds for all kinds of experiments. Many of them can have far-reaching consequences. I've written before about the time we tried converting *In Nomine* to the *World of Darkness* Storyteller System, including a translation of the 1-1-1/6-6-6 die system to the fistful of 10-siders. For those of you who don't feel like clicking the link, suffice it to say the dice mechanic translated poorly, and the previously covert war between Heaven and Hell had the subtlety and dignity of a celestial pillow fight. On a less interesting but more somber note, the attempt at converting our long-running *GURPS Supers* campaign to *Champions* pretty much marked the death knell for that game. In the latter case, it wasn't even a matter of the game being a poor choice so much as the lack of experience coupled with grand designs; a five-versus-five fight resolves much more quickly among a group of experienced *GURPS* players compared to a bunch of *Champions* neophytes.

In dozens of other campaigns I've run, I've added house rules to address certain problems, and an astounding percentage of those "fixes" have ended up causing enough problems that new fixes have needed to be introduced. It's like *The Onion* article, "New Technological Breakthrough To Fix Problems Of Previous Breakthrough." When house rules are introduced to a board or card game, the damage is limited to that session. Unfortunately -- especially for a campaign intended to continue for a while -- there can be considerable collateral damage to the series when new elements are introduced.

For example, let's say the GM tweaks the critical hit rules and allows for open-ended damage, which combines oddly with the fortune-point system that allows for dice rerolls. As a result of these two systems colliding, a lucky and shrewd player of a neophyte warrior uses all his fortune points to score one devastating critical hit against a much more powerful dragon, killing it. He uses the experience, loot, and fame to elevate his character to amazing heights of power (especially for that stage of the campaign), leaving the other characters in the dust. Now what? Sure, there are techniques that the GM can use to rid a character of title, cash, and prestige, but handled poorly, it's an invitation for

eyebrow raising among the players: "Don't play too well, or you'll get stripped of your winnings."

The problem, of course, is that such elements are usually introduced without much beta testing among the gaming group; the GM might do a sample combat round or two, or he might think about the revision *real* hard. But in the end, most groups feel they don't have much choice except to introduce the changes and hope for the best, then mop up the damage to the game afterwards. And in games without pushover GMs like me, the stakes can be high for players; I'd have a good old-fashioned snit in store if a beloved character died because some new rule got trotted out.

Next week, we'll look at some ideas for how to mitigate the problems of new rules additions, and keep them from causing too much havoc. The players might be willing to tolerate a mastermind unleashing his madness occasionally, but they may stop buying him pizza.

--Steven Marsh

American Dionysus: Johnny Appleseed

"Lord, there goes Johnny Appleseed
He might pass by in the hour of need
There's a lot of souls
Ain't drinking from no well locked in a factory."
-- Joe Strummer, "Johnny Appleseed"

Again we track an American demigod, we follow branches of allusion, we dodge around the solid trunk of history in search of a bite from the tempting fruit of knowledge. And everywhere we go, someone has been there before us, planting the seeds from which we harvest our bushels of sweet, sweet speculation. Before we get too far down the river, I should note that the seed for this column, and specifically for the notion of Johnny Appleseed as the American Dionysus, was planted by Michael Pollan's fascinating *The Botany of Desire.* I spent no little time trying to weasel my way out of just lifting Pollan's phrase, but he has, if you'll pardon the expression, gotten to the core of the matter. And so must we.

"A boy blew west,
And with prayers and incantations,
And with 'Yankee Doodle Dandy,'
Crossed the Appalachians,
And was 'young John Chapman,'
Then 'Johnny Appleseed, Johnny Appleseed,'
Chief of the fastness, dappled and vast,
In a pack on his back,
In a deer-hide sack,
The beautiful orchards of the past,
The ghosts of all the forests and the groves --
In that pack on his back,
In that talisman sack . . ."
-- Vachel Lindsay, "In Praise of Johnny Appleseed"

A barefoot man, wearing a coffee-sack for a shirt, with a tin pot on his head in lieu of a hat, walks out of the forest on the American frontier. He carries no gun, no axe. He has a bag of apple seeds, and he plants them wherever he goes. The animals follow him -- they are friends, not food. He brings sweetness to the farms along the river; the sweetness of his company, of his songs, and most of all, of the apples he plants. He brings also "the news fresh from Heaven," and preaches to anyone who will listen: Indians as well as whites. He is both medicine man and parson, a holy fool of the woods. In his footsteps rise groves and orchards and whole forests of apple trees, red and green and yellow. He is Johnny Appleseed, and you can hear one or another version of this story anywhere in America that apples grow. From Vermont to Washington, they assure you, Johnny Appleseed planted the first apple trees, without desire for pay or property. "Nurserymen," says Robert Price in his 1954 magnum opus *Johnny Appleseed: Man and Myth,* "invoke the blessings of the Johnny Appleseed moon on their spring plantings and sing his praise during the fall harvest."

". . . Johnny Appleseed, always going on about Paul Bunyan. In real life Chapman owned fourteen apple orchards. He farmed thousands of acres. Yes, he kept pace with the western frontier, but there's not a story out there about him with a word of truth in it, save that he went a little crazy once. But it doesn't matter. Like the newspapers used to say, if the truth isn't big enough, you print the legend. This country needs its legends."
-- "Wednesday," in *American Gods,* by Neil Gaiman

And that's not all. The first thing Johnny Appleseed saw out his Boston window was an apple, or he was buried under an apple tree. Johnny Appleseed was driven West when his girl back East rejected him, or for ten years he paid a farm couple to raise their daughter to be his bride only to find her canoodling with a boy of her own age, or he sought only his "two brides waiting in Heaven." Johnny Appleseed once slept in the snow to avoid disturbing a mother bear in a

hollow log, once put out his fire because mosquitoes flew into it and burnt up, once removed a hornet from his shirt without killing it because "it didn't mean no harm," once rescued a wolf from a trap and kept it as a pet and companion. Johnny Appleseed went barefoot to punish his feet for accidentally treading on a snake, the only animal he ever killed in his life. Or a snake tried to bite Johnny Appleseed through his calluses and starved to death. Johnny Appleseed was a frontier Paul Revere, racing for three days during the War of 1812 to warn the settlers of Mount Vernon, Ohio, that "the tribes of the heathen are round about your doors, and a devouring flame followeth after them." (Or, slightly clearer, "the British and Indians are come upon you, and destruction followeth in their footsteps.") His ghost haunts a cemetery south of Dexter City, Ohio. The stories piled up like windfall apples in autumn.

Eventually, they became novels -- especially Vachel Lindsay's *Golden Book of Springfield* -- and poems by Carl Sandburg, Stephen Vincent Benet, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay again. Johnny showed up in pageants and plays (including a 1929 effort in which he plants trees as fast as [Paul Bunyan](#) can cut them down) and even as the subject of a 1924 operetta, by one H.W. Loomis. Weirdly enough, there don't seem to be a whole lot of folk songs about Johnny. (Price said, in 1954, that there weren't *any,* and, Internet notwithstanding, he looked a lot more places than I did.) The closest thing to a Johnny Appleseed folk song is apparently the "Johnny Appleseed Grace" that Girl Scouts may remember singing, the operative phrase being "for giving me the things I need/the sun, and the rain, and the apple seed." This song, as it happens, was written by Kim Gannon and Walter Kent in 1946 for a Disney short about Johnny. Not quite Vachel Lindsay, but not the rude barbaric yawp of the Folk, either.

"There is in the western country a very extraordinary missionary of the New Jerusalem. A man has appeared who seems to be almost independent of corporeal wants and sufferings. He goes barefooted, can sleep anywhere, in house or out of house, and live upon the coarsest and most scanty fare. He has actually thawed ice with his bare feet. . . . This man for years past has been in the employment of bringing into cultivation, in numberless places in the wilderness, small patches (two or three acres) of ground, and then sowing apple seeds and rearing nurseries."
-- from the *Report* of the Society for Printing, Publishing, and Circulating the Writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg (Jan. 14, 1817)

Perhaps we shouldn't be too terribly surprised, given that the first substantial record of Johnny Appleseed, in the quote above, repeats the legend that he melted ice with his bare feet for drinking water. I say "first substantial record," in that the birth of John Chapman on September 26, 1774 in Leominster, Massachusetts, is recorded in the town archives. (Not in Boston in April of 1775 per patriotic legend, sadly.) Chapman appears again in 1804, in Franklin, Pennsylvania, signing two promissory notes for $100. Right around that time, he began his actual, historical career of itinerant apple-planting, mostly in what is now Ohio. He picked cast-off seeds out of cider-mill pomace, carried them to the edge of the frontier, picked out good land, planted two or three acres worth of seedlings, and fenced them in. Then he moved on to seed the next sunny clearing or the next dappled hillside, returning to his nurseries for occasional maintenance and to sell the seedlings to the incoming settlers. For forty years, Chapman kept just ahead of the westward migration, occasionally buying parcels of land to keep his nurseries going, always roving through the woods looking for the next future orchard. He did serve as a volunteer frontier scout in the War of 1812, warning of Indian attacks; he did go barefoot and dress in castoff garments; he did refuse to hunt for food or eat meat. He carried a gun and an axe, rode horses when he could (though often giving them away to those who needed them more), and got along with Indians better than most of his fellow frontiersmen. When he died, most likely on March 18, 1845 (though some historians plump for February 11, and others still for the summer of 1847), it was indoors near Fort Wayne, Indiana. He left an estate comprising at least 1,200 acres of apple orchards, and likely a good deal more -- but keeping careful track of his land holdings was not a priority for Johnny Appleseed.

"[W]hat we see, are only envelopes and outermost coverings, when there are interiors which are the all thereof. It was granted to represent to him a tree whose leaves only appear, then an apple, of which we see only the outside, when yet within it are fibers like trees, if they are unfolded: there are juices purer and purer, there are envelopes of seeds, there are seeds which inwardly store up the purest [principles] thereof: these we do not see."
-- Emmanuel Swedenborg, *Spiritual Diary* (Aug. 21, 1748)

No, his priority was spreading the "news fresh from Heaven," which is to say the gospel of the New Church, or the Church of the New Jerusalem, or as it is popularly known, Swedenborgianism. To sum up Swedenborgianism in a sentence, which can't be done, it holds that there are direct correspondences -- one-to-one links -- between Earth and

Heaven, so the more Heavenly a life you live on Earth, the better things will be in Heaven, both for you and for Heaven. For Johnny, his asceticism, kindliness, generosity, and insistence on planting apple trees from seed instead of grafting them -- "only God can improve an apple tree" was one of his favorite sayings -- were all of a piece. To John Chapman -- to Johnny Appleseed -- every apple tree that grew on Earth was one more that grew in Heaven. So his travels let him combine spreading the word of God (via Swedenborgian tracts) with helping God improve more and more apples.

Because as it happens, apples are insanely heterozygotic. If you take the ten seeds out of one Golden Delicious and plant them, the one and only thing you know for sure is that none of the ten trees that sprout will bear Golden Delicious apples. The new varieties will be genetic cards drawn by the apple tree to see if it can improve its hand in that spot, for that water or that soil or that amount of shade. The only way to get another Golden Delicious is to graft a Golden Delicious bough onto a seedling, and Johnny thought grafting was the Devil's work. Everywhere Johnny went, then, he left not just apple trees, but unique apple trees, perhaps millions of them, each as individual (and likely as ornery) as, well, an American. "The true democratic fruit," as Henry Ward Beecher called the apple, is, if you look at it correctly, an organic, self-evolving von Neumann machine that makes the liquid-metal Terminator look like a Ken doll. Johnny Appleseed becomes the vector for a benign (even Heavenly, if you're a Swedenborgian) virus that explodes in America at the turn of the 19th century, making America the Land of Apples in truth.

"After many years this land will be made manifest to those who come after you, when days of tribulation may come upon the people of Christ. The great river you see here divides this land into two parts; and just as it appears now, teeming with ripe fruits, so does it ever remain, without any blight or shadow whatever, for light unfailing shines thereon."
-- Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis, XXVIII

We recall the Land Promised to the Saints across the Atlantic, found by St. Brendan, with its (Ohio?) river valley "teeming with ripe fruits." What fruits? Apples, of course; the Greeks had the Golden Apples of the Hesperides beyond Ocean, the Norse had the Garden of Iduna (or Idhunn, she of the Apples of Immortality) over the sea, the Balts had the Apple Island of Saule the Mother-Sun, Bran the Blessed is called to the Other World by a silver apple-bough, Oisin follows a maiden with an apple to the Land of Youth, and Arthur is carried over water to Avalon, the "isle of Apples." The Irish and the Greeks piled windfall apples on graves for the dead to eat, the Iroquois have an apple tree at the center of the world reaching above the sky, the kabbalists have the Orchard of Shekinah. The Apple-Land is Heaven, as Johnny Appleseed would assure you, even as he planted it into existence beside the Mohican River, and Owl Creek (like Avalon a name associated with mythic life-in-death), and Black Fork, and Licking Creek, and the Auglaize River, and St. Mary's River, and the Maumee, and the Wabash.

"Johnny Appleseed was very much an American Dionysus -- innocent and mild. In this he may have helped to establish the benign, see-no-evil mood that characterizes the Dionysian strain in American culture, from transcendentalist Concord to the Summer of Love."
-- Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*

But what kind of Heaven? Pollan points out that since Johnny's un-grafted apples would almost never grow true for eating, they must have been for, well, drinking. Apple cider (or applejack) was "the true democratic drink," to paraphrase Beecher. Anyone with an apple tree could make cider in the backyard; easier than beer or wine. For applejack, they just needed cider and a hard freeze. Johnny is, as Pollan points out, the American Dionysus, the demigod of democratic cider (lineage literally irrelevant) instead of aristocratic wine (vintage is everything). Like Dionysus, he wears rude clothing and walks barefoot, he travels with animals (Dionysus favored the tiger, but then there aren't many tigers in Ohio), he brings song and new visionary myths and the occasional warning, he springs from the green wooded valleys, he dissolves boundaries -- between frontier and farm, between white and red, between Earth and Heaven. And sure enough, we find as we look deeper into Dionysus (or Dionysos, as we should perhaps call him in his purely Greek incarnation) that he is called Isodaites ("giver to all"), and Anthion ("the flowering"), and Borimos ("the fruitful"). Theokritos and Neoptolemos both gave Dionysus credit for the creation of the apple specifically. The apple, says Clement of Alexandria, features in the Dionysian mysteries. Dionysus' other signature plant is, of course, his *thyrsos,* the fennel stalk that held Prometheus' fire. (And which the Benandanti used to travel to the Otherworld and fight witches, you'll recall.) And what do we find when we return our attention to Johnny Appleseed? That he also

plants dog-fennel, or "Johnnyweed," as it is called in Ohio. Interesting.

" 47. And it is written . . . 'The dew of the lights is Thy dew.' Of the lights -- that is, from the brightness of the Ancient One.
48. And by that dew are nourished the holy supernal ones.
49. And this is that manna which is prepared for the just in the world to come.
50. And that dew distilleth upon the ground of the holy apple trees . . ."
-- Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata,* Pars Secunda, Tract 2, Chapter IV (trans. S.L. MacGregor Mathers)

It turns out that our Johnny was quite the herbalist, bringing not just apples but "dog-fennel, pennyroyal, catnip, hoarhound, dandelion, wintergreen, mullein, rattlesnake root, and any other plant supposed to be helpful," in Price's summary list. Twice-Born Dionysus is also a god of magic, after all. Cut an apple in half at the equator, and you see what? A pentacle of seeds. The Druids cut their divining rods from apple trees, and Cormac Mac Art was given a magical apple-bough (from the Land across the sea to the west?) by the sea-god Manannan. The unicorn famously sleeps in a maiden's lap, but also under an apple tree. Slightly further afield -- but what is a detour to Johnny Appleseed? -- the May-apple is another candidate for the mandrake, and the Rosicrucians might remind us that the apple is of the rose family. In Gypsy lore, getting an apple from an old widow and eating it on the Eve of St. Andrew (half before midnight, half after) would reveal the face of your true love. Apples are the fruit of love, as Meleager proved to Atalanta . . . and as Eve proved to Adam. And still less pleasantly, as Eris proved to the destruction of Olympus. On Twelfth Night, the English know enough to wassail the trees in cider, propitiating them for another year. Are we sure we want Dionysus to plant those ever-shifting trees in our national cantosphere after all?

"Actar speaking. Certain great powers in your world wish to see us go away or see us destroyed. Neither will happen. These powers fear us, and when you fear anything you hate it. All planets have come to help certain ones on [Earth]. Those of the right mind are one with us! We will not harm anyone, only their own thoughts can do that. Evil destroys evil. Bounce back! Certain seeds have been placed on [Earth]. To the apples we salt, we return."
-- George Hunt Williamson, *The Saucers Speak!*

But what choice do we have? Our Green Man, our Dionysus, has brought us the news fresh from Heaven, and the fruited boughs to point us there if we have tough enough feet to follow him. He is more American, literally, than apple pie -- Granny Smiths are Australian. He plants the Trees of Life (in the Kabbalah, the path from Hesed to Yesod is an apple-tree) as well as the Trees of Knowledge in the American Eden. He will warn us when he can, but he already told us what he is doing. Johnny Appleseed, when wounded, would burn the wound and then heal the burn, they say. Somewhere he may have planted a Nemesis Gold that blooms and burns for us all. He brings more sour than sweet, with just a drunken touch of madness. But this is not kind. Perhaps in some idyllic glen in the heart of the Ohio country grows the Iroquois tree to heaven, bearing the Golden Apples of the Sun, the Silver Apples of the Moon, and the Blue Apples at Noon hinted in the Rennes-la-Chateau parchments. It is planted round with dog-fennel, and guarded by "the rattlesnake his brother." It is the Nursery of Johnny Appleseed, an American Avalon ready for the holy fool who died on the eve of Iduna's feast day, and left a million new trees in Heaven behind him.

Pyramid Review

Starcraft: The Board Game

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed & written by Corey Konieczka, Christian T. Petersen, & James Torr

Edited by Jeff Tidball, Christian T. Petersen, & James Torr

Graphics & Artwork by Kevin Childress, Andrew Navaro, Scott Nicely, Brian Schomburg, Zoë Robinson, Jean-Pierre Targete, Stacey Diana Clark, Peter Johnston, Joe Marioth, Aaron Panagos, Frank Walls, Ben Zweifel, Anders Finer, & Blizzard Entertainment

Full-color boxed set with rulebook, 180 plastic figures (two sets each of Terran, Zerg, & Protoss units), six faction sheets, six reference sheets, 54 order tokens (nine per player), 36 base tokens (six per player), 90 workers (15 per player), 42 transport tokens (15 per player), 40 building tokens (six per Zerg, six per Protoss, & eight per Terran), 38 modules (four per Zerg, seven per Protoss, & eight per Terran), 108 combat cards (18 per player), 126 technology cards (22 per Zerg, 20 per Protoss, & 21 per Terran), 70 event cards, one first-player token, 12 planets, 12 starting planet tokens, 27 connectors, one conquest point track with six markers, 20 depletion markers, & 26 resource cards; $79.95

For two camps everyone claims are at odds, the computer and hobby game industries are transferring a lot of product between them. Board games gain exposure with automated versions, and programs present a universe so rich someone can't help but turn them into something played around the dining room table. Fantasy Flight Games has done this numerous times, and while not the first Blizzard offering they've nursed through the process, it's *StarCraft's* turn for the treatment.

The object of the game is to be the first to reach a set of victory conditions.

The three races -- the implacable, reptilian Zerg, the adaptable Terrans, and the mysterious and psionic Protoss -- are all here, and each is divided into two sides called factions, allowing two to six players to vie for supremacy. Their battleground is a series of interchangeable jig-cut planets connected to their neighbors, sometimes directly, sometimes by "z-axis" routes for that three-dimensional space feel.

Everyone starts with a base and some units on a planet they can call home, just like the computer game. Worlds have multiple areas with minerals, gas, or conquest points scattered throughout; these resources are necessary to build units and improve one's effectiveness. Getting anything done requires an order: build, mobilize, or research. Players alternate placing these chits on planets. Build adds units; mobilize moves them, sometimes into combat; and research gains technology cards, which are added to the faction's basic combat deck to make them better at warfare.

The markers are placed on the orders space of a planet, so a hotly contested world may get an impressive stack of

orders from factions seeking to fight, exploit, or build. These are secretly placed facedown and resolved from the top down, so sending troops to conquer an area and then establish a base means placing those chits in reverse order. In this respect the "first player" each turn is at something of a disadvantage; his orders may be at the bottom and get resolved only late in the turn. A similar situation occurs when someone wants to grab resources on one planet to pay for new units on another. Placing orders becomes an art form all its own.

Conquering planets starts out easy: If only one faction has a base on a world, it gets all that world's riches (he gets matching cards that indicate what he owns). Once things get crowded, however, occupying specific areas determines the ownership of their vital materials. When combat starts, the attacker forms pairs (called skirmishes) of his and his opponent's units in the contested area; any "extras" serve as support units. Both players play a combat card from their hand onto each skirmish. If the unit matches one of those pictured on the assigned card (he played a siege tank card and is attacking with a siege tank), the player uses the better of the two combat values listed on the card; otherwise, he's stuck with the lesser value. Numbers are compared to determine who gets eliminated, though other factors may intervene (the reinforcing support units, any special abilities on the cards, whether that ground unit can attack an airborne opponent, and so on).

The battle for the galaxy rages until someone achieves a victory condition or the event cards say it's over. (The first full six-player game takes about four hours; that number is cut in half once everyone has the hang of it.) Event cards come in three stages and act like a game clock, and when the last of these stages rolls around certain cards end the game. If a player achieves 15 conquest points (each planet is worth a set number), he wins. Each faction has its own winning conditions (the Zerg Overmind must place a base on three planets, for example). Wiping out all enemies is unlikely, but that also wins the game. Otherwise the event deck ends the game and the highest conquest point total wins.

The components are a joy to fiddle with for any *Starcraft* fan; short of finding action figures from the setting, the great plastic figurines are as close to Nirvana as they're going to get. The planets seem to snap together without too much trouble, and there's stiff cardboard and solid cardstock as far as the eye can see. It's another hefty Fantasy Flight price tag stamped on a box of components that's worth it.

Getting all the elements to work together -- resources, units, and combat -- takes work, but it's the kind of effort a gamer looks for. Alas, getting the top-end units is tough in the time and turns available . . . too often the game ends before you can put your shiny new battlecruiser to good use (just like the computer game). Fantasy Flight Games has kept as many elements as they could in the trip from the thrilling desktop to the epic tabletop. The units from the computer add-on *Broodwar* are already here, so no one's trying to jack the audience for a built-in supplement. A thousand words isn't really enough to convey all the attention to detail that went into duplicating the best bits of the on-line experience; suffice to say ***StarCraft: The Board Game*** is a diceless, smart, classy design that can be played again and again . . . just like the computer game.

--Andy Vetromile

Controlling the Chaos, Part II

[Last week](#) we brought up the realization that new additions or campaign changes can wreak havoc on a campaign world. This week, we examine how to keep those changes from destroying the world.

So, assuming that a game is a living, breathing thing, and new rules and additions are necessary (and I believe both should be the case for most campaigns), what can be done? Here are a few ideas.

Strong-Arm Beta-Test: Sure, it takes away from "real" gaming time, but getting the group to game out a few battles or interactions with the proposed rules provides a much better opportunity to sort out what works and what doesn't. The trick is to make sure the sample battles chosen cover a few likely scenarios and power levels; rules that work out with the heroes' starting abilities might break down at higher power levels. Although the most straightforward method, it's also one of the least satisfying in my mind; not only is it frustrating that it doesn't "count," but players often don't invest as much energy or ruthless creativity into playtest battles as they do those in a real adventure.

Be Kind; Rewind: Another simple idea is to drop the changes into the campaign and make it known that any significantly wrong or unforeseen earth-shattering effects will simply be rewound and/or discarded. The GM might decide that effects are mitigated, rewards are reduced, or the scene is replayed.

In the case of our dragon-slayer example above, perhaps the hero did successfully kill the dragon . . . but the GM decides to withhold the experience points, the treasure, and the adoration of the commoners. Or maybe the adventure simply never happened, and the next session picks up where the one before the dragon tale left off (presumably with reverted, new, or modified rules in place to keep something similar from happening again). This would leave a bad taste in the mouth of many groups (including most of the ones I've been in), but it's also one of the most honest approaches, and could be less distasteful than having to conspire to concoct plot contrivances to strip a character of his success.

Alternate POV Beta Test: For those who want to advance the campaign, have the adventure count, *and* test new rules or options, consider a one-shot adventure with an alternate group of characters. For example, the heroes might have some proteges or apprentices who might be gathered together for their own tale of derring-do. In this case, there are still consequences for failure ("That's my squire!") and rewards for success ("My squire just got phat l00t!"), but both are mollified by keeping them sandboxed from the main party. For additional firewall protection, the group might even focus on a party of heroes that has little or no advantageous connection to the PCs. For example, if the heroes are going to face a super-villain group in the next adventure, then maybe the players can take the role of a significantly underpowered group of unrelated heroes, first tackling a minor villain or threat, then facing the significantly overpowered villains as the climax; the presumption would be that the heroes lose, but any hits they can score will only soften the opposition for when the regular PCs face them the next adventure.

One big problem with this idea is that the players will be playing characters who *aren't* their usual ones; again, many problems tend to surface when a familiar character is utilized to its fullest potential. (This is one advantage that the players always have over the GM: The players have usually been working at playing their characters to their best abilities for as long as the campaign has progressed, while the GM probably has only been looking over his adversaries' abilities since the end of the last adventure, at most.) Another potential problem is that the heroes may not be playing characters that are at the regular PC power or skill level; again, many rule changes work well at one power level, but break down at higher or lower levels.

Alternate Reality: For those players who absolutely bemoan any possibility that doesn't involve playing their actual characters, one popular option is the creation or usage of an alternate form of reality or non-global change. For example, the X-Men's "Danger Room" -- a mechanical and holographic construct that tests the heroes' abilities -- is an ideal place to try new options whose effects won't go any further than the triple-plated titanium walls of the facility. (See also *Star Trek*'s holodeck.) And there are many possibilities for tweaking this base idea:

- The heroes are whisked away to another dimension where the rules are slightly different. If the new rules and

options are well-received, they may "spill over" to the "real" campaign world. (Conversely, if anything has any dire consequences -- such as a character death -- can be shrugged off by being elsewhere: "Death is only a transitory state here in Valhalla; awaken and be renewed.")

• The heroes are in the dream world. It's basically another dimension, albeit one we all visit on a nightly basis. It's a good choice and can be accomplished via magic, pseudo-science, and even not-so-pseudo-science (controlled vivid hallucination instead of actual dreams). Unfortunately, it can be tough to formulate how multiple PCs are visiting a single person's dreams. In addition, care needs to be taken so that the adventure doesn't hinge on, "And you wake up, and it was *allllll* a dream."

• The heroes are in a part of the "actual" world constructed to allow for more unreality, such as an evil theme park or Westworld. ("Good thing those were only rubber bullets, or -- with the kind of damage you took -- I bet you'd be dead!") Realistic androids are always a lot more possible in RPGs than the real world, aren't they?

There's little that can be done to poke holes in new rules or game elements that don't involve actually using them in a game. Though it's probably not possible to design a pure clean room of RPG-element testing, it's workable to devise a "less-filthy-than-normal room" that can hopefully allow for the infusion of new mad and wonderful ideas while, at the same time, preserving the world that everyone's worked so hard to create and protect.

--Steven Marsh

Nahal

by Brett Evill

The colonists who settled the planet Nahal were gently idealistic but rather daffy anarchists, who sought to establish a pacifist, mutualist society without authority, competitiveness, and sex discrimination. That lasted for about one generation. Their descendants went on a freakish roller-coaster ride of social change, and have ended up neither gentle nor daffy: fiercely competitive, sometimes violently individualistic, and with some very odd legacies. Even gender roles have reappeared, though with an odd twist.

The result is a world that explorers from the Scout Service might find a fascinating anthropological study. Traders, enforcement agents from the Space Patrol, or private agents conducting inquiries and repossessions might find it an interesting challenge to adapt their methods to Nahal's customs. Heroes living on the fringes of the law might make an extended campaign arc out of setting up shop on Nahal, perhaps establishing a pirate base or a refuge for mercenaries and smugglers. Alternatively, Nahal offers roleplaying opportunities as a place for a colorful character to have come from.

This star system is presented as generic, but it is compatible with *GURPS Space.*

NOC #1762 "Cleyre"

Primary star (NOC #1762 a.k.a. "Cleyre"): Spectral type F5 V, mass 1.35 solar masses, age 2.0 billion years, effective temperature 6,600 kelvins, luminosity 2.78 solar luminosities, diameter 0.014 AU.

Orbit 1 (Cleyre I): Orbital radius 0.21 AU, diameter 4,700 miles, density 0.8, mass 0.16, world type tiny (rock), atmosphere nil, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature 1,034°F. Tidally locked. No major moons.

Orbit 2 (Cleyre II): Orbital radius 0.37 AU, diameter 6,200 miles, density 0.7, mass 0.33, world type small (rock), atmosphere nil, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature 642°F. Tidally locked. No major moons.

Orbit 3 (Cleyre III): Orbital radius 0.63 AU, diameter 5,600 miles, density 0.7, mass 0.25, world type small (rock), atmosphere nil, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature 385°F. Tidally locked. No major moons.

Orbit 4 (Cleyre IV): Orbital radius 0.63 AU, diameter 4,700 miles, density 0.7, mass 0.14, world type small rock, atmosphere nil, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature 170°F. Tidally locked. No major moons, but one moonlet.

Orbit 5 (Cleyre V, a.k.a. Nahal): Orbital radius 2.1 AU, diameter 4,700 miles, density 0.9, mass 0.19, world type standard (garden), atmosphere standard marginal (oxygen-poor), hydrographics 90% (water), average surface temperature 67°F, apparent day 31.8 hours. One major moon (Nulrex) -- tiny (rock).

Orbit 6 (Cleyre VI): Orbital radius 3.3 AU, diameter 3,700 miles, density 0.7, mass 0.07, world type small (rock), atmosphere nil, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature -89°F, apparent day 10 hours. No major moons, but two moonlets.

Orbit 7 (Cleyre VII): Orbital radius 5.9 AU, diameter 1,300 miles, density 0.8, mass 0.000 7, world type tiny (rock), atmosphere nil, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature -181°F, apparent day 9.2 hours. No major moons.

Orbit 8 (Cleyre VIII): Orbital radius 10 AU, diameter 87,000 miles, density 0.24, mass 300, world type medium gas giant, atmosphere superdense suffocating toxic corrosive, apparent day 49.6 hours (tidally locked to VIIIb). 10 inner moonlets, spectacular ring system, 6 major moons (VIIIa tiny [sulfur], VIIIb small [ice], VIIIc tiny [ice], VIIId tiny [ice]. VIIIe tiny [ice], VIIIf standard [ice]), 1 outer moonlet.

Orbit 9 (Cleyre IX): Orbital radius 17 AU, diameter 36,000 miles, density 0.22, mass 20, world type small gas giant, atmosphere superdense suffocating toxic corrosive, apparent day 209 hours. 7 inner moonlets, visible ring system, 3 major moons ({)IXa tiny [sulfur], IXb tiny [ice], IXc standard [ice]), 4 outer moonlets.

Orbit 10 (Cleyre X): Orbital radius 29 AU, diameter 43,000 miles, density 0.19, mass 30, world type small gas giant, atmosphere superdense suffocating toxic corrosive, apparent day 73.2 hours (tidally locked to Xa). 6 inner moonlets, visible ring system, 3 major moons (Xa small [hadean], Xb tiny [ice], Xc tiny [ice]), 5 outer moonlets.

Orbit 11 (Cleyre XI): Orbital radius 52 AU, diameter 56,000 miles, density 0.17, mass 60, world type small gas giant, atmosphere superdense suffocating toxic corrosive, apparent day 10 hours. 2 inner moonlets, 1 major moons (XIa tiny [ice]), 2 outer moonlets.

planetary characteristics

Class of primary star: F5 V (main sequence).
Mean orbital distance: 2.1 AU.
Orbital eccentricity: 0.01 (perihelion 2.1 AU, aphelion 2.2 AU).
Obliquity (axial tilt): 11°.
Annual period: 2.69 Earth years (742.7 local days).
Apparent solar day: 31 hours 47' 22.6".
Diameter: 4,760 miles (0.60 times Earth's).
Density: 0.90 times Earth's (specific gravity 5.0).
Surface gravity: 0.54 g (17 ft/sec^2).
Escape velocity: 4.0 miles/second.
Vulcanism: heavy.
Tectonic activity: heavy.
Average surface temperature: 67°F (normal); at perihelion 70°F, at aphelion 65°F.
Visual illumination at the surface: 89% of Earth's.
Hydrographic coverage: 90% (water).
Tidal range: 4.0 ft. (77% of Earth's).
Atmosphere, composition: nitrogen-oxygen {breathable, marginal (oxygen-poor)}.
Atmospheric pressure: 0.86 bar (standard).

Population & economy
Habitability: 5.
Resource value modifier: +2 (very abundant resources).
Affinity: 7.
Settlement type: colony, several centuries old.
Technology level: 6.
Carrying capacity: 230 million people.
Population: 230 million people.
Population rating: 8.
Average annual income per-capita: $19,000 (GURPS dollars).
Typical wealth: poor (assuming a TL10-12 campaign), struggling (assuming a TL8-9 campaign).
Economic volume: $4.4 trillion per annum (GURPS dollars).

Government
   World unity: diffuse.
   Government type: anarchy.
   Control rating: 0 (subject to armed veto by concerned neighbors).

Installations

Spaceport: Class II (ground facilities intended for shuttlecraft; for starships only emergency repair facilities are available).

Planetology

Nahal is small and young as inhabited planets go. Its composition is rich in volatiles, giving it a deep atmosphere and extensive oceans, but a paucity of heavy elements. Being young, it is still racked by heavy vulcanism and tectonic ructions. Nahal's islands and small continents consist largely of dormant and semi-active volcanoes and young mountain chains: the continental masses are under water. Fresh lava flows and vast fields of volcanic ash and broken rock are seen in most views, but when the volcanic material weathers it forms fertile soil. Farming is productive in most parts of Nahal, and the grey lavas and ash-fields are besieged by verdant growth. Even the sky is tinged with green.

Nahal's oceans are less salty than most off-worlders are used to, and large parts of them are only shallow. Winds and storms are not fierce because the world is small and rotates slowly, but large waves build up over the long stretches of open water. Nahal's one moon, Nulrex, raises tides slightly larger than those on Earth, which have a period of about 15.6 hours.

Biology and Ecology

Nahal's native life was extremely primitive, and has been replaced completely by plants and animals introduced by the settlers' ecological engineers. The biology will all be familiar to experienced travelers.

Society on Nahal<

Nahal's society is an individualistic or "free market" anarchy. There is no government whatsoever, and no law or courts with coercive authority. In theory this means that everything is permitted. In practice this liberty is constrained by the fact that your neighbors are free to shoot you if you annoy them enough or threaten their way of life. A set of conventions has emerged over the centuries, which protect property rights and voluntary agreements, and which are enforced by lynch law. Bullies, and people who attempt to use their liberties coercively, get shot: eventually.

In such an environment it is ruinous to get a reputation for reneging on your deals. And it can be fatal to get a reputation for unprovoked violence. On the other hand, if you get a reputation for being too easy-going people will tend to take your rights lightly. Nahalese therefore make it a point of honor to make good on their word in the slightest thing, do all their killing openly, mind their own business, insist on every right unless voluntarily waived, and fight for their honor when required. At least, about half of them do . . . .

Gender Roles

The original settlers sought to end discrimination between the sexes by quashing differences of dress, behavior, and social role. All children were brought up exactly alike, but this produced only one generation of androgynes. The second native-born generation rebelled against the mild, passive manners of their parents, introducing a fashion for flamboyance, assertiveness, and even pugnacity. This developed into a subculture, and eventually stabilized as a gender role, defining Nahal's strangest social peculiarity.

Society on Nahal recognizes two gender roles: "reb" and "egal." Rebs wear sidearms and brightly-colored tattoos. They are flamboyant, assertive, macho, even pugnacious, and expected to fight for their honor. A reb puts his life on the line as a pledge of his honest and open dealing. Egals wear no tattoos, and seldom carry guns. They are expected to be sensitive, yielding, and nurturing. It is a dastardly act to shoot or even strike an egal, and egals enjoy some immunity from being killed in duels and such disputes. Egals are even permitted a limited license to hurl insults (though in circles where they exercise it freely that are liable to be slapped or struck for their lip). The price of this limited immunity from lethal violence is that an egal does not offer his or her life as a pledge of his or her honesty, and is less

to be trusted or believed in important matters. To take the word of an egal over that of a reb is a deadly insult to the reb. The result is that an egal with extensive property or important interests is obliged either to recruit a reb as his or her protector, or to get a tattoo, strap on a sidearm, and face the risks that that role involves.

"Reb" would seem an exaggeratedly masculine role, "egal" a typically feminine one, and indeed the Nahalese use masculine pronouns for rebs and feminine pronouns for egals. But the Nahalese don't consider their genders to have anything to do with biological sex. A woman is as free as any man to get tattoos, strap on a gun, and be a reb. A man is as free as any woman to remain an egal. To the Nahalese a person's gender is far more conspicuous than his or her sex. It seems incredible to off-worlders, but many Nahalese claim not to notice the biological sex of people they meet, only their gender.

Nahalese convention accepts romantic and erotic connections only between a reb and an egal. It is indifferent to whether they are the same sex, but it is scandalized by an affair between two rebs and, to a lesser extent, between two egals. The archetypal Nahalese household consists of an egal who runs the house and cares for children and a reb who works outside, brings in resources, and protects the assets and honor of their union. The Nahalese don't mind if they are both men or both women, but it is most censorious if they both have tattoos.

It is significant, especially in Nahalese literature and drama, that the decision to become a reb can be taken lightly and is essentially irreversible. Once applied, the tattoos cannot be removed; even if they could, the Nahalese despise a person who claims the privileges of a reb and then retreats from the danger by concealing or attempting to remove his tattoos.

"Guevedouche" *(Nahalese v5ARD)*

About half of the original settlers of Nahal employed germ-line genetic engineering to adapt their descendants to a society without sex roles. A trivial consequences is that the Nahalese have little body hair, and it is common for the men to grow no beards. Far more important, about 75% of boys are born with a dominant gene that suppresses the enzyme 5-alpha-reductase until puberty. To external appearances, these boys seem to be girls until puberty, when they develop into men rather than into women. The result is that seven out of eight children in a Nahalese primary school appear to be girls, and have no idea whether they will grow up into women or men.

Economics

Farmland on Nahal is very fertile, but it occurs in small patches and narrow strips in a rugged landscape, so it naturally supports small family farms rather than industrial farming. Despite their modest technological level, the Nahalese have a rich legacy of genetically engineered crops and farm animals, some of them producing materials far advanced over anything that occurred in Nature. Fishing is a huge industry on Nahal, and some of the fish are as much genetically engineered as the crops.

There is no government on Nahal to collect taxes, build large public projects, or confiscate land for rationally-planned infrastructure. With no government to make and enforce company law, there are no large corporations either: the Nahalese simply don't believe in corporate ownership.

No single person finds it possible to conduct the business of a huge enterprise on his personal honor, and Nahalese are suspicious of dealing with deputies and agents. Thus really large firms on Nahal are organized as a sort of industrial feudalism: a rich reb gives a department or a branch of his firm to a relative or trusted ally, in exchange for a promise that the "vassal" will run it on agreed terms and remit an agreed share of profits. Such arrangements are cumbersome, but they are the only way to amass and control a fortune on Nahal.

Lacking government and large firms, Nahal has to get by without huge factories, huge roads, or huge bridges. It copes by doing many things at a smaller scale, at some cost in technical efficiency. Nahalese industry also depends to a great extent on shipping rather than road and rail transport. Nahal's few navigable stretches of river are thronged with barges. Shipping tycoons and daring sea-captains are among its most prominent figures.

Private firms and small voluntary associations on Nahal find ways to provide a surprising range of the services normally expected of government. For example, the victims of crimes, their relatives, and sometimes their neighbors hire private detectives to recover their property or to discover whom they ought to seek revenge upon. People in dispute over contracts and property will often hire a reputable neutral party to arbitrate their claims. Wise Nahalese would rather face the risks of arbitration than let a property dispute escalate into lethal violence. It is an insult to the arbitrator not to abide by his decision, and he is expected to kill anyone who fails to comply with his decisions. An arbitrator will not accept a case unless he either trusts the parties to accept his ruling or trusts his ability to kill any party in contempt. Such arrangements don't work with perfect reliability, uniformity, or justice. But they function after a fashion.

Nahal depends on private bankers, wealthy merchants, and insurance feudalities to provide and maintain private currencies. Gold and silver specie from private mints circulate widely. Paper notes (promising payment in coin or other commodities specified) are good only as widely as the reputation of the reb who issues them. Rebs who issue currency often hunt down and kill, or hire private investigators to hunt down and kill, anyone who counterfeits his currency.

Nahal ends up a with a distribution of wealth that is a lot more equal than you might expect from its lack of government redistribution of income. On the other hand, it has a lot less total wealth than you might expect of an utterly free and completely untaxed economy. Partly, that is because its population is only 230 million, partly because many of its young people neglect their educations, and partly because of frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. But an infrastructure deficit, difficulty in raising capital for and running large firms, and cumbersome procedures for making and enforcing contracts also limit its economic development. Nahal is probably close to its limit maintaining the technology of late Victorian Earth (*GURPS* tech level 6).

If there is interstellar trade in the campaign, Nahal might export aquatic products, such as pharmaceutical processed from genetically-engineered fish, pearls, or even (if transport is cheap enough in the campaign) frozen seafood. Nahalese metallurgists make corrosion-resistant alloys better and cheaper than is typical of planets at their tech level: these can be exported with profit because of exchange-rate advantages. In return, Nahal might import a trickle of high-tech items that are either of enormous value relative to their cost and bulk (such as electronics for navigation and communications), or of life-saving value to the rich (armored clothes, high-tech weapons, and security systems).

Nahal is no libertarian utopia. It is poorer than it could be. Between a quarter and a third of people who get tattoos and strap on a gun die by being shot. And egals have to put up with diminished freedoms, a degree of humiliation, and some domestic violence.

Fashions

Egals' conventional clothing is based on designs suitable to be worn indoors, and in occupations that do not involve vigorous activity. Gowns are common. These may be very elegant, besides which egals wear jewelry in precious metals and with precious stones. Rebs' clothes developed from working garments and garments worn in vigorous outdoor sports. Trousers, boots, and overcoats are common. A reb always wears clothes that leave his tattoos visible, and it is by these that a reb is usually described by Nahalese. The essential reb garment is a gun belt, usually with a large stainless-steel revolver. These are usually highly decorated, set with precious metals and mother-of pearl, etc., though there is a distinct chic to their showing wear long use and constant practice.

Adventure Seeds

- Nahal has been cut off from the interstellar comity of colonies for centuries. The PCs come as Scouts (or private explorers) and rediscover it. Can they amass accurate details for their report without getting shot?
- Nahal has been back in contact with the wide Galaxy for some years, and its reputation is starting to spread. Decadent and sociopathic dilettantes and hunters from more advanced colonies are starting to arrive on various pretexts, but really with the intention of picking fights and killing with impunity. Ultra-tech weapons, armored clothes, subdermal armor, and so forth give these dueling tourists an unfair advantage over rebs in oilcloth coats with 10mm revolvers. The PCs learn about this; as officers of the Patrol, as journalists, as tramp traders, is there

anything they can do about it?

- A thief on an advanced world has stolen something of great value from an interstellar megacorporation, and has fled with his loot to Nahal. There are no local authorities to apply to, so the megacorp hires the heroes (private investigators or repossession agents) to go to Nahal and bring the treasure back . . . preferably without paying the thief's asking price.
- The number of fugitives and bail-defaulters living on Nahal has gotten to be an interstellar scandal. As a possible campaign arc, the Special Justice Group sends the heroes -- SJG agents -- to bring in a list of notorious white-collar criminals. Alternatively, a consortium of bail bondsmen, planetary sheriff's offices, and departments of justice hire the PCs (private investigators or bounty hunters) to make a few really high-profile recaptures.
- A beautiful woman from an advanced planet has committed crimes incomprehensible to the Nahalese: treason, for instance, or conspiracy to infringe copyright on a massive scale. The investigators (secret agents, police investigators, or private investigators) are sent to bring her back to justice. But on Nahal she has become the mistress of a reb with an immense reputation. Her lover is the kingpin of an industrial feudality that is pioneering the reintroduction of technological improvements that will help the whole of Nahal: aviation, perhaps. When the PCs meet this reb, they find him mannerly, tolerant, and likable. If they steal his mistress, his honor is going to force him to kill them, even if he has to come after them.
- The adventurers -- as archeologists or treasure-hunters -- discover that art treasures or religious artifacts from the Old Colonial Period were brought to Nahal by its first settlers. These are now of immense value, and belong in a museum. In fact, they are in a crashed landing craft on the bottom of a shallow ocean. The usual problems of artifact recovery (taxes, export bans, corrupt officials) are not found on Nahal, but organizing a Nahalese crew for ocean salvage presents its own difficulties. And, of course, the heroes' rivals will take unscrupulous advantage of the lawlessness.
- Nahal would seem to be a perfect place for pirates, smugglers, or mercenaries with unsavory methods to set up their base. As a campaign, PCs might be the pirates et. al., dealing with Nahalese oddities. Or they might be officers of the Patrol duty-bound to stop it even though on Nahal it is not illegal.
- The younger son of a powerful noble from an advanced society lands on Nahal with a brigade of well-equipped mercenaries led by family retainers. His goal is to conquer Nahal and establish a feudal domain for himself as overlord and his officers as vassals. As a multi-part storyline, the PCs are officers of the Patrol, reporters, correspondents of Amnesty Interstellar, private citizens with a distaste for feudal governments, mercenaries hired by a wealthy reb to advise the Resistance, or the like. What can they do?
- As a long-term campaign, the heroes constitute a firm of private investigators on Nahal, perhaps locals, or perhaps off-worlders who are hoping to do well out of imported police technology. Because of Nahalese anarchy, they are often hired to deal with cases that would be investigated by police in conventional societies, but they have to do it without police powers and resources.

Pyramid Pick

Trail of Cthulhu: A Horror Game Powered By the GUMSHOE System

Published by [Pelgrane Press](#)

Written by Kenneth Hite

Cover & Illustrations by Jérôme Huguenin

240-page two-color hardcover; $39.95

Trail of Cthulhu is several things. First it is a licensed adaptation of *[Call of Cthulhu](#)* for the GUMSHOE System first seen in Robin D. Laws' *[The Esoterrorists.](#)* Second, just as it is the third GUMSHOE System RPG, *Trail of Cthulhu* is also the third RPG to do Lovecraftian investigative horror. Third, rather than being set in *Call of Cthulhu's* Classic Era of the 1920s, *Trail of Cthulhu* is set in the following decade, thus preempting the publication of *Pulp Cthulhu* by several years. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, it is the first and only RPG to be written by Ken Hite. And if ever there was a games writer spawned to author a game of Lovecraftian horror, it is surely Kenneth Hite.

What the GUMSHOE System does is force the players to concentrate on clue discovery and analysis in investigative scenarios rather than on rolling for them. If an investigator possesses the relevant Ability, he gains relevant clues, but extra information can be gained by spending further points from the applicable Ability pool. Investigators are defined by two Ability types -- Investigative (divided into Academic, Interpersonal, and Technical) and General. Both Ability types work as pools of points, but while Investigative Ability points are spent to acquire clues, General Ability points are spent to modify the die rolls made to undertake actions such as Driving, Fleeing, and Scuffling. Notably though, both Health and Stability are General Abilities, as is the signature Sanity Ability, their points spent to save against taking physical or mental damage respectively. This use of point pools adds a resource management aspect to the game, but primarily, it shifts the focus to understanding clues rather than attaining them. In this it addresses the issue of having to roll for clues and bringing a scenario to a halt because a roll is unsuccessful. If you consider that *Call of Cthulhu* was the first, and remains the preeminent investigative RPG, it is as if *Trail of Cthulhu* (and by association, the GUMSHOE System) has been written in response to that problem.

Since *Trail of Cthulhu* is a licensed version of *Call of Cthulhu,* there are similarities aplenty between the two. Both have a very similar occupation list, the same range of Mythos entities and creatures, the same grimoire, and -- of course -- both have a Sanity mechanic. (After all, where would an RPG of Lovecraftian horror be without a Sanity mechanic?) But just as the Basic RolePlay and GUMSHOE System mechanics differ widely, so does *Trail of Cthulhu's* approach to Lovecraftian investigation to that of *Call of Cthulhu.* In *Call of Cthulhu,* that approach is of a singular note, but *Trail of Cthulhu* begins by asking how you want to play -- Purist or Pulp mode? In Purist mode, inspired by the majority of Lovecraft's stories, the Keeper and investigators play out tales of intellectual and philosophical horror, doomed to a searing understanding of the Cosmos. Robert E. Howard's writings inspire the Pulp mode, offering a more physical style of play, wherein stalwart heroes stand against the Mythos ready to go down two guns blazing.

The modes show up in the Occupations (Author and Antiquarian are Purist, while Alienist and Private Investigator are Pulp), in the Drives that push an Investigator to explore the unknown ("Sense of Adventure" is Pulp, "Artistic Sensibility" is Purist), and in numerous other rules (Bullet Resistant Clothing is acceptable in Pulp mode, and Ability caps are suggested for Purist mode). Naturally, Hite favors the Lovecraftian Purist mode for *Trail of Cthulhu* (as compared to *Call of Cthulhu's* more Pulp-like mode), but the rules and options for either mode are marked throughout the book.

Investigator creation starts with a player selecting an Occupation, each providing an Ability list, a Credit Rating range (more important here than has been the case in *Call of Cthulhu*), and a special ability appropriate to the Occupation. For example, an Antiquarian receives Architecture, Art History, Bargain, Languages, Law, Library Use, and another Investigative Ability as a speciality; a Credit Rating range of 2-5; and the special ability that allows him to unearth information or an item relevant to the investigation in his collection. Points to assign to Investigative Abilities are limited (16, 20, or 24 depending on player numbers), and while they can be assigned to any ability, players are encouraged to assign them to Occupational Abilities and are rewarded for doing so because they're half cost. A further 65 points need assigning to General Abilities, which include Stability, Sanity, and Health as well as Firearms, Fleeing, Psychoanalysis, and Sense Trouble. An Investigator also needs a Drive (or motivation); several Sources of Stability, an investigator's support network; and several Pillars of Sanity, his all-too-human ideals. All of these can be threatened during a game.

Although not new to *Call of Cthulhu,* Sanity is new to the GUMSHOE System, which usually just has Stability. *Trail of Cthulhu* has both, using Stability to measure an investigator's immediate mental state and Sanity his acceptance of the universe's true nature. The higher his Sanity, the more an investigator believes in a human-centered version of the universe. Stability is still lost for shock and horrifying encounters (now including Mythos encounters, the loss being higher for these), but where an investigator's Stability pool can be refreshed between adventures, Sanity is difficult to restore; in Purist mode, it's impossible. It is lost for reading Mythos tomes, for suffering a Mythos Shock (a Mythos encounter that drives an investigator's Stability below 0), and for using the Cthulhu Mythos skill to understand reality. The latter means that using Mythos is not only dangerous, but is a conscious choice in comparison to a dice roll as in *Call of Cthulhu.* Where *Call of Cthulhu* measures Sanity on a percentile scale, in *Trail of Cthulhu* most investigators will have scores of about 10 in both Sanity and Stability. This is not so much a scaling down of *Call of Cthulhu's* Sanity mechanic as a remodeling to closer reflect the Sanity-depleting effects of the Mythos upon the protagonists of Lovecraft's fiction. It is not as straightforward as *Call of Cthulhu's* linear Sanity scale though nor as easily interpreted.

Two-thirds of *Trail of Cthulhu* is devoted entirely to the Keeper, covering the Mythos, the 1930s, and advice on running the game, and includes a scenario, three campaign frames, a guide to adapting Basic RolePlay to the GUMSHOE System, and a bibliography. Naturally, the Mythos receives the lion's share of Hite's attention, and as before, although there are many similarities, *Trail of Cthulhu* approaches it differently from *Call of Cthulhu.* To start with, not a single Great Old One or Elder God is given any stats beyond the extra Sanity and Stability loss they incur for being seen. Instead, each is accorded a very long list of possibly contradictory descriptions and truths that makes any one difficult to define, and thus in keeping with Lovecraft's own stories. Similarly, the various alien races, from Byakhee to Xothian, inflict an extra Stability loss upon the viewer, but each also has its own set of stats. Descriptions for each race also cover how the various Investigative Abilities might be used to learn more about them.

The fundamental difference between Basic RolePlay and the GUMSHOE System is that the latter lacks Magic Points. Instead, casting spells in *Trail of Cthulhu* incurs a Stability check, Stability loss, and can count as a Mythos shock! Some even incur a Health loss, so even though he lacks the Sanity and Stability to lose, spell casting can still be dangerous for the insane sorcerer. In addition to spells, Mythos tomes provide an investigator with the Cthulhu Mythos skill, and just as in *Call of Cthulhu* an investigator's maximum Sanity falls as his Cthulhu Mythos skill increases. Most tomes grant one or two points upon reading, though a near complete version of the Necronomicon grants four points! In addition, some tomes give a dedicated pool of investigative points to spend on a related subject. For example, the Celaeno Fragments gives a two-point dedicated pool on Hastur and extraterrestrials. The actual tome list is quite short, but more are easy to create.

One pleasing inclusion is a description of several cults of the period, since investigators are more likely to encounter them than the Mythos. In keeping with the 1930s, the cults described are not only occult, but political in nature. So alongside the Brotherhood of the Yellow Sign and Yithian agents, Hite details Germany's Ahnenerbe and Japan's Black Dragon Society. Their inclusion nicely leads into the overview of the "Dirty Thirties," a decade of famine, poverty, racism, totalitarianism (described as mankind's own "Creeping Order"), and war. The guide to the "Desperate Decade" is rounded out with a brief chronology and a gazetteer of the world's major Mythos hotspots.

The actual advice for the Keeper is unsurprisingly good (given that Hite wrote *[Nightmares of Mine,](#)* the definitive guide to horror roleplaying), focusing upon scenario construction and clue placement and suggesting how some of the

genre's pitfalls -- such as the investigators being captured or their going to the authorities -- can be avoided or resolved. Pleasingly the player is not ignored in all of this (though perhaps this information could have been given earlier in the book), but the Keeper will find advice throughout *Trail of Cthulhu.* This ranges from an explanation of "anagnorisis" or the "big reveal" and its effect upon investigator Stability and Sanity; alternate methods of roleplaying insanity; Elder Sign use; and handling the GUMSHOE System's resource management aspects.

As an alternative to the standard investigative horror game, *Trail of Cthulhu* suggests the creation of the "campaign frame," which should offer a different approach and set-up for playing the game, optionally accompanied by a television series style pitch. Three examples are given, of which Project Covenant's "*The Untouchables* meets ***[Delta Green](link)***" or "*The X-Files* versus Fu Manchu!", and Book-Hounds of London's "It's James Ellroy's *Ninth Gate*" are almost pitch perfect. Each also includes new rules; for example, Project Covenant details the Federal Agent occupation, and Book-Hounds of London details on bibliographic science. All three deserve supplements of their own.

Rounding out the game is a scenario, "The Kingsbury Horror." Following the author's own advice to draw from history, it has the investigators delve into the [Cleveland Torso Murders](link). Set in 1938, it is a little too late to start a campaign and get the fullest use out of the decade.

Physically, *Trail of Cthulhu* outshines *Call of Cthulhu* on all counts. *Trail of Cthulhu's* layout is pleasingly simple, while the writing never lacks clarity or focus. The artwork is a dark delight, Jérôme Huguenin's photomontages always hinting at something more and some of the best artwork to grace an *. . . of Cthulhu* book since Pagan Publishing's best.

Trail of Cthulhu raises two questions. The first is minor: why the 1930s? Simply, it never been fully done before; it does not clash with *Call of Cthulhu's* 1920s; and it enables us to explore the Mythos anew, away from the familiarity of events like R'lyeh's rising. The second is larger. Why rewrite *Call of Cthulhu?* Well, the game is 27 years old, and, for all its core elegance, its age shows. Not only in a preponderance of almost *Dungeons & Dragons*-like stats for its Mythos menagerie, but by modern gaming standards, failing to address fully the tasks of both players and Keeper.

Dealing with these issues lies at the heart of *Trail of Cthulhu.* It addresses *Call of Cthulhu's* monsters and numbers problem by removing and reducing the numbers from its Mythos entities, thus moving them back into the unknown and the unquantifiable, and arguably this is what Hite is doing with *Trail of Cthulhu* as a whole. Literally moving *. . . of Cthulhu* investigative horror into the unknown and the unquantifiable that is Mythos activity during the 1930s, and that set against an all-too-known backdrop of human horror. This move towards the unknown also moves *. . . of Cthulhu* investigative horror back closer to its inspiration, Lovecraft's fiction, as shown obviously in the game's Purist mode and to a lesser extent in Pulp mode. Further, because the GUMSHOE System focuses upon clue interpretation, it heightens the players' attention on the unknown.

Combined with the GUMSHOE System's simplicity and elegance of numbers and what you have in *Trail of Cthulhu* is a harsher, grainier approach to Lovecraftian investigative horror that opens up new vistas of horror roleplaying while drawing the investigators and *. . . of Cthulhu* alike back into the unknown of Lovecraft's Mythos. In some alternate universe Sandy Petersen is working on a licensed version of *Trail of Cthulhu* entitled *Call of Cthulhu* as you read this . . .

--Matthew Pook

Ramon Collingwood

for *Transhuman Space/GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Phil Masters

Citizens of Fifth Wave areas in the year 2100 have many advantages. Genetic therapy eliminates many flaws once thought normal, AI-managed education is superbly attuned to the individual's needs and capabilities, and a high level of personal wealth can deal with many other problems. Unfortunately, though, technology, education, and money can only do so much. Ramon Collingwood is an illustration of the point. Not that he's exactly suffering, mind you.

Background

Ramon's parents were somewhat wealthier than the average for their home region, so when they decided to have a child, they could afford good genetic testing. They decided against any fancy upgrades, but they made sure that their son had no known genetic flaws. They also made sure that his education was well up to the current standard from the first.

But, over the years that followed, a series of kindercomps and teaching AIs did their best, and then reported back to Ramon's parents with the electronic equivalent of a shrug. There was nothing actually *wrong* with him, in the formal sense -- his genefixing had worked fine -- but the sad fact was that he was, well, a bit stupid. Nor did it help that his mental focus was unreliable; in fact, that seemed to be the heart of the problem, because any attempt to educate him, to direct his brain in any useful way, bounced off his vast capacity for inattention. This problem could be *treated* as a medical issue -- there were nanodrugs that could help -- but there were issues in medical ethics and local regulations with dosing a basically healthy child up with psychoactive nanotech, and his parents, while not exactly Preservationists, found the idea distasteful. Anyway, Ramon's peculiarities were deeply embedded. His parents authorized a few such treatments, as experiments and to ensure that he learned *something,* but the result was a limited success at best; Ramon's lack of real intelligence is fundamental.

Anyway, it wasn't as if Ramon was a basket case. He'd do fine in the world, if only thanks to the family fortune, his notable if slightly bland good looks, and his nice manners; he'd just never have much of a career. A particularly diligent educational AI eventually determined that the boy had a genuine interest in mechanical technology and some fondness for working with his hands, and also some tendency toward curiosity as well as a taste for meeting new people, so the later stages of his education were focused on technical matters, to make the most of what he had. He did just well enough at this to suggest that he could actually find some kind of job.

After all, technicians of all kinds in 2100 regularly employ an array of AI and cybershell assistants, which can compensate for quite a lot of basic dullness. In a technology-saturated society, freelance repair specialists can make fairly good money, and a *versatile* mechanic, able to fix anything that comes up, can actually command quite a bit of respect; if he (or his infomorphs) kept up with the field, there'd always be work out there, as well as personal satisfaction. Ramon liked the idea, and so his parents equipped him with a good collection of tools; among other things, they had his favorite tutor AI upgraded, enhanced, extensively trained in technical skills, and installed in a wearable system. Ramon depends heavily on these systems, and frequently becomes even more glassy-eyed and vacant than usual when working on a technical problem as he interacts with them. He honestly thinks of this as a normal way for anyone to work, and not something for which he should be criticized, though he is fully aware that he himself isn't terribly bright.

But once Ramon had slipped into the life of a freelance mechanic, his mind took off in its usual butterfly way. He *does* like meeting new people and seeing new things, in reality and not just through the Web, after all . . . and really, there were things that needed fixing everywhere. So he gathered up his toolkit (well, told his faithful tech spider to gather itself up) and hit the metaphorical road. His parents sighed and felt a little worried, but Ramon was hardly the

first youngster to take some time out to see the world, his infomorphs were under instructions to look after him, and maybe this way he'd learn something like wisdom. Intelligence was evidently too much to hope for, though.

Encountered

Ramon is a wanderer, and so can be met pretty well anywhere in the Transhuman Space setting. Sometimes, he'll be encountered as a tourist -- a rather typical over-wealthy Fifth Waver, some would say -- ambling around the local scenic sites and asking stupid questions, or hitting the local bars and clubs with an amiable smile. At other times, he'll be raising himself some spending money by plying his trade as a freelance mechanic, showing up whenever a call goes out for technical skills. Indeed, he can switch between the two states at any time; if a problem blows up on a tourist vehicle or in some remote resort environment, Ramon will happily extract his tech spider and cybertool from his baggage and lend a hand. He'll quite often be looking for some work, despite the fact that he receives some regular income from various trust funds and investments assigned to him by his parents; he likes to live well, and in all but the poorest areas, this means that he has to work an average of 10 or 20 hours a week. (In his wealthy home region, he has to work even more to maintain his preferred lifestyle -- which was another reason for him to start wandering.)

In fact, PCs with mechanical problems of any kind and insufficient skills or gear to fix them could easily find themselves hiring Ramon (and his infomorphs). His primary digital companion has learned the art of advertising his services in local markets; its preferred method is to help Ramon build a good name rapidly through local reputation networks (see *Toxic Memes,* pages 15-17). These aren't supposed to be manipulable, but it's hard to stop someone making a point of finding and doing good work for someone with a high reputation of his own, or politely drawing attention to his good standing in some other network in the next city over. The heroes may at first be concerned by Ramon's casual manner, then pleased by the quality of the work which he does for them, then amused when they realize that it's his infomorphs which are doing most of the thinking. But much depends on the exact circumstances; in complex, rapidly-changing situations with fast decisions required and poor Web access, having Ramon as your mechanic can be less amusing and more dangerous.

Social encounters with Ramon can also be interesting, especially given his good looks and manners and basically sybaritic attitudes. Early in his adolescence, one of his AI tutors determined that he was becoming quite handsome, and perhaps fortunately for everyone, having been designed to manage its pupil's ethical as well as practical education, it identified this as a potential source of trouble; Ramon, it understood, would have no trouble attracting romantic attention when he was older, but might not always behave terribly well if he wasn't taught better. Over the next few years, the AI accomplished one of its few real successes in molding Ramon's character, ensuring that he has a certain sense of responsibility in his romantic life. Unfortunately, though, it maybe had to be a bit heavy-handed about this. Ramon has a fully functioning libido, and no wish to settle down just yet, so he engages in a string of casual affairs; but he also feels a deep sense of responsibility to his partners, including past and prospective conquests. This makes him about as considerate as he can be, given his attention span -- he can be neglectful, but is never cruel -- but it unfortunately also makes him amazingly easy to manipulate. This can lead to real problems for him and the AIs who are responsible for his wellbeing, especially with romantic partners who turn out to be, frankly, gold-diggers. Also, he occasionally worries too much about former partners who have actually lost interest in him; he's never actually been arrested as a stalker, but he's come close once or twice.

However, Ramon isn't completely irresponsible (or a *complete* idiot). Shown a good cause or an injustice, he can even become quite high-minded . . . for a while. Of course, he'll shift his attention to something else soon enough, often within minutes, but he can do some good along the way, after his fashion.

Ramon Collingwood   *84 points*

A good-looking young man, usually clean-shaven and with olive skin and blond hair (though that can change, thanks to cosmetic biotechnology, and sometimes does).

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 8 [-40]; **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 8 [0]; Per 9 [5]; FP 12 [3].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 10 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0]; Spanish (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Appearance (Very Handsome) [16]; Fearlessness +4 [8]; Filter Lungs (Lung Cleaner Nanosymbionts) [5]; Genefixed Human (2050 onwards) [0]; High Manual Dexterity 1 [5]; Independent Income 2 ($1,200/month) [2]; Longevity (Nanosymbiont Treatments) [2]; Patrons (Parents; 12 or less) [20]; Regeneration (Slow; Radiation Only, -60%) (DNA Repair Nanosymbionts) [4]; Reputation +1 (As a useful mechanical repairs guy, on local reputation networks; 10 or less) [1]; Resistant to Disease +8 (Immune Machines) [5]; Resistant to Ingested Poison +8 (Liver Upgrade) [5]; Status +1 [5]; Telecommunication (Cable Jack; Temporary Disadvantage (Electrical), -20%) (Implant Jack) [4]; Telecommunication (Radio; Reduced Range x1/10, -30%; Temporary Disadvantage (Electrical), -20%) (Implant Communicator) [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Perks: Alcohol Tolerance (Liver Upgrade); Entertainment Downslink Implant; No Degeneration in Zero-G (Microgravity Biochemistry). [3]

Disadvantages

Absent-Mindedness [-15]; Curious (15) [-2]; Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Past, present, and prospective romantic partners) [-5].

Quirks: Broad-Minded; Likes older vehicles; Wanderlust. [-3]

Skills

Boating/TL10 (Motorboat)-10 (DX+0) [2]; Carousing-11 (HT+0) [1]; Computer Operation/TL10-8 (IQ+0) [1]; Connoisseur (Antique Vehicles)-8 (IQ) [2]; Current Affairs/TL10 (Science & Technology)-8 (IQ+0) [1]; Driving/TL10 (Automobile)-10 (DX+0) [2]; Electronics Repair/TL10 (Sensors)-7 (IQ-1) [1]; Machinist/TL10-7 (IQ-1) [1]; Mechanic/TL10 (Automobile)-10 (IQ+2) [8]; Mechanic/TL10 (Fuel Cell)-8 (IQ+0) [2]; Mechanic/TL10 (Legged Motive System)-8 (IQ+0) [2]; Mechanic/TL10 (Robotics)-7 (IQ-1) [1]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-11 (IQ+3) [8].

Note: Remember to give Collingwood the bonus for his High Manual Dexterity when performing detailed technical tasks by hand.

If Ramon Collingwood was a PC, he'd have to purchase his array of supporting cybershell/infomorph combinations (described below) as Allies with an appearance frequency of "Constantly" and the Minion enhancement. These would cost him 30 points for Lennox, 60 points for Stack, 20 points for Cockroach, and 8 points for each of Red and Blue -- making him a 210 point character in total.

Ramon's Cybershells

This is the collection of hardware and software provided for Ramon by his parents. Its stated purpose is to support his work as a general-purpose mechanic; the LAI running it all knows that its *primary* job is to look after Ramon, which it accomplishes surprisingly well, considering its low-sapient status.

All of these cybershells have a full set of teleoperation software in store, and Ramon and Lennox, his LAI, use these

extensively. In truth, most of the other cybershells act as extensions of these two's minds much of the time. Ramon also has a huge collection of technical skill-set programs, VR tutors, and hypertext manuals on this personal network. (These are mostly held by Lennox, but they can be moved around easily enough.) The details are up to the GM, but in general, if a task needs a piece of software or published data, it's reasonable to assume that Ramon has it available; if he doesn't, but Lennox can access the Web, he can probably acquire it easily enough. Hence, if there are any bonuses available for having the right equipment and information to hand, Ramon can usually claim them, ensuring that he looks like a pretty good mechanic to most people. Note also that some of his infomorphs have the ability to interface usefully with quite powerful skill sets; in fact, much of his reputation actually comes from jobs done with the right software rather than anyone's actual skill. (For example, by running an 8- point, complexity 5 skill set, Lennox can acquire Mechanic-15 or Engineer-14.) Given the unreliability of skill sets in high-stress conditions, though, this can amount to a dangerous vulnerability.

Lennox   *210 points*

ST 0 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 12 [0].
HP 1 [0]; Will 11 [-10]; Per 12 [-5].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0].

Social Background

TL: 10 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0]; Cantonese (Accented) [2]; French (Accented) [2]; Hindi (Accented) [2]; Portuguese (Accented) [2]; Spanish (Native) [4].

Advantages

LAI-7 [102]; Language Talent [10]; Modular Abilities (Computer Brain) 3 (8, 4, 4) (Limited Integration, -20%; Skills and Languages Only, -10%) [58]; Patrons (Ramon's Parents, 9 or less) [10].

Disadvantages

Duty (to owner, 15 or less) [-15]; Wearable Virtual Interface [-42].

Quirks: Insists on providing a detailed dietary assessment of everything its owner eats; Makes a point of reminding Ramon about his Sense of Duty. [-2]

Skills

Accounting-11 (IQ-2) [1]; Area Knowledge (Earth)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Computer Operation/TL10-16* (IQ+3) [0]; Current Affairs/TL10 (Headline News)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Current Affairs/TL10 (High Culture)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Current Affairs/TL10 (Politics)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Current Affairs/TL10 (Popular Culture)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Current Affairs/TL10 (Science & Technology)-13 (IQ+0) [1]; Diagnosis/TL10 (Human: specialized, Ramon Collingwood)-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Communications)-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Mathematics/TL10 (Applied)-11 (IQ-2) [1]; Mechanic/TL10 (Automobile)-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Mechanic/TL10 (Motorboat)-12 (IQ-1) [1]; Mechanic/TL10 (Vertol)-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Merchant-9** (IQ-4) [1]; Professional Skill (Personal Trainer)-13 (IQ+0) [2]; Propaganda/TL10 (specialized, Reputation Network Advertising)-13 (IQ) [1]; Psychology (Human Applied: specialized, Ramon Collingwood)-11** (IQ-2) [4]; Research/TL10-14 (IQ+1) [4]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-10** (IQ-3) [1]; Teaching (specialized, Ramon Collingwood)-14 (IQ+1) [2]; Writing-12 (IQ-1) [1].

* Included in LAI template.

**Includes -3 for Low Empathy

Notes: Lennox has been with Ramon as a tutor and aide for years, albeit with numerous upgrades, revisions, and retraining cycles along the way. It is programmed to instruct, advise, and assist, to the limits of an LAI's capability. Long experience of this work has made it surprisingly smart and even adaptable, after a fashion. It is notably good with human languages, and it quite often has to act as an interpreter.

Lennox's Professional Skill is, exactly as it says, the body of knowledge expected of a good personal trainer; it can advise a human on diet, exercise, and so on. This skill therefore incorporates snippets of biology and medical skills, but nothing very deep. Unfortunately, Lennox has become something of a fusspot on this subject over the years, especially with regard to Ramon's diet. Ramon has little trouble tuning out whatever Lennox says about what he's eating, but he may occasionally seem distracted or miss something that someone else says over a meal.

For full-on Wodehousean comic effect, turn Lennox into an SAI (possibly Emergent), and give him skills such as Administration, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, and Tactics. Such a version is likely to steal too many scenes (and whole scenarios) from the PCs, though.

Stack   *335 points*

ST 8 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [0].
Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 6 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 9.

Social Background

TL: 10 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0]; Spanish (Native) [6].

Advantages

Modular Abilities (Computer Brain) 3 (4, 4, 4) (Limited Integration, -20%; Skills and Languages Only, -10%) [47]; NAI-6 [69]; Tech-Spider [204].

Disadvantages

Duty (to owner, 15 or less) [-15].

Skills

Computer Operation/TL10-13* (IQ+3) [0]; Cooking-10 (IQ+0) [2]; First Aid/TL10 (Human)-10 (IQ+0) [1]; Free Fall-11 (DX+1) [4]; Housekeeping-10 (IQ+0) [1]; Mechanic/TL10 (Wheeled Motive System)-12 (IQ+2) [8]; Mechanic/TL10 (Robotics)-12 (IQ+2) [8].

*Included in LAI template.

Notes: Stack is Ramon's main tool in his work as a mechanic; a high-end tech-spider (see ***Changing Times***, page 58) with a powerful but non-sapient AI installed, it can work very effectively on its own for most tasks or be teleoperated when unusual problems arise. It also acts as Ramon's general valet and gopher, and has therefore acquired some household skills.

Cockroach   *175 points*

ST 5 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 8 [0]; **HT** 12 [0].
Damage 1d-4/1d-3; BL 5 lbs.; HP 4 [0]; Will 8 [0]; Per 8 [0].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0].

Social Background

*TL:*10 [0].
*CF:*Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Cybertool [129]; Modular Abilities (Computer Brain) 3 (2, 2, 2) (Limited Integration, -20%; Skills and Languages Only, -10%) [30]; NAI-4 [29].

Disadvantages

Duty (to owner, 15 or less) [-15].

Skills

Computer Operation/TL10-11* (IQ+3) [0]; Mechanic/TL10 (Micromachines)-8 (IQ+0) [2].

*Included in LAI template.

Notes: The device which Ramon has rather unkindly nicknamed "Cockroach" (because it looks slightly like one) is a standard cybertool (see ***[Shell-Tech,](#)*** pages 4-5) with a basic AI installed. It has no special training of its own, although it has learned a little about micro- scale technical work over time; it mostly operates under the direct supervision of Ramon or Lennox, and indeed they often teleoperate it.

Red and Blue   *77 points*

ST 3 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 8 [0]; **HT** 12 [0].
Damage 1d-5/1d-4; BL 1.8 lbs.; HP 3 [0]; Will 8 [0]; Per 8 [0].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0]; Dodge 9.

Social Background

*TL:*10 [0].
*CF:*Western (Native) [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Maintenance Snake [43]; Modular Abilities (Computer Brain) 2 (2, 2) (Limited Integration, -20%; Skills and Languages Only, -10%) [20]; NAI-4 [29].

Disadvantages

Duty (to owner, 15 or less) [-15].

Skills

Computer Operation/TL10-11* (IQ+3) [0].

*Included in LAI template.

Notes: "Red" and "Blue" are a pair of maintenance snakes (see ***Shell- Tech,*** page 15) which Ramon and Lennox use for repair work in inaccessible locations and occasionally as communications relays. They are indistinguishable apart from spots of color on their heads and tails (added simply to avoid confusion), and have very basic AI systems installed, mostly to keep them running safely when they aren't being teleoperated.

Game Uses

Ramon Collingwood can be an entertaining, if sometimes annoying, casual encounter almost anywhere . . . including some places where he probably shouldn't go. He spends his time looking for fun, interesting stuff, new experiences, and casual paying work (much like a lot of PCs, actually, but with a bit less focus). He's an extreme example, verging on a parody, of the growing tendency among Fifth Wave humans to depend on their AIs to manage large parts of their lives, but whereas most well-educated Fifth Wavers are capable of original thought and delegate the routine, boring stuff, Ramon finds almost everything that's important to also be boring, and goes looking for originality outside himself. It would be stretching plausibility too far to have Ramon show up *everywhere* the PCs go, but the occasional coincidental meeting could leave the heroes rather twitchy.

As previously mentioned, adventurers might well hire Ramon as a trustworthy freelance mechanic from time to time; once they get to know him, they may come to think of this as hiring his tools and resources, with Ramon regrettably but unavoidably along for the ride. Such transactions can vary from routine repair jobs, through chaotic but ultimately successful emergency hires, to outright disasters when Ramon and his systems hit their limits in difficult situations. After some bad experiences, the PCs may decide to avoid Ramon in future -- but sometimes, he may be the only person around with the tools for some important job.

It can also be quite hard to get rid of him. Apart from anything else, when he has started to make a romantic pass, and he hasn't yet been unequivocally rejected, he defines the other party as a prospective partner . . . which means that his Sense of Duty can be triggered very easily, and may crop up, say, when a barroom brawl erupts. And while he (and his cybershells) *may* then be useful to have around, he's more likely to get in the way and need saving. If he has even a brief romantic fling with a PC, he may become downright impossible to leave behind, short of employing violence (which would hardly be ethical, and which could lead to a lot of trouble from Ramon's protectors) or trickery. Fortunately, if he can be convinced that the object of his past affections no longer needs help, he will soon be distracted by something or someone else.

Finally, Ramon might appear as the victim of a crime such as fraud or, at worst, kidnapping. He's a rich foreigner who likes to visit *interesting* places, and while Lennox does its level best to keep him away from danger, there's a good chance that he'll eventually be spotted as a potential victim, and that danger will come to him. Kidnappers in 2100 have to take a lot of care to detach their victims from any Web access, but there are ways of accomplishing this, especially in poorer areas with patchy signal coverage. This *may* then leave some of his infomorphs free to look for help. Only Lennox has any actual initiative, but the others may somehow have received specific instructions. If the PCs have had dealings with Ramon and his infomorphs before and have given Lennox any reason to trust them in confusing and difficult situations, and if other help is unavailable or looks unreliable, they may well get a call; likewise, if Ramon is free but in trouble, he may contact these "nice people" to beg a favor. Alternatively, Ramon's parents may learn that he's in trouble (through, say, his failure to make a regular call, something he lets slip when he does get in touch, a message from Lennox, or a ransom demand), and may be looking to hire help, in which case the PCs may be brought

in as known competent troubleshooters or as "friends of Ramon's." Handling a delicate fraud case or violent kidnappers will be tricky, but Ramon will be very grateful . . . until he gets distracted.

Pyramid Review

Zombie Town

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Designed by Kerry Breitenstein

Illustrated by Dave Aikins

Full-color boxed set with board, six player pawns & 24 tokens (in six colors), 12 wall stands, 30 Combat cards, 102 Action cards, 12 House cards, 100 Zombies, one 12-Sided Die, & eight-page b&w rulebook; $39.99

The zombie board game takes its inspiration from just a handful of classic horror movies and their remakes. Even further, it is inspired by particular bits of those movies. For example, the classic best selling *Zombies!!!* does *Dawn of the Dead's* panicked run to the helicopter scenes and even has its own mall expansion. If *Zombies!!!* is all about escaping, then *Zombie Town* is about the end of *Night of the Living Dead* when everyone has holed up in the farmhouse.

Designed for three to six players, aged 12 and up, *Zombie Town* casts the participants as homeowners living on the same square around a cemetery. It was a nice neighborhood until the recent and unfortunate rise of the dead, which is going to be murder for property prices. The problem is that you do not have everything necessary to safeguard both your home and your survival, but your neighbors do. Raid their houses for fellow survivors or allies, guns and ammunition, barricades, traps, and first aid; by using them to your best advantage, you can hold out until the National Guard arrives. If you do, you not only get to survive, but will probably get a darned good deal on the surrounding vacated properties!

So, just like *Zombies!!!,* this is a game of survival horror, but a self contained one in which the players stay put. Its mechanics are primarily card driven with the die used as both a timer and a means to drive an ever increasing number of zombies towards the players. Whatever the number of players, a game lasts 10 nights or turns, and the surviving player with the highest score wins the game.

The first of *Zombie Town's* components is the heavy mounted board. Marked with a 14-by-14 grid of large squares, it depicts a neighborhood square surrounded by three houses per side. In the center stands the cemetery (which no player will ever enter), surrounded by pavement, then road, and then the houses. The zombies start on the pavement, so are only three squares away from the nearest house. Oddly the neighborhood square is so self-contained there is no exit road!

The miniatures consist of the flat-top hairstyled pistol-wielding male householders in six colors and the 100 gray zombies, the latter rotting and holding a hand looted from elsewhere. (This raises the question, if the zombies originate from the cemetery, where did they get the extra hands?) For each player miniature there are also four cardboard counters in matching colors, used to indicate control or possession of a house.

The game's cards come in four different types. Character cards are marked with the numbers one through four, indicating the amount of damage a homeowner can take before dying. Combat cards are used whenever a fight occurs, between players, allies, or zombies; the number on each card indicates range, not damage. The House cards give the former occupant's hobby or occupation, how many times it can be used, and its victory-point value at game's end. Visit the Survivalist's house to recruit an ally; the Woodworker's house for barricade wood; the Gun Collector's house for

ammunition; the Nurse's house for first aid; and the Nosy Neighbor for the door keys to other houses. Each House card can only be used five times during the game, but each use reduces a property's victory value at game's end. The exception is the Ordinary house card, which is worth simple victory points.

The larger Action cards are divided between Event and Resource cards. The latter include Barricades which can be erected to prevent both players and zombies from breaking into a house; Fireworks that will hold off the zombie approach to a house; Guns, each with four bullets; and Survivors, who can stay and protect a house for you, or join you as an Ally, possibly armed with a gun. The various Event cards can move cards, players, and zombies around; add extra zombies; provide extra Action cards; and even turn the game back to the previous turn!

At game start, the zombies are piled onto the cemetery with one zombie placed in each pavement square. Each player receives his pawn and four matching counters, a gun with three rounds, three Action cards (which cannot be Event cards); and chooses and marks the house that is his home. The House cards are randomly distributed between the other houses, slipped face up under the board such that the highest number is visible. Whenever a House ability is used, the card's next lowest number is revealed. Nine random Action cards are placed faced down on each unoccupied house, the remainder going into the draw pile. Lastly the die is set to the number 1 for day one.

During his turn, a player can move his pawn and conduct three actions. Possible actions include moving again; examining a card in the building he is in, either taking it into his hand or returning it to the card pile, or if an Event card playing it immediately (which does not count as an action); playing an Action card from his hand; storing or examining previously stored cards in the currently occupied house; arming or disarming a survivor at his current location or who is accompanying him; use the special ability of the house he controls; erect a barricade; or initiate a combat. Once a player has moved and taken his three actions (or more if Event cards allow it), he moves as many zombies as the number displayed on the turn die one space forwards or side ways towards the houses, though not backwards. Obviously, as the die number increases, the players move and face more zombies. Once everyone has moved for that day, the die is changed to the next highest number.

Combat is simple. A combat card is drawn and if the target is inside the range indicated on the card, the target is hit. One shot kills a zombie or survivor, while a player takes a point of damage. A player can shoot as many bullets as he has during an action. Without bullets, a player cannot defend himself, and he will take damage. When reduced to zero hit points, a player is dead and out of the game, his resources up for grabs.

To erect a barricade, a player slots a Barricade card into a stand and puts it in front of the house. Three Barricade cards can be erected in front of a house in the stand, each one numbered. When the number of zombies surrounding a house equals or exceeds the erected Barricades' total value, the zombies have pulled them down and can enter. Some Barricades will destroy some of the zombies as they break in. Barricades are essential to surviving and winning the game.

Zombie Town is about making a land grab in the face of a corpse countdown. Players need to visit their neighbors to take possession of both their houses and their resources. To protect both, a player must erect Barricades and co-opt and arm other survivors, but because such defenses will hold only so long as the number of zombies grows, he cannot hole up and sit still. He must move between his houses to defend them, shore up their defenses, and use their resources. A more aggressive strategy of attacking rather than picking off the zombies as necessary is doomed to failure though.

At game's end points are scored for zombies destroyed, survivors controlled, loaded guns held, and houses controlled, less the number of house abilities used. The player with the highest score wins. Our first game with three players took about two hours to complete, later play cut this time down to 90 minutes. Yet we found game play un-involving. This was for three reasons. First, as a three player game, the only player interaction came through moving zombies. Things improved with four players because this meant we were competing more directly for resources, which would suggest that a five or six-player game would be even tighter though more Action cards are added at game's start. Further, a two-player variant suggests it be played with two pawns per player, serving to enforce the fact that *Zombie Town* is better, and should be presented, as a four to six and not a three to six player game. Second, the game lacks flavor, in part because the rule book is bland, but mainly because the cards lack the *joi de vivre (joi de mort?)* of the cards in

Zombies!!! Third, staying put is just not as exciting as the fight or flight instinct inherent to *Zombies!!!* Additionally, at least one player objected to what she saw as the game's "screw you Jack, what's yours is mine" message.

Like many other games, *Zombie Town* is not unplayable, but it works better with more players. Its rules feel overly complex and the rulebook is dull and difficult to read. Game play feels similarly overly complex because a player has too much choice over his actions (also making the game awkward to teach) and because the Event cards interrupt and prolong a player's turn. That said, the House ability use versus Victory Points lost is a nicely balanced mechanic and the game does evoke certain desperation as resources run dry, but if I had to hole up in the face of a zombie horde and play a board game, *Zombie Town* would not be my first choice.

--Matthew Pook

Don't Ask, Just Drink It!

Alchemists in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*

by Reverend P. Kitty

A good **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** campaign is full of adventure and action, and doesn't involve characters taking weeks (or years!) off to make magic items and potions; this is why only NPCs can enchant and why the Alchemy skill is mainly there for wizards to identify elixirs. However, when combined with the variant Quick Gadgeteering rules for Alchemy from **Magic** (page 211), an alchemist can become a viable and appropriate character type.

For simplicity in the following rules, potions are grouped into three classes, based on their *retail* price: *inexpensive* ($0 to $999), *expensive* ($1,000 to $1,999), and *very expensive* ($2,000 or more).

Alchemist Character Template   *250 points*

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [-5]; Per 13 [-5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Quick Gadgeteer (Alchemical) [50] *and* Signature Gear (Backpack Alchemy Lab) [2]. Another 20 points chosen from among Gizmos 1-5 (Alchemical, -40%) [3/gizmo], various Potion Masteries (see below) [2, 3, or 5 each], or Wild Talent (Focused, Potion Masteries, -40%) [12/level]. A further 25 points chosen from among those traits or ST +1 [10], DX +1 [20], IQ +1 [20], HT +1 [10], Acute Taste and Smell [2/level], Alcohol Tolerance [1], Contacts [varies], Danger Sense [15], Eidetic Memory [5] *or* Photographic Memory [10], Fearlessness [2/level]*, Luck [15], Magery 0 [5], Serendipity 1 [15], or Wealth (Comfortable or Wealthy) [10 or 20].

Disadvantages: -15 points chosen from among Curious [-5*], Easy to Read [-10], Fearfulness [-2/level]*, Hard of Hearing [-10], Magic Susceptibility [-3/level], Missing Digit [-2 or -5], Nervous Stomach [-1], Obsession (Discover a particular secret formulary) [-5*] *or* (Master every formulary known to man) [-10*]; One Eye [-15], Overconfidence [-5*], Pyromania [-5*], or Weirdness Magnet [-15]. A further -25 points chosen from among those traits or Absent-Mindedness [-15], Clueless [-10], Combat Paralysis [-15], Cowardice [-10], Fat [-3] *or* Overweight [-1] *or* Skinny [-5], Gluttony [-5*], Greed [-15*], Gullibility [-10*], Laziness [-10], Loner [-5*], Low Pain Threshold [-10], Oblivious [-5], or Sense of Duty (Adventuring companions) [-5].

Primary Skills: Alchemy (VH) IQ+2 [16]-16; Fast-Draw (Potion) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Hazardous Materials (Magical) (A) IQ+1 [4]-15; *and* Throwing (A) DX+2 [8]-14.

Secondary Skills: Naturalist (H) IQ [2]-13; Occultism (A) IQ [2]-14; Research (A) IQ [2]-14; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-14; *and* Thaumatology (VH) IQ-1 [4]-13. *Either* Staff (A) DX+2 [8]-14 *or both* Shield (Buckler) (E) DX+2 [4]-14 *and one of* Broadsword, Rapier, Shortsword, or Smallsword, all (A) DX+1 [4]-13. *One* of Bolas (A) DX+1 [4]-13, Crossbow (E) DX+2 [4]-14, *or* Sling (H) DX [4]-12.

Background Skills: Another 7 points spent on improving any Primary or Secondary skills, or on Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Area Knowledge (any), Camouflage, Current Affairs (any), First Aid, or Gesture, all (E) IQ [1]-14; Cartography, Hidden Lore (Magic Items or Magic Writings), Holdout, Merchant, Packing, Speed-Reading, Teaching, Traps, or Writing, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; or Pharmacy (Herbal) or Poisons, both (H) IQ-2 [1]-12. Alternatively, if Magery 0 was chosen as an advantage, spend some or all of these points on spells, which will be either (H) IQ-2 [1]-12 or (VH) IQ-3 [1]-11.

* Fearlessness and Fearfulness are mutually exclusive.

Customization Notes

Much like the bard, the alchemist is a good choice for the player who wants to play a support role for the party. This character is strongest from the back, where he can lob (or shoot, sling, etc.) grenades into the melee ahead and administer healing potions to the wounded. The two archetypes for this character are the *trained alchemist,* who focuses on learning the Potion Masteries (see below) for every concoction he expects to make, and the *improviser* who raises Alchemy and takes as much Wild Talent as he can afford. (The limited version of Wild Talent above allows the alchemist to Gizmo or brew *one* potion as though he had the Potion Mastery for it.) Either archetype should take many Gizmos; the ability to pull out whatever potion is needed at a moment's notice is a crucial part of this template.

Magery 0 is available primarily as a "detect magic" ability. Some alchemists dabble in spellcraft, but higher levels of Magery are rarely worth the expense, and risk infringing on the wizard's niche protection.

The Naturalist skill may be taken with an optional specialty, Naturalist (Alchemical Ingredients) (A) IQ+1 [2]-14; this allows the alchemist to roll against a 14 to cultivate Alchemical Ingredients (see *Quick-Brewing Potions,* below) or against a 12 for any other use of Naturalist. The Sling skill can be used without penalty to sling Small Bottles into combat (treat them as sling stones with a (0.2) armor divisor); grenades go off normally, while potions affect the subject only if any damage penetrates DR. For similar attacks with the Bolas and Crossbow skills, see *New Alchemy Gear,* below.

Alchemists who did not take Wealth should trade in some of the points from their Quirks for cash to buy decent armor and at least $500-$1000 worth of Alchemical Ingredients, as well as spare Small Bottles and Crystal Vials. Any additional points can go toward improving skills.

Potion Mastery

An alchemist can attempt to brew *any* potion, but most will only master a few. Potion Mastery is treated as an advantage which greatly reduces the penalties to brew an elixir (see below); it is written on the character sheet as (e.g.) "Potion Mastery (Invisibility) [5]". Potion Mastery costs 2 points for an inexpensive potion, 3 points for an expensive elixir, and 5 points for a very expensive one.

Alchemists may start off play with as many Potion Masteries as they can afford. Mastering a particular elixir after character creation requires a *formulary,* which costs $200 or the value of the potion in question, whichever is *greater*. Rumors abound of formularies so well written that they reduce the character point cost to learn Potion Mastery . . .

Gizmos

An alchemist can buy up to five Gizmos with the special Alchemical limitation. Each such Gizmo allows him to pull out any one potion which he has *mastered* (see above). This includes the bottle/vial/bolt/etc. In a pinch, he can pull out an unmastered potion; however, when the potion is used, roll against his Alchemy skill at the penalty he would have to

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Under the Hood

This section is for serious rules tweakers only; everyone else can safely skip it!

The cost of Potion Mastery is equal to that of buying off the Hard technique for each potion. However, the penalties and times for each potion have been simplified into three classes (-1 at two weeks; -2 at three weeks; and -4 at six weeks), rather than having individual values for each formula. Each week translates to 1d minutes when using the Quick Gadgeteering rules.

The Gizmos use the suggestion from *Supers,* page 80, that allow for a total of 15 points' worth of Gizmos, instead of a flat limit of three.

When quick-brewing, the -6 penalty for an unmastered formula has been reduced to -3, and the cost of ingredients for each potion has been reduced to a flat 1/5 cost. Both of these changes are balanced by the fact that such potions only last for one day. The total penalty to brew a potion assumes -2 for a backpack lab, -3 for an unmastered formula, and -1/2/4 for the potion itself. Buying Potion Mastery removes the latter two penalties.

brew it (see below). Failure means it has no effect, while critical failures should be dangerous.

A potion produced as a Alchemical Gizmo is short-lived; it must be used within an hour or it loses its potency! This will be evident upon any form of analysis, and makes selling such elixirs nearly impossible.

Quick-Brewing Potions

In addition to their ubiquitous backpack alchemy lab (***Dungeon Fantasy: Adventurers***, page 26), alchemists will typically invest several hundred dollars in generic "Alchemical Ingredients"; this should not be done as Signature Gear, as it will be used up! Because the alchemist is a Quick Gadgeteer, these special ingredients can be treated as interchangeable components, useful for any potion. To brew a potion, the alchemist must use Alchemical Ingredients worth 1/5 the cost of the elixir.

When in town, an alchemist may try a single **Scrounging** roll before each adventure; success lets him scrape up $20 worth of Alchemical Ingredients (special bird droppings, a particular flower blooming under a full moon, etc.) -- $50 worth on a critical success. In the wilderness or in a dungeon, the delver may make one **Naturalist** roll per day; success locates $10 worth of Alchemical Ingredients *per point of success,* found along the way as the party moves.

Brewing up an inexpensive potion takes 2d minutes and requires a roll against Alchemy-6. An expensive potion takes 3d minutes and is at Alchemy-7. A very expensive one takes 6d minutes and an Alchemy-9 roll. Potion Mastery does not change the time or Alchemical Ingredients required, but brings the roll to a flat Alchemy-2. Success produces a useful potion, while a critical success uses only half the normal Alchemical Ingredients. Failure produces nothing, while a critical failure either (A) subjects everyone nearby to the effects of a harmful potion, or the reverse effects of a useful one, or (B) causes an explosion that does 3d damage (the alchemist may dodge for cover or distance) and attracts a *lot* of attention! The GM should decide which based on the situation and potion being brewed.

If successful, the potion retains its potency for one day. As with Gizmo potions (above), this is easily detected. Quick-brewed potions are thus best for personal use, not profit.

Slow-Brewing Potions

An alchemist can make a potion the old-fashioned way, so it will never expire, but it's rarely worth the effort. The time required is one week for every 1d minutes listed above; it requires Alchemical Ingredients equal to 1/2 the cost of the potion (instead of 1/5); and unmastered potions are made at an *extra* -3 to skill! All told, dungeon delving is a much better way for a bold and brave alchemist to turn a profit.

Analyzing Potions

As discussed in ***Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*** (page 14), a character can either taste a potion (taking 10 seconds) to analyze it or break out the backpack lab and take four hours to do so safely. A skilled alchemist can shave this time, of course. A two-hour lab analysis is done at -5 to skill. A 45-minute analysis is -8 to skill. And finally, a safe 10-second analysis -- consisting of pulling out a single test vial, putting a few drops in, and swirling it around -- can be done at -10 to skill!

New Alchemy Gear

Bolas, Breakable. A bolas with one weighted end and one end designed to attach to a Small Bottle. When successfully thrown around a foe, the bottle breaks against the weighted end and releases the grenade-type elixir. (Drinkable potions are wasted.) Cannot be thrown with a missing or empty bottle. Cost and weight include one Small Bottle, which must be replaced each time. $30, 2 lbs.

Bolt, Syringe. A crossbow bolt with an oversized glass tip which can hold a dose of elixir. Damage is -2 and piercing instead of impaling. Grenade elixirs go off normally; drinkable potions only take effect if damage penetrates DR. Not

reusable. $5, 0.1 lbs.

Full-Sized Alchemy Lab. Useful only if the campaign allows delvers to have a permanent base of operations. No penalty to brew potions (which means +2 to all rolls under *Quick-Brewing Potions,* above) but it takes up a small room and cannot be easily moved. $1,000, 100 lbs.

The Omniscient Eye

Is My Brother Dumber Than a Hamster?

In some RPG campaigns, some player characters will have animals, of various species, as pets, friends, companions or familiars.

In some worlds, these animals have raised intelligence, via magic or genetic uplifting, but my interest is in those campaigns where this is *not* the case. What about those cases where the animal follows a player character because it has been tamed, befriended, or otherwise become an "animal companion," without its brain or mind having been altered from its natural state?

It would be useful to have some kind of essay exploring how intelligent the typical animal species are. What can be expected of each of these (fairly) common animals? What can they be made to do (or trained to do)? how can they be useful? What problems will typically arise from their instincts and neuro-structure, all from an RPG adventuring perspective?

Also, how much variety is there within each species, in terms of intelligence? We've all heard about Kanzi, the genius pygmy chimpanzee, but what about dogs or cats or horses? How much smarter is a smarter-than-average dog, cat or horse, and do genius specimens exist? If so, in what ways could a genius dog, cat or horse be useful to an adventurer or a party?

Roleplaying animals can be a real challenge, particularly for the luckless GM, who may be stuck roleplaying creatures he knows next to nothing about because someone has decided to play Dr. Doolittle. Animals have thoughts and emotions, as humans do, but they are not human thoughts or emotions. Everything the animal does makes sense from the animal's perspective, but some aspects of that perspective will always be alien and unknowable to us humans. Perhaps more important to animal interactions than the animal's intelligence are cross-species communication skills, both those of the animal and of the human.

People hoping to do a good job roleplaying a species they know little about and have no chance to observe would be well advised (in addition to researching the specifics of the species) to observe a very small child that is too young to talk. Animals, like small children, have less developed problem-solving and abstract thinking skills than adult humans. They have shorter memories and often shorter attention spans. They have to rely on skills other than language for communication. They can create surprisingly complex and hard-to-comprehend world views from a few simple observations, simply interpreted. They will react to situations on the basis of instinct, emotion, and their world view constructions and will use very little prediction of the future or complex critical thinking.

Training

What an animal can be trained to do depends upon a number of factors. The primary factor is the cross-species communication skills of the human, modified by a number of characteristics of the animal and of the "trick." Training involves an automatic, learned response to a particular stimulus; once the trick has been learned, it is largely an instinctive reaction that does not involve intelligence.

Some species are inherently more trainable than others. This has to do with the sort of society that the species evolved in. The famous example is cats and dogs. Cats are less trainable than dogs, but by no means less intelligent. The ancestors of dogs evolved in a complex society with clear leaders and much interaction. If the human is established as

the leader in the dog's eyes, the dog will naturally try to fulfill the human's wishes and will derive great pleasure from being praised. The dog is actively searching to discover what the human wants from it. This tendency was encouraged in dogs after domestication. The ancestors of cats were solitary creatures, and trainability was not emphasized in cat domestication. The cat has very little concept of a leader and no understanding of why it should care what the human wants from it. Training a cat requires much better communication skills than training a dog.

The basics of training involve rewarding the desired behavior and potentially punishing unwanted behavior. The first and hardest step involves communicating ideas like "desired" and "behavior." The animal has to be convinced to do the thing before it can be rewarded, and it has to understand that the trick and the reward are connected.

Not only do species vary in their trainability, so do individuals. This depends simply on the animal's personality, sociability, background, and love of applause or other rewards. (I have met a cat that is so social that he can only be trained to stay off the table by shutting him in the bathroom for short periods. While there, he has access to the things that most cats consider necessary: food, water, litter box, a place to lie, and objects to play with, but he craves attention and interaction. Standard cat-training methods such as raised voices, a swat, or a spray of water merely encourage him since he is an ardent supporter of the theory that negative attention is better than no attention.)

Finally, the communications skills required depend upon how natural the trick is for the given species. Animals can potentially be trained to do anything that is not physically impossible for them. You will never train a horse to fly over and land on your shoulder, although this is not too hard to teach a parakeet.

Trotting is one of the most natural activities for a horse, so almost anyone can teach a horse to trot on command. One afternoon when I was about six, I taught my horse to trot whenever I said, "Alfalfa." Minimal communications skills are required. You need only set up a situation where the horse is likely to trot (in my case, I just had to give him the command he already knew), and then give the command as quickly as possible once the horse begins trotting. The horse should also be praised and given a break from any "pestering" you might have used to convince it to trot. Soon the horse will associate the command with trotting and obedience with praise and pleasant experiences.

On the other hand, training a horse to nod, "Yes," on command is far more challenging. It is a less natural behavior, so you must be more talented to convince the horse to do it in the first place. (A slight prick to the chest, causing the horse to bob its head and brush away the "fly," is one way.) Also, because trotting is a natural but conscious activity, the horse will understand what it has done. Bobbing its head is unconscious, and the horse may never become aware it has done so.

There are a number of factors that you should take into consideration if one of your players wants to teach an animal a trick. Is the animal a trainable species, like a dog, or one that is difficult to train, like a cat? Is the individual animal trainable or recalcitrant? Is the trick a natural behavior or something the animal would not do on its own? Is the trick a conscious or an unconscious behavior? How well do the character and the animal know each other? What is their relationship? How skilled is the character at animal communication?

Cross-species communication is a complex and beautiful thing and is in no way limited to human-animal interactions. I was privileged to observe the interaction between a puppy, Novy, and a young tom cat, Oscar. Oscar had a playful streak and enjoyed sparring with Novy, but they had to modify their play styles to accommodate their different species. Dogs play by biting and snapping. Cat's faces are not designed for this, so they spar with their paws. Being bitten by a dog would have been very dangerous for Oscar, so he trained Novy to shadow-box like a cat. She would use her muzzle as a third paw to bat with, but would not snap. Watching their bouts was like observing a good martial arts session. Their play was dangerous and a serious slip could have been fatal, but both displayed outstanding discipline. (Whenever Novy got careless, her "trainer" would give her a quick poke with a claw in the soft part of the nose to remind her to keep her mind focused.) Oscar was a talented communicator and successfully trained the puppy to play with him in a way that brought pleasure to both and kept both from being injured. When Novy finally met another puppy, she sat up and batted at her like a playing cat. The look she got from the strange puppy was priceless.

When quantifying a character's skill in communicating with animals, keep in mind these three elements: innate talent, experience, and tendency to anthropomorphize. Some people are just born better able to understand animals and to communicate with them. Perhaps it is a natural talent for non-verbal communication, heightened empathy, or sharper-

than-usual observation skills.

Practice is vital. Understanding a species takes time. A person must spend years carefully observing the species' interactions and reactions within its own kind and with other species. It is also necessary to interact with different members of the species. Over time, the species will become more predictable, and the alien aspects of its thought processes will become more familiar. This is especially true when an individual animal and a person spend a lifetime together, getting to know one another and learning to predict each other's behaviors and to share thoughts and feelings.

The final element is a tendency to anthropomorphize. This is a negative trait that can make practice a waste of time. Anthropomorphizing is used here to mean any tendency to project inaccurate explanations onto an animal's behavior. It clouds observation and understanding. Generally there is a tendency to attribute human emotions and reasoning to the animal rather than to acknowledge the animal's own emotions and reasoning. Anthropomorphic explanations are often romanticized. They often attribute too complex a grasp of spoken language to the animal, including the ability to grasp and create abstract thoughts. They attribute too precise a long-term memory for a given species or too great an ability to predict the future. Animals, like small children, tend to live much more completely in the present than adult humans. (This is not to imply that they have no memories or thoughts of the future, merely that they spend much less time in the past or future than we do. This tendency varies in intensity among species.) Animals feel sorrow, such as at the death of a friend, but less regret, such as over a past injury or a lost fight. Regret is an emotion with a strong past or future component.

Usually species will be easier for us to communicate with and understand if they are more closely related to us and/or if they have evolved under social structures similar to ours. From such examples as Farley Mowatt and Dian Fossey, it seems that someone willing to put in the time and observation can effectively communicate with highly social wild creatures like wolves and great apes. Conversely, house cats, which evolved under solitary conditions, remain enigmas to many of the people with whom they live.

If you are trying to decide how well a character and an animal friend communicate, consider these factors. Think about the type of social structure the animal evolved under. How likely is its species to care what others think and to try to understand them? Have the character and animal spent a lot of time together and developed a bond of understanding? Is the individual animal a good communicator and does it have a reason to care about what the human thinks and wants? How much innate ability, practice with this species and individual, and tendency to anthropomorphize does the human have?

Intelligence and Spontaneous Behaviors

Animal Affection

The question of animal intelligence, while largely extraneous to the question of learning tricks, is not moot. Animals do not use a great deal of intelligence while learning and executing tricks, but their intelligence is important to determining the sorts of actions they are likely to take on their own initiative.

One of the most common classes of animal behaviors is one that can be described as "loving behavior." This includes such things as exhibiting trust, being affectionate, and attempting to protect and defend their human friend. It involves a redirection of behaviors and emotions that evolved in order to ensure that young are protected and cared for. (Such redirection is quite common in evolution. The wing evolved for flight, but penguins use theirs very effectively for swimming. Once a trait exists, it can be put to a myriad of uses, some of which may be entirely unrelated to the original use.) Obviously, one expects loving behavior in animals that care for their young. Animals whose young are born helpless, such as cats and dogs, have a stronger tendency to exhibit protective behavior toward humans. Animals with relatively capable young, like horses, tend to be merely affectionate. Some dogs can even drag their people to safety, as they would a puppy. Cats are too small for that, but newspapers have stories from time to time of cats that have found other ways to rescue their owners from such dangers as fires and intruders.

If you are trying to decide how much affection an animal character should show, consider how it cares for its young.

This applies to fantasy creatures as well as real ones. Are the young born helpless? Do one or both parents invest a lot of time caring for and nourishing them? How long are the young dependent on their parents? Remember that in species where the male does not care for the young, half his predecessors were female. The male has all the species' latent capacity for love. If he does not express it, it was secondarily masked by hormones. Also, even the most loving species in the world has its Grinches. A loveless individual is always a reasonable character choice.

Even animals that just lay eggs and leave them might be capable of some affection. The few snakes that I have observed seemed to exhibit some loving behavior, including an ability to feel affection for humans. While walking, I came across a rattlesnake that had met a violent, accidental death in a mower. Within a few feet, I was stopped by one of the most furious rattlesnakes that I have ever seen. The faint vibrations of my footsteps worked it into a rage of buzzing and blind striking long before I came near. I could not help but wonder if it was expressing anger over the death of its mate. I may have been anthropomorphizing. Perhaps the presence of the dead snake merely made the aggressive snake feel threatened. Or perhaps its bad mood was entirely unrelated to the dead snake. (It is interesting to note that young rattlesnakes are born, not hatched, and continue to have some interaction with their mothers after birth.)

As between humans, love between species is a complex reaction between two personalities. My mare and I used to take part in local competitions with a mare and young man of our respective ages. He was a skilled horseman, and his mare was highly trained. However, for whatever reason, they could not stand each other. They would execute their figures precisely and beautifully, their faces set and unfriendly. They had no joy of togetherness, and I doubt they could trust each other. My mare was lighthearted and would sometimes make mistakes out of carefree lack of attention, but we were very close and she had absolute confidence in me and a desire to please me. If I faced a dragon, I would much rather have her than a horse that distrusted or hated me. Our bond did not alter the fact that she was a horse and that horses react naturally to dangerous situations with panic and flight. We probably would have had no chance against a dragon. However, I know that I could have trusted her to trust me and to not intentionally do me harm or betray me. Horses do display considerably more calm and courage when carrying a trusted human than when on their own.

Remember that affection is a two-way street. Although some dogs will offer slavish devotion to a person that mistreats them, do take your hero's behavior into consideration when deciding how affectionate his or her animal is. The PC cannot treat his animal like a used gauntlet most of the time and expect boundless love and devotion in return. Even an animal that is willing to accept those conditions will not have the trust and confidence in and ability to communicate with its loveless person that it would need to produce a stunning example of animal heroism.

Gelded horses often express a pronounced love of young creatures. (Although, of course, some of them detest the little beggars.) Many of them become very attached to young foals, in some cases even wanting to raise them as their own. One gelding that I knew would let foals play with his tail until they chewed and pulled it nearly bald. Geldings can also develop deep fondness for human young. I once saw an older ranch horse, whose whole life had been spent among adults in a working relationship without emphasis on affection, get his first glimpse of a child. He immediately claimed the child for his own, watching him, talking to him in little whickers, expressing affection and interest. Once he had convinced the child to lead him around, he instinctively used the savvy kid-horse trick of keeping his nose on the child so that if the child unexpectedly stopped or slowed, he would have enough advance warning to not step on him. Horses almost never do this with adults. Partly, adults have no handy nose rest at the right height, but also, adults can presumably look out for themselves. In one case, a child riding an older gelding partially fell from the saddle and dangled there, struggling and shrieking at full volume. Normally, a horse would react to loud, frightening noises and a sudden, unfamiliar situation by jumping or running. This gelding stood quietly until an adult could come rescue his child. Another gelding reacted the same way after a painful stumble and partial fall while carrying his child.

One horse that I know, Chance, makes a nuisance of himself if he has a new rider. He will run away or jump and shy at inopportune times. He acts flighty and gets upset about any little thing his rider does. With an inexperienced rider, he can be dangerous. Once Chance claims the person as his own, he is one of the steadiest, most trustworthy horses that I know. He lets his rider try any sort of nonsense without a bobble or a flinch.

My sister theorizes that cats rescued from the street or abuse make the most interesting, communicative, and

affectionate pets. I have certainly known a number of exceptional rescued cats. Oscar is one of these. He uses affection in an amusingly calculating fashion to further his lifelong goal of moving from the street to the house. Once he had charmed his way from the street to the barnyard, he proceeded to appoint himself bodyguard and escort for our reigning housecat, Jackie. Jackie, another rescued cat, was highly intelligent but frail and the target of merciless bullying. Oscar conspicuously ensured Jackie's peace and safety whenever she wished to take a walk outside, and soon he had a couch to sleep on. Oscar never had to be taught any of the house rules for inside cats. This former alleycat learned our expectations by watching Jackie and taking his cue from her. Oscar comes when his name is called for no reward other than a friendly word and a brief pat (and presumably the smug knowledge that he has successfully predicted and fulfilled the desires of they-who-decide-which-cats-sleep-in-the-house). When a newcomer, such as a puppy or baby, is brought into the house, Oscar's first reaction is one of disgust. Once he is certain that the lords of the house are fond of the new creature, however, he appoints himself its new best friend. He is so tolerant, gentle, and affectionate that one cannot help but think well of him, even knowing full well that he is not, in fact, a cat whose life's wish is to play with puppies and babies.

One dog that I know has to contend with a number of deep-seated phobias, including one of large animals. She became attached to my husband and I because we would take her on walks, which she enjoyed. When a young horse trotted up to see what we were doing, she placed herself between us and barked a quavery warning. There was of course, no danger. However, this was Medal-of-Honor courage from a creature as timid as she is, and was prompted by pure affection.

Some horses and dogs prefer humans of one sex or another. One dog that I knew liked children, tolerated women, and deeply distrusted men. Her case probably reflected past experiences, although I do not believe this is always the explanation. In some cases, the animal can be violently opposed to a particular sex.

If multiple herds of cattle are mixed, the cattle will prefer to interact with others their own color. I do not know the explanation for this "racist" behavior, but have several guesses. The cattle may be showing preference for old friends from before the herd mixed, and the original herds would probably have been mostly alike in color. The cattle may be showing preference for cattle that most closely resemble their former herdmates (again probably of a similar color). Or an animal may be preferring cattle with his or her mother's color, again, most likely similar to his or her own. We are very visual animals, and color is obvious to us. The cattle may be ignoring color and responding to things such as scent, which we don't notice, that happen to correspond with breed (and thus color).

Animals will bring their injuries and problems to a trusted human. The horses that I have known treat people as gods when faced with something beyond their abilities and understanding. They are confident that any humble, heart-felt prayer will be answered. This can be hard for the person if the answer does not lie within human power.

Once when Chance was loose in a pasture with another horse, the other horse was bitten by a rattlesnake. Chance went and, Lassie-style, brought human help for his companion. Chance kept watch over his friend until he recovered. Several times Chance pestered his human to check up on the injured horse and give him water.

Romantic love is not common in most non-human species. Humans have romantic love because they have complex spoken and written language, abstract thinking, strong ability to remember the past and model the future, hidden ovulation, and long-term pair bonding. Most animals do not have hidden ovulation and therefore merely feel sexual urges when the female is fertile. However, in most species the female selects her mate. Turning on the charm can mean the difference between being an also-ran and the successful suitor. Respected horse photographer, Robert Vavra, observed a mare violently reject a rough stallion interested only in sex. The stallion was removed and replaced by one known as a gentle lover. The new stallion successfully seduced the reluctant mare with sensual foreplay (Vavra, 1977). If the male can be expected to help with raising young, the female might be looking for evidence of gentle, nurturing behavior when making her choice.

Animal Navigation

Another ability fairly common for animals is to learn their way around a particular place. Rats are skilled at finding their way through mazes. Most horses can find their way home under difficult conditions. In fact, many horses will

start offering to show the way home long before their riders are interested in the information. Before there were cars, many drunkards had a faithful horse that could get them safely home from the bar while they were in a drunken stupor. Dogs that have a talent for navigation can find their way back over ground they have only crossed once in a car.

If the characters are in a blizzard, you need to remember that horses will not necessarily walk directly into the wind. Willingness to brave the wind is an individual trait. Some horses consider any breeze to be an unbearable hardship (cast upon them by their riders). I have known an unusually intelligent cow to have saved herself by walking into a blizzard, despite the fact that popular wisdom states (in most cases correctly) that a cow never will. She walked to a place of safety where she had been only once previously.

Animals are not some kind of supernatural GPS. If they were, you would never see advertisements seeking lost pets. However, some individual animals can manage amazing feats. If the situation arises, it is worth a dramatic roll against the animal's skill in navigation. It just might save the party. If the animal succeeds once, you might want to give it modifiers in the future, since it is apparently a natural talent.

Memory

Cats, dogs, and horses can remember a good friend of any species almost indefinitely. They probably have a similar memory for an enemy. If they see a friend again after a long time, they will recognize him. If a situation or a scent or an object reminds them of an absent friend, they will look for the friend or exhibit signs of missing their friend.

One of our horses, a red and white pinto named Manitou, was murdered in a very cruel fashion, a deeply traumatic experience for the rest of the herd. Several years later, one of the mares saw a black and white pinto at a distance and began to neigh an agonizingly hopeful greeting. The strange horse looked nothing like Manitou, but her hope that her human gods had performed a miracle overrode what her senses told her.

Individual cats, dogs, and horses will all play the "Do I know you?" game when they are angry at their person for leaving. Particularly poignant during my college years was when my mare stopped ignoring me on my returns and started to welcome me profusely. Her proud punishment had not induced me to stay with her; perhaps demonstrations of her affection would.

Animal memories of events are probably restricted to repetitive routines that the animal experienced over and over or vivid, traumatic experiences. One horse that was cut badly in barbed wire once will react with terror whenever he feels anything that reminds him of the experience. Brushing a leg against low brush is quite sufficient.

Advanced Skills

Skills that are difficult for animals include problem solving, using tools, and cooperative efforts. These skills are supposedly only available to the most intelligent species, such as apes and ravens. Some species are more talented at some of these skills, while others have other areas of expertise. Most difficult are solving two-part problems or using a tool to obtain the tool needed for the job. That sort of effort is at the limit of what non-humans can achieve.

Particularly interesting are cooperative efforts. Primatologist Brian Hare has found that cooperative efforts and reading social cues depend less on intelligence than on how little aggression, fear, caution, and rigid social hierarchy the creature has. To test the ability to read social cues, the researcher looked or pointed toward hidden food. Dogs, even tiny puppies, were much better at reading inter-species social cues than were chimpanzees (much more intelligent than dogs) or undomesticated canines. This was also true of foxes that had been selectively bred for less cautious or aggressive behavior. For the cooperation test, two primates had to pull on a rope together to get food. Chimpanzees could apparently comprehend the solution to the puzzle, but only close friends of the same social rank would actually cooperate. Bonobos have a less rigid, fearful, and intolerant social hierarchy than chimpanzees. Almost any pair of bonobos could solve the cooperation puzzle and get the food (Morell, 2007).

Animals, like small children, can be surprisingly adept at using their limited problem solving skills. Jackie, a cat who always wanted the run of the house, worked out that door knobs are the secret to doors. Many times I have seen her

stretched awkwardly on her hind legs, clasping the knob with her wiggling forepaws, cursing to herself in a long stream of disgusted meows. To my knowledge, she never opened a door, but she displayed impressive problem solving skills in figuring out how it was done.

Jackie would also look out the window in the morning, check the weather, and decide whether or not she wanted to go out. Oscar is less intelligent. He can look out the window at a blizzard, go to the door, and be shocked to discover that the weather is not to his liking. He has yet to make the connection between what he sees out the window and conditions outside.

Raised Intelligence

It is important to remember that the brain is developed through exercise. A lifetime of close interaction with a talented human communicator will result in an animal with "raised intelligence" and a more human-like mind. This does not imply flashy magic effects or that the animal will cease to be what it is. However, the human-like parts of its brain will develop to their full natural potential with stimulation and exercise.

Animal Personalities

An important issue when roleplaying an individual animal is its level of dominance and aggressiveness and how it displays these traits. A dominant dog can be a difficult animal to deal with, because it will struggle with its owner for leadership. A strong leader and talented communicator can have a harmonious relationship with a dominant dog that is willing to eventually admit defeat, but a weaker person will create an unstable, unhealthy relationship. Similarly, a dominant horse that will never accept a human's leadership is both dangerous and unpleasant to interact with. This unwillingness to accept human leadership results from a combination of individual personality and poor early training.

Many dominant horses will acknowledge a human's ultimate leadership and only pursue a position of leadership within the herd. How this is expressed also varies among individuals. Manitou was a stellar leader and held his position of authority with quiet competence. He protected the old horse in the herd, making sure he was allowed to stand with his friends and to eat his meals in peace. Manitou did not fight unnecessarily and discouraged fighting in the herd. Once Manitou was dead, leadership was taken by Stoney, who fought, bullied, and terrorized; the old and weak were given no peace. Some dominant horses are a serious danger to other horses and will need to be tied, shut up, under saddle, or alone at all times for everyone's safety.

Five Tips for Thinking Like an Animal

1. Think in the present.
2. Let basic emotions like fear, anger, or love direct your reactions.
3. React to body language, facial expressions, and volume and tone, not the meanings of words.
4. Know your place in the world and in the "herd."
5. Don't think outside the box.

Stoney also lacks respect for humans. If anyone shows attention to another horse, he flies into a jealous rage. I do not think he has ever actually attacked the human, but he will attack the horse, which is very dangerous for everyone.

My mare once quarreled with her leader because she had seen me riding her leader, and she considered me her own private person. However, she had the manners to wait until she thought I was gone. It was a very stupid, sophomoric trick, and possibly her youth protected her from the punishment she deserved for such impertinence.

Horse herds have a definite pecking order. In a wild herd, the mares run in order of dominance, and the stallion follows. In a domestic herd, the mares and geldings tend to interact more like a herd of mares, but it is not unusual to have both a male and female leader. Horses that are being ridden regularly will tend to have higher status than those that are not, while those that are being used for the most challenging and human-valued tasks tend to be higher still. My mare has had to run loose for many years because of a serious injury, and it is shaking the foundations of her decade- long position as leader. Juvenile horses can show deference (and claim immunity) by rapidly popping their lips together.

One horse that I know will bite or kick at a ridden horse while being wrangled. She is extremely low in status and a bitter, unfriendly character (although she interacts fine with people). She has few friends and was never particularly close to her foals. I think she acts aggressively toward the wrangle horse for two reasons: She is confident that the human will not allow the wrangle horse to thrash her, and the wrangle horse is usurping the one thing that she can rightfully claim, the position at the very end of the herd. She hates her place, but it is hers.

Animal personalities are as variable as human personalities. You can find bullies and bleeding hearts, cowards and paragons of courage, practical jokers and strait-laced types, shy ones and outgoing ones, fun-loving sorts and serious sorts, prissy socialites and mannerless boors, graceful creatures and clumsy creatures. I knew a cat that could climb telephone poles with no front claws and climb around a Christmas tree all day without disturbing an ornament. Her full brother could fall off a flat, broad surface, and knock over the Christmas tree practically just by entering the room. Animals can have all sorts of quirks, hang-ups, and neuroses to make them interesting. However, they will never cease to be what they are. A genius dog will not do algebra; a cautious horse will not worry about health insurance.

When creating an animal character, proceed much as you would for a human character. Create a background and personality and some interesting quirks. Keep in mind that the background will usually be shorter than for a human, both because of a physically shorter lifespan and because less of it is remembered clearly. Also remember than the animal does not have spoken language and complex thinking to make sense of the odd and mysterious bits. Think about the sorts of strengths, weaknesses, and instincts its evolution would have endowed it with. Consider its history and past experiences with the PCs. Then try to look out of the animal's eyes, keeping in mind the abilities and limitations that its physical body provides, and see through its mind.

Further Reading

- Morell, Virginia. 2007. Dogged. Smithsonian.
- Vavra, Robert. 1977. Equus: The Creation of a Horse. William Morrow & Company, Inc., New York. Pp. 196-199.
- Virginia Morell also has an interesting article on this topic with some of the more exotic species (and Kanzi) titled "Minds of their own: *Animals are smarter than you think,*" March 2008, National Geographic Magazine.

--Sierra Dawn Stoneberg Holt

Sages theorize that the Omniscient Eye might actually be composed of a panel of Experts chosen through mysterious and arcane means. Regardless, the Omniscient Eye is benevolent, and every other week it is willing to share its lore 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!

Coming to Your Emotional Rescue

In my infinite trolling of the infinite corridors of the infinite space of the Infiniweb, I came across[1] this quote from noted comic book scribe Warren Ellis, referring to someone else's post about the notion that **Doctor Who** is a children's show:

> *"That said, [**Doctor Who** is] a kids programme and I watch it with that frame of reference in mind.*
>
> Exactly. My rule of thumb is that when it loses my daughter's attention, it's failing. So, while I was retching at Gollum Doctor Saved By Power Of Prayer, she, having read a lot of magical fantasy children's fiction, just kind of went along for the ride with it.
>
> Russell Davies isn't writing this show as a hard sf writer. In fact I think, if you were to ask him, he'd consider writing the show as hard sf as being exclusionary and antipathetical to the mainstream cultural leviathan he believes WHO should be. He's a populist, he's a successful children's television writer, and he likes all kinds of television, from the lowest common denominator on up.
>
> Notably, he's a bit defensive about the latter at times. I saw him interviewed recently, wherein he said he loves all television, and then immediately says that doesn't make him shallow or superficial or stoopid. "I'm not," he said. "I'm clever, and I know what I'm talking about."
>
> And I think that's why he backs off logical, extrapolated conclusions to the big stories -- I think he deliberately conceives them as magical deus ex machina because he believes that's more accessible to a wide audience. He is clever. He's not writing dumb endings because he's dumb. He's writing dumb endings that he considers emotionally consistent, as opposed to logically consistent.
>
> . . .

Now, I could take this column just to point out that I'm a big *Doctor Who* fan[2], or even talk about the notion of such-and-such a program being a "kid's show" (although I note that the BBC has generally made kid-targeted fare that's about a jillion times more thought-provoking than most U.S. programming targeting adults). But then we wouldn't be Random Thought Table, would we[3]?

Instead, I'm going to focus on the notion of "emotionally consistent" versus "logically consistent."

Now, in the past I've talked about internal consistency, the need for a series to remain consistent with its own rules and ideas. (It may not make sense for the 1960s *Batman* show to have random objects in the Batcave labelled, but by gum if you're going to do that, make sure *everything* is labelled.) But I've never looked at the issue from the POV of "logic" versus "emotion" . . . a distinction so obvious that I'm tempted to hang up my Vulcan ears in shame.

What I've generally focused on is logical consistency; for example, if it's logical that some objects in a universe are labeled by our protagonist, then it's probably best to go ahead and label *everything.* Likewise if it's logical for otherwise intelligent superheroes to allow teenagers and pre-teens to dress up as sidekicks and help them fight men firing *real guns,* then no one should make an issue of it in the campaign universe (except, perhaps, to make an aside; Superman may scold Batman for teen endangerment, but he's not going to call Child Protective Services).

But there is, unseen by most, an underworld, a place that is just as real, but not as brightly lit. A darkside,[4] as it were, because *emotional consistency* allows one to trump the rules of *logical consistency* if it's really important.

Let's go back to our Batman example. Again, there usually aren't repercussions for Mr. The Batman's encouraging of kiddies to dress up as brightly colored targets and prowl the streets with him. But on at least one occasion, this has *not* been the case, and one character with the moniker Robin was beaten to death with a crowbar by a character who

realized that the phrase "homicidal maniac" was printed clearly on his business cards. Now, speaking from a viewpoint of logical internal consistency, the death of a happy-go-lucky character doesn't make too much sense. After all, Batman -- world's smartest human -- oughta know that this is a likely consequence of putting humans without fully developed brains[5] in harm's way. It is only by the same logical consistency that allows us to accept dressing in tights as an acceptable means of solving the world's problems that we can excuse the existence of a Robin in the first place. But from a viewpoint of emotional consistency, the death can be excused. Because, emotionally speaking, the Batman books have long been about a world of stark emotions, violent conflict, and -- yes -- sometimes even death. And from an emotional viewpoint, it is consistent to reinforce that worldview even if it violates the logical internal consistency.

What does this mean for an RPG campaign that's looking to tap this vein? Well, I would argue that emotional consistency is a rarity in most genres; perhaps a fairy-tale world (grim or otherwise) would get away with accessing it more often than internal logical consistency, but few others would. No, I believe that it's logical internal consistency that allows for most aspects of a setting to function, and emotional consistency allows it to probe outside those views every so often, in the service of the overall worldview *or* character outlook.

So let's look at an easy example first . . . one so common, it's mentioned in the blockquote above: the power of love (or friendship, or whatever) to overcome even so great an obstacle as death. One good spot where this makes an appearance is *The Fifth Element,* where wishful love-thinking brings back a scantily clad redhead on death's door. I also believe it shows up in *The Matrix Reloaded* -- an otherwise grim-and-gritty world where "love conquers death" would be an unlikely theme -- but I'm having problems accessing most memories of that film because those neurons were drowned by the internal brain hemorrhaging it caused. (In this case, the "love conquers death" emotional consistency is accessing the part of the story's soul that occupies the same "break the rules" worldview as Neo's rise in the first place.) And for homework, consider how this "love conquers death" theme applies to *The Princess Bride.*

Now, the reason that these aspects of "love conquers death" are *emotionally consistent* rather than *logically consistent* is that this is not a standard feature of the world; rather, it's a standard incredibly rare feature. In other words, logical consistency says that wearing a cape as a superhero is a good idea because it provides benefits (usually "distracts bad guys"); everyone can wear capes if they want to. But were "love conquers death" a logically consistent element of a game world, then there would be no further element of danger; after all, if Wesley/Dread Pirate Roberts becomes mostly dead again, then simply get emotional and all will be right with the world. No, even the folks utilizing such an element understand its rarity.

As another example -- a more complicated one -- let's say that you're playing a character with incredible luck; things just always work out for the character. Depending on the tone of the campaign world, there are a couple of ways one can be emotionally consistent even if it violates other aspects of the logical consistency. For example, if the group wants to emphasize how dark aspects of the setting have become, then a beloved NPC might die even with the lucky hero in full force. ("See? You're going to be fine, Kris; there's an ambulance that's luckily parked right here . . . and a bystander with your blood type waiting to help. You're going to be all right, do you hear? You're going to be all right! Kris?") The emotional consistency here would be the setting's view that even the most amazing luck in the world can't alter fate. Conversely, the lucky hero might survive an utterly impossible situation -- say, a spaceship crashing into the sun -- with little more explanation than "I'm lucky!" Presuming this trick wasn't used more than once (and, unless it becomes a running joke or theme, it hardly ever is), then it merely reinforces the character's emotional consistency that the most amazing luck can help even in situations where the most amazing luck can't help.

In game terms, I might allow each *player* (not even necessarily each *character*) access to an "emotion" chip at some point in the game, which -- when spent -- permits one to break pretty much any rule he can think of, provided it's a really emotional scene, and provided that it advances the plot or reinforces the emotional core of the character doing so. The player might receive more chips if the campaign world reinforces its emotional truisms on his PCs in a negative way (such as the death of the lucky one's loved one). Regardless, the reinforcement of emotional consistency should always be cool, dramatic, and/or interesting, and understood by all that this is truly a rare and . . . well, *emotional* event. If it's not, then it merely becomes part of the *logical* framework within which the campaign dwells.

At least it should . . . logically speaking.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] And by "came across" I mean "[swiped from someone else's blog](#)."

[2] I'm a big *Doctor Who* fan.

[3] No. No, we would not.

[4] I am so just waving my Geek Flag fast and furious this week.

[5] Teens, that is.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Wan Ring

by Steven Marsh

None would choose to wear the Wan Ring willingly; its color is too ghastly, its gold too ghostly, and its inner texture too gristly. In the best light, it's a bluish-blackish-grayish muddle; in most mundane light, it blends in with the skin of the wearer less than perfectly, appearing as a band of flesh that is paler than normal on the bearer's finger.

But the power of Wan Rings is incredible, and many in an urban environment who know of their secrets covet them more than most other magic items. Each Wan Ring is tied to a specific shopping establishment and grants incredible power over that locale; in other words, with the right band, someone can use the Wan Ring to rule the mall.

The Power of the Ring

Put simply, the Wan Ring allows incredible abilities in *one* specific shopping mall. The Wan Ring for the Fashion Mall of Plantation, Florida doesn't work for the Fashion Mall of Indianapolis. In addition, everything the Ring does is *subtle;* to an outside observer there is little to no indication that anything unusual has occurred.

Primary among the Ring's uses -- and, indeed, the only use that many wearers ever rely on or even become aware of -- is the ability to receive any merchandise free of charge from the Mall. When wearing the Ring, the wearer can go through the motions of paying -- waiting in line, providing cash or credit card, receiving the merchandise in a bag -- but no funds are actually ever *deducted.* Credit card charges never show up on billing statements, and if $20 is provided in cash, $20 is returned in change (although it will be in different, smaller bills). The payment form needs to belong to the wearer; he can't use someone else's credit card or check, but if handed cash by a third party, that seems to work.

In theory, this means that the owner of the Wan Ring can take every item in the mall, should he be so inclined. In practice, however, there are many limits to this ability. First, and most obvious, is the fact that the Ring cannot provide for the wearer anything that the mall does *not* supply. It would be rare to find a mall that has a shop that sells firearms or other weapons (let alone ammo), and many other useful accoutrements are challenging. ("No place in this mall sells rope, but we can unwind a rope-wrapped vase, or tie together some silk sheets . . .") Some stores have larger special-order departments that can be tapped, but this will involve waiting for the product to arrive, and the Ring provides no supernatural ability to acquire items that aren't available to a mall location.

Second is the fact that items permitted to be taken by the Ring do not seem to actually "belong" to the Ring-bearer; rather, the items seem to be on loan. For example, if any such items are returned, the same procedure for buying occurs in reverse; the credit card must be given back (but no actual money is put on the card), or a gift card is issued (which has no value). Likewise if any items taken from the Mall are given or sold to anyone else, those items are immediately reported as "stolen" . . . by whom is an unanswered question. For some this doesn't make a difference -- it's not like the police maintain a constant task force of SWAT team agents ready to strike the moment the master database of Dan Brown books indicates one is reported stolen -- but others find this makes for awkward situations. ("I went to get the ring you gave me appraised for insurance reasons and . . . well, this is my one phone call.") This effect is *not* realized for items that are consumed during the course of use or abuse; for example, if parts of the aforementioned silk-sheet "rope" were to fall off and be left behind at the scene of the item's usage, that item would not be reported stolen, and neither would the remains of books burned as kindling. (Nor, for that matter, would a sheet of paper from a larger notebook torn off and given as a note to someone else, nor the ink from an acquired pen.) However, if someone receives a "purchased" object from the Ring-wearer -- whether the item was given or taken, and regardless of whether it was done knowingly or not -- activates the anti-theft properties. Those who have studied the Ring's properties have come to the conclusion that this aspect of its magic is primarily to ensure that items taken from the mall are for the wearer's personal use. One exception -- or a logical extension of the "consumption" rule, perhaps -- is that food purchased by the wearer can be given to or shared with others.

The third limitation of the Ring's abilities to acquire items is that the wearer must be able to purchase the item

normally; he must either have the cash in hand, have the balance available on his credit card, and so on. In many cases, this isn't much of a limitation; if the wearer only has $20 and wants to "buy" two $15 books, he can simply purchase them one at a time. However, this has the effect of keeping the wearer of the Wan Ring from accumulating items he would have no reasonable shot at doing otherwise; apparently even magic isn't powerful enough to let a poor college student acquire a diamond necklace.

Another use of the Ring is the subtle alternation of the environment of its attuned mall. For example, if the wearer wants to get lost in a crowd to escape pursuit, then a fortuitous group of shoppers happens to cluster in the area. (Conversely, if he's trying to get through the mall as quickly as possible, then an otherwise crowded mall will have just enough of a hole for the sprinter to pass unhindered.) If the wearer has established that an intercom page for a certain person is the signal for something to happen, then that "person" will be paged at the wearer's will. If he wants certain music to play in a certain shop, it will "coincidentally" be on. Again, the limitation seems to be that it must be "coincidentally" possible within the realm of the mall or individual stores; it's unlikely that a plus-sized apparel store would play, say, *Nine Inch Nails'* "Head Like a Hole" or *Rolling Stones'* "Paint It Black," but such fare might be possible in a retro-trendy outfit shop.

Use of the Ring in this regard makes it arguably *more* powerful than its item-acquisition abilities. Within the confines of the wearer's creativity and the necessity to keep any effects discreet, almost *anything* seems possible. Good parking spaces are immediately available to the wearer, the elevator is always ready when the wearer wants (or curiously *unavailable* if an adversary tries to catch it), floors are washed and slippery if the wearer is evading pursuit, and so on. Even the weather in the immediate vicinity of the mall is cooperative for the wearer (once more, within plausible reason . . . no sleet storms in the South Florida summer).

Again, the Ring cannot conjure information or effects that are impossible, nor can it actively subvert the free will of anyone in a substantial or obvious way. For example, suppose a wearer, Ted, wants to be informed if anyone in the mall says his name. He cannot command the Ring to have a passerby turn to him and say, "Someone just said your name!" whenever anyone in the mall does so. But he *can* have someone near the person who said his name say loudly to a friend, "That person just said 'Ted'; I wonder what that was about?" And someone within earshot of that person might say, "Those folks by the elevator just said, 'Ted'; have you heard that name in a while?" And so on, until word reaches telephone-style to Ted. Likewise the Ring can be used to cause a crowd to migrate around the wearer and provide human shields or simply a way of getting lost in a sea of faces.

One final -- powerful -- effect of the Ring is to improve the reactions of anyone associated within or associated with the mall who does not actively seek to act against the wearer. Shop clerks are friendlier and more helpful (appearing from seemingly nowhere as needed, or leaving the wearer alone if desired), store managers are eager to employ the person if he wants (or grant favors to an employee who wears the ring), random shoppers will answer reasonable requests, and so on. This effect won't help improve the mood if the security officers have been abused or angered by the wearer, and if a homicidal maniac or zombies are loose in the mall, that's Bad News, but the mundanes of the mall will treat the wearer with utmost friendliness and respect.

For the most part, the Ring resists finding a new owner; when removed, the Ring becomes powerless for at least a week. It seems to know if its being "abused," and if it feels that its owner(s) are shuffling it around too much, it can depower itself for a longer period of time. However, items possessed by former wearers are still their personal property, complete with the same rules about giving them away or consuming them.

Campaign Uses

How the Wan Ring is used in a campaign depends on who ends up with possession of it.

In the hands of an antagonist NPC, it serves as an interesting means to confound heroes through subtle means . . . at least on the "turf" of the wearer. AFter all, within the confines of his attuned mall, he has incredible powers . . . and, unless the heroes are going to use decidedly unsubtle means of stopping him (guns, explosives, etc.), they'll have a very difficult time dealing with him. Of course, unless the wearer of the ring uses his abilities to convince someone to let him sleep at the mall, he needs to leave sometime, at which point he's vulnerable.

In the possession of a mentor or ally, it can be an alternative means of providing the things that mentors do . . . especially in the form of aid or information. ("Master Sensei, why do you always buy a book on a subject we need and then take us to the Chik-Fil-A?")

If worn by a PC, the Wan Ring becomes a great means of serving as an alternate focus for high resources or riches. It also becomes a wish-fulfillment device for shopaholic PCs (or their players), and a trip to the mall for the acquisition of useful gear may become a standard feature before an adventure. For PCs and NPCs, the mall can also become an alternate "headquarters"; really, the powers the Ring bestows aren't that much different from the abilities of any magical "sanctum sanctorum." Its primary offerings are gear, information (in the form of a well-stocked bookstore), and protection (in the form of turning the environment against any intruders).

It is suggested that, for the campaign's purposes, a specific mall be utilized, consulted, or modeled for the Ring . . . especially if in the hands of a PC. The available stores -- along with a good idea of what kind of items are available for purchase or special order -- should be sorted out ahead of time. However, given that many malls change their stores relatively often (especially small specialty shops), the dynamic nature of the attuned locale should permit variations and plot possibilities.

For adventuring PCs, the biggest limitation of the Ring is its tie to a specific geographical location. The heroes can have almost limitless resources within the mall, but once they fly to Timbuktu, they're done with restocking for a while.

Adventure Seeds

The heroes are pursuing someone in a mall who they know possesses a Wan Ring. They need to investigate and try to track down the person while remaining below the prey's radar, lest he turn the defensive power of a fully operational shopping center against the PCs.

Perhaps possession of multiple Wan Rings, in addition to their standard abilities, allows one to move from one attuned mall to another (probably by stepping into an empty elevator and emerging elsewhere); if so, it's suggested that the elevator becomes a portal that allows others to come along for the ride. In the hands of heroes, this would permit a more global expansion of the idea as a campaign progresses, while still keeping it limited in scope.

Finally, the Wan Ring can exist as the ultimate "fake-out"; with enough planning ahead of time, an enterprising and resourceful (in all meanings) person could emulate almost every aspect of the Ring (special arrangements with all shops to get merchandise, actors hired to be "bystanders" acting according to certain commands, etc.).

Pyramid Pick

Pandemic

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Designed by Matt Leacock

Graphic design & layout by Joshua Cappel

Art by Régis Moulun

Full-color boxed set with mounted map board, five pawns, five Role cards, four Reference cards, six Research Stations, six markers (Cure markers, Outbreak marker, Infection Rate marker), 96 disease cubes in four colors, 59 Player cards, 48 Infection cards, and rulebook; $34.99

Is there simply no market for cooperative games? The success of things like *Shadows Over Camelot* suggests, done right, there's mileage to be had. Maybe gamers just can't get behind a title unless it has them staring daggers at each other across a table, but *Pandemic* from Z-Man Games falls into that "done right" category. Diseases are running rampant throughout the population and humanity hangs in the balance.

The object of the game is to cure all four diseases before Earth succumbs.

Two to four players work together to eliminate outbreaks across the globe, and everybody has a role to play -- literally. Role cards give a player a job with a special ability that skirts the rules in some way. The Operations Expert builds Research Stations more freely, for example, and the Scientist discovers cures quicker. Action takes place on a world map of 48 major cities (including Essen -- *zing*). As the game begins diseases have broken out in several cities, and the heroes are dispatched from Atlanta's Centers for Disease Control.

A player uses his actions to move his pawn, treat diseases, and enable teammates to do their work. Player cards depict cities, with a precious few Special Event!s added in that offer vital bonuses. Travel is the basic action; adjacent movement is always possible, but inefficient. A city card moves someone to or from that location, but there's only one card per city. Further complicating things: Curing a disease requires expending five city cards of the same color. In all likelihood players must trade among themselves to make a set (and hands are limited to seven), but one may only give away the card for the city they occupy (to give someone Moscow, both pawns must be in Moscow). Research Stations ease the travel restrictions. Building one also burns the card for the city where the installation is erected, but pawns move between stations without resorting to cards.

Members can treat diseases in their city. Like Player cards, Infection cards display cities, but these show where bugs pop up. Cubes of that color contaminate the indicated city, and agents may remove cubes by spending actions. Locations are interconnected by lines, and a city with three of the same colored cubes doesn't add more; instead, that outbreak spreads to all adjacent cities. If one of those also contains three matching cubes, the chain reaction continues. Treatment is a stopgap, and only the cure eradicates a disease for good.

If there are no cubes available when its color is turned up, that disease outstrips the team's ability to deal with it and the game ends in failure. Also, they are allowed only so many outbreaks, and if the Player cards run out, again they've lost. If, however, they cure all four diseases, they stop the advance and share a victory.

It's a beautifully produced product, the centerpiece being the lush game board. Its painted illustration with all the little vectors suggests action. The order of play is printed on the board, but it's small and only in one corner. As diseases multiply it's tougher to track which cubes belong in which city (in dense spots like Europe, anyway), and players may fumble with the bits, but none of this is so awful as to be a deal breaker. (A new copy might have to air out a little -- like some other recent Z-Man releases, the smell of fresh ink is overpowering.) The cardboard card-holding insert is of dubious value; throw it out or fret endlessly over stuffing everything back into the box.

Nail-biting games are rare, but this one usually comes down to the wire (often to the last couple of cards). It's not just cooperative in concept; players *must* coordinate or they go down bleeding. The Role cards are well balanced, and each is invaluable in its way. Once players are used to the simple version, more Epidemic cards added to the deck make it tougher. There's no one right way or strategy, nor does a common tactic or pattern emerge over several plays. Players really have to think.

The box lists a 45-minute playing time, but it only takes about 20 to lose. With five Role cards and pawns, it's a little confusing to realize it's a four-player game (a read of some of the rules suggests this might have been a change late in the process), and players will always lament "If only we had the Medic . . ." At the other extreme, the game says nothing about solitaire play, which turns out to be a marvelously viable alternative. The best sign of a good game is when the participants have a great time even when they're losing. Players can lose ***Pandemic*** a lot. But to be fair, they're going to break it out a lot, too.

--Andy Vetromile

Less Weird Characters Might Mean More Fun Games

According to Jayne's written background, her new character harnessed the life essences and power of every animal on Earth that had died in the last hour. Zachary was playing an amnesiac who was the world's best sharpshooter with any object not intended to be a weapon . . . provided he only improvised with any given object once. Stan's "character" was the world's only A.I., whose power and intelligence was directly proportional to the amount of spam its massive network of zombie computers could send out. And Charlie's newest was an otherwise mundane person who was destined to die once a day, every day, only to become reformed whole and alive the next dawn.

*The GM sighed. Why wasn't anyone playing a character that was really **different?***

* * *

In many campaigns, there is a desire for many players to make their characters as whacked out and unique as possible. So if there are any rare abilities (Jedi powers), backgrounds (bright Lilim), or goals (Golconda), at least one player will really, *really* want them. Although your experience might be different, in most campaigns I have been in, that player has been me.

Many game systems encourage such wackiness by providing lots of character options, intriguing background hooks, and long-term personal plotlines for players. But there's an ancient saying that I just made up that goes as follows: "When everything is special, nothing is special." Curiously, when every character has an aspect that's one of a kind, the presence of a one-of-a-kind trait is no longer enough to ensure an interesting character. This can cause some players trying to come up with *really* off-the-wall characters; left unchecked, this tendency can lead to a degenerative PC pool of escalating freaks, masters of bizarre esoterica, and entities with impossibly convoluted backgrounds.

Now, some campaigns absolutely thrive on this mad-whack diversity; more power to them! Weirdness flows in these worlds like water through the roof of a foreclosed home. But other settings do better with a mild buzz of uniqueness, with only the occasional blip on the Interestometer. For example, almost all of the main *Star Wars* characters -- Han, Leia, Chewie, Lando. C3PO, R2-D2, Lobot -- were typical specimens of their character types. Sure, they may have been more competent than the rank-and-file of their archetypes, but their core concepts were all pretty basic and Jung at heart.

So where can a restriction on character options lead? Well, let's look at a couple of examples. The most obvious one is any of your non-weird military settings: Roman gladiators, World War II, the Cola Wars, and so on. If you're in a relatively realistic world, then your ragtag team of American soldiers isn't going to consist of the incognito prince of Liechtenstein, the keeper of the secret of the Holy Grail, the world's only known practitioner of imagitantric mystical powers, and a martial artist of 100 different fighting styles. No, you'll probably all be roughly the same level of skill and knowledge; at best, one of your guys will have an animal sidekick, like a dog (mostly realistic) or a hawk (mostly freakin' cool). But that's okay; even within the framework of a realistic setting, there are a number of different character types, ability specializations, and outlooks that can allow for lots of possibilities *without* resorting to the totally whacked out or implausibly unique aspects. For good 20th- century soldier ideas, look at the different characters in *M*A*S*H, The Dirty Dozen, Saving Private Ryan,* or even the *G.I. Joe* line (although the latter has many elements of the "weird unique" elements that this column is supposed to be railing against).

As one final example, let's consider a genre that's the bastion of "unique": Supers. It's practically a given that everyone in a Supers campaign will have unique origins and weird one-of-a-kind powers. But let's turn it on its ear: What if they don't? What if super-powers are entirely genetic and predictable, like detached earlobes or the ability to curl one's tongue? Imagine a campaign world where *all* powers are simply variations of the **Champions** trinity of flight, energy blast, and force field ("force field" meaning some kind of conscious defense mechanism, which can either extend no further than the super's skin or can reach outward from there).

Now, the more mundane version of this campaign idea still allows for power modifiers on any or all of these; you could have someone who can shoot napalm (energy blast + sticky) or seems to possess the ability to run up walls

(flight with limitation "only in contact with surface"). It's still possible to come up with a jillion characters even being limited to these three powers.

But let's crank it up a notch. What if there were only those three powers, and they all manifest in the same way? (For an American-centric campaign, perhaps the personal force field causes the skin to glow white, the energy blast is always red, and flight always leaves a blue trail.) The only variation would be the level that a super possesses those powers, and then it becomes an ability like mundane running or strength, which some people are simply better at than others.

Even with these grievous limitations, it's still possible for me to think of several interesting characters:

- A gonzo thrill-seeker who prefers to utilize his flight by seeming to "jump" and fall, leaving staccato stripes of blue in the air and using his force field to protect himself from the sudden stop.
- A "sleeper" super who avoids all use of her powers unless she is certain that there will be no surviving witnesses.
- A medic who uses his powers for medical good (finely honed energy blasts as a laser alternative, flight to transport patients, etc.).
- A chaplain who uses his abilities in hostage negotiations, using flight to get to the situation and the force field to protect himself.

And so on.

As one final thought exercise, consider a campaign where all players are playing the *same character*. Same stats and everything. Players would be free to interpret the character however they like, provided there's a communal origin. There are at least two examples I can think of in popular culture: the ever-popular *Doctor Who* (the nontitular character having appeared with "himself" a half-dozen times), and the character of Jamie "Multiple Man" Madrox, from the Marvel comics universe, who is able to split himself and has -- in recent years -- developed other personalities as he's remained separated.

In the meantime, keep it safe, keep it sane, and keep it fun . . . and if you can only score a 33%, go for the last one.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Glimpse of the Abyss: Enemies and Allies from the Underworld and Beyond (for *Feng Shui*)

Published by **Atlas Games**

Written by Darrin Bright, Chris Dolnunt, Will Hindmarch, John Seavey, and Jeff Tidball

Cover by Andrew Trabbold

Illustrated by Kelley Hensing and Conley Philpott

96-page b&w softcover; $19.95

This supplement is not just an anthology of Chinese demons. It is not just a collection of new schticks. It is not just a guide to Di Yu, the hell of Chinese mythology. *Glimpse of the Abyss: Enemies and Allies from the Underworld and Beyond* (for *Feng Shui*, the Hong Kong action movie RPG) is all of these and more.

It feels as if we have been waiting a long time for *Glimpse of the Abyss,* but the good news is that the wait has been worth it, because this supplement really does do a lot of things. At its most basic, the book is a collection of bad guys and monsters for the GM to throw at his players. Need a henchman, a mook or nine, an obstacle, or a delaying tactic fast? All the GM has to do is turn to the page of his choice and bang -- he is good to go. Of course, *Feng Shui*'s stat-lite nature makes this easy anyway.

But *Glimpse of the Abyss* provides more than just game stats and descriptions. First, it adds a whole new type of monster -- "Generic Named" -- to *Feng Shui* existing two types -- the Named protagonist and the Unnamed mook. Generic Named monsters covers the types of creature for which there would be no average versions because every one of them is special in some way. For example, there are no ordinary Abyssal Daughters (the demonic offspring of a sorcerer eunuch) or Flying Keris daggers or Sorcerer-Bots. Generic monsters can be used as is, or easily upgraded to Named status, and every monster gets a Named and a Generic or Unnamed variation.

In addition, a new type of sample dialogue is introduced for some creatures. Instead of a whole load of new ways to spell growling noises, *Glimpse of the Abyss* uses the "Someone says . . ." format to add flavor and description. So when facing an Angry Cloud (angry at being made sentient), someone says, "That cloud looks like a bunny. That one looks like . . . hot death!"

Second, *Glimpse of the Abyss* adds a host of new schticks, the abilities and feats that enable everyone and every thing to do amazing things in *Feng Shui.* Most are new Creature Schticks, and some are Unique Schticks. Although both are generally unavailable to the player characters, a few of them -- like Henchmen (choose your unnamed followers to take your hits), Glamour (supernatural charisma), and Dream (create, control, and understand dreams) -- can be available at the GM's discretion. The other new type of schtick introduced is the Weakness, which is definitely not for a player use.

Third, the book includes three new Character Types that also can be used as Named or Unnamed foes. The three are the Elemental, which as the physical manifestation of feng shui, comes in earth, fire, metal, water, and wood flavors; the four-armed Demon Martial Artist, sick of being beaten up by Scrappy Kids and Karate Kids, has decided to join

forces with them; and the Thumper, an artist or ganger cybernetically enhanced to be a walking sound system and antenna from the 2056 juncture capable of using sound to deafen and destroy. Plus alongside the Spirit Dog entry is the Dog Transformed Animal package, which includes the Bark, Mark Prey, Hump, and Sniff schticks.

Fourth, *Glimpse of the Abyss* provides an overview of Di Yu. However, this is not the Lonely Planet guide and we do not get a description of each of Di Yu's 18 maze-like levels, its guardians and judges, or its various courts where the souls of sinners are judged. Instead, each monster entry includes a detail or two that offers a flavor of the Underworld. Indeed, the section that gives the most details about Di Yu is "Chains of Bone," the supplement's scenario. Designed for a party of rookies or experienced participants in the Secret War, it can be played in a session or two. It starts with a simple job offer -- go get a skull from a tomb. Unfortunately in doing so, the party finds themselves in hell -- literally, with things taking a turn for the worse from there. "Chains of Bone" offers everything that the players would want from a *Feng Shui* scenario: martial arts mayhem and plenty of monsters, most of which come from the book in hand.

So far, so good, but what of the monsters themselves? Well it is no coincidence that there are 43 entries, because after all, 44 entries would be bad. Technically, some entries describe more than just the one monster, and one entry really is Thirty-Six Thousand Gods, all of them very, *very* small, so there are definitely more than 44 monsters. Further, while all of the creatures described are hellish, not all of them are from Di Yu. Some originate from the 2056 juncture, such as the Flying Head Network, which does battlefield surveillance and communications or C^3 (Command, Coordinate, and Creepify); Reclamations (recreated extinct species that might sprout tentacles, spines, or bat wings as they revert to the superdominant genes of the creatures they were bred with); and Rotting Robots (think a cross between *The Terminator* and *Night of the Living Dead,* both of which are referenced). Others come from the 69 A.D. juncture, such as Lai Kuang, the Demon-blooded sorcerer and living conduit to the Underworld and the Naga.

The monsters described as coming from the Underworld are a varied lot. They range from the simple pest-like the Conjunction Bug (revengeful cockroaches returned to disrupt feng shui sites) to heavy hitters like Di Yu's mechanized division, the Industrial Demon, and its truant officer, the Underworld Tracker. There are also individual denizens, above and beyond the Named creatures included in every entry, that the GM can have lots of fun with, such Twilk and Casbit, demonic con artists who will work for and against anyone; and Stone Monkey and Pigsy, a Monkey Spirit and Pig Demon respectively, both out of *Journey to the West.* Undoubtedly, the GM will also find plenty of use for the Sisters of Mercy, nuns with guns and a higher purpose; Dead Riders or hell's zombie bikers; and the members of Shiva Squadron, eight-armed huntresses from a lost juncture.

Glimpse of the Abyss: Enemies and Allies from the Underworld and Beyond fills in a hole in the *Feng Shui* line. Although every supplement has included a new foe or two, the line has not had a whole book devoted entirely to more things to beat up. If it purely did just that, then *Glimpse of the Abyss* would be good enough, but with everything else included -- the flavor, the scenario, and all of the Named characters -- you just wish that monster books for other games were as useful and as fun as *Glimpse of the Abyss: Enemies and Allies from the Underworld and Beyond.*

-- Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Entombed with the Pharaohs (for *d20 System*)

Published by Paizo Publishing

Designed by Michael Kortes

Edited by Jason Bulmahn, Mike McArtor, and Jeremy Walker

Art and cartography by Vincent Dutrait, Imaginary Friends, Drew Pocza, Wayne Reynolds, and Christopher West

32-page full-color book; $12.99

Remember the good old days of *Dungeons and Dragons,* when customers had to pick through the modules to find something that suited their group? Some were built for 1st-level characters, some for 5th, and getting the wrong one could easily doom the entire party. One of the things Paizo has brought back with its *GameMastery* series is that selection; now if someone could just get them to specify how many PCs are expected to take part in each scenario (four, if the standard number of pregenerated heroes at the back of each book is any indicator, but . . .). *Entombed with the Pharaohs* is a sandy, arid adventure that targets 6th-level characters with . . . well, no need to spoil it for the players.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

An uncommon planetary alignment has come around once again, the sort of event that captures the imagination of the astrology- and numbers-minded population of the desert land of Osirion. More to the point, whenever this phenomenon occurs, the harsh winds kick up, unearthing ancient secrets. It's been 50-odd years since it happened last, and lost pyramids have arisen to yield their great treasures.

Following tip-offs from their Pathfinder contacts, the heroes come across some of these artifacts being auctioned off in the city of Sothis at a black-market gathering of the local underworld (or at least the underhanded), and some of the items point to a far greater secret. A larger pyramid, the home of the four pharaohs who once ruled this region, promises intrigue. If the heroes accept this challenge, they won't be alone; they and their competition find themselves set not only against each other, but those things now waking in the tomb as well.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The adventure throws some interesting and compelling challenges the party's way, forming a workable give-and-take between the threat and the solution. The plotline cleverly manipulates events to establish an aura of peril that follows the team throughout their mission. There's a new rendering here of some of the foes typical of such a storyline, and while they're surely different enough to attract attention from jaded players, some of the reinterpretations may be just a bit on the crazy side. Still, if they assault his sensibilities too brutally, the GM can skip them without too much trouble and fall back on the traditional versions he probably has close at hand.

Osirion, part of their version of Egypt, doesn't exactly spring to life in this story, so if there's any depth of setting to be found in the background, it has to come from the GM or be drawn from some other source. This would presumably be Paizo, but if there is more to discover on the topic, they don't go out of their way to point out what it is. That's a bit odd considering the trouble the company usually goes to gluing the *Pathfinder* line together. The back cover also

promises details about the city of Sothis, but the only two stops of note for the party are the bazaar and the museum. It's still good material; the supporting cast is lively, the magic items are strange and wondrous, and there's a great deal of creativity at work under the hood. The author has put some creepy atmosphere in here that paints a scene of hoary fears come once more to light, a genuine feeling starkly missing from too many RPG stories claiming a horror element. It also has one of the coolest room traps in recent memory.

One of the nicest parts about this series is the dedication to good artwork. This may not be their finest, but the cover is rather striking (Paizo puts more work into a cover than some companies do a whole book), and the NPCs in the appendix always seem real. The writing isn't two-dimensional, so it's good to see the graphic accompaniment does it justice. There's a small map of the surrounding area, if that assuages any of the aforementioned concerns about the background, but it's not terribly useful.

It's always a dicey proposition (pun unintended), setting an adventure in an esoteric location like Osirion, especially since tying events so closely to Egyptian-based elements means the GM cannot simply file off the serial numbers and transfer the story to any nameless desert area. The rest is not uniquely *Pathfinder,* though, so even if the group isn't using Paizo's setting, there's enough quality material in ***Entombed with the Pharaohs*** to recommend the book as a whole.

-- Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Petros

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

Introduction

Petros is a world on the periphery of human-occupied space. It boasts a comfortable gravity, a breathable atmosphere, and a cool but quite bearable climate. It also offers no strategic value, relatively little usable land, and few valuable resources. As a result, it was mostly given to a small religious sect called the Family of Adam.

HD 9880 (Asterope) System Characteristics

Primary Star HD 9880 (Asterope): spectral type K5 V, mass 0.65 solar masses, age 2.5 billion years, effective temperature 4400 kelvins, luminosity 0.15 solar luminosities, diameter 0.0062 AU.

Orbit 1 (Asterope I, a.k.a. Petros): Orbital radius 0.355 AU, diameter 1.063 (8430 miles), density 0.8, mass 0.96, world type Standard (Garden), atmospheric pressure 0.855 (standard), atmospheric mass 0.9, breathable atmosphere, 73% water coverage, average surface temperature 62° F (290K, cool climate), surface gravity 0.85, apparent day 29.44 hours, year 0.86 Earth years (256 local days). No moons.

Orbit 2 (Asterope II, a.k.a. Einstein): Orbital radius 0.7 AU, diameter 0.042 (323 miles), density 0.7, mass 0.00005, world type Small Standard (Rock), trace atmosphere, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature -20° F (244K), surface gravity 0.03, apparent day 28.9 hours. No moons.

Orbit 3 (Asterope III, a.k.a. Bellarmine): Orbital radius 1.2 AU, diameter 0.025 (198 miles), density 0.8, mass 0.00001, world type Small Standard (Rock), trace atmosphere, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature -104° F (198K), surface gravity 0.02, apparent day 24.8 hours. No moons.

Orbit 4 (asteroid belt): Orbital radius 2.2 AU, world type Asteroid Belt.

Orbit 5 (asteroid belt): Orbital radius 4.2 AU, world type Asteroid Belt.

Orbit 6 (Asterope IV, a.k.a. Riccioli): Orbital radius 6.6 AU, diameter 0.17 (1348 miles), density 0.4, mass 0.002, world type Standard (Ice), atmospheric mass 0.6, suffocating atmosphere (nitrogen-CO_2), hydrographics nil, average surface temperature -262° F (110K), surface gravity 0.07, apparent day 17.2 hours. Two tiny moons.

Orbit 7: Orbital radius 12 AU, asteroid belt.

Orbit 8 (Asterope V, a.k.a. Sylvester): Orbital radius 21.5 AU, diameter 0.014 (111 miles), density 0.6, mass 0.0000016, world type Tiny (Ice), no significant atmosphere, hydrographics nil, average surface temperature -287° F (96K), surface gravity 0.008, apparent day 23.4 hours. No moons.

Petros Planetary Characteristics

Class of primary star: K5 V (main sequence orange).

Mean orbital distance: 0.355 AU.

Orbital eccentricity: 0.1 (perihelion 0.319 AU, aphelion 0.39 AU).

Obliquity (axial tilt): 32° (strong seasons).

Annual period: 0.86 Earth years (256 local days).

Apparent solar day: 29 hours 26' 24".

Diameter: 8430 miles (1.063 times Earth's).

Density: 0.80 times Earth's.

Surface gravity: 0.85 g.

Volcanic activity: Light.

Tectonic activity: Light

Average surface temperature: 62° F.

Hydrographic coverage: 73% (water).

Atmosphere, composition: nitrogen-oxygen (breathable).

Atmospheric pressure: 0.855 bar (standard).

Population and Economy

Habitability: 9

Resource value modifier: -4 (very scant resources).

Affinity: 7.

Settlement type: Colony, approximately 130 years old.

Technology level: 10

Carrying capacity: 2.94 billion people

Population: 210,000 people.

Population Rating: 5.

Average annual income per-capita: $60,000 (GURPS dollars).

Typical wealth: average

Economic volume: $12.6 billion per annum (GURPS dollars).

Government

World unity: World government .

Government type: Theocratic with enclaves.

Control rating: 4

Major Installations

Spaceports: Class III ground facilities at Port Faith; Class I at Book, Hopetown, and Charityville.

Private Research Center, PR 2.

Planetology and Ecology

In many ways, particularly its biology, Petros resembles Earth in the early to mid-Silurian Epoch. There is one supercontinent, dominating the southern hemisphere; another two smaller but significant landmasses; and assorted islands (mostly extinct volcanoes; there is no local equivalent of reef-building corals). Extensive marine life dwells in the seas and waterways, and photosynthesizing plants are widespread close to the shores in the temperate and tropical zone, helping to provide the atmosphere's high oxygen content (nearly 20%). No native land animals have yet been discovered -- a fact that has been attributed to both the lack of lunar tides and the frequency of impact events -- and most of the land surface is bare basalt, some of it weathered into infertile soil. The sky is slightly more violet than Earth's, usually described as amethyst. Petrosians mostly live well above sea level because of a well-founded fear of tsunamis caused by major meteor impacts in the sea.

Much of the supercontinent, Hope, is permanently ice-covered, but a peninsula extends to 42° south. A slightly smaller ice cap, known as Caina, covers the islands around the north pole. The next two largest landmasses, Faith and Charity, straddle the equator.

Petros is of particular interest to planetologists and xenobiologists because it is so similar to Earth but lacks a moon and exists in a system with three asteroid belts and no gas giants.

Society on Petros

The Family of Adam is a religious sect that originally arose on Earth but took to space in the hope of re-creating Eden. Many of its tenets were borrowed from Christianity and Islam, but others were invented by its eccentric founder. Some of their customs seem strange to outsiders -- particularly as regards marriage, nudity, and segregation of the sexes.

Devout members of the Family send their children to segregated boarding schools from the ages of five local years. To enforce the separation, all males are prohibited from setting foot on Charity, the smallest of the continents and home to all of the girls' schools. Girls and women, similarly, are banned from Hope, where boys are raised by the Brethren. Other Family members, and most Petrosians who are not members of the sect, live on Faith.

Veils are worn by all girls and women in any circumstances where they might expect to be seen by men other than their lawful husbands. Although laws require genitals to be covered, this is not enforced; Petros's climate means that most inhabitants dress warmly as well as modestly at most times. Port Faith is famous for its Forgiveness Festival in the week before the summer solstice, when clothes are discarded except for elaborate masks, bodypaint, and g-strings. This festival is followed by the Feast of Epiphany, a mass wedding of anyone more than 30 local years old, with partners chosen by computer. Only singles who the city computer cannot find a match for are spared -- but anyone still unmarried after three Feasts is excommunicated.

Divorce is forbidden by the sect, and separation also leads to excommunication unless all of the couple's children have married, at which time men may be accepted into the Brethren and women into the Sisterhood. Widows and widowers may also become Brethren or Sisters, or may remarry, but they are not obliged to do either. Pre-marital or extra-marital sex, homosexuality, and contraception use are also grounds for excommunication. The death penalty exists for murder, rape, abortion, and human cloning; execution is by hanging or stoning. Lesser offenses may be punished by

banishment to penal colonies on Caina or inhospitable islands, or by monitored servitude.

Petros is nominally a bicameral democracy, with the Women's House and the Men's House serving much the same roles as Congress and Senate respectively, but the real power is wielded by the religious leader, the Patriarch, and the Brethren who serve as his bureaucracy.

Common disadvantages for Petrosians include Charitable, Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism and/or Monasticism), Honesty, Pacifism, Phobia (Oceans), and Sense of Duty (Church). Petrosians with character traits frowned upon by the church (Compulsive Carousing, Laziness, Lecherousness, etc.) are usually encouraged to go offworld; Petrosians traveling offworld for the first time may also be Confused.

Bell, Book, and Candle

A small scientific community also resides on Petros. Traditionally run by Jesuits, the members welcome astronomers and marine biologists from other religions. Their main lab is on a flat, roughly rectangular equatorial island known as Book, with mostly automated observatories on the islands known as Bell and Candle. These islands are not subject to the laws of the Family, and promising students from the Family occasionally seek sanctuary there in the hope of avoiding an arranged marriage.

Economy

Petros is largely self-sufficient. Food is mainly vatgrown, with some fresh seafood. Metals, when needed, are mostly provided by asteroid miners. The only notable export industries are the famous malt whiskey, vodka, and ice-wine from Hope; these, and tourist dollars, pay for imports of technology, software, and luxuries.

Tourists are mostly restricted to Port Faith and small equatorial islands, though genuine pilgrims of the appropriate gender are welcome in the cloistered communities of Hope and Charity. More than 80% of tourists visit during Festival and the Summerisle migration (see below).

Transportation

Long distance travel on Petros is mostly by airship. Boats rarely venture far from shore, for fear of some of the larger marine life.

Security

Petros has no standing army, but it is justly proud of its orbital guard, which mostly protects the planet from asteroids that threaten inhabited areas.

Petros's notoriously incorruptible police, known as Deacons, usually go unarmed. Their uniform is limited to a copper badge (incorporating a tiny radio, computer, and camera) and a blue-and-white checked armband displaying their rank (and hiding 20' of cufftape) over their street clothes. When armed force is required, however, the Deacons summon the Urgent Response Team -- well-armed, well-trained, and justly feared.

Bestiary

In addition to the Summerisles and Lusca described herein, Petros's seas are home to a variety of ichthyoid, vermiform, and radially symmetrical creatures comparable to Earth's sharks, piranha, jellyfish, leeches, and poisonous fish, as well as many harmless (and even delicious) species of marine life.

Summerisle

Summerisles are marine filter-feeders who also gain energy from photosynthesis. They range in size from hatchlings as small as thumbprints, to floating leviathans more than half a mile across (and often mistaken for islands). Adults (statistics below) resemble gigantic eyeless manta-rays with multiple mouths on the leading edge. Their underbellies are mottled pale gray; their photosensitive upper surfaces are green. They mate sexually by releasing eggs and sperm into the water.

Summerisles are not aggressive, but they do compete for sunlight as well as food, sometimes seeking to climb on top of each other, or other floating objects, in the process. If the "other floating object" is a boat or a human swimmer, treat this as a Slam. This is their only attack form; they cannot bite, and even the largest Summerisle can not swallow anything more than 1' in diameter.

Summerisle surfing is a sport unique to Petros. Participants stand on a Summerisle and attempt to steer it by using a strong light source (Summerisles are attracted by light and try to avoid shadows). On a critical failure, surfers are dumped into the sea and may become trapped under a shoal of Summerisles or fall prey to other creatures.

ST 10-10,000; **DX** 5; **IQ** 2; **HT** 8.
HP 10-10,000; Will 10; Per 10; Speed 3.25; Dodge 3; Move 3 (Water).
SM +2 to +17; 100 lbs. to 100 tons.

Traits: Blindness (Mitigator: Can tell light from dark, -10%); Doesn't Breathe (Gills); Ichthyoid; Injury Tolerance (No Eyes, No Neck); Laziness; Regeneration, Regular; Vibration Sense (Water); Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-5; Navigation (Sea)-10; Survival (Open Ocean)-14.

Lusca

The second-largest creature in Petros's seas is the Lusca, a radially symmetrical trapper/hijacker that combines the worst features of giant squid and jellyfish. It is a bottom-feeder and night-hunter that prefers to hide in caves and crevices. It has superb camouflage abilities; a Vision roll at up to -9 is required even to spot one.

A Lusca has 12 tentacles, each with ST 5-10. It can wrap up to four tentacles around a human-sized prey, each gripping with retractable hooks for 1d-4 cutting damage per turn, as well as constriction. After a few turns of squeezing, the Lusca then attempts to pull its prey towards its mouth, at 1 hex per turn if it wins a contest of ST (combined ST of tentacles) against the prey. Its bite does damage appropriate to its ST. Each tentacle can take up to 1/10th of the Lusca's total hit points before being crippled (or amputated, with a cutting weapon); if this happens, the Lusca decides whether to continue grappling, or to flee from an obvious threat.

There is no record that Lusca have ever attacked surface swimmers or boats, but divers are another matter.

ST 20-100; **DX** 14; **IQ** 3; **HT** 14.
HP 20-200; Will 10; Per 10; Speed 7; Dodge 7; Move 14 (Water).
SM +2 to +6; 0.5 to 20 tons.

Traits: Bad Temper; Blindness; Chameleon 4; Constriction Attack; Doesn't Breathe (Gills); High Pain Threshold; Injury Tolerance (No Eyes, No Neck); Regeneration, Regular; Regrowth; Sharp Teeth; Temperature Tolerance 3; Vibration Sense; Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-14; Camouflage-10; Survival (Ocean Floor)-14.

Adventures on Petros

Location, Location, Location: The PCs' ship is chartered by a dreamgame producer who wants recordings of the more interesting aspects of Petrosian life -- Festival, Summerisle surfing, meteor impacts, etc. The company pays well, but

the job requires coping with the demands of the cast and crew, who continuously seek riskier activities.

Whisky Business: The PCs are told that the four containers dropped from a damaged zeppelin between Port Faith and Hopetown two years before have been found in ice-free waters. While the contents of three of the containers are probably not worth salvaging, the fourth contained more than 3,000 gallons of malt whisky worth more than $200,000 (salvage value is $127,000). No zeppelin or boat on the planet is equipped for the salvage operation, but the PCs starship might be. Unfortunately, while the whisky container is intact, a broken container nearby is the lair of a large and irascible Lusca.

Who Was that Masked Man? While in Port Faith for Festival, the PCs see a masked and painted but otherwise near-naked man stab another in the vitals, then run away. The man has a 20-yard head start on the PCs, but if they don't catch him, picking him out of a line-up may be extremely difficult.

Get Thee to a Nunnery!: A male bounty-hunter learns that a female criminal is hiding in a cloister on Charity, using the identity of a Petrosian Sister. The reward for her capture is great enough to persuade him to try to infiltrate the segregated school, unless his crewmates can think of a better approach.

With this Ring: A 33-year-old Petrosian desperate to avoid an arranged marriage, but too broke to afford fare offworld, seduces a PC and produces a forged marriage license. The starship crew is in a hurry to leave for another job, but if the PC owns a share of the ship, it can't take off until the matter is resolved.

Deep Freeze: A scientist from Book hires the PCs to take him to Caina so he can plant some automated sensors ahead of a predicted meteor shower. Unfortunately, on one landing, the ice cracks under the weight of the ship, dumping it in deep water below the cap and leaving at least some of the PCs on the surface, near ground zero for a major impact event. (For *GURPS* rules for meteor strikes, see the *Pyramid* article "Earthquake Weather").

Modern Firepower at the Movies

Shooting Movie Guns in *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

Movies are some of the most popular sources of inspiration for many gamers. They have the advantage of a fully fleshed-out world, with complete visualization so that everybody knows how things look and work. Often one of the things players and gamemasters want to know about are the weapons used.

It also works the other way round -- ever wondered how some of the firearms featured in **GURPS** (or other games) actually look like in action? Films can be used to visualize much of the hardware mentioned in the rules, even after allowing for cinematic license such as exaggerated effects, increased muzzle flash, and a preference for flashy chrome finishes . . .

The movies discussed below concentrate on classic "Take 'Em Down" action flicks featuring modern firepower; not all of them are necessarily *good* films. However, all of them are "gun films" in which firearms play a prominent role. All weapons mentioned are described and provided with full statistics in ***GURPS High-Tech, Fourth Edition***. (All page references are for that book, *except* where noted.)

Many movie-goers probably know that Commander James "007" Bond recently switched from the Walther PPK pistol (page 99) to the Walther P99 (page 103), and that the *Matrix* Agents prefer the .50-caliber IMI Desert Eagle pistol (page 102). But what about those other guns? Here they are. [SPOILER WARNINGS!]

Die Hard (John McTiernan, 1988)

"Now I have a machine gun. Ho-ho-ho."
-- Detective John McClane

McClane's service weapon is a Beretta Mod 92F pistol (page 100) with two spare magazines (which was *not* authorized by the New York police at the time . . .).

"Terrorist" leader Hans Gruber is armed with a nickeled H&K P7M13 pistol (below). Most of his comrades have H&K MP5A3 submachine guns (page 123), while Karl has a Walther PPK pistol (page 99) with suppressor (the latter a small cinematic prop), a Steyr AUG A1 assault rifle (page 118), and hockey puck-shaped flashbang grenades (movie props -- see page 193 for effects). Alexander fires the gang's Saco M60E3 machine gun (page 134). In addition, they have a rocket launcher (a fictional prop, which fires "aerial interception missiles" according to the packaging . . .).

LAPD Sergeant Al Powell carries a S&W Model 15 Combat Masterpiece revolver (below). The SWAT team uses Colt M16A1 assault rifles (page 117) and an armored car based on a converted Ford M8 Greyhound (***GURPS WWII: Motor Pool,*** page 43).

H&K P7M13, 9×19mm Parabellum (Germany, 1982-1994)

The P7M13 is a compact handgun with a unique single-action system that is cocked by squeezing the handgrip. This allows one-handed operation and makes it safe to carry with a round in the chamber, but you can unintentionally fire the gun by pulling the trigger when set on safe and then squeezing the grip . . . Unfamiliar wielders (page 169 of the **Basic Set**) run a high risk of accidental discharge.

S&W Model 15 Combat Masterpiece, .38 Special (USA, 1949-1999)

A slightly improved version of the Model 10 Military & Police (page 95).

Heat (Michael Mann, 1995)

For the initial robbery of the armored car, the team is armed as follows: Neil McCauley and Chris Shiherlis each have a full-auto converted Colt CAR-15 R6001 Sporter carbine (page 119, with RoF 15) with five magazines and a .45-caliber H&K USP pistol (page 102) with five magazines, Michael Cheritto an FN FAL-Para-50-61 semiautomatic rifle (page 115) with five mags and a Ruger KP90 pistol (below) with five mags. Trejo has an AKS-47 assault rifle (page 114) and Waingro a Star Megastar pistol (below).

At the drive-in, the assassin sent by Roger van Zant is armed with a Steyr TMP machine pistol (page 126). Neil uses a .45-caliber H&K USP, Chris an H&K HK91A2 semiautomatic rifle (page 116) with bipod, and Michael a Benelli [M3 Super 90](#) shotgun (page 106).

In the shootout at the bank, Neil and Chris each have a Colt [CAR-15A2 R733 Commando](#) assault carbine (page 119) with nine magazines and a SIG-Sauer P220-1 pistol (below) with three mags, while Michael has an IMI Galil ARM Model 372 semiautomatic rifle (page 117, with RoF 3) with bipod and a Ruger KP90 pistol. Detective Vincent Hanna has a FN FNC-70-30 semiautomatic carbine (below) and an ivory-gripped Colt .45 Officer's Model MK IV pistol (page 98).

For the showdown at the airport, Neil brings a SIG-Sauer P220-1, while Hanna uses a Mossberg Model 590 SPS9 shotgun (below) and his Colt.

SIG-Sauer P220-1, .45 ACP (Germany, 1986-)

An Americanized .45-caliber version of the Swiss double-action service pistol, made for export in Germany.

Ruger KP90, .45 ACP (USA, 1992-)

A full-sized double-action pistol with aluminum alloy frame and stainless steel slide.

Star Megastar, .45 ACP (Spain, 1993-1997)

A full-sized double-action handgun constructed entirely from steel.

FN FNC-70-30, 5.56×45mm NATO(Belgium, 1982-1990)

A semiautomatic, short variant of the Belgian service rifle, intended for law enforcement agencies. It has a folding stock.

Mossberg Model 590 SPS9, 12-gauge 3" (USA, 1987-)

The Model 590 Special Purpose Shotgun 9-shot is a mil-spec pump-action shotgun with heatshield and extended magazine.

Lat Sau San Taam (Hard-Boiled) (John Woo, 1992)

Inspector "Tequila" Yuen uses two NORINCO Type 54 pistols (Chinese copy of the TOZ TT-33, page 99) during the shootout at the teahouse. For the rest of the movie, he either brandishes a Ruger GP100 revolver (below) or twin Beretta Mod 92F pistols (page 100). At the warehouse, he also has an H&K MP5A3 submachine gun (page 123), a Mossberg Model 500 SPS6 Cruiser shotgun (below), MK 2 fragmentation grenades (page 191), and smoke grenades

(page 192). In the armory, he arms himself first with an H&K MP5A3, then with a Mossberg Model 590 SPS9 shotgun (above). In the final hostage scene, he uses Superintendant Pang's S&W [Model 36 Chief's Special](#) (page 96).

"Tony" employs a Davis P-32 pistol (below) with suppressor for the hit in the library. Later, he carries either a Taurus PT92SS pistol (below) or a Beretta Mod 92F -- or both. In the hospital, he adds a CALICO M960-A submachine gun (below) and then an MP5A3.

Johnny Wong first carries a Beretta Mod 92F. In the warehouse and the hospital he also uses an IMI Micro-Uzi machine pistol (page 126). Wong shoots Mad Dog with an Armsel Striker shotgun (page 106). In the final hostage scene, he uses an H&K P7M13 pistol (above).

Wong's assassin Mad Dog uses a SWD M11/9 Cobray machine pistol (below) with suppressor and MK 2 grenades during the raid on the warehouse; he somehow replaces the former in the middle of it with an IMI Micro-Uzi with suppressor. In the armory, he first uses a T/C Contender single-shot pistol (page 91), then a cut-down AKS-47 assault rifle (page 114) with taped magazines. Then he fires a Colt M16A1 assault rifle (page 117) with Colt M203 grenade launcher (page 142). In the stand-off with Tony in the hospital hallway, he uses a Beretta Mod 92F.

Johnny's other henchmen use a huge variety of weaponry, especially interesting being the Mossberg Model 500 Bullpup shotgun (below) and the NORINCO Type 86 bullpup assault rifles (below) seen in many scenes at the hospital.

Ruger GP100, .357 Magnum (USA, 1986-)

A stainless steel double-action revolver with 4" heavy barrel and swing-out cylinder.

Mossberg Model 500 SPS6 Cruiser, 12G 3" (USA, 1989-)

This Model 500 Special Purpose Shotgun 6-Shot Cruiser is a pump-action weapon with heatshield and pistol-grip. It also sports a stainless Mariner coating.

Davis P-32, .32 ACP (USA, 1987-2001)

A cheap single-action pocket pistol, seen here fitted with a suppressor.

Taurus PT92SS, 9×19mm Parabellum (Brazil, 1992-)

A stainless copy of the Beretta Mod 92S (page 100).

CALICO M960-A, 9×19mm Parabellum (USA, 1989-1993)

A stockless submachine gun with pistol foregrip and a helical magazine lying on top of the rear frame.

SWD M11/9 Cobray, 9×19mm Parabellum (USA, 1983-1985)

A development of the MAC-Ingram M10 (page 126) with a longer receiver.

Mossberg Model 500 Bullpup, 12G 3" (USA, 1986-1990)

This is little more than a plastic bullpup-style shell to hold a normal Model 500 ATP6 pump-action shotgun (above), with carrying handle and pistol foregrip.

NORINCO Type 86, 7.62×39mm (China, 1986-89)

This is a Chinese bullpup version of the AK-47 (page 114), with many parts including the magazines being interchangeable. However, it has a new stock and a carrying handle with integral iron sights, as well as a folding foregrip similar to the Steyr AUG. A couple thousand semiautomatic guns (Type 86S) were made for export. This one has been converted to selective fire.

Léon (The Professional) (Luc Besson, 1994)

Léon's main weapons are two Beretta Mod 92F pistols (page 100) with 5.9" barrels and compensators. His armory also includes a compact Ruger GP100 revolver (below), which becomes his gift to Mathilda, and an Olympic Arms ML-2 Multimatch sniper rifle (below), with which he starts Mathilda's training.

The weapons of the drug dealers he first hits include a Beretta Mod 93R burst-fire pistol (page 100) and IMI Micro-Uzi and Mini-Uzi submachine guns (page 126).

Among the DEA agents, Norman Stansfield uses a stainless S&W Model 686 revolver (below) and a Remington Model 870P shotgun (page 106), while Mickey carries an Ithaca Model 37 M&P shotgun (page 105), Benny a SIG-Sauer P226 pistol (page 102), and Willie Blood an Intratec TEC-9 pistol (page 102).

The drug dealer in the "ring trick" scene has a SITES M4 Spectre submachine gun (below); the same weapon is shortly seen lying on Léon kitchen table.

The NYPD ESU's entry team mainly uses the H&K HK33A3 assault rifle (page 116), Manurhin-SIG SG540 assault rifle (below), Manurhin-SIG SG543 assault carbine (below), and of course a MAT AA7.62NF1 machine gun (page 135). (None of these was ever used by the NYPD. The machine gun, mounted on a tripod and fitted with a scope, is used here quite unrealistically to fire a high explosive rifle grenade . . . which is actually a 60mm M63 illumination mortar bomb (!) slid onto a rod *below* the barrel of the gun. Wires were used for the "firing.")

Ruger GP100, .357 Magnum (USA, 1990-)

A stainless double-action revolver with 3" barrel and swing-out cylinder.

Olympic Arms ML-2 Multimatch, 5.56×45mm NATO (USA, 1991-1994)

A semiautomatic Colt CAR-15 clone (page 119) with free-floating 16" barrel, thumbhole stock, match trigger, bipod, and 6× scope.

S&W Model 686 Distinguished Combat Magnum, .357 Magnum (USA, 1990-)

A stainless double-action revolver with 2.5" barrel and swing-out cylinder.

SITES M4 Spectre, 9×19mm Parabellum (Italy, 1984-1998)

A compact submachine gun with double-action trigger, high-capacity four-column magazine, pistol foregrip, and folding stock.

Manurhin-SIG SG540, 5.56×45mm NATO (France, 1977-1988)

A Swiss assault rifle made under license in France. It has a folding stock and will fire 3-round limited bursts (RoF 9) in addition to single shots and full-auto.

Manurhin-SIG SG543, 5.56×45mm NATO (France, 1977-1988)

The carbine version of the SG540 with shorter barrel and folding stock.

The Matrix, The Matrix Reloaded, **and** *The Matrix Revolutions* **(Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999/2003)**

"Dodge this!"
-- Trinity

Neo's favorite weapon is the Beretta Mod 92F pistol (page 100), although he also uses, in this order, twin H&K [MP5K](#) submachine guns (page 123), twin CZ Sa vz. 61 Skorpion machine pistols (page 125) (showering the floor with 5.56×45mm rifle cases for better looks . . .), twin IMI Micro-Uzi machine pistols (page 126), a captured Colt M16A1 rifle (page 117), and a SIG-Sauer [P226](#) pistol (page 102) in the famous lobby shootout. A GE M134 minigun (page 135) also gets good coverage. Trinity carries a pair of Beretta Mod 84F pistols (below) and a pair of IMI Micro-Uzis. Switch has a chromed FN-Browning HP pistol (page 99), Apoch an MAC-Ingram M10 machine pistol (page 126). Mouse uses two Bowring Model 99 full-automatic shotguns (below).

The police officers trying to capture Trinity use Glock 17 pistols (page 100) and AAA Leader AC assault carbines (below); the soldiers in the government lobby carry Colt M16A1 assault rifles (page 117) and Franchi SPAS 12 shotguns (page 106) with fixed stock.

In *The Matrix Reloaded* Morpheus uses a Glock 18C machine pistol (page 101) and a Walther P99 pistol (page 103). Persephone has a COP derringer (below) with silver bullets. The Merovingian's henchmen use an Auto-Ordnance Model 1921AC Thompson submachine gun (page 122), IMI Uzi submachine gun (page 125), Colt [CAR-15 R635](#) submachine gun (page 119), H&K [G36K](#) assault carbine (page 121) with H&K AG36 grenade launcher (page 144), H&K [MP5K](#) submachine gun, and a full-size H&K MP5 (page 123) without stock. The Ghost Twins employ the H&K [UMP](#) submachine gun (page 126).

In *The Matrix Revolutions,* Seraph has two FN-Browning BDM pistols (below).

Beretta Mod 84F Cheetah, .380 ACP (Italy, 1984-)

A medium-sized double-action pistol similar in overall appearance to the Mod 92-series.

Bowring Model 99, 12-gauge (Australia, 1999)

An electrically-powered revolver shotgun with 25-round cylinder (custom-built by armorer John Bowring). It lacks a buttstock, but features a pistol foregrip.

Australian Automatic Arms Leader AC, 5.56×45mm NATO (Australia, 1986-1993)

A Tasmanian-made compact assault carbine with 10.5" barrel and retractable shoulder stock.

COP, .357 Magnum (USA, 1978-1983)

The Compact Off-duty Police derringer is a stainless steel, four-barreled double-action-only handgun, originally designed as a backup weapon rather than a lady's gun.

FN-Browning BDM, 9×19mm Parabellum (Belgium, 1991-1997)

A variant of the HP (page 99), but double-action and with one more round in the magazine.

Predator (John McTiernan, 1987)

"If it bleeds, we can kill it!"
-- Major Alan "Dutch" Schaefer

Major Schaefer's rescue team of mercenaries is well equipped: Dutch has a Colt M16 assault rifle (page 117) with Colt M203 grenade launcher (page 142) and two M67 fragmentation hand grenades (page 193) [*he uses at least five 40×46mmSR grenades, but has no pouches to carry them or* any *rifle magazines*]. Sergeant Mac Eliot has an H&K MP5A3 submachine gun (page 123) with up to 10 mags in his vest, a Saco [M60E3](#) machine gun (page 134) with 200-round belt, two M18A1 Claymore mines (page 189), and at least one M49A1 trip flare. Sergeant Blain Cooper carries an H&K MP5A3 with four magazines, two M67 grenades, and "Ol' Painless," a GE M134 minigun (pages 134-135) with M60 forearm, carrying sling, and a 400-round belt in a backpack. Billy Sole is armed with a Colt M16 with four magazines and an Mossberg Model 500 ATP6 underbarrel shotgun (below), and two M67 grenades. Jorge "Poncho" Ramirez an H&K MP5A3 with up to 10 mags and a 6-shot Milkor MGL grenade launcher (page 143) with 12 grenades (actually a prop using parts of an MP5A3 and a 37×122mmR AN-M5 aircraft signal launcher, but close enough). Rick Hawkins carries an H&K MP5A3 and no spare ammo. CIA agent Colonel Al Dillon is armed with an H&K MP5A3 with four magazines and two M67 grenades. All except Dillon carry .357-caliber IMI Desert Eagle pistols (page 102) in shoulder or belt holsters; Dillon has a Colt M1911A1 pistol (page 98).

Mossberg Model 500 ATP6, 12-gauge 3" (USA, 1962-)

A typical pump-action shotgun. Billy has mounted a sawed-off version below the barrel of his M16, worsening the rifle's Bulk by -2.

Ronin (John Frankenheimer, 1998)

"What do you use, weapons-wise?"
"Hmm?"
"Weapons. I'm a weapons man; they tend to settle the argument. So what do you favor?"
"Well, y'know, it's a toolbox."
-- Spence and Sam

In Paris, Sam uses a Colt .45 Government pistol (page 98), Vincent a Beretta Mod 92FS Inox pistol (page 100), which he keeps the entire time. Spence carries a a SIG-Sauer [P226](#) pistol (page 102) and an H&K [MP5K](#) submachine gun (page 123).

During the ambush in La Turbie, Sam first fires an H&K HK69A1 grenade launcher (page 142), then a SIG [SG551 SWAT](#) assault carbine (below), and a Raufoss M72A3 light antitank weapon (page 149) during the chase (fitted with a red firing button as "trigger" for effect). The bodyguards in the first car have CZ Sa vz. 61 Skorpion machine pistols (page 125), those in the second car a Beretta Mod 93R burst-fire pistol (page 100), IMI Uzi submachine guns (page 125), and a ROMARM M90 assault carbine (below).

In Nice, Larry uses a Taurus PT945SS pistol (below) and Mossberg Model 500 SPS6 Cruiser shotgun (below), Sam a FN [MINIMI-Para Mk 2](#) light machine gun (page 137) with 200-round belt, Deirdre an H&K MP5A3 submachine gun (page 123), and Gregor a Glock 17L pistol (below).

At the amphitheater in Arles, Sam has a SIG-Sauer [P228](#) pistol (page 102) and Deirdre an IMI Jericho 941FB pistol (below). Seamus O'Rourke uses a SIG-Sauer P239 pistol (below).

Of the Russians, the chap in the car has a [Glock 26](#) subcompact pistol (page 101), Sergei a Walther P5 pistol (below), and Mikhi a Beretta Mod 92FS pistol.

SIG SG551 SWAT, 5.56×45mm NATO (Switzerland, 1987-)

An assault carbine with folding stock, offering three-round limited bursts (RoF 9) in addition to single shots and full-auto. The translucent magazines clip together side-by-side to speed up reloading.

ROMARM M90, 7.62×39mm (Romania, 1990-)

A copy of the AKMS (page 114) with very short barrel. It has a folding stock.

Taurus PT945SS, .45 ACP (Brazil, 1994-)

A double-action stainless steel pistol.

Mossberg Model 500 SPS6 Cruiser, 12G 3" (USA, 1989-)

This is a pump-action weapon with pistol grip and foregrip with tactical sling.

Glock 17L, 9×19mm Parabellum (Austria, 1988-)

A competition variant of the Glock 17 (page 100) with longer 6" barrel. Gregor later also mounts a reflex sight and sound suppressor.

IMI Jericho 941FB, 9×19mm Parabellum (Israel, 1990-)

The compact version of an Israeli double-action police weapon.

SIG-Sauer P239, 9×19mm Parabellum (Germany, 1996-)

A compact double-action pistol with stainless steel slide and two-tone finish.

Tears of the Sun (Antoine Fuqua, 2003)

Lieutenant A.K. Waters has an H&K MK 23 MOD 0 pistol (below) with suppressor and three magazines, a Colt M4A1 asssault carbine (page 119) with collimating sight, advanced night sight, and seven magazines, and four M67 fragmentation grenades (page 193). He gives his stainless Walther PPK backup pistol (page 99) to the priest in the village. Ellis "Zee" Pettigrew has a MK 23 MOD 0 with three magazines, an M4A1 with Colt M203 grenade launcher (page 142) and four magazines and twenty-three 40×46mmSR grenades, and a yellow M18 smoke grenade (page 192). Danny "Doc" Kelley has a SIG-Sauer P226 pistol (page 102) with three mags, an M4A1 with M203, four mags and eight 40×46mmSR grenades, an M67, a yellow M18, and later also carries a captured AK-47 assault rifle (page 114). Kelly Lake has a MK 23 MOD 0 with three mags, an M4A1 with collimating sight, suppressor, and seven mags, a Remington Model 870P shotgun (page 106) with "duckbill" choke (see *Ithaca Model 37* in **GURPS SEALs in Vietnam,** p. 26) and 13 shells, two M67s, and a yellow M18. Jason "Flea" Mabry has a MK 23 MOD with suppressor and three mags, a M4A1 with 4× scope, suppressor and seven mags, two M67s, and a yellow M18. Demetrius "Silk" Owens has a P226 with three mags, NSWC Crane-modified MK 14 MOD 0 sniper rifle (page 115) with 10× scope, suppressor and seven mags, and a Talley M72A7 light antitank weapon (page 149). Michael "Slo" Slowenski has a MK 23 MOD 0 with suppressor and three mags, a FN M249 squad automatic weapon (pp. 136-137) with short Para barrel, retractable stock, and 500 rounds, a Talley M72A7, and at least one M67. James "Red" Atkins has a MK 23 MOD 0 with suppressor and three mags, a Saco MK 43 MOD 0 machine gun (page 134) with short barrel and 300 rounds, and three M18A1 Claymore mines (page 189).

The Sikorsky SH-60F Ocean Hawk helicopter gunship mounts a Saco M60D machine gun (page 134).

H&K MK 23 MOD 0, .45 ACP (Germany, 1996-)

Designed to the specifications of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) for an Offensive Handgun Weapon System (OHWS), this double-action pistol was developed from the H&K USP (page 102). It comes with a detachable 0.5-lb. underbarrel targeting laser/flashlight, which integrated visible and invisible IR targeting lasers and tactical lights [*not used in the film*], and a 1.3-lb. quick-detach sound suppressor. This is at -2 Hearing, -3 Hearing with slide-lock engaged (which reduces RoF to 1, however). With the suppressor mounted, Bulk becomes -3.

Terminator, Terminator 2: Judgment Day, and *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (James Cameron, 1984/1991 and Jonathan Mostow, 2003)

"The 12-gauge autoloader . . . the .45 Longslide with laser sighting . . . the Uzi 9-millimeter."
-- T-800 Model 101 at the Alamo Gun Shop

In *Terminator,* the T-800 acquires an AMT .45 Hardballer Longslide pistol (page 98) fitted with an early model targeting laser, Franchi SPAS 12 shotgun (page 106) with the stock removed, IMI Uzi submachine gun (page 125), and ArmaLite AR-18 assault rifle (below) at the Alamo gun shop. Kyle Reese steals a S&W Model 15 Combat Masterpiece revolver (above) from an LAPD officer and an Ithaca Model 37 M&P pump-action (page 105) with extended magazine from a cruiser (he saws off the stock for concealed carry). The T-800 latter acquires his own Ithaca Model 37.

In *Terminator 2,* the T-800 first acquires a Colt .45 Government MK IV pistol (page 98) and a Winchester Model 1887 lever-action shotgun (page 105) with shortened barrel and sawed-off stock. He arms himself with a Colt M79 grenade launcher (page 142) with 11-round bandolier and a GE M134 minigun (page 135) from Sarah Connor's underground armory. Finally, he takes a Hawk MM1 tear gas grenade launcher (page 143) from the LAPD SWAT team at Cyberdyne. Sarah first uses the T-800's Colt .45, but when she goes after Dr. Miles Dyson, she uses a Detonics .45 ScoreMaster pistol (below) and a Colt CAR-15 R6001 Sporter carbine converted to selective fire (page 119, with RoF 15) with 4× scope, suppressor, and targeting laser. They blow up Cyberdyne Systems by using at least two M18A1 Claymore mines (page 189). Later both she and the T-800 employ a Colt XM177E2 Commando assault carbine (page 119) found in the LAPD SWAT van. Finally, Sarah uses a Remington Model 870P pump-action shotgun (page 106) with folding stock and an 8-round shell holder.

The T-1000 uses a Beretta Mod 92F pistol (page 100) and H&K MP5K submachine gun (page 123) most of the time.

In *Terminator 3,* the T-800 retrieves a Glock 19 pistol (page 101), which Kate Brewster fires in his face, a Glock 26 pistol (page 101), which John Connor takes, a Glock 18C machine pistol (page 101), a stockless H&K UMP submachine gun (page 126), a cut-down NORINCO Type 56-1 Shi assault carbine (a Chinese copy of the AKMS, page 114), a H&K G36K assault carbine (page 121), a Browning M1919A4 machine gun (page 132) with a jury-rigged belt drum, a Penn Arms SL65 tear gas grenade launcher (below), and a NORINCO Type 69 rocket launcher (Chinese copy of the RPG-7, p. 148) from Sarah Connor's coffin (generating its own time problem, as it was sealed in 1997, but the UMP was introduced in 1999 and the SL65 in 2002 . . .). The T-X, aside of various obscure built-in weapons like a ".444-caliber SUBauro Neutralizer," mainly uses a stolen S&W Model 4506 pistol (below).

ArmaLite AR-18, 5.56×45mm (USA, 1969-1972)

An assault rifle developed by Eugene Stoner. It normally features a folding stock, but the T-800 has it removed, and also employs two 40-round magazines taped together -- use Wt. 8.6/2.6, Bulk -4, ST 14.

(Firearm laws in California actually make the sale of both this and the Uzi illegal; a scene showing him converting both a semiautomatic AR-180 and a semiautomatic Uzi carbine to full-auto, showing him cutting off the latter's 16.1" barrel was apparently filmed, but cut.)

Penn Arms SL65, 37×112mmRB ARWEN (USA, 2002-)

A revolver grenade launcher chambered for [ARWEN](#) less-than-lethal cartridges. It has a foregrip and collimating sight.

Detonics .45 ScoreMaster, .45 ACP (USA, 1983-1992)

A match version of the Colt .45 Government (page 98) with longer 6" barrel and adjustable sights.

S&W Model 4506, .45 ACP (USA, 1991-1999)

This stainless steel double-action pistol is the largest version of the [third generation S&W pistols](#).

The Way of the Gun (Christopher McQuarrie, 2000)

Parker and Longbaugh are both armed with Colt .45 Government pistols (page 98); in Mexico, Parker has at least five magazines, Longbaugh 10. Parker also carries a Remington Model 870P shotgun (page 106) with a 14" barrel, patrol sling, and a shell bag with some 30 rounds. Longbaugh is armed with a 7.62×51mm IMI Galil ARM Model 332 semiautomatic rifle (page 117, with RoF 3) with three magazines, which he uses first with bipod and Nimrod 6× scope, then with a patrol sling.

The bodyguards both have 9×19mm H&K USP pistols (page 102), as well as a Mossberg Model 590 Mariner shotgun (above). The doc has a Walther PPK/S pistol (below) in his black bag. Joe Sarno carries a S&W Model 640 Centennial revolver (below) with two speedloaders. His old chaps mainly use S&W [Model 36 Chief's Special](#) snubnose revolvers (page 96) and Mossberg Model 500 ATP6 pump-action shotguns (above).

Walther PPK/S, .380 ACP (USA, 1986-2001)

This stainless pocket gun combines the short slide of the PPK with the larger frame of the [PP](#) to comply with U.S. firearms laws, and is made under license in the U.S. using German parts.

S&W Model 640 Centennial, .357 Magnum (USA, 1991-)

A concealable, double-action-only swing-out revolver in stainless steel.

Weapon Tables

See pages 268-271 of the **Basic Set** and page 79 of **High-Tech** for an explanation of the statistics.

Non-Repeating Pistols

GUNS (PISTOL) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
8	COP, .357 Magnum	2d+2 pi	0	175/1,900	1.9/0.15	3	4(2i)	10	-1	5	$525	3	[1]

Note:
[1] No lanyard ring.

Revolvers

GUNS (PISTOL) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
8	Ruger GP100 3", .357 Magnum	3d-1 pi	1	180/1,900	2.4/0.2	3	6(2i)	10	-1	4	$535	3	[1]
8	Ruger GP100 4"HB, .357 Magnum	3d-1 pi	2	185/2,000	2.7/0.2	3	6(2i)	10	-2	4	$535	3	[1]
7	S&W Model 15, .38 Special	2d pi	2	110/1,200	2.2/0.2	3	6(2i)	9	-2	2	$500	3	[1]
8	S&W Model 640, .357 Magnum	2d+2 pi	1	175/1,900	1.6/0.18	3	5(2i)	10	-1	4	$660	3	[1]
8	S&W Model 686 2.5", .357 Magnum	2d+2 pi	1	175/1,900	2.4/0.2	3	6(2i)	10	-1	4	$675	3	[1]

Note:
[1] No lanyard ring.

Pistols

GUNS (PISTOL) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
8	Beretta Mod 84FS, .380 ACP	2d pi	2	120/1,300	1.7/0.4	3	13+1(3)	8	-1	2	$565/$26	3	
8	Davis P-32, .32 ACP	2d-1 pi-	1	120/1,300	1.6/0.2	3	6+1(3)	7	-1	2	$100/$26	3	[1]
8	Detonics ScoreMaster, .45 ACP	2d pi+	3	150/1,600	3/0.5	3	7+1(3)	10	-2	3	$1,640/$27	3	[2, 3]
8	FN-Browning BDM, 9×19mm	2d+2 pi	2	160/1,800	2.4/0.5	3	14+1(3)	9	-2	2	$550/$27	3	
8	Glock 17L, 9×19mm	2d+2 pi	2	165/1,850	2/0.6	3	17+1(3)	9	-2	2	$790/$32	3	
8	H&K MK 23 MOD 0, .45 ACP	2d+1 pi+	3	155/1,700	3.2/0.8	3	12+1(3)	10	-2	3	$2,050/$28	3	[2, 3]
8	H&K P7M13, 9×19mm	2d+2 pi	2	160/1,800	2.5/0.6	3	13+1(3)	9	-2	2	$1,250/$27	3	
8	IMI Jericho 941FB, 9×19mm	2d+1 pi	1	145/1,600	2.4/0.5	3	13+1(3)	9	-2	2	$550/$27		
8	Ruger KP90, .45 ACP	2d pi+	2	150/1,600	2.6/0.5	3	7+1(3)	10	-2	3	$490/$27	3	
8	SIG-Sauer P220-1, .45 ACP	2d pi +	3	150/1,600	2.1/0.5	3	7+1(3)	10	-2	3	$780/$27	3	[3]
8	SIG-Sauer P239, 9×19mm	2d+1 pi	2	145/1,600	1.9/0.4	3	8+1(3)	9	-1	2	$620/$26	3	[3]
8	S&W Model 4506, .45 ACP	2d pi+	2	150/1,600	3/0.5	3	8+1(3)	10	-2	3	$960/$27	3	
8	S&W Model 6906, 9×19mm	2d+1 pi	2	145/1,600	2.2/0.5	3	12+1(3)	9	-2	2	$720/$27	3	
8	Star Megastar, .45 ACP	2d pi +	3	150/1,600	3.8/0.8	3	12+1(3)	10	-2	3	$700/$28	3	
8	Taurus PT92SS, 9×19mm	2d+2 pi	2	160/1,800	2.5/0.6	3	15+1(3)	9	-2	2	$595/$27	3	
8	Taurus PT945SS, .45 ACP	2d pi+	2	150/1,600	2.3/0.5	3	8+1(3)	10	-2	3	$625/$27	3	
7	Walther PPK/S, .380 ACP	2d pi	1	110/1,200	1.7/0.25	3	8+1(3)	8	-1	2	$550/$26	3	

Notes:
[1] No lanyard ring.
[2] Fine (accurate).
[3] Very Reliable. Won't malfunction unless lack of maintenance lowers Malf. (see page 407 of the ***Basic Set***).

Shotguns

GUNS (SHOTGUN) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
8	Bowring Model 99, 12G 2.75"	1d+1 pi	2	40/800	15/3.5	15×9	25(3i)	13†	-7	1/5	n/a	2	[1, 2]
7	Mossberg Model 500 ATP6, 12G 3"	1d+1 pi	3	40/800	7.2/0.75	2×12	5+1(2i)	10†	-5	1/5	$315	3	[1]
8	Mossberg Model 500 Bullpup,	1d+1 pi	3	40/800	9.5/0.75	2×12	5+1(2i)	10†	-4	1/5	$635	3	[1]

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
	12G 3"												
8	Mossberg Model 500 SPS6 Cruiser, 12G 3"	1d+1 pi	2	40/800	6.3/0.75	2×12	5+1(2i)	12†	-4	1/6	$350	3	[1]
8	Mossberg Model 500 SPS6 Cruiser, 12G 3"	1d+1 pi	2	40/800	6.5/0.75	2×12	5+1(2i)	12†	-4	1/6	$480	3	[1, 3]
8	Mossberg Model 590 SPS9, 12G 3"	1d+1 pi	3	40/800	8.4/1.2	2×12	8+1(2i)	10†	-5	1/5	$420	3	[1]

Notes:

[1] First Rcl figure is for shot, second is for slugs.

[2] Very Reliable. Won't malfunction unless lack of maintenance lowers Malf. (see page 407 of the *Basic Set*).

[3] With heatshield and waterproof coating.

Rifles

GUNS (RIFLE) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
8	AAA Leader AC, 5.56×45mm	4d pi	4	700/2,900	7.2/0.7	12	20+1(3)	9†	-4	2	$500/$33	2	
7	ArmaLite AR-18, .223 Remington	5d pi	5	500/3,200	8.3/1.3	13	40+1(3)	9†	-5*	2	$325/$35	2	
8	FN FNC-70-30, 5.56×45mm	4d+2 pi	4	750/3,100	9.5/1	3	30+1(3)	9†	-5*	2	$1,500/$34	3	
7	Manurhin-SIG SG540, 5.56×45mm	5d pi	5	800/3,500	8.6/1.3	9/12	30+1(3)	9†	-5*	2	$1,100/$34	2	
7	Manurhin-SIG SG543, 5.56×45mm	4d pi	4	750/3,100	7.9/1.3	9/12	30+1(3)	9†	-4*	2	$1,100/$34	2	
8	NORINCO Type 86, 7.62×39mm	5d+1 pi	4	500/3,100	8.8/1.8	10	30+1(3)	9†	-4	2	$650/$30	2	
8	Olympic Arms ML-2, 5.56×45mm	5d-2 pi	5+2	750/3,100	8.5/0.7	3	20+1(3)	9B†	-5	2	$1,200/$33	3	
7	ROMARM M90, 7.62×39mm	5d-1 pi	3	350/2,500	8/1.8	10	30+1(3)	10†	-4	2	$300/$30	2	
8	SIG SG551 SWAT, 5.56×45mm	4d+2 pi	4	750/3,100	8.7/1	9/11	30+1(3)	8†	-4*	2	$1,500/$34	2	

Submachine Guns

GUNS (SMG) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
8	CALICO M960-A, 9×19mm	3d-1 pi	3	170/1,900	4.2/2	13	50+1(5)	10†	-3	2	$800/$307	2	
8	SITES M4 Spectre, 9×19mm	2d+2 pi	3	160/1,800	8.4/2	14	50+1(3)	10†	-4*	2	$450/$34	2	
7	SWD M11/9 Cobray, 9×19mm	2d+2 pi	2	160/1,800	4.8/1	20	32(3)	8†	-3*	2	$300/$29	2	[1]

Note:

[1] Unreliable. Malfunctions on 16+ (see page 407 of the *Basic Set*).

Grenade Launchers

GUNS (GRENADE LAUNCHER) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -4)

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
8	Penn Arms SL65, 37×112mmRB	1d+1(0.5) cr dkb	1	20/110	11.5/1.9	3	6(3i)	10†	-6	3	$1,500	3	

follow-up 8-yard-radius tear gas cloud lasting 20 seconds.

* * *

Thanks to fellow movie gunspotters andi jones and Matt Jones, as well as the rest of the Hellions.

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The Ship in the Rock

by Paul Drye

(Author's Note: This month's Infinite Crossroad is dedicated to the memory of E. Gary Gygax, the man who brought the dungeon crawl to a wider world.)

The Infinity Patrol is always on the lookout for what's commonly called "Post-Caliph" technology. Very often these are isolated items of murky history, appearing on timelines where they have no business being. Taken together, they're hints at long-lost crosstime civilizations, though it's evidence that's so fragmentary there's little chance of figuring out where they're from or who left them. For now that kind of speculation is left to the tinfoil-hat crowd, while Infinity concentrates on the artifacts themselves, looking for insight into the science behind them.

The most spectacular of these is a tightly-held secret that goes by the deliberately meaningless name "Operation Recount." Hiding behind the alias is a very large parachronic craft, embedded in 450-million-year-old rock exposed by the last Ice Age. The craft itself is unofficially called *Wonderland* by the teams investigating it.

The Target

Wonderland is an oblate spheroid, 500 feet in diameter with a height of 100 feet. The skin of the spheroid appears metallic, still shiny despite being exposed to the air for tens of thousands of years and groundwater for much longer. This is a clue to the ship's most remarkable characteristic: a few atomic radii above the surface, a zone of altered reality begins, entirely enclosing *Wonderland* in an anomalous zone of physics. Within the zone is the typical arrangement of a magical timeline: it's a high-mana region, and technology as advanced as gunpowder or more works intermittently, if at all.

This barrier is presumed to have been put in place to protect the technology inside, since most of it depends on a tightly integrated mix of magic and physics, and the former component invariably loses coherence when removed from the zone. Unfortunately this means that items recovered from the ship don't function, but Infinity's scientists still think they're worth investigating. Further, it's guessed that this force field was once permeable at will, but whatever system in the ship was responsible for this must be running down with age, as it only opens for a few hours once every 12 days or so, after which the rest of the world is sealed out and intrepid explorers sealed in until the cycle completes again.

Operation Recount

The paranoid security surrounding *Wonderland* has to do with its location on one of the most well-known timelines on the front of the Infinity War: Nottingham. This low-mana timeline is on Q6, and with its historical levers all centered

around England, Centrum is in excellent position to shift the world toward their own.

Fortunately for Homeline, Centrum agents haven't discovered the existence of the ship and haven't put in any special effort to take Nottingham. As the Patrol and Centrum fight it out in central England, an occasional expedition sets out from Riga in Livonia for the nondescript village of Hahnshof (Haanja, Estonia on Homeline) which sits at the foot of the *Eiberg,* a small mountain that is the highest point in the region. The ship is embedded in the mountainside about a mile southeast of town, and is accessible after an hour's hike up a valley that joins the road south out of Hahnshof en route to the even-tinier town of Plattshof.

Posing as priests and hangers-on from Bremen, Infinity engages in research on the ship, periodically sending in expeditions as well as exploring the surrounding region and trying to glean more information from the way *Wonderland* has affected it. So far they've managed to insinuate themselves into Hahnshof's isolated society, bringing the local priest on side by simply befriending him; it's an intellectual wasteland there, after all.

Operation Recount is unusual for an Infinity research project, however, in that it's under the control of the Nexus Oversight Division. *Wonderland* travelled through the multiverse in a unique fashion: there is a controlled, artificially generated banestorm in a large cylindrical chamber at the center of the ship.

Hahnshof

Infinity uses this town nearest *Wonderland* as a base, but it presents problems. The area is controlled by the Livonian Confederation, an offshoot of the Baltic Crusade which is in turn nominally under the control of the Teutonic Knights and the Papacy. Only distance and isolation keep it essentially independent. In the present year of 1246, the country is in upheaval, the Battle of the Ice having been lost to Alexander Nevsky's Russian army four years earlier. Subotai Khan invaded the lands to the south and west at the same time; the Kipchak Khanate was founded in 1244 upon Batu Khan's return to Russia from the funeral and succession rituals following the death of Ogodai. Even worse, the Prussian Uprising began in the wake of Nevsky's victory and still continues in the lands to the immediate south. The Livonian natives have been peaceful to date, but there are worries that the rebellion will spread.

Altogether, the Prince-Bishop of Dorpat (who is the local lord) is suspicious of anyone unusual in Hahnshof and vicinity. Only Infinity's circumspect approach and the town's relative obscurity even by Baltic standards have allowed the out-timers to avoid notice so far.

Hahnshof itself is a tiny place of about 60 people, a step above being entirely devoted to farming solely because it's at a crossroads between three other, smaller villages. Though in the depths of what will be Estonia if history continues to run as on Homeline, the people here are German settlers, part of the medieval German *Ostsiedlung* that would help cause such grief in the 20th century. There are many ethnic Livonians working the farms (and owning some of the poorer ones themselves), but the richest farmers, the miller, and the local priest are all immigrants from the west.

Operation Recount has set up in a few rooms of the local inn, the Lion, mixing with the travelers who stop here on route to Dorpat, Pskov, and points further afield. There is also a cabin built up in the mountains near where *Wonderland* pokes out of the rock, but conditions there are spartan and no one stays there permanently.

Wonderland

High up on the Eiberg, a section of stone has been sheered away from the mountain and a curving section of what appears to be light gray metal (yet resists any damage) runs for about 30 feet. Toward the western edge of it is what 21st-century eyes will see is obviously an airlock. A simple button protrudes from the wall immediately to the left of the door, and pressing it cycles the outer door of the lock. So long as this is done during the "open" period of the force field surrounding *Wonderland,* one can enter.

The interior of the ship consists of many long, curving passages linking cylindrical and hemicylindrical chambers ranging from 10 to 50 feet in diameter. While well-connected, many of the tunnels are ludicrously small, suggesting

that the ship's builders where either tiny or sufficiently amorphous to fit through a hole the size of a penny. Humans have to negotiate the larger tunnels, which turns most routes into a labyrinth of de facto dead ends and switchbacks.

Most surfaces are made of what looks like a slightly metallic stone, with characteristics similar to aluminum for strength and weight. Unfortunately, it's been very difficult to analyze since taking it outside where sophisticated instruments function changes its properties and it becomes the uninteresting metal oxide ilmenite.

Much of the interior is poorly lit, and electricity does not work. Early attempts to use lanterns proved disastrous in the poorly circulating air of the closed ships, so Infinity has arranged for lightsticks to be imported from Azoth-3. They don't glow in Nottingham's low-mana setting, but flare to life when taken through the barrier into *Wonderland*. Christopher Hicks (a character outlined below) will arrange for spherical "sticks" to be sent not long after he comes to Nottingham, so he can roll them down a tunnel or into a room ahead and get some idea of what awaits.

Unfortunately, a great variety of things -- many ranging from the annoying to the lethal -- do await. Not only has the magical bubble within *Wonderland* attracted monstrous parachronozoids from every quantum, the banestorm engine in the center of the craft seems to be hiccupping every now and then, bringing more visitors. Most don't survive the lack of food and water, but anything that can sets up shop until something else comes through. Whichever side loses moves into chambers toward the shell of the ship -- assuming it isn't wiped out completely -- pushing previous losers further out still in a domino effect. The net result is that many parts of *Wonderland* are infested with who-knows-what, with the level of danger increasing as one moves toward the engine room that is, unfortunately, the major goal of the Project.

While it's only 500 feet from the skin to the core, the unusual topography and inhabitants of the ship have prevented any expedition from making the entire journey.

Characters

Wilhelm of Findorff: Or, as he is also known, Christopher Hicks of Cleveland, Ohio, Chris is a geek brought into the Nexus Oversight Division because he's got magical aptitude; Homeliners who have a natural ability to use magic are both rare and valuable. He's spent the two years since his recruitment bending his geekish enthusiasm toward "hacking magic," and has been working hard to get himself assigned to his dream job: the investigation of *Wonderland.*

"Wilhelm" is his cover identity once he goes to Nottingham, and identifies him as hailing from a small town just outside Bremen. He is supposedly a secular oblate attached to the Archbishopric there, and he has a forged letter of introduction which commends him to the local Prince-Bishop. His time prior to being assigned to Operation Recount was spent on a crash course in local culture (including precious high-tech injectable lessons in medieval Low German and ecclesiastical Latin), and trying to take the rough edges off his obvious "American-ness." This has been partially successful, though he still tends to react emotionally as a young, unsophisticated mid-Westerner rather than cultivating the sangfroid of an older Infinity agent.

As a layman, he doesn't need to be tonsured, though he does affect a hooded black cassock. When among other Homeliners, he throws off what little medieval manners and speech he remembers to use and acts entirely as a 21st century geek with an obsession for magic instead of electronics.

Christopher's role is to be the one who pulls the adventurers into Operation Recount. He is a naïve, new agent being sent into a dangerous situation before he is ready, but his skills make him indispensible . . . and far more valuable than the bodyguards assigned to him.

Anneke: The single-named Anneke (she will use the byname "Hunekellin" -- the nickname given to her by her parents, "little chicken" -- if necessary) is the daughter of the local innkeeper, and a person oppressed by the severe isolation of Hahnshof. Now considered an adult at 15, she is that most dangerous of combinations: bright and restless. In the normal course of things she would marry the miller's son and get to work producing babies; her family is waiting impatiently for this to happen.

She, on the other hand, has decided that the Homeliners are her ticket out of this *eine-Kuh* town. In particular, she will set her sights on the most eligible bachelor in their group -- to wit, "Wilhelm of Findorff." While this is legal and not-unreasonable (if she can convince her father of the match) by Livonian standards, it breaks about four different kinds of Homeline laws. It will also make Chris profoundly uncomfortable.

Getting her to stop her campaign will be difficult; even swinging her father against the marriage will just make her act more covertly. Her native intelligence and 15 years on this Earth have made her an expert at navigating Hahnshof's people and lands, and no outlander is going to outmaneuver her on that front. There's also the issue that she can bring some abilities to the table. As well as the aforementioned regional knowledge, she is also capable of wielding magic though she doesn't know it; her unwilling paramour (or any other magically trained person) will discover this. In the long run, she will make a good recruit for the Nexus Oversight Division.

Anneke is a teenaged German woman, somewhat chubby with long, brown hair. She is very animated all the time, particularly when her love of the new is provoked.

Hermann von Buxhoeveden: Prince-Bishop Hermann I is the older brother of Albert of Riga, the man who implemented the Livonian Crusade and the most powerful person in the Confederation. Hermann himself is leader of one of the five countries that make up the alliance, the Bishopric of Dorpat, which he rules from a fortress on Toome Hill in what on Homeline is Tartu, Estonia. Though Tartu was an important trading center (especially as an eastern outlier of the Hanseatic League), this all lies in the future -- if at all -- for Hermann's little city. The bishopric is empty of inhabitants by 13th-century European standards and, while it's barely 50 miles from Dorpat to Hahnshof, the prince hasn't got the resources to pay much attention to that town.

Also slowing him down is the fact that he's a remarkable 83 years old (he has a couple of years left to him if history continues on course). As such, he looks like a very old man: lean, small, and wrinkled, with thin, white hair. He is also clean-shaven in the German manner of the time. He has a keen mind, but it's more geared toward practical matters than education; for example, as a bishop he theoretically knows Latin but it's not very strong and he prefers his native Saxon Plattdeutsch. His main motivation is a profound, almost paranoid, desire to watch for signs of unrest and deal with them before they can get out of hand.

The Prince-Bishop is likely to remain a distant figure unless the adventurers mess up badly, but he can also be the fallback savior of Hahnshof if it or its visitors run into severe trouble. Of course, if that becomes the case it's a question of what price has to be paid for his help.

Albert Boese: A member of the Cabal or, to be more precise, the Lodge of the Midwinter Aton, Boese has obtained hints of *Wonderland's* existence and wants to claim it for himself. He will arrive on the timeline by magical means some time after the adventurers have first visited Livonia, and will decide to co-opt Chris Hicks and (if the situation warrants it) Anneke. In return for their covert assistance and uninterrupted access to the Wonderland Banestorm for one 12-day cycle, he will take them on as apprentices, spiriting them away from Hahnshof and Infinity's control.

Without realizing it, he also has an advantage he didn't plan. Though he lived there six centuries after the local present day, Boese is actually from Bremen and can ask pointed questions about his home town of his supposed fellow Bremeners.

Before joining the Cabal he was an occult researcher in 1830s Europe, but on discovering his natural ability to "walk the worlds" and joining the vast conspiracy he has devoted himself to exploring what he can do.

Boese is a short, fat man, entirely bald and clean-shaven (though he was loath to lose his beloved beard and moustache, he deemed it necessary to blend in). He is posing as a churchman from Gotland, and knows all the necessary languages and cultural niceties to pull this off. His particular knack is for putting forth accusations of diabolism against people in his way, and so diverting attention from his own activities.

Adventures with Operation Recount

Wonderland is intended to be an excuse for a good old-fashioned monster-bashing session, but subplots may be required in these sophisticated days. In between delving expeditions, consider the following possibilities.

Trade Off: If Christopher Hicks and/or Anneke manage to resist Boese's blandishments with the help of the players, the Cabalist has stronger measures up his sleeve. He will kidnap one or both of the youngsters, potentially derailing the mission by taking away a key member, or threatening their position in Hahnshof by putting their favorite young citizen in peril.

In return for their safety, Boese wants the adventurers to go into *Wonderland* for him and perform the experiments he has in mind; he'd prefer to do them himself, but now he's busy guarding his captives. Will the out-timers do as he says, or risk a rescue?

Cut Off: The adventurers are within *Wonderland,* returning from a standard expedition, when it becomes apparent that the 12-day cycle of entry and exit has failed. The barrier between the interior and exterior stays up, and with rapidly dwindling supplies of food and other items the group must determine why they are trapped and how to escape.

Ward Off: By one means or another, the investigators discover that the local area is housing the Prince-Bishop's greatest fear: the beginnings of a native organization fomenting an uprising in eastern Livonia. If it comes to pass, the authorities' attention is going to be swung painfully hard toward Hahnshof and whatever else is going on there. Can the out-timers stave off the rebellion, and how can they do it in good conscience considering that it its natives fought back against an alien invasion a generation back?

Turn Off: There are occasional resonances between banestorms, and one is deliberately targeted by people trying to resist the Reich-5 incursion into Merlin's Argentina (see page 134 of **Infinite Worlds**). A spell is cast which brings "heroes" from elsewhere, and the PCs are transported to Buenos Aires on that world. Of course, even this complication of their Nottingham mission is not enough. Murphy requires that the Nazis themselves have a mystic alarm system that alerts them to the incursion.

On the other hand, the proximity of the Queen Maud Hellstorm means that any artifacts the travelers have on them still function, so they may have magic swords and whatnot to oppose the Aramaean Order while trying to get home and -- if they're so inclined -- help out the Argentines who summoned them. At base of all of this may be Georgia Bush, the Merlin CIA double agent working for the Duncorne Foundation on Homeline.

Operation Recount in Other Settings

Most sci-fi games allow for the existence of the "Precursors." While the name may differ, they're all ancient alien races that exist largely to supply ruins and incomprehensibly advanced technology. *Wonderland* is one of these translated to the Infinite Worlds setting, so there's nothing stopping a translation back. Careful GMs will notice that there's a mechanism to prevent characters from using their finds outside the ship, however, so they'll want to dream up a similar barrier of their own. One possibility is that the tech depends on a ship-bound probability manipulation field that can't be created by the current Imperium/Federation/Republic.

Wonderland can also be used in a fantasy game by simply inverting the conceit: have a group of people from a magically oriented society run up against a ship of technological marvels. Rather than get into further detail, simply note that this has already been done **before**.

The Real Story

Wonderland can be played as a purely impenetrable mystery, but that can be frustrating for some players. If an explanation that ties things up neatly is desired, the basic premise behind it follows.

The ship hails from a highly advanced civilization orthogonal to the region of the multiverse inhabited by Centrum and Homeline, a direction inaccessible to any parachronic technology either culture will develop in the next few centuries.

Its home timeline has physical laws identical to the magical zone inside the ship, a trick made necessary by the nature of the beings who developed there. The default laws of physics, as typified by Homeline, may be mundane but they generally hold true across the multiverse; a human being can go most anywhere. Conversely, *Wonderland's* builders relied on a subtle interaction of magic and science, being built out of eukaryotic cells embedded in a matrix of magical force. On traveling to another timeline that had anything less than high mana levels, they would disintegrate . . . as would much of their hybrid technology.

They heyday of this civilization was some 250 million years ago, and ended after a few tens of thousands of years. *Wonderland* was an exploration ship in those final days, and when the last war came, it and its crew carried on throughout the multiverse for lack of anything better to do. Maintenance was impossible in the absence of any resupply, and over the next few centuries the ship became increasingly decrepit.

On its final trip it mistranslated, ending up several hundred feet out of position at its final destination. Unfortunately this distance was downward, into the Earth's crust. The 9,000,000 tons of rock that were in the way were displaced back to *Wonderland's* point of origin. Under normal circumstances this would have been a bad accident, but not catastrophic. However, the ship's failing mass compensators were overloaded by the amount of matter they had to move into the origin timeline to make a space for the ship's appearance, and the rock was torn apart by the engine banestorm so completely that it was energy on arrival. The resulting 180,000 teraton explosion vaporized that timeline's Earth, and the infinitesimal fraction of backsplash from it into Nottingham destroyed many of *Wonderland's* systems; GMs looking to identify the victim timeline for whatever reason can use Aterra-1 from the Pyramid article "Space Station Peregrine."

The Omniscient Eye

It's a Billion Years Ago; Can I Play Outside?

How far back into Earth's past can I time travel before the conditions become incompatible with human life?
--Andy Vetromile

That rather depends on how much hardware you're willing to take with you. We will discuss four geological aeons: the Phanerozoic (from the present back to about 570 million years -- Ma hereafter -- before present time), the Proterozoic (back to roughly 2500Ma), the Archaean (to 3500Ma) and the Hadean (before that).

Through most of the Phanerozoic there will be no difficulty with sustaining life. The land surface is solid, and relatively cool; there is plenty of oxygen in the atmosphere; and there are plenty of things to eat, though before the beginning of the Silurian period (443Ma) the land is pretty much barren, and towards the beginning of the Phanerozoic aeon there are only basic multicellular creatures and the diet may become a rather monotonous one of farmed bacteria and algae.

Towards the beginning of the Phanerozoic and into the Proterozoic, things become rather more tricky. There are divergent theories as to just when the Earth's atmospheric oxygen reached its present levels, but the most popular at present seems to be that this happened quite rapidly during the Cambrian period (c.550-490Ma), but competing theories suggest that it may have happened somewhat earlier or later. Prior to this, there may not be enough oxygen to sustain human life; certainly, before 2000-1800Ma there is not even enough oxygen to rust the free iron that permeates seawater (in fact, formation of oolitic ironstones from about 1800Ma is the best evidence for the presence of oxygen at that point). By 2500Ma atmospheric oxygen is about 0.1%, arising from cyanobacteria, in an atmospheric stew of ammonia, methane, water, hydrogen and hydrogen sulphide. Not to mention carbon dioxide; in the Proterozoic, this constitutes the majority of the atmosphere, and will be toxic even without considering other contaminants.

Food availability in the Proterozoic is unclear; the bacteria that are the only form of life are using biochemistry that is broadly compatible with modern life, but much of it is radically different from anything living today, in order to cope with the odd conditions. They might well prove to be toxic; bringing a large farm of green plants (which could generate oxygen from the carbon dioxide as well as providing food) would probably be a good idea.

Temperature will be another problem. Earth's surface temperature averages 40 degrees Celsius through the Proterozoic, falling to about 20-30°C towards the end of the period. However, the Earth's surface is stable most of the time. Our Proterozoic traveler is thus wearing a refrigerated suit, breathing from an oxygen tank, and carrying his own food; if he has a base, it will almost certainly be a sealed environment, perhaps on insulated stilts to reduce heat transfer from the surface. From about 2000-1900Ma, there is a substantial formation of new continental crust, allowing a wide selection of base sites.

If our traveler wants to reach further back, into the Archaean aeon, things get more complex still. The boundary between Archaean and Proterozoic, conventionally given as 2500 or 2600Ma, is in fact rather fuzzy; it is defined principally by a gradual shift in tectonic conditions, faster in some regions than in others, from a generally mobile and fluid crust and lithosphere to a more rigid one. During this aeon, back to 3800Ma, typical seawater temperatures are 70°C or above; evidence for land temperatures is scant, but they are probably similar. The only life forms are cyanobacteria which put out a little oxygen, archaebacteria (adapted to live in extreme environments), and primitive forms of the eubacteria that we know today. There is no detectable free oxygen. The traveler to this period will need very heavy insulation and chemical protection, and in general would probably do better to remain in the rather less hostile environment of low orbit.

Further back still is the Hadean aeon, which stretches to the formation of the Earth at about 4600Ma. Here the surface

temperature averages 230°C, but the high atmospheric pressure (mostly carbon dioxide) allows water to remain liquid. Equipment rated for the Venusian surface will do well in this fairly similar environment.

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--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!

The Taste of Gaming that Lingers

By far my favorite aspect of an ongoing tabletop campaign is the way that a good game can carry on from session to session. (I note that this passion isn't unique to RPGs; not only do I think about good card or board games days afterward, but witness any die-hard sports fan peruse the Sports sections of the newspaper or television broadcast to see how much the game sticks with them between events.)

This is one of my column-loaf installments on the subject, where I rattle off some . . . well, Random Thoughts on the matter.

Cliffhangers: Cliffhangers are perhaps the biggest immediate reason most neophyte gamers tend to remain engaged with a game. (In this usage, "cliffhanger" doesn't need to refer to a literal stopage of the story mid-plot-point; rather, I mean cliffhangers in an overarching sense of unresolved plot lines or story elements.) Even among groups that had little interest in developing their own goals or motivations, most players love a sense of "What happens next?" that comes from a good unanswered question. Think of that sinking feeling in your stomach when you saw *The Empire Strikes Back* . . . especially if you're old enough to have seen it in the theater, knowing that it would be a few years before those questions got resolved. *That's* what a good cliffhanger-type situation does for player engagement; it keeps folks wondering what will happen, arguing about what things mean, and how the Good Guys can *possibly* get out of this one.

As a GM, one of the great tricks I love is that post-game (or mid-game) meal where I get the players to chat about where they think the story is going and how it will get there. In fact, often I'll steal their best ideas (especially if they're stronger than my own); not only does it give them a sense of being "right" when things go the way they expected, but it makes them believe that the story isn't something that's completely fabricated or unfathomable by humans. And if they learn that I'm stripmining their ideas like out-of-copyright dime novels? Well, they're usually happy to keep on offering suggestions, knowing that they can have a real effect on the shape of the game world.

Of course, if I think my ideas are better than the ones they've come up with -- or if I've sown the seeds for a revelation of twist that I'm pretty sure will knock their socks off -- then I'm still likely to spring that on them. Gidily.

Subplots: If cliffhangers are the way that a story impacts the characters (and the players), then subplots and continuing goals are the way that the players impact the ongoing story. Once I started gaining more confidence as a player and felt more connected with a campaign world, I loved concocting and participating in long-term goals and story arcs. My character sent a letter to a powerful prince with a business proposal; would he reply? Would construction continue apace on the new headquarters? Would the scientist/love interest from the last adventure make a reappearance?

I can't speak for other players, but I know I filled many a retail shift daydreaming about how I would respond to various scenarios or permeutations of an ongoing subplot: "Well, if that scientist makes a reapparance, I'll be sure to ask her if her superiors took proper notice of the way she came up with that plague cure . . ."

Character Options: While cliffhangers and subplots concern themselves with the ongoing story, character options are the way that players concern themselves with taking hard-earned experience (or character) points and buffing up their heroes. For folks stuck in classrooms (or, again, bored at work), a great way to keep the game alive mentally is by drooling over various new or enhanced skills and powers: "Okay; if I boost my Sword skill, then I'll be able to do a full defend each round while still maintaining a strike with the skilled equivilant of an expert . . . Oh, but if I raise my Magic, then I'll be able to summon that cool . . ." And, of course, in many campaigns, this daydreaming leads right back to subplots: "To raise my Magic, I'll need to find a tutor, but the king's edict against sorcery means that I can't put the word out publicly. Hmm . . . maybe I can invent a rumor of a promising, mysterious apprentice, and see if any interesting teachers come to try to find *me* . . ."

Having witnessed coworkers describe their future upgrades to ***World of Warcraft*** characters for hours on end, to the point where I have feigned the explosion of my appendix on three separate occasions to escape, I suspect this is something that MMORPGs do very well.

Player-centric Props: Finally, I know that a lot of players hate them, but I have a fascination for things that I can hold onto and contemplate. If my character finds a mysterious riddle or a cryptic puzzle that I, as a player, get to pore over for a week, I'm happy as a pig in pooh. (Of course, for groups that don't find such schenanigans as interesting, provide an escape clause of skill rolls for hints or revelations.)

Props don't need to be a one-way slope from the GM to the players. As a player, I've written letters to NPCs, devised badges or other in-character props, and created identity cards and business cards for our hero groups for various campaigns. Really, I've devoted enough energy to campaigns I love that, were it directed at a celebrity, my walls would be covered in restraining orders. But personally I find the hour prep-time to crank out business cards totally worth it when I get to whip one out for an NPC. (And, since the GM will usually give them back, it's not like you need to make many at all.)

A good roleplaying campaign gives what it receives, and for those who want to take the enjoyment of a game with them even when away from the table, it's possible to occupy a good amount of mental space with warm fuzzy thoughts of present and future fun.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Dust

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Spartaco Albertarelli & Angelo Zucca Art by Paolo Parente, Alessia Zambonin, Davide Fabbri, Ray D. Tutto, & Nicolas Fructus

Edited by Leo Cook

Dust **property created by Paolo Parente**

Full-color boxed set with jig-cut map board, six armies of miniatures (60 tanks, 20 mechs, 20 fighters, 15 bombers, & 15 submarines), 24 production centers, 45 cards, 10 special six-sided dice, 25 tokens (16 power sources, six capitals, three majority counters: production, land, and sea), three reference sheets, and two rulebooks; $59.95

In *Dust,* World War II takes a different turn. The world's hostilities are underwritten by the German discovery of a crashed spaceship and its still-living pilot in the Antarctic in 1938. The revelation of alien life shatters half of mankind's comfortable notions. The secret new technologies and the pockets of "VK energy" dotting the Earth finish off the other half. Now it's 1950 and the great nations are gone; it's everyone for himself.

There are two ways to play, the premium and epic rules, but the object in both is to achieve a certain number of victory points first.

Players start with a hand of cards and an army (two to six can play). They select capitals, VK energy sources (needed to power production centers), and some surrounding land spaces.

One's card determines turn order, how many moves and combats he may engage in, and this turn's production bonus. Its illustration indicates the special ability the player may employ, like dropping collected mechs into a city or making air units better combatants. Production points buy units and replacement cards, and reinforcements emerge from production centers. A "move" lets one stack of units go from a single location to another, depending on the rules used (sometimes one needs unbroken "supply lines" of adjacent friendlies). Some units have special rules: Bombers can fly to any friendly city, for instance.

Players may then fight adjacent strongholds. One player has tactical supremacy, usually through better units or by defending a production center, and therefore rolls first . . . a distinct advantage since battles aren't simultaneous. The six-sided dice have "hit" symbols on two sides, and each hit removes one unit. Tanks and fighters perish before mechs and bombers, so combining forces prevents pricey losses. If players roll three sets of misses (which happens more often than seems statistically believable), they must cease fire. If the attacker wins he occupies the vacant space and may attack another adjacent foe, leapfrogging through a lot of real estate.

Victory points are awarded each round for things like holding power sources or having a plurality of sea spaces. When someone accumulates the predetermined total they win.

There are things to like and dislike about the bits. To fit the board, having small units isn't terrible; yet it's hard to imagine needing most of these, never mind all. They look nice, the mechs in particular, and have a bulbous if

somewhat lumpy 50s retro about them. The board is expansive, colorful, beautiful, and easy to read. An early printing used thin and rather disappointing stock for various markers, but releases thereafter used far better material.

Two ways to play translates into two almost identical rulebooks. The changes are printed another color for quick recognition . . . in theory. The deep blue is almost indistinguishable from the black, and readers may fool themselves. Once they know to look for it, the colors are like stage magic seen from the corner of one's eye. Since the good idea doesn't play out, hopefully every fan chooses a version he likes and sticks with it. (The on-line .pdf file is a little clearer, should players wish to resort to that.) No review is complete without mention of the careful, loving Paolo Parente artwork that inspired the property (including a two-issue comic book). The man has a delicate hand and a depth of expression worthy of anything from comics to galleries. Be warned, it's classic pinup style, so that means plenty of lovely ladies who, while not baring anything R-rated, are certainly going for that unabashed cheesecake effect.

What are the two ways to play? It boils down to game length. Epic attempts to be just that. Where premium takes only a couple of hours, epic can run six. Its initial setup and victory awards make expansion harder and points scarcer, and movement is more limited. Players must aim for tough targets and broaden their spheres of control to score higher; premium spreads rewards out evenly over strategies. The rules differences are subtle, and too easy to confuse.

The mechanics to this game are going to drive purists into a frothing frenzy. The generous movement rules make the world situation utterly unpredictable. It's not about securing a position, but manipulating the current situation to maximize victory-point rewards. True, it's like a game of *Risk* . . . someone piles up units, sweeps several weaker positions, and leaves a trail of nominal forces until the main army ends its march . . . but players are seldom eliminated or even placed at a critical disadvantage. Even stable unit layouts are vulnerable to special card abilities like dropping ballistic missiles into the heart of an empire or forcing an alliance to prevent hostilities with a specific player. These remove any chance of anticipating an enemy's attacks in any meaningful way.

Dust is definitely a whole other gaming experience, but adding a European board-game feel to a war game is a gamble that only pays off with a select audience. Even with fantastic illustrations, it doesn't really convey a particular feel; few immerse themselves fully since the art is just an accessory. The first go around the block should weed out those who can't stomach the fluid nature of events, but the question remains whether anyone can spare the patience to get into a second foray.

--Andy Vetromile

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Sinking Tower

by Alice Turow

"At some point in our lives, almost all of us become aware of the unavoidable fact that everything we build will eventually fall down. Such is the state of our lives, our dreams, and even the floor upon which we build our world. Destined to sink, all of it."
--Snell the Sage, on one of his more optimistic days

Imagine a bustling medium-sized low-magic fantasy town. Surround it with a huge circular wall. Put a roof on the whole city. Above that, put another, less-developed city; and above that, another; and so on, for several levels. Above all that, put empty floors, stretching seemingly to infinity. Below the city, put the ruins of a previous city. And below that, more ruinous remains, descending -- again -- seemingly to infinity.

You now have a mental snapshot of the Tower as it exists at any given moment in time.

Add the element of time, however, to become aware of another fact: Every year, the Tower sinks half a level, forcing the entire populous to scramble to raise to another, higher level, lest they be cut off from life-giving sunlight and placed in a dangerous situation below sea level.

You now know something of the Sinking Tower. To the inhabitants of the Tower, this is their entire life.

Overview

The Sinking Tower is both a fantasy locale and a framework for either an adventure series or an entire campaign. As a locale, its description is equal parts simple and fantastic: Take a tower of seemingly infinite height situated in the water. Transform the ground levels into a proud city, and add levels above that for economic speculation or seclusive adventuring. Below the city, add a seamy undercity, and below that, add dungeons that grow progressively more dangerous the deeper one goes.

Finally, add the wrinkle that the entire structure sinks at the rate of one floor every two years (although in an unusual manner; see below). As such, today's majestic third floor will be part of the dungeons in 30 years, and the entire geography of the "land" changes every decade or so. It may be unusual to us, but that's because we have further points of reference. The residents of the Tower do not have that luxury, as the Tower seems to be the only known locale of non-aquatic life, save tall tales told by perhaps delusional "off-world visitors" (see *Outsiders,* below).

The Sinking Tower is a high-fantasy concept, making a Dyson Sphere look quaint in comparison. However, the actual Tower itself is a mid-to-low-fantasy world; for the idea to work to its utmost potential, it needs a lack of higher magical abilities or, at least, commonplace powerful magic, such as teleportation, far sight, and massive means of affecting rock (or whatever the Tower is made of). This isn't to say that such concepts can't be incorporated into an alternate Tower campaign, but including them will affect the core outlook of the setting in the same way that medieval Europe would have been different if it had a working light-rail system. (More specifically, the odds of there being multiple large cities at different points of the Tower are much higher.)

Geography

The shell of each level of the Tower is identical. Each is approximately 20,000 yards in diameter and 10 yards tall from floor to ceiling, with three-yard-thick layers (floors or ceilings, depending on viewpoint) dividing the levels. All walls, floors, and ceiling are made from the same sandstone-like material, which has a number of interesting properties (see below).

All levels are connected in the center via large "stairs," which more closely resemble giant teeth (about two yards square each) of a spiral-cut gear than any conventional, useful stairs; the central "stairwell" is just under four yards across, and the stairs are close enough together that it's impossible to look up or down the central chamber more than a few yards; there is no central hole. Climbing these stairs is very difficult, involving more ascension of pure stone facing than any mundane climbing; without tremendous effort or careful consideration, it takes about one day to climb up one level using the staircase; descent, done safely, is twice as fast. However, on lower human-occupied levels, wide, (semi-)permanent stairs have been build atop these stones to allow much easier ascent and descent (about 10 minutes per level).

At the water level exists the lowest "above ground" level; that level is the lowest outskirt of the Rising City, which extends from the first to about the 10th level, usually with the fourth, fifth, or sixth level as the "center" of the city, complete with seats of power and government. The Rising City is a huge metropolis, spread out over layers as about 10 somewhat disconnected cities (one "city" per layer).

Above the Rising City, on levels 11 through about 20 or so, are usually long-sighted prospectors attempting to set up a base of operations that will eventually become part of the Rising City proper, in the hopes that they might establish a good position for themselves or -- more likely -- their children. These people tend to be called "Abovers" by those of the Rising City. (They prefer to call themselves Futurians or Prospectors.)

Beyond the Abovers is anyone's guess. There are always rumors of other splinter settlements that formed -- or attempted to form -- hundreds of years ago, but so far there has been no evidence of their existence as a strong force. (Occasionally a ruined homestead of a hermit or small family trickles down to the Abovers, but if there have been any people there, they have assimilated into the Abover culture quickly enough.) Each level of unoccupied Tower is the same featureless area -- a large circle with the "spiral stair" in the center -- but there are enough oddities and occasional treasures that the notion of exploring the areas outside the Futurians' realms is not considered entirely foolish.

In the first levels below the Rising City (and below sea level) is the Undertown. Consisting largely of malcontents and those who have decided to drop out of the Rising City's society (or who have had that choice foisted upon them by the City's justice), it is a seamy, dangerous place, and the darkness of the air is a perfect complement to the callous nature of many of the hearts in Undertown. Still, there are those who believe there is good to be done in the City's underbelly, and optimistic or mad (or both) souls have taken it upon themselves to establishing flickering fireflies of good in the omnipresent gloom.

Below the Undertown, there are the remains of previous layers of the Rising City, modified by the strange life forms taking up residency there now. These once-vibrant human homesteads are now the Dungeons, and they get progressively more dangerous the deeper one descends.

Outside the Tower is the ocean, which stretches outward seemingly to infinity. Every generation or so some fool gets it in his head to mount an expedition via a crafted ship to try to see what is beyond the line of sight of the Tower. Those that return report having found nothing; those that do *not* return are presumed dead by realists, although some dreamers cling to the hope that those explorers have found someplace else interesting to stay and have decided not to return with the news.

Above the Tower is the sky, which is very similar to our own. Given the difficulty of looking upward, it's hard (or impossible) for occupants of the Tower to realize the smooth, rhythmic motions of the planets, moon, sun, and stars obey strict, predictable laws of motion, and lacking the ability to stargaze and the need for navigation, astronomy is a primitive art at best.

Assuming a spherical world, the location of the Tower indicates a relatively temperate environment, and the temperatures around where the Tower resides never fall below 40°F or rise above 100°F. The atmosphere of the Tower world is similar to Earth's, which has made exploration by humans of any levels above a certain point (approximately 10,000 yards, or right around 750 levels) very difficult (if not impossible) because of the lack of oxygen in the thin air at higher altitudes.

The Downward Trend

"What's the difference between the Rising City and the Undertown?"
"Twenty years."
--Old Tower Joke

What makes the Sinking Tower truly awe-inspiring -- for definitions of "awesome" that include wonder and awful -- is the fact that the entire Tower descends, at the rate of one level every two years. This is not a smooth, gradual descent; rather, for several seconds at the height of every summer solstice, the tower descends a half-level, settling to its new level quickly and effortlessly. (Given the lack of development in astronomy, no one in the Tower has figured out yet that the event *is* happening on the solstice, although everyone knows that the event happens one year apart. However, the knowledge isn't impossible to deduce, and it could form a good "reward" for science-minded adventurers looking to unravel the larger mysteries of the Tower.)

In the seconds the Tower descends, everyone and everything aboard it experiences a reduction in weight as gravity is reduced (to about 0.5g), akin to being on a huge elevator. These days have come to be known in the Rising City as Feather Days, and they are a cause for giddiness among children, sales in marketplaces, and grumblings as those who've lost track of the time become disoriented and even tumble; "falling like a fool on Feather Day" is a popular euphemism to indicate someone who is out of touch with society.

Years are measured in levels or half-steps, so if the current year is 6421 (literally, 6421 levels since the occupants began counting), then the next year is 6421.5, and so on. As such, "ages" are half their equivalent on Earth. The "year" is generally understood to be counted at sea level, but one famous adventure writer crafted a tale centuries ago about how ascending or descending the Tower was a form of time travel, and the protagonists of the tale had various Odyssean encounters with occupants of assorted "eras" as they climbed up or down, even meeting themselves at one point.

Because of the fact that the Tower is constantly descending, the occupants find themselves needing to continually prepare for the (literal) fall of their society. This is the reason behind the name of the Rising City: It finds itself needing to "rise" above the surface of the water level at a near-constant pace, to keep from falling below the surface and becoming part of Undertown (or worse).

A Brief History

"In the beginning there was a tower . . ."
--Excerpt from a children's primer

There is little known about the ancient history of the Tower . . . or even how much ancient history there is, or how far back it goes. Legend says that life emerged from the depths of the Dungeons, below even where the bravest adventurers dare trod. It is generally assumed that the City first formed thousands of years ago, although how it was able to survive without the continuing infrastructure and know-how of the citizenry is anyone's guess.

The City was nowhere near as formal a place conceptually until about 1,000 years ago, when the Edict of Ten stated that the City claimed the first 10 levels of the Tower as its domain. Some Abovers fear a new Edict (say, an Edict of 20) might force them to uproot their entire lives or worse, but neither the Crown nor the Futurians would presently welcome the conflict such a decree would make.

In recent decades, the Undertown has taken advantage of the discards of the City to advance itself, and it has elevated from a minor annoyance to a true threat to the Crown. Sages theorize that this is partly because the Undertown elevates itself upwards toward sea level in a similar fashion to the way the Rising City raises itself, and also partly because the Undertowners are able to adventure and accumulate helpful treasure from the Dungeon more easily than agents of the Crown.

Areas of Interest

Most adventurers will be primarily concerned with the Rising City, at least at first. But excitement lurks above and below for those daring enough to explore.

The Rising City

"The sky is rising! The sky is rising!"
--Saying from a popular children's fable

The Rising City is architecturally uninspiring but a marvel. Few points of particular interest exist because it is constantly shifting upwards; glorified tents are the order of the day for most buildings, and even most "permanent" structures are little more than stone facade outer walls with cloth walls and partitions. Other semi-permanent buildings are made of wooden substructures designed to be taken apart and moved up-level as necessary. Population density varies from level to level, with a low of about 1,000 on the first and 10th levels to a high of about 10,000 in the center levels (although many of that population make their permanent homes elsewhere); in all, total population of the City is approximately 35,000. Although each level of the City has its own character and feel, there are a few constants for the entire 10-level structure.

First, the outer perimeter of each level is devoted entirely to farming. Huge windows are cut into the wall to permit sunlight, and a "soil" made from the excavated rock permits growing a wide variety of crops. Nearly everyone in the City holds the farms and farmers in high regard, and all recognize what a difficult job it is . . . especially since it needs to be repeated from scratch every 20 years. Perhaps most important to the continued survival of the City as a place of magnificence are the tree farms. Trees from the first level (which were planted decades ago on the 10th or 11th levels) are harvested for wood that is usually taken up to the seventh or eighth levels to form the semi-permanent structures that will become the basis for the Middle areas when those levels sink down to the fourth through sixth levels. It also used to build the high-traffic staircases in the center of the Tower. Some lumber is made available to the general marketplace, where it almost always goes for high prices.

Those who farm tend to be some of the more exotic and attractive members of the Tower, since they receive the most sunlight and avoid the pallid complexion of most of the world. In addition to the farms, the outer perimeter is also home to many spas, high-end retreats and resorts, and other places of relaxation; the novelty of direct sunlight is worth a premium, and many farmers rent out sections of their homes to those seeking to be closer to the sun. Finally, just outside the windows of the second through 10th floors are giant rain-accumulation bins whose purpose is to gather a more refreshing alternative to the seawater; farmers get the primary allotment of that water for their crops, and the rest is owned and distributed by the Crown.

Level One is primarily occupied by the "Fall-Savers" -- those charged by the City to ensure that the lowest level is sealed up, stripped of anything particularly valuable, and prepared to sink to become the newest level of the Undercity. The most important task is ensuring that the huge windows of the outer tower are sealed as tightly as possible, lest water flood and cause massage damage above and below when the level sinks. Fortunately the self-healing nature of the stone (see below) makes this a relatively easy task, and it seldom takes more than one year of the two allotted to perform the task. Fall-Savers are viewed as vital but lower-status citizens of the City, akin to sewer workers or garbage collectors in the modern world; they are fairly well compensated for their labors, but it's common to hear fathers speak of not wanting their children to marry Savers. Regardless, the Fall-Savers know of their own importance, and every so often there is the threat of rebellion or work stoppage that causes no end of consternation to the Royal House.

The Fall-Savers are also the ones most likely to interact with those of the Undertown, and it is from the Savers that their ranks are replenished and grown.

Levels Two and Three are the lower- and middle-class sections of the City, and those who live there are most concerned with making sure they accumulate enough wealth or power to elevate themselves up a level or two every

two years, lest they sink into the Undertown.

Levels Four through Six are the most active and powerful areas of the City. It is from here that the Royal House -- also known as the Crown -- rules. Although the Royal House is technically situated only on one level, the entire three-level area is usually devoted to the workings of high society, mercantilism, and the running of a bureaucracy. Because the Royal House prefers to secure stability where it may, it usually stays on the same level for five or six years before moving; what begins as Level Six becomes Level Five after two years, and so on. Most have good things to say about the Crown, but there are always Byzantine plots against the rulers as well as threats from above and below.

Besides the farms, Levels Seven through Eight are most commonly the home of status-seekers: those who hope to become assimilated into high society when their level falls to the Royal House. This is a dangerous gamble, since the Crown claims dominion over everything in the City, and if it decides it wants a particularly useful or developed piece of land, it can just seize it. However, for the most part, these entrepreneurs set their goals and demands low enough that the Crown finds it easier to acquiesce than to start a potentially serious conflict. While the middle levels are the most economically active, these levels are the most innovative and resourceful; it is here where most scientific or magical development takes place.

Finally, levels Nine and 10 are the outskirts, home to a mishmash of assimilated Futurians, City planners, and developers working years in advance, and those who like the solitude of living away from the crowds while still remaining part of the City. One philosopher described the appeal of this section as an adage: "Live in the Uppers once for the quiet, live in the Crown once for the noise, live in the Lowers once for the fun, and live with the Savers once for the work."

The Abovers

"I'm pretty sure that the future palace will be right here in a decade. So what's say we get to tell our grandkids about how we did it in the royal throne room, eh?"
--Amorous Abover

If the seventh and eighth levels of the Rising City are home to those who work within the bounds of the City's rules to earn a living, then the 10 levels above the 10 levels of the City are doing the same thing *without* rules.

The Abovers (or Futurians) take a much longer view of their efforts than those who are part of the mainstream City. They are the ones who initially work the stone of the farming windows, plant the trees with the longest growing times, and develop infrastructure that will eventually become used by the City. (In many ways, they are similar to colonies of Earth during the Age of Exploration.)

While the City is a monarchy, the Abovers are much more inclined toward developing self-rule or alternate governing structures, ranging from town-hall democracy to communes to near-anarchy. Abovers tend to get in conflict with each other more often than the City, and some suspect the Crown of actually fomenting discord among these groups to ensure they do not become a threatening force.

The reintegration of these ideas into mainstream City society has so far not resulted in too many skirmishes, but as more and more generations of Abovers and their descendants become part of the metropolis, these radical notions could prove problematic for the Crown.

The Futurians' realms are much less sparsely populated than the City, ranging from approximately 500 people per level on the highest levels (18-20) and just shy of 1,000 people per level on the lowest levels (11-13).

Undertown and the Dungeons

"Throw it away, right? Throw it away. Your garbage, our future; throw it away."
--Popular Undertown labor song

The first level of Undertown is well known: Level "Zero," the first one below sea level. Beyond that truth, there is no set definition for when the Undertown ends and when the Dungeons below that begin. For symmetry's sake some peg it at 10 levels, but that's likely to be a level or two too high. (One City writer wryly notes that the way to find the Dungeons is to ask Undertowners on your level if they would be willing to go one level down; if they aren't, then that level is the start of the Dungeons. He also suggested that you can tell when you're in the Dungeons if your questions are met by being eaten.)

Undertowners tend to be much more resourceful and cunning than City-folk. They have an elaborate lichen-growing economy for sustenance, as well as occasional raid on the Rising City for sun-grown food. Some powerful magics also have been developed or maintained exclusively by the Undertowners that are in demand by the City, so there remains at least some contact between the two. Nevertheless, the near-constant threat of skirmish if not outright war between the two is a major headache for the Royal House.

The Dungeons are home to everything that has either devolved from City life or climbed up from even lower levels, although where those entities came from is anyone's guess. More powerful creatures tend to stay deeper down the sub-sea-level spire, but the random fierce monster comes up from time to time to threaten Undertown or even the City itself. Such creatures often have items of great interest and value, so that some who go and seek out such encounters often return the richer for the experience. (Those who do not return probably regret their adventurous decisions.)

The "Science" of the Tower

"The Tower couldn't exist if it weren't for the stone it's made of."
--Bera the Alchemist

As mentioned previously, all walls, floors, and ceiling are made from a substance akin to sandstone. This "stone" (naturalists are divided over its exact nature) has a number of interesting properties. First, it is extremely versatile. It is strong yet relatively light, making it good for a building material. If it is ground into a fine powder and heated slightly (about 200°F for 24 hours), it turns into a rich soil suitable for crops. If it is treated with minor alchemical reactions, it becomes a fizzing, popping fuel that forms the basis for stonelights, the most common source of light outside of the edges of the Tower. If the stone is heated as a mass at much hotter temperatures -- about 800°F -- for three hours, much of the stone burns away, leaving behind a thin residue of metal that can be utilized like iron. (This metal is still incredibly rare in the Tower, however, and possessing metal weapons is truly a sign of wealth and prosperity.)

Second, the stone regenerates . . . very slowly. Left alone, windows cut in the side walls to the outside gradually grow closed, as do holes in the floor. It takes about 10 years for a large two-yard high window to do so, but an inch-sized hole closes up in about a week; minor scratchings or shavings close up quicker than that. Even more curious, the stone can grow and combine with itself; if a door-sized plank of the stone were placed against a similarly sized hole, the two would fuse the entryway shut with a weak bond in a few days, and more sturdily in only a week more. However, planks or chips of the stone left alone do not seem to get larger by themselves; the stone seems to need contact with the larger whole. The Tower appears to have a nature that it wants to get back towards -- in particular, the large "steps" in the center and the wholeness of the outer walls -- but it's generally forgiving of other transgressions. These regenerative properties require the farmers and craftsmen who maintain the windows to the outside world to constantly shave the stone off the inside, lest they grow too closed to be useful; however, this shaved stone is itself a valuable commodity.

Finally, the stone of the Tower seems somewhat porous through the entirety of its structure. This gives the stone a permanently moist feature, and helps keep the Tower from catching fire without deliberate action. It also provides a fair amount of humidity for its occupants and allows those in the lower levels to accumulate enough water to survive; the stone seems to act as a filter of sorts to reduce the water's salinity.

The seawater surrounding the Tower is much less saline than its Earth counterpart, and it is possible (although unpleasant) to survive by drinking it alone. Most residents -- especially those in the Rising City -- prefer to consume water accumulated from other, fresher sources, such as gathering rainwater or collecting condensation from boiling.

Although unknown to the residents of the Tower, there is a large amount of particulate material in the seawater that is the same material as the stone. Although not fatal by itself, the water does produce some dementia-type effects as people age for those who drink it unfiltered over a lifetime; were such a body to be examined after death, it would be discovered that the walls of the arteries and the edges of the bone were calcified with a thin layer of the stone.

The Outsiders

"I've a feeling we're not in Kans-"
"Not. Another. Word."
--Agents Klein and Rory, at the beginning of a long year

One final significant secret of the Tower is its tendency to pull in those from other worlds or dimensions. The number of such visitors is relatively small -- perhaps a dozen or so every other year -- but that's no consolation to those who find themselves accidentally transported to the Tower. Scholars from worlds other than the Tower's suspect this is because the spire's unimaginable size and sheer impossibility attracts interdimensional phenomenon like a lightning rod.

Outsiders who find themselves within the Tower are almost always trapped; none of their interdimensional abilities or magical effects enable them to escape. Should they make their natures known, the general reaction is disbelief (in much the same way that telling someone "I'm from another planet!" is met with blank stares on our world), but it is feasible to convince some of the Tower's residents of the truth. Possession of abilities, knowledge, or items that are rare or impossible on the Tower is a good start, but exhibiting such would also make the person a target.

The ability to escape is rarer still than the circumstances that allow entry into the Tower, but the most common answers to how to do so are found in the Dungeon. Research, adventuring, and luck generally reveal that the way home entails performing a ritual on a Feather Day in the view of sunlight. Such a ritual seems only able to target Outsiders to begin with -- it appears to use their natural resonance to their original homes to snap them back there -- but a few speculate that a group of people from the same place might be able to "trick" the resonance into permitting them to take one or two Tower residents back with them. Otherwise, escape from the Tower by its residents is completely impossible, save whatever new vistas death permits.

As a final note, off-world sages speculate that the Tower accumulated most of its flora and fauna -- including, perhaps, human beings themselves -- from outside its own planet. This would make sense because, barring divine intervention, it seems unlikely that such life could develop on its own in the Tower, given how much human intervention and tending is required to make the Tower work in the first place.

The Tower in a Campaign

The Sinking Tower is intended as either a long-term urban campaign of a decidedly different bent, or as an adventure possibility for off-world PCs to become trapped therein. Many aspects of the Tower have been left deliberately vague -- such as the nature of the royal government structure or the exact state of magical knowledge and research in the Tower -- to give the maximum leeway possible to the GM to incorporate his own ideas or plunk down material from other sources. (For example, each "level" of the City could be easily mapped using a city or town from existing fantasy-city books, and the Undertown has many analogies to existing subterranean settings.)

Almost any standard urban fantasy tropes or ideas work well in the Rising City; simply remember that the population is spread out over 10 levels. (And if you're willing to hand-wave away even more realism, feel free to inflate the size of the populous by 10 fold or even more should you need a truly massive city.)

Adventure Seeds

The Lost Over-City: Centuries ago, a group of settlers grew weary of having to move the entire city piecemeal every 20 years, so they set out to move up as high as they possibly could and establish a new city there . . . one where they wouldn't need to relocate constantly. They succeeded, building their own bustling metropolis comparable to the Rising City, but without the need to move every two years. In the intervening centuries, however, this new city has continued its own downward sink. When it finally descends to the same level as the outskirts of the Abovers, it will be cause for a major headache for the Crown, and could result in outright war.

Our Allies, the Mole-Men: It's possible that a large enough threat to Undertown could send representatives from that place to the City to request aid. Such a team-up would be wholly unholy, and both sides would be distrustful of the other (for good reason). But if the danger were real enough -- especially if there were the risk it could continue rising up and affecting the City -- the Crown would almost certainly come to their aid. And if the adversary is eventually overthrown, could it lead to a new era of peace between the Undertown and the Rising City? Or one last knife in the back?

The Cusp of Tomorrow: In a lot of ways, the Sinking Tower is a setting feeling its way toward a future; a more intense devotion to either science or magic could improve the lives of its inhabitants greatly. Perhaps different regions are choosing different paths for development; if so, there's bound to be ideological conflict in the future.

The Secret of the Tower

The nature of what the tower is and why it does what it does is primarily left up to the GM; in fact, it may well be better if the reasons behind the Tower is one of those unexplainable mysteries. However, one possibility is presented below for those who desire a definitive answer.

All life is, to a certain extent, a matter of scale and perception; the urgency with which a fruit fly lives its life as measured in days seems impossibly abbreviated to humans, and trees -- were they sentient -- would no doubt find our half-century outlooks equally incomprehensible.

So, too, are the natures of the gods (at least the gods of the world of the Sinking Tower), whose eons-long outlooks and galaxy-wide perceptions dwarf the ability of mortal minds to comprehend.

What humans perceive as the "Sinking Tower," then, is nothing more than a vertical pendulum for an impossibly huge "clock" for an uncaring deity. The movement of the sun, planets, and stars are nothing more than carefully designed marking mechanisms for the timepiece to reflect its output, in ways that only the deity understands.

The Tower is, in fact, the only thing on this world habitable by beings who cannot breathe seawater, and any attempts to leave the tower that don't involve leaving the world are doomed to failure.

The natural motion of the Tower, then, is to mark off its measure of time by sinking into the water and then, at the end of its cycle, spring back to the top, so that the lowest "level" of the Tower becomes the first floor of the new world. (The "water" is actually both a lubricant for the spire as well as a source of repairing material for the spire; it also happens to contain enough dihydrogen monoxide content to slake the thirst of those who drink it in a purified form.) Since by the point of the Tower's reset, most civilized life will probably be living on the top levels of the tower just before it returns, this may come as a momentary relief for those fearful of being buried by the sea forever. Unfortunately for them, such relief will be amazingly brief, as the cycle's renewal will almost certainly kill anyone in the tower . . . if not by the high-speed motion, than the lack of air from those first levels being transported above breathable atmosphere. (This assumes, of course, that society hasn't completely collapsed years before as the realization dawns that there is no further "up" to climb to.) Once the piston/Tower resets, the most likely outcome is that the fiercest, toughest, least-human near-life-forms from the lowest levels will retain mastery of the first floor, which is now sea level. In this regard, if this cycle has happened more than once (and it almost certainly has), the ancient legends regarding the origins of life on the Tower -- strange creatures from the Dungeons -- are more or less true, in a manner of speaking.

How soon the Tower is from resetting depends on how much the GM wants to make it a part of the campaign. Since

adventurous explorers can raise one Tower level per day (and descend twice as fast), the number of levels above the highest standard occupied levels times 1.5 equals the number of days it would take to reach the highest levels and return. (Cunning players would, of course, almost certainly be able to shave some of that time off.) For campaigns set entirely within the Tower, a good number would be somewhere around 100-150 levels; that would mean the world would end in 200-300 years, and explorers could discern this fact in 150-225 days of straight travel. For campaigns where the Tower is intended as a magical morass from which to escape, perhaps 15-30 levels would be appropriate; this is a long enough distance for the heroes to be the first ones to be likely to get to the top, and -- if they inform people in the Rising City of their findings -- a short enough time for the City to potentially collapse under the weight of its own eschatonic fears.

Although the deity who owns the timepiece of which the Tower is a part does not care about the Tower's inhabitants per se, it *is* keenly interested in the continued operation of its clock. Because of this fact, were anything cataclysmic to happen to the Tower, the god would probably take notice. Unfortunately, most aspects of "take notice" involve the destruction or replacement of the Tower altogether, resulting in the deaths of all therein. But it might make for a suitable campaign-ending climax for the motes in a god's eye to meet and perhaps even question their houser (if not their maker); regardless, preventing such an event by a madman or doomsday cult is an excellent adventure hook, even if those in the Tower don't know the truth.

Pyramid Review

Thousand Suns

Published by [Rogue Games](#)

Written by James Maliszewski & Richard Iorio II

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274-page b&w digest-sized softcover; $24.99
19.9 meg b&w PDF; $9.99

Rogue Games follows its first RPG, *[Colonial Gothic: A historical supernatural role-playing game](#)* with ***Thousand Suns,*** a science-fiction game mechanically modern and light but old school as far the inspiration for its science fiction goes. That inspiration is the "imperial" science fiction of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and of authors like Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, H. Beam Piper, and Jerry Pournelle. It posits a future in which mankind has explored the galaxy; settled colonies; established interstellar states; and encountered, befriended, and even fought other intelligent species. The dominant human state is vast, too big to be ruled directly from its capital due to the lack of FTL communication and the time taken by FTL travel. Instead appointed representatives govern whole regions, enforcing interstellar law while allowing each individual world to retain its own culture and laws.

As a sub-genre, imperial science fiction is not necessarily of a utopian bent, but it is positive in outlook, fundamentally humanist in nature, never focuses upon its technology, and possesses a sense of wonder about the universe. These are all traits at odds with the Cyberpunk and Transhumanist sub-genres that followed, and all traits that ***Thousand Suns embraces*** emphatically. Indeed, ***Thousand Suns,*** like Maliszewski's earlier genre RPG, *[Fourth Millennium,](#)* is staunchly anti-Transhumanist. In gaming terms, though, ***Thousand Suns*** feels very similar to ***Classic Traveller,*** and indeed the writers of ***Thousand Suns*** acknowledges the authors of ***Traveller*** in its dedication.

Yet if similarities abound between the two games -- most obviously the hands-off government and the relatively long travel time between star systems -- there is one fundamental difference and that is in how ***Thousand Suns*** treats its setting. Where ***Classic Traveller*** originally only implied its setting through its rules, Thousand Suns not only implies its setting through its rules, it is also a setting in itself (that is, the "Thousand Suns"), making it both game and setting, plus a toolkit for the GM to create his own imperial science fiction setting.

Mechanically, Thousand Suns employs the same 12° system as ***Colonial Gothic.*** It requires two 12-sided dice rolled equal to or under ability plus skill or just the ability, with better rolls able to modify the outcome of the ability or skill test. The same mechanic is used throughout, including both ground and space combat, and because better rolls means better results, combat can be very deadly. Even a simple slug thrower can kill an average human on a good or critical roll, and energy weapons are even deadlier.

Space combat in ***Thousand Suns*** is miniatures based, but uses small cards to both represent each spaceship and record its statistics. This includes its Offensive and Defensive Modifiers, Move Factor (measured in card lengths), Turn capability, Hull Rating, weaponry, and Damage Control for repairs. Combat takes place within a distance of 12 card lengths or less, so an area no larger than 30-inches square is needed to play. Two different 12-sided dice are needed per ship. One is placed on the ship's card to indicate how far the ship is above the plane of the table, but when the ship goes below the plane of the table it is replaced by the other die to indicate how far down. This enables ship combat and

movement to take place in three dimensions rather than two. Designed to handle combat between light ships, from assault fighters and couriers up to cruisers and destroyers, the rules are simple, encourage player participation, and -- as hinted before -- can even be used with miniatures instead of the cards.

It is also used in an interesting way for social interaction. Where each character has Vitality to represent his hit points, his Resolve represents his determination. Divided into five attitudes from Antagonistic through to Helpful, it can change depending upon the outcome of social skill tests. Designed to work with both NPCs and player characters, it means that the outcome of an NPC's social skill test can affect a player character's Resolve directly, changing the player character's Attitude towards that NPC. This rule requires a sense of trust between player and GM, but it does allow the GM to actively use NPC social skills.

Character generation in **Thousand Suns** is an easy process. First, 25 points are divided between five abilities (Body, Dexterity, Perception, Presence, and Will, but not Intelligence, whose more deductive aspects are assigned to Perception), and packages are chosen for species, homeworld, and careers. Each package is balanced to provide a mix of ability and skill bonuses, while alien species packages also give one or two traits, such as gills or ultraviolet allergy. These species advantages and disadvantages are the only ones available in the game. The homeworld packages vary according to location (core, frontier, or wildspace), and technology and population levels. A player character can have three different Novice careers, one Novice and one Experienced career, or one Veteran career. Combining career packages creates a character with both decent skills and a sense of history and background. For example, to create a space-traveling barbarian, a player selects the Terran species package, plus the Low-Tech World, Barbarian Veteran, and Novice Trader packages. To further flesh out his background, a character has five Hooks, one each for species, homeworld, and career packages. A Hook can be either positive or negative, and grants bonuses when used with a character's Action Points. A character begins with five of these, which can be spent to be a +1 bonus on skill tests; +2 on a skill test or reroll the dice if related to a Hook; or to edit the game in some way . . . at the GM's discretion, of course. Lastly, a character begins with several Benefit Points, best used as money or pooled for a spaceship mortgage.

Alongside the usual Marine, Navy, and Scout packages is the Psion career. Part of the genre, psionics are available to all characters during character generation, but the Psion actually studies them and begins play with more psionic abilities. Each psionic ability is treated like a skill, but the use of many, like Cryokinesis and Teleport inflict Vitality damage upon the user, thus preventing their over use affecting the game.

Thousand Suns does not explain how Psionics works or even try, simply assuming them to be natural to both genre and setting. The game treats its technology similarly, including the setting's answer to the FTL engine, the Dillingham or D-Drive. Various other technological staples of the genre are listed, but their descriptions are such that they can easily be renamed to fit whatever setting the GM has devised or is running.

Means are also provided to create two further genre staples: aliens and worlds. The latter are created by rolling on various tables to determine a world's type; for example, it can generate an academic/research or military planet, its primary terrain, gravity, atmosphere, population, government, and tech level. The GM is expected to interpret the results, which are geared towards playability rather than scientific plausibility. The rules for sector creation are even simpler: Determine how many worlds it has, the jump routes between them, and their length. The alien creation rules are more guidelines, with a GM creating a species package using the alien traits listed and some thought. The guidelines do draw a distinction between real aliens and "men in (rubber) suits." The latter are classified as Clades, genetically distinct subspecies of humanity. Clades found in the **Thousand Suns** setting include the Myrmidon super soldiers and the super-intelligent and honest Delphic, while proper aliens include the tree-like, free-thinking, but conservative Czaniki; the egotistical cephalopod chlorine-breathing and Terran-hating Hen Jaa; and the fractious Kriilkna, trilaterally symmetrical arthropods.

The **Thousand Suns** setting is set at least 1,500 years in the future, the GM free to determine the date. The invention of the D-Drive enabled humanity to take advantage of the Dane-Ohlmhorst Map, a memory core found on Mars listing the coordinates for a thousand local star systems, and thus explore the galaxy, make first contact, and establish the Terran Federation. Collapsing into civil war following conflicts with artificial intelligences and the Myrmidon, the eventual signing of the Concord established its successor, the Thousand Suns. Only 500 years old, the Thousand Suns is recovering from the recent civil war fought over the articles of the Concord. One element left for the GM to decide

is the exact nature of the Thousand Suns government. Whether a new federation or an empire, or governed by a doddering fool, first citizen, puppet, or zealot, this helps define the Thousand Suns' general feel. To help the GM get started, the Five Stars sector is given as an example.

Physically, *Thousand Suns* needs both a slight edit and an index, but it is well written with a few pieces of excellent artwork that evoke both the genre and similar RPGs. The GM advice covers not running the game, but running the genre, making *Thousand Suns* more suited to experienced gamers.

It seems impossible for *Thousand Suns* to escape the shadow of *Traveller,* but in comparison, *Thousand Suns* is a compact, concise package with both easy rules and setting. The *Thousand Suns* setting and the GM advice evoke its genre more readily than the rules, but this is no bad thing because *Thousand Suns* enables a GM to easily create his own setting or even adapt an existing one, such as *[Battlestar Galactica,](#)* *Star Frontiers,* or *[Traveller.](#)* As a setting, the *Thousand Suns* feels nostalgically old fashioned, and as game *Thousand Suns* is a pleasingly straightforward toolkit and rules set.

--Matthew Pook

Sub Rosa

Early Principles and Practices in Espionage

by Matt Riggsby

Many problems in espionage carry a long and honorable pedigree. Indeed, many of the problems with gathering intelligence were identified again and again across time, and there was a surprising unanimity in how to deal with them. Although different societies came up with specific variations on the main themes, the underlying principles have been followed to the present day. We'll only be considering the history of espionage up through the Renaissance, but one can expect that most principles presented here can be applied to low-tech fantasy campaigns, and many can apply to contemporary and science-fiction campaigns as well.

Spies

We'll be considering three classes of spies: agents who gather information which other people would rather not have them know, operatives who use stealth and deception to carry out missions of sabotage and assassination, and spymasters who usually don't perform activities in the field but who recruit and manage those who do.

No lesser authority than Sun Tzu spoke of the importance of spies, particularly noting their ability to confuse the enemy and improve one's own position, thereby leading to faster, cheaper, and less bloody wars. Therefore, he noted, spies should be well paid; whatever one spends on gathering intelligence will be paid back many times over in savings gained by avoiding a long war. We can find this idea appearing over and over again through history. A number of Indian rulers had large budgets for espionage, Medieval Muslim rulers suggested rewarding spies lavishly, and Jean de Bueil, a 15th century French general and a companion of Joan of Arc (and thereby removed from Sun Tzu by two millennia and nearly half a planet) suggested that a ruler spend about a third of his military budget on intelligence-gathering.

Many ancient "spies" were what we might regard as secret police or undercover agents keeping tabs on their own society (government officials were often the subject of covert investigation) rather than venturing into others. And, indeed, keeping an eye on your own society is a lot easier than sending spies elsewhere. Their purpose was slightly different, but their methods were often the same.

When we think of spies, we think most often of intrepid operatives sent out from one nation to another to gather information or carry out other dark missions. However, agents were sent out from home to spy on an enemy far less often than a spymaster would be deployed in the area. The spymaster would recruit locals, who would have far better knowledge of conditions and better access to information, to do the dirty work.

Spies could be paid very well, but the risks were commensurately high. If a captured spy were lucky, he might be quickly executed. More likely, though, he'd be tortured until he told what he knew and *then* executed. Still, there was sometimes a way out. A captured spy could become a double agent, pretending to act for his old master but helping his captors find his fellow spies or passing on disinformation.

Sun Tzu identified five classes of spies: members of an enemy's population who can report general conditions on the ground in their area, subverted members of the enemy's hierarchy, enemy spies uncovered and convinced to switch sides, agents sent abroad with false information and deliberately revealed to the enemy, and spies capable of infiltrating enemy positions and organizations. He even demonstrated some logical orders for their use. For example, after converting some enemy spies into double agents, information gathered from them could be used to identify disgruntled officials and other turnable locals. After recruiting some of them, sacrificial agents could be deployed and revealed by agents already on the ground, and other agents would report back on reactions to the false information provided to the enemy. A spymaster might try to reduce the potential damage of having his own agents turned by

making sure they know as little as possible about conditions in his own country or organization. However, since trustworthy people are rare in the espionage business, any given person might have to serve multiple roles and know more than he absolutely needed to.

Since they were, after all, supposed to be secret, actual spy agencies and formal posts related to spying were vanishingly rare. Rather, spy networks were, much like lines of political authority, built up through personal initiatives and relationships. For example, Francis Walshingham is famed in the annals of history as the father of modern intelligence (he is sometimes, though clearly inaccurately, called the first spymaster). He built a large network of spies and counterspies at home and abroad, sniffing out multiple plots against Elizabeth I and making extensive use of forgery and cryptography. However, he paid (and paid heavily) for his work out of his own pocket, never held any formal title or commission to gather intelligence, and after he passed away, his intelligence network and methods passed out of use for decades.

How To Spy (And How To Counterspy)

Spymasters can be regarded as the driving force in intelligence gathering, but they had to find people to do the hard, dangerous work of spying for them. How, then, are spies to be motivated? Sun Tzu nailed the motivations of money and hope for personal advancement (or anger over a lack of advancement), but the religious struggles between Islam and Christianity and between Catholicism and Protestantism added ideological conflict as a major motivator for spies. European spymasters also capitalized on national and ethnic ties; merchant factors residing in foreign countries would be more inclined than usual to provide information to countrymen sent to spy, particularly, in the case of some diplomats, those who were in a position to intercede them in sometimes hostile foreign lands.

The primary target for foreign espionage was the capital. The capital was where all the important decisions were made, where all of the important information came together, and, if anybody had to be done away with, where all the people worth bribing or killing were. Capitals were also usually the largest population centers to be found, and it's much easier to disappear into the crowd, if need be, where crowds are a possibility. After the capital came seaports. Goings-on at a seaport provided information on both a country's military preparations and their commercial relations. They were also excellent targets for sabotage. Ships in port are much easier to find than ships at sea, and they are *much* more vulnerable.

A great deal of intelligence, particularly military intelligence, could be obtained just by looking around. Spies might take note of standards flying in an army camp; count the number of ships in harbor and, if need be, note what kinds there were and where they were from; sketch out fortifications and ground plans; and keep an eye out for livery and coats of arms, indicating which important people (or, at least, their retainers and servants) were in town and visiting rulers at the palace. Likewise, just sitting in taverns or public squares and eavesdropping could yield a great deal of useful gossip about preparations for major events. The idea of "top secret" classifications is relatively modern, so most of the information a casual spy might collect would even be technically legal to gather and communicate, though by the same token the legal definition of espionage would likely be sufficiently vague that a spy might find himself thrown out of the country. Even if he wasn't, he could always be arrested on trumped-up charges, a popular tool of authoritarian governments everywhere.

For more secret information, spymasters would have to look particularly hard for natives with access to it. Officials at all levels were often in need of some ready cash and many could be convinced to part with confidential information in return for it. Household servants were apparently a significant weak point as well. The separation between public and private spheres is another relatively recent thing. Through most of history, a person's home has usually been his place of business as well, even (or, indeed, especially) when that business extends to ruling countries, plotting wars, and conducting diplomacy. This means that not only are a ruler and his trusted retainers physically close to secret documents and within earshot of sensitive conversations; so too, potentially, are distant cousins, guardsmen, butlers, father confessors, cooks, ladies' maids, stable boys, and the man who polishes the diamond buckles for his majesty's knee-britches.

At certain times, agents might be sent to infiltrate a large household themselves. It was sufficiently easy to plant people in large noble households in later Medieval England that one king regularly placed *pairs* of agents with suspect

noblemen. One spy would collect information and pass it on to his partner, who would in turn pass it along to his superiors, so that neither could be clearly tied to the transmission of sensitive information out of the household. It would be a bit extreme, but perhaps thinkable, for a spy in the guise of a nanny to suggest that her charge play a little game: the child hides in a wardrobe or chest, eavesdrops on a conversation, and tells nanny what the old men said . . .

The nigh-universal advice, from Europe to China, was to disguise agents inserted into a foreign environment as members of the few professions where practitioners could be expected to wander from one place to another. In almost all places and times, this meant holy men and merchants. Merchants are universal travelers, and many societies have had a class of wandering monks or priests. Other societies added their own classes of traveler to the list. For example, Indian spymasters used both of those classes as well as beggars, prostitutes, and scholars. Although there's no clear record of it in European history, the international nature of Medieval scholarship would certainly make students and master teachers candidates for recruiting as spies, particularly in university towns.

Although modern cosmetics and plastic surgery were unavailable, it was still possible to put on disguises and take on protective coloration. Many societies associated particular styles of dress and grooming with certain professions. For example, in many parts of the ancient world, shaving your head and putting on the right kind of robe almost immediately classifies you as a Catholic priest or a respectable Buddhist monk.

As we've seen elsewhere, diplomats might be involved in espionage. Early treatises on diplomacy discouraged such activity in the strongest possible terms, of course, but it was generally acknowledged that practicality often won out over idealism. In a few cases, some rulers even sent envoys knowing that they'd never be able to reach acceptable agreements just so they'd have a man on the ground gathering information. A GM could build an interesting adventure about a sincere diplomat unknowingly sent on a mission doomed to failure accompanied by PC spies, who must hide the truth of their mission from both their hosts and their nominal superior.

Covert operatives, who carry out missions of assassination and sabotage, have been relatively rare, but they have generally been raised from the same pool as spying agents: disgruntled natives or people who will appear inconspicuous or at least harmless if they circulate. For example, in a plot to kill Lorenzo de Medici, the prospective assassins were a pair of priests. International operatives are typically rare, though some periods see exceptions. Chanakya, an Indian scholar and government official of the fourth century BC, made passing references to assassins used to kill enemies and devoted considerable attention to compounding poisons they could use.

On rare occasions, armies used covert forces to gather intelligence and make focused attacks, which is about as close as the preindustrial world comes to the modern idea of international operatives who both gather intelligence and carry out missions to change the situation on the ground. These troops constituted a sort of "special forces" unit. They performed high-risk missions in positions of enemy strength and even landed small groups of brave volunteers on shore near important targets to get a look at the situation on the ground or infiltrate targets to carry out sabotage missions, much like WWII commandos launching secret missions from submarines. They were particularly active during the Crusades, using everything from special ships to captured armor and clothing to carry out their missions. A group of French-speaking Egyptians used ships captured from Christians to get close to Crusader vessels and Crusader clothing to get themselves on board. Once there, they could attack the crew and sink the ship. The Byzantines and contemporary Arabs employed special kinds of ships for gathering naval intelligence. They were smaller than typical warships of the period, with a single bank of oars, a single mast, and a crew of twenty to fifty rather than three banks of oars, double masts, and crews of around a hundred. They were fast and low to the water, making them hard to spot. They even employed camouflage, sometimes being painted blue to make them invisible against the sea and sky.

Where there is espionage, there will eventually be counter-espionage. Some counter-espionage took the form of simple, elementary policing. One of the reasons that international secret agents were (and, to some extent, still are) so rare is, after all, that they're easily noticed. They dress funny, talk funny, and nobody knows them, and all of those attributes are magnified at a time when people from neighboring *counties* seem foreign, let alone different countries. Officials at royal retreats in the countryside and important military sites could spot such agents simply by asking if anyone had seen any strangers lately.

But good spies aren't obliging enough to speak with funny accents, which requires governments to work a little harder

to find them. Governments had to deploy counter-spies to keep an eye on possible spies and spymasters. The methods of spying could be quite similar (performing mundane surveillance, recruiting members of potential enemy households, etc.), but would be less risky and probably less lucrative for the people doing the work.

The institution of formal postal services made counter-espionage easier. When Henry VIII established the first post-Roman postal system in western Europe, the crown acquired an important source of information. Unlike systems instituted by the Romans, Byzantines, and Chinese, which were used only for official communication, Henry's postal system could be used by anyone who could afford a few pence to send a message across the realm. It was cheap enough to attract correspondence from merchants, clergy, and even diplomats who might want to send a message from where ever they were to their own messengers stationed at ports, who would then transfer messages to their own countries. What this meant for espionage, though, is that everyone's messages were passing through the government's hands. Henry and his successors had few scruples about opening letters from particularly suspicious characters and making copies before sending them on to their destinations.

Some rulers started to limit the flow of sensitive information even in governmental circles. For example, one later Medieval English king noted in official budgets that a certain unnamed person was being paid to gather intelligence. The fact that the king noted specifically that he would not name the person indicates that he knew that official records could be vulnerable to spies carrying out their intelligence work. The spy's identity was being kept secret to protect his operation from counter-intelligence agents.

The Great Game

So what does this mean for your gaming? Players looking to be realistic spies have some oddly limited options. The spymaster can be a viable character type for campaigns involving intrigue and social interaction. He needs a bundle of social skills, good observational abilities, extensive social contacts (or the ability to create such contacts), and lots of funding; espionage is *expensive.* The money doesn't need to be his own, but he does need it to entice his agents to risk their careers and, usually, their lives. Many spymasters had at least a veneer of respectability to justify contacts with the upper ranks of society, though a lower-class spymaster could run a perfectly effective string of turncoat stable boys and harlots. He would also be well-served with an exceptional memory so that he doesn't have to produce any incriminating written records.

The agents and operatives at the tip of the spear, on the other hand, are defined less by what they can do and more by where they happen to be. Anyone can be a spy as long as they're in the right place at the right time. On one hand, this means that it's difficult to build a realistic international spy, because international spies are inherently unrealistic. On the other, this means that just about any sort of character can be involved in an espionage adventure so long as they've got a connection to someone powerful, or even if they have a connection to somebody else with such a connection. For example, Renaissance French diplomats maintained ties with the English Catholic community based on their shared religion. Through those connections, they could encourage and even finance Catholic Scottish rebels. In such a scenario, PCs could include diplomats attempting to build up a spy ring or covert operation, members of a politically active religious minority (which could be just about any character type, including noblemen, priests, soldiers, merchants, common laborers, scholars, and so on) working as intermediaries, and potential rebels and contacts in the current political hierarchy. The few spies selected for their abilities rather than their connections are mostly the low-tech "spec ops" troops of the type used during the Crusades.

Realistic espionage adventures are likely to be heavily social, with not much breaking and entering and a lot of making friends and getting people to tell what they know. They're likely to be tangled by political and diplomatic concerns as well. To *make* an espionage-centric adventure more like a contemporary international spy adventure, the GM probably needs either PCs who are exceptionally culturally adaptable or a culturally homogenous setting. For example, an empire which has fractured into parts like Three Kingdoms-era China or a cultural area like Classical Greece or Renaissance Germany which shares a language and a lot of cultural background but no overarching political structure. In such a setting, it's easier for outsiders to blend in. Small, fragmented kingdoms also have less military strength and internal structure, which increases the effectiveness of saboteurs and assassins commensurately. One other option is to set an adventure in a newly opened area, such as Spain during the Reconquista or the Near East during the Crusades.

In such a setting, just about everyone (and certainly everyone in a position of power) is a newcomer, so few foreigners are going to appear particularly conspicuous. If *everyone* is different, they'll never see you coming.

The Psionic Assassin

for the *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

The assassin has been revered and feared through fantasy role-playing game history. Over time, the roots of the assassin have been lost. Marco Polo's account of assassins proved the most fantastical, with allegations of drug use and fanatical devotion. Templar reports told of mystical powers associated with the assassins and their mysterious leader. This article seeks to restore the mystery and powers of the assassins that treats them as both an organization and a prestige class, drawing on the roots of the original term assassin: *hashishiyyin,* or "hashish-users."

There are some misconceptions about who the assassins were, and as a result they have been confused with other trained killers.

Assassins are not ninjas. Assassins differ from ninjas because they are motivated out of religious zeal. Ninjas are experts at infiltrating a target's defenses and then escaping, but assassins are content to die after completing their mission, conducting suicidal attacks on well-guarded figures even if it means being slaughtered by their victim's guards immediately after carrying out the assassination.

Assassins are not rogues. Assassins do not pick locks or pick pockets because their purpose is not to deprive their victims of their possessions, but their lives. They also do not need to pass traps or peripheral guards because the guard will probably be an assassin and learn through their disguise skills the means of avoiding said traps. The only physical conflict an assassin seeks to have with his victims is the assassination itself; his other tactics are under a guise. Assassins are motivated by the terror and fear spread by their assassinations, not out of selfish material gain. The freewheeling lifestyle of a rogue is abhorrent to an assassin, who lives a very structured life.

The Assassin Organization

In any campaign, an assassin will belong to an organization which is bent on nothing less than the total overthrow of the ruling leader to be replaced by a leader of the assassin's choosing, which is sometimes the assassin leader himself. Assassins do not believe in religious systems whatsoever in terms of worshipping any deity other than that supported by the Imam. The extreme version of this belief is the use of psionics, an internal reliance upon self that stems from their belief of the hidden knowledge of the universe. Assassins below 6th level have no qualms about imitating the dominant religious customs. Note that even higher-level assassins will put aside their own beliefs for a disguise, and will even go so far as to pose as a member of a religious order if deemed necessary.

Assassins mete out justice and threats in a manner that intimidates and frightens most foreigners as well as the local populace. The entire assassin belief system revolves around destroying what is perceived to be a heretical religious and governmental authority. Assassins are capable of penetrating the best-defended sultans, and they specialize in brutally stabbing key officials of power to cause chaos in a political structure.

Assassins sometimes operate alone, but they are rarely far from another assassin. The power of assassins lies in their ability to subvert the trusted members of an official's bodyguards and servants, and be among such in disguise. Assassins could be anyone and anywhere, from the beggar to the bodyguard, from the messenger to the scribe. The only defense against such tactics is to only allow trusted members near the potential target, but who to trust?

The weapon of assassination is ineffective against well-organized forces. For example, a knightly order cannot be disorganized by the murder of their Grand Master; if he is killed, a fellow knight immediately replaces him. Thus assassins avoid prolonged conflicts with such groups.

Curiously, assassins operate in well-organized groups themselves. When an assassin chooses to strike, it is often in concert with other assassins. This makes one or two bodyguards ineffective against five or six assassins fanatically attempting to stab their target without regard to their own lives.

Only as a last resort will assassins engage in military operations and then generally on a small scale, such as the capture of a castle or the seizure of a town from within. Their strategy is to acquire mountain castles, control the highlands, and from there dominate the plains, in this order:

1. Convert the inhabitants of the environs
2. Acquire adjacent castles
3. Erect forts at strategic points
4. Institute economic and social reforms
5. Unite the assassins by bonds of fraternity
6. Make every assassin feel he is a responsible member of the community and inseparable from it.

Assassin strongholds are exceptionally well fortified, stocked, and located such that they are nearly impenetrable by a ground force. Thus, the strongholds have no need to be secretive, as penetrating the actual structure without being invited in is nearly impossible.

In a magical campaign, assassins have to up the stakes. On one hand, there are many more ways to discover an assassin's identity. This makes an assassin's job in getting closer to a ruler more difficult, but it also changes the assassin's targets. Assassin organizations will first seek to convert those capable of detecting them. Failing that, they will assassinate all who are capable of detecting them, and then prevent any other members from joining the protected target's service. But even then, killing the spell caster who protects the intended target is no easy feat. Assassins will extensively use magic to protect their identities, most specifically *amulets of proof against detection and location.* These are not likely to be as available as amulets with *mind bar* placed in them by the Imam himself.

Assassins also work in groups. This means that assassins are likely to strike at their target simultaneously and will always be networking with other assassins for their spy network. They are never eager to reveal their presence by simply eliminating everyone in their path, if only because doing so instantly ruins the careful facade the assassin has worked for possibly months, even years, on fabricating.

The assassin's most powerful tools, in order, are intimidation, conversion, fanaticism, and assassination. Assassins rely on the paranoia generated by their unnerving ability to infiltrate any organization. Fear causes mistakes and often cows rulers into submitting to the assassins without even using a dagger.

Conversion allows assassins to achieve their scope and power. By converting supposedly loyal individuals, assassins are able to divide and conquer their enemy's forces. Because the assassin population is fanatical unto death, there are no betrayals, no hesitation, and an unswerving single-mindedness in the pursuit of their goals. If assassins were weapons, they are ticking time bombs, ready to go off at the worst moment doing as much damage as possible.

Finally, there is the assassination itself, which assassins have perfected. Most assassins are instructed to kill, but not always, and won't hesitate to maim or intimidate when it suits their purpose. This tactic is used much less because the assassin is revealed without the promise of an honorable death, and thus he is much less likely to relish his murder and carry out his duties effectively.

In a campaign, assassins should be played as terrorists of the highest order: They operate in daylight, and they are so secretive that no one can be trusted. Because assassins use disguise as well as conversion, they can be anywhere at any time. The best defense against assassins is a different culture altogether. Just as the assassins rarely chose to cross the Templars, enough racial and cultural prejudices can keep assassins at bay. Nevertheless, even foolhardy Templars fell to assassin blades.

The Psionic Assassin Prestige Class

Hit Die

d6.

Requirements

To qualify to become an assassin, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment

Assassins may be neutral or evil, but must always be lawful.

Age

Cannot be older than mature.

Gender

Assassins must be male.

Skills

Knowledge (religion) 4 ranks, Diplomacy 8 ranks, Move Silently 8 ranks.

Special

The character must offer up all his gold as a demonstration of his faith to the cause.

Class Skills

The assassin's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Autohypnosis (Wis), Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (psionics) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Open Lock (Dex), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), Tumble (Dex), Use Magic Device (Cha), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level

4 + Int modifier.

Table: The Psionic Assassin Level Base

Level	BAB	Fort	Reflex	Will	Title	Abilities
1st	+0	+0	+2	+0	Mustajib	Sneak attack +1d6, death attack, poison use, psionics
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+0	Novice	+1 save against poison, uncanny dodge
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+1	Fidai	Sneak attack +2d6
4th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Initiate	+2 save against poison, request hashish
5th	+3	+1	+4	+1		Improved uncanny dodge, sneak attack +3d6
6th	+4	+2	+5	+2		+3 save against poison

7th	+5	+2	+5	+2	Dai	Sneak attack +4d6
8th	+6	+2	+6	+2	Huja	+4 save against poison, hide in plain sight
9th	+6	+3	+6	+3		Sneak attack +5d6
10th	+7	+3	+7	+3	Imam	+5 save against poison

Class Features

All of the following are Class Features of the assassin prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency

Assassins are proficient with the crossbow (hand, light, or heavy), dagger (any type), dart, rapier, sap, shortbow (normal and composite), and short sword. Assassins are proficient with light armor but not with shields.

Sneak Attack

This is exactly like the rogue ability of the same name. The extra damage dealt increases by +1d6 every other level (1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th). If an assassin gets a sneak attack bonus from another source the bonuses on damage stack.

Death Attack

If an assassin studies his victim for 3 rounds and then makes a sneak attack with a melee weapon that successfully deals damage, the sneak attack has the additional effect of possibly either paralyzing or killing the target (assassin's choice). While studying the victim, the assassin can undertake other actions so long as his attention stays focused on the target and the target does not detect the assassin or recognize the assassin as an enemy. If the victim of such an attack fails a Fortitude save (DC 10 + the assassin 's class level + the assassin's Int modifier) against the kill effect, she dies. If the saving throw fails against the paralysis effect, the victim is rendered helpless and unable to act for 1d6 rounds plus 1 round per level of the assassin. If the victim's saving throw succeeds, the attack is just a normal sneak attack. Once the assassin has completed the 3 rounds of study, he must make the death attack within the next 3 rounds. If a death attack is attempted and fails (the victim makes her save) or if the assassin does not launch the attack within 3 rounds of completing the study, 3 new rounds of study are required before he can attempt another death attack.

Poison Use

Assassins are trained in the use of poison and never risk accidentally poisoning themselves when applying poison to a blade.

Save Bonus against Poison

The assassin gains a natural saving throw bonus to all poisons gained at 2nd level that increases by +1 for every two additional levels the assassin gains.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex)

Starting at 2nd level, an assassin retains his Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) regardless of being caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. (He still loses any Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized.) If a character gains uncanny dodge from a second class the character automatically gains improved uncanny dodge (see below).

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex)

At 5th level, an assassin can no longer be flanked, since he can react to opponents on opposite sides of him as easily as

he can react to a single attacker. This defense denies rogues the ability to use flank attacks to sneak attack the assassin. The exception to this defense is that a rogue at least four levels higher than the assassin can flank him (and thus sneak attack him). If a character gains uncanny dodge (see above) from a second class the character automatically gains improved uncanny dodge, and the levels from those classes stack to determine the minimum rogue level required to flank the character.

Request Hashish (Ex)

At 4th level, an assassin can request a single dose of magical hashish for his mission. This vial of hashish is treated like a poison. The imbiber must make a Fortitude save (DC 15). Failure inflicts 1 point of Wisdom damage. However, the imbiber gains a +2 alchemical bonus to Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution for 1d4 hours. The assassin determines the ability score affected by the magical hashish at the time of the request.

Hide in Plain Sight (Su)

At 8th level, an assassin can use the Hide skill even while being observed. As long as he is within 10 feet of some sort of shadow, an assassin can hide himself from view in the open without having anything to actually hide behind. He cannot, however, hide in his own shadow.

Psionics (Ex)

Some claim that it takes three years to train the mind, repeating the magical word AK-ZABT-I, to allow the assassin to influence others with thought alone.

Table: Assassin Psionics

Level	PP/Day	Powers Known	Max Power Level Known
1st	+0	+1	1st
2nd	+1	+2	1st
3rd	+3	+3	1st
4th	+4	+4	2nd
5th	+7	+5	2nd
6th	+11	+6	2nd
7th	+15	+7	3rd
8th	+19	+8	3rd
9th	+23	+9	3rd
10th	+27	+10	4th

Power Points/Day

An assassin's ability to manifest powers is limited by the power points he has available. In addition, he receives bonus power points per day if he has a high Wisdom score. His race may also provide bonus power points per day, as may certain feats and items. A 1st-level assassin gains no power points for his class level, but he gains bonus power points (if he is entitled to any), and can manifest the single power he knows with those power points.

Powers Known

An assassin begins play knowing one assassin power of your choice. Each time he achieves a new level, he unlocks the knowledge of a new power. Choose the powers known from the assassin power list. (Exception: The feats Expanded Knowledge and Epic Expanded Knowledge do allow an assassin to learn powers from the lists of other classes.) An assassin can manifest any power that has a power point cost equal to or lower than his manifester level. The total number of powers an assassin can manifest in a day is limited only by his daily power points. An assassin

simply knows his powers; they are ingrained in his mind. He does not need to prepare them (in the way that some spellcasters prepare their spells), though he must get a good night's sleep each day to regain all his spent power points. The Difficulty Class for saving throws against assassin powers is 10 + the power's level + the assassin's Wisdom modifier.

Maximum Power Level Known

An assassin begins play with the ability to learn 1st-level powers. As he attains higher levels, he may gain the ability to master more complex powers. To learn or manifest a power, an assassin must have a Wisdom score of at least 10 + the power's level.

Assassin Powers

1st-level Assassin Powers: biofeedback, burst, call weaponry, catfall, chameleon, conceal thoughts, control light, control object, detect psionics, distract, elfsight, empty mind, float, grip of iron, metaphysical weapon, mindlink precognition (defensive), precognition (offensive), prescience (offensive), prevenom weapon, skate, stomp, vigor.

2nd-level Assassin Powers: body adjustment, body equilibrium, body purification, darkvision (psionic), detect hostile intent, dissolving weapon, hustle, levitate (psionic), painful strike, prowess, psionic lion's charge, psionic scent, strength of my enemy, sustenance, thought shield, wall walker, clairvoyant sense, cloud mind, read thoughts.

3rd-level Assassin Powers: danger sense, escape detection, evade burst, keen edge (psionic), ubiquitous vision, vampiric blade.

4th-level Assassin Powers: energy adaptation, freedom of movement (psionic), immovability, steadfast perception, truevenom weapon, weapon of energy.

Code of Conduct

Assassins must swear to the initiating Dai not to betray him or other assassins, to be truthful with him, not to join the foes of the assassins, and to continue the outward observance of other rites. Each level is associated with a degree, where the assassin is given more and more insight into the secrets of his organization:

1st Degree: The assassin accepts the principle that the revelations of the Holy texts had a superior esoteric meaning, to understand which he requires the help of a divinely authorized interpreter (the Dai).

2nd Degree: The assassin enters the second degree when he is convinced of the error of other teachings and the need to replace private judgment by an authoritative guide (that is, the Imam or his representative).

3rd Degree: The third degree acquaints the disciple with the sacred significance of the number seven. He is informed him of the first seven assassin Imams and the esoteric names by which their intercession might be invoked. They were to be revered both for themselves and their sacred number, which was proof that the belief of the assassins is the true religion.

4th Degree: In the fourth degree the postulant learns that the divine has sent seven prophets incarnating Reason to reveal His will. Each prophet has an associate (an Imam) to interpret his revelations. The prophet was thus the recipient of divine inspiration, Imam his heir, executor, and interpreter who opened a cycle of seven Imams.

5th Degree: The fifth degree rejects revealed religion and the observances of the literal interpretation of the Holy texts, which are for the ignorant masses that could not understand assassin principles. The candidate's mathematical and numerological knowledge is deepened and its magical value stressed.

6th Degree: The sixth degree instructs the assassin to abandon overt religious observances, such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, or to perform them only if expedience requires. The Dai then expounds the teachings of great philosophers

and the superiority of philosophy over revealed religion. He urges his pupil to believe only what his reason accepts. This degree entitles the convert to become a Dai himself.

7th Degree: The seventh degree teaches the theory of the eternity of matter. Creation is not the fabrication of the non-existent but the introduction of movement, thus producing time and change.

8th Degree: The eighth degree teaches that there are two Principles, the nameless First Cause and the Second Cause. The latter is generated by a thought of the former, as the spoken word proceeds from the thought of a speaker. The Second Cause acts as intermediary between unknowable Reason and Man.

9th Degree: The ninth degree entails the study of the ancient philosophers' treatment of the soul, the heavens, and the intelligence. By this degree all faith in gods is abandoned and the assassin submits to no authority other than his own reason. Not only his world, but eighteen thousand others depends on the Imam. If he were to disappear, even for a moment, the World would spiritually cease to exist. The Divine Light is transferred to the son the moment the father dies. A minor Imam must have a relative as regent, but the Imamic line can never become extinct.

Pyramid Review

Yakuza (for *Ca$h'n Gun$*)

Designed by Ludovic Maublanc

Illustrated by Gérard Mathieu

Developed by Les Belges à Sombreros aka Cédrick Caumont & Thomas Provoost

Translated by Nicolas Doguet -- Eric Harlaux

Full-color boxed set with three character stand-ups, six plastic bases, three foam Tantos, three foam Shurikens, three sets of eight Yakuza cards (equivalent to the base set's Bullet cards), nine honor tokens, 24 banknotes, six Wound markers, six Super Kiai cards, three gang cards (one Yakuza & two Gangsters (East and West Coast), 18 Object cards (six Yakuzas & 12 Gangsters), & rules; $39.99

Everyone wants a piece of the action. The Mafia has ruled the roost for a while, but the *Yakuza* want their cut of the pie, and they brought their own foam-rubber arsenal to town.

In this supplement to *[Ca$h'n Gun$](#)*, the routine is the same. The heist went well but the same can't be said about the split, so everyone points their weapon at someone else and those who aren't bleeding or hiding like wussies under a table at the end of each round get some share of the money. But this time the stakes were higher, the take was bigger (there are more bills in the stack each round), and the operation took the combined efforts of three groups: East and West Coast gangsters, and the mysterious Yakuza.

The object of the game is to make the most money for one's criminal faction by the end of the eighth round.

Basic game play isn't changed much, but they've added plenty of new rules starting with three new characters collectively called the Yakuza. Everyone plays for a team now, sitting in alternating positions so their enemies are on either side of them. The Japanese express their displeasure through two new weapons: the tanto and the shuriken. The tanto is a small sword (unless it's stuck in one's gut -- seems pretty hefty then) that can only be used on the gangster to the yakuza's immediate left or right. If the target bows out or gets shot, though, the tanto is automatically redirected to the next criminal in that direction -- possibly a fellow yakuza.

The other option is the shuriken; these throwing stars are how the yakuza get some range on their enemies. The wielder stands behind his chair and throws it (a rule that surprises no one) at the offending character standup of his choice. If the portrait card is knocked over the gangster takes a wound, though an errant star could do unexpected damage to others. The Yakuza cards are a little dissimilar from Bullet cards, replacing "Clicks" with "Clings" (the "clanging" noise of dropping the weapon), Bang!s with Tantos, and Bang! Bang! Bang!s with Shurikens (a yakuza wields his tanto until he reveals his shuriken card). Since their weapons are difficult to master, the yakuza have some leeway with their withdrawals. The first time they chicken out they get a special wound token with a severed finger on one side; only on their second, dishonorable retreat do they flip the marker to its wounded side.

Not to be outdone by foreign elements of the underworld, the gangsters step up their own game with the shotgun. This

dandy item (yes, another foam weapon, this one in two jig-cut pieces) is gained as one of the Super Power cards; it can be aimed at one player or pointed between two of them in hopes of catching multiple enemies in the blast. Wound tokens are thrown at the targets like dice, and if the bandage side comes up that character is laid low for the round. The yakuza counter powers of their own, though theirs are called Super Kiai. Some simply duplicate abilities available to gangsters, whereas others are a little different: The Kamikaze, for instance, detonates a vest of dynamite as he dies, but unlike the grenade he wounds only those on either side of him.

Finally, for a really fast game, Asmodee Editions has added Objects: devices and toys that make for a truly lethal or short game. The Laser Beam, for example, lets a gangster wound not only his target but anyone aiming at him as well, and yakuza can use a Smoke Grenade to end the round early without further wounds or rewards.

The new foam weapons are every bit as cool as the originals. A diagram on putting the tantos together would help (the handguard is pulled down over the "blade," not up the handle), but they all feel good in the hand, are built to last, and come in glaring orange. There's even a caution about using pieces not manufactured by them, which is probably the first instance of a consumer warning about unauthorized foam-rubber weapons. The markers and cards must be drawn from the same manufacturing pool as those used in the core game, and this time they follow through on the promise of two plastic stands for each of the character cards. The rules suffer a little from translation issues, but it's more an annoyance than a production problem (it's why the text sometimes refers to *Yakuzas* (the original French title) instead of *Yakuza*).

The good and bad news is more people can play (up to nine) but you need at least six. A round table to play at helps immensely. The undercover cop rules tragically have no parallel here. The shuriken rules sound complex when you read them, but in practice they're pretty easy. A bigger issue for some will be the uncertainty of actually having to throw the stars, adding a dexterity element to what is otherwise a game of outthinking one's opponents. Teams do add a lot of diplomacy and new strategy (bulking the playing time back up to 30 minutes) so the game is a little less breezy, but it's still a whole lot of fun and it packs, along with drop-dead cool weapons, a new brand of tension.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Ticket to Ride: Switzerland

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Alan R. Moon

Illustrated by Julien Delval

Full-color bxed set with 46 Destination Cards, Board, & Eight-Page Multi-Lingual Rule Booklet; $25

Ticket to Ride: Switzerland is the latest edition to the *[Ticket to Ride](#)* family, and like *[Ticket to Ride: USA 1910,](#)* it is not another full game like *Ticket to Ride: Europe* or *[Ticket to Ride: Märklin,](#)* but another expansion. What *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* offers is a whole new board or country to play across, one that has previously only been available as a board in *[Ticket to Ride: The Computer Game.](#)* It comes packaged in a flat album-sized box that contains just the board, the rules, and a new set of Destination Tickets. This means that a set of Train cards, scoring markers, and Train pieces from *Ticket to Ride* or *Ticket to Ride: Europe* are needed to play. The cards from *Ticket to Ride: 1910* can also be used, but the Train pieces will have come from somewhere else. Because its distribution of Train cards is different, *Ticket to Ride: Märklin* is not considered compatible with *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland.*

What really sets *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* apart from the *Ticket to Ride* family is that it is designed for either two or three players only. In addition it adds a new type of Destination Ticket and a new way to play the Locomotive (or wild) Train cards, all tied into the numerous tunnel routes which were first seen in *Ticket to Ride: Europe.*

The first thing you notice about this expansion is the board. It a gorgeous piece of work, depicting Switzerland and its cities and routes, surrounded by the nations of Deutschland, Österreich, Italia, and France. These are not mere window dressing, but destinations in themselves that the players can connect to by claiming routes across their respective borders. The new cards are as equally nice, although everything does feel a little too like a chocolate box.

The simplest new rule for *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* is a reduction in the number of Train pieces each player starts the game with: 40 instead of the usual 45. A player also receives more Destination Tickets: five as opposed to three. Of these he must keep two. Any rejected Destination Tickets -- including those rejected after drawing more during play -- are discarded from the game completely, thus making it possible to run out of Destination Tickets during a game.

Of the 46 Destination Tickets, 34 connect two cities. The remaining 12 connect a city to another country or one country to another. The points scored for either of these new types of Destination Tickets varies and depends upon the country connected to. For example, completing the Zürich-to-country Destination Ticket scores a player just three points if he claims a route connecting to Deutschland, seven points to either France or Österreich, and 11 points if claims a route between Zürich and Italia. If a player does not connect either destination then he loses only the lowest point value for that Destination card (so in the previous example, only three points). Harder and longer routes score more points, of course, but these new city-to-country and country-to-country Destination Tickets make it easier for a player to score points, especially later in the game when a player draws extra Destination Tickets.

The way in which the Locomotive Train (or wild) cards are used in *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* is radically different to that of the standard game. In ordinary *Ticket to Ride,* only one face-up Locomotive card can be drawn per turn and it is the only card that can be drawn on a turn. Here they are drawn as standard cards, so two Locomotive cards can be picked up on a turn. Once in a player's hand, Locomotive cards can only be played to claim tunnel routes, either using

all Locomotive cards or combining with Train cards matching the tunnel's color.

The last rule previously appeared in *Ticket to Ride: Europe* and concerns the tunnel routes, which are clearly marked with dots along their sides. To claim a tunnel route a player first pays the correct number of Train cards, either in the matching color, in Locomotive cards, or a mix of both. He then draws the top three cards from the draw pile. For each of these three that match the color of the cards used to claim the route, the player must an extra Train card of that color. If the player has no extra cards of this color, he receives his original cards back and his turn ends. He or another player can claim this tunnel route on subsequent turns, but either is still subject to what is the chance of having to pay a tunnel tax.

The first challenge with playing this expansion is answering the question, "Where the heck is . . . ?" After all, Swiss geography is not going to be familiar to everyone and learning the routes is a whole new challenge by itself. Looking at the board it is clear that this geography is dominated by tunnels (well, this *is* Switzerland), mostly in the South and East. About a quarter of the tunnels are gray, meaning that any color can be used to claim them, and the majority of gray routes are tunnels.

The second challenge is one that only happens in *Ticket to Ride* with five or six players: competing for routes. In a game with two or three players, there is usually very little competition and the game can feel as if everyone is playing alone. Not so with *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland,* where there are not only fewer routes, but everyone has fewer Trains to place. Within the borders of Switzerland each city is usually connected by at least three routes, but most routes are quite short so it is easy to block access or at least force a player to find another route. This is slightly offset by the city-to-country and country-to-country Destination cards which provide multiple choices in terms of routes and scoring.

Initially, a game of *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* lasts about an hour, but with practice our games now last less than this. What we did find is that routes were harder to claim and that there was more competition for them, and because Locomotive cards are no longer available for use as wild cards (except in tunnels), we accumulated fistfuls of Train cards as we waited to get the ones we needed. In fact, we wanted a means of displaying Train cards as easily they are in the computer game, ideally some sort of display tray. The other issue we have is one of packaging. The new slimmer box is a great idea, but there is actually very little room in the bottom of the box for the new Destination cards. The need for components from another game in the series also adds to the set up time, but this is a minor inconvenience.

Given that we only host our gaming group once a week or so, *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* has become the game of choice whenever my partner and I want to play a good, competitive two-player game. And that is where this expansion primarily succeeds: making the smaller and shorter game more competitive and more of a challenge. The other area where it succeeds is in format, offering a new play area without making the purchaser buy a whole new version of *Ticket to Ride.* In fact, my partner commented on this and suggested that it would be even better if future expansions in this format could have a double-sided board and offer two countries to compete over. After all, other train games have done it. There are of course, problems with such a format, in particular the need for two sets of Destination Tickets, but it is an idea . . .

Not only better priced then, *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* offers new means to play in the city-to-country and country-to-country cards, a new country to compete for, and a greater degree of competition. These reasons will make it a perfect purchase for both the long time *Ticket to Ride* fan and the owner of one of the *Ticket to Ride* core games (*Ticket to Ride* or *Ticket to Ride: Europe*), who will appreciate everything it offers without the need for a whole new game.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

The 1960s with the Internet Wouldn't Be the 1960s

Imagine a world that's exactly like our own, except there's a class of people who can shoot energy beams from their eyes, or fireballs from their hands. Or can turn invisible. Or fly. And these abilities are known by the general public to exist.

If you're sufficiently clever and/or cynical, this should be a very tough assignment. This is especially true if those abilities have been around for any length of time, and society has had a chance to react. Yet this is the view taken by many Supers campaigns set in the real world, or magical fantasy campaigns in a vaguely Europe-y medieval society. In many cases, little to no consideration is given to how unusual abilities would alter the fabric of society, except possibly with regards to the field of battle.

As a minor example, consider the humble light spell, a low-powered favorite in most sword-and-sorcery settings. With a duration that measures hours, such a spell could change the course of the medieval world. After all, until the invention of permanent, reliable, and safe light sources, most places during the dark ages shut up tight as a drum when the sun went down. The ability for a few lightsmiths to set up some streetlights or areas of illumination would allow some or all of the town to continue activity into the wee hours; imagine a world that suddenly has 20-50% more "light" time for creative studies, research, or other advancement of society. Or imagine a modern world where some otherwise normal-seeming humans can shoot laser beams from their eyes; would any prudent world leader get within 100 yards of anyone who hasn't passed a thousand different security checks?

Curiously, the difficulties of maintaining realism with new abilities or powers isn't a phenomenon that's limited to the supernatural world. For example, as of a decade ago the omnipresence of cell phones has led to the need for any modern-mystery novelist to address why the devices can't be used in certain circumstances or situations (car chases, scenes of extreme danger, and the like). No doubt many other potential exciting situations have been rendered more difficult or impossible owing to the commonplace nature of phones with cameras ("How will I remember what the suspect looked like? Oh, right." <CLICK!>) and Internet connectivity ("The killer taunted us by mentioning a monkey shrine. How will we possibly learn more about that?" "Google 'monkey shrine' plus zip code . . ."). I suspect mystery-novel settings have much worse cell phone reception than our own world, where the guy who walks beside me into the lead-lined elevator is able to continue on with his scintillating Conversation About Nothing for as long as he is within my eye- and earshot. Similarly the rise of forensics medicine has changed the perception of crime drama such that it's quite difficult for modern-set stories not to deal with DNA evidence, blood-splatter patterns, and enough TV shows about forensic scientists to fill more hours of viewing than real scientists have actually spent doing real forensic science.

Still, for the most part, it's a common trend to drop down anachronistic or fantastic elements into otherwise known settings. And how these elements react or fail to do with the world can stretch credulity past a breaking point for some gamers. Now, for many gaming groups, such considerations don't matter. But for those whose suspensions of disbelief are a bit less forgiving, the need to allow both the fantastic element *and* the lack of side effects of that element on a world is just too much. Even worse, ignoring these implications can lead to rich and interesting game worlds being discarded or ignored. As one example, many fantasy, sci-fi, and super campaigns have the ability to see into the future as an ability that some folks have, and for the most part this is merely presented as one of those snazzy abilities that allows for a skill check to gain useful info. But in the real world, such an ability would almost certainly have very different effects; see *Minority Report* as an example of a world radically different because of a form of precognition much more limited than what's tossed around in many special ability packages in some games. (For those who like more buttered popcorn with their time travel visions, check out *Paycheck,* whose story core is based on another scribbling of Philip K. Dick, the same genius that devised the essence of *Minority Report.*[1])

Next week I'll look at a few ways to address the need (or lack thereof) to address the implications of fantastic elements on a game world. As a thought exercise, though, consider what a game world would be like if special powers were given some logical impact and implications; consider how such abilities could either change the world or be changed to more closely match the themes of the genre. (For example, one major theme of England's Industrial Revolution is

omnipresent pollution. Consider how a clean source of energy -- such as magic in a fantasy-steampunk setting -- would have changed the game world. Conversely, consider what would happen if magic were as equally pollutive -- if not more so -- than coal or other dirty fuel sources: "Behold the fireball! <KOFF KOFF WHEEZE!> I can't see anything!") Who knows? Such mental gymnastics might provide the inspiration for a new adventure, character, or even campaign setting.

--Steven Marsh

[1] The ghost of Philip K. Dick refuses any responsibility for *Paycheck.* Said spirit also doesn't give a tinker's cuss that Your Humble Editor kinda enjoyed the movie for what it was.

A Stampede of Centaurs

"The fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to 't
With a more riotous appetite.
Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
Though women all above;
But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
Beneath is all the fiends'."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* IV:vi:122-127

As he has the disturbing habit of doing, Shakespeare has hit the mark again. We'll follow the hoofprints of these Thessalian beasts past "riotous appetite," "the soiled horse," division, women, and even "the fiends." Yes, it's another trip to the Weirdness Zoo, so stay with the tour group . . . and whatever you do, don't feed the centaurs.

"Far were the Graces when the mother bore -- ne'er such a mother, ne'er such a son -- her babe of monstrous breed, who had no honor amongst men nor in the laws of Heaven. She reared him up and named him Kentauros, and the Magnesian mares knew him as their mate by Pelion's ridges; and that strange race was born, like to both parents, their mother's form below, their sire's above."
-- Pindar, Pythian Ode 2:1

Pindar, writing around 475 B.C., gives us the above, our first literary description of the half-man, half-horse centaur. (Homer and Hesiod mention centaurs earlier, but as we shall see in a bit, thereby hangs a tale.) Visual depictions of the centaur go back at least 300 years in Greece, and possibly another thousand in Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamian centaur (not unreasonably) came in with the first horse-nomad empire in the region, that of the Kassites. Kassite boundary steles depict traditional centaurs, winged centaurs, and centaurs with two heads (often human and draconic) and two tails (likewise). A particularly confused-looking specimen has a scaled body, horses' legs, eagles' wings, a human head and torso (complete with bow and arrows), a backward-facing lion head (from the human neck), and a scorpion tail. Terra-cotta centaurs in Cyprus from around 550 B.C. depict centaurs with bulls' horns, among other variations. Moreover, plenty of Greek vase paintings show centaurs with fully human bodies and the horse barrel and hindquarters extending from the human half's back. Only after Pindar writes (and, probably more importantly, after Phidias sculpts proper "horse legs-man arms" centaurs on the pediment of the Parthenon) do centaurs become "fixed" in the familiar pattern.

Pindar's etymology of the centaurs' name (sons of Kentauros) is even less fixed, especially now. The standard derivation seems to be from the Greek *kentein tauros,* or "prickers of bulls." (In this context, *kenteo* can be translated as "stab," "spear," "goad," "sting," or, inevitably, "phallus.") In 1910, a clever German philologist suggested rather a derivation from *kentein aura,* or "prickers of cloud" (or fog, or dew, or moisture generally), implying that the original centaurs were water-spirits. (Kentauros' mother was Nephele, a cloud given the form of Hera, which makes another explanation plausible in this context.) Other creative folks have gone farther afield yet. Robert Graves suggested a connection with *centuria,* or "hundred-man unit," which is weak even for him, and Latin to boot. Borges was fond of the derivation from the Sanskrit Gandharvas, the horsemen of the sun, which has euphony but no history to recommend it. Not that anyone asked me, but I think the real horse to back (as it were) in this question is the derivation from the Thracian *kent-avros,* meaning "lover of the swift," or possibly (ahem) "lover of horses."

"As soon as we saw our horsemen we fell on the enemy so vigorously that, caught between the horsemen and ourselves, they soon fled. The Indians thought at that time that the horse and rider were one creature, for they had never seen a horse before."
-- Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*

Of course, by the time Pindar wrote, barely any Greeks bothered to believe in centaurs at all. Some authorities (especially the city-dwelling authorities) believed that bestiality-spawned horse-human hybrids might lurk back in the hill country, but even that rationalization became the target of Plutarch's gentle mockery. Plutarch's rough contemporary Lucretius pointed out that the horse half of a centaur would be fully grown while the human half was

still a mewling infant, and by the time the human half had matured, the horse half would be dead. Lucretius explained centaurs like he explained mermaids, as the result of "films" or images entering the mind through the eye. (In other words, people made things up and believed they saw them.) Other scholars, such as Palaephatos (a contemporary of Aristotle), went with the "prickers of bulls" explanation, considering the Kentauroi to be ancient Thessalian cowboys. This is pretty much what any killjoy classicist who bothers about the question has decided, too -- that the centaurs weren't "man-horses" but horsemen, probably (like the Kassites in Mesopotamia) the first horse-nomads to hit the Greek cities. In this reading, the Achaeans responded much as the Aztecs and Incas (or at least some of them, according to Diaz) did to the Spaniards: by considering the man on horseback as a composite monster, and probably for much the same reason.

"Boundless the Centaur raged; till one and all
The heroes rose, and dragg'd him from the hall;
His nose they shorten'd, and his ears they slit,
And sent him sober'd home, with better wit.
Hence with long war the double race was cursed,
Fatal to all, but to the aggressor first."
-- Homer, *Odyssey,* XXI (trans. Alexander Pope)

This explanation gets some juice from the first echo of the centaurs in Greek literature, as barbaric invaders and rapists. Homer refers to the centaurs in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as *pheres,* or "beasts," with no imputation of hybrid nature. (But with some hints of man-eating, like the mares of Diomedes of Thrace.) He discusses the "Kentauromachia," or the war between the centaurs and the Lapiths of Thessaly, which began (according to tradition) at the wedding of Theseus' boon companion Peirithous. A centaur guest got drunk and attempted to kidnap the bride, and the centaurs managed to thoroughly bloody the Lapiths' hometown heroes until Theseus showed up to straoighten things out. As I mentioned above, the war between centaurs and Lapiths was important enough for Phidias to carve it into the Parthenon (along with the war between the Athenians and the Amazons). Heracles likewise ran into centaur trouble when he opened a jar of wine and attracted hordes of centaurs to the smell. Heracles' host at the time was Pholos, one of the few "good centaurs" in Greek legend, the other being the more-famous Chiron, teacher of both Achilles and Aesklepios, who was a byword for wisdom rather than traditional centaurine rapacity. He was usually depicted as a human-legged kind of centaur, and was not a son of Kentauros, but of Kronos. Heracles' centaur massacre accidentally claimed the life of both Chiron and Pholos, and no doubt the centaurs considered it rough justice that Heracles should himself die from the blood of the centaur Nessos, poisoned by Heracles' own arrow.

With the death of their killer Heracles, the centaurs departed the Greek mainstage, to leave little but rude skepticism behind, as we saw earlier. Despite the best efforts of the skeptics (and of Heracles), a trickle of centaurs continued down the ages. Pliny records the birth of a centaur in Thessaly around 50 A.D. In the same time frame, Roman officials in Egypt captured a live centaur, one of a small herd that roamed the mountain city of Saune in Arabia. (Like its centaurs, Saune has remained frustratingly elusive since, although Phlegon reports that it is the source of a "deadly drug.") Although they fed it on raw meat, it died in captivity, so the prefect of Egypt ordered it preserved in honey and sent to Rome, where visitors to the Emperor Hadrian a century later could see it. In 341 A.D., St. Paul of Thebes also saw a centaur in the Egyptian desert, although St. Paul himself was unsure whether it was a centaur or the Devil. Further east yet, our old buddy Sir John Mandeville describes the centaurs of Bactria, or as he calls them, the "hippotaynes" of "Bacharia." Like the Greek centaurs, they eat human flesh, but Mandeville's hippotaynes live in both water and land. (Score one for German philology!) There were enough sightings of "onacentaurs," or donkey-men, that they made the cut for the standard medieval bestiaries. In 1254, about a (human) lifetime before Mandeville travelled, a centaur was born in Verona -- talk about your star-crossed lovers.

"There is in the northern and farther part of Ulster, namely in Kenelcunill, a certain people which is accustomed to appoint its king with a rite altogether outlandish and abominable. When the whole people of that land has been gathered together in one place, a white mare is brought forward into the middle of the assembly. He who is to be inaugurated . . . has bestial intercourse with her before all, professing himself to be a beast also. . . . When this unrighteous rite has been carried out, his kingship and dominion have been conferred."
-- Giraldus Cambrensis, *History and Topography of Ireland*

Readers of delicate sensibilities may want to skim this next bit. Even Robert Graves glides past this section on his way to mapping out the endless iterations of the mare-goddess across Indo-Europe: Demeter, Leucippe (who appears as a daughter killed by centaur-slaughtering Heracles, as a cannibal, and as the mother of Priam of centaur-allied Troy), Rhiannon, the Muses, Lady Godiva, and of course the Gallic goddess Epona. Who the Pseudo-Plutarch, as it happens, claims was the daughter of one Fulvius Stellus ("yellow star") by a white mare. Gallic coins of the period show a mare-centaur, implying that this is more than just crude Roman slander. More decorously, Ovid tells a heart-tugging tale of two monogamous centaur lovers who die together in the Centauromachia. But even there, lustmord enters into the tale. Regardless of what Ovid or Graves would elide, the connection between centaurs and unnatural sex -- including rape, bestiality, erotic drowning, and sex with a cloud -- remains in the myths.

"Warm sand flowed round him. Blurts of crimson light
Splashed the white grains like blood. Past the cave's mouth
Shone with a large fierce splendor, wildly bright,
The crooked constellations of the South;
Here the Cross swung; and there, affronting Mars,
The Centaur stormed aside a froth of stars."
-- Stephen Vincent Benét, "Portrait of a Boy"

How much more edifying to turn our gaze upward, where two centaurs reside among the stars: the constellations Centaurus and Sagittarius. Sagittarius has been a beast-man with a bow since Babylonian times, settling into centaur form right around the same time Pindar settled the centaur's terrestrial form. (Do the centaurs, extirpated by Heracles' bow, appreciate the irony of becoming the Archer in the zodiac?) Centaurus wasn't discovered by the Greeks until relatively late, entering the skies during the Ptolemaic period. Both have been identified with Chiron, who is delightfully credited with inventing constellations as a navigational aid for Jason. Chiron's father Saturn, intriguingly, produces disasters and madness in Sagittarius; Mars (associated with the centaur-god Pabilsag in Babylon) is if anything even worse.

"A file of Centaurs galloped in the space
Between the bank and cliff, well armed with arrows,
Riding as once on earth they rode to the chase.
And seeing us descend, that straggling band
Halted, and three of them moved out toward us,
Their long bows and their shafts already in hand.
And one of them cried out while still below:
'To what pain are you sent down that dark coast?
Answer from where you stand, or I draw the bow.'"
-- Dante Alighieri, *Inferno,* XII:55-63

Chiron also famously gave up his immortality to restore Prometheus, and used his healing arts to bring Peleus (father of Achilles, and a centaur-battler in his own right) back from the dead. Greek art depicts centaurs as the mount of Psyche, the soul, and as mounting up to the skies on storm-clouds. (The parallel with the horse-maiden Valkyries obtrudes here.) The centaurs ride along the boundaries: not merely between civilization and barbarism, between man and animal, between natural and unnatural, but between life and death. They are psychopomps and psychagogues, guides and guardians of the dead. Homer puts Leucippe (the "white horse") in the company of Persephone (the daughter of the mare-goddess Demeter) when she is abducted (centaur-fashion) by Hades into the underworld. Virgil (followed by Dante) puts the centaurs into Hades as guardians of the doors of the dead. Ixion, the father of Kentauros, is one of Tartarus' most decorative denizens, and the redoubtable Graves comes roaring back to inform us of an Etruscan depiction of Ixion associated with the hallucinogenic amanita mushroom. Phlegon's "deadly drug" of Saune? Chiron's plant lore (and Heracles' madness, and his death by fiery poisonous centaur-blood) takes an interesting turn, and the centaurs, apparently, guide us to all the otherworlds.

"Anybody who has seen an Onokentauros would never have doubted that the race of Kentauroi once existed, and that artificers did not falsify nature, but that time produced these creatures by blending dissimilar bodies into one. But whether in fact they came into being and visited us at one and the same period, or whether rumor, more ductile than

any wax . . . fashioned them and by some miraculous combination fused the halves of horse and a man while endowing them with a single soul."
-- Aelian, *On Animals*

Lycophron, writing in the 3rd century B.C., blames the Sirens for killing the last centaurs by luring them to starvation in the Libyan desert. This sets up another interesting opposition: between poetry and barbarism, or between recorded history and . . . nothing. When the Kassites brought the centaur into Mesopotamia, they ushered in a Dark Age. (The Kassite sub-capital of Nippur became a fane of the centaur god Pabilsag.) Not one single Kassite inscription survives: we have a little under 300 words, total, of the Kassite language, including names of horses. And in Greece, the same thing: the centaurs arrive at the close of the Heroic Age and war against the last heroes until the Mycenaean fall brings darkness for 400 years. A centaur appears in the desert -- and Rome falls. (Did embalming the centaur of Saune preserve the Empire?) The centaurs peek through one last time in the late 13th century -- the next 100 years see "the disastrous fourteenth century" of plague, famine, and continent-wide war in Europe. Are these the Centaurs of the Apocalypse? The centaurs the Aztecs saw would seem to make it so. The centaurs are sheer roiling chaos, bestial unmaking. They are the grandchildren of murderous Ixion and a Yog-Sothothic "cloud in human shape," and they bring perversion, cannibalism, and poison in their wake. They are where monster meets man, and their arrows have lodged in a twelfth of the sky. Look up, and listen for the hooves.

Pyramid Review

Carnival of Tears

Published by [Paizo Publishing](#)

Designed by Tim Hitchcock & Nicolas Logue

Developed & edited by Jason Bulmahn, Mike McArtor, & Jeremy Walker

Art & cartography by Drew Pocza, Jonathan Wayshack, John Gravato, Wayne Reynolds, & Rob Lazzaretti

32-page full-color softcover; $12.99

Roleplaying games are at their best when they run the gamut of emotions. Long separated from their simple hack-and-slash roots, they can now tell a story full of hope and horror, humor and drama. There's definitely a different feel to Paizo's GameMastery module E1: *Carnival of Tears,* one that may have the reader squirming a bit in his chair.

Namdrin Quinn was once a half-elven criminal who felt the world owed him a living (now he's still a half-elf, just not a crooked one). His life was turned around when the law caught up to him in the form of Tessa Kelrand, a beautiful constable who helped him onto the straight and narrow. The two were married, but their long and storied careers as partners in adventure (apparently a more civilized form of looting) came to an end with her death.

The half-elf gradually became proprietor of (and perhaps a father figure of sorts to) the various personalities inhabiting what is now Quinn's Carnival, an enterprise he originally secreted himself in to mourn. An early winter has come to Falcon's Hollow (a logging town GameMastery buyers might remember from module D1: ***Crown of the Kobold King***), and with it the much-anticipated carnival. Even as the heroes avail themselves of the amusements therein, something horrible lurks behind the surrounding countryside.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Quinn's situation may in some ways be less Shakespearian, but at this point it's not terribly noble, either. The love of his life wasn't killed, she was stolen from him by the fey and her purloined soul placed into a gem. He fell into despair, found some sort of solace with the circus folk, and eventually took over the operation, making it once again profitable. Dead inside, he only went through the motions on behalf of those on his payroll . . . until now.

The logging town has incurred the wrath of the local fey population through years of careless deforestation, and they've planned something big. Syntira, their local representative, was content to sabotage the town's festival, but her plans have been upset by the Cold Rider. This dark and menacing figure isn't just going to harass the denizens; he's going to kill each and every one of them, and by hook and crook has Syntira's subjects doing the dirty work for him. She summons the player characters and implores them to help her stop the horrors to come. She helps them see the whole carnival for what it now is, with booths and purveyors perverted to do the Cold Rider's ghastly, murderous bidding. Quinn's assistance would be invaluable in a situation like this, but he's been told (read: extorted) that if he sits this out, the imprisoned soul of his beloved will be returned to him.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The artwork takes a dark turn to keep up with the storyline, and it's evocative stuff. Some of the choices made

regarding the appendices are out of place; one expects some of the details in the main text (like Quinn's stats) to end up with the rest of the reference material, for example. There's already a lot going on at the back of the book as far as descriptions of the new creatures, but this story demands bookkeeping of the GM, with a timeline to be followed. The reference section here is shorter than some of the previous GameMastery modules; surely things that could see use throughout the story could all have been pushed there. It would have been better to have Quinn and the timeline and so forth at the back, even if it made the adventure seem shorter.

This tale makes rather clever reuse of Falcon's Hollow, so the story continuity gives bonus points. It's compelling stuff, but it's not engaging enough. The team can wander about the event as they please -- there's no set order, so calling the adventure linear isn't fair -- but members aren't called upon to think much. They must outwit several varied opponents, but many plot points are just handed to the players without the need for their in-game personae to work for them (outside of witnessing the narrative and beating up the appropriate enemies). The good news is, given the icky obstacles they face, there's no denying they'll very much feel like the heroes (unless they fail . . . then the fate of all concerned is spelled out in depressing detail).

It's certainly a fantasy adventure, but *Carnival of Tears* comes with a word of warning. It's not for the fainthearted. It deals in some pretty unpleasant events and, while it doesn't go out of its way to spell out every graphic detail, the gruesome aspects are there. This isn't the sort of thing you want to employ with the younger members of the gaming group, but those seeking action without some of the fantasy sugar-coating should be pleased.

--Andy Vetromile

The Omniscient Eye

Can You Conceive of a Crop a Colony Can Cultivate Collectively but Can't Keep a Couple Colonists Content?

I'm delighted and amazed how quickly you answer. Am I the only one to use you as a campaign planning think-tank? Here is the next one:

I want to describe a planet where a small population is concentrated in one small area. Small is relative, of course; I'm thinking about four million people living on 400,000 square miles. Still, human nature suggests that individualists, loners, and malcontents would colonize the next valley and the next continent sooner or later. History and politics are part of my explanation, since the colony started from the starport and the central government was in charge from day one, but I need something stronger to make it credible . . .

Can you imagine a crop that can only be raised by the collective effort of an entire village, but not by a homesteading family?

Other people do use the Omniscient Eye as a think-tank, but you do seem to pose more questions than most.

What, that wasn't the question? And the Eye thought it would be able to knock off early this week . . .

How Do You Keep Them Down On The Farm After They've Seen Rigel VII?

To some extent, this gets into issues of technical support and how to establish and sustain a colony. We'll assume a setting where the society in question can't superscience its way out of its problems: no total conversion power plants providing unlimited energy, no genetic engineering miracles creating superfoods that can grow on rock and the vapor water in the atmosphere, no home-based nanofactories cranking out complex machinery for free, and no friendly robots do to all the hard work for you. Agriculture still requires significant human intervention.

On the other hand, the setting has, at least potentially, technology as good as or better than ours. After all, there's that starport, which is better than we've got. Consequently, we'll assume that they can produce farm equipment which, while perhaps more efficient and requiring less maintenance than in our world, would be recognizable to the modern farmer. They've also got at least theoretical access to good selective breeding programs and information about genetic engineering, though not necessarily all the resources to capitalize on them. Four million people is a sizable city and its surrounding suburbs (say, the San Francisco Bay Area excluding San Jose, metropolitan Phoenix, or Cleveland and Cincinnati combined). It's enough for survival, but it almost certainly lacks the resources to support cutting-edge technologies. You might reconsider the area they're spread out over, though; 400,000 square miles is about the size of Texas and New Mexico combined, which, as anyone who has ever driven through them can tell you, is a *lot* of area for loners to get lost in.

One of the big obstacles to answering this question is that we have to come up with a reason why they can't use the tried-and-true crops which have gotten us to where we are today. Ignoring for the moment things like farm machinery, trade for non-agricultural goods, and the rest of the social and economic structure which provide the farmer with the tools he needs, basically every staple crop known to humanity is one in which a properly constituted family can be self-sufficient, and that's something which would only become more pronounced with better technology. Although a modern Western family farmer is most likely to raise cash crops rather than subsistence crops, he *could* produce

enough to support a small community on his own, let alone himself and his immediate relatives.

There are some ways around this. Naturally occurring blights might make traditional staple crops unfeasible. Even if the GM is reluctant to make a blanket prohibition against all traditional crops, corn and potatoes, which have higher yields per area than wheat and barley, are good ones to limit. Other crops could be made less productive as well. For one thing, they may simply not grow well in alien soil, though like creating blights, that may seem a bit arbitrary, so we'll look at more real-world limits on agricultural production.

Das Kapital

One thing to consider is crops and production processes which might be carried out by an individual or family on a year-by-year basis but require long-term commitments to start or maintain. The literally classical examples of "capital-intensive" resources are olive trees and grape vines, both of which take years of growing before they start producing fruit. Other trees which approached the importance of staple crops in some areas include chestnuts, which have been particularly important in the poor highlands of Italy; and acorns, which fed many Native American groups (though as hunter-gatherers and early horticulturalists, they probably didn't directly cultivate those trees). And that's ignoring the full range of fruit and nut trees! A high-tech society in search of a viable non-grain food source might try to grow its own forests, particularly with the aid of a bit of perfectly non-cinematic breeding and genetic engineering to make them more suitable to the alien soil.

Of course, those aren't the only capital-intensive resources. Many aren't even crops. In dry Mesopotamia, feeding the growing population and expanding into the plentiful and potentially fertile land beyond the rivers themselves required the construction of extensive networks of canals to water the crops. These required both a great deal of communal labor to get them dug and maintained and a significant level of central control to make sure that water flowed through all parts of the system. Though the power and significance of "hydraulic empires" has been overstated in fiction, there are nevertheless political implications of exactly the sort which would both create and frustrate dissidents. Poor rainfall alone could justify sharp geographical limits to the extent of colonization. If water on this planet were, say, mostly underground and had to be pumped out at great initial expense for drilling, communities could expand only as fast as wells could be dug. Certain kinds of grain cultivation require occasional large bursts of effort. In hilly areas of southeast Asia, hillsides must be cut into terraces every several years in order to bring new land under cultivation for rice and allow exhausted soil to recover. The Aztecs built artificial islands along the shores of lakes to produce large quantities of maize.

The GM can turn the colony's relatively high technology into another capital-sink. Indeed, a modern farmer's relatively high productivity is mostly due to other people's labor. A farmer with modern tools would still be far less effective without modern fertilizers, which in turn depend on readily available or convertible sources of soil nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Nitrogen-based fertilizer compounds are typically created by processes which involve natural gas, while the others require mineral deposits rich in those two elements. If the colony in question doesn't have access to ample fossil fuel reserves or phosphorus and potassium mines, farm productivity goes down considerably. A poor water supply, a lack of nutrients in the soil, or too many chemicals unfriendly to plant life which would be difficult to remove (say, an excess of salt) would limit the use of traditional crops as well.

Indeed, poor (or, at least, unsuitable) soil alone may be what keeps the population close together without resorting to exotic crops. Without modern chemistry and a supply of nutrient chemicals, bad soil could make crop yields drop below a viable level to support a population without serious soil enrichment. If the colony and its industrial capacity are sitting on top of the planet's only exploitable source of phosphorus, the loner can never break away from the colony entirely. Indeed, if he's off poking in the dirt on his own rather than holding down a real job, he may be completely unable to buy the necessary chemicals to make his patch of land bloom or hire transport to take it to his location. (There's a related example of this in the literature: In Larry Niven's *Destiny's Road,* humans have colonized a planet severely deficient in potassium, a necessary trace element in the human diet. A small group holds a monopoly on the only known source of potassium, giving them similar political and economic power.)

And, of course, there are manufactured items: tractors, plows, combine harvesters, the fuel to keep them going, and the parts and know-how to keep them maintained. It might not be *impossible* for smart, highly motivated, and initially

well-funded loners to keep a subsistence farm going if the colony were concentrating its technical know-how on making durable and maintainable goods (not unlikely if they're not being regularly respelled from an outside industrial base), but a restricted industrial base does make it harder to establish an independent existence. Moreover, a single family may lack the medical know-how and supplies to keep its members active in case of illness or accident. One bad fall or accidental fire at the wrong time could destroy the loner's ability to support himself.

The point of all of these is that the prospective loner can't just walk away with last year's harvest and live off of it until next year's harvest is in. Even if he does spend some extra time going off into the wilderness and starting his own chestnut forest or irrigation well, he is, first of all, tied to his original location until such time as he can get it into production, a period of years. Second, if he does manage to move to a new location, he's stuck there if the original colony expands to surround his new location. Loners might, with great effort, break away from their original location, but their children are easy targets for being reabsorbed by the growing community their parents left.

Going Farther Afield

Still, that seems a bit dull. If the problem is poor soil, the result is a familiar-looking green zone and a vast desert beyond, which is an absolute waste of a perfectly good alien landscape. Let's go back to the premise and consider what can we imagine about a crop which must be raised by a community rather than an individual. It would probably be one which requires a lot of labor within a limited time frame. Whales, for example, have historically required group efforts to hunt and process. One might imagine an animal which is hard to find (requiring a group of people to track down), hard to kill (requiring a lot of firepower focused in one place), and must be processed quickly (requiring a lot of people to butcher the animal and preserve the meat before it goes bad). If that's the primary food source, people will have to form at least temporary groups to feed themselves.

It's a bit harder to imagine a plant crop which would be hard to find. After all, plants didn't migrate. Even if it is difficult to locate (like, say, truffles), the bigger and therefore more time-consuming to harvest it is, the easier it will be to find. But could a plant be big and perishable enough that it would need a group of people to harvest and process it quickly? That's a trifle easier to deal with. Some fungi, notably the honey mushroom, can form networks covering acres, even square miles; a few trees and species of kelp can form similarly large areas of biomass. An edible version would take a considerable effort to harvest completely, but that doesn't, in itself, put any time pressure on the harvesters, and therefore no need to organize in order to concentrate their labor. However, perhaps the fungus has a defense mechanism against pests: if it thinks something is trying to eat it, it starts to produce chemicals which make it undesirable, a reaction recently observed in the cowpea plant. It must be harvested quickly and processed to stop the reaction. Moreover, even if one man manages to harvest and process some of it, the unharvested portion of the fungus still becomes inedible until the defensive chemicals eventually decay or leach out weeks or months later. To make maximum use of the fungus, it must *all* be processed rapidly.

But even more traditional crops can suffer some time pressure, albeit from external forces. A recurring issue in the history of agriculture is getting enough labor to harvest before weather turned bad and damaged the ripe crops. It usually took a massive communal effort plus a little hired labor to get everything in in time. One could imagine a plant which has that problem, only more so. It might be incredibly productive, but it would last for only a day or two after ripening and requires *immediate* harvest. This prospective crop would need a short-term burst of effort greater than the amount of labor one person could put in during that time for the year's harvest, requiring a certain amount of cooperation with others.

We might also consider how the crop fits into the local ecology. We can easily imagine a bountiful local crop which can, theoretically, support the human population and more, but soon after it becomes ripe, the local equivalent of locusts or evil flying monkeys descends on it. Sure, the humans could kill them all off to preserve this year's crop, but that would throw the ecosystem into chaos. The humans must put in massive overtime bringing in as much food as possible in as little time as possible, or perhaps some humans have to harvest while others work the sprayers containing the alien-flying-monkey repellant.

To sum up: You've got a number of options to keep your colonists close together. Crops can be difficult to grow,

require a lot of infrastructure, or just need a lot of effort in a brief time to plant or harvest. Just keep an eye out for the flying monkeys.

--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!

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Spirit of the Season: A Holiday Present for *Spirit of the Century* & *Truth & Justice*

Published By [Evil Hat Productions](#) & [Atomic Sock Monkey](#)

Written By Fred Hicks & Chad Underkoffler with Daniel M. Perez

Illustrated By Christian N. St. Pierre

80-page digest-sized softcover; $12.00
8.47 Mb PDF; $4.99

As the holiday season approaches, those on the "naughty list" work to ruin everyone's fun and make the season ever bleaker, colder, and harsher. Jacques Frost, arrogant polar explorer searches both poles for their ancient secrets while sending unfrozen prehistoric monsters to terrorize civilization. His occasional ally, Professor Salomon Mizrahi, near peerless mathematician, uses the power of Kabbalah to his own twisted amusement and self-gratification. Commanding an army of spectral Seleucid soldiers, Antiochus the Defiler works to destroy as many holy relics as possible, including the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in the hope that it will restore the former glory of the heirs to Alexander the Great. Rival to Antiochus the Defiler, the uncaring Baroness Blackheart is driven by her quite literally steam-powered heart to acquire as many holy relics in the hope that one will lead her to the alchemical formula that will give her the fabled Elixir of Life. An incomparable miser, Doctor Scrooge embodies the worst aspects of Dickens' creation, ruled by insane greed and hiding behind what his money can make legal with his bully boys, the Cratchits, always on hand to deal out a beating!

Fortunately for both Christmas and Chanukah celebrants, there are those who stand against these evil-doers. Not just the stalwart members of the Centurion Club, but more specifically, the Spirit of Giving, Nick Saint and his doubty allies, The Reindeer Men, and the Spirits Of Guardianship, Judah "HaMakav" Hammerstein, Matthew "Shamash" D'Israeli, and Hannah Cohen and her allies, the Cohen boys. They are quite literally the "Spirits of the Season," and both these and the Shadows of the Season are described in a new supplement for two highly regarded RPGs.

Spirit of the Season is written for both *[Spirit of the Century,](#)* possibly the best Pulp RPG available to buy, and *[Truth & Justice,](#)* Chad Underkoffler's interesting take on the superhero RPG. It is not just a Christmas-themed supplement, but also a Chanukah-themed one too, so not just two games in one supplement, but two holidays in one supplement also. That it is also co-written by the authors of each RPG is merely the icing on the (Christmas) cake.

What *Spirit of the Season* does is present a number of characters themed around Christmas and Chanukah. For the Christmas set, the authors have created a band of charity and anti-poverty driven do-gooders based upon Father Christmas and the nine reindeer that pull his sleigh. This could all be so crass and ho-ho-ho-hum, but the good news is that it is anything but. Nick Saint -- Secret Santa and the Man in Red -- is the 20th Century's Spirit of Giving. A gifted mechanic and toy maker who rides a time-distorting rocket sled, he is aided by nine dispensers of two-fisted charity, the Reindeer Men, each one given a Codename according to his abilities. Thus Codename Dasher is the "fastest man alive"; Codename Dancer and Prancer are circus acrobat twins; Codename Comet, is a barnstorming pilot and ace wheelman, and so on. Each Reindeer Man is more than his or her Codename, for example, Codename Cupid is an unassuming mild mannered archaeologist coming to terms with his enthralling persuasiveness. All Reindeer Men carry a standard kid: an armored trenchcoat, a grapple gun and a Reindeer Beacon, capable of shining the reindeer signal onto a building or cloud in time of need.

Fighting occasionally alongside Nick Saint and his Reindeer Men are his Chanukah allies, the "Shomerim Gedolim" or Great Guardians. Specifically they are the Spirits of Guardianship, warriors and protectors against the forces of Tumah, or impurity. That there are currently three suggests dangerous times lie ahead. The first is Judah "HaMakav" Hammerstein, a New York-based private investigator who is learning to use Kabbalah mysticism in his stand against Tumah. The second is Matthew "Shamash" D'Israeli, an unstoppable brawler who gains minor divine inspiration from a dreidel, a four-sided spinning top carved from a piece of wood from the Holy Land. Both are reformed men after earlier criminal or dissolute careers. The third is Hannah Cohen, who mothers both D'israeli and her seven young sons, leading her family with her heart, always knowing where they are and able to come to her aid at any time.

Each character in *Spirit of the Season* is fully written up for both *Spirit of the Century* and *Truth & Justice.* In both instances each character is ready to play or run, although with a little tweaking. For *Spirit of the Century* several of the characters need a few Aspects, allowing for a degree of customization. Also, Nick Saint has too many Stunts for a starting character, so his player will have to remove a few. For a one-shot game this is not a problem, however. As much as the various Aspects and Stunts help define each character it is interesting to note how the *Truth & Justice* write-ups inform the *Spirit of the Century* write-ups. For example, under *Spirit of the Century* Codename Dasher is described as a fast and well-traveled courier, the fastest man alive, whereas his *Truth & Justice* motivation, "See it, learn it, live it!" says it all.

Of course, *Truth & Justice* is a superhero RPG so some adjustment is needed to create characters for a pulp game. This is merely a matter of limiting the number of powers available to a character and assigning any remaining power ranks to Intense Training instead. Spirit of the Century gets new material too, primarily a host of new Mysteries Stunts such as Judah Hammerstein's Mystic Rites and Rite of [X], a practiced rote that needs defining prior to play and allows Judah to replace another skill with Mysteries under certain circumstances; and Baroness Blackheart's Alchemist, an extension of the Artificer Stunt. This is in addition to the numerous mystic artifacts owned and wielded by the characters described herein. One fix Spirit of the Season does provide is "Companions Reloaded," a set of new backwards compatible rules that fixes the Companion rules in the core book and which are also used for Jacques Frost's Murder Monsters.

Spirit of the Season can be used in several ways, most obviously as a set of heroes and villains for a seasonally themed one-shot or campaign, but also as a set of handy villains for an already existing campaign, or just as inspiration. Either way, *Stories of the Season* presents 11 adventure seeds that see Doctor Methuselah go after Nick Saint's rocket sled, the Villains of the Season -- plus Gorilla Khan, besieging the Fastness where the Spirits of Giving find eventual refuge, and evil new toys running amok!

Physically, *Spirit of the Season* is a slim digest-sized book, decently written with nice artwork with the stats and write-ups for both games are kept clearly separate. If I have one quibble, it is that the authors do not explain what a dreidel actually is. Once I found out I understood the rules for it, the quibble is as much down to the fact I do not know that much about Judaism or Jewish culture. The cover is particularly good, aping the style of the cover for *Spirit of the Century* (which depicted the heroes fighting the gorilla pilot of a biplane as a zeppelin looms overhead) with Nick Saint rocketing to the rescue of a Christmas parade being attacked by Jacques Frost riding a woolly Mammoth!

One might ask why this supplement is coming out in March, three months after or nine months before Christmas, depending on how you look at it. Me, well I feel almost at home given that my Mother would play records of Christmas carols in July and my Father once held a Christmas barbecue in June. Then again I loathe Christmas bar the giving of presents, so what do I know? Actually, I do know that I like *Spirit of the Season.* It is fun, it is full of good cheer, and it does full justice to both Christmas and Chanukah without being cheap or tacky in its treatment of the various elements that make up both holidays, and with [so many days until Christmas](), I just found my first Christmas present.

--Matthew Pook

Flight or Invisibility?

As I write this, our household is less than 24 hours away from playing hooky to go to the oft-mentioned Children's Museum to check out the opening day of the year-long Comic Book Heroes exhibit. I make no apologies about being a consummate comic-book geek, although with the advent of parenthood I find myself much more infatuated with the *idea* of comics rather than the actual *ability* to read comics. (In some ways I keep hoarding entertainment so that, at some point in the distant future, I'm able to "catch up" on everything I've been meaning to. At this point, were all other new entertainment options to wink out of existence tomorrow, I would still probably have enough accumulated to keep me occupied until my head-in-a-jar is hanging out with Fry and Bender in the far-flung future.)

Anyway, with my museum visit hours away, the opening of the *Iron Man* movie, and the umpteenth iteration of Free Comic Day coming up on Saturday, I thought I'd ask a question that I don't think I've asked you all before: What super-power would you want to have? (Now, I personally don't put many restrictions on this thought experiment, although I note that some choices -- like "complete mastery over all reality" -- are pretty lame.)

I've asked this question to a lot of people, and have generally gotten a bunch of different answers. One ex-girlfriend wanted the power of time travel. Another friend wanted teleportation. Another wanted matter manipulation. Another wanted to be super-rich (which, while a fine wish, seemed a bit low-balling; as *Aberrant* proved, with pretty much any power you can make your *own* super-wealth).

And me? Personally, I've always wanted super-speed, like the Flash. Sure, the "run to Paris" aspect is nice, but the ability to get as much done as I want in a window of time is what makes it an amazing power for me.

For those looking to listen to a great show on the subject, check out *This American Life's* "Superpowers" episode, where they ask a psychological question that masquerades as a super-power one: "Flight or invisibility?" (There's also a segment in that episode about a "self-made superhero," and the whole thing sounds just like a great character concept.)

What I find fascinating about the question is that many non-real RPGs allow this question to be posed by GMs to prospective players. Of course, it can be framed according to each genre: "Which character would you most want to be from the *Lord of the Rings?*" is a fine character-generation conversation starter for any fantasy RPG. "What fictional vampire would you most want to be?" can kick off a *Vampire* character creation session. And so on. (And, of course, "What power do you most want?" translates directly to any supers campaign.) And sub-aspects of that question make character creation even more applicable: "Okay; you're playing a wizard. What spell do you *most* see yourself enjoying casting?"

In many ways, RPGs are wish fulfillment, plain and simple. Some call them "power fantasies" and I guess, from a certain point of view, they are. But many forms of entertainment are "power fantasies" in their own way; even reading the most depressing book in the world is exercising one's "power" to control the pace and experience of that depression (not to mention the "power" of choosing to read it in the first place). And "wish fulfillment" can be a way of exploring less-than-shiny wishes as well: "I wish I could know a bit of what it is like to be blind" or "I wish I could experience life as a person wrongly accused of a crime."

But sticking with power-wish fulfillment, the easiest way to have a wish fulfilled is to ask for a wish. The beauty of many RPGs is that it just might be possible to explore what happens when that wish comes true. And, especially with new players, new campaigns, or new systems, that one question can form the basis for a truly satisfying character . . . and, ultimately, a satisfying campaign.

Of course, if your wish is to stand in line with a jillion four-year-olds at a museum, that wish will probably be easier to fulfill than others.

--Steven Marsh

Lama-7: Past Future

for *GURPS Infinite Worlds*

by Eric Funk

Déjà Vu

"We're old souls in a new life, baby; they gave us a new life to live and learn."
-- Paul Williams, *Old Souls*

People who have strong past lives often get a sense of déjà vu; they get dreams of people and places that they have never seen in reality or fiction. When they are seeing places, people, and things for the first time, there is the distinct impression that it is not the first time. A few people could have had some psychic powers in previous lives (if not now) and that grants powers of animal speaking, reading history, and so on. Some souls are flagged for "great things" and will awaken on their own, while many will have whispers and dreams, but not discover how to actively remember . . .

Here on Lama-7, it is true that each person has possibly an infinite number of past lives, and the more powerful super-powered beings can tap into more lives, sequentially. For example, one could add the physical strength and agility from the past two lives to be stronger and faster using Chi. While some individuals are better able to access their talents naturally, there is also still a great deal of skill. It is one thing to have the gift to potentially tap the past; it is quite another matter to actually access the strength and discipline of your Spartan ancestry, for example.

The total "power" rating of a super will determine the number of previous years upon which they can draw. Each generation or life lasts an average of 25-70 years, and eventually reduces to 20-40 years as a channeler reaches farther back in time. As the meta-humans are drawing on mostly "simple" past lives, "super-normals" will make up most ability types: increased resilience, speed, strength, and other passive abilities such as memory.

Lama-7, 1980

Current Affairs

Numerous brushfire wars are proceeding around Africa, South America, and the Middle East. The European Union may be established within the year, ahead of Homeline. This world is classified as Lama-7, as there is an increased amount of Buddhist mysticism worldwide compared to Homeline. The media, martial arts clubs, and schools all show more philosophy.

Divergence Point

Around 460 B.C., the descendants of slaughtered Spartans were reunited a generation later and tried to wipe out the descendants of the soldiers that killed their ancestors. (It has not yet been discovered that these were *reincarnations* of the Spartans who did this. When this realization is made, the Infinity rating will change to Z4, and the Centrum rating to Red.)

Worldline Data

TL: 7
Mana Level: Normal.
Infinity Class: 0-8
Centrum Zone: Yellow

In this setting, there is a "destined" time to die, and a child is born at that time to take the soul. Unfortunately, human violence and accidents can shorten this, causing this lack of place for the soul while the next baby is not yet born. On the other side, "magic" and science can extend life beyond what the body's internal clock would otherwise bring, and this can cause problems on the other end, by "missing" a best reincarnation, causing the baby to die stillborn and the soul to take the next convenient place to reincarnate.

A GM might want to consider the number of souls alive at a given year to determine the likelihood that a current life

extends back that far. The world population was more or less constant between 1 A.D. and 1000 A.D., and the number of souls alive around that time -- about 300 million -- should help provide a baseline. This also links to a possible statistic of the number of individuals with Iterations in the past; with currently about seven billion humans, about one in 23 people, or 4% could have "lifelines" going back to 1000 A.D. (or 1 A.D.). A statistic that a GM might also utilize is the continental statistics for population; for example, 50% of all incarnations are in Asia, and 50% are female . . .

Most individuals can only look back about 1,000 years. This is the standard tether assumed to be a "soft" limit by many scholars. Anyone who can look farther is either assumed to be lying, or is someone very *special.* Some scholars fear that if that is a near-absolute limit, then it is something that must be broken every once in a while for cosmic balance. A group of villains called the Spartans, for example, could be a *terrifying* threat. (With the GM's permission, PCs may possess comparably old souls. The time and energy required to activate these powers should still cost character points, as usual, but the plumbing of their potential will be stressed. Any reaction bonuses should be purchased appropriately.)

Mechanics

"I have seen in strange young eyes familiar tears"
-- Paul Williams, *Old Souls*

Most people who can tap into past lines only get fleeting visions, moments of random past lives, with the most recent being the most vivid. Channelers train to be able to call random scenes from past lives. Emphasizing inheritance, this does cut down on "weird" super powers, but in addition to inheriting direct ability, modern "supers" could channel skills, personality, and so on, to pose as one of their past lives' occupations (such as a mechanic or professional gambler). The farther back on travels, the more exotic powers that might be available (a 1% chance of strangeness per life over 20 lives is better odds than 1% over 10 lives). Perhaps for power level N a person can channel N lives back, have a vague feeling of 2N lives back, and odd flashes from 3N lives back. The higher the number of lives that an individual tries to assimilate, the less stable he can seem. There is a difference between seeing, feeling, and channeling, and some individuals have the power to "look" back through someone else's "lives" without that person being able to do so himself.

Timeline

460 B.C.: Spartans revive. "Age of Stone"
1 A.D. to 1000: World population stable. Spartans encourage global warfare. "Age of Birth"
1000 to 1500: Artists and inventors start to explore; literacy increases. The "finite soul" theory loses many supporters. "Age of Revitalization"
1500 to 1800: World explored, many random reincarnations plotted. Spartans reunited at last. "Age of Colonization"
1800 to 1900: Technical knowledge is so recent that reincarnations rarely help much. "Age of Machines"
1900+: The "soul" is supposedly located by machine. "Age of Wonders"

In all this, it is important to note that many skills will be outdated in any modern world, whatever defines the local "now." For example, calling the skills of a steam engineer from 1850 will not help much in 1999. GMs are encouraged to enforce TL penalties with vigor (see page 168 of the *Basic Set*). Using IQ-based technological skills more than one level out of date becomes counterproductive quickly.

Discipline

To some extent, "looking" back is a trainable discipline, as it can be approached systematically and the results are observable. Different parts of the "recall" include skills, personality, memories, and form, in ascending order of difficulty. Assuming a person knows what skills and abilities the prior life had, he can train to reawaken them at half normal study time (see page 292). Practitioners are split along several lines. First, there is a gap between those who do so carefully and those who do not; this is not necessarily a split between either hero or villain, but of attitude toward sleepers. Second, the past life explorers are divided into two schools: the channelers and the reawakeners. The former fear losing their "now" selves while the latter go for immersion, continually trying to bleed their pasts and present.

Channelers

These individuals seek out specific aspects of past lives to express them. Utilitarian, they rarely tap into the *personality* of past lives (except where they seek memories), but rather aim to recall *abilities*. Due to training time, the channelers can go farther, but not directly exploit many memories or abilities at the same time. To the channeler it is a discipline, but he does not have a specific timetable or knowledge of exactly *what* each past life can do. These people tend to treat the accessible abilities more like powers rather than a part of themselves. (In a campaign, GMs are encouraged to keep the focus and total powers secret from the player.)

Reawakeners

These inheritors go back personality by personality. The goal is to awaken the memories, skills, and mental traits of past lives, so that they can actively see what "they" did in the past life and reawaken those abilities more fully. Trained reawakeners often leave specific, vivid messages to later lives in an attempt to encourage immersion.

Arthur Pendragon is the prime example of a "good" Awakener, while the Spartans are less polite about it. Some pilgrims and scholars who just want to read "every" book, wander to "see" humanity, or walk the planet find that it takes longer and longer with each life. Others develop obsessions to puzzle out the secret of Atlantis, or the mysteries of darkness. Most try to set up some inheritance for their next life, whether that involves burying gold in forests, leaving stocks in escrow, or giving money to relatives with strict instructions.

Technically, reawakening can be done one personality at a time, generally at a great personal cost of the current self. If the prior personality was already combined with another previous one, this can save time, although the skills and powers associated with that once-removed life must be learned normally.

The classic tale to scare channelers from becoming awakeners involves a ritual where the young channeler trainee has his personality temporarily subsumed by the aggregate of all his lives. They can be immersed, lost in the hundreds of short lives. Potentially dangerous to a fragile mind, this practice is considered illegal and immoral by many of the secret societies.

Escape the Cycles

There is the possibility that if a person achieves a great feat of goodness or evil, their soul is taken from this plane when they die, with no reincarnation (see the ***In Nomine*** universe for one example of this). If "great" souls escape to their final rest based on their deeds, there will be few Genghis Khans or Ghandis still around. As such, most people will *not* be reincarnations of Jesse James or George Washington.

There will be hundreds of ordinary people who lived full lives and died at their appropriate time. The advantage is that they lived *full* lives. While a war hero can experience two centuries in 10 short incarnations, dying at age 20, Joe Destiny might have experienced *eight* centuries in 10 incarnations. For such a consistently long-lived individual, it takes only half the study time to be able to recall events that occurred 200 years ago, since there are fewer lives to sort through.

Some pessimists suggest that only "holy" people escape, while criminals have to live on earth again. However, they are usually vague as to what entails a "holy" person in this context.

Rituals

"Some time to touch old friends and still return."
-- Paul Williams, *Old Souls*

Different groups that have been exploring past lives for a long time will not only have their selection processes, but also their own individual explanations for it. While the process may be similar for all those with past lives, it has

Other Lamas

Lama-1: Tibet conquered Asia during times of instability.

Lama-2: The *philosophy* of Tibet spread much farther than

many faces. Some groups cloak their rituals in great ceremonies while others prefer closed doors; still others perform just the minimal rituals.

For all groups, the ability to tap memories actively or passively is an important aspect of their multifaceted self. For those who believe that a person is the sum of their memories, loss or erasure of memory is essentially death of self.

Advantages for *GURPS*

- *Reawakened (see page 80):* This allows individuals with the potential to actively look for past lives.
- *Channeling (see page 41):* This advantage is not required to be able to channel a personality of a past life; past lives are a part of you. (A GM may wish to use the indicated mechanics to handle a powerful past life who tries to take over when contacted, however . . .)
- *Reputation (Deep Lives):* Possessing a large number of lives can be worth a reaction bonus from a secret society.
- *Reputation (Other):* Being the reincarnation of specific people can have certain reaction modifiers, positive or negative, among secret societies as well.

Recall

A Will roll regarding an object, place, or person can encourage recalling a random event regarding that subject. A failed roll means that the individual daydreams as per the imagination of the accessed personality.

Leave Memories

With a Will roll, any trained reincarnationist can leave a short message for future lives of a number of words equal to his Will. This message can be received without skill, often in dreams.

Recognition

A connection to someone, something, or someplace unknown to the current life is determined by the last feelings of a previous iteration, although the intensity of emotions should make it easier to recognize past people that someone knew well. The significance or reason for past connections will not be immediately apparent to the rememberer; it is simply déjà vu. Individuals with close past connections will recognize each other easiest. A GM should roll for recognition once each day, using the distance table (page 19; max modifier +0) against the better of Perception and whatever sense the GM believes that the character can perceive the subject with; for example, an old rival or flame that you still aren't over will be easier to remember on sight, and might even be recognized by passing in the street. In classic tragedy, they could now be elderly with little time left, or perhaps a child in a new life.

- +5: Lovers or close family; hated enemies
- +3 to +4: Good friends or family; bitter rivals
- +1 to +2: Casual friends; rivals
- +2: if eyes meet
- +2: saying a previous name

Assimilation of Past Life

This is the ritual used by Reawakeners to incorporate the prior past life with the current. Should the prior life have

in most parallels, and by the time Infinity made contact it became the world's leading religion.

Lama-3: Buddhist-related mysticism is demonstrably *true.*

Lama-4: World War III wiped out major world powers. Taking advantage of the weakness of the others, Tibetan agents were able to weaken major groups' remaining influences while overtly helping them.

Lama-5: The latest Dali Lama chosen is a female born of the same family as on Homeline.

Lama-6: Tibetan authorities claim to have discovered Shangri-La. A meeting of world leaders behind closed doors was followed by its joining of the world's "big five," and an increase of the UN council's powers to preserve peace.

been mixed with one or more of the lives prior to *it,* they all meld together. This requires a Will roll, at -1 per personality back. In this setting, there is a "destined" time to die, and a child is born at that time to take the soul. Organized reincarnators can plan ahead to some extent with rituals that have a child ready, as a person's clock runs out, for when he dies. (Of course, this requires at least nine months' planning, if an active hand is taken in the creation of the new life.) Those that plan ahead can organize for birth near time of death; subtle groups check children for "friends" based on timing and astrology.

Racial Memory (Passive) [15 points] (see page 78)

This is required as the Unusual Background to allow Channelers to access past memories. Racial Memory (Active) is *not* available.

Each life is a new skill to learn (see skills without attributes, page 172; assume a base "skill" of 10, and each life is an Easy skill. For example, 4 points grants skill 12 in one past life.)

Skills penalties:

- 0: Skill
- -1: Personality
- -2: Memory
- -3: Form

New Talent: Past Life Channeler   10/Level

Each level adds +1 to skills, and decreases the time to learn "life" skills (as above), as per normal rules for Talents (see page 89).

Modular abilities (Channeling only, -10%; Mental or Physical +100%)

This can represent a dynamic pool from which PCs can temporarily gain ability (see page B71). GMs choose between the options Super-Memorization and Cosmic as per the setting (see page 71).

Recovered *GURPS* advantages (Chi, -10%) can include: Absolute Direction [5]; Absolute Timing [2]; Alertness; Combat Reflexes [15]; Danger Sense [15]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Luck-related [varies]; Psychiometry [20]; Recovery [10]; Regeneration [varies]; Regrowth [40]; Speaks with Animals [25]; Special Rapport [5]; Strong Will; Talents [varies]; Temperature Tolerance [1/level]; Voice [10]

Factions: The Movers and Shakers

"Our paths have crossed and parted; this love affair was started long, long ago."
-- Paul Williams, *Old Souls*

Many secret societies create a reverence for specific types. Just as the priestly tribe from 4,000 years ago is revered genetically in modern Judaism, people are going to be hunting out descendants of Agincourt, Thermopali, and so on. Representing the best Reawakeners, there is Arthur, who feels obliged to save the world when he feels he's needed. On the dark side, there are the Spartans, and Hess' SS, fermenting war. Extended versions of the Dali Lama searches span the world. Some reincarnators are tired and do not *want* to be reawakened. Thus, some are trying for a last great evil to move on, since they believe that it is easier to do evil than good.

More than a few organizations keep an eye out for particularly honorable individuals, hoping to "revive" and recruit them. Most are small in scope and different clubs and even military groups exist for those who channel such things. They even hold different reincarnations in different light. For example, a military group might give extra lenience to a

reincarnation of Patton, while a reincarnated Einstein would be revered in a mental group.

Organizations

There are different groups active in this setting. Some have done more, broadly; in this era, the heroes and villains are either part of those groups, or part of modern agencies attempting to utilize reawakening for their own ends. If that is not enough, past entities are forcing themselves into the modern world through their descendants.

Law Across Lives

The setting will have to handle deals across iterations, even among secret societies. History and law may have to be different, depending on the law of inheritance, signing unto "X Iterations" or such, depending on when the public becomes aware of this. Without such formalities, *Highlander*-like rivalries can carry over the centuries, with competitors killing each other every generation. Many people seek to persecute, prosecute, or kill people for actions taken in their past lives, particularly if it cumulated in their death. The penalty for breaking some pacts is described as "cursed for seven generations."

Some religious incarnators believe that reincarnation is a big philosophical issue; that is, the notion of "life after death" means "on this world" as opposed to the next. Some believe that this concept then allows for a vicious form of Calvinism: If you have a past life, you are already a sinner. To others, having a reincarnation just means that a person wasn't as evil as Hitler or as good as Ghandi.

Veterans

This is a broad term for personalities who seek to dominate all subsequent incarnations. They set up memories and images to guide their next life to reawaken their past as soon as possible; gifts of money and social connections encourage the unsuspecting youth to immerse himself in the secret society.

Sample "Good" Group (Order): The Arthurians

Arthur Pendragon, despite his reputation, has not yet achieved his destiny. It is hypothesized that his mentor Merlin changed or unhinged it, or perhaps there is some ultimate threat he is destined to face . . . much greater than all the "greatest threats" to face Britain so far. While the rebirth of Arthur is not a guaranteed victory, it is his soul, and the ideal, that keeps this faction alive and determined to make the world according to the Arthurian ideal. The history of the Arthurs is a closely guarded secret. Only the Round Table has access to the full story, and then only the Order of the Grail knows Arthur's conditions. This is to prevent the vessels (or the soul) of Arthur from being harmed prematurely.

The Arthurians exist to awaken the king in times of greatest need. Although not all awakeners themselves, they keep track of the "map" of the Arthurian soul and aid him in full awakening, ultimately serving them. The Arthurians take their names from the knights of the round table, but few of them are straight lineages. Although some Arthurians are military, the bulk of them make up different positions in political and professional society. A typical western European lodge has several hundred members, only 150 of which trace their lineage to the round table. Their goal: Peace and unity amidst chaos and ruin. Mallory Tennyson and White were Arthurians, and fragments of their poetry are used as propaganda throughout history. Steinbeck spent his life investigating them, but they always eluded his search.

All this is in preparation for a battle with a great foe. At this time, Arthur will be led to Excalibur, the great treasure of the Arthurians, and the material evidence that their beliefs are true. Hidden in a lake somewhere in Wales, it can only be accessed by the one true king. There are no *documented* cases of the real Excalibur, but they do have many "false" Excaliburs, for show and to distract thrill-seekers.

Many people train Arthur in the overt and secret ways of the world, and its ideals, until he is who he is meant to be. These include people whom he'll have never met before and will never meet again. There is a guiding/training process that's meant to reflect Arthur's youth and his experiences with Merlin. In the absence of Merlin, the job falls to the Arthurians. It is a guided experience by the Order, with Arthur still feeling that he's making choices. The Arthurians can't interfere if he chooses against what they feel is right; the King will decide when he appears. There have been Arthurs who have not been Arthurians, and some who were members or parts of the Round Table without ever awakening.

The training of young "knights" follows a similar "hands-off" policy. Thus heroes could be in branches of the Arthurians, trying to learn and keep down chaos. On a local level, it means that a young reincarnatee may have the patronage of any sort of professional: doctor, engineer, or lawyer. Arthurians feel a strong pull to be useful in the world, so they are medical workers, professionals, businessmen, and statesmen during the day, and by night they support reincarnations of the knights and any other that aids the cause and "might" be from that age. Most of the time, their job and life is to promote peace, camaraderie, and the advancement of the individual for the betterment of society. Their arch-enemies are the Spartans (see below). The Arthurians mean peace, and Spartans only exist for war.

In a campaign, the Arthurians are generally patient and give students a chance to prove themselves. Branch offices are generally based in libraries and other centers of intellectual learning. A study of history is important, with emphasis on strategy and morality. Second to this are various forms of unarmed combat and life-saving skills.

Sample "Evil" group (Chaos): The Spartans

The Spartans are most often spoken of as a warning story for neophyte channelers and reawakeners. This spreads the name, yet imprints it as a legend, so that no one seriously believes that these men exist. Those that do hear of them rarely find more evidence than that they are just a large biker gang. At most, their expressed skill matches a "high deniability" group hired by goons of corporations. In this setting, there is a mythos around what opponents think that the Spartans can do. It is believed that there are only a few hundred individuals in the Spartans, but they are spread across the world. It is said that all Spartans are rated to non-parachute drop at 500 feet . . . not rappel, bungee, or just jump, but cold drop. (For sufficient values of cinematic, this may be possible; the fact that these soldiers do low-altitude drops into jungle terrain adds to the legend.)

Encountered

Now, if an incarnationist encounters a Spartan at all, it is likely as an instructor, or a behind-the-scenes person for bad guys. The man's charisma just drips "combat veteran." His role in these missions is *just* training. He may offer to give the heroes free lessons to gauge their skills. Being impressed by "potential" could cause him to offer them a card for a full "test of abilities." *Attacking* a jaded 2,500-year-old Special Ops instructor should have appropriate results. PCs able to look at others' previous lives will likely receive the following information regarding him: "Yeah. There's that scary moment. You fight an army, see that guy in black kevlar, sense he's like you, but the tunnel of lives that goes back goes back *so incredibly far.*"

The most surprising encounters will be those that, where the Spartan, facing off against the best the heroes have to offer, brushes himself off, and says "Hmm . . . The boss was wrong about you guys. We will not meet again." After an intense head-to-head battle, the Spartan simply exits while the PCs nurse themselves to health. Even a standoff against a Spartan is an unbelievable victory; this warrior will report that his opponents had great strength of will. The Spartan's patron needs to build up his own will and gang before being able to hire another Spartan.

The Spartans are designed to be an insurmountable threat. They are not necessarily evil, just dangerous mercenaries. It should be easy to play them as a callous drill sergeant, but a GM should play them as a "simple" threat such as a tsunami.

History

Around 2000 B.C., the 300 Spartans killed by Xerxes' forces were reunited a generation later and tried to wipe out the soldiers that killed their ancestors and their descendants, roughly 300,000 targets. That soon became boring and unprofitable, and thereafter they discovered a purpose: the will of warfare. The Spartans soon found out they need to expend no effort in making war happen. Together, they are a battalion of reincarnating warriors, with every generation maximizing itself for war so the next generation has more tools. These are 4,000-year-old warriors with the bodies of 20-year-olds. Their regime of discipline is beyond the capacity of many vessels, possibly working them to literal death. Their sole purpose is the will of Ares. It is a fanatical cult: They have no goal, no dreams of conquest . . . Spartans are just out to ferment war. This goal simultaneously scares yet relieves would-be-conqueror cabals and intellectuals. The Spartans train special ops and first-in troops in grueling sessions. They participate in any standard training session when possible. Awakening every generation, the Spartans continually train from the earliest childhood years that they find their "missing" comrades. There are always exactly 300 Spartans. Being specifically "lukewarm," they achieve neither fate nor destiny, forever reincarnating. There are rituals in which the young trainee has his personality subsumed by the aggregate of all his lives; the "old gang" of his past self/selves does so without hate, only efficiency and a bit of pride: "Suck it up! it is *you* we are awakening, the you we know." Spartans beginning Intensive Training at age 5 will gain 29.2 character points each year, having gained 438 points this way by age 20, in addition to normal points gained by aging (see page 292).

They are not a hero or villain on their own, but when someone hires a Spartan, he is bringing the equivalent of a supervillain into play: "Victory at any price" is one of their mottos. The Spartans are against push-button wars and large bombs, preferring "the man make the difference." They just need to know who to back to make the best battles, in their definition of "best." These mercenaries will only sponsor the strong, or rather those whom they believe are strong; the Spartans favor the strong of will and spirit, and nations that rely on machines to fight for them are not strong. Countries that believe that the men on the ground will ultimately make the decisions will be able to hire them. To the Spartan worldview, there is no right or wrong; there is only Brave, Cowardly, and Spartan. They believe in strength of will and spirit, regardless of good or evil. Thus, the more spiritual a people, the more likely the Spartans will work for them. It is exclusively martial; they are as much civilization's destroyers as defenders. Most of their current time is spent in East Asia and Africa, where the volume and ferocity of conflict draws them. These continents are rife with fierce, open warfare: "Death is only the beginning . . ."

Today

Today, the casual dress for the Spartans is black leather and kevlar. The Spartans are 300 men (and women) that even trained mercenaries are terrified of. One of them is an army, and in places like Africa, Peru, or Kazakhstan, a Spartan can train an army into something amazing. Most of a Spartan's time is occupied by training others; their contracts provide a lot of support for the individual Spartan to further his goals. That said, they have over 2,500 years of mercenary wealth yet a minimal logistical structure. A Spartan should be able to be his own logistics, but Spartans demand prestige arms, equipment, and materials for their projects. They take pride in their weapons, and these weapons best be able to take care of them. They come hand-tooled with hand-filled bullets, and lab-scale-balanced swords made of (no pun intended) cutting-edge materials. The three most coveted items in modern warfare: a Spartan rifle, a Spartan pistol, and a non-metal [ceramic](#) Spartan sword. The blade is a modern sword designed with the experience of Rome, Carthage, France, and Germany, going all the way to the trench knife; it's a black ceramic death dealer. These specwar knives are nearly unbreakable, hold a sharper edge longer, and don't decay. While even ceramic blades are detectable by modern airport scanners, it is said that the day a Spartan flies commercial is the death of the Spartans.

Leader

The reincarnation of Leonidas is their king, general, and high priest; he is rumored to have been the avatar of Ares at several points in time. Regardless, he is a terror to encounter. The sheer presence of will and charisma has caused many people to collapse in fear. As a warrior and a [descendant of Hercules](#), he is the best of their fighters. If a GM needs an epic story, he can deploy Leonidas. The GM is encouraged to map back his Iterations to find out why these wonderfully dangerous Spartans are able to strike terror by the mere mention of their name.

In a campaign, the Spartans are rarely gentle, and never "spare the rod" when it comes to discipline. Students are given challenges above their abilities. Recruitment and training centers are generally centered around martial arts dojos and target ranges. Study is devoted to methods of combat, with some military history included. Victory is the goal.

Need of Heroes

This is a secret war setting. There is a mystical tradition that gets co-opted by numerous groups, and it is not known to the general public. There is a large variety of abilities that reincarnators can call on. Internal, passive abilities are the most common. Psychohistory and past-life related feats are next, and healing, the reading of emotions, and looking into one's own life and the past lives of others. "Psychic" feats are rare, but most powers can be described as it is either a strong spirit (Rasputin, Comte du Saint Germain), or strong discipline. The Spartans are the *far* extreme examples, as these martial reincarnators focus on internal powers.

Campaign Focus

Lama-7 can be used in a straight, gritty *X-Files* in a flamboyant *Buffyverse*-like setting. A good focus is on the pain and identity problems those with past iterations encounter. Over-the-top martial arts might fit well in this setting, as well as unleashing inner powers. Here, it is the abilities that generally sell the setting. A secret high-school "magic" setting could unfold as all the students are discovering their powers and coincidentally in a class for reincarnation. In any case, available technology should be as per today. Any more psychic technology beyond a few gadgeteers' prototypes can have severe implications on the setting, and when registered science and government get their hands on it, it becomes something else entirely.

Stop, Listen, What's That Sound?

The goal of the campaign will be to stop the reassembling of groups who seek mischief. For example, Hess' SS attempt to find and reawaken Teutonic Knights to the Nazi cause, and that the next iteration of that group of villains would be in their 40s by the 2000s. One Nazi goal was to reanimate and reawaken the Aryans, to the point that they went to Tibet to find their ancestors. The monks in the area were well versed in the theories of reincarnation, and had to find ways to resist these supervillains (see *GURPS Weird War II*).

Setting Option: Finite Souls

These souls are escaping the setting by achieving their fate or destiny and diminishing the number of souls in play. In modern day, since passing the "peak" soul count in 1000 A.D., more and more individuals are being born without "real" souls, perhaps only fractional souls. Only those with whole, real souls can "look" into their past. This can lead to the situation where the more complete a soul an individual has, the more control he has over his connection to past lives. Callous individuals may find ways to steal pieces of others' souls to complete his; others might simply be able to collect parts of departing souls to boost theirs . . .

Example Campaign: Eternal Joe in Everyville, or Joe Destiny Vs the New Reich. Assisted by Johnny Charlemagne

It is a tale of success among reincarnators to have a channeler who does not have heroic pasts, but is clever about using the talents and information from the ordinary people of his history. Such lives may include a telegraph operator, a teacher, a doctor, a gambler, a sailor, and dozens of farmers. Combining these talents together, he can be fast, suave, and possess good survival skills. The factions can consider such an individual a great hero to start with. He is a literal everyman, with talent to see far. He has no "dominant" personalities, but each is not weak. He knows how empires rise and fall. He knows the plights of the people. His generalist skills mean he can live off the land, work with iron, control crowds, influence people in all walks of life, is good with animals and the land, and can survive anywhere.

As a lone reincarnator, Joe (or Joanna) Destiny must begin by teaching himself to explore past lives. In his adventures he discovers that others understand transmigration, and encounters heroic avatars, and people trying to utilize transmigration for their own purposes (good or ill). But behind those posers are people who have done insane things with it, and guide the shape of the world that Joe either has to aid or stop.

Scope

The scope of Joe Destiny's campaign will start small: exploring the world. To begin with, he is but one man. His dreams begin to give him clues about the past, and eventually, he pieces together clues that something is different about several people in his community. He discovers something familiar about a gang leader, a school teacher, and a child. Some use this discovery for money, others to help other "travelers." For example, a young girl is having nightmares about a past life. As Joe talks with her, he teaches her his "tricks" to focus, and finds she can see more and more of that life. In it, she did bad things to people to protect her family from worse. Can she find the truth before it hurts other people she cares about? One friend might become lost when he has his personality subsumed by the aggregate of all his lives, or at least one past life . . .

In the end, the group will amount to four to six people in all (an ideal PC group), each with different pasts, most connecting at some point . . . perhaps the last attempt to stop a malignant force. They then will have the opportunity to find a patron or two of various goals themselves, representing different aspects of this power, with incarnations from various ages. The heroes have the differences between channelers and reawakened explained to them, with the choice open before them. An early encounter could include a fight with a Spartan (which they will lose), and also a meeting with some Arthurians that can open up the long-term ideals of the campaign.

Adventure Seeds

Supervillains are . . . You!

A group of ex-Knights Templar or witch hunters can be disconcerting, and any time one of their number dies again, they hunt out the new form. A group of dark-armored knights approach the heroes. "You are our new leader. Join us so that we can wage war on [group X, where X is an ally of the heroes]." The PCs need a diplomatic way to say "no." Alternately, beginning training could provide useful information.

Final Angst

A PC with a long life finally finds his Eternal Foe, in the form of a lovable little kid. Presuming the hero is not a sociopath, he will probably struggle with the implications this encounter presents. Some GMs have a mindset for classic tragedy, which is all about problems attempting to overwhelm morals. A just hero might try to guide the youth on a good path, and hope that he choses the narrow way.

Variants

Cryonauts

If "weird" powers are associated with particular ages, then being stuck in time -- either physically or spiritually -- can be a problem a GM might want be prepared for. For example, in a modern campaign, a character's previous life might have ended in 1010 A.D.; this means that his life before that began at about 980, and his skills are even further out of date.

Future Past

What if a time traveler physically or astrally projecting himself into the past dies? His soul could reincarnate from that

point. This can become awkward if the timeline his soul follows is not the same as that which he came from. This could explain genius inventors whose inventions did not pan out.

Animal Power

As presented, channeling requires strength of soul and will. A GM might also rule that animals could be able to call upon such powers, although they also have more "iterations" to cross. (As an extreme encounter, a chihuahua could become a dire wolf.) What if some human souls could take "time off" if they die too early and instead reincarnate as an animal before their next "destined" human body is ready? Could this spark legends of vampires and werewolves, not to mention "the Littlest Hobo?"

Ret/Con II

While some settings retcon at each generation, this one keeps the generations alive, but sleeping in the next. As presented, this setting is a low-weirdness supers continuum. Injecting pieces of Kirby-2 (Part I/Part II) can give examples of superscience and a world government or International Supers Teams. The reason that reincarnation may be discredited publicly may be that prior lives' memories are "wrong" every time a "retcon" occurs.

In Nomine

As presented, the Incarnations do not spontaneously grant new Songs or such, as that would mean a previous incarnation knew them. In canon, this is virtually impossible; the Forces of undead souls disperse, almost all Soldiers get to Heaven, and all Hellsworn meet one final rest or another (see *Corporeal Player's Guide,* pp. 56, 59, 89). This should help alleviate most of a GMs' fears regarding long-lived human souls. As a channeller delves into his past lives, a GM is recommended to allow one extra Force per past life. Humans with a large number of Forces might be sought after by all sides. Proper reincarnation means staying away from destiny and fate. Knowing what they are in each iteration can help avoid them, or perhaps muddle it if it is true that telling avoids it (see *Superiors 3: Hope and Prophecy,* page 111).

Links

- *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*
- Old Souls
- Amida Buddhism- The llhama selection process is very specific in tracking the next incarnation.
- *Avatar: The Last Airbender*
- Leonidas king of the Spartans, purportedly a descendant of Hercules.
- *Highlander*
- *Quantum Leap*
- *Doctor Who: Genesis of the Daleks*

* * *

Thanks to Rowan for the Arthurians and the Spartans, to my beloved Ilona for the finite soul theory, and to Stephanie Keith.

Where Everyone Knows Your Name

by James L. Cambias

On a stretch of desert road north of Las Vegas, there's a windowless cinder-block roadhouse. The broken neon sign says "Indy's." From the outside, it's pretty shabby looking, and to the casual eye, it always appears closed. Inside, it's unlike any bar in the world. Some bars are biker bars, some bars are cop bars, but Indy's is the only Men In Black bar.

Background

Originally, there was nothing special about Indy's. During the 1950s, it was a hangout for airmen and contractors from Nellis Air Force Base and the Nevada Test Site. It might have remained just another bar except for one incident back in 1956. A quiet, dark-suited man was having a drink in a booth by himself when an amorphous alien creature escaped from his suitcase and attacked him. The bartender and other patrons acted quickly. After some tense moments, they managed to drive the blob into the barbecue pit and destroy it with charcoal starter fluid.

When the quiet man in black recovered from the attack, he found the bar had returned to normal and nobody seemed to want to talk about what had happened. They all understood -- these things happen, business is business, and there's no need to tell the police or the papers every time.

The next Friday night the man in black came back with a couple of friends. Word spread, and by the end of the year, Indy's was a regular hangout for quiet men in dark suits who can't talk about what they do.

Getting In

Because the customers at Indy's value their privacy, the bar doesn't encourage non-regulars to drop in. The bouncers are strict about proper ID, enforce the "proper attire required" rule, and don't hesitate to tell rowdy or nosy-looking customers that the place is "too full." The sign by the door doesn't define "proper attire," leaving the bouncers free to keep anyone out. A military, intelligence agency, or defense-contractor ID gets the bearer waved through no matter what he's sporting.

Layout

The main room of Indy's has a long Formica-topped bar along one wall with chrome barstools upholstered in glittery red vinyl. There's a row of booths along the opposite wall, and half a dozen small tables fill the space in between. A small kitchen, a barbecue pit, and a couple of rather grubby restrooms are located in the back. That's it. No secret elevators, no hidden inner sanctum back room. The patrons get enough of that kind of thing at work.

Decor

The decor of Indy's is a mix of the tacky and the surreal. When the place first opened, it had a race-car theme (the Las Vegas Motor Speedway is not far away). Some model cars still dangle from the ceiling and a couple of posters of famous drivers grace the walls. But in the past few decades, the regulars have had an effect. Just about every imaginable bit of alien-themed kitsch is represented on the walls of Indy's. The face of the "alien Grey" stares back from dozens of stickers, posters, and awful velvet paintings. Toy saucers hover on strings over every table. In a glass case behind the bar is a big toy ray-gun

The Bouncer, John Smith

John is, quite simply, the toughest guy in the room. He served 20 years in the Marines and taught unarmed combat. He occasionally moonlights as a bodyguard in Vegas when he's not working the door at Indy's. Because he knows he's the toughest guy in the room, he's laid-back and tolerant. But if anyone is dumb enough to cause trouble, John can come down on offenders like the wrath of God.

rifle, with the sign "In case of alien invasion, break glass."

Some stranger items lurk among the souvenirs of Roswell and toy spaceships. The "moon rock" in a case on the bar must be a hoax -- but the box has signatures of two real Apollo astronauts on it. The "Mars rock" *has* to be bogus -- except that a geologist will be able to tell it's no Earthly sample. The Sputnik satellite dangling over the pool table can't possibly be real -- and why does it have three bullet holes in the casing?

Some of the weird items are used for practical purposes. The doorstop for the kitchen is a chunk of torn and scorched hull plating made of an unidentifiable green metal, marked with what may be Egyptian hieroglyphics. The griddle on the stove is a slab of golden crystal, a perfect superconductor of heat.

The snapshots tacked to the walls are equally weird. There are scores of flying-saucer photos, dozens of images of crashed or landed saucers, and even a couple of pictures of aliens. In one, the alien is waving cheerfully to the camera, flanked by two smiling men in dark suits. One of the men looks a lot like a fellow sitting at the end of the bar. In another, a different alien is being led off in handcuffs. There are also pictures of astronauts in space suits exploring a ruined city in a red desert, test pilots standing next to saucers with Air Force markings, and men in dark suits posed in landscapes that don't look like any planet in the Solar System.

On the wall by the jukebox are a dozen or so framed snapshots. Most are men, most are wearing dark suits, and all have the clean-cut look of soldiers or government agents. None of the photos bears a name, but at closing time some of the regulars will raise a glass or a bottle in a toast to the silent pictures.

If anyone asks about the weird photos, the bartender just shrugs. "Some of these guys are real jokers," he says. Questions about the photos over the jukebox get a more serious answer. "Line of duty," he explains.

The Menu

The food menu at Indy's is straightforward -- burgers, Texas-style barbecue, buffalo wings, and fish-and-chips on Fridays. The chili comes in three flavors: Hot, Atomic, and Big Bang. The waitress slips on a HAZMAT suit to serve the Big Bang chili -- but she's only joking. *Right?*

The drink menu is a little more varied. Indy's has an international beer selection, with a large number of Asian brands and plenty of obscure microbrews. Tom the bartender has a standing offer than he can make any cocktail you can name, or you get a free drink. Only one person has ever beaten him.

Customers

In general, all the customers at Indy's are quiet types. Nobody starts fights, nobody gets too rowdy, and nobody hassles newcomers -- provided the newcomers behave themselves. About half the patrons are armed, typically with new-model Glock automatics or old Army Colts. Most of the rest have some basic competence at unarmed fighting, and a few are serious combat monsters.

Mr. H

Mr. H is a very old man, weather-beaten and hard of hearing, who sits at a booth by himself most evenings. His hair and beard are long and unkempt, and his white linen suit has seen better days, but he insists that all the utensils be

The Bartender

The bartender at Indy's is Tom, a grizzled Air Force veteran with a Kentucky twang. He doesn't like to chat with customers -- especially not *new* customers. But keeping the bar running is his business, and he'll give adequate service to anyone who gets past the bouncer.

If patrons cause trouble, Tom backs up John Smith. He's got a Louisville Slugger under the bar by the cash register, and the joke "alien invasion" ray gun is actually a *real, working* blaster carbine.

The Waitress

Amelia handles the table service. She has a dry wit and a

brought to him fresh from the dishwasher in an unused plastic bag. He drinks about eight cups of coffee a night, and routinely leaves a $100 bill as a tip. Mr. H is shy in conversation due to his deafness, but he knows an awful lot about the space program, the aviation business, and all "black technology" projects of the past 50 years.

Fred

A man in middle age, Fred is still fit but developing a gut from the beers he drinks every day now that he's retired. He wears loud Hawaiian shirts and cargo shorts, and he has been heard to say that the next time he wears a suit will be at his own funeral. Fred sits at the bar when he's not playing pool. If you get him talking, Fred will only say that he used to work for the government. He does have an encyclopedic knowledge of UFO cases and other Fortean phenomena. He's intensely amused by paranormal buffs, conspiracy theorists, and UFO contactees, and he loves to make fun of them. His favorite method is to appear interested in their theories, then top them with something even wilder. Anyone who bothers to check Fred's over-the-top wild claims will discover that every detail is verifiable. Fred keeps a pistol in the waistband of his cargo shorts.

Abe

A tall, slim, bald man with extremely pale skin, Abe wears sunglasses and a Dodgers cap, even indoors. He wears gloves to conceal the fact that his hands have only four digits -- but if you ask, he'll say only that he's from Cleveland. He eats cup after cup of strawberry ice cream and pays in uncut diamonds. While Abe knows more than anyone about extraterrestrial life and alien technology, he much prefers to talk about baseball. He can be found at the bar, at a stool with a good view of the television if there's a game on. Abe detests violence of any kind.

Nikki

An athletic woman in her mid-thirties, her chain-smoking and whiskey-drinking have given Nikki a gravelly baritone voice. She is probably the most high-strung of the regular clientele, and she sits in a booth with her back to the wall. Nikki can be persuaded to get out on the dance floor if someone picks a good two-step tune on the jukebox. She is frighteningly well-informed on the details of every political assassination since 1960. Nikki is openly contemptuous of conspiracy theorists and their ilk. She carries about four different kinds of weapon at all times.

Using Indy's

Place of Danger

For novices just getting involved in weird goings-on, Indy's is the lair of the enemy. Everyone there knows the Truth, they don't feel like sharing, and they're perfectly willing to follow you out when you leave and dump your body somewhere in the desert if you get nosy. A dangerous Indy's has more unfriendly patrons, people jotting down license numbers, and overpriced drinks. Use this version when a dying man hands the PCs a matchbook with the address scrawled inside, or when a missing friend's last message said they were going there.

Place of Insiders

Getting inside Indy's means you're playing in the big leagues. The Men In Black and their masters may not like you, but they do at least acknowledge you as being "in the game." As insiders, the PCs can trade secrets with the regulars, and try to pick up the latest rumors and gossip. Customers are reasonably safe from attack inside the bar (but keep an eye on that rearview mirror driving home). But there is a downside: once you're part of the in crowd, you can never try to "slip under the radar" again. The Men In Black know you're someone to watch.

Neutral Ground

Indy's is a good "neutral spot" where PCs can meet their enemies in a relaxed setting with no gunplay. It's perfect for roleplaying-heavy scenes, adventure hooks, and rumors. This is the place to sit down with the bad guys and arrange the hostage exchange or the big scam. A neutral Indy's has absolutely unflappable staff and patrons. This is the version most likely to allow the heroes to run into a mysterious figure at a corner table who's looking for someone to perform a job.

Home Base

Once the player characters have been accepted at Indy's, they may become regulars themselves, gradually getting drawn into the life of the place. All the ordinary cliches of *Cheers* can take on a surreal twist at Indy's. Signing up for the bowling team can get very disturbing when you discover who you're bowling against, and what the stakes are. ("If we win, we keep the trophy. If we lose, the Zeta Reticulans take Neptune.") Even a simple softball game against the Area 51 All-Stars can get crazy when both teams try to get an edge with alien technology.

Crossovers and Variants

GURPS Black Ops

Obviously Indy's is an off-duty hangout for Company operatives. In that case, there are likely to be some very strange stuffed animal heads on the wall, and a much bigger collection of "absent friends" photos over the jukebox. Since even off-duty Black Ops are pretty formidable, the main threat to the place is the danger that the SecOps will decide it's a security breach and close the place down. So far it hasn't happened, which makes most Ops suspect someone at the Argus level is a regular, too.

GURPS Illuminati

Indy's is neutral territory in the wars among the world's Secret Masters. Agents of different conspiracies can sit down on adjacent stools and trade war stories. The ironclad rule of the place is "no names, no business." The moment anybody starts trying to use Indy's to pass secret messages or set up ambushes, the fun will be over for good, and nobody wants that. An Illuminated Indy's isn't listed in any phone book or database, and the staff are all Zeroed.

GURPS Atomic Horror

After a hard day spent in the desert hunting giant ants, Indy's is the preferred place to stop and have a couple of cold ones. Employees of the Theoretical Science Foundation are frequent customers at Indy's. In the Golden Age of weird monsters and alien invasions, there's less secrecy about the place, and even reporters are welcome if they've had their share of battles with radiation-spawned menaces. This also means the bar is considerably more rowdy, and the after-hours shenanigans can get weird and wild.

Doppelganger

by J. Edward Tremlett

One drawback of most supers games is that, much like the comics they draw inspiration from, there are very few superheroines who can go toe-to-toe with the guys -- either as fully formed stars of their own comic, or as the center of complex story lines. In the hopes of adding some equal time, we present some A-grade superheroines who can fully compete on the playing field and aren't just male heroes in female guise.

The first is the shadowy presence known as Doppelganger. Society girl and philanthropist by day, scourge of the underworld by night, June DuBlanc walks a tightrope between her needs to see justice done and the dark appetites of her alien power source. The more she discovers about others, the more clues she uncovers about her family's past, and the Form Body she inhabits. But how long can she keep it all under control . . . ?

This article is generic, so stat guidelines go Poor - Average - Medium - Impressive - Powerful - Way-Powerful. The city could be any setting.

Doppelganger

*"I know what you are. I see what you've done. Now look me in the eyes. I **hunger** . . ."*

June DuBlanc grew up a child of wealth and privilege. Her family's estate was vast, her manor had many rooms, and each and every room was open to her -- except the locked, heavy door at the end of the upstairs hallway. She was told to never go *near* that door, but never told why, other than it was her late father's laboratory.

(Her mother was never good with explanations, leaving them to June's indomitable governess, Ms. Priscilla Sharp, or their mostly silent manservant, Robert, to dispense. All Ms. Sharp had to say was that June should do as she was told -- she'd understand when she got older. Robert said nothing at all.)

So June got older. She went to the most prestigious prep school on the East Coast. She attended an Ivy League to make friends and contacts, as well as secure a fiancé. And she went to all the happenings -- all the parties and soirees -- to become the face of the DuBlanc family fortune, and its future, just as she was expected to.

But when her mother died in an awful boating accident her senior year, June suffered a near-total breakdown. She was sent to Europe to recuperate with her "eccentric" (read: "philanthropist") spinster Aunt Judith, leaving the estate in Robert's hands and her fortunes in the care of her governess. She was told to find herself, and when she was ready she could come back, she would be formally presented to the elite, and take her proper place among her peers.

A year passed, and June came back changed -- exposed to whole new ways of thinking and living by her aunt. While there, working among the poor of the Continent, she'd seen that money was meaningless unless it was put to good use. Understanding that she *did* have a choice, she was no longer as accepting of the role she'd been prepared for.

She and Ms. Sharp had a terrible argument the night of her return. At its climax, her governess collapsed. And her last words before slipping into a coma were: "Whatever you do . . . don't . . . open . . . that door."

June waited a week, long enough to know that her governess might never awaken, that her "peers" were already arranging June's presentation to proper society without her say, and that her weak-chinned fiancé, Richard, was more interested in her financial details (and the wedding planning) than her feelings. That week was enough to show her that everything Aunt Judith had said about well-moneyed society was all too true. It was also long enough for her to realize that she had to leave it before it swallowed her whole.

The key to that door had been around Ms. Sharp's neck all along. Opening it -- its lock heavy, hinges creaking from

years of disuse -- was only supposed to be June's way of saying a final goodbye to an old, controlled life before starting a new one, somewhere else, like Paris. But what she found in that mostly empty, cobwebbed room changed everything.

There were tables and chairs and empty bookshelves. An ancient switch by the door clicked impotently, as there were no lamps or lights. But moonlight poured in through the windows, and once her eyes adjusted, June could see the figure in the corner, swaddled in cobwebs so thick she thought they were a blanket.

Was this the secret of the room -- a dead body? June leaned down to look at it and saw that it wasn't dead. The eyes were closed so tight they seemed screwed shut, and it was breathing, ever so slightly, under that mass of thick, spiderless webs.

Who was this person? How could it be alive after all this time? And why did its face look like a strange, thin distortion of June's . . . ?

June did what any caring person would have done: she touched the body's face, hoping to wake it up. But the instant her fingers brushed its cheek, there was a moment of grey vertigo -- a swift shifting of perspective -- and suddenly she was in the body. Or, more correctly, she *was* the body, and her old one was now trapped in its place, under the thick blanket of webs. Her eyes were glassy and unseeing but not grey with death.

She didn't know who or what this pale, androgyne form was, only that it wasn't quite human. It had no memories, no past to speak of. But it could sense things (*be* things), slip between walls and floors with the most exquisite grace. The webs were not trapping it, but rather a part of it -- something to do with becoming someone else.

And her thoughts! They had become alien -- slippery like eels. Strange connections, ideas, and feelings slid through her mind like rain. Her life was examined, dissected, and re-assessed from several different directions in seconds. And she realized she felt . . . hungry. Very, very hungry.

She slipped through the ceiling into the kitchen, and surprised Robert, who was making a sandwich. When he saw her, he opened his mouth to scream. Instead, he vanished in a puff of black smoke. That smoke was sucked up into her eyes, and in that moment, she knew everything about his life -- most notably that he, Ms. Sharp and a number of her "friends" were responsible for her mother's death, and conspiring to take the DuBlanc fortune for themselves.

But June wasn't worried about that. In fact, she realized that she somehow always knew, or at least suspected. She was more horrified by the fact that *she wasn't hungry anymore.*

At least, not then . . .

That was three years ago. In that time, June DuBlanc has entered the high-priced social whirl of the city's power elite, as her mother and governess would have wanted her to. She has used the family fortune to fund charities and scholarships, and lent her name to several worthy causes, well above and beyond the token ones her peers attend to. She maintains residences at both her estate and a vast apartment overlooking the best part of town.

Meanwhile, the city's power elite has been stalked by a strange, avenging presence in the night. A black-wrapped, shadowy figure seamlessly infiltrates high society crimes and conspiracies by taking over the bodies of others, the better to get closer to the true sources of corruption. After the plot has been broken, it leaves its victims half-dazed and wrapped in shadowy webs for the police to find, along with physical evidence of their guilt.

Unless they're really bad. Unless she's *really* hungry.

Characteristics

Age 26; American citizen with no criminal record.

Stats: Average Body; Medium Mental; Impressive Spirit.

Appearance: 5'5, 175 lbs., long curly brown hair, watery blue eyes, winsomely cute. Always dresses for the occasion, preferring white over all other colors.

Costume: The Form-Body is wrapped in a dark, shifting web of thin, black tendrils that can take the form of a tight bodysuit, leaving only the hands and head uncovered. The only other item worn is an expensive, almost insect-like pair of black sunglasses that completely cover the eyes, so as to shield onlookers from seeing them.

Family: Aunt Judith Adela DuBlanc (53, Parisian); Governess Priscilla Sharp (72, Comatose).

Power: The Form-Body.

The Form-Body is the source of June's incredible power. It is freakishly thin, shockingly pale, and completely androgynous, lacking any sex organs whatsoever. Its mouth has no teeth or tongue, and its eyes are horrible, endless, burning black pits that destroy the bodies of the guilty and devour their souls. (This is why Doppelganger wears sunglasses.) It does not need to breathe, though the pulsing of its strange innards make it appear that it is. It heals damage in half the time a human body does, but only when it's not being worn.

Judy needs only to touch the Form-Body in order to slide her mind into it, thus becoming Doppelganger. In this form, her Body is Impressive. Her Mental also goes up to Impressive, given that its alien thought patterns make connections between seemingly disparate facts faster and more intuitively than the human mind. While she is Doppelganger, her real body is wrapped in the cocoon of black tendrils that the Form-Body normally resides in. She need only touch her body once more to switch back, but the mental and physical stress of the change leaves her tired and confused for up to an hour.

The Form-Body can slide thin black tendrils out of every inch of its skin, up to a distance of 10 feet. The tendrils can be used to create dark, ropy tentacles; extra limbs; clothing; frightening shapes; or whatever is needed. They likewise act as natural armor with Impressive strength against solid objects.

It can spit black gouts of tendrils up to a distance of up to 15 feet from its mouth, coating victims in a tight, viscous web of Impressive strength. Anyone caught in these webs must also perform a Mind test against Impressive, or else fall into a deep sleep filled with nightmares of their own guilt.

The Form-Body can become insubstantial with a high degree of control, allowing bullets and energy weapons to pass through it without phasing through the floor, or slipping through a wall or door while grabbing hold of someone and taking him through with it.

Doppelganger gets its name from the Form-Body's uncanny ability to swap bodies with others. To achieve this, it need only touch another conscious, living person with its skin (not merely a tendril) and concentrate. The Form-Body then takes on the appearance, mannerisms, voice, and memories of the individual, leaving the person so impersonated wrapped up in webs and seemingly asleep. It can't absorb any special powers or talents, though, which hampers its ability to masquerade as supervillians.

That said, the impersonation is near-perfect, requiring Powerful sense-based abilities to break. However, so long as the Form-Body is masquerading as another, it cannot use its tendrils or other powers without ending the illusion. Doppelganger can cease the illusion at any time, anywhere, simply by concentrating. Once the illusion is over, the webs around the victim turn to dust, the victim wakes up, and only the strongest and most relevant memories stolen from him remain with Doppleganger -- all else is lost until it can touch the victim once more.

Doppelganger has three main weaknesses:

1. Light is the Form-Body's enemy. A well-lit room causes Average burns after a half-hour. Powerful sources of illumination, like klieg lights, cause Average burns after a minute. Direct Sunlight does Impressive damage within seconds. While impersonating someone, this weakness is nullified, but it turns on full force the moment the mask is dropped. This is why Doppelganger primarily operates at night.

2. The Form-Body could be used by *anyone* who finds it and touches it. This has led June to lock it up in a special high-tech, walk-in safe in her bedroom. Similarly, she doesn't let anyone set foot into her apartment (she says it's because she was raised "old fashioned.")
3. The Form-Body hungers for souls. If it isn't fed every 90 days, its powers and Body begin to drop one level per month, rendering it near-useless after three. This means that June has to periodically commit murder in order to keep using the body at full strength. Ideally, she'd like to visit especially evil supercriminals on their deathbeds, and let them look her in the eyes, but it hasn't always worked that way.

Current Situation

June spends her days navigating the world of jet-setting socialites, trying to get others to donate to her charities and causes. She affects the role of the vapid, overly moneyed do-gooder, but it's a thin veneer -- anyone who stays with her can see she really, truly cares. She also feels ashamed of having wasted so much for so long.

She has a personal assistant, William V. Cannes (28), who helps with the organizational side of things. He knows *something* is up, given her erratic nighttime schedule, but he suspects she's just having flings and says nothing. He's not interested in June at all.

Doppelganger is investigating two different crimes: a human smuggling/white slavery operation that a shipping magnate of June's acquaintance is a small, unknowing part of; and a supercriminal known as Baron Mind-Master who is trying to take control of the city's police, one voodoo doll at a time. She's also waiting for Governess Sharp to awaken from her coma, so she can find out how much she knows about a great many things.

Recently, June's been able to remember less about being Doppelganger. There are nights when entire hours go by that, once she's out of the Form-Body, she just can't recall. And the memories don't come back when she puts it on, either. She's wondering if she's losing control, or if it's becoming more powerful than she understands.

As Friend

Doppelganger doesn't do groups, preferring to work alone. That said, she has done a few team-ups with fellow, nighttime heroes, but she doesn't stick around to answer questions or small talk, much less swap identities over a beer. She's been known to pick up a tricky investigation from a fellow hero, walk it through so far, and then deliver the evidence (and occasional miscreant) the following night. But she's petrified of others finding out about the hunger, for good reason.

As Foe

How do you protect your organization from someone who could be anyone, and have their memories? The criminal underworld of the city quivers at this new scourge, and they have been employing more disposable talent and ignorant go-betweens to try and build layers between them and their crimes. There's also word that certain high-placed masterminds are seeking talent to kill this "hero," or set her up for the cops to deal with.

As Background

Doppelganger works best in shadows and low doses. A criminal being sought out by the group will be found wrapped in webs by the police. A thug who was in the room with the others when the heroes came through the roof will turn black and phase through the floor, taking something or someone with him. A truly evil but seemingly untouchable target will completely vanish, one night, and never trouble the city again.

Unanswered Questions

- What really happened to June's father? Everyone she's spoken to about him has said that he was considered either a visionary or a crackpot, but no one wants to elaborate on it. His researches have vanished, his papers are

gone, and no one knows who has them.

- What is the Form-Body, and how did it get into her father's laboratory? Did he find it, or create it? Why was it stored there? And why does it look like a strange reflection of June?
- What does her governess know? Did she come up with the plot to kill June's family all by herself, or is there someone else pulling her strings? How much did she know about the body? Why did she warn Judy not to open the door?
- What is the body doing when June can't remember? Does it have something to do with its origins or creation? Is it tracking down leads on June's behalf, behind her back? Is it seeking out evil in order to devour it, in order to hide a growing hunger? Or is it doing something it doesn't want June to know about, because if she did she wouldn't use it anymore?
- On that note, is the Form-Body developing a mind of its own? Or was it always there and just not very noticeable at first? Might it start trying to take over June's body when June's being Doppelganger? And what might it use June's body to do . . . ?

Pyramid Review

Basic Fantasy Role-Playing Game

Written and Published by [Chris Gonnerman](#)

Art by Erik Wilson, Steve Zieser, Matt Finch, Dan Dalton, Luigi Castellani, Nick Bogan, Mike Hill, and Kevin Cook

Available for free as a PDF download, or for purchase in print (hardcover, softcover perfect bound, or softcover spiral bound) via [LULU](#) ($7.57 or $20.04)

With the recent passing of E. Gary Gygax, I found myself contemplating what my history with roleplaying games has meant to me. In fact, I started searching places like Half Price Books and eBay in an attempt to purchase some of the classic products that defined my childhood: the old red-box *Basic Dungeons & Dragons,* the blue-box *Expert Set,* even the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* tomes that defined a long and beautiful journey that has been -- so far -- 30 years in the making. My game group and I will be playing a "Tribute to Gary Gygax" campaign that will start with *The Keep and the Borderlands* and go for as long as they want to, all using the box *Basic Dungeons & Dragons* rules set.

So there I am, looking over the material and refamiliarizing myself with things. I remember the old adventures. I am amazed with each page how solid these rules really were. And to be honest, I started wondering about what it was that pushed me to leave *Basic Dungeons & Dragons* and move on to the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* rules. I really don't recall what it was. Part of me wonders why such rules were not kept in print. But then reality slaps me squarely on the forehead and reminds me that this is a business, and no business wants to compete with itself. So I go back to looking for some things I can get to run this E.G.G. tribute game. It is then that I stumble on two interesting sites. The first is *OSRIC* (which I will be reviewing in another article) and the second is Chris Gonnerman's *Basic Fantasy* site.

Basic Fantasy is 145 pages of old-school roleplaying rules (147 if you count the two pages of the OGL). It is, in many ways, a re-imaging of the *Dungeons & Dragons Rules Cyclopedia.* Things that were problematic have been ironed out (spell loopholes, rules that were vague or unclear, etc.); things that were clear cut have been left intact. Things that gave flavor to the old rules without detracting from anything have been left alone (the *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*'s use of the "universal ability score modifiers: for example). All an all, it is a worthy torch-bearer of the ways of roleplaying, circa 1977. The writing is above average, and the layout is simple and elegant (again, bringing out the feel of the older materials it is emulating). The artwork, however, is the real cherry on top of this sundae -- it feels like the old days.

The organization of the book is good. It is very similar to the *Cyclopedia.*

- *Part 1:* The introduction describes the basics of roleplaying, what it is, and how to use the dice. Fairly standard stuff.
- *Part 2: Player Character Information* covers rolling up a character, hit points and hit dice, character classes, money, and equipment. Again, hailing back to the days of *Basic Dungeons & Dragons,* the game uses four classes (Cleric, Fighter, Magic-user, and Thief). Unlike the material it apes, the demi-human races are not considered separate classes. You are not a 4th level Elf or a 6th level Halfling. The demi-human races are treated more akin to the later rules (allowing them to take on the normal roles that humans do, or taker multiple classes in combination).
- *Part 3:* This section covers the spell descriptions. Unlike the older games, the spells are cleaned up and handled much akin to the d20 system (i.e., a spell works the same if it is cast by a cleric or a magic-user).
- *Part 4:* The adventure section covers rules for movement, vision, secret doors, mapping, and so on. Experience

and character advancement is handled in this chapter as well.

- *Part 5:* This is the full encounter and combat rules. They are well written and fun, showing off mechanics that are quick to play and straight forward, without making the game dull.
- *Part 6:* This is a mini-monster manual. This section ranges from page 54 to page 111 -- the longest section of the book. It details a nice, wide selection of critters ranging from humanoids (like goblins and such) to the dinosaurs and dragons one expects from such a game.
- *Part 7:* Treasure, including magical treasure, is covered here.
- *Part 8:* This last part of the game is a condensed dungeon master's guide. A good set of rules for handling most situations likely to come up in a game are presented in a clear, concise manner.

If you want to play in a game that is simple and reminds you of the old days of grabbing up your dice and rolling up a character in 2d12 minutes, then this is the game for you. Also available on the Web site are over two dozen supplements and game aids for free download. These game aids include additional classes (druids, assassins, etc.) as well as some campaign material. The site deserves a look, even if you just want material for your other games.

If this book has a drawback, it is the relative lack of self-identity. It tries so hard to be the old games of the early days of **Dungeons & Dragons** that it becomes them and stops being anything on its own.

--K. David Ladage

Pyramid Review

Loose Alliances (for *Shadowrun*)

Published by [FanPro](#)

Written by Lars Blumenstein, Mikael Brodu, Anthony Bruno, Elissa Carey, Dan Grendell, Rik Hakala, Robyn King-Nitschke, Christian Lonsing, João Nunes, Peter Taylor, Malik Toms, and Tobias Wolter with Rob Boyle and Jason Hardy

Cover by Marc Sasso

Illustrated by Fergus Duggan, Jason Glaser, John Gravato, Larry MacDougall, Erik Roman, Klaus Schwerinski, and Chad Segesketter

164-page perfect bound soft cover; $24.99

Even as **Shadowrun** *Fourth Edition* is released and goes out of print, and then back in again, FanPro is still publishing supplements that detail the Sixth Age in the run up to the new core rules' pick-up date. And detailed this magical era certainly is, with a myriad of sourcebooks exploring the events and plots that have occurred during the 2050s and 2060s. Many of these, of course, have involved the setting's major movers and shakers. These include, but are not limited to, dragons, megacorporations, the Mob, secret cabals, and a panoply of political organizations. That's all fine and dandy, but what do you when not involved in the affairs of the big boys? Which Mr. Johnson does your Fixer put you in touch with, and who are the threats you might face, if not on an international scale, then on a national scale -- and lower? In other words, who are the bigger players in the smaller ponds?

Loose Alliances is the supplement that answers that question, taking a step down the rung to examine the medium-sized movers and players. From the political and the ecological to the religious and the criminal via the elite and the magical, the groups given in *Loose Alliances* are still powerful, just not powerful enough to change the world. The information is presented in the usual *Shadowrun* fashion, as a series of online documents posted to the Shadowlands Bulletin Boards, each accompanied by comment, opinion, conjecture, truths, untruths, and rumors from those that hang out on the boards, some of whom are also shadowrunners. Any actual game information is placed at the end of the book. Physically, *Loose Alliances* is up to FanPro's usual standards, decently illustrated, particularly so by Larry MacDougall.

The first chapter is entitled *Political Agitators,* and it covers a wide spectrum of groups and issues: green groups and activists, anti-corp groups, anarchists, neo-communists, meta-human hate groups, pro-meta groups, modern fascists and anti-fascists, feminists, and finally, plain old rebel and revolutionary movements. All of the usual suspects are here, including TerraFirst!, the Humanis Policlub, GreenWar, and Alamos 20K, in an update of previously published material. To this mix are added plenty of smaller, possibly more interesting groups. For example, the Astral Space Preservation Society takes care of damaged regions in astral space, the Ghoul Liberation League campaigns for Ghoul rights, and the Mother Earth Policlub takes in groups whose interests encompass feminist, green, and nature magic issues. Lastly, the descriptions of the home-grown revolutionaries also updates the status of various uprisings, including those within the Elven nation of Tir Tairngire, the Mitsuhama corporation-dominated Native American Nation of Tsimshian, and the anti-Aztlan rebellion in the Yucatán peninsula.

Although a decent selection, the book takes a more interesting turn in its look at the Sixth Age's elite. The more obvious of these is the Aristocrat's Cabal, the informal group of European blue bloods whose influence and power is enough to engineer an election in Austria and have a grand duke acclaimed in Lithuania. They get it all done while looking good at the latest fashionable soirée, of course. Of possible interest to player characters is Aegis Cognito, a data- and intelligence-gathering corporation that offers a subscription service for constantly updated information that 'runners and their associates might need. The most intriguing entry here is the description of the United Nations in the 2060s. Resurrected by the Corporate Court and now wholly Geneva based, its General Assembly is still a big chat forum, and the Security Council remains relatively powerless and is rivaled by the corporate-dominated Economic Council. Rumor has it, though, that the current S ecretary General is using UN Observation Teams as cover to investigate the world's hotspots, all perfect roles for a shadowrunning group. It has adapted to the changed circumstances, with organizations devoted to Awakened and environmental issues, and even anti-terrorism with the agency being known as UNATCO.

The *Awakened World* is one very much of secrets, magical in particular. With so many of these hinting at a previous age of magic, there is multitude of organizations and individuals searching high and low hoping to reveal the arcane mysteries of the past. Besides discussing the current status of arcane archaeology, the major rivals are presented in some depth. These are the Sheila Blatavaska-led Atlantean Foundation and the late great dragon-funded Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research. However, both face a new rival in the Mediterranean: The Apep Consortium specializes in Egyptology, and it is rumored to have links to people with a very dark agenda. Several more normal magical organizations are also covered, most notably the French Seers Guild, which has strong ties to France's nobility and politics,

Next, the book turns to divine matters. The chapter *Keepers of the Faith* deals with just the two religions. For Catholicism, there is the "Vigillia Evangelica," a Holy Office of the Vatican dedicated to both expanding the Church's secret library and protecting both Church and flock from the Sixth Age's darker side.

The state of Islam was previously covered in the chapters on the Middle East-based dragon Aden and his rival, Lofwyr, in ***Dragons of the Sixth World,*** and it is continued here. Simply, this book updates the Islamic world following the assassination of Badr al Din Ibn Eisa, the Iranian mufti who helped engineer the unification of the Arabian Peninsula, and whose more militant stance following his resurrection is increasing tensions across the Arab world. This is probably the least useful section in the book because its contents do not lend themselves to obvious use within a game, unlike the "Vigillia Evangelica," which just screams for the addition to a game featuring a ninja nun or two.

The penultimate chapter exposes a little of ***Shadowrun's'*** criminal underworld, providing a couple of services, some bad guys, and a host of potential rivals and employers. The first service is Brokerage X, a highly illegal investment service that helps turn a shadowrunner's hot tips (sort of insider trading acquired with guns and magic) gained on a mission into hard cash. The second, Draconic Information Virtual Exchange, is a nexus point for all facts draconic to which almost anyone can subscribe and contribute. Of course, rumor has it that someone is putting all of this gathered data to sinister ends.

The bad guys are really bad. Tamanous are body snatchers and organleggers, rumored to be lead by flesh- munching Ghouls or Wendigo, so it is okay to be wantonly violent with them. The potential rivals and employers are other shadowrunners who perform particular missions, such as burglary or smuggling, or who have risen to the big leagues and can afford to hire other shadowrunners (such as the player characters) to help with their missions.

The last chapter is for the GM only, adding a minor rule here and there, but mostly discussing how the contents of *Loose Alliances* can be put to use. This can be boiled down to the fact that any one of the groups discussed is a potential enemy, employer, cause, or rival. The summation for every group is more practical; this gives just the straight facts plus a trio of scenario hooks. This is preceded by a set of suggestions on how the various groups can form unholy alliances, such as Mother Earth and the Islamic Unity Movement. The clever little combinations should serve as examples for a GM to create his own.

Like other supplements for the game, *Loose Alliances* contributes more background to the *Shadowrun* world, but by

its very nature, it lacks the focus of previous titles. Its scattershot approach raises a problem or two. The first is a need for an index, and the second is that at times the reader is left wanting more information on a particular group. The feeling is that there is more to be told about some of the organizations described herein. Nonetheless, the lack of information leaves plenty of room for the GM to develop a group as he wants.

There is likely to be something for everyone within *Loose Alliances*' pages, and it helps that each group possesses more than the single use. Not a supplement to push *Shadowrun*'s back story forward, or to concentrate upon a particular feature, *Loose Alliances* does a decent job of filling in the game's minor niches.

--Matthew Pook

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

Of Tumultuous Travel, Tumbling Tummies, and Typical Times that are Anything But

Here in the States, this coming Sunday marks Mother's Day. (In perusing Wikipedia, I note that apparently several other nations celebrate their own versions of this holiday, despite the well-known fact that America invented mothers.) I was originally planning on doing something a bit special this week for *Pyramid* -- perhaps a themed article or two -- but I found myself wanting my own mother more than anything about 36 hours ago. That's when I got about as violently ill as I've ever gotten in the lead-up to the weekly *Pyramid,* and about as ill as I've been in the past 15 years or so. Frankly, when ingesting a tablespoon of apple juice makes one's intestinal track sound like a wooden roller coaster[1] that's two missing nails away from a class-action lawsuit, it's not a good sign. (This also marked the first day of my week-long descent into bachelorhood as my wife and our son departed for Texas to visit her brother. Fun.) Anyway, while I'm not exactly *better,* I've at least recovered to the point where I can spend more than three minutes in my computer chair before needing to stagger off whimpering back to my bed.

Which is to say, "No theme issue for you." This is a shame on my end, for entirely selfish reasons. I've been thinking about my own mother recently, ever since she passed away a few weeks ago, on the first of April (a date I generally had positive feelings toward before then). It was no particular surprise, since she'd been fighting cancer for 14 months by that point, but I think it's still hard to prepare for fully.

In hindsight, I'm wondering if it's ever possible to really appreciate quiet moments that we have with our friends and family. I mean, sure, the big events -- weddings, graduations, celebrations -- are pretty easy to mentally note as a special time. But it's the less-hectic moments -- the games of *Scrabble,* the umpteenth iteration of an oft-seen movie, the "boring" chats -- that I miss most about times gone. As a minor example, if I'd known that my gaming days in college would represent an era of free-wheeling creativity and group dedication that I've not encountered since, I might have tried to savor them more.

Or maybe not. I suspect that it's the very mundanity of such events that enables them to be enjoyed. As proof, I remember one of the last collegiate gatherings of our old gaming pals before we went our separate ways. We recognized this time for what it was: the end of an era. And, really, that realization got in the way of the good gaming we were all there to enjoy. Oh, sure, we had *fun* . . . but we would've had more fun if we hadn't realized it was our last time.

And so it goes with my mom. Six weeks before she died, we drove down to Florida for our February visit, an annual tradition for perhaps a decade. But we all knew that the odds were pretty good that this would be the last time we'd gather like that, and it put a pall over the whole thing. (Of course, being pretty doped up on morphine didn't help.[2]) No, far more special -- to me, at any rate -- was the family visit we "snuck" in last August, when I was helping run the World Yo-Yo Contest for my umpteenth year in a row. I'd managed to talk my corporate masters at the WYYC to giving me a gas stipend instead of an airline ticket, so we all drove down to Orlando; my mom and stepdad drove up from Fort Lauderdale, and we met and chatted after the convention was over. There wasn't anything noteworthy about the gathering, at the time; we went out to eat, we went to the mall ([Downtown Disney,](#) home of the LEGO Imagination Center), and hung out by the swimming pool (where Sam experienced his love-hate relationship with pools: loves playing in the water, hates getting his face wet). It was a mundane time, in the sense that such gatherings happen a million different ways the world over, but it turned out to be the last time we were together as a family.

The message of this column? Darned if I know. My stomach is still making noises like the MGM lion[3], and just because I'm able to type doesn't mean I make sense. I guess I would suggest that you take a look around and appreciate anything that might be noteworthy. Don't dwell on it -- it'll only get in the way! -- but make that mental note, and move on.

Because today's same-old same-old moment might be the last one of its kind.

I love you, Mom.

--Steven Marsh

[1] Another American invention.

[2] My mom, that is.

[3] [Leo](), that is.

Quick Fixers

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

In any adventure, there is likely to come a moment when the heroes or their equipment have taken more damage than they can deal with themselves, and they need to call for expert help. Given the variety of equipment adventurers are likely to carry, this may occasionally require some rather bizarre expertise.

Here is a modest collection of healers, artisans, and assorted repairmen from various eras. Each one is designed with a particular cultural background in mind but requires only minor changes to adapt for almost any setting.

Asta Kristinsdotter, Shaman and Exorcist   *125 points*

Asta is the wise-woman of a small, isolated Norwegian village. Her mother, Kristin, maintained that Asta's father was a skald who never returned from a Viking raid, but many in the village whisper that the dark-haired child was really the son of a Finnish wizard who passed on his magical talent.

Asta was married at 13. Though quick-tongued and not considered beautiful, she could skillfully run a household and a small farm, and a local midwife was training her.

She outlived her first husband and divorced her second. She was 44 and still childless when her third and last husband died. By the time she was 50, no one in the village remembered her birth or her father.

In a setting with magic, Asta may or not have some minor magical powers, depending on the needs of the campaign -- but she will recognize when first aid is more appropriate than an exorcism or other spell, and treat her patients accordingly.

In a setting with no magic, Asta's ability to heal or harm is largely illusory: whether or not she realizes this is up to the GM. Even there, though, she is probably the best nurse for many miles around, skilled at sewing up wounds as well as clothing, and with enough knowledge of herb lore that she's unlikely to poison anyone unintentionally.

Campaign Uses: Asta is not only the village's healer; she also serves as its leader when the men are away viking. Strangers who she doesn't accept as friends or allies will need to be careful: Even if she has no magical powers, she is still capable of putting aconite in someone's soup or have them murdered in their sleep. Anyone to whom she has a good or better reaction, however, will be offered hospitality as well as healing.

Other Settings: A wise-woman like Asta might be found in almost any low-tech setting from the stone age onwards -- even in a "secret magic" horror campaign, or in a post-holocaust survivors campaign.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Ht 5'7", Wt 145 lbs., Size Modifier 0, Age 52. Fair complexion, grey hair in long braid, grey eyes; a healthy-looking broad-shouldered woman.

TL: 3. *Cultural Familiarity:* Norse. *Languages:* Norse (Native) [0].

Advantages and Perks: Charisma [5]; Danger Sense [15]; Magery 0 [5]; Magery 1 [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Bad Temper (12)[-10]; Bloodlust (15)[-5]; Collects (and hoards) amber [-1]; Dislikes sex, except when drunk [-1]; Intolerance (Total) [-10]; Likes most animals, except dogs [-1]; Proud [-1]; Unattractive [-4].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Village) (E) IQ [1]-11; Cooking (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Diagnosis/TL3 (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Exorcism (H) Will [4]-11; Farming/TL3 (A) IQ [2]-11; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-11; First Aid/TL3 (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Housekeeping (E) IQ [1]-11; Leadership IQ+1 [2]-12*; Melee Weapon (Axe/Mace) (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX+3 [8]-15; Naturalist (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Pharmacy/TL3 (Herbal) (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Poisons/TL3 (H) IQ [3]-11; Professional Skill (Weaver) (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Psychology (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Running (A) HT-1 [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-11; Sewing/TL3 (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Thrown Weapon (Axe/Mace) (E) DX [2]-12; Veterinary/TL3 (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Weather Sense (A) IQ-1 [1]-10.

* +1 from Charisma.

Spells: Detect Magic (H) IQ-1 [1]-10; Ease Labor (H) IQ [2]-11; Lend Energy (H) IQ-1 [1]-10; Lend Vitality (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Minor Healing (H) IQ [4]-11; Purify Water (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Seek Water (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Sense Disease (H) IQ-1 [2]-10.

Gear: Hatchet; small knife; first aid kit.

Variants: This is the 125-point version of Asta for a campaign where magic is possible. For a no-magic setting, drop Magery and the spells, and she becomes a 100-point character. For a formidable 200-point witchdoctor, increase IQ and IQ-based skills by two levels, Magery by two levels, double the points spent on each spell to raise their level by a total of five, and add one level of Per or Will.

Bartholomew "Bones" Campbell (50 points)

Bartholomew Campbell had never intended to become a doctor. As a boy, he was good with animals but slightly shy around people and not thought to be overly bright. Because of his skill with horses, he apprenticed to a blacksmith. He soon gained renown as the best farrier in the county.

In 1849, Campbell left his hometown for California, setting up shop in Sacramento as a blacksmith, horse trainer, and veterinarian. When the Civil War broke out, he returned home to fight alongside his brothers and cousins, and he was made a surgeon's assistant. What he saw so horrified him that he was soon unable to sleep unless dead drunk.

At the end of the war, Campbell returned west, and his life fell into a pattern. He would arrive in a new boomtown advertising his services as a farrier and horse doctor, but keeping busy with any other work he could find. While the town prospered, so would he, but after the boom ended and work dried up, he would start drinking increasingly heavily until he broke or lost his last pair of glasses. Unable to work, he usually ended up as town drunk. In time, though, he would hear of a new boom (preferably in a "dry" state or county), sober up, acquire new glasses, and head for another mine site where the cycle would begin again.

Campaign Uses: In a reasonably large or established frontier town, such as Dodge City or Tombstone, Campbell may be the owner of a successful business such as a livery stable, smithy and cartwright, funeral parlour, or any combination of the above; his skill at caring for horses provides him with a comfortable living, and potentially be of use to the PCs. In a one-horse or ghost town, however, "Bones" Campbell may be the only medical care available for several days in any direction -- after he sobers up, at least.

Other Settings: Though designed for an Old West or *Deadlands* campaign, Campbell only requires mild tweaking to fit into any setting where an economic downturn could result in his becoming a homeless vet. He might also accompany a small underfunded cavalry unit in almost any era, providing medical care to both horses and men.

ST 11 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].

Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Ht 5'9", Wt 160 lbs., Size Modifier 0, Age 49. Weatherbeaten complexion, shaggy grey hair, blue eyes; a shabby but amiable-looking man with strong hands.

TL: 3. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western. *Languages:* English (Native) [0].

Advantages and Perks: Animal Empathy [5]; Animal Friend 2 [10]; Healer 1 [10]; Honest Face [1].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Alcoholic [-15]; Bad Sight (Nearsighted)[-25]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Dead Broke [-25]; Dislikes train travel [-1]; Horrible Hangovers [-1]; Incompetence (Fast-Talk) [-1]; Odious Personal Habits (Doesn't wash) [-5]; Pacifism: Self-Defense Only [-15]; Responsive [-1].

Skills: Administration (A) IQ [2]-11; Animal Handling (Equines) (A) IQ+4 [8]-15*; Area Knowledge (USA) (E) IQ [1]-11; Carpentry (E) IQ+1 [2]-11; Diagnosis/TL5 (H) IQ-1 [1]-10†; Guns/TL5 (Shotgun) (E) DX [1]-11; Leatherworking (E) DX [1]-11; Merchant (A) IQ [1]-10; Naturalist (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Packing (A) IQ+2 [2]-13*; Physician (H) IQ-1 [1]-10†; Professional Skill (Undertaker) (A) IQ [2]-11; Riding (Equines) (A) DX+3 [6]-14*; Smith/TL5 (Iron) (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Teamster (Equines) (A) IQ+3 [3]-14*; Veterinary/TL3 (H) IQ-1 [2]-10.

* +2 from Animal Handling.
† +1 from Healer.

Variants: The traits above are for Campbell during his "town drunk" phase. For Campbell at the top of his form, add the (-60%) mitigator to "Bad Sight," change the Dead Broke Wealth level to Comfortable [10], and replace Odious Personal Habits [-5] with Workaholic [-5], for a total of 100 points.

Quentin Weaver, Gadgeteer, Tailor to the Metahuman Elite   100 points

Quentin Weaver was a theatrical costumer and assistant stage manager in his native London when World War II broke out. Though he was exempted from military service because of poor health, he was recruited as part of Britain's Special Operations Executive. He helped to make fake enemy uniforms and other foreign clothes, then, at Station IX, he created disguised weapons and other equipment for use by saboteurs, spies, and POWs hoping to escape.

After the war ended, Weaver resumed his old career and landed a job at the BBC, but he found he missed the excitement of espionage work. He kept in touch with some of his SOE superiors and designed a few gadgets for Cold War era spies, but he soon discovered there was little demand for his services. In the mid-1960s, however, millionaire super-normal Herne approached Weaver. He wanted the tailor to create a protective costume and a variety of gizmos that would enable him to defeat foreign or rogue super-soldiers. Weaver rose to the challenge, and as Herne recruited more supers into his team, the Knights Companions, Weaver was called on to make costumes appropriate to their abilities. The costume he designed for Fortalice made him famous worldwide. Since then, he's become one of the world's leading couturiers to the super community.

Campaign Uses: Apart from enabling characters in a supers campaign to acquire the Costume advantage once they have enough points, Weaver also crafts and repairs other gear -- from holdout weapons to battlesuits. He likewise designs interior decor for secret bases and super-vehicles, and he moonlights as an art director for British science fiction films and TV series.

Other Settings: In a non-super campaign, Weaver might work for the "Q" branch of an intelligence agency, from ***Deadlands'*** Pinkertons or Texas Rangers to the I-Cops.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 9 [-10].

Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Ht 5'11", Wt 110 lbs., Size Modifier 0, Age 79. Pale complexion, shoulder-length wavy silvery-mauve hair, blue eyes; an undernourished but exquisitely dressed man with a walking stick.

TL: 8. *Cultural Familiarity:* Zagadka. *Languages:* English (Native) [0].

Advantages: Fashion Sense [5]; Gadgeteer [25]; Gifted Artist 1 [5]; Gizmo 1 [5]; High Manual Dexterity 1 [5]; Longevity [2]; Versatile [5].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Careful [-1]; Effeminate Homosexual [-1]; Imaginative [-1]; Pacifism: Cannot Kill [-15]; Post-Combat Shakes (6) [-10]; Refuses to learn foreign languages [-1]; Skinny [-5]; Trickster (15) [-7]; Unfit [-5]; Workaholic [-5].

Skills: Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Artist (Scene Design) (H) IQ+1 [4]-13*; Camouflage (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Cartography/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Current Affairs/TL8 (Science and Technology) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Disguise/TL8 (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Forgery/TL8 (H) IQ [4]-12; Group Performance (Directing) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Hidden Lore (Supers) (A) IQ [2]-12; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-12; Inventor! (WC) IQ [24]-12; Performance (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Photography/TL8 (A) IQ+1 [2]-13*; Professional Skill (Tailor) (A) DX+1 [8]-13; Propaganda (A) IQ+1 [2]-12; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ [1]-12; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-13; Sewing/TL8 (A) DX+2 [2]-13; Smuggling (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Traps/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [2]-12; Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

* +1 from Gifted Artist.

Jacques Mihallef, Technomancer   *250 points*

In 1945, when Robert Oppenheimer changed the world by reviving magic, Jacques Mihallef was a plump dreamy 15-year-old in Lausanne. He performed poorly at school and expected little more from life than to inherit his father's locksmithing business. Maybe, just maybe, he could find a girl who would tolerate and possibly even share his enthusiasm for horror movies, astronomy, and antique weapons.

By the end of '45, Jacques had realized that the visual disturbances he was experiencing were actually magical auras and ley lines, and he began studying magic.

By 1950, Jacques was living in Paris and widely respected in magical circles as an alchemist, astrologer, and enchanter. While not particularly creative, he could use his abilities to repair and improve a variety of items. He did a lot of work for museums and antique dealers as a restorer, as well as consulting for security firms. That year, he met Suzette Dupont, who convinced him that honest work would never earn him enough money for him to get the finer things in life, including her. Soon, Jacques was freelancing as an armourer for local criminals, assisting burglars to break into magically secured premises (though never museums), and turning his talents to forgery.

When Jacques finally realized he was being used, he turned Suzette and her accomplices in in exchange for immunity and a new identity. After the trial, he returned to Switzerland and opened a shop selling scientific and magical equipment. Occasionally, he accepted jobs enchanting or repairing items for a few trusted clients. Nearly 50 years later, he still works there, insisting that he will only retire if he finds someone sufficiently skilled to take on the business.

Campaign Uses: Jacques is mainly useful as a provider and fixer of magical items. However, because he frequently feels the need for protection from his old enemies, he is likely to ask for the PCs' help at least as often as they ask for his. Though no fighter, he would also make an interesting Enemy, at the Watcher or Rival level.

Other Settings: Though intended for the Merlin timeline, Jacques can easily be adapted to any campaign that mixes magic and technology, including supers or ***Shadowrun.***

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

Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 5 [0]; Basic Move 4 [-5].

Ht 5'10", Wt 225 lbs., Size Modifier 0, Age 74. Ruddy complexion, bald, blue eyes, neat white beard and moustache; a fat man with long, spidery fingers.

Languages: French (Native) [0], English (Accented) [4], Italian (Accented) [4], German (Broken) [2]. *TL:* 7+1.
Cultural Familiarity: Merlin.

Advantages: Artificer 1 [10]; Contact (Business Agent, Effective Skill 12, Somewhat Reliable, 9 or less) [1]; High Manual Dexterity 1 [5]; Longevity [2]; Magery 2 [25]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Careful [-1]; Clueless [-10]; Curious (9) [-7]; Dislikes dogs [-1]; Dreamer [-1]; Easy to Read [-10]; Enemy (Criminal gang, medium sized group, 6 or less) [-10]; Fat [-3]; Loves horror movies [-1]; Low Pain Threshold [-10]; Oblivious [-1]; Post-Combat Shakes [-5]; Shyness (Mild) [-5]; Unfit [-5]; Workaholic [-5].

Skills: Accounting (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Alchemy/TL7 (H) IQ-1 [4]-12; Armoury/TL7 (Body Armor) (A) IQ+2 [4]-15*; Armoury/TL7 (Melee Weapons) (A) IQ [1]-13*; Armoury/TL7 (Small Arms) (A) IQ+1 [2]-14*; Astronomy/TL7 (H) IQ+2 [12]-15; Computer Operation/TL7 (E) IQ [1]-13; Connoisseur (Visual Arts) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Current Affairs/TL7 (Science and Technology) (E) IQ [1]-13; Electronics Repair/TL7 (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; First Aid/TL7 (E) IQ [1]-13; Hazardous Materials/TL7 (Magical Items) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Hobby Skill (Horror movie trivia) (E) IQ [1]-13; Lockpicking/TL7 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Mathematics/TL7 (Applied) (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Mechanic/TL7 (Clockwork) (A) IQ [1]-12*; Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Photography/TL7 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Professional Skill (Locksmith) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Research/TL7 (A) IQ [2]-13; Speed-Reading (E) IQ [1]-13; Thaumatology (A) IQ+2 [8]-15†.

* +1 from Artificer
† +2 from Magical Aptitude

Spells: Accuracy (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Adjustable Clothing (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Analyze Magic (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Apportation (H) IQ [1]-13; Armor (H) IQ [1]-13; Aura (H) IQ [1]-13; Blur (H) IQ [1]-13; Clean (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Colors (H) IQ [1]-13; Complex Illusion (H) IQ [1]-13; Continual Light (H) IQ [1]-13; Copy (H) IQ [1]-13; Counterspell (H) IQ [1]-13; Create Air (H) IQ [1]-13; Create Earth (H) IQ [1]-13; Create Fire (H) IQ [1]-13; Create Object (VH) IQ [2]-13; Create Water (H) IQ [1]-13; Current (H) IQ [1]-13; Dark Vision (H) IQ [1]-13; Darkness (H) IQ [1]-13; Daze (H) IQ [1]-13; Detect Magic (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Detect Poison (H) IQ [1]-13; Dispel Magic (H) IQ [2]-14; Dream Viewing (H) IQ [1]-13; Dye (H) IQ [1]-13; Earth to Stone (H) IQ [1]-13; Enchant (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Extinguish Fire (H) IQ [1]-13; Far-feeling (H) IQ [1]-13; Far-Tasting (H) IQ [1]-13; Find Weakness (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Foolishness (H) IQ [1]-13; Fortify (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Heat (H) IQ [1]-13; Hideaway (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; History (H) IQ [1]-13; Identify Metal (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Identify Plastic (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Identify Spell (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Ignite Fire (H) IQ [1]-13; Infravision (H) IQ [1]-13; Keen Vision (H) IQ [1]-13; Know Location (H) IQ [1]-13; Lend Energy (H) IQ [1]-13; Light (H) IQ [1]-13; Lighten (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Lighten Burden (H) IQ [1]-13; Lightning (H) IQ [1]-13; Locksmith (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Machine Control (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Machine Summoning (H) IQ [1]-13; Mage Sight (H) IQ [1]-13; Magelock (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Manipulate (H) IQ [1]-13; Measurement (H) IQ [1]-13; Memorize (H) IQ [1]-13; Missile Shield (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Mud Jet (H) IQ [1]-13; Night Vision (H) IQ [1]-13; No-Smell (H) IQ [1]-13; Perfect Illusion (H) IQ [1]-13; Puissance (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Purify Air (H) IQ [1]-13; Purify Fuel/TL7 (H) IQ [1]-13; Purify Water (H) IQ [1]-13; Reconstruct Spell (H) IQ [1]-13; Recover Energy (H) IQ [1]-13; Rejoin (H) IQ [1]-13; Repair (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Reshape (H) IQ [1]-13; Restore (H) IQ [1]-13; Reveal Function (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Reverse Missiles (H) IQ [1]-13; Schematic/TL7 (H) IQ [1]-13; See Invisible (H) IQ [1]-13; See Secrets (H) IQ [1]-13; Seek Earth (H) IQ [1]-13; Seek Food (H) IQ [1]-13; Seek Fuel/TL7 (H) IQ [1]-13; Seek Machine/TL7 (H) IQ [1]-13; Seek Magic (H) IQ [1]-13; Seek Plastic (H) IQ [1]-13; Seek Water (H) IQ [1]-13; Seeker (H) IQ [1]-13; Sense Danger (H) IQ [1]-13; Sense Foes (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Shape Air (H) IQ [1]-13; Shape Earth (H) IQ [1]-13; Shape Fire (H) IQ [1]-13; Shape Metal (H) IQ [1]-13; Shape Plastic (H) IQ [1]-13; Shape Water (H) IQ [1]-13; Sharpen (H) IQ [1]-13; Shatter (VH) IQ-1 [1]-12; Shatterproof (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Shield (H) IQ [1]-13; Simple Illusion (H) IQ [1]-13; Sleep (H) IQ [1]-13; Sound (H) IQ [1]-13; Talisman (H) IQ [1]-13; Tell Position (H) IQ [1]-13; Temporary Enchantment (H) IQ [1]-13; Test Fuel/TL7 (H) IQ [1]-13; Thunderclap (H) IQ [1]-13; Trace (H) IQ [1]-13; Umbrella (H) IQ [1]-13; Voices (H) IQ [1]-13; Walk on Air (H) IQ [1]-13; Warm (H) IQ [1]-13; Watchdog (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Water Jet

(H) IQ [1]-13; Weaken (H) IQ [1]-13; Wizard Eye (H) IQ [1]-13; Wizard Hand (H) IQ [1]-13; Wizard Nose (H) IQ [1]-13.

Gear: Enchanted business suit and fedora hat (DR 3 and Missile Shield); Concealable ST 20 Powerstone pendant; Ring of Foe Detection; professional alchemical laboratory.

Lea Mao de Ferro, Mechanic and Armourer   *100 points*

Lea Mao de Ferro had long dreamed of following in the tire-tracks of her parents, both double-ace autoduelers. She had to change her plans after the family car was ambushed and exploded, leaving her burned almost beyond recognition. While Gold Cross could clone her a new body, the psychosomatic damage remained.

Though no longer able to fight effectively, Lea was still fascinated by cars. Once she had sufficiently recovered from her injuries, she started building one that would be safer for its occupants but still a threat to other cars. Her first, the Revolvo, was a heavily armored and effectively fireproof station wagon that featured a turret-mounted Vulcan Machine Gun, with six-shooters front and rear linked to bumper triggers. It was criticized by many as being too slow and expensive for dueling or pizza delivery, but the design became popular with soccer moms and undertakers. This led to her being offered a job with the Fnord company, which she turned down in order to continue working for her family and as a freelancer.

Campaign Uses: Lea mostly works as pit crew for her family (who could be either useful Allies or dangerous Enemies in an *Autoduel* campaign), but when she has time free, she hires out to the car designers building prototypes, and sometimes to other autoduelers who can afford her.

Other Settings: Lea is designed for *Autoduel* scenarios, for use as an NPC mechanic, but her skills would also be helpful in any setting where armed vehicles are available to civilians, such as a supers, *Cyberpunk, Reign of Steel,* or space campaign.

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

Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Ht 5'7", Wt 90 lbs., Size Modifier 0, Age 27. Attractive; brown complexion, short curly black hair, dark brown eyes; a slender, waif-like young woman with heavily calloused hands.

TL: 9. *Cultural Familiarity:* Western. *Languages:* Spanish (Native) [0], English (Accented) [4].

Advantages: Attractive Appearance [4]; Artificer 2 [20]; High Manual Dexterity 2 [10].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Attentive [-1]; Combat Paralysis [-10]; Dislikes smokers [-1]; Duty (to family) (6) [-2]; Incompetence (Dancing) [-1]; Likes beer, but won't drink anything stronger [-1]; Motion Sickness [-10]; Never wears make-up or jewelry [-1]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Prefers sex in a car to sex in a bed [-1]; Sense of Duty (Family and Team, Small Group) [-5]; Skinny [-5].

Skills: Area Knowledge (American highways and arenas) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Armoury/TL9 (Small Arms) (A) IQ+2 [2]-13*; Armoury/TL9 (Vehicular Armor) (A) IQ+4 [8]-15*; Brawling (E) DX [1]-11; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Computer Operation/TL9 (E) IQ [1]-11; Current Affairs/TL9 (Sports) (E) IQ [1]-11; Driving/TL9 (Automobile) (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Electronics Operation/TL9 (Electronic Warfare) (A) IQ [2]-11; Electronics Repair/TL9 (Electronic Warfare) (A) IQ+1 [1]-12*; Electronics Operation/TL9 (Security) (A) IQ+1 [1]-12*; Engineer/TL9 (Automobile) (H) IQ+1 [2]-12*; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11; Gunner/TL8 (Machine Gun) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Gunner/TL8 (Rockets) (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Guns/TL8 (Rifle) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Liquid Projector/TL9 (Flamethrower) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Machinist/TL9 (A) IQ+1 [1]-12*; Mathematics/TL9 (Applied) (H) IQ+2 [1]-9; Mechanic/TL11 (Automobile) IQ+4 [12]-16*; Merchant (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Navigation/TL9 (Land) (A) IQ [2]-11; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-12; Sex Appeal

(E) H T [1]-11†; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-11.

* +2 from Artificer
† +1 from Appearance

Gear: In workshop -- medium pistol; protective suit with assault boots; armoury and mechanics' tool kits. While dueling -- storm rifle loaded with APHEX; UGL and bandolier of grenades; ballistic suit; tool kits; first aid kit; small fire extinguisher. While partying -- medium pistol; ballistic vest; denim or PVC shorts; assault boots.

Variants: For a more formidable 150-point version of Lea, remove the Combat Paralysis and Motion Sickness disadvantages, add the Bloodlust (15) [5] disadvantage, and increase DX and DX-based skills by one.

Adventure Seeds

Thou Shalt Not Suffer (Vikings): When several children in a nearby village become sick, a rumor spreads that Asta has poisoned them. Their warriors raid the PCs' village in order to capture her. If the PCs succeed in protecting her, she will insist on going to the next village to try to cure the children. The jarl reluctantly agrees, on the condition the PCs go along as bodyguards.

One Norse Town (Old West): The posse, badly wounded after an encounter, stagger into the nearest settlement in search of healing. The only available choices are "Bones" Campbell, who the locals assure them used to be a doctor in the war, and an old seamstress who believes that the Indians are descended from her Viking ancestors and is rumored to have magical powers.

Costume Party (Supers): After metahuman mastermind Maximus (see ["Supporting Cast: Circus Maximus"](#)) escapes from prison with some of his most dangerous henchmen, he decides his new gang needs new costumes, weapons, and vehicles. A few days later, Lea Mao de Ferro disappears along with a prototype battlecar. Then Jacques Mihaellef is kidnapped. Quentin Weaver suspects (rightly) that he's likely to be next, and persuades one of the heroes that the logical thing to do is for one of them to disguise themselves as Weaver, so that he can lead the others to where Maximus is holding his other captives.

*With a Strange Device (**Technomancer/Infinite Worlds**):* To infiltrate the citadel of a dangerous magical cult on Merlin, the PCs need to acquire the regalia of one of its members. An opportunity arises when a wealthy cultist is wounded and takes his uniform to Jacques Mihallef for repair -- but the PCs will either have to persuade Jacques to cooperate, or find another way to get into his magically protected workshop.

*Reality Test (**Autoduel**):* Lea Mao de Ferro has designed a new two-seater and wants to road-test it under arena conditions. She offers to sell it to one of the PCs at a greatly reduced price, under one condition: In an attempt to recover from her fear of autodueling, she wants to accompany him on a cross-country combat event, alternating between the driver and gunner seats. The PC may decide he needs his friends to come along as backup.

Eve's Daughters

for *GURPS* and *In Nomine*

by William Keith

This is a true story.

Longer ago than time has been counted, there lived a woman with many daughters. We don't know much about her -- whether she was wise as her people reckoned such things, or if she was counted beautiful or notably strong. She had no name of a sort we would recognize, because her people did not name things like people. We do know one very important thing about her: In some sense, she must have been a good mother.

Her daughters survived to womanhood, and had daughters of their own. So well did her family flourish that eventually every woman around was descended from her. Because these people were the only humans anywhere, those descendants of hers were the only women in the world. Because this is a true story, those daughters of hers are the mothers of us all.

These days, we count years we didn't even see, and according to our count this woman lived about two hundred thousand years ago. We also speak, and name things that are important to us. Before we knew for sure that a woman existed who was the forebear of everyone in the world, we felt like such a woman should exist, and one religion called her Eve. When biology became capable of tracking our maternal ancestry through the delicate strands of DNA in our mitochondria, that name arrived at an owner who had never had one of her own, our gift to her. We found some of her daughters, and gave them names as well: Lingaire, Malaxshmi, Xenia, Yumi, Jasmine.

After all, mothers are important to their children. Children are important to their mothers, too: so important that -- and this part of the story is no longer any more true than any other could-have-been -- if our mothers could have been given a chance to watch over their descendants and help guide us through untold ages, there is little doubt that they would take it instantly. . .

Less than gods but still extraordinary, many campaigns can make use of powerful humans, especially with the inherent authoritative status of mothers to entire geographic regions. They can be Patrons providing assistance or even powers, hiding in the shadows of the game world or shaping it. These are five such ancestors, herein referred to as Clan Mothers, who generally divide the world among them. Each Mother is assigned a region of the Earth; people living there are relatively likely to have this Clan Mother as an ancestor. (This division is not strictly accurate in a genetic sense; the GM who cares to do some research will find 30-odd names, dates, and regions available to flesh out with as much personality as desired. The chosen Mothers' "real" regions of influence have been expanded for convenience.) Lingaire, the eldest, is presented in *GURPS* terms; if desired, the other Mothers can be built using her as a base.

Settings

How these ancestral women arrive in the game world will depend heavily on the setting.

Modern Fantasy/Supers: The Mothers are bodily immortal, and have known each other for millennia. The setting can even revolve around the Clan Mothers as the world's primal, maternal, human "pantheon." Lingaire, the leader, represents humanity to even remoter gods who do not deal with humans directly. She symbolizes humanity's power over lesser spirits. Malaxshmi is the striking hand. Yumi tends her potent herbs, healing and soothing and intoxicating. Jasmine walks the hallways of worldly power wrapped in anonymity. Poor Xenia may have gone completely round the bend, her fiery technology threatening the stability of the world order. Flesh out the Mothers with a few more of their sisters and perhaps some of their husbands (serial or immortal, as desired), weave a web of alliances and rivalries, and set them to pulling the strings of world events that involve the heroes of their nations.

In Nomine: The Mothers listed passed on millennia ago and now dwell in the Lower Heavens. Lingaire far predates the Fall, as does the younger Malaxshmi; they are likely among the oldest souls who have not moved on. Xenia lived around the time of the Fall, and may have even been alive at that moment. Did it mark humans alive at that time? Yumi probably lived around the time the demons broke free, and Jasmine lived just slightly before recorded history.

Many people are interested in the afterlife of their ancestors and the welfare of their descendants, so the Hall of Family has been erected in Heaven. Within, angels search soul-biographies and query the Symphony for information to build the Universe's ultimate family trees. The Clan Mothers are housed here and involve themselves in affairs of their descendants, keeping informed on current events. They are often summoned to advise angels on their associated human cultures.

Mitochondrial Eve apparently ascended, as did any Mothers the GM finds convenient. The areas of influence assigned are agreed upon by the Mothers who remain in the Lower Heavens. They are famous across Heaven, commanding loyalty from numerous Saints and other blessed souls, especially among their descendants. A Mother can get quick audience with an Archangel, or even a chance to speak to the Seraphim Council, though they will not squander their reputations on frivolities. Meeting one (or several!) on Earth should be quite a shock to anyone who knows about them (most angels will have at least distantly heard of them), signifying that something may be seriously wrong with a notable percentage of humanity, likely broken down along roughly racial lines, which requires a very human intervention to deal with correctly.

Sci-Fi/Bio-Tech: Bionomicorp usually trumpets its genetic achievements to the skies, but its most valuable project has taken place under layers of cover in the last 30 years: the reconstruction and birth of mankind's common ancestors. Designed by technology, raised by earnest if distant parents, given the best training money can buy, maneuvered into positions of power and influence. . . what does Bionomicorp hope to gain from their massive investment? Do the medical examinations they've undergone all their lives yield sufficiently valuable information? Is the pure source of the genetic adaptations that outcompeted all other family lines on the planet part of a long-term plan? Or have unexpected new abilities run ahead of the Corp's scenarios? Xenia thinks the Mothers are in danger, but then, she actually thinks she's 25,000 years old. Jasmine, however, is taking her seriously enough that she's putting out a few feelers. . . time to put that web of contacts to good use.

The Clan Mothers

Lingaire, the Eldest Mother

Maternal ancestor of East Africans, Lingaire is the oldest of the Clan Mothers. She appears to be a dark-skinned elderly African woman of medium height, with something slightly off about her features but generally a healthy physique. She is the only Clan Mother old enough to be noticeably different from modern human appearance, though it would take careful physical examination to pinpoint the slightly primitive features of a human female of 100,000 years ago.

As the closest remaining daughter to Eve, Lingaire claims not only all of Africa but, by historical extension, all of humanity under her protection. The other Clan Mothers always take her input seriously when she chooses to intervene in affairs beyond her proximate descendants. Clan Mothers are strong believers in respecting one's elders. . .

Lingaire (modern fantasy statistics)   *760 points*

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10], **DX** 12 [40], **IQ** 13 [60], **HT** 12 [20]

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 12 [2]; Will 15 [10]; Per 15 [10]; FP 14 [6].

Basic Speed 7 [20]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Block 12; Dodge 11; Parry 12 (Spear).

Social Background: TL: 8; *CF:* Stone Age African (native), modern rural African, modern urban African [2]; *Languages:* Swahili* (native) [0], Egyptian Arabic (Accented) [4], French (Broken/None) [1]

* Lingaire may well have been around for the invention of spoken language. Her native tongue has simply changed over the centuries along with that spoken by her descendants, albeit somewhat more consciously in her case. She may well be able to speak any language directly intervening between Swahili and mankind's mother tongue . . . a very useful ability in a Cabal setting. A similar spectrum applies for the rest of the Clan Mothers' "native" languages. Lingaire does *not* speak English; it hasn't been the world's *lingua franca* long enough for her to care yet. She'll commune in thought if there is a language barrier.

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5], Blessing of the Human Gate* [75], Blessing of the Spirit Door [45], Blessing of the Wilderness Trail [65], Combat Reflexes [15], Contact (Ayida-Wedo) [30†], Hard to Kill +4 [8], High Pain Threshold [10], Invokable [18]‡, Medium [10], Outdoorsman 3 [30], Reputation (+2, knowledgeable non-mundanes (large class), all the time) [5], Telecommunication (Long-Range (no penalties), +50%; Universal, +50%) [60], Unaging [15], Very Fit [15], Autotrance [1]

* Each Blessing is an Affliction 1 (beneficial Malediction (Long-Distance), +200%; Reliable +10, +50%): Racial Memory (active), Medium, and Outdoorsman 3, respectively.
† Skill Hidden Lore (Spirits)-21, supernatural talents, base cost 5; available on 15 or less (x3); usually reliable (x2). Daily contact via meditation keeps Lingaire up to date on the status of certain doings in the spirit world, and Lingaire returns the favor regarding affairs on Earth. Ayida-Wedo has very rarely steered Lingaire wrong for her own ends; just often enough that Lingaire keeps her own eyes peeled.
‡ Invokable: name for Detect (rare condition(people invoking her), base [5]; Reflexive, +40%; Precise, +100%; Long-Range(to no penalties), +100%; Reliable+4, +20%). This ability allows Lingaire to detect anyone, anywhere, who deliberately requests her attention; each contact attempt activates a straight Perception roll on her part (15), and if successful she becomes aware of the attempt and knows the precise location of the invoker. This is a handy ability for members of any pantheon, which GMs can fine-tune by considering the number of supplicants (more worshipers means a more common condition detected), setting conditions for the request (requiring a spell instead of mundane prayer would be even rarer, while detecting anyone in need of ancestral guidance would be more like Occasional), or adding No Roll Required instead of Reliable.

Disadvantages: Unattractive [-4], Bloodlust (12) [-10], Sense of Duty (all people of African descent) [-15]

Quirks: Isn't shy about using "respect your elders"; speaks familiarly of various gods; occasionally waxes nostalgic about mundane events dozens of millennia ago, even her first husband [-3]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Africa)-16 (IQ+3) [8], Armoury/TL0 (Melee Weapons)-15 (IQ+2) [8], Body Language-15 (Per+0) [2], Brawling-16 (DX+4) [12], Climbing-12 (DX+0) [2], Dreaming-16 (Will+1) [8], Farming/TL1-13 (IQ+0) [2], First Aid/TL0-15 (IQ+2) [4], First Aid/TL8-15 (IQ+2) [4], Game (Mankala)-16 (IQ+3) [8], Guns/TL8 (Rifle)-12 (DX+0) [1], Hidden Lore (Spirit Lore)-14 (IQ+1) [4], Hiking-12 (HT+0) [2], Housekeeping-14 (IQ+1) [2], Knife-14 (DX+2) [4], Leadership-15 (IQ+3) [8], Leatherworking-12 (DX+0) [1], Naturalist-19 (IQ+3+Outdoorsman 3) [16], Navigation/TL0 (Land)-16 (IQ+0+Outdoorsman 3) [2], Paleontology/TL8 (Paleoanthropology)-11 (IQ-2) [1], Psychology-11 (IQ-2) [1], Religious Ritual (ancient African gods)-13 (IQ+0) [4], Shield-16 (DX+4) [12], Spear-16 (DX+4) [16], Stealth-16 (DX+4) [16], Strategy-13 (IQ+0) [4], Survival (Plains)-20 (Per+2+Outdoorsman 3) [8], Survival (Jungle)-20 (Per+2+Outdoorsman 3) [8], Survival (Desert)-20 (Per+2+Outdoorsman 3) [8], Swimming-13 (HT+1) [2], Tactics-13 (IQ+0) [4], Teaching-13 (IQ+0) [2], Thrown Weapon (Spear)-14 (DX+2) [4], Tracking-20 (Per+2+Outdoorsman 3) [8], Traps/TL0-14 (IQ+1) [4]

Equipment: Lingaire is familiar with modern survival equipment and carries a full set of hiking gear and hunting weaponry. Should she lose any, she is fully capable of constructing new equipment from raw natural materials. The most obvious primitive equipment she commonly carries is a knapped stone knife, while back at her camp she possesses a light set of religious paraphernalia, the components of which would set any modern paleoanthropologist panting. She has a normal amount of starting wealth in equipment and even a bit of modern cash stored here and there; she simply has neither steady income nor significant living costs.

LINGAIRE *(In Nomine)*

Corporeal Forces - 3   Strength 8   Agility 4
Ethereal Forces - 2   Intelligence 7   Precision 3
Celestial Forces - 3   Will 7   Perception 7

Skills: Dreaming/4, Engineer/3 (Stone weaponsmithing), Fighting/4, Move Silently/5, Survival/6 (Plains), Languages (proto-Swahili/3), Large Weapon/5 (Spear), Medicine/1, Small Weapon/3 (Knife), Ranged Weapon(Bow)/4, Tracking/6, Knowledge (Psychology/4, Heavenly politics/3, Area: the Celestial City/6, Area: the Marches/2, the Loa/6), Savoir-Faire/5, Tactics/4

Songs: Tongues (Celestial/6), Projection (Corporeal/3, Ethereal/5)

Attunements: Blessed, Soul Link/6 (Ayida-Wedo).

Lingaire has no Vessel or Role unless required for an adventure; her "standard version" for In Nomine is a blessed soul in Heaven.

For most of her life, the skills Lingaire possessed were enough to master any environment, then start a human community from scratch and teach them to do the same. She is testament to the resilience of humanity in the face of raw nature. To an uninformed observer her supernatural potency is subtle, possibly even secondary to her astounding survival skills. It is nevertheless impressive once seen; in a Shadow War *(GURPS Voodoo)* setting her Advantages translate well to making her a Voodounista of high Initiation; in a *Cabal* setting she may well qualify as a Grand Master; in *In Nomine* she is Soul Linked with a powerful ethereal. And yet, she seems to have no traditional magical training!

Lingaire doesn't *need* to travel beyond the wilderness to affect world events; her name travels well-connected circles as someone who can be called upon for access to memories of humanity's deep past, guidance with outdoor skills, and excellent motherly advice. How she obtained her frozen age, invokability, and power to commune with supplicants are deep mysteries on which she keeps silent; the most informed guessers suspect it and her other abilities are gifts from the loa. Her responsiveness to invocation leads some to believe she is dead or otherwise transfigured into a loa herself, a belief she does nothing to disturb if not asked directly.

An informed observer in a setting with active loa would note that, if Lingaire's age is what geneticists would surmise, she predates the African religions upon which Voodoun was founded. If the loa grew in power from out of the mass of animist entities that primitive humans worshiped, it is not a farfetched possibility that Lingaire was responsible for selecting and promoting particular gods, in which case her Contact loa would take a request for a "small favor" very seriously. In a Cabal setting, someone this old may well predate the Deluge! While all the Clan Mothers predate the Cabal, Lingaire's age brings her very status as a human into question. Some might suspect her of being a qlippoth assuming the form of this archetypal human.

Variations

In a sci-fi campaign where Lingaire is a genetic reconstruction, remove the supernatural traits Blessing of the Spirit Door, Contact, Invokable, Medium, Telecommunication, and Unaging as well as her Dreaming and Hidden Lore skills. Her Body Language, Leadership, Paleontology, Psychology, Strategy, and Tactics skills were developed with formal study rather than just long life experience. *Keep* her other two Blessings, but lower the Malediction range to Regular and add the Biological power modifier; Lingaire's body produces high-tech drugs she can emit to unlock deep genetic memories in herself and other humans. Add spoken English to the social traits, Bionomicorp (or your preferred creator) as a constant Patron with setting-suitable modifiers, and Survival (Urban)-20 to the skill list.

Update the higher-TL versions of skills to the campaign's current TL and increase her Guns skill to a more campaign-survivable quality, but regardless of the Tech Level do not change Lingaire's TL0 skills. She keeps these practiced and accessible, even while displaying a keen ability to pick up recent improvements. The first of the reconstructed Mothers and the one closest in touch with raw humanity, her respect from the other Mothers in this setting is partially due to

her intense life experience and more an acknowledgment that she's probably the most openly dangerous of them all.

In a campaign where Lingaire is part of a pantheon, she should have Unkillable at some level, and may be the entity one invokes to obtain powers over lesser spirits. Her Afflictions can be bought permanently, and would include such traits as Channeling, Medium, Spirit Empathy, and others to form the GM's spirit-magic system.

In an *In Nomine* campaign, Lingaire is dead but still quite active. She is possibly the oldest human soul in the Lower Heavens. She is a political force to be reckoned with there, and stays in contact with Ayida-Wedo in the Marches on a regular basis. Her skill development is quite a bit different; though she was a skilled survivor on Earth and maintains her knowledge base, she has spent the centuries working in support roles for her children in Heaven. Her name travels sorcerous circles; Sorcerers on good terms with the loa can use divine Tethers created by Voodoun belief to contact her with the sorcerous ritual Summon Human Soul. As a blessed soul, she is not compelled to respond, but is aware of the call and the sorcerer's general desire, and can respond with Celestial Tongues or by projecting to certain places on Earth or in the Marches.

Malaxshmi, the Dancer

Maternal ancestor of the Indian subcontinent, Australia, and Oceania from about 50,000 years ago, Malaxshmi is a completely modern-looking human woman of apparent middle age. She currently lives in Sri Lanka, where her dark skin and obvious good looks point, paradoxically, to membership in the traditionally low-caste Rodi. She is fully capable of assuming the dress, speech, and body language of any of India's fine gradations of social status, and in the past she was known to assume a more respected identity. Yet in the modern day with its official rejection of the caste system she most often chooses to appear as a member of this caste with complex historical claims to both royalty and atrocity. Her motivations for doing so are complex; anyone asking who is not steeped in Indian society is more likely to get a conversation-turning witticism than an explanation. Her most obvious current project is dealing with the civil war in the region.

Summary Statistics Notes

Other than her beauty and lithe physicality, Malaxshmi is defined more by her skills than her advantages. She's a lover *and* a fighter: equally impressive dancing the complex religious narratives of Hindu temples, and dodging acrobatically between flashing bullets and clashing blades. Her greatest skill is her mastery of the vast and intricate body of Indian dance. Her more martial arts allow her to avoid detection in entrance and exit, outmaneuver hunters, and evade harm in a fight. In a fantasy campaign, she is a fully-realized *kalaripayit* master (see **GURPS Martial Arts**), complete with secrets of *marma* unknown to most practitioners. She may have been involved in the early distillation of yogic secrets, including the source of her immortality. In the modern day, she speaks English fluently, as well as an astonishing number of the many other languages of India. While she is now comfortably wealthy and is focused on social and martial interaction, she still has many skills that she honed over the millennia, necessary to hunt, farm, and survive in the climates of the region.

Personally, Malaxshmi is a cheerful woman with an easy laugh and a habit of melodramatic gesture in her conversation. Dance is her life; when she dances she joins Siva Nataraja as he turns the world. She's closest to Yumi among the other Clan Mothers, and is likely to go to her in times of trouble. She engages in regular dalliances with a series of men, and somehow manages to both avoid long-term entanglements and never leave a disappointed lover behind.

Indian dance is incredibly nuanced, with large bodies of narratives and styles that have intricate systems of stage conventions. GMs may consider permitting Malaxshmi the Enthrallment skills, based not on Public Speaking but on her Dance skill; though Captivate and Suggest would only work on an audience intimately familiar with the style being used.

Variations: In a sci-fi setting, her martial art possesses no arcane secrets, but her training makes up well for that with espionage techniques suitable for a Special Forces expert. Malaxshmi can get in, get the data, and get out, leaving

behind a kiss and a logic-bomb or not even a ghost on the entrance/exit logs.

In a "pantheon" setting, Malaxshmi is the patron of warriors. She is the ultimate Master of many schools of martial arts in the world, and is patron and teacher to their auxiliary magical traditions. Her social influence comes through her contacts with the leaders of these schools. Legendary achievement in these arts probably requires seeking her out for personal training.

In an *In Nomine* setting, Malaxshmi was a natural Soldier in life, and then spent millennia as a lively dreamshade ancestor spirit, working the ethereal Domain of her local pagan spirits to advise the shamans that served her children. When the Hindu pantheon absorbed the surviving members of these spirits, their policy dictated that she move on to Heaven, and she peacefully obliged. A later arrival to Heaven than Clan Mothers thousands of years younger, she nevertheless had a pre-established power base and remains in communication, albeit now at a remove, with Hindu mystics.

Xenia, the Burning

Xenia knows. Xenia *remembers.* Twenty-five thousand years wandering this planet, and the Mother of the Russian people recalls every waking moment. She watched the ice sheets advance and retreat and advance again. They will return, whether it be the inexorable cycles of the planet or the freeze of a nuclear winter, and she and her family will *not* be ground under their bitter touch like so many others.

In an "immortal Mothers" campaign, eidetic memory over such a long life has pushed Xenia's mind beyond normal human boundaries. Born in a northern settlement close to the edge of human habitability, she struggled against cold and predators and had to develop the ingenuity to keep her children warm, fed, and whole. Obsessed with extracting every ounce of warmth from the cold earth, her keen intellect came across many techniques and technologies before the rest of the world. But the clarity of memory has its price. A yipping chihuahua can bring back desperate fights against wolf packs; the touch of an ice cube yields a vision of another baby dying blue in her arms. Freezing to death is terrible, deceptive, and slow.

Burning is better. Burning is so much better.

Xenia's technological skills are often one TL ahead of whatever modern time is. She is interested in architecture, textiles, and climatology, not to mention Greek fire, gunpowder, flamethrowers, napalm, and energy weaponry -- anything that has to do with staying warm and using fire to your advantage. As a Patron, Xenia can provide advanced equipment.

One thing she can't do in a "modern fantasy" campaign is explain how her aging process stopped. Long, careful examination and more recently intense MRI scanning has shown her the lingering marks of extensive precise surgery she fails to remember undergoing, millennia healed, forcing her to conclude that some sort of intelligent intervention altered her during her natural lifespan. Her speculation ranges from alien visitors, to herself time traveling, to magically-traveling crossplanar experimenters. Her sister Clan Mothers think she is seeing evidence where none exists, but the question of her origins continues to nag at her.

GURPS Summary Statistics Notes

Xenia needs a few specific statistics in a *GURPS* game. She should include:

Attributes: IQ (astonishing genius level) [high*20]
Social Background: TL: campaign current+1 [5]; Very Wealthy [30]
Advantages: Eidetic Memory (Photographic) [10]
Disadvantages: Delusion ("It's getting colder than it should. The ice is returning.") [-5]; Flashbacks (Severe) [-10]; Phobia (Dogs) (12) [-5]; Pyromania [-5]; Sense of Duty (Europeans, Native Americans) [-10]; Workaholic [-5]
Quirks: Keeps her self and home outrageously hot [-1]
<>*Skills:* In addition to her background survival skills, Xenia's "mad scientist" skills focus on keeping warm, taming

fire and using it for protection, from weather or from people. They should be at least one tech level ahead of campaign norm; include anything reasonably necessary for her to have invented much of her equipment herself.

Equipment: Xenia is in many ways defined by her equipment. She has a bunker somewhere in Siberia with everything a survivalist could need for years, but her home and main workspace is a comfortably appointed 18-wheeler. The trailer contains a cutting-edge inventioneers' lab with $150,000 of facilities available. She can immediately begin work in play on a Simple TL9 invention, and with external funding can work on Average inventions. Encountered away from her home/workshop, she is likely to be fully outfitted with cold-weather survival equipment from utility knife and hatchet (ceramic, and tucked in an attaché case, if she *must* pass as sociable) to firestarters and survival blanket. Scientific or tactical equipment possibilities include a high-end TL8 laptop, with attached personal chemsniffer and laser mike, and infrared camera.

Xenia has invented or at least upgraded from TL8 the envirobag (***Ultra-Tech,*** page 75), the vapor canteen (page 76), TL9 toolkits for her skills (page 82), Reflex, Plastex B (page 88), and any TL9 equipment listed below. The smaller equipment would make fine Gizmos. Much of her personal wealth has come from discreet sales of body armor, explosives, and manufacturing data to interested entities. Her most advanced project to date, however, is non-weapons-related; she has long been interested in meteorology and is starting to lay the foundations for the design of a TL10 weather control system.

When it comes to weaponry and armor, Xenia doesn't think small. She owns several pieces of heavy weaponry, some of which are so illegal they don't exist yet. (Upgrade them to one TL higher than the setting in a world beyond TL8; substantial changes may have to be made in a lower-TL world.) Some options with which she may be found are the following:

- A trusty old flamethrower -- a personal favorite.
- A few pounds of TL9 Plastex B and some remote detonators. Almost as much fun.
- A holdout pistol. How positively outdated.
- A TL9 plasma torch is part of her workshop equipment.
- A TL9 assault laser. Her own invention, chemical-pumped and used when she has time to don her tacsuit. Either would be worth a fortune on the arms market. (The suit is a TL9 Reflex tacsuit with combat infantry helmet, as much for protection from the fumes of her assault laser as from incoming arms fire.)
- A still-experimental TL9 electrolaser carbine, which hums like a swarm of demons and fails on rolls of 14 or more.
- An MLAWS system, usually mounted in a niche in the back of the trailer, though she can carry it. This... works perfectly. (Suggested warheads include high explosive with Viper imaging for anti-equipment, and thermobaric for antipersonnel, although she's perfectly capable of upgrading standard flares or inventing an EMP warhead.)

Variations: In a sci-fi campaign, the reconstructed Xenia developed her mental problems and delusions during her growth due to missteps in the delicate process of constructing her genius brain; add the Delusion "I have survived since the Ice Ages." Otherwise, she needs little change beyond tech level upgrades. In any campaign, Xenia -- despite her skills, technological equipment and decent physical health -- is psychologically the most fragile of the Mothers, and her sisters subtly take care of her.

In Nomine Statistics Notes

Xenia isn't a techie in ***In Nomine;*** she's delved into the Word of Fire farther than most humans ever will, through alchemy, Attunement, and Song. She possesses Gabriel's Smite and Dance of the Atoms Attunements and can use the latter for some delicate and intriguing alchemy. She qualifies as a virtuoso with the Songs of Fire. These she can sing across planes, especially down Fire Tethers, and she is known to alter the Celestial version to provide strange omens to favored children. She may be involved with the Ignes (see ***Superiors 3***). For personality purposes, remove Xenia's normal delusion -- the environment of Heaven is just too accommodating to permit that to continue -- and make her phobia and flashbacks mild. (As for the pyromania, she typically resides in the Volcano, so to anyone without the "Where There's Smoke" Attunement it's barely noticeable. . .)

One might note that, while Xenia is no Saint, there's little reason for Gabriel to provide the Smite attunement to a human soul likely to reside in Heaven permanently. Perhaps some groundwork is being laid.

Yumi, the Green

The maternal ancestor of Korea and Japan has taken on responsibilities for most of Asia as well. She now maintains the appearance of an elderly Asian woman (hardly a day of her 20 millennia, really). Behind that slightly knowing smile is a mind that sings through the treetops and the roots, gentle as a falling petal, subtle as datura.

Yumi, more than the other Mothers, has a rather large array of names: called "the Green" and "honored ancestor," she has also been called Princess of the Primordial Dao and the Mysterious Woman in temporal and celestial aspects respectively, acting as a patroness of alchemy, especially herb lore and medical elixirs. She's also the best farmer among the Clan Mothers, the rest of whom are no slouches themselves.

In a modern fantasy setting you'll find her at one of her many compounds tucked away in rainforests and jungles -- anywhere there's a rich supply of biodiversity. If there's an alchemical recipe for it, she probably knows it, and the Herb Lore version of it. More exotic preparations, such as the brewing of tana, the making of azoth, or the creation of homonculi are known to her as well.

In a "pantheon" setting Yumi reveals secrets of the green world to husbandmen and herbwives, alchemist-apothecaries, and mages. Some of her alchemy works on the alchemist; the proverbial formula for Lichdom is supposedly a mere shadow of the process by which she ascended to her current status. Formulas that permanently bestow superpowers focused on wood, plants, and other aspects of life might be had from her for the asking, if the asker is qualified.

Need it be said for whom Yumi works in an *In Nomine* setting? The Archangel Novalis, of course. She pursues her researches in the Glade, and is famous for them.

Yumi will be drastically different in a sci-fi setting. She becomes a bioengineer par excellence, focusing on the plant kingdom and its derivative pharmacopeia, though by no means shunning synthetics. She's the best doctor among the Mothers, usually with a black bag close by. If Bionomicorp has designs on the Mothers, she may be in on them, a willing participant. On her person, she's almost always carrying a few drops of this and that useful drug, in syringes or on a scalpel -- stimulant, tranq, antidote, mace. . .

Jasmine, the Worldly

The maternal ancestor who claims the Middle East is a young and local Mother, at 10,000 years old or so a mere whippersnapper compared to her sisters. Nevertheless, she has taken on responsibilities for a difficult region of the world, and handled them with skill. In dress and manner Jasmine most closely resembles a Kurdish woman with a taste for Persian elegances from the height of the Abbasid caliphate.

Jasmine is a financier and power broker whose strength is a wide array of contacts and properties. She has access to numerous identities and legal authority to move significant funds. Her personal skills of business and law are second to none. She is also a propagandist: a social engineer who can, given time, shape masses. She professes Islam, the only Clan Mother to have openly espoused a modern religion. She claims to have seen the Prophet and several of the major events from the birth of the faith. (She also offers differing accounts of certain hadiths.) She claims no named sect, hewing to a unique interpretation of the religion applicable to her unique status. Some of the other Clan Mothers suspect that her expression of religion is opportunism -- Jasmine is very good at reading the political winds and conforming to the fluid expectations of societies -- but she insists that she is truly Muslim, even if her interpretation of the faith is necessarily different from that of her shorter-lived descendants.

While Jasmine's behavior and accoutrements mark her as a Muslim, Jasmine's descendants include the Jews as well; after all, the Clan Mother that claims Ishmael also claims Isaac! All the Mothers have had to come to grips with the saddening sight of tribes of their own children at war with each other, but in the post-World-War-II era Jasmine is

beginning to convince the other Clan Mothers that the conflict between the branches of her Semitic descendants deserves the group's concentrated attention.

Alterations: Jasmine will work well in any reasonably civilized setting that permits women wealth and social influence. In a "reconstructed Mothers" sci-fi campaign, of course, she never saw the Prophet preach and is simply Muslim. Her assets are limited to control of a large portion of Bionomicorp's capital . . . but that is still a portfolio the size of some small countries, and Jasmine has certainly parleyed control of these assets into productive investments that pay into more personal accounts. In pre-Islamic settings, ignore this personality trait or switch her to another religion. (She could well have been in Egypt when the Cabal was being forged.) If the Mothers themselves are the world's pantheon, Jasmine is a curious exception: the temporal powers she manipulates include a monotheist Church. That the Church's God doesn't answer contact requests as clearly as the Mothers does not deter the faithful, though it leads to a certain mockery by the populace. Everybody wonders what Jasmine is doing with the organization.

The abilities Jasmine can provide her supplicants are mostly temporal: resources and propaganda support, access to information and social circles. Her supernatural abilities may not have fully developed. She might be able to bestow, say, Business Acumen or Smooth Operator Talents. Even if all the other Mothers are Unaging, consider requiring Jasmine to hold back the tides of time with alchemical support from Yumi, or by transferring among serial bodies prepared by Sufi mystics. In a fast-changing modern world, though, her power works directly and efficiently in the areas of concern to the Mothers: effecting social change and spreading ideas.

The most radical alterations to Jasmine are required for an ***In Nomine*** game. Humans are strongly discouraged from attempting to manipulate corporeal wealth; that sort of attachment is very bad for the spirit. The wealth Jasmine has amassed here is in ownership of relics, talismans, and instruments traded by angels of Trade and spirits of the Marches. Some even travel as far as Hell, via intermediaries of course. After all, angels must deal with ethereals, ethereals deal with other ethereals, and those other ethereals can sometimes manage to buy something off of a demon. The same goes with humans. Jasmine shapes a web of trade connections that stretches from the Eternal City to distant points of the three Realms. Coin isn't important here; what she gleans for Heaven is information. A thread of rumor comes drops during a transaction with an ethereal enchanter, or an Infernal supplier, and travels by boast to a human who lets a certain phone number know, and Marc passes on the word to a Michaelite who is ready when the assault arrives at his Tether. If in the meantime she can do some good for her descendants, she is happy to make the world a better place.

The Omniscient Eye

How Much Sea Can I See Before I'm Sick?

I'm working on an adventure that has someone sailing a long way and the PCs chasing after them. It needs to be far enough across the ocean that turning around or stopping for supplies isn't an option (it's a big, open ocean without a lot of islands). How far can a sailing ship go without the crew running out of food and stuff? What difference does the size of the ship and crew make, and can I have bigger ships with more supplies still run by a small group of characters? Can't they get along for a long time just eating fish and seaweed?

The question of how to keep people alive for long journeys over challenging terrain has vexed mankind for millennia. Oceans are hostile environments where a great deal of ingenuity is required, particularly in the preparation for the journey. Many of the issues are similar for space travel, or even crossing a desert, although the sea has its own peculiarities. The question can be broken down into two parts: What is the nature and purpose of the vessel, because that will determine crew size; and what food and water can be carried and preserved or obtained to feed them? This article will focus on the Age of Sail when ocean crossings under sail were commonplace, ranging from Columbus's great ocean voyage in 1492 to the advent of steam-powered vessels in the late 19th century. Although many of these issues were still valid in the steam era, the reliability of powered vessels greatly reduced the risk compared to sailing ships subject to the vagaries of the wind.

The Crew

There is a world of difference between a merchant ship and a warship. One of the most significant differences is in manpower. Since all actions were powered by human muscle, a fighting ship needed an enormous crew to trim the sails, man the guns and act as a boarding party. A man-of-war was a crowded vessel, with each man allotted 14 inches of vertical height to sling his hammock, three rows deep along the gundeck. A large fighting vessel like *HMS Victory* had a complement of over 850. A full discussion of the crew of a warship can be found in the article "[Naval Warriors: The Officers And Men Who Fought The Great Square-Riggers](#)."

In contrast, a merchant ship had a much smaller crew. They would expect to perform sailing maneuvers more slowly than a warship, so they had many fewer skilled sailors. Although most merchant ships were armed, their focus was on deterring pirates rather than offensive warfare. They would rarely have enough crew to trim the sails and fire an entire broadside at the same time.

A good rule of thumb is that a naval or pirate ship would carry three men per foot of length, a merchant ship 0.5 men per foot and an armed merchant vessel 1.5 men. There were variations. Mail packets for whom speed was everything might carry more crew to ensure they could pay close attention to the set of the sails at all times, although if they sacrificed firepower for speed, they might not need men to man any guns. An East Indiaman bringing silks and spices from India or the Dutch East Indies needed both speed and sufficient firepower to deter pirates in the South Seas or the Indian Ocean, and would have enough crew to fight with one whole broadside (each gun required four to eight men, depending on its size) as well as handle the sails.

So the question of how many crew a sailing ship needs has many variables. If the ship in question is a merchant ship with no expectation of fighting and prepared to undertake all maneuvers slowly, it could have a very small crew. If it was a warship expecting to fight other warships on arrival, it would be a packed mass of humanity.

These numbers apply to square-rigged ship above about forty feet in normal usage. A square-rigger could be sailed with many fewer men *in extremis.* A fore-and-aft rigged vessel with a single mast and foresail can easily be crewed by

two and sailing single-handed is not impossible.

Food

Food technology has improved immeasurably in the last two hundred years. Prior to that, the basic premise had remained consistent. Food preservation involved smoking, drying, or salting the meat or fish to remove water. Sailors led active lives with high protein and calorie requirements. The staple food for men of war was salt beef and salt pork. This was stored in barrels deep in the holds of the ship and needed to be soaked for 12 to 24 hours in vats of fresh water, changed every four hours, to make it edible before it was boiled. The allotted food for a British sailor in 1805 for a week was:

two lbs of salted pork   four lbs of salt beef   two lbs of pease   seven lbs of bread   12 oz of cheese   six oz of butter   seven gallons of beer

Other staples were found in different navies, such as *bacalao,* or salted codfish, in the Spanish navies.

For a vessel the size of *HMS Victory,* this equated to eight barrels of pork per day. There were many challenges in providing this quantity of food. The meat itself was of variable quality, sometimes due to practical difficulties in the salting and storing process, sometimes due to corruption in the suppliers. It was stored deep in the hold of the ship, a dank dark place where the water from the bilges could rise up around the barrels, especially during a storm. It also was kept for a long time. It was not unknown for barrels of salt pork and beef to travel in a ship of the line to the West Indies, or even the East Indies, and back, before being put ashore and supplied to another ship when it was already two or three years old. Modern navies can keep a vast range of foods preserved in freezers, although this requires a permanent expenditure of power. The other great innovation was canning, a process perfected in 1810, whereby food was heated and vacuum sealed into an airtight metal container, greatly extending its life. This made the issues of running out of food much less troublesome for a naval skipper. In fact, two tins -- one of veal, one of carrots -- destined for an Arctic expedition in 1824 were opened 114 years later and found to be entirely edible, except for slight spoilage from the tin coating. It also reduces the other perennial problem for food on board a wooden sailing vessel: rats.

It was essentially impossible for a sailing vessel to feed itself from the sea while underway. Fishing is a skilled activity that is incompatible with traveling fast. A fishing vessel has to seek out the areas where fish are expected to be, reduce speed to veer out nets and gather them back in again, and the catch then needs to be sorted, gutted, cleaned and preserved. Fish does not keep well unless it is smoked or salted quickly. Additionally, many sailors seem to have had a marked preference for meat, seeing fish as an unpleasant alteration to their normal routine.

Where ships could and did forage for food was on islands, particularly those that were thinly inhabited or which had rarely seen humans. It was entirely possible to walk amongst a seal colony, killing as many animals as necessary and barreling them. (Animals could include penguins, dodos, tortoises, and indeed a very wide range of creatures.)

Access to the vitamins and minerals contained in vegetables and fruit was a critical issue. Fresh vegetables do not last very well at sea, and scurvy was an ever-present disease. Symptoms included very bad breath, bleeding gums, teeth and hair that could be dislodge by the slightest touch, a weakening of muscles, and extreme fatigue. In the early period of the Age of Sail, when sailing was primarily a summer activity, it was a particular problem for sailors from Northern Europe, many of whom had been very short of vegetables or fruit for the entire winter before setting sail. Southern Europeans with access to fruit, particularly fruits high in vitamin C like lemons and limes, suffered much less from scurvy. Scurvy still affected expeditions in the early 20th century: the doomed men of Captain Scott's Antarctic expedition might have survived if they had not been suffering from the fatigue caused by scurvy.

Seaweed is not a reliable replacement for onboard stores of vegetables. Many varieties are nutritious but hard to process and digest. It is not always that easy to come by, either. Oceans are deep, and seaweed is generally a coastal plant, although exceptions such as the Sargasso Sea do exist. (Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the Sargasso Sea is famous because it is such an exception.)

Simply put, after three months without some form of vitamin C, crews would begin to suffer rapidly from scurvy, making them listless, inefficient, and -- before long -- dead.

Water

Water was often more scarce than food aboard a ship. It was critical for soaking and cooking the salted meats which were inedible without it. By modern standards, the quantities of water allocated to each man were meager. They received between four and eight pints of water per day for all purposes, including washing. Sailors were notoriously averse to using sea water for washing, mainly through superstition but also because it can irritate the skin and make clothes stiff and brittle. The galley, the sick and the livestock all had first call on supplies of water. Some historians attribute the mutiny on board *HMS Bounty* to Captain Bligh's decision to prioritize water for the breadfruit he was transporting from Tahiti to the West Indies, rather than giving it to the crew.

It was possible to recover water from rainstorms, but this had many issues. It was unreliable, the catching mechanisms were imperfect and often salt-encrusted, and the rainwater pouring off the sails and rigging was likely to be dirty from the slush used to grease the rigging.

Distance

Most calculations of food and water supplies focus on time, not distance. A sailing ship is subject to the vagaries of the wind, which can be extremely unpredictable. Atlantic crossings are facilitated by the trade winds, bands of consistent wind that speed westward-bound ships across from the Canary Islands to the Caribbean and eastbound ships from Bermuda to the Azores and Lisbon or Gibraltar. However, ships also have to cross the doldrums (the areas of the Atlantic Ocean where a ship might sit becalmed for weeks) and contend with calms, storms and localized weather systems that disrupt the trades. It was entirely possible for a four-week crossing to take four months if the weather was unkind, and crews of merchant vessels have been known to die of hunger or thirst in the Downs, the anchorage near Dover in the south-east of England, while waiting for a fair wind to travel up the Thames.

A reasonable estimate for passage planning is that a vessel can average five knots across the entire journey, equating to 120 nautical miles per day. This figure could vary enormously, dependent on the vessel, her crew, and of course, the weather.

Summary

A well-stocked ship, with a full hold, lots of livestock and good quality barrels, could carry enough supplies for three to six months. However, there were substantial limits:

- Fresh vegetables do not keep. Without vitamin C, scurvy develops within three months, and by four months, crew members would be dying.
- Much food spoiled, particularly in the warmer latitudes of a westwards Atlantic crossing, the Pacific, and the Indian oceans.
- Fresh water was a precious resource. Without water, much of the food was inedible.
- Gathering food at sea, particularly fishing, is intensive and skilled. Few sailors had the skills to feed an entire crew, and would lose time traveling if they tried to do so; foraging was only really an option on land.

Any trip that lasts more than three months without any resupply is a risky undertaking in the Age of Sail.

Vessel	Launch	Length (ft)	Crew	Crew/foot	Notes
Santa	1492?	70	40	0.6	The largest of

Maria					Columbus' three ships
Golden Hind	1577?	120	85	0.7	The armed three-masted galleon in which Sir Francis Drake circumnavigated the world
Batavia	1628	185	303	1.6	A Dutch East Indiaman launched in 1628
Queen Anne's Revenge	1710	110	300	2.7	Blackbeard's flagship, a 40 gun brig
HMS Victory	1759	227	850	3.7	A first rate ship of the line with 104 guns, Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar
HMS Speedy	1782	78	90	1.2	Lord Cochrane's 14 gun brig and inspiration for HMS Sophie in Patrick O'Brian's Master and Commander
HMS Bounty	1784	91	46	0.5	A ship-rigged vessel despatched to carry breadfruit from Tahiti to the West Indies; closer to a merchant ship in crew numbers
USS Constitution	1797	204	450	2.2	A 44 gun frigate
Raj Mahal	1858	224	33	0.1	A later East Indiaman, once shipbuilders had begun to sacrifice firepower for speed
Cutty Sark	1869	212	35	0.2	A fast, unarmed tea clipper

Sources

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- *The Command of the Ocean,* N.A.M Rodger, Penguin
- *The Pirate Ship 1660 - 1730,* Angus Konstam, Osprey Publishing
- *Nelson's Sailor,* Gregory Fremont Barnes, Osprey Publishing
- "One of Jack's Prejudices" New York Times, 25 May 1884

--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!

Pyramid Review

Dark Heresy: Roleplaying in the Grim Darkness of the 41st Millennium

Published by [Black Industries](#)

Designed By Owen Barnes, Kate Flack, & Mike Mason with Dan Abnett, Gary Astleford, Alan Bligh, Ben Counter, Jon French, Guy Haley, Andy Hall, Tim Huckleberry, Andrew Kenrick, Mark Latham, TS Luikart, Chris Pramas, & Rick Priestley

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402-page full-color hardcover; $54.99

Dark Heresy is perhaps the most longly anticipated RPG of 2008, probably more so than the forthcoming *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition.* After all, fans had been awaiting the publication of an RPG set in Games Workshop's *Warhammer 40,000* universe for 20 years, ever since the announcement of the *Rogue Trader RPG.* And even with the publication of *Dark Heresy* the fans have not got that, instead having been expected to wait for its eventual publication in 2009 to be followed in 2010 by *Deathwatch,* an RPG focusing on the *Warhammer 40,000's* iconic Space Marines. Yet *Dark Heresy* looked like it was all the fans would get, for despite an incredibly successful launch, Games Workshop announced it would close Black Industries and thus cancel its two RPG lines… Fortunately, the good news is that Fantasy Flight Games has the license to publish and develop both the *Warhammer 40,000* and *[Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay](#)* lines, but in the meantime fans will have to make do with the few new supplements made available for both.

Dark Heresy is not the definitive *Warhammer 40,000* RPG, but rather is an RPG set in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe. This is an important distinction, because *Dark Heresy's* focus is upon the one style of play: Acolytes tasked at the direction of an inquisitor, to interrogate, root out, and combat aliens, cultists, demons, heretics, and witches. This is done in the service of the God Emperor who has ruled deathless for millennia over a galaxy-wide Imperium whose citizens worship him knowing that he is all that stands between them and Chaos. Even as his word and will is spread, enforced, and worshipped, it is the God Emperor's actual will that binds the Imperium together: the Astronomicon. Fueled by a life-draining psychic choir, this is a beacon that shines out brightly from Holy Terra and so guides ship navigators through the Warp and across the Imperium.

This is the setting for the dark and perilous 41st Millennium, but *Dark Heresy* comes with its own official setting, the Calixis sector. It sits far from the importance and protection of Terra, and must stand alone against the threats to humanity: chaos, mutation, war, and Xeno incursion. It is beset though by the Hereticus Tenebrae or Tyrant Star, a prophecy that foretells of a darkness that will eventually engulf the worlds of men. This prophecy attracts the attention

of the Inquisition and cultists alike, and even the populace as the appearance across the sector of a spectral star causes mass hysteria, psychic outbreaks, and geological upheaval. All of Calixis sector's major worlds and populations are described in some detail giving the GM plenty to work with. The book's introductory scenario "Illumination," is also set in the Calixis Sector.

Dark Heresy details only some of the threats that the 41st Millennium faces. This includes an introduction to the four major gods and the dark powers that inhabit the Warp: Khorne, Nurgle, Slanish, and Tzeentch, enough to hint at their nature, but no more. Other threats, such as mutants, cultists, and witches, are fully written up along with various minor demons and horrors, all easily customized to suit a GM's need. Although plenty of NPCs are given as well, the one threat not detailed in the "bestiary" or anywhere else in *Dark Heresy* is that of the Xenos. This reflects the humanocentric nature of the setting, with hatred that the Imperium has for Xenos (such that it could be argued that the average citizen of the Imperium is a racist bigot) and its upholding of the purity of man as an ideal; it's also reflected in the game since non-humans are unavailable to play.

Mechanically *Dark Heresy* is a percentile system similar to that of *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* such that if a GM has run that game, he can run this one. Rolls against an attribute or attribute plus skill need to be low with good and bad rolls granting degrees of success and failure respectively, enabling a GM to better interpret the roll. Combat adds to the perilous nature of the setting, guns in particular, because even with armor and his innate Toughness reducing damage, a character will only be able to take two or three hits before being seriously wounded. This occurs when a character's wounds are reduced to zero or less, with further successful hits inflicting critical damage, the result determined by damage type and hit location.

Being a game of dark future horror, characters in *Dark Heresy* can also be driven insane by the unnatural creatures they encounter. Failed Fear Tests will gain a character Insanity Points; gain too many and he will suffer from semi-permanent mental traumas. In addition, exposure to chaos, dark rituals, and the Warp will give the character Corruption Points that will physically affect or even mutate his body. Fortunately an acolyte possesses a number of Fate Points. These can be spent to re-roll tests, gain initiative in combat, improve the result of a test, or to recover from wounds or from being stunned.

Character creation in *Dark Heresy* is random, with a limited number of careers available. These are Adepts (scholars and bureaucrats), Arbitrators (law men and investigators), Assassins (skilled killers), Clerics (priests and dogmatic worshipers of the Emperor), Guardsmen (soldiery and mercenaries), Imperial Psykers (who practice psychic disciplines by opening themselves to the Warp), Scum, and Tech Priests (who are maintainers and operators by rite and rote of the mysterious technology who implant more and more technology as they advance and who worship the Machine God as well as the Emperor). The creation process begins by rolling for a character's home world -- Feral, Hive, Imperial, or Void Born (a massive space vessel whose charter takes it on a set route), which determines characteristic rolls and careers available. Each career offers a mix of standard and optional skills and talents plus equipment. Lastly, every starting character receives 400 Experience Points to spend on customizing his skills and talents.

Except for attributes, character generation does not have to be random, but everything about a character *can* be, from physical appearance and name to Imperial Divination, the result of which acolytes see as part of the plan that the emperor has for them and can grant a character attribute bonuses, Corruption, Fate, or Insanity Points, or even a minor mutation. Character advancement is done by spending earned Experience Points on buying advancements: attribute improvements, skills and talents. Every few thousand acquired experience points a character rises in rank opening up a new range of advancements to purchase. Buying advancements outside of a career path is possible, but only at the GM's discretion. Essentially though, *Dark Heresy* is a class and level system.

Of the eight careers, all are straightforward bar the Imperial Psyker. Sanctioned and bound to the Emperor, each Psyker opens himself to the Warp to use his abilities. In game terms he channels Warp power, rolling one 10-sided dice per Psychic Rating. If the result exceeds an ability's threshold it succeeds, but if a nine is rolled on one or more dice, a psychic phenomenon or worse occurs, ranging from minor occurrences like an ethereal stench or ghosts from the Warp appearing to perils such as sending the psychic gibbering or a shower of blood falling. The psychic abilities themselves are organised into disciplines that include biomancy, divination, pyromancy, telekinetics, and telepathy.

It is **Dark Heresy's** physicality that first catches the eye. Certainly the book has presence, both heavy on the eye and in the hand. However, this enforces the feel of the setting which is backed up by the wealth of detail inside about both the 41st Millennium and the Calixis sector.

Yet **Dark Heresy** is not without its problems. The lack of information about vehicles or spacecraft and space travel may be a problem for some, but these are hardly the game's focus. The lack of information about Xenos is more disappointing, but in some ways understandable. Where **Dark Heresy** is certainly lacking is a way into the game, there not being enough information up front about the setting of the 41st Millennium or what exactly the Acolytes do. This, of course, is to investigate dark heresies under the distant direction and authority of an Inquisitor, several of which are described as part of the Calixis sector. In selecting one of these, the GM also determines his game's focus, whether hunting aliens, demons, or witches. How this affects the game directly is never gone into, though and nor are there guidelines for the GM to create inquisitors of his own. As an aside, it would have been interesting if the GM and the players had the means to create their character's inquisitor, much in the manner of *My Life With Master.* Of course, the lack of information up front and the relatively sparse advice for the GM means that **Dark Heresy** is not a game for the neophyte GM and player, and so limiting the crossover capacity between **Dark Heresy** and its nearest relative, the **Warhammer 40,000** miniatures game.

Despite these issues, most notably the hurdle of getting into the game, **Dark Heresy** feels very complete with everything needed to play. It enables a GM to run a "Cthulhu in space" style of game in a very dark oppressive future. It may not be the **Warhammer 40,000** RPG that many have waited so long for, but **Dark Heresy** is a pleasingly comprehensive package that lets you roleplay in the Dark Millennium.

--Matthew Pook

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

When Was Your Childhood Future?

To quote my two-year-old niece stumbling triumphantly out of the bathroom during Christmas last year, "I poo-pooed in potty!" Such was my triumph in accomplishing roughly the same feat today, although in fairness I've been recovering from an illness that has lasted with more ferocity and vigor than any I've encountered since I became an adult. If my intestines refrain from shooting out my hinder any more this year, I will have only devoted about 2% of this year to that pursuit.

Among other side effects of this new-found freedom from porcelin, I find myself thirstier than any other point in my life I can remember . . . probably because I've been avoiding most fluids for the past eight days (or, as I like to think of it, "primer"). So I've been drinking lots and lots of my beloved diet soda, which has the odd side effect of (wait for it) making me go to the bathroom a lot. But at least I'm standing.

Which is to say, I've still been out of it for a week, and this week's column is more of a random-thought steam-of-consciousness thing here.

Mostly, I've been amazed in the past month or so about how I'm living in the future. By that I mean, flashing back to the primordial ooze of my childhood memories (the 1980s), I had this vision of how I thought the future *should* be. The ability to watch any television program whenever I want, on a device that's the size of a deck of cards. The ability to play incredibly fulfilling video games while on the bus . . . perhaps even with graphics that rivaled my Intellivision! The ability to carry around my music collection in a format that enabled me to find songs quickly and easily. The ability to store hundreds of books in my pocket.

In short, I entered my childhood future about five years ago.[1]

And I'm amazed at both how seamlessly my future came to be, and also how amazed at what the future might still yet become.

Now that I have a kid, I find myself practicing the "when I was your age" speeches. For example, we were one of the first ones on our block who owned a device that could play back video on demand. Oh, but if you wanted to buy a movie? It was over $100 . . . in 1980s dollars. For one movie. Television on demand? Forget it. There were video clubs that you could subscribe that would allow you to purchase some high-demand series *(I Love Lucy, Star Trek: The Next Generation)* but they were about $10 or more an episode (again, in 1980s dollars). Nowadays your average Best Buy has a television-on-DVD section larger than most "supermarkets" were in the 1950s. (Oh, and recording something yourself? That requires a blank tape . . . which cost about $5 for two hours at high quality, and each one is the size of a paperback book.)

I dreamt about owning an arcade-quality video-game machine in my own home, and the original Nintendo Entertainment System brought that dream true around the end of the 1980s . . . at the same time that games requiring longer devotion than an arcade can permit started coming into being. (See *Legend of Zelda* for perhaps the most triumphant beginning of that era.) I wanted a wrist-television-radio to be able to talk to whoever I want wherever I was. Nowadays such devices are so cheap that they're given to anyone willing to sign a two-year contract with Satan.

For the record, I've never had any particular interest or desire for a flying car, so that's one aspect of my childhood future that has never been disappointed. I saw *The Jetsons* enough to consider that such a thing might not be a good idea.

Anyway, my point is that I'm very interested in seeing my son grow older, so I can learn what he dreams of . . . because I'm out of ideas. Just about anything I can envision is the stuff of boring fiscal responsibility and nuanced social desires. I can't envision an eight-year-old under the blankets at night going, "In the future, I hope we'll have a clean renewable form of portable energy!"

And when it comes to my beloved tabletop gaming? Well, my childhood self wanted to be able to play any games he

wanted, with anyone anywhere. And today I pretty much can. Err . . .except I don't have any time, because I have a child; maybe irony is that clean renewable form of energy I long for. So now I don't know if my future dreams are so outlandish because I've forgotten what it's like to dream of the future, or if I just *think* they're too outlandish because I've learned to disbelieve. In other words, 38-year-olds who dream of holodecks view them as the impossible figments they are; eight-year-olds who dream of holodecks don't know any better, so they just grow up and invent them.

And thus ends my deep thoughts for bathroom contemplation. In the meantime, I'm enjoying my future . . . and I got to enjoy a *lot* of it while in bed last week.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] I'm trying to peg the exact date, but I think it was the point when I could own a complete run of the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* movies, the complete works of Monty Python and *Star Trek,* and *The Twilight Zone . . . all in a smallish bookshelf.*

Pyramid Review

Eketorp

Distributed by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Dirk Henn

Full-color boxed set with mounted board, six player mats, six player screens, deck of battle cards (numbered one to six nine times), six castle name tags, 12 material cards, 30 amulet tokens (five in each of six colors), 48 Viking pawns (eight in each of six colors), 112 bricks, rulebook; $59.95

Just to clear it up, because the box's font is odd to say the least, the name of the game is *Eketorp.* It's based on a Swedish fort from the Iron Age, and players contend for materials to erect walls in their own bastion.

The object of the game is to amass the most points by the end of the game.

Three to six Norsemen compete to finish their castles, vying with one another to obtain building materials from the fields. Each gets a player mat, a privacy screen, a hand of four battle cards, and a set of five amulets. Random material cards determine which locations offer up their riches this turn. Some areas produce grass (the cheapest and easiest substance to obtain) while others yield wood, clay, or stone (the best and most contested). Players secretly plan their actions using the mat and screen, leaving their Viking pawns at the castle (to defend it), placing them on the fields (to fight for and collect bricks), and stationing them on siege sites (to batter an enemy's stronghold).

A solitary meeple can grab a brick from his field, and multiple pawns can all take one so long as the ratio is one-to-one. But if there are more pawns than prizes, a battle ensues. Fights also occur when someone lays siege to a castle, or multiple attackers try to attack the same section of a castle.

Each player has a hand of four cards, each valued from one to six, and he selects one for each battle. If a player doesn't like his hand, he may trade it for an equal number of new cards by turning in an amulet for every card in his hand (an all or nothing exchange, so it's not cost-effective unless he's holding few cards). Choices are revealed simultaneously: The higher number wins, and the loser goes to the field hospital. This is a track of spaces on the board through which an injured piece must progress before it's healed and returned to its owner. The worse the beating, the further back the pawn is deposited. In a tie, both units are injured. Regardless of the outcome, the attacker and defender trade the cards they used and place them facedown beside their castle. When he's used all his own cards, a player scoops up the pile of enemy cards he amassed and that becomes his new hand.

If a Viking eliminates enough opposition in the building material fields, the remaining pawns collect bricks to build castle walls, stacking them up to three high in one of the six sections. If an embattled pawn is at a siege site outside a rival's castle, the margin of success is how many points worth of bricks he can eliminate (he steals one brick, but a sufficiently effective attack might destroy additional ones). If two or more clans try to attack the same barrier, they fight each other first to see who progresses to a siege.

A game takes about 45 to 60 minutes; when the 10th round concludes, or someone places the 18th brick in his castle, the game ends and points are totaled. Better-quality bricks are worth more points, a complete castle gets the owner a bonus, and unused amulet tokens are worth a point apiece. The highest total wins.

It's a good set of pieces, from the wooden pawns to the mounted map board. The bricks are small, but they stack pretty well without falling over, something that's obviously key. The privacy screens are a necessary evil, but still no one's

managed to crack the issue of how to provide shields big enough to work but small enough to fit the production budget. As a nonjudgmental word of warning: The mat graphics are small, so cheating and accidents are easy. Unless a careful player-by-player placement system is employed, pawns can be redirected to unintended destinations while everyone's busy with their own affairs.

Where the game really excels is strategy. Every bit of the rules makes obvious decisions a gamble. Commit a Viking to defense, or leave the homestead empty and hope the guy in the castle next door has a more tempting collection of bricks? Send several men to compete for valuable stone, or let others fight over those and pray no one wants the easy pickings? Successful attacks require some card counting, or at least avoiding the least successful player; after all, his Norsemen now possess all the good cards they *lost* to the first time around.

The clean and simple rules mean that nothing is unimportant. It may be grating to spend an entire game trying to second-guess someone -- or for that matter, third-guess him -- but it makes for some fun and surprising events and turnabouts (watch as a valuable set of bricks sits utterly unattended). *Eketorp* demands good recollection, a keen sense of judgment, and the ability to think ahead.

--Andy Vetromile

From Here to Tomorrow, with a Whip

I'm going to share a personal anecdote today, because, hey, it's my column.

The missus and I played a half-day of hooky to go see the new Indiana Jones movie. (I'll try to keep this column spoiler free, but there might be some broad thematic discussion later on.) Short version: We dug it.

Now, we go to very few movies, for a number of reasons (it's usually not worth the cost compared with buying the DVD when it comes out, we don't have the time or much interest in most blockbusters, it's *really* hard to schedule these dates with a 20-month-old, and so on). In fact, we calculated that we've been to less than five movies with just the two of us since we started dating, and this was the first time in almost two years. So we decided to treat this as a true festivity. For her, that meant a 1950s-Hollywood-style dress, and for me, that meant dressing up like the Man in the Fedora himself: leather jacket, off-white shirt, tan pants, whip, journal, sack with weird artifact inside. We didn't get as many comments as we were expecting, but I think we made some five-year-old kid's day at the theater.

Anyway, afterwards we were eating at one of those sit-down burger places for lunch, and my better half noticed that another patron of the restaurant had her Styrofoam container of leftovers sitting atop her minivan (forgotten as she got into the vehicle) . . . and she was starting to drive away.

So, in full heroic mode, I leap out of our car and start chasing the minivan. It takes me about two-thirds of the parking lot to catch up with the driver, but I finally make it and inform the perplexed person of her predicament. So, somewhere, there's a woman who has an anecdote about being chased down by Indiana Jones on the premiere of the fourth movie.

Aside: If you're looking to make a cheap costume whip, buy a cheap leather belt made from cross-woven bits of leather. (Get the longest one you can.) Rip the stitches along the tip end (not the end with the buckle), and it should unravel a bit. Wrap some black electrical tape around that end. (Done right, the frayed bits should look whip-like.) Fold the body of the belt in half long-wise, and use a tough thread of a neutral color to sew it together along the edge. (Since you won't be poking the needle through the actual leather but rather just the holes made by the weave, it should be pretty fast and easy.) When it's almost complete, rip the stitches in the buckle end, leaving the strands unweaving a bit there. Tape that end with the black electrical tape again to a wooden dowel, and wrap more tape around the dowel to form a handle. If you want, take some of the leather from the ripped-off tips and wrap it around the handle's end to form a slight knob; use more tape to keep it down. All told, I went from looking at a $2 Goodwill belt wondering, "What am I going to do with this?" to a completed prop in less than two hours.

Now -- and, again, we're in mild spoiler territory here -- the fourth Indiana Jones movie is set in the 1950s. What I find interesting is that they applied some of the tropes of that era -- and even the genre of 1950s adventuring -- to the Indiana Jones formula. In other words, no Nazis, more Russians.

From a gaming standpoint, what's most interesting to me is this segueing of a campaign from one era/genre to another via the passage of time. After all, it stands to reason that there would be adventurers who live on the cusp between two genres, forced to transition to a new outlook and world view. To a certain extent, the third edition of the original ***Vampire: The Masquerade*** did this by transitioning from a goth-inspired outlook to a rave-centric world view (grossly simplifying, of course). Even better, it was done in reverse on the BBC show *Life on Mars,* where a modern-day high-tech cop wakes up three decades ago in the "anything goes" lo-fi car-chase world, finding his old assumptions and standard operations no longer apply to his life as a cop in the 1970s. Such transitioning doesn't even need to be done via time. For example, the Victorian era and the Wild West were separated by a mere ocean and some land, so it would be interesting to consider a Sherlock-Holmes-esque Victorian gentleman ending up in a no-rules gold-rush town. (And, of course, the converse Wild Westerner could easily make the voyage back across the sea himself.)

Incorporating this in a campaign depends on how long it's expected to last, and how long-lived the heroes are. (There's no excuse for a long-running ***Vampire: The Dark Ages*** campaign to *not* start out in the Middle Ages and work its way

through the Renaissance . . . and beyond.) Any comic-book universe set in the past can find itself transitioning through gold/silver/bronze/iron-age strata as different tropes and ideals take root in the game universe; **Mutants & Masterminds** has riffed on this a number of times, and check out the [two](#) [parts](#) of "Kirby-1" for a reasonable in-game world justification for such era transitions. But any closely linked genres can find themselves evolving into each other via the simple passage of time; add magical slumber or cryogenics and you can have a *big* transition.

So if you want to mix up a campaign, start out with something like a grim realistic future-tech world and transition it to a space-opera setting via the discovery of FTL travel and a Force-like metaphysical energy source. Or start out in a Victorian campaign and eventually segue to a World War II good-versus-evil battle epic. The big question is: Do you tell the players ahead of time? (I say, "Yes," unless the players *really* like surprises.)

Because no one can remain a cliffhanger forever . . . but if they're willing to evolve, the need for heroes is eternal.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Ventrue: Lords Over the Damned (for *Vampire: The Requiem*)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Written by Russell Bailey, Will Hindmarch, & Chuck Wendig

Edited by Anita Hager

Art by Craig S. Grant, Ed Bourelle, Robert Carter, Miguel Coimbra, Lucas Graciano, Michel Koch, Efrem Palacios, Matt K. Smith, Claudia Sutton, Matias Tapia, Andrew Trabbold, Derk Venneman, & Chad Michael Ward

128-page full-color softcover; $19.99

Those folks who see all vampires as Dracula types -- flashy, debonair, perfectly coifed -- are probably also keen on the *Ventrue: Lords Over the Damned* when playing White Wolf's *Vampire: The Requiem RPG.* They are the epitome of the in-control bloodsucker, the imperturbable planners and schemers who sit back and allow their plans to come to fruition over many years. And since there was a World of Darkness reset, there has to be a new sourcebook for all one's haughty needs.

This one is written almost exclusively in the form of a series of interviews. Someone (who exactly is deliberately left in the air, though a couple of suggestions are made) has gone to all the Lords and asked them what they can contribute to a monograph on the subject. Not exactly a history, not precisely a who's who, the material is victim to a Ventrue's natural ambivalence. Comply with the wishes of the interviewer's obviously well-placed sire, or maintain that air of distant distaste for revealing personal information?

As the interrogator walks this fine line the lineage is uncovered, traced to such remote ends as Troy, the *Aeneid* and *Iliad,* and the group's movement (escape? exile?) to Italy. It survives medieval Europe and the not-inconsiderable journey to the New World. There's more to be said about the modern nights than the backdrop of the past if for no other reason than simple proximity (some were actually there for the Black Death, but some sources can't be questioned when they've sunk into torpor), but "tonight" is also the better part of the book.

As history goes it's okay, but it is some fairly dry and confusing reading early on. It's hard to tell the players without a score card, so careful attention must be paid to keep on the beam and know who's cheesed off at whom and why. The further one progresses the more compelling the work becomes, and the livelier the characters. If it's needed, here's a warning about the adult content, but while some of it makes the reader squirm it's usually for the right reasons. This *isn't* Dracula, after all, and even the proudest Ventrue doesn't always wear tails to dinner; vampirism is a sickness that hollows out the apple and the authors make sure their audience remembers these creatures are both refined and bloodthirsty.

Speaking of disease, the Malkavians are also described in this book. After all, who more ironic to endure a malady of madness and loss of control than a self-satisfied Ventrue? What it is, how it's contracted, how to use it in a story are all discussed, but they don't release all their secrets; indeed, the writers don't even come clean whether they're being coy because the time isn't right to divulge everything about that story element or because it's all up to the individual

Storyteller to decide what role the ailment plays in his tales. It's a testament to the text that it almost makes one feel sorry for those affected, no matter how conceited they may be.

The book goes light on illustration. There's not much here to break up the text, but what they have is more than passable. Some is culled from historical artwork (or is made to look like it, which is a mark in their favor). The graphic imagery is really good, where even the paperclips in the files are made to appear real. The bulk of the portraits are of the interview subjects, and those are done well. They match the text descriptions, they're deep and evocative . . . and they don't leave out the fangs.

Those who seek crunch may be disappointed; the book is information heavy (light on the art means plenty of text), but only the last 20 pages or so offer new Merits or powers. While there are bright spots, most of these seem uninspired. The Good and Bad Breeding Merits are appropriate Social devices for the Ventrue, but they're not reason enough to buy the book. Lordly Palette (the ability to taste blood impurities, presumably a play on words) is more intriguing but probably has limited application in a lot of games, while the Devotion called Hounds of Blood (which lets one's cur fetch blood) is the sort of nifty idea the manuscript could use a little more of. There are quite a few powers that mess with the mind but these appear because this section is haunted by the Malkavians, and they seem to blend together before too long, which good thematically, but again, for those seeking crunch . . .

They remove any hints of a rosy outlook for vampires; this is a secret society seen from a remove, deeply entrenched in the World of Darkness. To say this volume provides some strong writing is an understatement. Every line is carefully crafted for effect. The success of the book as a gaming product depends on the buyer's taste for literature, for that's really what *Ventrue: Lords Over the Damned* amounts to. But it earns this appellation for good reason, and it's a compelling saga most roleplaying lines don't achieve in their own long years of publication. If the reader can find the utility in the narrative when compared to just piling on more cool abilities, he'll see the bar has been raised a notch for turning RPGs into art.

--Andy Vetromile

GURPS Martial Arts Case Study: Agile Guys -- Part I

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

Previously, in the *GURPS Martial Arts* Case Study series we examined [Strong Guys](#). Those are fighters who have enough ST to tote big weapons and bash things hard. This time, we're going to concentrate on their polar opposite. That is, weak but agile fighters who lack the strength for large weapons. These guys aren't always small or terribly weak, but they can't rely on sheer damage to drop opponents. A low ST stat doesn't mean low combat capability. Let's see how to be combat effective with a low-ST fighter.

Fighting Tactics for Agile Guys

Let's run down through Maneuvers, Combat Options, and Optional Rules. Many rules affect everyone equally regardless of skill or strength; we'll omit those. These are the rules that have the most potential -- or the most pitfalls -- for low-strength, high-skill fighters.

Maneuvers

Here are the maneuvers that need special comment for a Agile Guy.

Aim. For ranged-combat Agile Guys, this is extremely useful. While it takes a turn you could be attacking, you'll get to add your Acc to your skill. This will help offset the range/speed penalties for your target, and can help overcome hit location penalties. Low-tech ranged weapons are dependent on your ST for damage (all thrown and most missile weapons) or are handicapped with a slow reloading time (crossbows, especially those above your ST). Therefore you'll need to make your shots count. Use Aim when you can and make each shot a more potentially damaging one.

High-Tech Agile Guys can use this too. Snipers will need it for long-ranged shots. While Strong Guys can carry and expend prodigious amounts of ammo to get a ROF bonus to hit and stack up lots of damage, Agile Guys will generally need to ensure each round hits a telling spot. Why settle for Torso if Aiming for one turn will net you enough Acc bonus to let you hit Vitals or Skull instead?

If you're toting what's effectively a one-shot weapon (a ST 20 crossbow on your ST 10 fighter, for example, or a black powder musket) make the shot count by Aiming first. Aim will also let you make the shot more tricky (see Tricky Shooting, *GURPS Martial Arts,* page 121) and less likely to be dodged.

All-Out Attack. This option is dangerous. You'll trade away all of your defenses for additional offense. Unless you've got a chance to drop your only opponent in one go, avoid this one. But if you take it, try to play to your strengths. AOA (Strong) is +2 damage or +1 per die; use this to ensure your minimum damage is enough to hurt your opponent, such as to overcome the Skull's DR 2. While (Strong) gives you bonus damage, (Determined) and its +4 bonus coupled with aiming for a better hit location might give you even more overall damage. AOA (Double) is useful for adding an additional strike to overwhelm a foe. AOA (Feint) plays into your strengths -- your Feint can reduce your target's defenses almost to zero if you're both lucky and

more skilled, and the followup strike should be Deceptive to ensure you get through. Agile Guys generally aren't high-DR so avoid AOA unless you're sure you can't be attacked.

Defensive Attack. This attack trades damage for a bonus to defend. As such, it's of mixed use to a Agile Guy. Your defenses should already be pretty high, so you'll only need this to boost yourself against an especially dangerous foe or to deal with multiple foes (+1 to Parry can go a long way to offset multiple parry penalties). The attacks also drop you in damage: -2 or -1 per die, whichever is higher. If you're only do about 1d of damage in the first place, this type of attack can cost you most of your damage potential. Against armored foes this can reduce you to irrelevance. On the other hand, if you're attacking very low HP foes, or using a non-strength dependent weapon (perhaps a Force Sword), or targeting a location where even minimal damage will incapacitate the foe (such as Eyes), it's like a free Parry bonus. In those cases, take it!

Committed Attack. Here you'll trade away defenses for damage (+1) or skill (+2). Generally, this isn't worth it unless your Dodge without Retreat or your off-hand Block or Parry is so good that you're still capable of defending yourself with ease. One interesting option, especially for long weapon fighters, is to "attack and fly out." Step, attack, and then step back. This costs an additional -2 to skill (so you're -2 to hit, +1 damage or -0 to hit) but can leave you outside the normal Attack reach of your opponent. That in turn may force a Move and Attack, All-Out Attack, or Committed Attack to reach you . . . opening your opponent up to a potential followup the next turn. Be careful, though, as a wily opponent may just attack your weapon or Beat against it instead to try to reduce your future offense and defense.

Evaluate. This isn't especially useful for skilled fighters, unless you need the extra margin of skill to fight an even more skilled opponent or strike a specific hit location. If you are outmatched in skill and your opponent favors Feint and Deceptive Attack, Evaluate for three turns and use that +3 against all of his Feints. When you get a good chance (perhaps after a buddy lowers his defenses by raining blows down on him or does a Beat) claim your +3 and go for a telling shot.

Feint. Like Deceptive Attack (see below), this is a bread-and-butter move for skilled fighters. Feint allows you to directly pit your skill against your opponent's skill. Generally, you'll win this contest. While you could just make a Deceptive Attack, a successful feint is twice as efficient. If you have 4 more skill than your opponent, on average you'll impose a -4 to his defenses with a feint. Trading those same 4 skill for Deceptive Attack only nets a -2. Plus they stack, so you can Feint now and give him a -4, then Deceptive Attack for another -2 for a total -6 to his defenses.

Good Times to Feint

- You have multiple attacks. If you have Extra Attack, trade one in for a Feint, and use the following attack as a Deceptive Attack to double-stack the benefits and overpower your opponent.
- You want to be sure of your attacks. Sometimes an opponent's Parry will be an Aggressive Parry, or they'll use Counterattack or Riposte, or they'll want to use Beat against you. Use Feint to lower their defenses before striking, reducing the chance of them pulling these off.
- Your effective skill to hit is relatively low. This is often the case where you need to hit a difficult location (Chinks in Armor or Eyes) to defeat or avoid an opponent's DR. Deceptive Attack is less useful because your overall skill is reduced. Feint before striking to lower the defenses, then take your shot.
- Your weapon will become Unready or has limited uses. Use Feint to open up your opponent and then followup instead of wasting limited-use attacks against defenses or wasting your time re-readying.
- *Defensive Feints* are a great option if you can't afford to be hit; you can make yourself effectively unhittable by a single foe by repeatedly using Defensive Feints against them. With Extra Attack, consider using one attack as a Defensive Feint (to protect yourself) and the other as an attack to wear down your foe. You can even do one Defensive Feint and one normal Feint, making yourself hard to hit and your foe easier to hit on your next turn . . .

The only time it's *not* worth using Feint is when your opponent is more skilled than you. That's a waste, because you're betting you'll roll much better. Chance are, you won't. Spend your turn Evaluating or just Attacking instead.

Beats are only useful if your ST exceeds your DX, or if you must reduce your opponent's defenses for a friend's

followup attack. But generally you'll have a harder time with Beat than with Feint. Ruses are also another one that you'll get limited use out of. Your IQ shouldn't exceed your DX, so Feint will be better.

Also, don't forget Ranged Feints if you're fighting at a distance.

Move and Attack. Use this maneuver with care. It will let you take advantage of a good Move score to cross the battlefield quickly, but it comes with a maximum skill of 9. Move and Attack is much more useful for ranged weapons.

Combat Options

When fighting with a high-skill fighter take a close look at these combat options.

Rapid Strike. Very useful for skilled fighters. One attack splits into two at a -6 penalty to hit. An Agile Guy should be skilled enough to absorb this penalty and double up. Of course, if you're also a Weapon Master or Trained By A Master, this is a mere -3 per attack. Rapid Strike makes the most sense for fighters with a single, powerful weapon backed by a good defensive weapon: a shield, a main gauche, etc. If you've got two weapons, check out Dual-Weapon Attack. If you already have multiple attacks, from All-Out Attack or the Extra Attack advantage, you can split one of them into a Rapid Strike. Which one is a matter of choice. One method is to put the Rapid Strikes after any normal attacks. This depends on the initial attack being successful in either in using up a limited defense or being Deceptive enough to get past defenses and inflict enough damage to open the open to follow-on attacks. The other option is the stick the Rapid Strikes first, and follow them with your "normal" attacks aimed at vulnerable locations or heavily Deceptive or both.

Dual-Weapon Attack. This is one attack with each of two weapons, at -4 per attack (plus any off-hand penalties). If you are skilled enough to hit twice (base skill 16 or so is usually enough), this is an excellent move. Compare this option with Rapid Strike; you get two attacks at -6 each vs. two at -4 each, and the two at -4 each come with a built-in -1 to defend against each. Dual-Weapon Attack can also be improved by fighters with the proper prerequisite advantages or perks. If you use the same weapon skill for both weapons (a double-stick fighter, a fencer with a case of rapiers, matched balisong or hook swords, etc.) it costs a mere 5 points to buy off DWA fully, giving you two attacks at -0/-0! If you intend to use it a lot, buy it up.

Dual-Weapon Attack has three major downsides. The first is that you need two weapons (or two fists!) to do it, both of which can reach the target (a problem for rapier-and-main gauche, or most weapon-and-fist combos). Both weapons also need to be able to *hurt* the target, another problem for Agile Guys. If your main weapon is a razor-sharp Puissance +3 Very Fine Katana and your backup weapon is a plain wakizashi, you're going to have problems dealing with significant DR. Second is that opponents with the right weapons can Dual-Weapon Parry, sweeping both of your attacks aside with one defense. The final downside is that you need Ambidexterity or Off-Hand Weapon Training to offset an additional -4 to the "off hand" weapon's attack. However, no self-respecting two-handed fighter should be long without either Ambidexterity or Off-Hand Weapon Training.

One "downside" often mentioned isn't much of a downside: If you are Trained By A Master or have Weapon Master, Rapid Strike is only -3/-3 while Dual-

Trading Skill for Effect

GURPS allows skilled fighters to effectively opt to trade skill for damage. This isn't done directly, but rather skilled fighters can aim for Hit Locations that give extra damage bonuses. If you have Broadsword-21, a Skull attack is a mere 14 or less to hit, and instead of 1.5x damage after DR it's ×4 damage after DR. Spear-15 gives a 12 or less to hit the vitals and change ×2 damage for impaling to ×3 damage. Further, skill can be traded for additional attacks (Rapid Strike) or to inflict defense penalties (Deceptive Attack), effectively making it possible to land more blows and thus inflict more damage.

GURPS Fourth Edition gives skilled fighters a broad array of options for trading their skill for superior effect. In general, there are three tradeoffs:

- trade skill for increased damage (ex: Hit Locations, Exotic Hand Strike, Jump Kick)
- trade skill for reduced active defenses for an opponent (ex: Feint, Deceptive Attack)
- pit skill versus skill to defeat the enemy (ex: Arm Lock, Finger Lock)

The main way to trade skill for damage is to aim at a superior hit location. Which location

Weapon Attack is -4/-4. Who would ever use Dual-Weapon Attack, it's said. Again, you can improve it, and it comes with that nice -1 to defend . . . equal to a Deceptive Attack at -2 to skill for each attack To get the same benefit, that Weapon Master needs to take that Deceptive Attack separately and his skill drops to -5/-5, worse than Dual-Weapon Attack.

Deceptive Attack. For skilled fighters, this is a bread-and-butter move. Against skilled defenders, you may need it to get through their defenses. Against lesser foes, it can be a cheap and easy way to reduce their moderate defenses to low defenses, allowing for easy victory.

When using Deceptive Attacks in a multiple-attack situation, generally you want to use them *later* in a sequence rather than earlier. Earlier attacks should be intended to defeat the target, but if not at least force active defense rolls that will use up things like Retreat. This in turn will force later Parrys and Blocks to be done at a penalty, and so on. If you can't make all attacks in a sequence Deceptive, make the later ones Deceptive. Pile on when the opponent is weak; it's better to ensure a single later attack will certainly overcome defenses instead of evening out your opponent's defenses. Deceptive Attacks can be a very useful team tactic, too. A Deceptive Attack aimed at a vulnerable location can force an opponent to Retreat or use a high-value defense, allowing your allies to attack your now more-vulnerable opponent. If you're a higher Speed fighter with a Strong Guy at your side, you can contribute more by using up defenses than by trying to single-handedly kill your opponent with a shot to the vitals or eyes.

Generally, though, it's not worth using Deceptive Attack to reduce your skill below 16. Skill 16 maxes out your chances for a Critical Hit. If your skill is already going to dip below 16, thanks to other penalties or Rapid Strike or aiming at specific locations, go ahead and make it Deceptive as well!

Telegraphic Attack. Your skill should be high enough that you don't need this except in utter emergencies. You should be trading your skill down to reduce his defenses, not trading up his defenses to get a better chance to hit! Save this for attacking by surprise or against defenseless foes.

Cross Parry. If you're fighting with light weapons and must parry heavy weapons (or strong monsters), this is well worth doing. Your weapons will be able to parry much heavier attacks, and if one of them breaks the lighter one will take it. This will ensure your Fine Rapier or Fine Longsword stays intact while your good-quality knife snaps off, taking the hit for the team.

Grappling

Grappling is often seen as the bane of the Agile Guy. So many rolls in grappling are ST-based, and being grappled reduces your defenses and your DX. While strong guys can profit from grappling more skilled opponents, Agile Guys aren't out of luck.

First, don't let a grapple happen. Back up (use Retreat!) and Parry. Armed parries can injure or cripple would-be grapplers. Your first goal is to stop the grapple cold.

Second, remember that skill (in Wrestling or Judo or Sumo Wrestling) trumps ST very often in grappling. Takedowns, for example, are resisted with your best of ST, DX, or a grappling skill. It doesn't matter if your opponent uses Wrestling-15 or ST 15 to take you down, you can use your Judo-18 to prevent it.

Third, superior skill will allow you to take the offensive during a grappling situation. One or both of your opponent's hands and arms will be occupied grappling you, reducing him to a single Parry or just Dodge. You'll be at -4 DX for being grappled, but it may still be possible to launch an Eye Poke or Lethal Strike, or counter grapple. You can grapple

depends on your skill and the damage type of your attack. But generally, the harder the location is to hit, the better it is . . . and the better for a Agile Guy. For more discussion of hit locations, see "Martial Arts Case Study: Choosing Your Hit Locations Wisely."

Finally, high skill can *directly* improve damage. The unarmed striking skills (Boxing, Brawling, and Karate) give a damage bonus for character with sufficient skill. If you are a Weapon Master, you also get a damage bonus when armed! We'll discuss this further in Part II of this article.

back if your opponent seizes you, and use Arm Lock or Finger Lock to leverage your skill against him, just Judo Throw him.

But be careful; it's best to Break Free (if you can beat his ST) or down your opponent with an Arm Lock or Judo Throw as quickly as possible. A strong, skilled grappler will have the advantage over you, and you only need to lose one Takedown contest to hit the floor under your opponent. Once you're down and he's trying to pin you (or ground-and-pound you), your ST is very important. Don't confuse "not helpless" with "superior grappler" here. Don't panic, but don't assume you'll win any contest with ease.

Miscellaneous Tactics

"Hit and run" is a valid tactic if you can pull it off, and Agile Guys are generally best equipped for this. High DX, good HT, and light weapons and armor generally means high Move. Use it to maneuver around on the edges of the battlefield, engage dangerous foes and take them out.

Standing and slugging it out *sounds* dangerous for a Agile Guy. It can be, but doesn't have to be. Superior skill and high defenses can tell. Generally, for handling mobs of low-skilled opponents, a Agile Guy does as well or better than a Strong Guy. Superior skill will allow more Deceptive Attacks (or just more attacks, with Rapid Strike or Dual-Weapon Attack) and higher defenses means that only criticals will bother you. It can be ironically easier for the Agile Guy to stand off against a crowd of mooks than for the big tank-like Strong Guy to fend off the same group, despite superior DR and damage potential. As always in a multiple-foe situation, watch your flank, watch your back, and be wary of foes overwhelming your defenses with sheer numbers. If possible, keep moving and force mobs to come to you over and over as you whittle them down.

You can sometimes use your superior mobility to disengage from one foe and engage another. For example, breaking off from a fighter facing you to take a Committed Attack for two steps and then Great Lunge (for 1 FP) with your rapier (1, 2 reach) at the back of a foe five hexes away can dramatically change a fight. As always, be careful about over-committing. Skill will usually tell in the end, so you don't need to always take risks to beat your opponents. The simple mathematics of higher skill vs. lower skill will allow you to eventually overcome your foes.

Final Thoughts

Skilled characters can be lots of fun to run in *GURPS.* You'll know the joy targeting Chinks in Armor (Eyes) and hitting half of the time. You'll experience the glee of mowing down mobs of mooks with your choice of cool moves. Next time, we'll look at how to build a Agile Guy. Until then, happy stabbing!

Spellbooks for Fun and Profit

for *GURPS*

by Reverend P. Kitty

GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 4: Sages introduced the spellbook: a tome of rituals which can be useful whether you already know the spells within or not. As with any useful magic item, it exists both as something an adventurer can have commissioned for purchase *and* as potential dungeon loot. The former is easy on the GM; players of spellcasting (or Scholar) PCs will be happy to come up with the exact details of what they want in their collection of magical text. The latter requires coming up with lists of related spells that one's players will find useful, but also involves adding some color and backstory to the book to make it more than just a dry spell list.

The following spellbooks follow the rules on pp. 13-14 of *Sages*: Casters who don't know the spells can learn them or cast them at default, and those who do know a spell can get a +1 or +2 bonus by casting out of a Fine or Very Fine spellbook. Due to the latter, spellbooks intended as loot should be Fine or better if they contain spells the PC already knows; dollar values are listed for all three types. Each writeup specifies which template(s) can use the spells within. All of the books here follow the standard of 1 point allocated per spell. They *also* have specific, non-magical information in them as well (granting 1 point per skill) which is related closely enough to the spells that it adds no additional weight.

Note that making one of these spellbooks Dwarven adds a flat ($100 × total number of spells and skills) to the value, while making one Faerie adds ($425 × total number of spells and skills), regardless of the spellbook's quality.

Almanac Animalia (Druids)

A holistic hodge-podge of information, this thick book is the work of an editor, not an author. Lothar Sweetwater -- a formerly unknown druid who has attained some measure of recognition for this almanac -- gathered together the animalistic knowledge of dozens of experienced druids, painstakingly copying from their notes while adding minimal linkage text to assist the reader. As a result, the text contains spells for a wide variety of beasts; anyone using the almanac to cast Beast Possession, Permanent Beast Possession, Rider, or Rider Within can do so on any type of animal, as the prerequisite knowledge for every species is found within. (Note that *not* every Repel (Animal) spell is included, however.) Worth $1,350, $4,150 if Fine, or $7,300 if Very Fine.

Spells: Beast Possession, Bird Control, Fish Control, Hybrid Control (VH), Mammal Control, Permanent Beast Possession (VH), Repel Mammals, Repel Reptiles, Repel Vermin, Reptile Control, Rider, Rider Within, and Vermin Control.

Skills: Veterinary.

Doors Unbarred! (Wizards)

This short, informally written work is filled with illustrations more than anything, showing in great detail how to bypass locks, manipulate objects, and so on. The author, Ronin (an admitted pseudonym), is a self-declared Thief-Wizard who has retired wealthy and now shares his wisdom with others . . . for a price. Each copy is dedicated to the client who commissioned it, though never by actual name; still, curious adventurers may be able to deduce the identity with some excellent detective work. Guards who capture a character holding this tome will naturally assume that it's dedicated to them, and treat them as the master thiefs they obviously are! Worth $550, $1,750 if Fine, and $3,100 if Very Fine.

Spells: Apportation, Lockmaster, Locksmith, Manipulate, and Undo.

Skills: Lockpicking.

The Eighth Book of the Holy Rites of Angitia (Clerics)

The priesthood of Angitia are a healing order with strict ranks and rules about what information may and may not be shared with outsiders. Their various *Books of Holy Rites* are the latter, being intended for Angitian eyes only. Despite this, unauthorized copies of the First Book and Second Book -- showcasing some of the basic healing spells -- can often be found for sale if you know who to talk to. This, the final book in the series, is considerably more rare. Only powerful clerics will be able to make use of the rites within, and they will have to take care to hide where they obtained this knowledge from . . . for the Angitians are healers, but not pacifists. Worth $975, $2,775 if Fine, or $4,800 if Very Fine.

Spells: Cure Disease, Instant Regeneration (VH), Instant Restoration (VH), Major Healing (VH), Neutralize Poison, Regeneration (VH), Relieve Paralysis, Remove Curse, and Restoration (VH).

Skills: Diagnosis and Religious Ritual.

The Juratis Treatise on Flight (Wizards)

This remarkably straightforward book assumes that the reader has a basic knowledge of magical telekinetic techniques, and builds upon those fundamentals to achieve progressively more difficult effects. Sir Juratis, the author, is a well known Warrior-Wizard who runs an informal training ground for young mages which has become famous for its tough discipline and high drop-out rate. While copies of this work are not supposed to make their way into circulation, some feel that Sir Juratis turns a blind eye to it, knowing that every mage who learns from his textbooks is also spreading his legacy far and wide. Worth $425, $1,425 if Fine, or $2,550 if Very Fine.

Spells: Flight (VH), Flying Carpet (VH), Hawk Flight (VH), and Levitation.

Skills: Navigation (Air).

Key to the Will of Man (Bards, Wizards)

Unlike most of the books here, the author of this codex is unknown. Considering that the entire work is a discussion of ways to bend and twist the minds of others to your will, it seems likely that the anonymity was to allow the author to remain a "power behind the throne," wherever he is. Unsurprisingly, in most locations this text is as illegal as it is useful. At least one nearby kingdom has a standing $20,000 reward for the successful identification and live capture of the author; the king will not go into detail as to the reasons, but rumors typically involve His Majesty, a field of sheep, half a dozen noblewomen, and a bucket of oatmeal. Worth $1,450, $4,650 if Fine, $8,250 if Very Fine.

Spells: Charm, Control Person, Dispel Possession, Enslave (VH), Enthrall, Lesser Geas (VH), Loyalty, Mind-Reading, Mind-Search (VH), Mind-Sending, Possession (VH), Retrogression, Soul-Rider, and Telepathy (VH).

Skills: Acting and Diplomacy.

Libri De Occulta Elementum (Druids, Wizards)

One of the more rigorously researched tomes, this volume is an attempt to syncretize elemental magic and ecology. The author, Zariq Tiyad, puts forth the idea of a partially animistic world -- one in which the soil and air interact as intelligent equals (but, oddly, not one in which animals have a guiding spirit). While this work is controversial, it offers an unparalleled look into the mindset of such spirits. Worth $1,250, $3,850 if Fine, or $6,775 if Very Fine.

Spells: Control Air Elemental, Control Earth Elemental, Control Fire Elemental, Control Water Elemental, Create Air Elemental, Create Earth Elemental, Create Fire Elemental, Create Water Elemental, Summon Air Elemental, Summon Earth Elemental, Summon Fire Elemental, and Summon Water Elemental.

Skills: Hidden Lore (Elementals).

The Nutrinomicon (Clerics*, Wizards)

(Or *Codex Nutrimens,* for those of you running a more serious game.) This volume tracks the knowledge of six generations of the Litherius family, famed magical cooks. While its teachings are less glamorous than some, the spells within can go far toward keeping a party alive. In addition to its magical and mundane knowledge, the spellbook contains several lost recipes -- to a true connoisseur, this tome would be worth an additional 20% or more. Openly using the recipe-spells within may eventually attract the attention of a surviving Litherius . . . or that of a rival cook. Worth $1,425, $4,425 if Fine, or $7,800 if Very Fine.

Spells: Cook, Create Fire, Create Food*, Decay, Essential Food*, Fool's Banquet, Mature, Monk's Banquet*, Prepare Game, Preserve Food, Purify Food*, Purify Water*, Test Food*, and Water to Wine*.

Skills: Cooking.

* Clerics can only cast these noted spells; this does not change the value of the codex.

The Yellow Grimoire of Malthais van Orley (Wizards)

Malthais van Orley was one cold, messed up, mean, relentless illusionist -- but he had a gift for figuring out how to best blur the line between illusion and reality. This dissertation on the subject reads like a sadistic rant, with notes on how to best exploit your opponent's fears, softening him up with illusions before surprising him with an actual creation, and so on. Still, the information within (both magical and psychological) is valid and useful, once one gets past the tone. Worth $775, $2,775 if Fine, or $5,025 if Very Fine.

Spells: Create Animal, Create Mount, Create Object (VH), Create Servant, Create Warrior, Perfect Illusion, and Phantom (VH).

Skills: Artist (Illusion), Interrogation, and Psychology.

The Search for Ed

Part I: Monsters

by Matt Riggsby

"Joe the Barbarian, with his friends Ed the Barbarian and Marge the Barbarian, went down into a cave. They saw lots of monsters and killed them and took their treasure. A dragon ate Ed. Joe and Marge ran away."
--*GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns,* page 501

When Joe and Marge Barbarian fled the dragon's lair, they left behind a fortune in gold, jewelry, and magical items. In this adventure for *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy,* the PCs are a group of four to six 250 point dungeon delvers who are offered the chance to go after the treasure which Joe, Marge, and Ed left behind. This part presents a set of monsters who will populate the dungeon, though they may be used in any Dungeon Fantasy or traditional fantasy adventure. Part Two presents maps of the dungeon and a description of the physical environs (though it can be reused with different inhabitants). Part Three presents the situation of the current population of the dungeon: who's there, what they're likely to do, and what surprises the heroes will face.

Petty Goblins

Small, weak, and quarrelsome, the petty goblin is an almost inconsequential threat. However, they often appear in sufficient numbers to cause problems even for experienced adventurers. They have little sense of self-preservation, so they will often swarm over their opponents, attempt multiple grapples, and immobilize their enemies so that a few can stab through chinks in armor.

ST 9   **HP** 9   Speed 5.25
DX 11   Will 9   Move 5
IQ 9   Per 9
HT 10   **FP** 10   **SM** -1

Dodge 9   Parry 10   Block 10
DR 2

Shortsword (12): 1d-1 cut/1d-3 imp
or
Spear (12): one-handed thrust 1d-1 imp, reach 1; two-handed thrust 1d imp, reach:1,2; thrown 1d imp Acc:2 Range:8/12

Traits: Night Vision +3; Bad Temper
Skills: Stealth-12, Brawling-12
Class: Mundane
Notes: Active defenses include a buckler, and DR includes leather armor. Though they can theoretically be negotiated with, petty goblins have a short attention span and a low threshold for frustration, so they'll most likely just attack if there's too much talking.

Petty Goblin Variants

Although garden-variety petty goblins qualify as "mostly harmless," there are a few exceptions. Those few goblins have special attacks or defenses which can

This Is Supposed To Intimidate Me?

give adventurers a nasty surprise. They're distinguished by faint markings in colors different than the usual pebbly green, which can be spotted on a successful Vision roll.

Red Goblins: These goblins are attuned to fire. Add flaming breath (11), 3d burning incendiary, range 3, uses 1 fatigue per use; and DR5 against burning attacks.

Blue Goblins: These goblins are attuned to ice. They can hurl shards of ice (11), 2d (3) imp, Acc 3, Range 10/20, uses 1 fatigue per use.

Black Goblins: These goblins are attuned to darkness. They have Dark Vision and carry a switchable 4-yard radius area of darkness around them (treat as the Darkness spell).

Trolls

Trolls are burly, ugly humanoids at the upper end of the goblin-orc-troll threat spectrum. When not loitering under bridges and shaking down goats, they whack people with large clubs and eat them.

Rock Troll

The rock troll lives underground, venturing out only at night. Its stony skin and flesh gives it great durability, but it must avoid the sun.

ST 18   **HP** 25   Speed 5.75
DX 10   Will 9   Move 5
IQ 7   Per 7
HT 13   **FP** 13   **SM** 0

Dodge 9   Parry 9   DR 7

Club (12): 3d+2
Punch (12): 1d+2

Traits: Night Vision +8, Berserk (12 or less). Rock trolls are paralyzed when exposed to sunlight; they may not move for a turn if struck by Sunbolt or other sunlight-producing spells (but *not* when exposed to flame or regular light spells).
Skills: Brawling-12, Broadsword-12, Stealth-10
Class: Mundane
Notes: Trolls just barely qualify as intelligent, and they have little or no conception of subtlety. They have a straightforward bash-over-the-head approach to life and are unlikely to pause for conversation, even if they can understand it.

Swamp Troll

Though they have the same shape and overall features as their rocky cousins, swamp trolls are smooth and rubbery rather than rocky. Though less durable than rock trolls, they recover from wounds quickly and can only be harmed permanently by flames and acids.

ST 18   **HP** 18   Speed 5.75
DX 10   Will 9   Move 5

IQ 7   Per 7
HT 13   **FP** 13   **SM** 0

Dodge 9   Parry 9   DR 3 (vs. crushing only)

Club (12): 3d+2
Punch (12): 1d+2

Traits: Night Vision +3, Regeneration (1 HP/second, not vs. fire or acid), Regrowth, Berserk (12 or less).
Skills: Brawling-12, Broadsword-12, Swimming-14
Class: Mundane
Notes: See Rock Trolls.

Horrible Spiders

Horrible Spiders are . . . well, horrible. Though individually less formidable than Acid Spiders, they're certainly dangerous enough and appear in larger numbers around a nest ruled by a queen. Hatchlings travel in frightening swarms, and as they grow, they become more dangerous, using a paralyzing poison.

Swarm

A swarm of a dozen Horrible Spider hatchlings has Move 8 and 11 HP. It does 1d-2 damage, with a follow-up paralyzing poison (save vs. HT+3). They hide very well, even on walls and ceilings (Clinging, Camoflage-14, Stealth-15), and lie in wait to leap on passing targets, preferring those with soft coverings to anything in solid armor.

Small Spider

This is a somewhat older and therefore larger spider than the swarming hatchlings. As creepy as Horrible Spiders are, they're actually rather vulnerable once you get past the hard exoskeleton.

ST 11   **HP** 11   Speed 6
DX 12   Will 10   Move 8
IQ 3   Per 10
HT 11   **FP** 11   **SM** -1

Dodge 9   DR 3

Bite (13): 1d cut with follow-up paralyzing poison (save vs. HT)
Claw Strike (13): 1d+1 impaling

Traits: Clinging, Extra legs (8 legs), Night Vision +5, Peripheral Vision, Fragile (Brittle), Horizontal, No Fine Manipulators
Skills: Brawling-13, Camoflage-12, Climbing-14, Jumping-12, Stealth-13
Class: Giant Animal
Notes: A juvenile Horrible Spider has a bit harder time hiding that its smaller brethren, but follows much the same tactics. In addition to its bite, it can strike with its sharp-clawed legs.

Large Spider

ST 16   **HP** 16   Speed 6
DX 12   Will 10   Move 7
IQ 4   Per 10
HT 12   **FP** 12   **SM** 0

Dodge 9   DR 5

Bite (14): 1d+3 cut with follow-up paralyzing poison (save vs. HT-2)
Claw Strike (14): 2d-1 impaling

Traits: Clinging, Extra legs (8 legs), Night Vision +7, Peripheral Vision, Super Jumping, Fragile (Brittle), Horizontal, No Fine Manipulators
Skills: Brawling-14, Camoflage-12, Climbing-14, Jumping-12, Stealth-13
Class: Giant Animal
Notes: A full-grown Horrible Spider is best at sneaking rather than lying in wait, but it's surprisingly good at leaping on to opponents.

Spider Queen

ST 20   **HP** 22   Speed 6
DX 12   Will 12   Move 7
IQ 12   Per 12
HT 12   **FP** 12   **SM** +1

Dodge 9   DR 7

Bite (15): 2d-1 impaling with follow-up paralyzing poison (save vs. HT-4)
Claw Strike (14): 2d+2 impaling

Traits: Clinging, Extra legs (8 legs), Night Vision +8, Peripheral Vision, Fragile (Brittle), Horizontal, No Fine Manipulators
Skills: Brawling-14, Camoflage-12, Climbing-14, Jumping-12, Stealth-13
Class: Giant Animal
Notes: At the center of any Horrible Spider nest is the spider queen. She is an absolute monarch; Horrible Spiders aren't smart enough to undertake complex actions, but they will do anything she commands and sacrifice themselves for her without a moment's hesitation. The queen has limited telepathic contact with the spiders around her, allowing her to silently command any who are within sight. She is intelligent, but immensely hostile. She may negotiate, but it's really just a deception she maintains until she finds herself in position to attack.

Hexagonal Colloid

The Hexagonal Colloid is a large, dense, and relatively solid predatory slime. Left to its own devices, it forms a hexagon about a yard across and six to eight feet tall, but it can twist itself into a wide variety of shapes if it has walls to cling to. It mostly waits for edible animals to walk near it and falls on it to slowly digest it.

ST 30   **HP** 50   Speed 1
DX 11   Will 10   Move 1
IQ 1   Per 4
HT 11   **FP** 11   **SM** +1

Dodge 5   DR 4

Enzyme Attack: Grappled targets of a constriction attack take a further 1d-2 damage per turn from acid burns. Armor protects completely for turns equal to its DR and not at all thereafter. Tentacle Strike (12): 3d, reach 2; the hexagonal colloid can only form one and strike with one tentacle per turn, but if damaged it can simply form another.

Traits: Constriction Attack, Injury Tolerance (Homogenous)
Skills: Camoflage-15

Class: Slime
Notes: Hexagonal colloids are large blocks of dirty black slime which conceal themselves along damp, dripping corridors. As edible targets pass by, they slam closed *around* the tastiest morsels. They can form temporary tentacles with which to strike opponents, but mostly they just dissolve the prey they engulf. Although a colloid can be effectively destroyed by hacking it to bits, the resulting gobbets of slime are still alive. Left to their own devices, they'll reassemble themselves into their original form. Only damage from fire is permanent.

Lich King

The lich king isn't *evil* as such, but he is driven by nothing other than his own intellectual obsessions. His one interest in life (or, at least, un-life) is reanimation of the dead, and he's always in search of new and interesting people to turn into skeletons, zombies, mummies, and other dead critters, entirely or in parts. Beyond that, he'd prefer to be left alone to work.

ST 9   **HP** 9   Speed 6
DX 12   Will 16   Move 6
IQ 16   Per 16
HT 10   **FP** 15   **SM** 0

Dodge 9   Parry 9   DR 0

Bare-hand strike (12): 1d-1 cr.

Traits: Charisma +2; Dark Vision; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Indomitable; Magery 3; Unaging; Fragile (Unnatural)
Skills: Alchemy-16, Hidden Lore (Spirits)-18, History-16, Karate-12, Thaumatology-16. The Lich King has all spells listed for Necromancers on DF1 p. 13 at level 18, all spells for Artillery Mages at 17, and Innate Attack skills for all of his combat skills at 14.
Class: Undead
Notes: The Lich King will send his minions to retrieve any interesting bodies who happen to wander through his neighborhood. He'd prefer them in one piece, but he can put them back together if need be. Most mortals interest him solely as experimental subjects, but he'll happily converse with knowledgeable mystics, sages, and magicians to get new perspectives and news of recent developments in the field of thanatology. And *then* he'll kill them and turn them into zombies. If engaged in combat, the Lich King will erect defensive spells and leave most of the fighting to his minions, but will fire off lightning bolts and other offensive spells if support is warranted.

Undead Warrior

To be honest, the undead warrior isn't the lich king's best work. He's basically a magic automaton, retaining most of the source body's physical skills but almost none of his mental capacity. But he's still plenty tough.

ST 19   **HP** 24   Speed 6.5
DX 15   Will 10   Move 7
IQ 10   Per 12
HT 13   **FP** 13   **SM** +1

Dodge 13   Parry 15   Block 15
DR 5/3

Fine Thrusting Broadsword (18): 3d+3 cut/2d+1 imp
Iron Shield Bash (18): 2d-1 cr

Traits: Absolute Direction; Combat Reflexes; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain

Threshold; Luck; Magic Resistance 3; Appearance: Hideous; Bloodlust (12 or less); Cannot Learn; Cannot Speak; Gigantism; Fragile (Unnatural)
Skills: Axe/Mace-18; Brawling-17; Broadsword-19; Camouflage-14; Carousing-13; Climbing-14; Forced Entry-15; Hiking -12; Intimidation-10; Running -12; Shield-18; Stealth-15; Survival (Mountain)-15; Swimming-13; Throwing-16; Tracking-15; Two-Handed Axe/Mace-15; Wrestling-17
Class: Undead
Notes: The undead warrior is wearing a mail suit and carrying a medium iron shield. He'll kill whoever he's supposed to kill, but otherwise does nothing.

Dragon

What would a dungeon crawl be without one?

ST 30   **HP** 50   Speed 7
DX 14   Will 14   Move 7/14
IQ 14   Per 14
HT 12   **FP** 12   **SM** +3

Dodge 10   Parry 11
DR 6

Claw (16): 3d+5 cut
Bite (16): 3d+2 imp
Tail Strike (15): 3d+6, range C,1
Flaming breath (16): 5d burning (2 yd. cone), range 5/10, 1 fatigue per use

Traits: Dark Vision; Discriminatory Hearing; Discriminatory Smell; Extra Attack (1); Flight (Winged); Indomitable; Unaging; Cold-Blooded (stiffens below 50°); Compulsive Gambling (12 or less); Compulsive Vowing (12 or less); No Fine Manipulators; Sadism (12 or less)
Skills: Blind Fightng-14; Brawling-16; Fast-Talk-15; Gambling-17; Observation-15; Psychology (Human)-14; Stealth-15
Class: Dragon
Notes: The dragon is more than a little twisted. He likes to torment his prey, psychologically as well as physically, before killing them. If he has the time, he'll use his Psychology and Fast-Talk skills to size up his enemies, then sow discord and taunt his opponents into making mistakes. Nevertheless, he's got an odd sense of honor. If he can be talked into making a wager (and that's not hard; he may even suggest it himself if his opponents look likely to offer him an interesting game), he will honor it.

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

by David Morgan-Mar

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Irregular Webcomic

![?]

Pyramid Pick

Burning Empires

Published by [Luke Crane](#)

Written by Luke Crane with Chris Allingham, Radek Drozdalski, Alexander Newman, Thor Olavsrud, & Mayuran Tiruchelvam

Cover by Christopher Moeller

Illustrated by Christopher Moeller with Michael Kelleher, Jordan Worley, & Peter Bergting

656-page undersized full-color hardcover; $45

It is 597 of the Hanrilke Era. The last emperor of the Federated Empire, Ober IV has been dead for a century, eight Iron Empires control human space, established after the Great Civil War following his assassination, maintaining an uneasy peace. The nobility leads space armadas, their Hammer, and their planetary militaries, their Anvil. The theocracy of the Mundus Humanitus is the Iron Empires' foremost faith, believing in fate predetermined. Merchant leagues and princes direct great commercial ventures, smugglers supply the populous with contraband, outlaws hide from the authorities, and criminals prey on society. Psychologists, trained in their Foundations and capable of reading and directing thoughts, serve as advisors to the nobility even as they are reviled by the faithful. Even as the fractious Iron Empires feud for power to restore the Federated Empire, they ignore a threat that will enslave humanity: the Vaylen.

Consisting of a host and a Naiven worm, the Vaylen eye humanity greedily for the memories and experiences inside the human brain. A vast empire organized along clan and caste lines, the Vaylen have only been kept at bay by limited available hosts and by the quarantine methods enforced by some worlds. Typically, the Vaylen work to infiltrate a world, usurping its key figures, before launching a military invasion.

This is the setting for **Burning Empires,** the Origins Award winner for Best RPG of 2006, the first self-published RPG to win the award, something that we have been waiting for since the 2003's *[My Life With Master.](#)* Also the first licensed indie RPG, **Burning Empires** is based on the *Iron Empires* graphic novels, *Faith Conquers* and *Sheva* by artist-writer Christopher Moeller, and as the first full-color indie RPG, is illustrated with art taken from the graphic novels and new pencil work by Moeller.

Designed by Luke Crane, self-publisher of the highly regarded *[The Burning Wheel Fantasy Roleplaying System,](#)* it draws from his earlier *Dune*-influenced **Burning Sands: Jihad** supplement and employs the same mechanics as **The Burning Wheel RPG** to create not just a character or micro-focused sci-fi RPG, but a macro focused game. In **Burning Empires** the players control both the fate of their characters and the fate of their world as it faces the Vaylen threat.

Play begins not by "burning" or creating characters, but by burning the world whose fate the players will decide. This is a collaborative process between GM and the players, together deciding its location, physical characteristics, technology level, government, factions, military, and allowed imports. Importantly they must set its quarantine level, attitude towards the Vaylen, and the phase of the Vaylen campaign against the world: Infiltration, Usurpation, or Invasion. These factors set the disposition or strength of each side at the beginning of each phase.

Character creation or burning is a lengthier process, a cross between that of [Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay](#) and *Traveller,* using the same process and asking the same questions as *The Burning Wheel RPG* to provide mature, experienced, and detailed characters for play in the Iron Empires. Possible roles include world leaders, nobles, merchant princes, Anvil and Hammer lords, crime lords, psychologists, and soldiers, officials, and inquisitors of the Mundus Humanitus. The suggested set-up is having three Figures of Note and the other player characters being their advisors, enabling conflict and interaction between other Figures of Note and their advisors. Several alien species are available to play, most notably the batrachian Kerrn, who once part of the Vaylen empire, have a near pathological hatred of their former masters. Most of the playable aliens, all with their own lifepaths, are Vaylen hosts, enabling a GM to create detailed adversaries or run a game wherein he controls the human defense against the player directed Vaylen campaign.

Although time consuming, the process of world and character burning not only defines the world, but also sets the stage for the game and influences the characters' roles in it. Further, it invests the characters in that fate.

This fate is played out in a campaign consisting of three phases: Infiltration, Usurpation, or Invasion. It is here that *Burning Empires* departs from the norm. Each phase consists of a number of maneuvers, the aim being to reduce the enemy's disposition while protecting your own. Each maneuver is made up of a limited number of scenes of various types. They include Color Scenes, which establish the stage or mood; Interstitial Scenes, which focus on player interaction; Build Scenes, which set up and lay the groundwork for Conflict Scenes; and Conflict Scenes, which is when the maneuver is resolved. Dice rolls are required only during Build and Conflict Scenes. Scenes are themselves a finite resource, so it is possible to literally run out before a maneuver can be executed; this feels unfair, but if you think of scenes as representing both time and action, it works.

For most scenes, there only needs to be a single dice roll per side to determine the outcome. Mechanically, *Burning Empires* keeps to *Burning Wheel's* core simplicity. Actions require the rolling of dice pools of six-sided dice to achieve successes of four or more. Conflict scenes/maneuvers are more complex with the stakes negotiated beforehand by both sides, the required detail handled in the rules for Infection maneuvers (which represent the campaign against or by the Vaylen), Duel of Wits (verbal debate), and Firefight (combat).

Thus a Build Scene might involve planting bugs in a corporate infrastructure to gain proof of the company's dealings with the Vaylen or casing a target prior to a kidnap attempt, using the appropriate skills. The Conflict scene would be revealing this proof at an AGM using the Duel of Wits rules or the Firefight mechanics for executing the kidnap.

Essentially, each level of a *Burning Empires* game -- campaign, phase, maneuver, scene -- narrows the game's focus, but even as everyone focuses in and roleplays each scene and maneuver, they need to keep an eye on the bigger picture. Indeed, this is not a game where the mechanics fade into the background; and "everyone" because the Vaylen are trying to win as much as the humans, the players are essentially in direct competition with the GM, and to support this competition needs the set up established during the burning process.

For the most part, technology in *Burning Empires* is employed as color with no mechanical effect. If a player wants more than this, he must expend resource points. Technology is not an important part of the game as written, and technician-type characters will have a hard time in a game. If required, technology has its own burner, as do aliens. One staple of the genre, space travel is discussed, but is rarely part of game play and can be hand waved. Technology, like the look of the Iron Empires, has a retro High Medieval feel, right down to the Anvil and Hammer armor suits worn by the military.

One interesting aspect of *Burning Empires* is how psionics work. A psychologist forges connections with other characters, granting them enhanced social skills and even allowing skills to be transferred. The psychologist must be given permission by another character to do so, as it opens the mind to the psychologist's influence. Forging this bond takes place in-game and out, with the psychologist's player literally handing a die to the accepting player who adds it to social skills. Each connection forged has the side effect of weakening a psychologist's will though.

Physically, *Burning Empires* is a brick of a book, superbly illustrated and written, and in places heavy on the author's voice. It does suffer from an odd organization that hinders the learning of the game, but the book has an excellent

index and some very full examples. The other problem apart from the learning curve is the slight nature of the background. It does not help that it is spread throughout the book, but to get the fullest out of the setting, everyone needs to have read the graphic novels. Alongside this, traits are left for the players to decide and many in-game terms and titles are left unexplained. For example, what is a Caeptir, a Ravilar, or a Cotar?

Burning Empires is most definitely not a generic sci-fi RPG, being clearly designed to be anything but. Yet even pulling it away from the Iron Empires setting to do something on a similar scale, for example with the *Babylon 5* or *Battlestar Galactica* settings, would require some effort (say, designing new lifepaths). Alternatively, scaling it back to focus on minor, less experienced characters more found in other science-fiction RPGs, is possible, but it misses out on the scope given here.

For obvious reasons, *Burning Empires* is an even more complex game than *Burning Wheel* and possesses a steeper learning curve to reach the style and structure it is designed to emulate. This being the fight to decide the fate of a world in an almost competitive manner combining elements of both roleplaying and wargaming, and emulating this grand style and structure it does very well. It is in providing the means to capture such an epic scope that *Burning Empires* so impresses and so re-creates the fate of the Iron Empires.

--Matthew Pook

The Theory And Practice of the MacGuffin: Part One

"Say, what's this bird, this falcon, that everybody's all steamed up about?"
"Supposing I wouldn't tell you anything about it? Would you do something wild and unpredictable?"
"I might."
"It's a black figure, as you know, smooth and shiny; of a bird, a hawk or falcon, about that high . . . here."
"What makes it so important?"
"I don't know. They wouldn't tell me."
-- Sam Spade and Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, dir.)

Every so often, we like to drift from the specific to the general in this column, providing not just fantods and fripperies for your campaign but a look, if you will, at fantodology, or at least at fantod aesthetics. With this installment, we approach the generally specific, or the specifically generic: the MacGuffin, which can be any sort of thing, as long as it's the right sort of anything for your game. And now that I've toppled through your office doorway with that cryptic utterance, let the chase begin!

"In regard to the tune, we have a name in the studio, and we call it the 'MacGuffin.' It is the mechanical element that usually crops up in any story. In crook stories it is most always the necklace and in spy stories it is most always the papers. We just try to be a little more original. The only thing that really matters is that, in the picture, the plans, documents, or secrets must be of vital importance to the characters. To me, the narrator, they're of no importance whatsoever."
-- Alfred Hitchcock, in a 1939 lecture at Columbia University

Alfred Hitchcock coined the term, borrowing it from a Scottish joke: A man in a railway carriage asks the other fellow: "Say, what's that in your bag?" Replies the Scot: "'Tis a MacGuffin." "What's a MacGuffin?" "'Tis a device tae trap lions i'th'Highlands." "But there are no lions in the Highlands." "Then, 'tis nae MacGuffin." The point of the joke is that it's none of the fellow's business what's in the bag; Hitchcock uses the term because it's none of our business what the blueprints in *The 39 Steps* build, or what the code in *The Lady Vanishes* says, or what secrets "George Kaplan" hides in *North by Northwest.* The ideal MacGuffin, narratively, exists solely to propel the story. It can be an object of desire, or an object of fear, or both. (The "scary MacGuffin" is often called the "Great Whatsit," after the contents of the briefcase in *Kiss Me Deadly.*) It also ideally exerts a continuous propulsive influence, one that can last for the whole length of the narrative: one scenario, many scenarios, or the whole campaign, in our art form. Thus, a MacGuffin must therefore either be some combination of remote, hidden, and guarded; or a team of bad guys (with a deep bench) must already be hot on its trail, so that if the heroes find it, they have to run instead of figuring out what it does.

"It is enough to stagger the imagination of a wizard! We call it a Cosmic Cube -- and it well may be the most potent device in all the world!"
"You must guard it well! If it should fall into the hands of a madman like the Red Skull --"
-- A.I.M scientist and Count Royale in *Tales of Suspense* #79, by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby

And what does a MacGuffin do? In its pure form, nothing but drive the story -- its only use is to endanger or attract (or both) the heroes. It may not be valuable in itself: the "dingus" in *The Maltese Falcon* isn't even the real McCoy, although it's a swell MacGuffin. It may never get revealed, a la the briefcases in *Ronin* and *Pulp Fiction.* In gaming, over more than one scenario, that seems unfair; players will want to look in the silver briefcase after all those car chases, regardless of what Robert de Niro says. Generally a McGuffin offers its possessor one of: knowledge, wealth, or power. The power might be political, theological, magical, or just capital-P Power like the Steamball in *Steamboy.* These results are pretty fungible: traditionally, knowledge will get you power, and power will get you wealth, or vice versa. At the very least, selling the MacGuffin to a museum or a creepy private collector will earn everybody riches beyond imagining.

Sometimes a MacGuffin (like the letters of transit in *Casablanca*) merely offers an escape from the plot conflict, although such escape can still require the heroes to solve the mystery stirred up by the MacGuffin's passage (as in *The Maltese Falcon*) or deliver it to the right authorities (as in *North by Northwest*) or to the right location in time or space

(as in *Repo Man*). Occasionally, by contrast, a MacGuffin (especially one with a cool or useful power) serves to tempt the heroes to involve themselves further conflict, as with the demon-killing Colt revolver in *Supernatural.* If the MacGuffin has powers in and of itself, they should be thematically appropriate to the form of the MacGuffin, to its backstory, and to the genre of the game or story. The Ark of the Covenant in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is a box, so opening it triggers its power; its backstory is Biblical, so its powers involve divine wrath; the genre is pulp adventure, so its powers are big and showy and kill Nazis.

"Gilgamesh, you came here exhausted and worn out.
What can I give you so you can return to your land?
I will disclose to you a thing that is hidden, Gilgamesh,
I will tell you.
There is a plant . . . like a boxthorn,
Whose thorns will prick your hand like a rose.
If your hands reach that plant you will become a young man again."
-- Sin-liqe-unnini, *Epic of Gilgamesh,* Tablet XI

Indeed, the First MacGuffin Ever had specific thematic powers: the Flower of Youth from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* plays on the connections between flowers and spring, and therefore youth. By contrast, Helen of Troy, the MacGuffin for the *Iliad,* doesn't do much except mope; she might as well be glowing in a briefcase somewhere. The Golden Fleece from the *Argonautika* is the same sort of thing; no doubt it looks very nice on the castle wall, but it's not going to melt any Nazis. But that said, the mere antiquity and awesomeness of such MacGuffins is often its own reward; how hard would it be to get a bunch of player characters to team up and chase down the Golden Fleece if you suddenly drop it into your campaign world? And you can always add powers post-hoc; Cato the Elder decided that the Golden Fleece gave its holder the right to rule as king, and no doubt other wonderful consequences could follow, from vast golden wealth to command of all things born under or governed by Aries the Ram. And some MacGuffins have lots of power but no set form. The Sampo, from the Finnish *Kalevala,* provides wealth and food and salt and fertility and light and who knows what else, but it's only in Lonnrot's retcon that it became a Grist-mill instead of a Shield or a Coin or a Tree or an Astrolabe or a Pot.

"These are facts, historical facts. Not schoolbook history, not Mr. Wells' history, but history, nevertheless."
-- Kasper Gutman in *The Maltese Falcon* (dir. John Huston)

That great medieval MacGuffin, the Holy Grail, is the same sort of thing: it provides food and drink and holiness and health to the land and resurrection and salvation, and it's a Cup or a Dish or a Stone or a Cauldron (or a Bloodline) or a [Crystal](). Whatever it is, it's one of the Four Arthurian MacGuffins, or as they're called in the original, the Hallows: the others being the Sword Excalibur, the Spear Dolorous, and the . . . well, the fourth one is kind of murky. It might be a Dish (which also might be the Grail), or a Cauldron (of Annwn, or Hell), or a Stone (as in "Sword and the"), or a Chair (the Siege Perilous), depending on the version of the story you read. The overlap with the Four Treasures of Ireland (the [Stone of Destiny](), the Sword of Nuada, the Cauldron of Dagda, and the Spear of Lugh) is interesting, although adding the Thirteen Treasures of Britain (Whetstone, Sword, Cauldron, Spear . . . and Dish, Crock, Hamper, Knife, Halter, Horn, Chariot, Coat, and [Chessboard]()) just gets silly. Not to mention the Three Sacred Treasures of Japan: the Sword of Susano-o, the Necklace of Amaterasu, and the Eight-Hand [Mirror](). And don't forget the Ten MacGuffins of Heracles, which include two classic MacGuffins (the Apples of the Hesperides and the [Amazon]() Girdle of Hippolyta) along with six monster MacGuffins to capture (Stag, Boar, Bull, Cattle, Mares, Hound) and two MacGuffins cut out of his kills (the Skin of the Nemean Lion, and the Immortal Head of the Hydra).

"There, the Rod was shattered, and its parts scattered, but the enchantments of the item were such that nothing could actually destroy it, so if its sections are recovered and put together in the correct order, the possessor will wield a weapon of surpassing power."
-- Gary Gygax, ***AD&D Dungeon Master's Guide***

Sets of MacGuffins are common in the various folk traditions from which we (and George Lucas) draw our tales, although the multi-part MacGuffin (such as the Rod of Seven Parts, or the [Deck of Many Things]()) or multiple similar MacGuffins (Rings of Power, Silmarils, [Crystal Skulls]()) are more literary than folkloric. (Unless you count each Stone

in the Necklace of Amaterasu, or of the Brisingamen Necklace of Freya, of course.) More usual in folklore is the "serial MacGuffin," from the fairy tale model: You need a Key to get into a castle, but you need a Bird to get the Key, but you need a Rope to catch the Bird, etc. Another variant is the "series MacGuffin" such as the Kerchief and Comb from the Baba Yaga stories: the heroes hurl them down to make a river and a forest, respectively; each MacGuffin must be expended in the right order for the story to come out well.

"The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something; for the box might even be empty. No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is."
-- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

There are no shortage of possible forms a MacGuffin can take, although not all of them are as multivalent as the Grail and the Sampo. (We've left the "secret plan/code/identity/microdot" sort of modern MacGuffin well behind by now, but it's easy enough to go back that direction if you like.) To the many examples already given, we might add: Armor, Axe, Bell, Belt, Book, Boots, Bow (with or without MacGuffinly Arrows), Bowl, Brazier, Candle (in a Hand or a Menorah or a Lamp), Canoe, Carpet (flying or visionary), Chain, Chest, Cloak (feathered and otherwise), Dagger, Disk, Elixir, Eye, Hammer, Head, Helmet (such as the Tarnhelm, which makes its wearer invisible), Lute (or Harp, or Lyre, or Kantele), Mask, Orb, Sandals (winged or kingly), Scabbard (to amp up a swordly MacGuffin), Scepter, Scroll, Seal (of Solomon, although a Selkie-Skin makes a nice MacGuffin as well), Ship, Shoes, Staff, Statue (Idol or Dingus), Tablets (in or out of an Ark), Throne (conveying wisdom, flight, or rulership), Trident, and Wand. Plus another ten or thirty Swords, Stones, and Rings, all from genuine legend and folklore, and this without even cracking the pages of the ***Dungeon Master's Guide.***

Add to all of this MacGuffins that are places (such as the Fountain of Youth, the Garden of Eden, the Kingdom of Prester John) or people (or MacGuffins turned into people, like Dawn in *Buffy*) or animals like half of Heracles' roster. Immobile MacGuffins present their own challenges: once the heroes have killed all the guards, destroyed all the defenses, and left a trail a mile wide to El Dorado or the Hollow Earth, how exactly do they plan to keep it safe from meddling Nazis, or keep the outside world safe from it? There had better be a handy volcano or vibratory barrier . . . Meanwhile, living MacGuffins can move around, or have their own ideas about when and how -- or whether -- to unleash their mighty powers. (Such people tend to stop being MacGuffins once the heroes begin interacting with them; they're either villains or allies, or both.) Finally, consider meta-MacGuffins such as a map to another MacGuffin, or a MacGuffin that detects MacGuffins. Some MacGuffins are already made out of MacGuffins; the Spear of Destiny and the Iron Crown of the Lombards are both supposed to contain one of the Three Nails of Christ (a rare multiple MacGuffin from authentic legend). And some MacGuffins, like the Rheingold, can be made into other MacGuffins, like the Ring of the Nibelungs. In short, the MacGuffin can be anything you want . . . as long as your players, and maybe the Nazis, want it more.

NEXT: Worked Examples and the MacGuffins of Mars!

Pyramid Review

Worlds of Freedom (for *Mutants & Masterminds*)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Designed by Scott Bennie, DT Butchino, Shawn Carman, Steve Kenson, Christopher McGlothlin, Aaron Sullivan

Edited by Joanna G. Hurley

Graphics, art, & cartography by Hal Mangold, Ramon Perez, Brett Barkley, Darren Calvert, Storn Cook, Talon Dunning, Greg Kirkpatrick, Comfort Love, Octographics, Tony Parker, Craig Taillifer, Udon with Chris Stevens, Adam Withers, & Andrew Law

128-page full-color softcover; $26.95

While most gamers are arguing over what kind of game they'd like to play, those already in a comic book campaign heartily laugh at them. They know their genre of choice comes with built-in setting variations that are not only available to the willing GM, their use is practically required at some point. If the group wants that for its *Mutants & Masterminds* game, they need only pick up *Worlds of Freedom.*

Of course, most of what's here is based in Freedom City, the traditional epicenter of all superactivity in that world. The book is billed as a sourcebook for the *Freedom City* book, and while not essential it's certainly a huge help to have that volume as well, if for no other reason than to appreciate all the work the authors did reinterpreting the town. A number of "lenses" are offered for viewing the setting. Both the Revolutionary and Civil War periods had their own heroes and villains, to say nothing of colorful timelines. These can be used as the historical forebears to the modern city, or alternate worlds the team can visit where events played out a little differently. Similarly there are future settings with Freedom City in the middle of things, from the cyber-ish near future to the far-flung and space-faring civilizations comic-book technologies always presage.

For the parallel "now" players may revisit Erde (the world depicted in *Time of Crisis* wherein the Axis Powers won World War II), and see if they can turn the situation around 60 years after things went south for the Allies. The GM may also run a truly contemporary campaign, keeping Freedom City at the center of the action but allowing the characters to get in on the ground floor of legend-making as paranormals make their first appearance in the here and now.

Finally, there's a small scattering of ideas for the GM to develop himself, from ape-dominated Earths and animated cartoon critters to post-apocalyptic worlds where the classifications "hero" and "villain" no longer hold much meaning.

If anyone gets tired of keeping track of all these worlds and possibilities, he can just eliminate them wholesale by putting the omniversal villain Omega front and center again and letting him chew through all the offending timelines. Also a part of the *Time of Crisis,* a whole chapter has been given over to describing this mega-villain, his "world" Terminus, and the heroes and villains in his orbit. The nods to Jack Kirby's *The New Gods* make it pretty clear it was no small part of the inspiration for much of it.

The book also serves as a guide to traveling through time and dimensions in the game. The various parts of the omniverse, the bits that surround them, and the hellish nowheres that threaten to consume anyone who ventures too far afield are all detailed, and each lends itself to different methods for getting the heroes wrapped up in adventures on a grand and spanning scale.

The artwork is comic-book quality in most places. Some of the portraits look a little stiff or come in a bit on the tired side, but most are classic poses with energy behind them. For some of the teams they offer a group shot, and since it's pretty easy to determine which character is which without labeling them, the marriage of the text and graphics is commendable.

The writing really shines in some spots (the description of Terminus' early days is actually lyrical in quality), but even when it's just good it's often marred by some poor editing. Since the lead time on producing an RPG book isn't short, it's worth noting this volume seems to have anticipated both Marvel Comics' *Civil War* and *Secret Invasion* storylines (great minds and all that). Peppered with in-jokes and homages, it's a treat for comic fans and gamers alike.

As a resource for temporal and dimensional travel, the book relies more on storytelling elements than a detailed or mechanical deconstruction of the subject matter. It only amounts to some eight pages (plus the ideas that liberally dot the text of other chapters), so those hoping for more detail or crunch had best look elsewhere. It all centers on possible other worlds, and while many of them are executed well it means the reader must be satisfied with the surfaces herein scratched; tips on creating one's own worlds out of whole cloth aren't a priority. ***Worlds of Freedom*** allows just that -- greater freedom for the players and their heroes -- but there are limits to the book.

--Andy Vetromile

Mrs. Liberty

by J. Edward Tremlett

Welcome back to our series of superheroines, where we present A-grade female superheroes with complex storylines who can fully compete on the playing field with the guys.

Previously, we looked at the dark and mysterious [Doppelganger](), who's more *felt* than seen. This time we're coming out into the light of day, to proudly present Mrs. Liberty: World War II legend, scientist, Great-Grandmother, and recently un-retired octogenarian Superheroine.

During the Big One, the newly-forged teenage Superhero was groomed by her father, and government, into being another "Patriotic" presence in America: keeping the homeland safe from harm while more powerful (and predominantly male) heroes battled overseas. She soon proved herself to be a leader, and a force to be reckoned with, both in and out of costume. And after retiring, returning, and retiring again, she has become active once more in the face of global emergency.

This generic article looks over her long career, and presents tips for using her, unanswered questions, and stats for both her WWII and modern day careers. Stat guidelines go Poor - Average - Medium - Impressive - Powerful - Way-Powerful.

Mrs. Liberty

"Well, you're not so tough when your guns won't do what you want, are you, sonny?"

Brenda Hawkins (nee Jaspers, aka Donna Harding), retired Medical Researcher and Great-Grandmother, has four scrapbooks in her small bungalow in Gainesville, Florida.

The first dates back to 1942, and chronicles the wartime adventures of a plucky, smart 17-year-old gal from Orlando named Little Miss Liberty. Her father, Dr. Donald Jaspers, was engaged in secret research for the war effort, and -- contrary to rules and regulations -- did a lot of work out of his garage workshop at home. Brenda's older brother, Todd, had been helping her father just before the war, but went away on sudden business for the Government. One day he was just gone, without saying goodbye, and no one -- not even her father -- could say where he was.

After Todd left, Dr. Jaspers asked Brenda to step into his apron, given that she was showing high aptitude in science and medicine. And that's why Brenda and her father were involved in an accident in the lab, one night, and she was accidentally exposed to the highly-unstable "X Element" in gaseous form. She was touch-and-go for a week after inhaling it, but when she came out of the coma she seemed perfectly normal . . . at least until she stopped a speeding car in its tracks by just holding out her hand, generated enough illumination to read by when her bedroom light burned out, and healed Aunt Irma's broken leg just by touching it.

Realizing that he'd created a superhero, Dr. Jaspers took her to his superiors in Washington D.C., hoping that they could find a use her newfound talents. They were happy to have another American with powers on their side, obviously, but given her age and inexperience -- not to mention her gender -- they didn't want to send her into combat operations. So they gave her a suitably patriotic (and feminine) name and costume, put her in the newsreels, and teamed her up with other Superheroes they preferred to keep stateside, there to fight spies and saboteurs, cheer up wounded soldiers and headline at USO shows.

One thing that bothered Brenda was lying about her powers' origin. Her father told her they should say she just fell into a coma, and discovered her new abilities when she woke up. He said he was afraid that if his superiors knew the truth, they might want to do tests on her, so to replicate what had happened. That and, if they knew he was working on "X Element" at home, they'd put him in jail for treason. So she lied.

The first scrapbook has a number of impressive stories: stopping giant robot torpedoes from reaching the wharfs of the East Coast; uprooting Die Fledermaus and his vast ring of spies; battling Baron Cadavre, The Bloody Arrow, Die Eisenmaid and other notable supervillians of the war; and lending her talents to heal some of the worst injuries imaginable. There were several epic encounters with the raging monster known only as The Brute, whose abilities were strangely similar to Brenda's, only more powerful. Only by outthinking the creature could she defeat it.

There were also gossipy stories in the tabloids about her secret romance with the dashing, near-invulnerable Captain Shield -- hero of the European Theatre. There were also small hints, here and there, that Brenda was doing a lot of the thinking and leading for her team, especially after the war's end, when stateside clean-up operations had to be done quietly so as not to alarm the citizens.

But the scrapbook also has a number of omissions, such as the horrible discovery, in 1948, that her own father had been in league with the Nazis. He'd been tasked to use his position to create an army of "Supermen" for the Fatherland, using ordinary Americans as guinea pigs. That led to the sad realization that The Brute was actually her long-lost brother, Todd . . . another victim of their father's mad schemes.

Both facts were withheld from the press, so as to keep the American public from knowing how badly their wartime research had been compromised by the enemy, and her father's mysterious disappearance from custody guaranteed there would be no trial. A heartbroken Brenda went along with the deception, finding comfort in the hope that her recaptured brother might be cured. But she decided that she'd had enough heartbreak: after she married Captain Shield (Brian J. Steel) she would put her costume aside, focussing on becoming a wife, a mother, and a medical scientist, in that order.

The second scrapbook picks up in the mid-1950s, when Brenda J. Steel was a doctoral candidate in Medical Science, and trying to save her rocky -- and mysteriously childless -- marriage to Brian. But her studies were rudely interrupted when she was investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee, like so many other heroes from the war. So she wore her uniform, once more, and traveled to Washington to reiterate her patriotism.

She had no problems "unmasking" for the Committee, as her identity was publicly known, but HUAC's relentless grilling brought her father's previously-suppressed schemes for Nazi Germany to light. To escape official suspicion she had to tell the truth about how she got her powers, and while the government exonerated her, the damage was done. The stress brought an end to her marriage, and she was unceremoniously dropped out of her doctoral program, which was fearful of bad publicity.

But Brenda picked herself back up, and soon thereafter she finished her doctorate at the University of Florida's newly-opened College of Medicine. Afterwards, she was hired on to teach on the strength of her experience and skills, and she began a notable career for herself, specializing in the research of patients with highly abnormal physiology (read "superpowers"). She also began research into finding a cure for her brother, who was still a raging, near-mindless powerhouse locked up a half mile underground.

While helping treat the horrific wounds dealt to The Red Flame (after an epic battle with what may have been a god), Brenda met a handsome, committed young doctor named Thomas Hawkins. They fell in love over the course of the treatment, and were married the summer of 1958. And soon Brenda had everything she'd hoped for, after the war: a career, a real marriage, and children.

The third scrapbook opens in 1976, when Dr. Brenda J. Hawkins, mother of three and head of the University of Florida's Abnormal Physiology and Biochemistry Department was lured back into costume. She and a number of other WWII-era heroes who had been run into retirement or disgrace by HUAC were coaxed back out by the Bicentennial spirit, as well as a desire to reclaim their good names. And soon they were joined by the super-powered children of old colleagues, as well as those who had taken on the names of those long since fallen as homage to heroes past.

Renaming herself Mrs. Liberty, and wearing a much more sensible costume, Brenda was one of the most vocal advocates of her peers getting back into action. While a few of her male colleagues may have made some old-fashioned jokes about the ladies acting their age, they stopped laughing after their first real case, as Brenda had

actually grown *more* powerful over the years, not less. And she wasn't about to take any guff from the boys . . . especially not from her ex-husband.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were filled with good, heroic times for all. Brenda was able to balance her "mundane" life with super heroics, and proved herself time and again to be a leader and a thinker, and not just a powerhouse. They fought old foes from back in the day, along with their sociopath descendants, fended off invasions from other worlds and realities, and did their best to make America safe and sound.

That proud and colorful scrapbook ends abruptly in 1987. Die Eisenmaid returned, and the Nazi Supervillain took advantage of Mrs. Liberty's public persona to hold her twin grandchildren hostage at their elementary school. The plot was thankfully foiled with no casualties, and Eisenmaid was recaptured, but the knowledge that her family might pay the price for her heroics was too much for Brenda to take. This time she went into total retirement, and she and her entire family were expertly hidden by the Relocation Undercover Network (RUN).

Once under wraps as Donna Harding, she re-devoted herself to private researches, with the occasional quiet favor for her peers. She redoubled her efforts to find a cure for her brother. And she watched with sorrow from the sidelines as her fellow super-powered friends died, retired, or passed on their mantles.

The fourth scrapbook begins September 11th, 2001. Shocked by the tragedy, and wishing she could have done something -- *anything* -- to stop it, she saw the greater truth: that all evil needed to triumph was for good people to do nothing. So she put on her costume one more time, and stepped out into the War on Terror, both to make certain something like that never happened, and to be sure the new heroes didn't do anything stupid out of anger or misplaced patriotism.

That was seven years ago. She has remained a leader. Even in her early 80s she is in perfect health, more powerful than ever. America's enemies still have good cause to fear Mrs. Liberty.

Brenda Jaspers, circa 1942

Age 17; American citizen with no criminal record

Stats: Average Body; Impressive Mind; Medium Spirit

Appearance: 5'7; short blonde curly hair, brown eyes, quiet beauty. Dresses like a young lady should.

Costume: "That thing," as Brenda calls it these days, was a blue shirt with white buttons, a flowing red and white striped skirt that came down to just below her knees (so she could run, sort of), red slippers and domino mask, and an awful, coppery-green headpiece that was supposed to look like the Statue of Liberty's. The headpiece was heavy and impractical, and she stopped wearing it after the war.

Family: Mother Susan W. Jaspers (40, Duped), Father Dr. Donald Jaspers (43, Scientist and Spy), Brother Todd D. Jaspers (20, Failed experiment)

Dr. Brenda J. Hawkins (a.k.a. Donna Harding), circa 2008

Age 83; American citizen with no criminal record

Stats: Medium Body; Impressive Mind; Impressive Spirit

Appearance: 5'8; long silver curly hair, brown eyes, quiet beauty eerily unbowed by time. Dresses no-nonsense most of the time, but enjoys being "classy" once in a while.

Costume: Since 1976, Brenda's costume has been a blue shirt with white buttons, red padded pants, black heavy boots and gloves, and a red domino mask. For a while she wore a blue tri-corner cap, but left it behind in 2001.

Family: Husband Thomas Hawkins (82), Brother Todd (86, Still Howling), Children Thomas Todd Hawkins (48), Martha Jane Cauley (46) and Marcus Charley Hawkins(44) Grandchildren Thomas Todd Hawkins II and Gina Elizabeth Marsters (28, twins), Lisa Jane Cauley (25), Great-Grandchild Todd Jones Marsters (4)

Power: Energy Absorption, Storage and Redirection

Mrs. Liberty can absorb, store, and reflect several different kinds of energy, and can keep a number of different energy pools going at once. In most cases, she can handle the energy without harm to herself; atomic energy is a troublesome exception. In World War II, she could store two pools at once, up to the Impressive level. Since the 1980s, she's been able to store up to four pools, and sometime in the 1990s her power level went up to Powerful.

The kinds of energies she can work with are: kinetic (bullets, punches, speeding objects), heat (warmth and fire), light, electrical, health, chemical, sonic, and atomic. She does not need to touch the source of energy, or its discharge, to do this: so long as it's within ten feet of her, and she has bare skin pointing in the general direction, she can absorb it.

Once the energy is absorbed, she can wholly redirect it, put it entirely into a pool, or redirect some while storing the rest. Pools can be stored, but they drop one level per day if unused. If she has to drop a pool to build another, she can either let that pool loose or let it bleed away harmlessly. She does not have the power to convert one form of energy to another (yet).

One favorite tactic of hers is to absorb the sound from an area and redirect it at an opponent's head (her famous "Liberty Bell" maneuver). She also likes to take energy blasts full-on and throw them right back at the shooter; stop bullets in mid-flight and return their energy by punching the air (the blow travels to the shooter's body); and grabbing someone's fist, robbing their kinetic energy, and then hitting them with it square in the jaw.

She can heal wounds, but that requires taking health from other people nearby, or herself. So she only uses it in the worst cases, and then only to get the patients over the worst bits and then stabilize them.

Also, note that she cannot absorb superpowers . . . only the various energies given off when they are activated.

Weaknesses: Mrs. Liberty's body is not an endless storage space. If she tries to absorb or redirect energy that goes over her ability, she will be overloaded, and will be unable to act for one combat round per level over her ability. She also has to be careful about expending more energy than she has available, as it will suck Body levels away at a one-for-one basis.

She can absorb atomic energy, but it works strangely with the "X Element" that created her powers, and creates a bizarre, temporary side-effect. Past instances have included shrinking to the size of a doll, developing transparent skin, and growing a second, "evil" head that fought for control over the body. As a result, she's loath to work with it, and only absorbs it if there's no choice.

She also cannot do anything with magical energy, and is twice as vulnerable to it. This may be due to the "X Element" inside her.

Current Situation

Mrs. Liberty is recruiting a new team of heroes on the southern east coast. She's become disgusted with the attitudes of many newer American heroes in the wake of 9/11, and is hoping to find candidates who can mirror the sense of decency and justice as the ones from her previous careers.

Her primary case at this time is tracking down Die Eisenmaid, who escaped from an I.R.O.N.S. facility two years ago. She suspects her brilliant quarry is hiding amongst White Separatists in the Pacific Northwest, and probably recruiting an army. She'd much rather defuse the situation now, rather than face a force of Neo-Nazi cyborgs in a few years, but leads are elusive.

She's continuing her attempts to cure her brother. Giving him more "X Element" has proven useless, and while

exposing him to atomic materials sometimes brings about moments of lucidity, he always slips away, and becomes angrier and more powerful than before. She's wondering if exposing him to massive amounts of radiation, like a nuclear blast, would return him to humanity, or destroy him. But she doesn't want to do something irreversible to her own brother.

She's also keeping a close watch on all her descendants, to see if they begin showing any signs of superpowers. None of them have, yet, and all the research into "X Element" have shown that its superpowers are not handed down to successive generations. Then again, she's the only person who's had a great-grandchild, and he's only four. When he comes of age he might rewrite all the theories . . .

On a more personal level, she's worried about her too-good health. She doesn't have a wrinkle, and -- except for her hair turning gray -- she still looks like she's in her late 30s. All the tests for typical conditions for someone her age come back negative, and she hasn't even entered menopause. She thinks she may be immortal, and that scares her.

As Friend

Mrs. Liberty likes having allies in the field, but she's a take-charge, no-nonsense person who doesn't take lip from anyone -- especially teammates. She's not particularly grandmotherly to anyone but her own family, and it takes a long time for her to warm up to someone. But if you sign on as an ally, she will be at your side no matter what.

As Foe

Tangling with Mrs. Liberty is one of the worst things anyone can do. She'll foil your plans, find your hideout, kick down the back door you didn't know you had, and give you just one chance to surrender. Not everyone takes it, but at least she doesn't beat them up *too* badly.

As Background

Mrs. Liberty likes to take charge of things, which may deprive PCs of a chance to shine. That said, her presence in town can be a goad for acting faster, so she won't beat them to something. She's often interviewed whenever World War II heroes are profiled.

Unanswered Questions

- What happened to Brenda's father? Did he escape, or was he "disappeared" to avoid a trial? If he escaped, who helped him? Was he one of the many criminal geniuses she fought, later, or one of the ones she fought earlier who vanished after the war? Is he in league with any of her old foes? Is he still alive, and watching her?
- Her father was tasked to create "Supermen" for the Third Reich. How many others did he create before his capture, or after? Is his research still being used?
- Why did her brother become a mindless monster when exposed to "X Element," and not her? Did he get too much, or not enough? Did she get too little, or just enough?
- Why is she becoming more powerful? Is the "X Element" still changing her, ever so slowly? If so, will she continue to become more powerful, or start devolving and become like her brother?

Martial Arts Case Study: Agile Guys -- Part II

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

In [Part I](), we discussed the tactics useful for a skilled but low-strength fighter. Now it's on to building a "Agile Guy" to take advantage of those tactics. You'll need to be fast, skillful, and agile.

The Quick and the Dead

This "Agile Guy" build is very useful for martial artists, rogues, thieves, swashbucklers, pirates, and so on. These kinds of fighters don't rely on bashing down an opponent with strength but rather apply their skill to overcome them. But it's not restricted to those types. Remember that you don't have to make a weak, physically small character. Sure, given sufficient points you can make a strong, agile, fast, skilled fighter . . . but it's almost always more useful to specialize a little, and it's cheaper. Don't go crazy trying to cover all of the bases. This build maximizes weapon skills and using that skill to take our your enemies.

Building the Agile Guy

Building an Agile Guy isn't really any different from building another type of fighter. Rather than go into a treatise on building a fighter, we'll concentrate on those particular things that will help a weaker fighter thrive.

Attributes & Secondary Traits

Let's start at the top: attributes.

ST: You're weak, but don't be *too* weak. Get at least enough ST to use your chosen weapon. Next, get enough ST that you can reliably hurt opponents with the average DR you expect to encounter. Note that other parts of your character can help. If your weapon skill is so high you can routinely aim for Chinks in Armor (see page 400 of the ***Basic Set***) you won't need as much ST. If you are using firearms or ultra-tech weaponry, your ST won't determine how much damage you do. It will determine how big of a gun you can carry, so again, don't forget Min ST!

DX: Your DX score should be as high as you can reasonably make it, +1. DX is the central and defining trait of Agile Guys. Sure, munchkin builds that drop DX and trade points for a +5 to a weapon skill are more cost-effective, but they suck if you are ever called on to do anything except use that one skill. An Agile Guy needs to be broadly capable of DX-related feats. That includes climbing, sliding on banisters, crossing tightropes, and *not falling down in combat.* DX is the basis of every combat skill, and a sufficiently high DX means good defaults in anything. Potentially this can make any weapon dangerous in your hands. Add the Improvised Weapons perk and any*thing* might be a weapon in your hands. Get at least a 13 DX, and get it higher if possible. You'll need it!

HT: HT gives great bang for the buck. It's cheap (10/level) and useful. Again, like ST, don't go crazy. This isn't your main attribute. Get a few levels, if only to improve your speed and your ability to survive hazards.

FP and *HP:* Both of these are useful, and you may want to improve them. FP is good for Feverish Defense, following up a great Feint with Might Blows, or for the occasional Great Lunge extra effort. HP keeps you alive. Both are valuable. But when you've spending from a budget, it's usually better to spend elsewhere. An extra +2 HP (4 points) can save your life, but an extra +1 on your main weapon skill (4 points) can keep you from needing those HP in the first place. Leave damage absorption and huge FP efforts for those built for it.

Speed: Raise your Speed. Speed kills and Speed saves. It saves *you* and kills your opponents. Your Dodge is based on Speed, your ability to reach in Cascading Waits (see page 108 of ***Martial Arts***) is affected by Speed. Your ability to avoid attacks and take risky, fight-ending shots depends on your ability to move quickly. Which also means we can't

overlook . . .

Move: Raising Move is also a good idea. If you can get Move 11, do it. That gives you 2 Steps during actions, which will dramatically increase your flexibility on the battlefield, *especially* if you use miniatures and hex maps. Even if not, a good Move will offset penalties for high encumbrance (unavoidable) and let you do more and further Acrobatic movements than a lower-Move character. You can't go all [Parkour](#) during combat with a low Move.

As a note, don't forget to consider your half-move. You will occasionally and unavoidably get hit, and low ST means low HP, which means you'll get to Half Move and Dodge quickly. You'll need a high Move to escape from danger after injury. Also, your half-move is how far you can go with an All-Out Attack.

Advantages

Certain advantages make exceptionally good sense for Agile Guys.

Ambidexterity: At only 5 points, this is almost a must-have for Agile Guys. If you intend to use two weapons at any point, it's worth taking. Using the Perk rules from **Martial Arts,** Off-Hand Weapon Training is only 1 per weapon skill. That makes Off-Hand Weapon Training more cost-effective until you get to five weapons. If you intend to use many different sorts of weapons, cut to the chase and get Ambidexterity to start with. It's also very in-character for highly agile guys to be able to fight in either hand.

Combat Reflexes: This advantage is a must-have. You are building a fighter that depends on high defenses and avoiding being caught flat-footed and vulnerable. You need this.

Extra Attack: This is especially useful with Multi-Strike (+20%) because you can pile up the attacks behind your best weapon. With one level of Extra Attack (Multi-Strike) your fencer can fire off two Eye shots without Rapid Strike penalties, or allow three attacks by splitting one into a Rapid Strike.

Luck: This is useful for anyone, and is especially good for fighters without a big supply of HP to fall back on. Take it!

Perfect Balance and *Catfall:* These are excellent choices for mobile fighters, eliminating many rolls, giving bonuses to others, and mitigating the downsides of failing them! They make a great combination.

Enhanced Defenses (any), Weapon Bond, Trained By A Master, and *Weapon Master:* All of these are useful; buy them if at all possible. Weapon Master will increase your weapon damage, and reduces the penalties for Rapid Strike to half, and allows you to buy Dual-Weapon Attack up to full skill. If you carry a shield, make sure your Weapon Master covers Shield so you can halve the penalties for Multiple Blocks, too. If you're fighting with guns or bows, *Gunslinger* and *Heroic Archer,* respectively, are must-haves.

Skills

Skill levels are king for weaker fighters. If you're weak, you must be skilled. You can't make up for lack of skill with damage potential if you're weak, so you must make up for damage potential with skill.

Combat skills: As with any character, the higher the weapon skill, the better. For an Agile Guy, this is critical because all of your combat tactics depend on being able to soak large penalties for Deceptive Attack, Rapid Strike, or Dual-Weapon Attack, and hit locations all at once. It's not enough to be able to hit the Vitals *or* Rapid Strike *or* Deceptive Attack; you need to do all three at once. At a rock-bottom minimum, a skilled guy needs Skill 16 in his primary weapon. That's the lowest level that will let you execute a Rapid Strike with each strike having a 50% chance to hit or launch a Deceptive Attack (-1 to defend) on the Vitals (-3) with an 11 or less to hit. It's also the minimal for criticals on a 3-6 if you launch a normal attack. A skill of 18-20 is much more reasonable based on the tactics you need to survive, and the higher your skill the better.

Ranged weapon skills should be higher, by at least 2-3 points. This is especially true for low-tech missile weapons.

Those generally lack the penetration power of firearms and often compete with heavier armor as well! High-tech missile weapons are much easier on Agile Guys because they have high damage and good range. Conversely their superior range lengthens engagement distances so you need better skill to compensate.

Movement skills: Next most important for an Agile Guy are movement skills. Primarily, this means Acrobatics, but Climbing and Jumping are also very useful. Acrobatics will improve your chances of an Acrobatic Dodge, and allow for the *Acrobatic Stand* and *Roll with the Blow* techniques to be used effectively. Take a good look at the *Acrobatic Movement* rules starting on page 105 of **GURPS Martial Arts.** You'll need a solid Acrobatics skill -- at least a 14 -- to make regular use of them. The higher, the better, much as your main combat skill.

Cinematic skills: If you've got access to cinematic skills, take advantage of it. Skill like Pressure Points and Pressure Secrets are very useful, allowing you to directly leverage your skill for additional effect. Power Blow doesn't give the bang-for-the-buck strong guys get, but don't overlook it. Even a ST 10 fighter gets ST 20 from a successful use of Power Blow. Just be careful to choose a weapon that can take advantage of your improved strength. Cinematic movement skills are even more useful in some ways. Lizard Climb and Light Walk will let you run across (and up!) surfaces that won't support normal movement. Flying Leap will let you cross the battlefield or escape a desperate situation in a few bounds. In general, pick a few cinematic skills that will either reduce your weaknesses (Power Blow, Immovable Stance, and so on) or maximize your strengths (Lizard Climb, Flying Leap, Pressure Points, etc.) and focus on them.

Techniques

Generally, choose techniques that either boost your damage or reduce your opponent's ability to defend. Techniques that allow you to leverage skill (Arm Lock, Finger Lock) instead of strength (Wrench Limb, Neck Snap) are better choices. A character like this isn't built to absorb damage, so be careful with attacks based on All-Out Attack or Committed Attack. Jump Kick and Axe Kick do provide a nice damage boost but they can leave you vulnerable to other opponents.

Here are a few techniques are especially useful to skilled guys.

Arm Lock: Along with Finger Lock, this technique lets you pit skill vs. strength, and use your skill to determine if you inflict damage or not. It can also feed into throws; see Throws from Locks (**Martial Arts,** pages 118-119).

Exotic Hand Strike: Use this when striking unarmed against any DR 0 opponent. It's only -1 to skill for +1 damage, which is a great tradeoff for a high-skill fighter.

Feint: This is a must-buy for Agile Guys. You should be using Feints to drop opposing defenses. Spend the full 5 points and maximize it. You'll also need it to defend against Beats from stronger opponents.

Ground Fighting and *Low Fighting:* These are useful for reducing penalties from bad situations. This is handy for making sure that even when you're down, your skill isn't appreciably reduced.

Targeted Attack: If possible, get Targeted Attack for your main weapon at a potentially fight-ending location. It doesn't make sense to buy more than two or three Hard techniques for a given combat skill, so you'll rarely want more than one or possibly two Targeted Attacks. Choose well. For impaling attacks, Vitals and Eyes are excellent choices. For crushing, look at Skull, Joints, and Groin. Cutting attacks benefit from Veins/Arteries, Neck, and limbs and extremities. Piercing attacks do well against Vitals. Remember to factor in DR, of course. The skull is a good location for any attack if you can overcome its DR, but the head if often armored (at least in realistic and historical games). Limbs may be heavily armored (for example, your opponents are medieval knights) or not armored at all (your opponents are largely Tokugawa-era samurai). Once you buy a Targeted Attack you're committing valuable points to it and will use it often, so (again) choose a good one.

On a related subject, the *entire* "Go For the Eyes!" box (page 72 of **Martial Arts** 72) is your personal playground.

If they are allowed, take a look at *Combinations.* You've got the skill to make the point investment worthwhile for a good combination. What is a good combination depends wildly on your fighting style, but remember to make the first strikes feed into the success rate of the later strikes. Use your hard-to-stop attacks first to get past your opponent's defenses and avoid giving him a bonus to stop the rest of the combo.

Cinematic Techniques are also useful. *Dual-Weapon Attack* is a natural choice for two-weapon fighters. Skilled fighters are more apt to be able to use *Initial Carving* (just for the fun of it), or *Grand Disarm* or *Whirlwind Attack.* If you've got time to spare in a fight, a Springing Attack is also a good way to deal with a high-DR opponent.

Equipping the Agile Guy

For an Agile Guy, we've got two major areas of concern, armor and weapons.

Armor is an important consideration, if only because you usually don't want a lot of it. It's important to choose it well. Get the best DR you can get without raising your encumbrance past None or Light. Encumbrance past this point will be a problem for Agile Guys using Karate, Judo, or Fencing skills. It'll sap away your Move and make you less mobile. It'll make you less Stealthy and burn more FP from combat fatigue.

The higher the TL, the better the armor you can get. If you go sufficiently high, wholly self-powered high-DR combat armor that grants high ST is possible. In that's the case in your game, buy the armor, and then look at both the Agile Guys and [Strong Guys](#) articles for combat tactics . . .

DR is vital for everyone. You *will* get hit at some point. Critical successes against you, failed defenses, area attacks, etc. will all inflict damage on you. Get some DR and survive them.

Note that, while this build is aimed generally at lightly-armored folks, you can be a heavily-armored Agile Guy. ST 10 is sufficient for a Broadsword fighter, and you may choose to wear heavy armor despite its effect on your movement. You'll be better equipped for standing and slugging it out with opponents, or dealing with missile fire and area attacks. Your weapon skills will be unaffected. While you will be less mobile you can still use Agile Guy tactics to wear down and defeat foes. Don't ignore the possibility of a plate-armored high-skilled fighter who just happens to have relatively low ST. Just don't invest so heavily in Acrobatics . . .

Weapons: It all comes down to a question of, "What will you fight with?" The classic Agile Guy weapons are fencing weapons. Rapiers, smallswords, sabers. The occasional katana or staff will show up, as will more exotic weapons. But don't limit yourself. Avoid weapons that are Unready or Unbalanced, that have a high Min ST, or which have high logistical requirements (i.e. consume lots of heavy ammunition).

Weapon weight is also a big concern. Very heavy weapons (especially modern firearms such as squad automatic weapons, sniper rifles and big game rifles, and any machine guns) are both a drag on encumbrance and have high Min ST. You need a high ST to fire large pistols, or one-hand most SMGs. Heavy sniper rifles and machine guns often require substantial ST even with a bipod or tripod. Ammunition for such weapons is also heavy, and rapid fire will burn through it quickly. If you have dreams of a .44 magnum revolver (Min ST 11) or firing a TL6 9mm Machine Pistol (Min ST 12), you'll need more ST. Get a smaller, lighter weapon: a 9mm pistol only needs Min ST 9, a 9mm SMG needs an 10, and a 4.6mm PDW only a 7! Use that. Aim instead of using max ROF to get a high effective skill. For low-tech missile weapons, bows and slings and crossbows give you more shots to the pound than spear throwers or most thrown weapons (Axes are 4 pounds each, arrows and shuriken are 10 to the pound).

Light melee weapons are a mixed blessing. They have a low Min ST, but they are also susceptible to breakage. Breakage is a real possibility if your weapons are in the 1-2 pound range, as 3-7 pound melee weapons are quite common. Make sure your weapon is heavy enough -- or high enough quality -- to survive being used to parry the common weapons you'll encounter.

Weapon Length is also worth looking at. A reach 1,2 weapon is a much better choice than a reach 1 weapon. Spears, rapiers, and longswords are worth looking at for their superior thrusting reach, and since your damage is so low it's

usually better to go for Impaling than to trade up 1-2 basic damage for a cut.

Weapon quality is especially important to Agile Guys. The better quality the weapon, the more damage it does (vital when your ST is low) and the less likely it is to break. You'll need a high-quality weapon as soon as you can get it. Starting with one as Signature Gear (matched with a Weapon Bond) is definitely worth considering. This is especially true if you don't expect to find superior, magical, or higher-tech replacements. If the best you can get is a Very Fine Rapier, why not start with one?

Final Thoughts

The Agile Guy can be one of the most fun builds in *GURPS.* While strong guys can deal great damage, many techniques and interesting combat options just aren't terribly useful in mortal combat situations without *lots* of skill. A high-skill fighter with a low damage capacity can be a challenge to run, but your tactical options are extremely broad. You can use your skill to gain multiple attacks and overwhelm a foe or focus down to a pin-point attack that slides past you foe's defenses and takes him down. Even in the face of stacking penalties (multiple parries, darkness, bad footing) your skill will help you prevail. Build your Agile Guy carefully, avoid high-damage, PC-rending attacks, and stab or shoot away at targets stronger or "balanced" builds wouldn't dream of targeting. Fend off mobs of opponents and leave your initials on their leader's chest. You'll pay a lot for high DX and high combat skills. Revel in them!

The Search for Ed

Part II: Location

by Matt Riggsby

The dungeon in which Ed lost his life consists of three levels. The highest is the former stronghold of an evil cult, dug into the side of a hill. Beneath it are catacombs and natural caves. This article describes the original conditions of the cultist stronghold, pre-monster occupation. For the adventure described in part three, it's in far worse shape.

Level 1

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Level 1: Evil Temple

This level was once the headquarters of an evil cult worshiping icky gods. Unless otherwise noted, all doors are of Average wooden construction and provide no bonus or penalty to Lockpicking (see ***Dungeon Fantasy 2,*** page 18). All are locked, but none are barred.

1) Entry Hall: The first thing a visitor sees is the entrance hall, a chamber with a marble floor and walls carved with eldritch runes. They were carved by someone who was given the runes but no words to write with them, so they don't mean anything, but adventurers can be excused for believing that they're a secret code.

2) Guard room: This room is set aside for the use of burly armed men who keep the stronghold safe without cluttering it up with visible muscle. It contains a table, at which the guards often play dice and other gambling games, and a rack for spears and pikes.

3) Main Hallway: The stronghold's central hallway is decorated by a series of mosaics on walls and ceiling. The mosaics are made of small, cloudy glass tiles, but particularly greedy characters may notice that some of them appear to be gold. Actually, they're just gold leaf laminated between thin sheets of glass, so there's not much value there. A very diligent character might pry out $80 worth of gold. About half-way down the hallway, there's a trap. A stretch of hallway about ten feet long is on a slab which pivots on a concealed axle running over a pit across the hall:

Detect: Per-2
Disarm: Find the hidden switches (Per-2 again)
Circumvent: Fly or leap over the 10-foot area
Evade: Characters with ground Move 7 or better can make a DX-3 roll to run across in a single turn without being tipped into the pit.
Effects: Fall 10 feet
Shots: Infinite
Steal: No

4) Store room 1: This plain room is mostly used to store goods for outdoor use: cloaks and other heavy clothing, tents and luggage for longer expeditions, and tools for digging and gardening.

5) Library: In addition to storing books, this room is for study and teaching. Students sit on plain benches while being read to from a lectern. The room is plain stone, but the walls are lined with shelves. Many books are fastened to the shelves with chains to prevent theft, and a number are locked to prevent the uninitiated from reading them.

6) Dormitory 1: This is one of the two rooms containing sleeping quarters for ordinary cultists. The floor is plain flagstones. The walls are plastered and have crude but extensive frescoes depicting the cult's gods destroying unbelievers and rewarding the faithful with power. The furnishings are narrow cots accompanied by small chests for clothes.

7) Store room 2: This room is used to store a variety of miscellaneous goods: bales of fabric for evil robes, bedding, curtains, and so on; planks, mortar, and other digging and construction supplies; stacks of parchment to bind into new books; extra ritual items (wavy knives, copper bowls into which to drain the blood of sacrifices, incense, censers, etc.); soaps and other cleansers; and many other items.

8) Dormitory 2: To avoid scandal in their evil community, the cultist segregated sleeping quarters for men and women. This is the women's dormitory, though you'd never know it if you didn't open any of the chests, and even then most of the clothing the cult allows is unisex. The furniture and architecture are identical to the other dormitory.

9) Refectory: Even evil cultists gotta eat, and this is where they do it. The benches and tables are a bit rough, but solidly built.

10) Kitchen: This room, with smoke-blackened plaster walls, is for food preparation and storage. The kitchen has a well in one corner. A bucket on the end of a coiled rope can go down nearly fifty feet to a pool deep below, which happens to be Pool #2 on level 2. Characters who are SM -1 or smaller can climb down the rope to reach the next level down. Of course, anyone (or any*thing*) SM -1 or smaller can climb up as well.

11) Apartment 1: This room is set aside for the cult's #2. It is sparsely furnished; the leader's assistant is a true ascetic who prefers a quiet evening scourging himself to any luxuries.

12) Apartment 2: These rooms, consisting of an outer audience chamber and an inner private chamber, are set aside for the cult's leader and whatever other nubile cultist he wants to keep around. It is decorated with polished wooden panels on the walls and soft rugs on the floor, as well as comfortable furniture. The locks are somewhat higher quality than elsewhere on this level (-2 to Lockpicking) but no more durable.

13) Ceremonial chamber: This large octagonal chamber is where the cult conducts most of its rituals. The high-domed chamber has marble-lined walls resembling those in the entry hall and is lit by an enormous chandelier at the center of the room. A series of full-sized demon statues hold up the arches which form the ceiling dome. There is a solid stone altar at the north end of the room. The chamber is protected by a magical trap which afflicts any intelligent nonbeliever who enters the room:

Detect: Per + Magery for magicians or Detect Magic
Disarm: No (short of destroying the room)
Circumvent: No
Evade: No; people initiated into the cult are unaffected, but since they all died decades ago, the PCs are out of luck.
Effects: Resist Curse-20 or be afflicted with the Curse spell (-2)
Shots: Infinite
Steal: No

14) Cells: Naturally, the cult practices human sacrifice and needs a place to stash the prospective victims until it's time to use them. Some of the occupants have scratched brief messages on the coarse stone walls.

15) Secret chamber: Behind the back wall of the ceremonial chamber is a smaller, *secret* ceremonial chamber for the inner circle's rituals. The black marble-lined chamber has a sarcophagus containing the remains of the founder of the cult.

Level 2

Level 2: Catacombs of the Spider Queen

One of the reasons the evil cult built their headquarters where they did is that it sits atop extensive natural caves inhabited by evil creatures.

1) Crypt: Notables in the cult are interred in the crypt, laid on the altar until their flesh decays. The room and the adjacent catacombs are lined with carved white marble, showing more images of ferocious monsters consuming wailing victims. The doors at the bottom of the stairs are Heavy and Ironbound. They're also barred on the *outside*, facing the stairs. The catacombs which extend from the crypt proper are essentially hallways lined with stone shelves. Once there is nothing left of a dead body but bones wrapped in a shroud, the remains are moved from the altar to a niche in one of the catacombs.

2-11) Spider Chambers: These areas are rough, unshaped stone chambers with dirt-and-rubble-covered floors, liberally covered with dry old webbing, bones, and other detritus. The old webs are sufficiently covered by dust that they're no longer sticky, though they provide excellent camouflage for hiding spiders. The webs can be damaged by fire, but don't really burn. Chamber 5 contains a deep pool of surprisingly pure (that is, drinkable rather than filled with horrible muck, not suspiciously and unnaturally pure) water. The darker circle on the pool in the pool chamber indicates where the well on the floor above is placed.

12-20) Zombie Chambers: These rooms are constructed from roughly stacked but nevertheless intentionally laid courses of stone by the lich king's zombies. Chamber 19 is full of the lich king's equipment.

21) The grand chasm: Past the lich king's laboratory, the cavern opens out. And down. Way down, changing quickly from a steep slope to a sheer cliff. Characters with good night vision can see another cave wall at least twenty yards away from them, a ceiling about three yards up, and no floor. The blackness extends for at least two hundred yards. However, down the slope about ten yards and over a few, there's an opening with dull red light coming out of it.

Level 3

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Level 3: The Vault

The lowest level is really a single large underground chamber with a single strong room separated off from it.

1) Outer Chamber: The outer chamber is a large, high-ceilinged cave. There are two exits. One is the small passageway to the north, which can be reached from the level above. The other is the caverns to the west. Characters can explore the caverns if they wish, but this takes them off the map into monster-infested caves and out of the adventure.

2) The Vault: A small section of the large chamber has been squared off, walled with iron-reinforced stone, and turned into a treasure vault. It is full of wooden chests but is otherwise unfurnished and undecorated. It has Ironbound Vault doors which have a very good lock (-4 to Lockpicking). It is also protected by Scryguard and Teleport Shield.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

More Senseless than Normal

There I was, enjoying almost two weeks of non-sick bliss, when my son, Sam -- who shall be known in the medical literature as "Patient Zero" -- gave me Death Plague 2010, which has manifested in the form of a horrible cough. (Being a parent means exposing oneself to all manner of contagion. When the apocalyptic death contagion comes, it won't arise from a secret government lab or an alien planet, but a kindergarten.) In addition, my voice has been gone for almost four days now, either as a direct result of the Death Plague or a side effect of the cough that makes me sound like I smoke whole cartons of unfiltered cigarettes dipped in tar.

I was only completely devoid of my voice for one day, but for the others I've been limited to croaking out a pained word or two, and I generally learned to conserve my voice as much as possible. As someone who has a love of words and a gift of gab, being deprived of my voice is only slightly more limiting to my continued daily interactions than, say, cell division. So I've gotten to hone my skills with voiceless communication, including such noble pursuits as charades and writing words on my son's magnetic-write board . . . the one with the bunnies on it.

(True story: I was attempting to convey to the missus that I wouldn't mind going for a walk with her and Sam, and attempted to convey this through charades. I pointed at her, and I pointed at me, and she immediately got, "You and me! You want to do something?" I then proceeded to make the arm-cradle-rocking sign for "baby," and she got lost. "And a baby? There's a baby somewhere? You want a baby?" Exasperated, I made a punching motion to my groin and doubled over in fake pain. Immediately, she said, "Oh, Sam!" For those fellows reading who have not yet gone down the path, be aware: Being a father is a path fraught with peril.)

Anyway, although I have lost a couple of days (mostly from getting tuckered out by coughing my fool head off and needing to lie down for a bit), it's been nowhere near as bad as my ailment from a few weeks ago. And I've gotten to think creatively about how to communicate as wordlessly as possible. Really, it's a game, if you think about it.

And it's a "game" that's been introduced in various RPG or gamer-related pursuits before, perhaps most notably in the episode "Hush" of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* but also in a series of wordless comics from Marvel (an entire month-long event called "'Nuff Said" from 2002) and the classic *Silence 10' Radius* spell from ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.*** (It was years before I realized that spell was primarily intended to be casted on *other people.* For the longest time I thought it was just a way for heroes to sneak up on folks, and I couldn't help but wonder, "Yeah, but why would you give up your spell-casting abilities for that?!")

Removing some aspect of assumed ability or sense is a great way to mix up an otherwise mundane adventure. An adventure described entirely without visual information would be very difficult (since RPGs are often hard to visualize normally) but you could easily do a tale where the heroes can't hear, or sense color . . . or something else. As one creepy Cthulhu-esque possibility, imagine an otherwise mundane investigatory adventure where the heroes find themselves unable to perceive either the threat they face *or* the damage it causes. In other words, not only is it "invisible," your mind doesn't even understand what it's doing: "You're reading the book, and you start feeling very sleepy. You've obviously been at it too long. You rub your neck in tension, and your fingers feel slick. As you continue researching, you realize that the pages you're turning are becoming stained with red where you touch them." (The creature is on the hero's neck, clawing away.)

Or perhaps the heroes find themselves facing a well-known enemy who grows more powerful/aware/summoned when his name is spoken (akin to Beetlejuice), and PCs find themselves needing to rally the townspeople to the cause *without* utilizing the name of the foe.

Or maybe the good guys lose their sense of perceptive counting, finding themselves reduced to ***Bunnies & Burrows***-esque counting of "One, two, lots!" A standard dungeon crawl becomes a lot more interesting when opening a double door to a huge room and "lots" of zombies. ("Does that mean four, or 100?" "Lots!")

Our ability to know and trust what our senses tell us and the ability to communicate that information to others are two of those things we take for granted every day until something disrupts those perceptions. And that's when things get

interesting . . . although whether "interesting" means "communicating with a bunny slate" or "facing an unknowable number of monsters" depends entirely on the circumstances.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Profane Miracles (for *The Esoterroists*)

Published by **Pelgrane Press**

Written by Leonard Balsera

Cover, Illustrations, & Cartography by Jérôme Huguenin

32-page b&w softcover; $9.95

With ***The Esoterroists,*** Pelgrane Press inaugurated the GUMSHOE System, the investigative rules that focus on clue interpretation rather than clue acquisition. It also presented a setting threatened by occultists who would bring magic into the world and so threaten to rend the veil between the physical world and the beyond. Operating against the Esoterrorists is the "Ordo Veritatis," reality's last defender. This secret organization is part-paranormal investigation agency, part-paranormal clean-up department, and is sanctioned by virtually every government world wide.

Profane Miracles is an action-orientated fast-play scenario for **The Esoterrorists** written for three to six players. Penned by Leonard Balsera, better known as one third of Evil Hat Productions and co-author of the superb ***Spirit of the Century,*** the scenario is designed to get the players involved and the game going quickly, and to also offer a couple of sessions of play.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The set up is simple: Famous financier Jonathan Bentley has been resurrected from the dead at a charity ball in Los Angeles by his wife, Grace Summerville and her spiritual advisor, the self-styled "Psychic to the Stars," Cassandra Madrigal. Which raised several questions, not least of which is, was Bentley really dead and is he alive now? Further, what was his wife's involvement and is Madrigal just another fraud, or the real deal? And if magic was involved, was it an act of esoterror? How far does the Esoterrorist conspiracy go in Los Angeles and is Madrigal involved?

All of these questions and more will need answering as the Ordo Veritas hastily assembles a team and sends them undercover in the City of Angels. Equally as hastily assembled is the team's cover, as a news team for a major television outlet, which is going to pose its own problem in that the characters lack the legal authority they would have had were they operating as FBI agents. So the team will have to tread a little lightly wherever their investigative efforts take them. This will be from the site of the resurrection in the Millennium Biltmore Hotel to the Bentley-Summerville mansion to a final showdown in television studio via Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles and the Hollywood Hills.

Profane Miracles is more action orientated adventure than is usual for an ***Esoterrorist*** scenario, with less of an emphasis on Academic investigative abilities. Indeed, it is suggested that for player groups with low Shooting and Scuffling scores that the antagonists have theirs slightly lowered to reflect this. It is not all out-and-out combat, and several scenes do require some investigative subtlety. Of course, because the scenario involves an investigation into the paranormal, it is no surprise that it throws an occult monster at the characters, but pleasingly it also presents them with a moral quandary that they will have to deal with before the "Veil-Out" and scenario end. The Veil-Out is the clean-up process that debunks and de-mystifies any outbreak of magic that the investigators will have encountered during the adventure, which prevents Esoterrorist efforts to strengthen the presence and belief in magic by the populace at large.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Physically, ***Profane Miracles*** is a very nice looking book with an excellent cover, plus artwork and cartography by

Jérôme Huguenin. Bar the odd bit of phrasing the book is well written and easy to understand, such that an experienced GM only needs to give this a minimum of preparation time.

Beyond the scenario itself, *Profane Miracles* offers a new monster (something that *The Esoterrosrists* was lacking, but fortunately now has its own version of *The Book of Unremitting Horror*), but it also showcases what a scenario for the game should look like. Further, it could be adapted to other RPGs, most obviously *Fear Itself,* since it uses the GUMSHOE System, with the characters as an actual news team. It would require making the adventure's protagonists less powerful; otherwise, it would be a very tough challenge. *Trail of Cthulhu* is more problematic, though still possible, and it actually provides the conversion guidelines between the GUMSHOE System and *Call of Cthulhu.* Other possibilities include *Conspiracy X, Delta Green,* *GURPS Black Ops,* and Reality Blurs' Agents of Oblivion setting for *Savage Worlds*.

Simple, straightforward, and easy to prepare, *Profane Miracles* is a quick fire scenario that does a nice job of showcasing *The Esoterrorists.* And the price is pretty good too.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

H1, Keep on the Shadowfell (for *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition*)

Published by Wizards of the Coast

Written by Bruce R. Cordell & Mike Mearls

Cover by William O'Connor

Illustrated by Miguel Coimbra & Eric Deschamps

Cartography by Mike Schley & Jason Engle

Card folio with 80-page & 16-page full-color booklets and three Double-Sided Maps; $30

With the launch of *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition* everywhere today -- have you gotten yours yet? -- everyone now knows what the new game is like. Yet for the past few weeks, gamers have been able to get a big taste of what we can hold in our hands right now, with *H1, Keep on the Shadowfell.* This is the first scenario for the new edition, the first part of a campaign that will take the player characters from 1st through to 30th level, and the first product released for it. This makes it quite a significant item, but then its significance does not end there, for *H1, Keep on the Shadowfell* also includes the rules needed to play the scenario. Not all of the rules of the game are included, but still enough to get a character from 1st to 3rd level.

What you get is a card folder with pockets for two booklets and three double-sided poster maps. The left-hand booklet is the 80-page scenario, while the right-hand booklet is the 16-page Quick-Start Guide to the rules for both players and DM that also includes a set of five ready-to-play characters for use with the scenario. The double-sided maps depict encounter areas within the scenario. Almost everything is done in full color, and is clearly presented, although the lack of a card cover for either booklet means that neither will stand up to much punishment. Worse still, the ink on the pages smears too easily; the two hours it took holding the booklet to read through it left the cover indelibly marked with my fingerprints.

So what of the rules in *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition?* From the Quick-Start Guide multiple changes are evident. It is still a "d20 System," the core mechanic still being roll a d20 with high results being better. The core characteristics remain the same, but after that, almost everything changes. The Armor Class system inherited from *Gamma World 4th Edition* is joined by other Static Defense that work exactly like Armor Class, but for Fortitude, Reflex, and Will. These Defense Values can be targeted by various powers and abilities; for example, when the Wizard throws a Magic Missile, his player rolls the attack against a target's Reflex, but against the target's Fortitude for his Ray of Frost.

Characters have more Hit Points. For example, the given wizard starts with 23! This Hit Point inflation applies equally to the monsters: The Level 1 Kobolds in the scenario start with 24 and the Level 2 Kobolds start with 36, while the Level 4 Dragon we faced in a demonstration game had 260! When a character or monster is reduced to half their Hit Points, its status is Bloodied, which can trigger certain effects, like a Dragonborn's Fury, which grants it +1 to hit. Weapons and Powers do more damage.

However, every character can heal himself, possessing a number of Healing Surges per day, each equal to a quarter of the character's total Hit Points. Once per encounter a character can apply a Surge, while a Cleric can use his Powers to

trigger another character's Surge but with a bonus. Surges can be used out of combat and between encounters.

The biggest and most obvious changes in ***Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition*** will be the Powers that every character possesses. These are divided between Powers that can be used At-Will, per Encounter, and Daily. For example, the Wizard has the Magic Missile, Ray of Frost, and Scorching Burst At-Will Powers; the Burning Hands Encounter Power; and the Acid Arrow and Sleep Daily Powers. In addition, he has the Ghost Sound and Light cantrips that can be used at will. Each sample character possesses his own Powers according to Class and Race, but the Wizard illustrates a major shift in feel and concept. Obviously, this is no Vancian magic as per previous editions of ***Dungeons & Dragons*** and the ***Dying Earth RPG,*** and with multiple and easily used Powers, the Wizard becomes more like we read in fiction and see in film, but all of the Powers mark a more dynamic style of play. Further, many powers have secondary effects; for example, the Cleric's Lance of Faith At-Will Power not only damages the target, it also grants a bonus to an ally when he attacks the target.

Then again, what of skills and Feats? Both are present, but the long skill list of ***Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*** has been simplified, for example, the Thief class relying on the Thievery skill rather than Pick Pockets, Disarm Traps, and so on. Likewise, Feats are present, but the emphasis appears to be on the Powers, not the Feats.

Combat is played in turns, with each character possessing one standard action (usually an attack power), a move action, a minor action (such as drawing a weapon, opening a door, or aiming a wand), and any number of free actions (usually talking or dropping a weapon). These can be done in any order and a standard action can be downgraded to a lesser action. If a player wants to conduct another action during an encounter he can spend an Action Point. Each character starts with one, but gains more as encounters are played through. Combat is played out over a battle board or map using miniatures, with distance not given in terms of a traditional measurements, but actual squares. This has the effect of making play more tactical and less easy to imagine, as does the scenario's suggestion of using ***Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures,*** which -- given their collectable format -- makes getting all the figures needed for the scenario's monsters (let alone the player characters) a hurdle at best.

Of the five pre-generated characters provided, they showcase the system's changes rather than the new character options. We have a Dragonborn Paladin, a Dwarven Fighter, a Half-Elf Cleric, a Halfling Rogue, and a Human Wizard. This seems to be a fairly traditional selection, with everyone having to wait for the full game to see the more radical options. It is a pity though that the illustrations do not quite match the characters.

The ***Keep on the Shadowfell*** booklet repeats some of the rules found in the Quick-Start Rules, but it adds additional material in the form of skill explanations, combat modifiers, and combat states. It also breaks down the new monster Stat Block, who are more complex with a continuing emphasis upon Powers and how they interact with each other. In general the new Stat Block format is easier to read and reflects the more powerful nature of the monsters.

So what of the adventure itself? Its set up is a cliché-and-a-half, one that we have seen in classic dungeons from ***B1 Keep on the Borderlands*** and ***T1 Village of Hommlet*** through ***U1 The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh*** and ***The Sunless Citadel*** to ***Scourge of the Howling Horde*** and ***D0 Hollow's Last Hope.*** It starts with a village imperiled then, with something else directing the nature of said peril. In ***H1, Keep on the Shadowfell,*** the village is Winterhaven, and the immediate threat is Kobold brigands, but the real threat comes from the dim realm of the Shadowfell, while the keep built to contain the threat from Shadowfell has long lain abandoned, its purpose forgotten. Pleasingly three hooks are provided to encourage the characters' travel to the area and to provide them with more Experience Points should they succeed in fulfilling the hook's quest. As is traditional, the adventure throws them into the action quickly and after stopping at Winterhaven takes them onto the adventure, which is well written, with good advice on running it. Where possible it adheres to the two-page layout per location seen in late ***Dungeons & Dragons 3.5*** official adventures, but this does not always work; there is sometimes a disconnect between the immediate item description, such as a trap being triggered and its actual in-game effects being described on separate pages. Other problems are the lack of floor plans for every encounter location (which in the dungeon proper can consist of several rooms) and the lack of handouts given that several letters provide clues. Yet in taking the characters from first to third level, ***H1, Keep on the Shadowfell*** should provide hours of play.

H1, Keep on the Shadowfell is a good, solid -- though not great -- adventure. But it does not have to be great, because

it also has to introduce the new rules, and this is where it does not quite succeed. The Quick-Start Rules state that they are a cursory introduction, and that is the problem; they are just *too* cursory. How exactly are they meant to be run and played? The authors never go into this, though all it would have taken is one good example. Indeed I am better placed to run or play the adventure after having played through a demonstration game at the local game convention and reading its provided "What you need to know about" sheet for the game . . . thanks to John Amos, my old DM. The other issue is that the advice in the adventure is aimed at the novice DM and (to be fair) the cursory nature of the rules just might not be enough for a novice DM. It's perhaps best wait for the new rulebook then, though this will not be a problem for experienced players of **Dungeons & Dragons.** More problematic is the problem of wear and tear that the booklets in the folio will withstand; they really, really need proper covers.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Uptown

Published by [Fred Distribution](#)

Designed by Kory Heath & Rick Soued

Boxed set with mounted foldout map board, 140 tiles (28 in each of five colors), five plastic tile racks, & rules (German & English); $19.95

It's the 1920s, and there's nothing people like more than a hot night out on the town. Things then weren't much different from today, though. One needs the right combination of elements for a good time: some ladies ready to cut a rug, a dashing fellow, some smoking music, good booze . . . leave something out and the evening might fall flat. It's time to swing by in your fancy car to collect your gal, because the two of you are headed *Uptown.*

The object of the game is to have the fewest groups in the player's color.

Each player receives a small plastic rack and a set of 28 tiles in his color. There are nine tiles numbered 1 through 9, nine lettered A through I, and nine more showing different symbols. Finally, there's a single counter marked $, and that's a wild card.

The board is reminiscent of a sudoku puzzle. The numbers run across, topping each column, and the letters run down the sides. Correspondingly, the board is nine squares by nine squares, and contains nine "areas," each a three-by-three grid showing the same symbol (so there's a set of nine saxophones in a three-by-three arrangement, another such setup for the flapper picture, and so on). The tiles start upside down, and players randomly draw five tiles of their color onto their rack; they only see those five pieces.

On his turn, a player places one of his counters onto a matching space on the board. A 1 tile could be placed anywhere in the 1 column, for example, while a car is placed in the car bloc of spaces. The $ piece can be placed anywhere on the board. A "group" is all the pieces of a single color that attach orthogonally; meeting at a diagonal doesn't count, and forms a separate group (unless a later play connects them). Inevitably someone will want an already-occupied spot, and a player may capture another's piece by replacing their chit with one of his own. The stolen bit is placed face-up in front of the capturing player where everyone can see it. One cannot steal a tile if it splits the affected player's group into two or more smaller groups.

A player finishes by replenishing his rack with a tile from his face-down selection; then play passes to the left. When everyone has played their 21st tile, the game ends and the person with the fewest groups wins. In case of a tie, the person who captured the fewest tiles wins; it pays to refrain from interfering with someone else's stuff. The game is usually played with three or more players, but there's a variation for only two participants. In it, each player takes two colors and racks instead of one, and plays from whichever set offers the best play (unless he exhausts one color . . . then he's got to play from his remaining color). The player with the fewest groups is determined by adding both colors together.

The whole thing fits in a small, sturdy box. The racks are plain but effective, and the tiles are just the right size . . . they can be placed (and in the case of capturing, picked up and replaced) in the midst of all those other counters without shifting those neighbors about the board and undoing the whole shebang. The rules fit on one small slip of paper, and they come in both English and German. A good plastic insert keeps the components from misbehaving, all of which makes the price shockingly low.

The action is simple, and the 30-minute playing time is one of the results. Being able to see plainly what's been played and what hasn't yet hit the board allows players to anticipate some of their rivals' moves, though one cannot always do something about it. Part of the game is taking a chance on what might come up; there are always four tiles one doesn't get to play in a given game, so trying to connect groups based on probabilities is the perfect amount of forethought to ask of the players.

The mechanics offer some small penalty to players who ruthlessly capture other people's tiles, and living conditions on the board are tight enough that this can actually affect the outcome, if everyone has the same number of annoyingly unconnected groups. It's a refreshing alternative to the status quo of most games wherein outright cutthroat tactics are, if not encouraged, at least understood and condoned. Working around not only one's own limitations but the plans of the opposition is part of what makes *Uptown* just the right degree of playable . . . and replayable.

--Andy Vetromile

Irregular Webcomic

by David Morgan-Mar & Steven Marsh

Irregular Webcomic

Irregular Webcomic

The Ceasefire Parallels

for *GURPS*

by Stephen Dedman

The worlds known officially known as Hong and Hong-2 are Puzzle Worlds better known to Infinity Operatives as the Ceasefire Parallels. For reasons that still baffle Homeline physicists, chemical explosives do not work on either of the Hong worlds. Other chemical reactions occur as normal, but materials that would explode on Homeline merely burn slowly. As a result, two inventions that have shaped the history of so many worlds -- gunpowder and the internal combustion engine -- are unknown there, dramatically changing the history of warfare and colonization and resulting in an oddly Steampunk technology.

World Name and Current Year: Hong, 1950

The first obvious divergence between the histories of Homeline and Hong occurred in the early 16th century. Mexico held out against the conquistadores until 1533, slowing down their expansion throughout the Americas. Though disease took its toll on the native Americans, battles between them and the Europeans were less one-sided than on Homeline; less gold was taken back to Spain to fund empire-building, or to tempt sailors into piracy. While battles between Protestant and Catholic raged in Europe, Duke Joseph Nasi founded an Israeli city-state in Galilee and Mughal emperor Akbar the Great united India under a new syncretic religion, the Din-i-llahi (Divine Faith), and formed lasting alliances with the Ottoman Caliphate.

European nations were struck yet another blow by the Black Death, which rat-infested English ships carried across the Atlantic to their North American colonies. The Caliphate spread through the Arabian peninsula and around both shores of the Mediterranean. The Japanese, who had already conquered Korea and Manchuria, claimed a stretch of the west coast of North America from Alaska to San Francisco bay. The Incan empire allied itself with Portuguese traders, while the conquistadores led Mexican armies north and east to capture the Caribbean islands and the south of North America. Swedes and Norwegians settled eastern Canada. Alarmed by these developments, the Protestant British and Dutch settled their differences and increased the sizes of their navies, their trading empires and their American and Australian colonies.

The Indian invention of the steam engine soon led to the steamship and the railway. The Japanese, faced with rebellion in China, adapted the technology to produce steam-powered battlewagons with steam-powered polybolos. More effective still was a biological warfare program aimed not at the Chinese, but at their horses. By 1896 the Japanese controlled the entire coast and the navigable rivers.

Though Hong history up to this point had been almost as bloody as that of Homeline, by 1900 the major powers had settled into an uneasy truce. This was formalized in 1915 after a Swedish scientist published a paper describing the possibility of an atomic bomb, and the major powers established the Comitium as a forum for peaceful negotiations between nations.

The "Cold Peace" was shattered in the 1990s with the invention of the first weapons-grade railguns. Though these were too heavy and expensive to replace the repeating crossbow as an infantry weapon, they were employed for defending fortified positions, and bandits and guerilla found them useful for assassinations, ambushes, and terror attacks.

In Hong-1, it is 1951. Though not a utopia, most of Hong is safer and more peaceful than Homeline was at any time in the 20th century. Most societies are CR2 to CR4 and largely governed by meritocratic bureaucracies. Conscription is common, but military spending is relatively low, leaving more money for education and other government services. The only full-scale war that the Comitium has not been able to prevent is in equatorial Africa, where the Zulu Empire and Sudan (a member state of the Caliphate) are fighting local warlords as well as each other for control of the smaller

African nations. Elsewhere, violent crime is rare; the air above the cities is cleaner; private cars, though rare, are cleaner and safer, being electric or steam-driven; several species hunted to extinction on Homeline still survive (passenger pigeons are at near-plague proportions in the Sioux Nation); and police rarely carry anything more dangerous than a nightstick, while most criminals favor knives.

One result of this is that some very effective martial arts styles have been created on Hong -- armed as well as unarmed. Staff-wielding Shaolin still clash with katana-carrying kenjutsu masters in parts of China, while variants of armatura and furusiyya are part of basic training for most soldiers west of India.

In Hong-2 it is currently 2005, and while the major powers are still nominally at peace, arguments as to who is arming the gun-toting "freedom fighters" plaguing their respective countries are becoming increasingly heated, and the threat of a major -- even a nuclear -- war breaking out is a real concern.

Current Affairs: In Hong-1, the Caliphate is accusing the Zulu Empire of using chemical weapons in the Congo. Indonesia and Australia have recently been granted independence from the Anglo-Dutch Commonwealth by the Comitium, and many islands in the Caribbean and Central America are petitioning to break away from the Mexican Republic. The resource-poor Caliphate and Israel have begun work on a joint project to irrigate the deserts of the Middle East, requiring a major influx of migrant workers -- and with them, criminal gangs catering to their vices.

A little-known but very worrying development is that Hong-1 has been discovered by Homeline Triads, who have begun "rescuing" ethnic Chinese women and paying for them with weapons and new drugs. Raven Division world-jumpers from Reich-5 have also discovered Hong-1, but have not yet begun to interfere in its politics.

In Hong-2, as rebel groups arm to take on the major powers and claim independence (and a greater share of the wealth), hotspots include east Africa, the Philippines, the Caribbean, Central America, Eastern Europe, and Galilee. Terrorist attacks on the small Israeli state, and the rise of Tatkreis, a racist political party, in Bavaria and Austria have lead many in Infinity to believe that the design for the new weapons came not from a Japanese engineer but from Reich-5. Some railguns have also fallen into the hands of some of the larger criminal gangs in Europe, Japan, and America.

Divergence Point: unknown, but no apparent change to human history before 1500 CE.

Major Civilizations: Japanese (empire), Western (multipolar), Islamic (empire with satellite states), Indic (Empire).

Great Powers: Japan (oligarchy, CR 4); European Commonwealth (representative democracy with constitutional monarchy, CR 3); India (representative democracy with constitutional monarchy, CR 2); Caliphate (theocracy, CR 4); Mexican Federation (representative democracy, CR 3); Zulu empire (dictatorship, CR5); Australian Democratic Republic (socialist representative democracy, CR 2).

TL: Hong-1 technology is TL6+1, with some Steampunk technology (airships, electric cars, steam-powered cannon) replacing Homeline cars, planes, guns, etc. Hong-2 is TL8+1, with the addition of anachronistic Gauss weapons. Computers are also one level below the nominal TL (TL5 for Hong-1, TL7 for Hong-2).

The standard infantry weapons in Hong-1 are the Compound Crossbow and Compound Repeating Crossbow -- the equivalents, respectively, of the rifle and the SMG. Both are +2 to ST for damage and range without increasing draw strength. Double cost, plus the cost of aiming aids.

In Hong-2, Gauss Miniguns and/or 40mm railguns are standard military equipment wherever an electricity supply can be assured (warships, battlewagons, blockhouses, etc), and most elite forces have a battery-powered sniper railgun as a squad weapon. See p. UT 141-142 for descriptions, but quadruple the cost. Targeting lasers, tactical lights and thermal-imaging sights (often combined) are fitted to military crossbows. Tasers and pepper spray become popular with police, and are also carried by many civilians.

Mana Level: Low.

Quantum: 3

Infinity Class: R

Centrum Zone: Inaccessible

Junsacho Kentaro Hayashi, Hong-1   *100 points*

The son of an American-born Japanese airship crewman and a half-Navajo sales clerk, Kentaro Hayashi was frequently discriminated against by racial purists in his native Kusanayagi (located roughly where San Francisco is in Homeline). After finishing high school and his compulsory basic military training, he decided to join the local police force in the hope of being able to help other mixed-race individuals. Diligent but not brilliant, and happy to walk a beat in uniform rather than try for detective, he was soon promoted to the rank of junsacho (senior constable) in the Prefectural Police.

Hayashi's skills are typical of the police of the Japanese empire in Hong-1, but he is unusually sensitive to the plight of outsiders. As his koban (police sub-station) is across the street from Infinity's Kusanayagi safehouse, he has frequently helped parachronic travelers without being aware of their origins. If he suspects that something illegal is happening in the innocent-looking youth hostel, however, he will not hesitate to investigate or report it.

Hayashi is single, and spends much of his spare time trying to write a novel about the life of a beat cop and the people he meets -- a hobby that could lead to him discovering or exposing the Secret.

Ht 5'9", Wt 140 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 28.

Appearance: Bronzed complexion, black hair, dark brown eyes; a cheerful, round-faced, clean-shaven athletic-looking man.

Languages: Japanese (native) [0]. TL: 6+1. Cultural Familiarity: Japanese. [0 points]

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

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 13 [10]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [5]. [15 points]

Advantages and Perks: High Pain Threshold [10], Honest Face [1], Legal Enforcement Powers 1 [5], Police Rank 1 [5], Style Familiarity (Modern Taihojutsu) [1], Teamwork (Modern Taihojutsu) [1]. [23 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Broad-Minded [-1], Code of Honor (Police) [-5], Duty (Police) (15) [-15], Incompetence (Cooking) [-1], Insomniac (Mild) [-10], Mild fear of flying [-1], Responsive [-1], Sense of Duty (Fellow cops and honest citizens) [-10], Social Stigma (Second-class citizen) [-5], Wannabe novelist [-1]. [50 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Administration (A) IQ [2]-11; Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ [1]-11, (Precinct) (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Arm Lock (Judo) (A) Judo+1 [1]-11; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Choke Hold (H) Judo [2]-10; Criminology/TL6 (A) IQ [2]-11; Crossbow (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Current Affairs/TL6 (local region) (E) IQ [1]-12; Detect Lies (H) (A) Per [4]-18; Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]-11; Disarming (Judo) (H) Judo+1 [2]-11; Elbow Strike (A) Brawling-1 [1]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; First Aid/TL6 (E) IQ [1]-11; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-10; Forensics/TL6 (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Handcuffing (Judo) (A) Judo [2]-10; Holdout (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1]-10; Judo (H) DX [4]-10; Law (Criminal) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Lifesaving (H) Swimming-4 [2]-8; Melee Weapon (Jitte/Sai) (A) DX+1 [4]-11, (Kusari) (H) DX-1 [2]-9, (Spear) (A) DX [2]-10,; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Professional Skill (Law Enforcement) (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Riding (Equines) (A) DX [2]-10; Running (A) HT+1 [4]-12; Savoir-Faire (Police) (E) IQ [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-13; Search (A) Per [2]-13; Soldier/TL6 (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Sweeping Kick (Judo) (H) Judo-2 [2]-8; Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-10. [87 points]

Gear: Jitte; Flashlight; Leather jacket with badge over anti-stab vest; leather helmet; leather leggings; boots; handcuffs; personal radio; basic crime scene kit; small first aid kit.

Malachi Levi, Hong-2   *250 points*

A Galilean Army brat who never knew his mother (who died in childbirth) and hated his father, Malachi Levi hated the discipline of school and the military. Though he became a murderously effective fighter who served briefly with the special forces, he deserted his unit after a near-fatal assault on his CO. With few other career options, he joined a small mercenary unit bound for Kashmir.

Over the years, after fighting against and alongside soldiers trained in Africa, Europe, India and the Caliphate, he improved upon his special forces training to develop a distinctive style of his own. This style became almost legendary, and while recovering from being shot by a railgun, he was persuaded to try to formalize it and open a secret school. The fame of his style, Sicariu, spread to Infinity, and the school became popular with ISWAT as well as special forces around Hong-2.

Being wanted for crimes almost everywhere on Hong-2, Levi has to relocate his school frequently; finding it requires Streetwise skill, and reaching it may be an adventure in itself. Levi will not teach women, or anyone else he has a bad or worse reaction to, and not all of his would-be students survive the audition process - much less the training!

Ht 5'10", Wt 105 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 48.

Appearance: Massively scarred face, shaven head, dark brown eyes; a scrawny man who seems to have been sewn together from mismatched scraps of leather.

Languages: Hebrew (native) [0], English (Accented) [4], Arabic (Broken) [2]. TL: 7+1. Cultural Familiarity: Middle Eastern. [6 points]

Attributes: **ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 12 [20]. [150 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 11 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 13 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.5 [0]; Basic Move 7 [5]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Ambidexterity [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlesness 2 [4], Fit [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Improvised Weapons (Karate) [1], Rapid Healing [5], Style Familiarity (Furusiyya) [1], Style Familiarity (Iklwa Spear Fighting) [1], Style Familiarity (Sicariu) [1], Temperature Tolerance 1 [1], Weapon Adaptation (Shortsword to Smallsword) [1]. [50 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Appearance (Ugly) [-8], Always carries at least two knives [-1], Bloodlust (15) [-5], Berserk (15) [-5], Bully (15) [-5], Chauvinistic [-1], Code of Honor (Mercenary's) [-10], Dislikes sergeants and clerics [-1], Has no respect for women [-1], Horrible Hangovers [-1], Light Sleeper [-5], Miserliness (15) [-5], Sense of Duty (Comrades) [-5], Skinny [-5], Social Stigma (Known Criminal) [-5], Wealth (Poor) [-15]. [-73 points]

Skills and Techniques: Aggressive Parry (Karate) (H) Karate-4 [2]-12; Axe/Mace (A) DX [2]-14; Body Language (A) Per [2]-13; Climbing (A) DX [2]-14; Crossbow (E) DX+2 [4]-16; Current Affairs/TL7 (Politics) (E) IQ [1]-12; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-12; Disarming (Wrestling) (H) Wrestling+1 [2]-17; Elbow Strike (A) Karate-1 [1]-15; Exotic Hand Strike (Karate) (A) Karate [1]-16; Eye Gouge (Wrestling) (H) Wrestling-4 [2]-12; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-15*; First Aid/TL7 (E) IQ [1]-12; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-14; Garrote (E) DX [1]-14; Guns/TL7 (Rifle) (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Hiking (A) HT [2]-12; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-12; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-13; Karate (H) DX+2 [12]-16; Kicking (Karate) (H) Karate [4]-16; Knee Strike (A) Karate-1 [1]-15; Leadership (A) IQ [2]-12; Melee Weapon (Main Gauche) (A) DX+2 [7]-16, (Smallsword) (A) DX [8]-16, (Spear) (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Navigation/TL7 (Land) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Observation (A) Per [2]-12; Riding (Equines) (A) DX [2]-14; Running (A) HT [2]-12; Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (E)

IQ [1]-12; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-13; Shield (E) DX [1]-14; Soldier/TL7 (A) IQ [2]-11; Stealth (A) DX [2]-14; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-12; Survival (Desert) (A) Per [2]-12; Swimming (E) HT [1]-12; Tactics (H) IQ [8]-12; Teaching (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Thrown Weapon (Spear) (E) DX [1]-14; Wrestling (A) DX [8]-16. [108 points]

* +1 for Combat Reflexes

Gear: Compound Repeating Crossbow with combined tactical light and laser sight; Compound Crossbow (ST 13) with fixed power 8x telescopic improved night sight; case of 20 bolts; sleeve sword (smallsword); folding baton; main gauche; long knife; trench knife; wire saw (garrote); personal kit; Desert Camouflage fatigues over anti-stab vest; jungle boots. Small backpack contains mess kit, hand radio, military grade binoculars, personal tent, sleeping bag, UV purifier canteen, covert survival kit.

Variants: This 450-point cinematic version of Levi would be a suitable teacher for a Martial Arts character looking for a Master, as well as a very formidable Enemy.

Attributes: **ST** 12 [20]; **DX** 15 [100]; **IQ** 13 [40]; **HT** 13 [30]. [210 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 7 [0]; Basic Move 8 [5]. [5 points]

Advantages and Perks: Ambidexterity [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlesness 2 [4], Fit [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Improvised Weapons (Karate) [1], Iron Body Parts (Arms, Hands, Legs, Neck, all DR 2) [12], Rapid Healing [5], Style Familiarity (Furusiyya) [1], Style Familiarity (Iklwa Spear Fighting) [1], Style Familiarity (Sicariu) [1], Temperature Tolerance 1 [1], Trained by a Master [40], Weapon Adaptation (Shortsword to Smallsword) [1]. [62 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Appearance (Ugly) [-8], Always carries at least two knives [-1], Bloodlust (15) [-5], Berserk (15) [-5], Bully (15) [-5], Chauvinistic [-1], Code of Honor (Mercenary's) [-10], Dislikes sergeants and clerics [-1], Has no respect for women [-1], Horrible Hangovers [-1], Light Sleeper [-5], Miserliness (15) [-5], Sense of Duty (Comrades) [-5], Skinny [-5], Social Stigma (Known Criminal) [-5], Wealth (Poor) [-15]. [-73 points]

Skills and Techniques: Aggressive Parry (Karate) (H) Karate-4 [2]-16; Arm Lock (Wrestling) (A) Wrestling+1 [1]-21; Axe/Mace (A) DX [2]-15; Back Kick (Karate) (H) Karate-3 [2]-17; Body Control (VH) HT [8]-12; Body Language (A) Per [2]-13; Breath Control (H) HT [4]-12; Choke Hold (Wrestling) (H) Wrestling-2 [2]-18; Climbing (A) DX [2]-15; Combat Riding (Equines) (H) Riding+1 [2]-16; Counterattack (Karate) (H) Karate-4 [2]-16; Crossbow (E) DX+2 [2]-16; Current Affairs/TL7 (Politics) (E) IQ [1]-13; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-12; Disarming (Wrestling) (H) Wrestling+1 [2]-21; Dual-Weapon Attack (Smallsword) (H) Smallsword-3 [2]-14; Dual-Weapon Defense (Smallsword) (H) Smallsword-5 [2]-12; Elbow Strike (A) Karate [2]-20; Exotic Hand Strike (Karate) (A) Karate [1]-20; Eye Gouging (Wrestling) (H) Wrestling-4 [2]-16; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-16*; First Aid/TL7 (E) IQ [1]-13; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-15; Garrote (E) DX [1]-15; Guns/TL7 (Rifle) (E) DX [1]-15; Hammer Fist (Karate) (A) Karate [1]-20; Head Butt (Karate) (H) Karate [2]-20; Hiking (A) HT [1]-12; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-12; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-14; Karate (H) DX+5 [24]-20; Kicking (Karate) (H) Karate [4]-20; Knee Strike (A) Karate [2]-20; Leadership (A) IQ [2]-13; Lethal Kick (H) Karate-3 [3]-18; Lethal Strike (H) Karate-1 [2]-19; Meditation (H) Will+1 [4]-13; Melee Weapon (Main Gauche) (A) DX+2 [7]-17, (Smallsword) (A) DX [8]-17, (Spear) (A) DX-1 [1]-14; Navigation/TL7 (Land) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Observation (A) Per [2]-12; Pressure Points (H) IQ [8]-13; Pressure Secrets (VH) IQ-1 [8]-12; Pressure Point Strike (H) Karate-1 [2]-19; Riding (Equines) (A) DX [2]-15; Roll with Blow (Wrestling) (H) Wrestling-1 [2]-19; Running (A) HT [2]-13; Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (E) IQ [1]-13; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-13; Shield (E) DX [2]-16; Soldier/TL7 (A) IQ [2]-13; Stealth (A) DX [2]-15; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Survival (Desert) (A) Per [2]-12; Swimming (E) HT [1]-12; Tactics (H) IQ-1 [4]-12; Teaching (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Throwing Art (H) DX [4]-15; Thrown Weapon (Spear) (E) DX [1]-15; Wrestling (A) DX+5 [20]-20. [192 points]

* +1 for Combat Reflexes

Sicariu   *7 points*

Skills: Garrote, Karate, Main-Gauche, Riding (Horse), Smallsword, Spear, Wrestling.

Techniques: Aggressive Parry (Karate), Arm Lock (Wrestling), Back Kick, Choke Hold, Combat Riding, Counterattack (Karate), Disarming (Wrestling), Elbow Strike, Exotic Hand Strike, Eye-Gouging, Hammer Fist, Head Butt, Kicking, Knee Strike, Stamp Kick.

Perks: Improvised Weapons (Karate); Iron Body Parts (any); Off-Hand Weapon Training (Any); Quick-Swap (Any); Special Exercises (DR 1 with Tough Skin); Weapon Adaptation (Shortsword to Smallsword).

Cinematic Skills: Body Control, Meditation, Pressure Points, Pressure Secrets, Throwing Art.

Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack, Dual-Weapon Defense, Lethal Kick, Lethal Strike, Pressure-Point Strike, Roll with Blow.

Adventure Seeds

In the Drift: The heroes learn that a diamond mine in Hong-2's Congo has been abandoned ahead of an expected attack by a Zulu impi. The miners have grabbed as many loose diamonds as they could carry, but not all of them (though they have taken all of the weapons). Of course, the mine has also been booby-trapped, but all the PCs have to do is rush in, disarm the traps, pick up as much loot as possible, and get out before the Zulus attack - or before any other treasure-hunters, such as Malachi Levi or the Raven Division, have the same idea.

The mine is also reputed to be haunted, which may help deter the Zulus, but that's probably just a native superstition, right?

Crossfire: When an Austrian Tatkreis member finds an Infinity-issued electrozap pistol accidentally dropped in Hong-2, he gives it to the party's scientists and engineers. The I-Cops learn that Tatkreis is trying to build an electrolaser rifle that will be an effective infantry weapon for a planned attack on Israel . . . but the location of the labs and workshops is a well-kept secret. A team of Intel Scouts is ordered to infiltrate Tatkreis, retrieve the zat, and prevent production of the electrolaser rifle by any means necessary -- and, if possible, locate and shut down any Gestapo Kerne that may be involved.

The Suicide Pilots: The cash-strapped Hong-2 Caliphate is using its control of Gibraltar to tax any ships entering the Mediterranean. The heroes are on board an airship bound for Gibraltar, when they hear that a suitcase nuke has been attached to the outside of the ship and will detonate if it descends to allow passengers to disembark: they will have to either disarm the bomb, or find some way to let people abandon ship safely before letting the bomb detonate where it will do the least harm.

In One Era and Out the Other: En route to or returning from a dinosaur hunt, the PCs are dropped into Hong-2's Philippines by a conveyor malfunction. Neither their guns nor their multi-fuel vehicle work, but they look enough like military equipment that the local rebels aren't going to be happy to see them.

A Bridge Too Far (Supers): When a Triad boss brings his Zagadkan bodyguard, Mutianyu, to Hong-1, he discovers that his metahuman powers still work. Delighted by the idea of a high-tech world with no guns, Mutianyu begins smuggling metavillains in, resulting in a wave of superpowered crimes.

After finding the Infinity safehouse in Kusanayagi, Mutianyu and his team plan to capture it and its conveyor. Kentaro Hayashi becomes suspicious of the strangers checking out the area and alerts the hostel manager. To defend the safehouse and the secret, Infinity calls in I-SWAT and, if the menace is great enough, recruits supers from Zagadka.

Time Heals All Wounds, Except Death

My friend Dennis had sage words of wisdom when we were playing ***Torg.*** For those who don't remember, in ***Torg,*** the heroes (and many of the villains) have game-affecting points called Possibilities. Spending Possibilities allows for bettering rolls, negating damage, powering effects, and whitening teeth.

Anyway, during one particularly hard battle, he found himself dipping deep into his pool of Possibilities; one of the other players was questioning the wisdom of that expenditure. And Dennis said *[WISDOM ALERT!]*, "If you die with Possibilities, you're dumb."

This sage advice applies to many different game systems and campaigns. If you had that one-time-use magic item that would solve your problems in this encounter, and you die before you get to use it, you're dumb. If you have a jillion character points that could help turn the tide of battle, but you die with them, you're dumb. And so on.

This week sees the release of the snazzy new ***Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition*** RPG, a game that -- at a cursory glance -- unabashedly resembles a MMORPG even more so than ***3rd Edition,*** an RPG that, when released, I noted how it looked just like a MMORPG. One of the bits that's new (as you would know if you read our snazzy review of the preview adventure this week) is the possession of all PCs of limited-use powers: power-ups, buffs, healings, and so on. And, much like a computer game or ***Torg,*** if you die with these abilities, and they would've helped you, you're dumb.

Unfortunately, the inclusion of these abilities leads to an odd situation that existed as far back as ***Ye Olde Dungeons & Dragons,*** back when it was a modern-day simulation. Namely, the nature of ablative abilities that can be recharged by resting. When such abilities are an integral part of the campaign -- such as the limited number of spells per day that clerics and priests get to cast -- there's a strong temptation to follow into a methodic rut: advance, battle, establish camp, rest, heal, assume full strength, advance again. Such tactics, while 100% understandable, also tend to make dungeon crawls feel less like epic battles of good and evil and more like minor housekeeping adjuncts tied to the Battle of Normandy (the anniversary of which is today).

How, then, should an RPG handle this problem (assuming folks view it as a problem, of course)?

Well, a time crunch is the most tried and true method. If you know that the evil cultists on the third level of the dungeon are going to do Something Nasty in three days, then you can't exactly take a month to heal between every encounter. Unfortunately, this technique is often transparent. Perhaps even a worse problem -- one that's cropped up time and again in my own games -- is the difficulty that arises when the heroes don't *know* the clock is ticking. If the cultists forgot to send the threatening note, or if the nature of the calamity is unknown to the heroes, then the most excitingly ticking clock in the world won't matter if people don't know it's there.

Another variation of the time crunch is to ensure that the baddies are taking the opportunity to power up themselves. It doesn't matter if the heroes are taking the evening to recharge their single *fireball* spell if the adversaries are taking the same time to completely entrench, lay down traps, and make crank phone calls to the heroes' parents.

Another technique is just to ensure that the heroes don't have many abilities that require recharge. This is the technique taken with the cards in ***Torg;*** it's assumed that, at the end of each encounter, the players would replenish their hands. Likewise if you have powers that recharge after every encounter, you don't need to worry about taking extraordinary bouts of time to heal up.

From another point of view, you can also have abilities that don't recharge at *all,* without extraordinary effort. For example, if the heroes are parachuted into enemy territory, then -- once they're out of ammo in their firearms -- no amount of resting or preparation will cause their guns to reactivate. Of course, in this case the adventure can become an exercise in resource management, but many gaming groups thrive on balancing that need to be thrifty with expendables with the desire to remain alive.

And, finally, it's entirely possible not to worry about it. The heroes fully heal up between battles, and -- on paper -- a two-level dungeon crawl took three months. Who cares? The only downside is the need to beef up the encounters a bit, especially if they were built around the idea that the heroes' abilities would be slowly depleted. But there's something exhilarating about going into each battle as powered up as you can get.

From what I've read, the new version of ***Dungeons & Dragons*** tries to balance a few of these techniques; for example, having abilities that reset after every battle keeps folks from taking 24-hour naps to replenish themselves. But it still has some abilities that are once a day, and I worry that enterprising dungeon looters will find themselves taking 24-hour naps between encounters where they've used those limited-number-a-day powers.

Because, as previously established, if you die with a use of a snazzy power that could've saved you, you're dumb.

--Steven Marsh

Dinah Print, Improbable Detective

for *D6 Adventure*

by Steven Marsh & Nikola Vrtis

*"So you see, the murderer **had** to be standing here, because the smudge on this wall must have come from someone who uses heavy amounts of hairspray. Now, let's assume that a shot ricocheted off the chandelier, but the broken aspects of that adornment were replaced by the killer . . ."*

* * *

Dinah Print is a middle-aged reporter for a small-town newspaper, who has developed a reputation over the years of blurring the lines between "writer" and "crime-fighter." Dinah has a unique gift: She has the ability to see through the obvious solutions of most murders, and discern what "really" happened, no matter how convoluted or contrived the situation is.

Unfortunately, the "really" is in quotes because her ability has no connection whatsoever with reality; she has never been right in her theories, but instead has been able to *convince* others that she is right. (Depending on the campaign setting, she might even be able to convince the murderer and the accused of her theories of the case!)

A History of Print

Dinah Feldon was born 45 years ago in Ann Arbor, middle child of a respected upper-middle-class family. Her older brother, Jake, was protective of her, just as she was protective of her younger brother, Nathan. She went to the University of Michigan and received a degree in journalism, graduating without either significant accomplishments or demerits. While at college, she met Charles Print, who was a senior when she was a sophomore; the two were married when she turned 22, and they moved to the East Coast to facilitate his fledgling career as an architect. Mrs. Print took a job as a reporter for a small local paper, where she did little of note for many years.

The first decade of their marriage was to be the only uneventful one of their lives together. Two incidents happened in her second decade with Charles that fundamentally altered her worldview . . . and laid the groundwork for the future mayhem she would unwittingly cause. The first tragedy occurred two days after their 13th anniversary, when Charles' vehicle was hit by a truck, killing him as well as the driver of the other vehicle. The police had ruled it a tragic accident, but Dinah realized that the blueprints and sketches he was supposed to have in his trunk were all missing or blank, even though he had a meeting with a client to discuss those plans that day. She became convinced that he was killed by some kind of conspiracy -- perhaps involving an evil architect -- that involved the theft of his plans. (In reality, the ever-proud Charles had been suffering from a lack of creativity for months, and hadn't informed Dinah of his problems.)

The second incident happened almost three years later. At a family gathering one Thanksgiving, she witnessed a horrific scene as she investigated the sound of gunfire: her younger brother, Nathan, standing over her older sibling, Jake, smoking gun in hand. Nathan explained that he'd heard the same shot she had a minute before, and had picked up the gun on the ground next to the body. The police didn't buy this explanation, but she devoted almost a year to finding and assembling the evidence that would establish reasonable doubt. Her theory was that her 16-year-old niece, Sue Print, had been playing with the gun and accidentally shot Jake. At a dramatic trial verdict, the jury returned a finding of not guilty, and Nathan was a free man . . . although the police never believed they had enough evidence to press charges against Sue.

In reality, Jake and Nathan had been fostering a growing animosity for years, and that holiday brought all the brotherly tensions to the fore. Although Sue had been in the room, and had been investigating the gun, she had left 30 minutes

before the fatal shot was fired . . . by Nathan. Nathan has never revealed the truth to his sister; he may have even convinced himself of the truth of Dinah's version.

After the trial, she wrote about the experience for her newspaper. The tales were immensely popular and did much to bolster both her reputation and fortune. This rise to fame led to juicier assignments from her newspaper, which in turn led to her being on the scene of interesting events . . . often crimes, such as murder. She has seen it as her duty to investigate and "meddle" to find the "real" culprits behind these crimes; her theories never match up with the police's initial impressions, and also never have anything to do with what *really* happened. She has a somewhat adversarial relationship with Sheriff Franklin Slate; at first, he viewed her as nothing but a nuisance, but as she's helped "solve" more and more cases, he grudgingly has started coming to her when he needs help with stubborn cases.

Dinah Print in a Campaign

Dinah Print acts as a dark-mirror version of many television and novel detectives. She is not maliciously attempting to do evil (although it would be a simple enough tweak for this to be the case), but -- as a meddlesome busybody -- she finds herself in the middle of major cases and crimes. And, when she does, she invariably comes to the wrong conclusion, and then she sets out to "prove" her version of events. Again, she isn't acting maliciously, and she really does believe the line of reasoning she's concocted in her mind . . . but she is truly unhinged, with little grasp on reality as it relates to the crimes she witnesses. Thus she isn't using "fast talk" or similar skills, because she's not trying to "trick" anyone; rather, she uses "persuasion" to make others see the "truth" of the matter.

Mrs. Print is driven by two ghosts who haunt her past. The first is the mystery over what "really" happened to her husband; she still believes there is some criminal-mastermind murderous architect out there who has conspired to craft such an unsolvable case. Were she presented with a suspect that could even remotely fit that profile, she would almost certainly stop at nothing to thwart that person's evil machinations (no matter how nonexistent they were). The second past failure is her inability to build a conclusive case against Sue Print. Sue has come to view Dinah as her "crazy old aunt," and Dinah believes Sue to be a cold-blooded murderer. At least once a year, Dinah makes a point of visiting family functions that Sue is attending, as an effort to keep the pressure on Sue.

The role of Dinah in an adventure -- or even campaign -- can depend largely on the tone. First, the GM needs to decide when the heroes discover (or will have it be possible to discover) Dinah's "secret." If Dinah is only intended as a one-shot character, then having the truth of her deductions revealed might make a suitable climax to an adventure. However, if she makes an appearance in a long-term setting, she might be better served making several appearances and solving several ancillary cases the heroes know about before the truth is discovered.

Once the heroes do know what's going on, they'll almost certainly have a hard time convincing authorities. Dinah is very good at what she does, and law enforcement, victims, and perhaps even those convicted face the realization that everything they've come to believe is wrong . . . well, sometimes it's easier to live with the lie, no matter how kookie it is.

In a weird setting, such as *GUPRS IOU* or *Over the Edge,* Dinah might merely be another aspect of weirdness: "It's another day, another murder, and another intervention by Dinah Print!" In a humorous campaign, the heroes might glean on to what's happening almost immediately, but find themselves utterly stymied in their attempts to convince others. (In a slightly darker world, the heroes might feel like they're in a pod-person movie, unable to convince others of the truth.) Also in a darker setting, it should be possible to play up her insanity, especially when coupled with a full accounting of how many lives she's destroyed. Finally, in a setting with metahuman or paranormal powers, she might possess the extra "oomph" of psionic abilities that enable her to convince others more easily . . . perhaps even going so far as to modify the memories of the accused, the real criminal, and any living victims.

Adventure Ideas

- Dinah is at the scene of the crime where the heroes are in attendance, and she believes one of them (or an ally of theirs) to be guilty! (If the hero happens to be an architect who was in the area a decade or so ago . . . well,

things may get even uglier for him.)

- As a humorous alternative, if Dinah has made appearances before and the heroes know the truth, they might spend the entire adventure trying to find someone else to pin the crime on . . . preferably someone guilty of something else (since Dinah seems incapable of fingering the right person for a crime).
- Dinah's younger brother, Nathan, is still a part of her life, and he would be willing to kill were it to come to light that others were trying to hurt her. And "hurt" can mean "destroy her reputation or livelihood." A homicidal Nathan on the tail of the heroes would be a good way to bring her more fully into an adventure, as well as provide a way to give closure to one of her long-term plot threads.
- Should Dinah ever learn of the trouble she's wrought (which may take monumental convincing), she might have a complete change of heart and attempt to put right what she has wrecked, in a redemptive character arc akin to *Quantum Leap* or *Highway to Heaven*. In this case, Dinah might make a good catalyst for adventures as she enlists the help of heroes to try to figure out what *really* happened. Dinah might also make a good sidekick for investigative heroes, allowing her to tag along as she tries to figure out how to hone her not-insignificant investigatory skills toward actually catching *guilty* people for a change.

D6 Adventure Stats

Two versions of Dinah Print are presented below. The first is the more "realistic" option; her high *persuasion* and *willpower* enable her to convince others of the correctness of her theories.

Dinah Print

Genre: *D6 Adventure* (no *Extranormal* abilities)

Reflexes 2D: brawling 2D+1, dodge 2D+1, sneak 3D

Coordination 2D

Physique 2D: running 2D+2, stamina 2D+1, swimming 2D+1

Knowledge 3D: business 3D+1, scholar 3D+1, tech 3D+1

Perception 3D: investigation 4D, search 4D, tracking 3D+1

Presence 5D: charm 5D+1, command 5D+1, persuasion 5D+2, willpower 5D+1

Strength Damage: 1D

Move: 10

Fate Points: 1

Character Points: 10

Funds: 4D

Body Points: 26

Wound levels: 5

Disadvantages: Employed (R1), as a reporter; Quirk (R3), has great difficulty being dissuaded from her (incorrect) theories on criminal cases

Advantages: Contacts (R3), has an incredible number of contacts throughout the world; Fame (R1), as a prolific

investigative crime reporter; Patron (R2), newspaper publisher; Wealth (R1), +2 to *Funds* totals/US$5,000 cash

This version of Dinah uses *Extranormal* abilities -- in particular, broadcast telepathy -- to "reprogram" others to her way of thinking.

Dinah Print

Genre: *D6 Adventure* (with *Extranormal* abilities)

Reflexes 2D: brawling 2D+1, dodge 2D+1, sneak 3D

Coordination 2D

Physique 2D: running 2D+2, stamina 2D+1, swimming 2D+1

Knowledge 3D: business 3D+1, scholar 3D+1, tech 3D+1

Perception 3D: investigation 4D, search 4D, tracking 3D+1

Presence 3D: charm 3D+1, command 3D+1, persuasion 3D+2, willpower 3D+2

Psionics 1D: telepathy: broadcast only 10D

Strength Damage: 1D

Move: 10

Fate Points: 1

Character Points: 10

Funds: 3D

Body Points: 26

Wound levels: 5

Disadvantages: Employed (R1), as a reporter; Quirk (R3), has great difficulty being dissuaded from her (incorrect) theories on criminal cases

Advantages: Contacts (R3), has an incredible number of contacts throughout the world; Fame (R1), as a prolific investigative crime reporter; Patron (R2), newspaper publisher; Wealth (R1), +2 to *Funds* totals/US$5,000 cash

Character Design Note

The average core attribute for a *D6 System* adventuring character is 3D, with several skills 1D, 2D, or (occasionally) 3D above that. (Generic NPCs have an average attribute of 2D.) The maximum for any core attribute is 5D, with additional levels available through Special Abilities.

The Search for Ed

Part III: Adventure

by Matt Riggsby

Now that we have [places to go](#) and [monsters to kill](#), let's put them together with a plot.

Any adventurer worth the name has heard about Ed, Joe, and Marge and their ill-fated encounter with a dragon. The heroes are approached by an old man in a tavern who tells them "In my younger days yadda yadda yadda long journey blah blah terrible battle something something *legendary treasure*." Or, at least, that's what the PCs are likely to hear. This week's old man in a tavern offers the group a map which will lead them to the lost treasure of Ed, Joe, and Marge. He'll give them a map to (but not *of*) the location, about a week's journey away through the wilderness, in return for a promise of a cut of the treasure. He doesn't downplay the potential risk (after all, Ed the Barbarian was plenty tough), but he can expand on the magnitude of wealth there and he'll settle for a fairly small cut of the proceeds. He can even suggest a few shortcuts along the way and mentions a nearby town where an old witch-woman sells potions.

And so, unless they want to play *Car Wars* instead, the PCs soon find themselves in front of the doors of the evil cult's lost stronghold. The old man's travel tips are good, and there's a small town where they can stock up on mundane supplies and a few low-end potions from the old lady. And now it's into the dungeon . . .

Level 1

The cultist stronghold was abandoned years ago, but their treasure remained behind. A number of the monsters who infest the area have taken up residence. Most are petty goblins, who are divided into two factions by the central hallway, plus a few larger monsters who are allied with one faction or the other. They have small quantities of valuable goods over which they fight constantly, but the real wealth lies elsewhere.

1) Entry Hall: The entry hall is full of long, pale, spindly vines which have grown in from outside, a few small skeletons, and a lot of dirt and rocks. There are also N/2 Horrible Spider swarms hidden in the debris and one more on the ceiling, waiting to attack passers-by.

2) Guard room: The guard room is host to N+2 orcs (use the orc template [here](#); the orc's leader has T'Karsh's stats). They have wandered in to take shelter and don't know anything about treasure or the site's other inhabitants. Beyond their gear, they have about $100 each in mixed copper and silver; the leader has about $200, and a nice fur-trimmed cloak worth another $200 if the PCs don't hack it to bits first.

3) Hallway: The hallway is a frequent battlefield, so it is covered with skeletons and a few rusted, broken weapons. The pit trap is armed.

4) Store room 1: The room is occupied by one petty goblin of each color and a rock troll, who are arguing over a valuable-looking metal box. The door to the room is barred to prevent anyone from interrupting them. The box contains a valuable, though unmagical, unholy symbol worth $400. However, there's a trap on the box. Anyone who opens it without using the (long-lost) magical key is struck by a lightning bolt doing 3d of electrical damage.

> ### Orcish Horde +/-
>
> A number of rooms in this dungeon indicate N opponents, or some number related to N. This is to scale opposition, to some degree, to the PCs. For any room, N is the number of active PCs in the party at the time they first enter the room, rounded up, minimum 1. If there are six PCs and the room has 2N goblins, they'll find 12 goblins when they kick open the door. If there are three PCs dragging around two paralyzed or entangled companions and the room has N/2 zombies, there'll be two zombies.

5) Library: The room is occupied by a rock troll and N petty goblins, none of whom have the slightest idea of the value of the items in the room. Most of the books are decayed, but there are N-1 in good condition, each worth about $500. One other book's pages are a portal to a hell dimension. When opened, a flaming skull (DF2, p. 23) leaps out and attacks whoever is nearby; others follow at intervals of 1d6 seconds until the book is closed or destroyed. The first page notes a ritual to prevent this from happening, but a new reader will be hard-pressed to read it and recite the words while flaming skulls are trying to kill him. The book is worth thousands to the right people.

6) Dormitory 1: This room more or less retains its old function as a residence. It is the home territory of a faction of monsters who hate the ones on the other side of the hallway. It is occupied by 2N petty goblins, including two Reds.

7) Store room 2: The room is full of precariously stacked crates and bales, the useful contents of which have long since decayed into uselessness. The room also hosts N/2 hidden small Horrible Spiders and a Hexagonal Colloid waiting for someone to pass through the wrong hex.

8) Dormitory 2: This room has come to much the same fate as Dormitory 1. It is occupied by 2N petty goblins, including two Blues, who hate the goblins on the other side of the hallway.

9) Refectory: This room is used as a sanctuary by N Black petty goblins, who spend a lot of time hiding under the tables.

10) Kitchen: A pair of swamp trolls live here, using water from the well to keep themselves moist. The smell of decay is terrible; any scent-based rolls are at -5. Anything which once had a value has become rotten or rusted through.

11) Apartment 1: The cult's second in command was a very nasty character who managed to avoid death by transforming himself into a demon, albeit not a terribly successful one. He still occupies his old rooms as a toxifier (DF2, p. 26). The room contains little else of interest save for a few well-made torture implements which might fetch as much as $300.

12) Apartment 2: Two rock trolls and N petty goblins occupy this space. The once-fine furnishings are now greatly decayed, but a secret panel in the north wall guarded by a crossbow trap (use the stats on DF2 p. 20) hides a stash of $500 in coin and $1000 in jewelry.

13) Ceremonial chamber: In addition to the curse, four of the figures around the room are stone golems who will attack any nonbelievers who enter the room; they take a few seconds to activate, so the PCs can get completely into the room before the golems start moving. Use the Stone Golems on DF2 p. 26, but instead of having Unhealing, they regenerate 1 HP/hour. If the PCs fight them, run away, and come back later, the golems will have recovered.

14) Cells: The cell at the end contains a crushroom, but the other cells have little of interest. Concealed beneath a loose stone in the first cell is, sadly, a partly-dug escape tunnel about ten feet long.

15) Secret chamber: This room contains nothing but some old bones. They're not magical, not cursed, not undead, not anything at all except old and easy to break.

Level 2

One of the reasons the evil cult built their headquarters where they did is that it sits atop extensive natural caves inhabited by evil creatures. A colony of Horrible Spiders occupies a series of unworked natural chambers, while the Lich King lives with a number of experimental zombies in his roughly finished rooms.

1) Catcombs: This section contains nothing but a few broken bones and tattered old shrouds. Smart PCs may take the lack of anything resembling a complete skeleton as a clue.

2-10) Spider Chambers: For chambers 2 to 10, roll 2d6 when adventurers enter to see what the encounter there:

2.	Nothing
3-4.	N Horrible Spider swarms
5-6.	N small Horrible Spiders
7.	N/2 large Horrible Spiders
8.	N/2 Horrible Spiders swarms and N/2 small Horrible Spiders
9.	N/2 small Horrible Spiders and N/3 large Horrible Spiders
10.	2 Acid Spiders
11.	1 Crushroom (Crushrooms don't eat Horrible Spiders and can coexist peacefully with them)
12.	Roll twice, ignoring results of 12 or 2.

The floors here are *extremely* uneven and covered with a great deal of lightweight detritus, so it's easy to stick one's foot into a small hole or trip over a hidden bump. Every turn a character walks or runs more than their base Speed (for example, when getting the sprinting bonus or using Haste), roll against the better of Per or DX to avoid tripping. That does *not* apply to the spiders, who are more used to the open ground.

Unless one is a fan of small or broken bones and bits of rusted metal, these rooms do not contain anything valuable.

5) The Pool: The pool drops off steeply. It's a yard deep in hexes adjacent to the shore and another yard deep per additional hex. Characters will notice a faint glow from the center of the pool. If they dive in, they'll encounter N/2 aquatic Frost Snakes; treat as the Frost Snakes from DF2 p. 24, but they swim at Move 7, and their Chill Breath has a range of 1/2 while underwater. However, in addition to doing damage, a successful hit freezes a five-pound block of ice around the afflicted location. Treat ice-encased extremities as grappled until the ice can be shattered with 4 points of damage. The light comes from three small gems permanently with Continual Light (level 2) at the bottom of the pool.

10) Spider Queen's Throne Room: This chamber holds the Spider Queen and some minions (N/2 swarms, N/2 small spiders, 2 large spiders). The other spiders will attack suicidally to keep their queen from harm. Although the other spiders have no use of material things, the queen enjoys shiny things. A corner of the room holds a pile of coin ($3000 in mixed gold, silver, and copper) and a large, elaborately decorated mirror (20 lb., worth $4000, but extremely fragile).

11-19) Zombie Chambers: The Lich King's chambers are full of experimental undead. He doesn't directly control the Horde Zombies, but he *does* make them from time to time, and being dead himself, they don't bother him. For chambers a-b, roll 2d6 to see which experiment tries to kill the heroes:

2-4.	N skeletons (use the skeleton template from *Magic*)
5-6.	N zombies (use the zombie template from *Magic*)
7.	N-1 Horde Zombies
8.	N/2 skeletons and N/2 zombies
9.	N/2 skeletons and (N/2)-1 Horde Zombies
10.	2N Zombie Giant Rats
11.	N+1 Zombie Dire Wolves
12.	N/2 Zombie Flesh-Eating Apes

For the zombie animals, use the stats for the regular animal, but it has the traits Doesn't Breathe, Doesn't Eat or Drink, Doesn't Sleep, High Pain Threshold, and Fragile (Unnatural).

20) Lich King's Laboratory: The Lich King putters away in his well-stocked lab, accompanied by three zombies and his latest invention, a zombie Siege Beast. For the survivors, the room contains a full alchemical lab, one of every potion worth $500 or less, and a manual on thaumatology. The Lich King wears a gold crown worth $7000; it's also a power item containing 20 FP.

21) The Grand Chasm: There used to be a set of wooden steps set into the wall of the chasm leading down to the cave below. However, it has mostly rotted away and those few planks which are left won't support any weight. The PCs will have to make their own way down. Every few minutes, a group of (N/2)+1d6 Foul Bats (***Dungeon Fantasy***

2, page 23) is likely to fly by.

Level 3

Since the cultists died off, a dragon has taken up residence in the large underground chamber. He's got a remarkably cordial relationship with his upstairs neighbor the Lich King, but mostly keeps to himself.

1) Outer Chamber: As the PCs make their way from the entrance through the narrow passage, the dragon greets them. With his acute senses, he knows they're coming and has a pretty good idea of how many there are and how heavily they're equipped, and he's got his end of the passage staked out. He has, in short, the drop on them. Assuming they don't rush in and start attacking anyway, he has a proposition. Anyone who can beat him in a game of chess (or go or *Car Wars* or whatever the appropriate game is) may enter the vault, take as much as he can carry, and leave unmolested. The dragon is quite serious about his offer, though if anyone takes him up on it, he'll still keep an eye and an ear on the passageway. Unless he can be distracted (contest between Fast Talk or other applicable social skill vs. the dragon's Will), treat it as a Wait maneuver; anyone with clever ideas about jumping around the corner with a loaded crossbow to take a snap shot at his eyes gets a face full of flaming breath.

2) The Vault: If the dragon is defeated, either at the table or on the battlefield, at least one PC can enter the vault, a strongroom which formerly held the cult's treasure and now holds the dragon's. It contains the following treasure:

$5000 in gold
$8000 in silver
$4000 in copper
$5000 in jewelry
A very fine Icy shortsword
A Bottomless Purse
10 arrows of Piercing
A meteoric iron Large Shield
A fine suit of Elven mail for someone SM-1
An ornate (+2 CF) suit of spiked plate armor for someone SM+0
A pot helm of Invulnerability
A Necklace of Fireballs
Four ornate broadswords (+2 CF) and one very ornate axe (+4 CF)
A rack of 16 potions: Agility, Alchemical Antidote (2), Alchemist's Fire (2), Liquid Ice, Magebane, Major Healing, Minor Healing (3), Perception (2), Strength (2), True Water.
Nine tomes: Thaumatology (3), Occultism (4), and Hidden Lore (Demons) (2). The tomes are well-decorated with gold leaf and semi-precious stones, so they're worth twice the usual price.
An atlas: By itself, it's worth at least $500. However, coded writing on the maps might be a guide to other treasures.

The Twist: Ed's Dead, Baby. Ed's Dead

The vault also contains guards, including a rather surprising one. The dragon didn't *quite* eat Ed. He took a big bite out of him and killed him, certainly, but he didn't consume the intrepid dungeon delver, finding him too tough and stringy. Instead, he had the Lich King reanimate him and send him down to the vault with a handful of other guards. Zombie Ed, along with a few other undead, now serves as a never-resting guard in the vault, protecting the treasure from pesky adventurers who might slip past the dragon. Use the Zombie Warrior stats for Ed; he's accompanied by N-1 other zombies with mail and broadswords.

The Other Twist: The (Second and) Third Barbarian

If/when the PCs finally emerge from the catacombs with a big stash of treasure, they've got one more obstacle to face. Although Joe and Marge had to flee the dungeon, they didn't stop wanting the treasure. After years of adventuring, the

struck upon an idea. If three of them couldn't make it through the dungeon alive, then two of them certainly couldn't. However, they could find someone to do it for them. When the PCs get out of the dungeon, they'll have to get past Joe (the old man who gave them the map) and Marge (the old lady selling potions in the nearby town).

Joe and Marge are getting on in years, but they're still tough and are more experienced than the PCs. Use the Barbarian template for them both. In addition, both have ST bought up to 24, HP up to 32, an Additional Attack, and an additional DR2 against crushing attacks. Also, Joe has the Barbarian-Scout lens and Marge has the Barbarian-Swashbuckler lens. They're also equipped with a fine balanced Dwarven axe in one hand and a very fine broadsword in the other, and fine meteoric Elven mail layered with giant spider silk armor.

Awty Car and Autogon

by Alice Turow

As gasoline prices continue to rise worldwide, creative minds everywhere turn toward solutions to the problems of personal transit. Of course, as is frequently the case with such endeavors, the results are solutions in search of a problem . . . or a sucker. Such might be the case with these two oddball devices, which prove the adage, "Any sufficiently advanced technology ought to be left the heck alone."

Awty Car

The Awty Car appears to be a completely mundane vehicle. In fact, some suspect that the modifications that make an Awty Car special are not tied to the car itself, but are a special alterations that can be performed to any vehicle; if so, a beloved car or truck might be "upgraded." Why the Awty Car is special becomes more apparent once one realizes where the name comes from; "AWTY" is an acronymic abbreviation of "Are We There Yet?" And, more often than not, the answer when it comes to the Awty Car is "yes."

Travelers in an Awty Car who utilize the enticing "Turbo" button located on the shifter find their trips take one-tenth the time their voyage would normally require. Thus only one hour passes for a 10-hour drive, and a one-hour trip is completed in six minutes. The trip does not feel subjectively different to the passengers; those who spend the time to think about it describe the experience as how time on a long car trip "melts away," where it feels like a moment has passed but glancing at the clock reveals that three hours have gone by and you're 200 miles further on the trip. Only in this case, the clock only advances 18 minutes.

For the most part, outside observers don't notice anything unusual, either. Cryptoscientists have theorized that the Awty relies on the fact that most cars look the same, and -- for the most part -- people don't actually watch one car for extended periods of time. When a car gets "lost" in traffic, it floats away as if it were another faceless wave on the sea. Even on large, open roads or highways, a stationary observer watching a car traveling at 70 miles per hour will only see it for less than a minute. One upshot of this fact is that an Awty vehicle that is being actively observed or pursued cannot perform its "magic." If the driver of an Awty Car manages to lose his pursuer, he can punch the Turbo button at will (or, if the Turbo button is left permanently depressed, its power activates at that time).

This one-tenth reduction occurs across the board; in other words, if an Awty driver accelerates to drive "faster" subjectively, he can trim additional time off the trip. This is best abstracted with the game system's driving rules, but assume that any percentage reduction in driving time is applied before the one-tenth Awty reduction. For example, if the driver rolls well enough to cut a 10-hour trip down to nine hours, then his resultant Awty trip will be cut from one hour to 54 minutes. In most cases, such a reduction isn't very useful -- and almost always isn't worth the risk (see below) -- but it could be appropriate for extremely long trips. For example, a car trip from Key West, Florida, to Anchorage, Alaska, normally takes about 86 hours of driving; a successful driving roll might reduce that 10% to 77.4 hours, lowering the Awty time traveled from 8.6 hours to 7.7 hours.

Besides less time spent inside a vehicle, the Awty Car confers two other benefits. First, the car only seems to consume gas (or whatever fuel source it uses) equal to the amount of time spent in the car . . . which usually means about a 10-fold increase in fuel efficiency. Furthermore, additional time is saved because of the lack of time spent in the car; if a 20-hour trip is reduced to two hours, then that probably means significantly fewer refuel stops, bathroom breaks, and so on.

There are two drawbacks when making use of an Awty vehicle. First, any trip made in Turbo mode takes double the time the journey *should* have taken off the lifespan of any passengers. For example, if a trip should have taken 12 hours (and thus only took 1.2 hours), the driver's life (as well as any passengers and items) would be reduced by 24 hours. This is neither an artificial aging nor an advancement of when the person *will* die, but more a compression of the person's personal timeline. Thus if someone would have spent a half-year driving (and subsequently only spent a

tenth of that behind the wheel), he might find his expected lifespan reduced from 77 to 76; his "mid-life" would come a half-year sooner, and so on. Those who investigate weird science aren't sure *why* the Awty Car has this effect; some scientists speculate that the penalty of double the expected travel time is because some aspect of the Car's essence reaches out to the destination and back . . . which requires travel time. And, according to theory, the Car gets Time from whatever source it can find.

In game terms, this effect should only be rendered abstractly, and then only if the vehicle is used extensively. Assuming a driver who would have spent 81 minutes a day behind the wheel (one estimate for the average time a man spends driving in the United States), such a person would have 41 days removed from his lifespan each year; thus every nine years spent driving the Awty in "Turbo" mode results in a lifespan that's one year shorter. Really, the effect is almost negligible, at least in the case of middle-age or younger drivers, but can make a good plot point for older drivers ("Each trip brings him closer to death!"), those who have pets as sidekicks ("Why do my trained hawks keep dying of old age?"), and cases where time is of the essence (ironically, if an experimental serum is going to expire in 24 hours and it needs to be driven someplace 13 hours away, the driver of an Awty car *can't* use the Turbo function if he wishes to get there before the drug's demise!). Even so, the actual day-to-day effects of this drawback are fairly minimal, and -- for most adventurers -- moot; who cares if you'd live to be 76 or 67, if you're probably going to die of a gunshot wound when you're 40?

The second drawback is that the Awty Car does what it does by tweaking the laws of time and space in ways that are unusually dangerous for a four-door coup. Any critical failure or other catastrophic event while the Turbo function is engaged results in the vehicle ending up Someplace It Ought Not Be. If the campaign features a hyperspace, ethereal plane, or similar subspace construct, consider using any suggestions offered for botched travel in or to those places. Otherwise, point to someplace interesting on a map -- almost certainly nowhere near where one wants to be -- and say, "You are here!"

Adventure Uses

At its core, the Awty Car allows for an in-game justification for the "screen wipes" that often accompany adventurers: "We need to drive to Chicago! [Time passes.] We're in Chicago!" It carries just enough of a "cost" to provide for some interesting plot possibilities as well as justification for why it might not be wise to use the Turbo function constantly. It also serves to make the world a much smaller place; as already mentioned, only eight hours pass when taking the car from Florida to Alaska, making it an ideal vessel for a "globe-trotting" (or at least continent-trotting) campaign.

The Awty Car can also provide an aggravating nemesis. It creates an enemy that can get anywhere faster than the heroes and, with some skillful driving, seemingly disappear in the middle of a chase from a crowded street.

The Awty Car concept can be easily shifted to any mode of transport, whether horse or spaceship. One important point is to make sure that the vehicle is bulky or inconvenient enough that its primary purpose is to get *close* to the adventure, not *become* the adventure. A dungeon-crawl where the heroes can get to the surface in minutes instead of hours greatly changes the flavor of most such adventures.

Autogon

With the escalation of gas prices comes the increase of security devices on cars: locking gas caps, alarms, and high-tech devices capable of tracking and disabling vehicles from afar.

The Autogon is the latest advance in such technology and takes the place of any standard alarm. The Autogon consists of two parts: the "black box" unit that is attached to the inside of the vehicle, and the key fob, which acts as a keychain to the car's key. The black box has little of note, except for its ability to receive instruction from the fob seemingly *anywhere* (and, some truly off-path explorers claim, any *when*).

The fob possesses four buttons, arranged so that the first and second are the most comfortable to push, the third requires some contortion and concentration, and the fourth is almost impossible to push accidentally or mistake for one

of the others. (In terms of inaccessibility, the fourth button is akin to the "Alarm" button found on many fobs, only much more so.) All four buttons do not perform any function while the key is in the ignition . . . although even this safeguard is not enough to protect those truly determined to be stupid (see below).

The first button Opens the trunk. (This button has no effect if pressed while the trunk is open.)

The second button locks the car and activates the alarm, or unlocks the car and deactivates the alarm (depending on the current state of the alarm). This aspect is the same as most vehicles' alarm systems, performing its functions identically to its more mundane counterparts. This feature is useful in pretty much the same situations as a "real" car alarm.

The third button blots the car from the vision of those around it. The car still exists, but outsiders have an incredibly difficult time seeing it unless there are extraordinary reasons for it to be seen. For example, a car parked on a curb in front of someone's door will cause someone emerging from the doorway to walk around the car, scarcely aware that he has just done so. However, if the car were to be parked such that it were *blocking* the doorway, the same person would notice that something was in his way and, were he to focus, he'd be able to see the car. (Pressing the third button again renders the car fully visible.)

The third button's security is best utilized when there is a need to keep the car in one space, but the driver doesn't wish to draw attention to his being there.

The fourth button provides the ultimate in security, by removing the vehicle from reality, presumably to some subspace dimension or locale. When the fourth button is pressed, the car simply winks out of existence silently. To retrieve the car, the holder of the fob must push the button again . . . but only if the space the car was located in is occupied by nothing more substantial than air. The car's coordinates when it disappears are tied to its position on Earth (or whatever solid landmass the vehicle was on when it disappeared). So, for example, pushing the button when the car is being carried by a moving train will cause it to vanish on the train; pushing it again will cause it to appear where the train *was* when the car vanished. (And, since the train was above the tracks with a carrier of some sort, the car will immediately fall to the tracks below since the train it was on will have moved on.)

Although the fourth button's ability is incredibly powerful -- a car that doesn't exist is impossible to steal or damage -- it also activates secondary effects that can be both useful and dangerous. Although it might not be known to the fob-holder, anyone and anything inside the vehicle when it disappears is placed in suspended animation; apparently the else-where the car appears is also outside the time stream. This is very helpful if the hero needs to delay time at all; for example, if someone in the passenger seat has been poisoned and is slowly dying, it is possible for the driver to park the car, exit, and press the fourth button, confident that he can go get help for his companion. Those who are within a car when it disappears have no memory of their trip; it is as if time ceased being for them from the moment the button was pressed to the moment it was pressed again.

The problem, then, should be obvious: If the fob-holder gets *inside* the vehicle and presses the fourth button . . . well, he's gone. Since he's in suspended animation, he can't press the button again to get himself out. Likewise if the fob is destroyed or lost, it seems impossible to retrieve the vehicle. The group that makes the Autogon system claims that each fob is unique, and additional fobs tied to a car cannot be provided should such an incident occur. Nevertheless, in a universe with cars that can disappear at the touch of a button, it might still be possible to recover a vanished car . . . for those willing to brave adventure to do so.

Another problem with the fourth button is that the space for the car's rematerialization needs to be empty (mostly . . . a mosquito isn't enough to keep the vehicle from returning, but a traffic cone is probably enough). If the space is not available because something has taken up the area it was in, the car simply refuses to materialize. Conversely, if the area *is* free but there isn't any ground below that -- say, the car was vanished on a bridge that subsequently collapsed -- then pressing the fourth button results in a plummeting car.

There is another feature the Autogon's manufacturer doesn't make known, even to its customers. If the second, third, and fourth buttons are pressed at the same time, the car not only vanishes -- as per the effects of the fourth button -- the vehicle and its contents vanish from the minds of humanity . . . *including the fob-holder!* This is, by far, the ultimate in security, but the driver needs to take extraordinary precautions to ensure that he can get his car back.

("Why do I have a notecard that says, 'Push the second, third, and fourth buttons?'")

If the first button is pushed at the same time as the second, third, and fourth ones, the car vanishes from sight and mind as normal. When it returns, it does so with its trunk open.

Adventure Uses

The Autogon makes another not-too-powerful gadget useful in tone for a **Black Ops** or *Men in Black*-esque campaign. Its supplemental features offer some interesting possibilities for clever owners.

As an adventure idea, have one of the PCs discover that he has a fob in his pocket. What's going on? (Answer: He pushed the second, third, and fourth buttons, and forgot he had a special car.)

Finally, the fob itself -- along with the attached key -- serves the same function as a regular key . . . namely, to get lost or stolen. Of course, the existence of additional features may make the resultant mayhem more or less perilous to the heroes.

The Thuggee

for the *d20 System*

by Michael Tresca

Thuggee myth speaks of a monster in early times so huge that the deepest ocean could not cover it. It devoured humans as soon as they were created. Kali slew it with her sword, but each drop of blood the monster shed created a new demon. Kali continued to butcher the new demons, but growing weary, she paused to catch her breath. From the two drops of sweat that fell from her sprang two human beings. Giving them her handkerchief, she commanded the men to strangle the demons. After completing this mission they wished to return the handkerchief, but Kali bade them retain it and give it to their progeny to kill those not of their kind.

At first Kali relieved them of the burden of burying their victims by eating them. Eventually, a novice looked back after strangling his prey and noticed Kali feasting upon one of the corpses with half of it still hanging out of her mouth. Embarrassed and incensed, she insisted thereafter that victims be buried. To throttle new victims, she gave the Thuggee the hem of her garment. To slit the corpses open to prevent swelling after death, she gave one of her ribs as a knife. To bury the bodies, she gave one of her teeth as a pickaxe.

Departing for their winter campaign in gangs of 20 to 50, Thuggee pretend to be simple, cheerful travelers and seek to share with other wayfarers, their intended victims. They ingratiate themselves by friendliness, amusing talk, and song. Indeed, they encourage singing, for a singing man is easier to strangle. While a solitary voyager might be dispatched expeditiously, with groups Thuggee sometimes accompany their prospective victims for days before finding an appropriate site for a successful murder, usually where they camp for the night.

When their leader utters the death call, the Thuggee spring into action. Usually three Thuggee devote themselves to each victim; his arms and legs are seized, he is propelled forward, and kicked in the groin, while the doubly knotted Rumal is expertly manipulated around his throat. If the strangulation takes place after the Thuggee lay down to rest for the night, the death call might be "Scorpion!" or "Snake!" because it is difficult to strangle a prostrate man and such a warning would brings the victims bolt upright and in position to be garroted. A dozen men might be murdered simultaneously in this manner.

Victims' bodies are then stripped of their possessions, slit to avoid swelling in the grave, doubled up, and buried. If the Thuggee are interrupted before disposing of the cadavers, they hastily cover them and bemoan that their poor friends were suffering from an infectious disease. After the corpses are buried, the Thuggee -- pleased that they had propitiated Kali -- sit on the graves and sing or partake of goor.

A gang might murder as many as a thousand persons a season. Beyond their violent methods of strangulation, Thuggee are indistinguishable from other people. Because even their Rumali are disguised as turbans or sashes, Thuggee are invisible in their own culture. Since Thuggee can be recognized by their lack of a true profession, many take up farming.

The Thuggee Organization

Thuggee rely on the fact that there are great distances between villages, that the populations of those villages are sparse, and that communication between them is poor. They intentionally commit their murders far from home, thus protecting their families. In addition, they share their booty with potentates, landowners, and police authorities, thus ensuring they will be immune to persecution in whatever area they operate.

Thuggee do not induct their sons into the order until they are positive that their children would enjoy the work and keep it a secret, thus ensuring loyalty. The life of a Thuggee is not only a ritual sacrifice to Kali and the highest form

of sport for its practitioners, it is also a vocation, for Thuggee live off the property they steal from their prey.

Thuggee intentionally avoid murdering well-armed and well-organized individuals, for fear of a powerful retaliatory action. Thuggee by nature strike the weak and foolish, and most importantly the rich, to perpetrate their crimes. They choose their targets by observing omens from the heads of dead sheep, a flight of birds, or the hissing of lizards. They choose their spots for murder by looking for other omens, such as the appearance of a tiger, a crow cawing on the left side of a tree, or a partridge clucking on the right side.

The best way to ferret out a Thug is through alignment detection spells. Therein lies the Thuggee weakness; they assume Kali will protect them. If they are caught, it was Kali's will. Thus, Thuggee will not take any more measures to hide themselves beyond their mundane capacity of disguise.

Thuggee are a dangerous threat to more powerful characters, not because of their abilities, but because they work in large groups. Experts at grappling, Thuggee attack each victim in groups of three, with one specialized in grappling and another specialized in strangling. If the odds are not in their favor, they will move on.

Victims have several factors against them: The Thuggee outnumber each person three to one and have the advantage of surprise. While fighter types may be able to shake off their attackers, weaker casters will be easily subdued, and the excess will rush to assist. Ultimately, Thuggee value their own lives more than anything, and will gladly flee if the odds are against them.

The Thuggee Prestige Class

Hit Die: d6.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Thug, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment

Thuggees may be neutral or evil, but must always be lawful.

Skills

Knowledge (religion) 4 ranks, Bluff 8 ranks, Move Silently 8 ranks.

Class Skills

The Thuggee's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (local) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Open Lock (Dex), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), Tumble (Dex), Use Magic Device (Cha), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level

4 + Int modifier.

Table: The Thuggee

Level BAB Fort Reflex Will Abilities

Level					Special
1st	+1	+0	+2	+0	Sneak attack +1d6, strangle, death attack
2nd	+2	+0	+3	+0	Bribe
3rd	+3	+1	+3	+1	Sneak attack +2d6
4th	+4	+1	+4	+1	Bonus feat
5th	+5	+2	+4	+1	Proper burial, sneak attack +3d6
6th	+6	+2	+5	+2	Bonus feat
7th	+7	+2	+5	+2	Sneak attack +4d6
8th	+8	+2	+6	+2	Demon slaying
9th	+9	+3	+6	+3	Sneak attack +5d6
10th	+10	+3	+7	+3	Bonus feat

Class Features

All of the following are Class Features of the Thuggee prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency

Thuggee are proficient with all simple and martial weapons and with light armor.

Sneak Attack

This is exactly like the rogue ability of the same name. The extra damage dealt increases by +1d6 every other level (1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th). If a Thug gets a sneak attack bonus from another source the bonuses on damage stack. Note that Thuggee can add their sneak attack damage to strangle attacks (see new rules, below).

Strangle

A Thug can strangle or choke any target up to one size category larger than himself. (For example, a Medium-size character can strangle any Large or smaller creature.)

When grappling an opponent, the Thug can choose to strangle him instead of damaging him. With a successful opposed grapple check, he prevents the opponent from breathing for 1 round. If the Thug gets more than one attack per round, he needs to succeed on only one of them to prevent his opponent from breathing.

The target can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to his Constitution score. After that period of time, he must make a DC 10 Constitution check at the beginning of his next turn. He must continue making a Constitution check each round for as long as the strangle is maintained, but the DC of the check increases by 1 each round after the first.

When the opponent fails one of these checks, he begins to suffocate. The next round, he falls unconscious (to 0 hit points). In the following round, his hit point total drops to -1, and he is dying. On the third round after failing the check, he dies of suffocation.

While still conscious, the target can attempt to break the strangle as if escaping from a pin. If the target breaks the strangle, he can breathe again. Any accumulated increases to the Constitution check DC are negated and do not apply to future attempts to strangle the target. If the target is both pinned and being strangled, he must escape from the pin before he can attempt to break the strangle.

Death Attack

If a Thug studies his victim for 3 rounds and then makes a sneak attack with a Rumal, the sneak attack has the additional effect of killing the target (Thug's choice). While studying the victim, the Thug can undertake other actions

so long as his attention stays focused on the target and the target does not detect the Thug or recognize the Thug as an enemy. If the victim of such an attack fails a Fortitude save (DC 10 + the Thug's class level + the Thug's Int modifier) against the kill effect, he dies. If the victim's saving throw succeeds, the attack is just a normal sneak attack. Once the Thug has completed the 3 rounds of study, he must make the death attack within the next 3 rounds. If a death attack is attempted and fails (the victim makes his save) or if the Thug does not launch the attack within 3 rounds of completing the study, 3 new rounds of study are required before he can attempt another death attack.

Bribe (Ex)

Starting at 2nd level, a Thug receives his class level as a circumstance bonus to all Diplomacy checks involving bribery. Bribery requires two willing participants - one to offer a bribe and the other to accept it. When a character requires a bribe to render services, then a Thug's Diplomacy check automatically fails if a bribe isn't attached to it. If a bribe isn't required, a Thug can add a bribe to get a bonus on his or her skill check. This can backfire, as some characters will be insulted by a bribe offer (their attitude changes one step for the worse) and others will report the Thug to the proper authorities. To bribe a character, the Thug makes a Diplomacy check. Typical DCs range from 7 for a typical witness to 10 for the town watch and local politicians.

Bonus Feats

Thuggee may choose bonus feats from the fighter list. Many specialize in Weapon Focus (grapple) and Improved Unarmed Strike.

Proper Burial (Su)

At 5th level, a Thug can bury the corpse of any creature he has murdered and it will not rise up as undead. Because Kali claims the soul, the corpse is considered to be dead for twice the number of days, thus significantly impairing raise dead efforts.

Demon Slaying (Ex)

Thuggee slay those who are not their kind, as they were originally given the duty of strangling demons. At 8th level, a Thug gains a +2 bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against evil outsiders. Likewise, he gets a +2 bonus on weapon damage rolls when using his Rumal such creatures. The Thug's Rumal is considered a magical weapon when used to strangle evil outsiders. The evil outsider must have a neck, but it does not have to breathe to be strangled. Note that Thuggee do not kill demons out of any moral duty but because Kali wishes it. They will seek out demonic opponents first and foremost.

Equipment of the Thuggee

Elixir of Goor

Goor is a coarse sugar used in a Tuponee, the ritual feast after every murder. Anyone ingesting Goor feels no remorse for murder. For the rest of that day, the Thug is immune to any spell or psionic discipline which causes sorrow or regret.

Faint Enchantment; Cl 2nd; Craft Wondrous Item, calm emotions; Price 500 gp.

Mahi

The Mahi is a small silver pickaxe used to dig graves. There is one Mahi per Thuggee gang. Losing a Mahi is a grave violation that inflicts a curse (-4 penalty on attack rolls, saves, ability checks, and skill checks) on the entire gang until

a new one is made or it is found. It is a +1 silver pickaxe of throwing and returning.

Rumal

A handkerchief, either a turban unfolded or a long narrow sash worn around the waist. It is doubled to the length of about 30 inches, with a knot formed at the doubled extremity, and about 18 inches from that a slip knot.

A Rumal deals nonlethal damage. It deals no damage to any creature with an armor bonus of +1 or higher or a natural armor bonus of +3 or higher. You can use the Weapon Finesse feat to apply your Dexterity modifier instead of your Strength modifier to attack rolls with a Rumal sized for you, even though it isn't a light weapon for you.

Cost: 1 gp; Dmg: 1d2 S, 1d3 M; Crit ×2; Weight: 1 lb.; Type: Bludgeoning.

Pyramid Review

Mission: Red Planet

Published by [Asmodeé Editions](#)

Designed by Bruno Cathala & Bruno Faidutti

Illustrated by Christophe Madura

Full-color boxed set with Square Mars Board, Launch Pad, 20 Destination Tokens, 14 Resource Tokens, 70 Score Tokens, 24 Event Cards, 34 Die Cut Spaceships, 110 Astronaut Tokens, 45 Character Cards, First Player Medal Token, Turn Indicator, & 8-page rulebook; $44.99

From the outset, ***Mission: Red Planet*** has a number of obvious selling points. First, both the box and the components look good. Second, it is a collaboration between Brunos Cathala and Faidutti, one the designer of the very well received *[Shadows Over Camelot](#)* and the other of *[Citadels.](#)* Third, it can be played within an hour. Fourth, the theme is pure steampunk. The year is 1888 and several corporations stand ready to send men to Mars and there explore beneath its surface for precious minerals. At each corporation's command is a cadre of specialists -- explorers, scientists, soldiers, recruiters, and even saboteurs -- who will ensure that the corporation's astronauts will not only get aboard the right space rocket, but also dominate the tunnels and mineral veins beneath Mars. They will also do their best to prevent rival companies from both reaching and dominating the Red Planet.

Designed for three to five players, ***Mission: Red Planet*** is an "Area Control" game in which the players try to control not one area, but two. The first is the Launch Pad, the second is Mars itself. Control is gained through the use of specialists, who in a mechanic familiar to Faidutti's *Citadels*, can be used only once per game. Unless, of course, they can be recruited again by the correct specialist. All this has to be done within 10 turns, the game's length and around the three scoring rounds in the game's latter half.

The first of ***Mission: Red Planet's*** two fully mounted boards is the Launch Pad. This has gantry spaces for five rockets and the turn track below, numbered one through 10. Numbers five, eight, and 10 are marked in red, indicating a scoring turn. The second board depicts the surface of Mars, divided into three inner and seven outer named regions. Each outer region has a slot for a Discovery Card played during the game.

The game has two types of tokens: the square Resource tokens represent the minerals ready to be mined on Mars and are color coded and numbered. They are blue Ice worth one, purple Sylvanite worth two, and red Celerium worth three. The circular Score tokens match the resource tokens in value.

Like the Resource and Score tokens, the Spaceship tokens are done in thick card. Each Spaceship token depicts a steampunk-style rocket ship and is marked with a destination on Mars and a number indicating how many astronauts it can carry. Four Spaceships have no destination, leaving it to be decided by the first astronaut aboard, indicated by a Destination Marker, these also used whenever a Spaceship's destination is changed. The last two tokens are the Turn Marker and the First Player medal.

The game's full color cards come in three types. Bonus Cards grant a player extra points at game's end. For example, "Ultra Secret Mission" gives a bonus for every Martian Zone occupied by a player's astronauts. Discovery Cards reveal a secret to be found in one of Mars' outer zones, and will also affect a player's score. For example "Inexhaustible Deposit" adds extra Score tokens to a zone at game's end. Together the Bonus and Discovery Cards make up the Event

Deck.

The third card type is the Character Card. These come in five identical sets of nine cards numbered one through nine, one set per player, and color coded to the sets of wooden disks representing a corporation's astronauts. Each Character Card has a different effect, but together they all work to put astronauts aboard the rockets and get them to Mars where they can be moved between zones. Once a Character Card has been used, it is discarded, and cannot be used again unless the Recruiter card is played. The nine Character Cards do the following:

- *Recruiter:* place an astronaut in a spaceship and pick up all used Character Cards.
- *Explorer:* Place an astronaut in a spaceship and make three astronaut moves on Mars.
- *Scientist:* place two astronauts on one or more spaceships and either draw an Event Card or examine a Discovery Card in play.
- *Secret Agent:* place an astronaut in two different spaceships and force the launch of a spaceship that is not filled with passengers.
- *Saboteur:* place one astronaut in one spaceship and destroy one spaceship still on the ground along with its astronauts.
- *Femme Fatale:* place one astronaut on a spaceship and replace another players' astronaut either aboard a spaceship or on Mars. The replaced astronaut is lost.
- *Travel Agent:* Place three astronauts on any one spaceship. If this is not possible, the player loses a turn.
- *Soldier:* place two astronauts on one spaceship and destroy a rival astronaut in an Outer Zone on Mars.
- *Pilot:* place one or two astronauts on one or two spaceships and change the destination of one spaceship on the ground or in the air.

At game's start, the Launch Pad is placed pointing towards Mars and seeded with spaceships equal to the number of players. Each player receives his astronauts, his Character Cards, and a random Bonus Card. The first player is also randomly determined.

Each turn is comprised of five steps. First, new spaceships are added to the Launch Pad to replace any that took off last turn. Second, each player selects a Character Card to play that turn, and third, the first player calls out the Character Cards in order, beginning with the Recruiter (1) and ending with the Pilot (9). When a selected Character Card is called out, its player reveals it, and carries out its effects. The Character Card is then discarded. Once a spaceship is full, it launches, landing on Mars in the fourth step. Reaching its intended destination, it disgorges its passengers and is discarded. If the spaceship lands on an uncharted zone, a random Resource Token is placed there. The corporations will invariably contest a zone with a high value Resource Token. In the fifth and last step, the First Player Token is passed to the player who took the last action and the Turn Token is advanced one space.

Scoring occurs in the fifth, eighth, and 10th turns. The player with the most astronauts in each zone on Mars is awarded Score Tokens matching the color of the Resource Token in the scoring zone. One score token is given out for each explored zone in turn five, two tokens on turn eight, and three tokens on turn ten. Final scores are modified by Bonus and Discovery Cards revealed at game's end. The player with the highest score is the winner.

The key to winning *Mission: Red Planet* is getting your astronauts to Mars, specifically getting them to Mars by the scoring turns. To do that, a player needs to use his Character Cards with care, first to get his astronauts onto the spaceships and thence to Mars, where he must concentrate them to gain control of each zone, but also spread them out to take advantage of the effects of the Bonus Cards. The balance between the two needs is nicely judged, with movement on Mars hardly being easy, the Explorer and Femme Fatale Character Cards being the main methods. In particular, a player will need to choose when to play his Recruiter, necessary because with only nine Character Cards and 10 turns, he has to refresh at some point. The scoring turns also influence when certain cards are played, getting the astronauts to Mars being the aim. Discovery and Bonus Cards will influence potential destinations, the Scientist character able to examine Discovery Cards already in play.

Physically, *Mission: Red Planet* is a fine looking game. Some of the card text is difficult to read, but otherwise its problems are minor -- the box is a little tight and the insert tray is not really designed for ease of play. Otherwise, the components are attractive and good quality. The rulebook is concise, clear, and easy to understand.

Mission: Red Planet offers more thoughtful, tactical play than a pickup game, but still keeps its playing time short. Even so, my players wanted to keep playing after 10 turns, and an expansion might allow this. Otherwise, ***Mission: Red Planet*** does a good job of asking its mechanics to support its steampunk theme, and the game is engaging to play.

--Matthew Pook

Discworld Racial Templates for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Kelly Pedersen

Much has changed on both the Discworld and in the world of **GURPS** since **GURPS Discworld** was first released. Let's return, then, to see what's changed, and see how we might bring the races of the land kicking and screaming into the *Fourth Edition* of **GURPS.**

Dwarf   *41 points*

Dwarves are probably the most successful of the non-human races at integrating themselves into Ankh-Morpork society. They are hard-working, quiet, and community minded[1]. They have found themselves fitting well into the role of "middle-class tradesmen," and human resentment of their tendency to make large amounts of money is mitigated by their tendency to -carry- large amounts of money. Dwarves have a long-standing conflict with trolls, but city life, and recent revelations about dwarf-troll history, seems to have reduced tensions. [2]

There has recently been a great deal of strife between the "deep-down" dwarves, preservers of tradition, and the more liberal urban dwarves. The deep-down dwarves believe such notions as going aboveground, seeing the sun, and acknowledging the existence of non-dwarves, are dangerously radical. The liberal faction, on the other hand, merely thinks these ideas are questionable. This has lead to considerable debate in dwarf bars[3] and neigborhoods.

Dwarven society is also undergoing something of a feminist revolution, as traditional dwarven gender roles (or rather, the lack thereof), are challenged. Dwarven feminism consists of the radical notion that (some) people are women, and that they should be allowed to put on makeup, trim their beards, wear frilly clothing[4], and generally announce that they are *different* from male dwarves. More traditional-minded dwarves are not taking this well, and the conflict has the potential to seriously disrupt dwarven life.

Discworld dwarves are short (usually about four feet tall), and broadly built. Dwarves of both genders grow beards, wear lots of metal and leather, and carry large axes, which in dwarven hands are lethal[5].

Attribute Modifiers: ST +2 [20]; HT +1 [10].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM -1.
Advantages: Absolute Direction (Only while underground, -30%) [4]; Damage Resistance 1 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3]; Dwarf Metal-Lore Talent 2 [20]; Extended Lifespan 2 [4]; Night Vision 9 [9].
Perk: Can smell gold [1].
Disadvantages: Greed (Dwarfish) (12) [-15]; Intolerance (trolls) [-5]; Odious Racial Habit (Take everything literally) [-5]
Quirks: Can't run long distances; Consider dwarf gender a private matter; Like wearing metal; Have Bad Temper (12) when drunk; Proud of beards. [-5].

Dwarf Metal-Lore Talent gives bonuses to Armoury, Engineer, Geology, Jeweler, Machinist, Mechanic, Metallurgy, Prospecting, Smith, and Expert Skill (Miner) skills, and provides a reaction bonus with people whose jobs or major interests revolve around metal. Game-mechanically, the "can't run long distances" quirk can be treated as Unfit, except that it imposes no HT penalties, and the doubled FP expenditure rate only applies to running.

Dwarves who openly acknowledge that they are female can take the Social Stigma (Minority group) disadvantage. However, the penalties only apply when dealing with other dwarves, so this is only worth -5 points, instead of the standard -10.

Goblin   *44 points*

"Goblin" or "gnome" are generic names for a fairly wide range of short-but-strong-and-irate Discworld creatures. Goblins are gaining prominence in human society through the benefits of their small size; they can do jobs humans can't (such as killing rats in single combat, or riding birds to provide information), and they need far less food and drink to sustain them, letting their pay go further. Goblins tend to be somewhat short-tempered[6]; there is some speculation that they pack human-level aggression into a one-sixth-scale frame. They, however, are generally capable of controlling themselves sufficiently to be allowed into society, if not -polite- society.

Then there are the Nac Mac Feegle. The Feegles (also known as pictsies, the Wee Free Men, and "those bastards that stole all the drink") are a variety of goblin with a tribal culture centered around their clan, fighting, drinking, and stealing everything they can lift [7]. Feegles do not seem to have moved into the Big City just yet, but once they hear about urban amenities such as slaughterhouses ("Food just lyin' aroond!"), sewers ("Smells o' the cludgie, but saves a vera' powerful bit o' diggin when you're makin' a new home."), and Bearhugger's Finest Whiskey ("*Crivens!*"), they will probably descend en masse[8].

Goblins are typically about four inches to two feet tall, with a more-or-less human range of skin tones and hair color. The Nac Mac Feegle seem to have exclusively red hair, and their skin appears blue from their extensive tattoos.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +3 [30]; DX +2 [40].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM -5; HP -3 [-6]; Basic Move -2 [-10].
Disadvantage: Bad Temper (12) [-10]
Features: All but one HP are considered "massless."

Massless HP are not added into any calculation where HP are used to represent mass, such as slam damage, or damage from collisions or falls.

Goblin ST tends to vary; the level above represents the upper range, allowing four Feegles to each pick up the leg of a cow and move off with it. Size Modifier can reasonably be adjusted down or up by two levels, for various sizes of goblins. Likewise, Basic Move can probably be raised or lowered by one, to represent particularly fast or slow specimens.

Feegles, as a group, tend to demonstrate the advantages of Daredevil, Fearlessness 5 (or more!), Fit, and Jumper (Spirit) (Special movement: must walk a few steps, -10%); the disadvantages of Alcoholism, Code of Honor (Pirate's), Compulsive Carousing (12), Illiteracy, Impulsiveness (6), Kleptomania (12), Noisy 2, Overconfidence (6), Sense of Duty (clan), and Social Stigma (Uneducated); and a quirk, "Believe they are living in a typical 'warrior's paradise'-style afterlife." This make a Nac Mac Feegle-specific template worth 76 points.

Golem *240 points*

Golems are rapidly gaining in importance in Ankh-Morpork society. Golems were formerly exclusively property, forced to obey the every command of those who owned them. However, led by the golem Dorfl (now a Watch constable), they obtaining freedom for themselves, in the only way they know how - by buying it. Free golems pay some or all of their wages into the Golem Trust, which then uses the money to buy owned golems, and allows them to work off the cost of their purchase. Once its price is paid, a golem is freed, and it usually begins contributing to the Trust itself. Of course, such a social movement inevitably stirs up resentment, but expression of this is reduced by the fact that free golems can hit back - a fairly serious consideration when the one doing the hitting is stronger than a troll! Luckily, golems have so far demonstrated a very strong moral sense, even after being freed.

Golems typically stand about 10 feet tall and are humanoid, though most have a fairly "unfinished" appearance, the result of centuries of inexpert self-repair. Their eyes and mouths glow red, like the coals of a fire.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +10 (Size, -20%) [80].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM +2.
Advantages: Body of Stone [140]; Damage Resistance 10 (Limited: only against burning attacks, common, -40%) [30]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Temperature Tolerance (cold) 10 [10]; Temperature Tolerance (heat) 10 [10]; Unaging [15].
Perks: Penetrating Voice [1].
Disadvantages: Disturbing Voice [-10]; Sense of Duty (humanity) [-15]; Social Stigma (Minority group) [-10]; Unattractive (only to humans, -0%) [-4]; Unhealing (total) [-30]; Workaholic [-5].
Quirks: Cannot float; Sexless. [-2]. Features: Can be repaired with the Artist (pottery) or Artist (sculpting) skills; Does not fatigue.

Free golems often have a number of other disadvantages relating to social responsibility, including Charitable, Compulsive Generosity, Honesty, Pacifism, Selfless, or a larger Sense of Duty. Many also seem to donate a large portion of their income to the Golem Trust, which may represent some form of Vow. It is possible that a free golem, for some reason, never received a tongue, which would leave it with the Mute disadvantage.

Owned golems replace Social Stigma (Minority group) with Social Stigma (Subjugated) and add the Automaton meta-trait, Maintenance (1 person, daily), and Reprogrammable. This changes the template cost to 139 points. Most owned golems also lack Disturbing Voice, as they are Mute, but this is not automatically part of the template, since some owned golems (particularly those owned by the Golem Trust) do have a tongue. The Maintenance disadvantage is modified for owned golems; instead of requiring an hour of maintenance every day, golems require 24 hours of "time off" (defined as doing nothing related to work), approximately once a month. If they fail to get their day off, the HT penalties begin to take effect at one per hour and quickly disable the golem completely.

Igor   *40 points*

Igors are not, strictly speaking, a distinct species; they apparently have no problem breeding with humans[9]. However, they have distinctive enough physical and psychological features that they warrant consideration on their own. Igors are rapidly moving into general human society from their traditional haunts of Uberwald and similar regions. Their skills with surgery and healing are revolutionizing the medical profession[10], and their professional and discreet services are being sought by discriminating lunatics from far and wide.

Igors are humanoid, but they have several features that make them very recognizable. They all have a pronounced hunch, they all lisp a great deal, and they all have stitches and scars prominently displayed. Given their dedication to competent surgery and the correction of physical shortcomings, these more-or-less *have* to be deliberate choices on the part of the Igors.

Attribute Modifiers: HT +2 [20]
Advantages: Healer 2 [20]; High Manual Dexterity 3 [15]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Resistant to Disease (+8) [5]; Very Rapid Healing [15].
Perks: Low rejection threshold [1].
Disadvantages: Appearance (Ugly) [-8]; Code of Honor (Igor) [10]; Hunchback [-10]; Stuttering [-10]; Workaholic [-5].
Quirks: Attentive; Broad-minded; Distinctive feature (stitches). [-3]

The Code of The Igors consists of the following tenets: Help those who need a hand (or leg, or lung, etc.), but only as long as those helped are willing to "pass on the favor." Give your employer your best work. Do not comment on any personal idiosyncrasies your employer may develop. If it comes time to get out before the mob arrives, take what you're owed from the petty cash, leave the key under the mat, and go quietly. Always have at least one set of visible stitches. On the Disc, the Healer talent includes the Weird Surgery skill (GURPS Discworld Also, p. 18). The Low Rejection Threshold perk represents Igors' ability to receive transplants from corpses without serious problems; it doesn't impose a cap on HT, since the Disc is a cinematic setting. The Stuttering disadvantage is used here to represent

the Igors' lisp.

Many Igors have a positive Reputation among those they have helped previously. Many also have Contacts among other Igors, who can often provide useful information on Mad Doctors, Vampire Lords, and similar types who Igors typically work for.

Troll   85 points

Discworld trolls are an older-established minority in human society [11] than most other races. Like the dwarves, they have had time to find their niches, occupy them, and become as immovable as only a being entirely made of stone can be. Trolls tend towards jobs involving heavy lifting, intimidation, and hitting things with rocks (not necessarily in that order). They even have their own "family" of "business associates," the Brecia. Modern urban trolls still struggle with prejudice at times, however, and their centuries-long feud with the dwarves will probably not die away immediately, despite recent events suggesting the whole thing was just a large mix-up.

Trolls stand about eight to nine feet tall, and look like massive humanoids carved roughly out of rock. They often have lichen or moss growing on them[12].

Attribute Modifiers: ST +5 (Size, -10%) [45]; IQ -2 [-40]; HT +2 [20].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM +1.
Advantages: Damage Resistance 5 [25]; Damage Resistance 2 (Only against crushing attacks, -40%) [6]; Extended Lifespan 1 [2]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood) [5]; Longevity [2]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Temperature Tolerance (cold) 3 [3]; Temperature Tolerance 1 (heat) [1]; Troll Brain [36].
Disadvantages: Ugly (Only to humans, -0%) [-8]; Fragile (Brittle) [-15]; Illiterate (native language) [-3]; Innumerate [-5]; Intolerance (dwarves) [-5]; Odious Racial Habit (hitting people with rocks) [-5].
Quirks: Cannot float; Puts everything in terms of rocks; Regards brawls as basic social relationships. [-3]

Features: Stone metabolism -- not damaged by normal human poisons or drugs, but affected by other chemicals. Eats rocks.

The "Troll Brain" meta-trait is composed of a bonus to IQ in cold conditions and a penalty to IQ, plus some additional disadvantages, in hot conditions. Trolls get a bonus of +1 to IQ when the ambient temperature is 35 degrees or lower, +2 when the temperature is below 0 degrees, +3 when the temperature drops below -35 degrees, and +4 when the temperature drops below -80 degrees. Trolls suffer a -1 penalty to IQ when the temperature is above 92 degrees, -2 when the temperature is above 132 degrees, and -3 when the temperature is above 162 degrees. In addition, trolls suffer from the Sleepy (1/2 the time asleep) disadvantage when the temperature is above 92 degrees, and the Nocturnal disadvantage when the temperature is above 132 degrees.

Trolls can get quite large and strong; increasing a troll's size modifier by +1 or +2 and their ST by up to +20 would not be out of the realm of possibility. Likewise, large trolls tend to be tougher, justifying extra Damage Resistance. Trolls whose morphic resonance is closer to "soft" minerals like chalk, brick, or asphalt could reasonably take -less- Damage Resistance and possibly reduced ST. Many trolls have the High Pain Threshold advantage.

Urban trolls often buy off their Odious Racial Habit, as it tends to cause comment[13]. Trolls often display "angry" disadvantages such as Bad Temper and Bully. A troll who just arrived in human society could easily justify a level or two of Low Tech Level, and possibly such disadvantages as Confused or Oblivious, as they try to adapt to the strange, squishy society of the people around them.

Vampire   155 points

Discworld vampires have been gaining more acceptance among the general populace lately, with the rise of the League

of Temperance, also known as the Black Ribboners. Essentially, vampires agree not to drink human[14] blood, and humans agree not to stake them, cut off their heads, burn their bodies, and scatter the ashes. So far, this seems to be working out, although the other races[15] retain a certain degree of suspicion. However, vampires tend to have a lot of money[16], and most have a fair degree of personal charisma, which smooths the waters somewhat.

Vampires on the Disc tend to look a lot like the stereotypical "movie vampire": urbane, good looking, male vampires wearing evening wear, and female vampires wearing low-cut dresses with a *lot* of support. Vampires trying to fit in to human society sometimes attempt to avoid these clichés, but they often come through anyway.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +5 [50].
Advantages: Doesn't Breathe [20]; Flight (Switchable +10%, Winged -25%) [34]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance: Independent Body Parts (Detachable Head +15%, Reattachment Only -50%) [22]; Injury Tolerance: Unliving [20]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Regeneration (Fast: 1 HP/min) [50]; Sharp Teeth (Switchable +10%) [2]; Unaging [15]; Unkillable 2 (Hindrance: wooden stake through the heart -15%, Trigger: blood -5%) [80].
Disadvantages: Addiction (human blood) [-15]; Dependency (blood, daily) [-15]; Dread (holy symbols, 3 yard radius) [-12]; Fragile: Unnatural (Only against damage suffered from bright light -60%) [-20]; Social Stigma (Minority Group) [-10]; Supernatural Features (No body heat, pallor - can gain the flush of life temporarily) [-10]; Vow (don't drink human blood) [-5]; Weakness (common: very bright light, 1d per second, Variable -40%) [-64]; Weakness (occasional: garlic, 1d per minute) [-20]; Weakness (rare: holy water, 1d per minute); [-10]
Quirks: Always react visibly to garlic and holy symbols [-1]

A vampire's Addiction to human blood is priced similarly to Alcoholism, because it has the same insidious effects; a vampire is never *really* free of the craving, and coming across human blood can trigger a relapse. However, some vampires manage to channel the craving into some other obsession, such as iconography or coffee drinking. The GM may allow such vampires to take a Mitigator on their Addiction to blood.

Many vampires have higher ST than given here; this represents the vampiric baseline, not the maximum. Instead of Flight, some vampires have a bat Alternate Form, and some have Injury Tolerance: Diffuse, with the Swarm enhancement, for a whole *flock* of bats.

Many vampires have levels of Charisma and Appearance, and Status and Wealth are very common advantages as well. Older vampires often have very high levels in the skills that interest them, and advantages such as Weapon Master and Trained By A Master, that often represent intensive training, are also appropriate.

The template above represents a "Black Ribboner," who has sworn off "the b-word." An unreformed vampire loses the Vow and Social Stigma: Minority Group, and gains Social Stigma: Monster, and they will probably have a negative Reputation as well.

Werewolf *155 points*

Discworld werewolves are probably one of the *least* well-liked non-human minorities. Werewolves have the wolf's killing instinct and direct attitude to what it wants, and the human's ability to think ahead and make plans, as well as nastier impulses like revenge. The combination makes for unpleasant personalities. Werewolves also tend to find it much easier to go unnoticed in human society than vampires do, since in human form, there's very little to distinguish them from a normal person. This can lead to a certain cavalier attitude on the part of werewolves, a belief that they can do what they want, and no-one will be the wiser. Luckily, some werewolves are coming to realize that this sort of attitude is deeply wrong[17], and they are working to change their species' behavior. Time will tell if the good examples of these well-meaning individuals will alter the behavior or the perception of centuries.

In human form, a werewolf looks human[18], while in wolf form, they look like wolves[19], albeit unusually large specimens. The human form and wolf form generally share certain physical characteristics, such as similar hair and fur color.

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Per +1 [5].

Advantages: Acute Taste and Smell 2 [4]*; Alternate Form (Wolf) (Difference in template costs 143, Active Change +20%, Reduced Time 4 +80%, Uncontrollable Trigger: moonlight, the smell of blood -10%, Cannot change while in contact with silver -5%, Nuisance Effect: ability earns a reaction penalty -1 -5%) [156]; Night Vision 1 [1]*.

Disadvantages: Odious Racial Habit (Stare thoughtfully at people's throats) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Pack) [-5]; Social Stigma (Minority Group) [-10].

Quirks: Intolerant of vampires [-1] *These abilities represent a werewolf's "racial template" for purposes of the Alternate Form advantage; they are lost when the werewolf shifts into wolf form.

In wolf form, apply the following template:

Attribute Modifiers: ST +1 (No Fine Manipulators -40%) [+6]; DX +2 (No Fine Manipulators -40%) [24]; IQ -3 [-60]; HT +2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM -1; Will +3 [15]; Per +5 [25]; FP +3 [9]; Basic Move +2 [10].

Advantages: Acute Taste and Smell 3 [6]; Arm ST 3 (one arm - applies to jaw, not limbs) [9]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Damage Resistance 1 (Tough Skin -40%) [3]; Discriminatory Smell (Emotion Sense +50%) [23]; Enhanced Move 1/2 (Ground) 1 [10]; Night Vision 4 [4]; Parabolic Hearing 2 [8]; Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach -50%) [2]; Regeneration (Regular: 1 HP/hour) [25]; Regrowth (Bane: silver -10%) [36]; Sharp Teeth [1]; Temperature Tolerance 1 (cold) [1]; Ultrahearing [5]; Unkillable 1 (Achilles Heel: silver -10%) [45]; Vibration Sense (air) [10].

Perks: Fur [1]; Penetrating Voice [1].

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5]; Colorblindness [-15]; Gluttony (12 or less) [-5]; Quadruped [-35]; Vulnerability (Silver; X2 damage) [-10]; Wild Animal [-30].

Werewolf disadvantages often, unfortunately, include the nastier ones, such as Bloodlust, Callous, or even Sadism. Wolf and human nature are not a particularly good marriage. Werewolves who give in to their inner beast and have it found out should replace their Social Stigma (Minority Group) with Social Stigma (Monster), and probably have an Odious Personal Habit (eats sentient beings). "Nice" werewolves can sometimes overcompensate, and pick up disadvantages such as Charitable, Compulsive Generosity, or Guilt Complex.

Werewolves often display higher physical attributes than the human average, and many have Combat Reflexes in their human form as well as their wolf form (this will change the relative value of the wolf template, which will require recalculating the value of the Alternate Form advantage). Werewolves tend to run in packs, even when those packs aren't composed of other werewolves. As a result, many werewolves can claim at least a few Allies, Contacts, or Patrons.

* * *

[1] Except when drunk, of course. So, they're hard-working, quiet, and community minded *most* of the time. Well, more than 50%, at least.

[2] Though it's still not a good idea to get between a drunk dwarf and a drunk troll.

[3] This usually requires the intervention of the Watch, and the rebuilding of the bars in question.

[4] Well, frilly leather and chainmail, anyway.

[5] Though not, of course, as lethal as their bread.

[6] Using that exact term is probably a good way to see an example.

[7] Which is a fair bit more than one would expect, or hope for.

[8] As will property values.

[9] Although they have problems convincing the humans

[10] To the dismay of hot pitch salesmen.

[11] Or possibly majority, if one goes by sheer mass.

[12] Though Nice Troll Girls shave, of course.

[13] Mostly along the lines of "Ouch!"

14

Or dwarf . . . it wouldn't do to discriminate.

[15] Or at least those with blood

[16] Vampires *love* compound interest.

[17] Not to mention likely to get *all* werewolves hunted down, their individual attitudes towards hunting humans for sport notwithstanding.

[18] That's rather the point.

[19] Also the point.

* * *

The Theory And Practice of the MacGuffin: Part Two

"In effect, the function of a MacGuffin is like the 'meaning' of a poem -- which T.S. Eliot compared to the bone thrown by a burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind while the poem goes about its own, deeper business."
-- Ken Mogg, *The Alfred Hitchcock Story*

Welcome back, to Dingus Studies 101 -- Topic: the MacGuffin. For those of you who came in late, the "MacGuffin" is the object of desire (or the object of fear) that pulls, or drives, the characters through the plot. It's the "39 Steps," the Lost Ark, the glowing briefcase, the "Rabbit's Foot," the Black Bird. Last time, we looked at the general theory of the MacGuffin, and riffled idly through some historical examples. This time, we'll aim for parahistorical ones. In this installment, the aim is to demonstrate the fine art of MacGuffin carving; for three typical (not to say stereotypical) settings, we'll look at the sorts of MacGuffins that you might plant a map to, or stash in a convenient trunk, or fall through the PCs' door cradling in your arms.

"Our worlds are in danger. To save them and the galaxy we must find the four Cyber Planet Keys before the Decepticons can use them for evil. It is our mission. Hot Shot, Jetfire, Landmine, Vector Prime, Scattershot, Optimus Prime . . . Transform and roll out."
-- Optimus Prime, in *Transformers: Cybertron* (Manabu Ono, dir.)

Assume a solar system. No, assume *the* Solar System, not the one that whirls dustily around us but the one that shines in our dreams -- decaying canals on Mars, dinosaur swamps on Venus, the whole nine yards. Call it Etheria, or Lucifer-5; you know the one I'm talking about. What ancient relics do its fedora-clad exo-archaeologists hunt? (And you *know* its exo-archaeologists wear fedoras and hunt relics.) The biggest interplanetary MacGuffin might simply be the Whatsit that destroyed the "lost fifth planet," the Asteroidal Dynamite, either in blueprint (carefully carved into primordial nickel-iridium) or actual form, whatever that might be. (A Tuning Fork of the Gods? A mysterious cone suitable for tapping zero-point energy in unrestricted amount?) Or perhaps each world has its own MacGuffin: an enviable solution for setting up "serial MacGuffin" tales (or "plot coupon tours" as they're called in computer game design). Then, the only problem is deciding what counts as a world for MacGuffin purposes: is the Earth a world? How about the Moon? The Sun? Does Pluto count, or should there be a "Planet X" MacGuffin orbiting out in the cold deeps? Just to get things going, let's say there's Eight of the Big Birds out there. And to give us some kind of framework, let's riff on the Eight Trigrams of the *I Ching* for their natures. It's up to you whether there's any overt connection in your game world, or whether this is just a design shortcut. (If you pick seven or ten things, you can use the Classical planets, or the sephiroth of the Kabbalah, respectively, in such roles.) So the Eight MacGuffins of the Planets are:

- **Ultimate Mercury:** A compound born in the volatile, solar-sleeted hell of Mercury's daylight surface. It creates a perfectly smooth molecular polymer that, well, let's just say it would revolutionize space warfare. Or kill all life on Earth. Or provide free power for everyone. Or at least make us all fabulously wealthy. This is the kind of thing you transport in a glowing briefcase. (Xun, the Gentle)
- **The Fountain of Joy:** Somewhere deep in Venus' worst jungle, amid rampaging packs of quasisaurs and below Brimstone Falls, is a fountain of pure, carbonated elixir. If you drink it, you will achieve your heart's desire. No one has ever returned from seeking it. (Dui, the Joyous)
- **The Telluric Claw:** An alien artifact, vaguely gun-shaped, that can wrench and twist the crust and mantle of worlds, as with an invisible taloned hand. It may have sunk Mu, or ripped the Moon out of the Pacific, if those aren't the same thing. It's hidden on the Moon. (Li, the Clinging)
- **The Syrtis Lattice:** An artifact made of petrified Martian wood, supposedly woven by the first Canal-Priests of Mars. Some scholars believe that the planet's canal system recapitulates the Lattice, which has been lost for millennia. According to legend, whoever comprehends the Lattice can compel all Martians to obey him. (Zhen, the Arousing)
- **The Jovian Grail:** A mysterious artifact suspended in the vortex of the Great Red Spot; it may have been the trigger for planetary formation, or it might be the seed to turn Jupiter into a second Sun. Also called "Jupiter's Mill" (or the "Jovian Sampo" by Finnish exo-archaeologists), as it may be spinning the Red Spot up from

nothing. (Qian, the Creative)

- **The [Ring-Eater](#):** Is it a giant alien or a robotic doomsday machine . . . or both? It's out in Saturn's rings, and it is devouring them. And it lays eggs of ice and diamond. *Eggs MacGuffin,* need I add? (Kan, the Abysmal)
- **The Bergenholm Helix:** The last-gasp invention of a dying dictatorship (Atlantis? South-Polar Mars? The Nazis?), the Bergenholm Helix completely cancels inertia. The sole prototype for this incredible dingus was rocketed to a remote laboratory (or refuge, or temple, or bio-dome) on Uranus' fog-shrouded moon Miranda. (Gen, the Still)
- **The Nemesis Ark:** When it opens, comets rain down on the inner planets, destroying moons, blasting away atmospheres, and killing off whole biospheres. Who built it? How does it work? No one knows. It sits on Planet X, the hidden Tenth Planet. And it waits. (Kun, the Receptive)

Note, by the way, that this only sort of follows the traditional correspondences of the trigrams; you could build just as satisfying a group of eight by taking the trigrams' reflections as the key attribute: Qian, the Sky (Uranus); Dui, the Marsh (Venus); Li, the Fire (Mars or Io); Zhen, the Thunder (Jupiter); Xun, the Forest (Moon); Kan, the Ocean (Europa or Neptune); Gen, the Mountain (Ceres or another asteroid, or Olympus Mons on Mars); Kun, the Earth (Earth, or if "Earth" means soil or dust then Mercury). Maybe they're terraforming gadgets, or elementals bound in mathematics and metal, or crystals for empowering your chakras for astral star travel. That's seldom the important thing, with your proper MacGuffin. So, in short: Figure out how many MacGuffins you need to build, then come up with a handy hook on which to build them. Or come up with your hook and populate MacGuffins to suit. Then make up what they do, if need be, and how they came to do that. Note that some of the items above hint at other, better-known pre-existing MacGuffins -- that's just fine, as long as you don't put both the eidolon and its model in the same adventure.

"'The only thing I don't understand,' said City Commissioner of Streets Druff, 'is why anyone would go to such lengths. To put a twenty-four-hour tail on me, we never close.'"
-- Stanley Elkin, *The MacGuffin*

Let's drop it down a few orders of magnitude, to a city. If you're running an [urban-centric](#) campaign, you may not want the PCs to go running away to India every time they hear a rumor about some mystical rocks, or scarpering off to Istanbul with the fat man. Your urban MacGuffin must be intimately, unavoidably, tied to the city. Leaving aside the traditional folder full of blackmail photos, or the "second set of books" for the mob/mayor/megacorp, let's look at some possibilities. If you only need one dingus, I suggest tying it to the *genius loci,* the "spirit of the place" -- Vulcan in Birmingham (Alabama, that is), Ceres in [Chicago](#), the Queen of Angels in L.A., the Sacred Cod in [Boston](#), Dick [Whittington's Cat](#) in London, and so forth. This can be an idol, an object, a key, or a human (or animal) avatar somewhere in the city; in a supernatural campaign, it could convey rulership or power over the city or some major part thereof. Take Tallinn in Estonia: Vana Toomas ("Old Thomas"), a copper statue of a landsknecht (or a city guard), has sat atop the Town Hall weathervane since 1530. The original statue was damaged in a 1944 Soviet bombardment, and is now in the Town Hall museum. The MacGuffin might be that statue, or the "real" original Old Tom (removed in 1944 by a secret brotherhood, no doubt, and hidden), or the key (or map) to the oubliette where the original Old Tom is secreted; or the genius loci might be incarnated in a modern Tallinn policeman, in which case he might be the MacGuffin, or it might be some device (Longsword? Slingshot? Whistle?) which allows that policeman to remember his ancient heritage and powers.

If you need more than one MacGuffin, again, tie it to the city's geography and history if possible. New York might have one MacGuffin for each borough -- a Mantle of the original wampum used to purchase Manhattan, the Cable-Tie used to measure out the cornerstone of the Brooklyn Bridge, the first home run Baseball hit in Yankee Stadium in the Bronx (by Babe Ruth in 1923), the occulted Trylon from the 1939 World's Fair in Queens, and the Steam-Throttle from the *Nautilus* of 1817, the first Staten Island Ferry. If they need powers other than symbolic or commanding, you can apply the five classical Elements to these MacGuffins, as we saw with the planets: Air (Baseball), Fire (Trylon), Water (Cable-Tie), Earth (Mantle), Aether (Steam-Throttle). Or go with more modern, urban Elements: Water, Gas, Electricity, Data, and Concrete, for example. Then the five "controlling" MacGuffins might be a Hydrant, a Stop-Cock, a Transformer, a Relay, and a Jack-Hammer. Tie them to specific figures in the city's history (Edison or Tesla for New York, Charles Insull for Chicago, William Mulholland for L.A.) or to legendary elementals updated for the modern city.

"Haven't you ever wanted to see the interior? . . . A hundred miles inland lies the wreck of our entire civilization, waiting to be plundered. . . . A year never passes without someone bringing some great prize out -- but it is so large . . . that whole cities are lost in it. There was an arch of gold at the entrance to St. Louis -- no one knows what became of it. Denver, the Mile High City, was nested in silver mines; no one can find them now."
-- Gene Wolfe, "Seven American Nights"

One last set of Worked Examples. We've made up MacGuffins from whole cloth, and we've researched historical or technical arcana and turned the results into MacGuffins. For the final set, we take existing MacGuffins and repurpose them for a new setting, only occasionally inventing powers to fit a specific story or historical niche. As noted last time, there are thirteen legendary Treasures of Britain, a Welsh poetic tradition of the 14th or 15th century. But another legendary country has a still better claim on the number thirteen, and this wondrous land is our final setting. It is America, as far from us as the Welsh triadeers were from Arthur, which is to say the 31st century -- the tenth after the Fall, and only a few centuries out of the Dark Ages. It is an America slowly recovered, and slowly rediscovered, by its proud scholars and adventurers. What MacGuffins do they seek? What rumors do they scoff at as they attempt to uncover the lost learning of the ancients? The old libraries are confused and burnt; much lore was transferred to the Net-God, Gugul, just before the Fall, and taken with him up into Heaven. But here's what the new old MacGuffins, the Thirteen Treasures of America, might be.

- **The Green Glass Grail:** The obvious place to start. It contained an elixir of pure enchantment and great spiritual power; it may lie somewhere in the lost city of Atlanta.
- **The Sword of Patton:** Whoever carries it can never be defeated in battle, and can know the mind of all enemies. It was lost when Patton was killed by treachery in the land of the Nautsii demons. (If your campaign has gunpowder -- or better yet, blasters -- then it might be the Pistol of Patton. Pearl-handled, of course.)
- **The Coat of Stonewall:** Wearing this coat makes a man invulnerable to fear and to wounds, but legend has it that its geas will someday inevitably doom the wearer's side in battle.
- **The White Stone of Washington:** No man may be true king of America without dwelling over it. Every lie told on it shrinks it imperceptibly. Legend says it was once the center of the tallest obelisk in the world.
- **The Glass Bird:** By gazing into this, or by releasing it to fly to Heaven and read the words sewn into the Web there, one may learn anything known by any other person in America. Its name may be Avatar, or Browser.
- **The Phials of Jayefkay:** Always full of powders that guarantee virility and love, in any quality or quantity desired. "Open the phials!" cried the love-god's acolytes after he was slain by Damajjio, the jealous husband of a goddess he had seduced. But they were stolen by the basement spirits and hidden away.
- **Apples of the West:** Planted by Johnny Appleseed in the time of the Fathers, they grant love, or eternal youth, or perfect growing weather, or the ability to talk to animals.
- **The Cash Guitar:** A jongleur or bard who plays this instrument will draw wealth to himself irresistibly. It has been associated with all the legendary singers and poets of the Fathers' time; it may only be obtained by bargaining with -- or beating -- the Devil.
- **The Mercury 49:** A chariot that only the most perfect can drive; it is faster and more beautiful than any other. If the unworthy drive it, it will kill them. In the various tales, it has many strange number-names (The Old 97, The Apollo 13, etc.), and it may be a flying craft rather than a conventional chariot.
- **Babe Ruth's Staff:** Guarantees victory in any personal or athletic contest. (If your post-Fall America still plays baseball, it can even still be a Bat.)
- **The Lincoln Casket:** A chest containing the radiance of the god himself. Those who find and open it can receive the direct powers of the Fathers.
- **The Freedom Ring:** It belonged to King Martin, who used it to free the American people from slavery; it cracked during the struggle, and he died of it. Some sages say it was a bell, not a ring; either way it may grant divine eloquence, or be a sonic weapon, or both.
- And last, but not least, **The Big Rush Candy Mountain:** Guarded by four terrifying giants, this legendary mountain holds all the secrets of the Fathers and an entrance to Heaven through two wonderful golden arches.

I'd tell you more, but a man just fell dead in my office holding a mysterious statue of a savage bronze eagle . . .

Pyramid Review

Imperial

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Mac Gerdts

English translation by Sybille Aminzadah & Bruce Whitehill, "Word for Wort"

Written by Mac Gerdts & Peter Dörsam

Illustrated by Matthias Cathrein

Layout by Peter Dörsam

Full-color boxed set with board, 48 wooden armies & 48 wooden fleets & 60 wooden taxation disks (all in six colors), 30 factories in two colors (factories and ports), 18 wooden octagonal scoring pieces in six colors, wooden turn marker, 48 bond cards in various denominations for six nations, six flags, one investor marker, one blank replacement card, 130 slips of money in various denominations, rules, & background booklet; $59.95

As the name *Imperial* suggests, herein lies a game about the world in the Age of Imperialism, when politics stopped being all about a lust for power and more about the business of running the world. Players do not take the roles of embattled nations directly; no, they are investors sinking money into Europe and its neighbors in hopes of making a profit from their petty squabbles.

The object of the game is to have the most points from one's investments.

Two to six players begin the game "controlling" a single country. The map covers all of Europe, westernmost Russia, Turkey, and North Africa. Control is represented through bonds assigned to the players, though more can be purchased later. Whoever holds the plurality of a country's bonds makes its decisions. A wheel on the board called the rondel shows the available actions in their specific order, though a leader can move the nation's marker up to three spaces . . . more if he's willing to pay to force events.

For example, if England's current player used Investor last turn (which pays dividends to those players who have invested money in England), the next space is Import (buy extra military units from abroad) and the one after is Production (receive free military units domestically). If the player hasn't the money or the need for new units, he can skip to Maneuver, which lets him move his armies and fleets and attack their destinations. If he wants to skip four spaces to Taxation (which pays money into the nation's coffers and determines its current standing on the world stage), he has to pay for the last step. There's also a space that allows him to create more factories in other territories.

Combat is a straightforward affair, rather a blessing when one considers all the elements one must juggle to play. One fleet can carry one army and deposit it on an enemy shore, assuming it can reach its destination. If the ship enters an enemy-occupied space, a fight occurs if either potential combatant wishes it to, otherwise there are no hostilities. Fleets

are eliminated on a one-to-one basis; ships are paired off and destroyed and the extras survive. The same thing happens when enemy armies clash. Movement is generous, ending only when confronted with opposing units. Only the side with units remaining keeps the territory or sea space. The player places a round wooden counter on anything he conquers, and those generate money for his country during Taxation.

Monies a player collects during Investor can be used to buy bonds in any nation; as investors, they can buy from any and all interests. If someone else's nation looks to be doing well, purchasing bonds from them probably means profit down the line. Buying enough shares puts a player in control of an empire until someone one-ups him. During the Taxation phase, a nation has to pay money for its units, but this is also when its stats are adjusted. It gets points added to indicate how well it's doing in relation to other powers, and when any one nation reaches 25, the game is over.

Players receive points based on how well each nation did, multiplied by the bonds they purchased for those nations. Whoever has the most points wins. This system means someone who bought an average number of bonds from pretty successful countries could win against someone with a controlling interest in only a couple of the leading nations.

Even by the standards of the European-style board games put out by Rio Grande Games, this one is impressive. There are wooden components everywhere, a big foldout map, and high-quality counters. The whole thing seems so austere one feels like they ought to be sitting across from Henry Kissinger in the drawing room while playing it. It fits rather well into a box that's broad but not so much bigger than other ones that run along similar lines. About the only complaint is the space allotted for all those lumpy wooden bits (England feels particularly cramped).

This is surely an ambitious effort, and one that requires players to marshal all their resources to see victory. The box lists a playing time of 90 minutes to two hours, while the rules claim two to three hours. Frankly they're both coming in low on their estimates as the game can easily take four hours. The feeling of power one gets from playing a nation is one thing; to play someone who is above the fray and just plays odds-maker with the fates of millions, well . . . that's something else altogether. It's an interesting new take on the war game, and melds those types of pastimes with European sensibilities effectively. The rondel is a well-thought-out feature. For example, buying units comes before employing them, and losing them in battle means not paying for them during Taxation.

On the other hand, it's a whole lot to take in. It's not that the rules are all that baffling, but while one can see what needs to happen to bring about victory, it's not always obvious the steps needed to get there, and even then it requires the player to perform well enough on the way. (The phrase "love-hate relationship" comes to mind.) Just reminding oneself that you don't need to own anything on the board to win is enough to set one's head spinning; hitch your star to the right nations and someone else does the heavy lifting. *Imperial* has the potential to be a powerhouse on the game table, but it takes a certain stamina and a persistence of strategy to play through.

--Andy Vetromile

Please Buy 2.0! Now with 80% Less Yuk than 1.0!

For reasons I can't quite explain, I'm fascinated with Apple the company. I'm not a huge fan of their products, although I enjoy them for what they are; I jumped on the iPod bandwagon pretty late, a couple of our household computers are Macs but we have a number of Windows and Linux machines as well (although I quite like OSX), no one of our household is particularly intrigued by the iTunes store, and I don't think we have any other Apple stuff to speak of. However, as ambivalent as I am toward Apple's offerings, I'm enthralled by its place in the corporate world. Truly, I can't envision any other company that fills the niche it does. What other company makes front page of its news with some version of "CEO Has Cold"?

This past week saw the announcement of a new iPhone. In reading reports of the keynote speech -- I confess not to having the patience to sit through a couple hours to get to the meat -- I was struck by how unapologetically the new phone was presented in terms of how much better it was than the old version. *Let's load two web pages at the same time . . . whoops! The new one's already done. You can grow an olive tree before the old one finished. This one has a GPS device; if you're stuck with the old one, you're lost! And the old one was crazy-expensive, but the new one will only be $200!*

I also note that the eight-gig iPhone, when released a year ago, was $599; the new eight-gig version will be $199.

Now, I can't speak for any iPhone owners, but if I'd purchased an iPhone when they came out last year, I'd feel pretty upset . . . even by the standards of tech early adopters, this seems like a lot of change really fast. Their own website boasts, "Twice as fast. Half the price." Fortunately, my own cell-phone needs have always been modest (our annual costs for cell phones are about the same as some folks' monthly plans on the iPhone), so we're definitely not the target market for these guys, no matter how cute they may be. (Now those iPod Touches? Yum. I'd take one of those.)

So, from a marketing standpoint, I can't help but wonder: Is it good to radically revamp your product? And if you do, how far should one go to point out the deficiencies in the old versions?

This controversy arose in some circles leading up to the launch of *Dungeons & Dragons Fourth Edition.* Some fans felt that advertising by Wizards of the Coast went too far in attacking previous versions, conveying a sense of, "What were you doing trying to have fun with that old stuff?!" Others disagreed, feeling it was lovingly poking fun at its fore-bearers. Of course, we now see that *Fourth Edition* is a pretty radical departure from what's gone before. Still, this is the first edition change I'm aware of where it's been made explicitly clear, "You can't really translate characters over from old versions." (Unlike that "*Second Edition* to *Third Edition* translation" booklet that was released in 2000 . . . I remember poring over that.) And this isn't even the first time that *Dungeons & Dragons* has generated similar controversy. For example, some gamers are still bitter about the transition from *Third Edition* to *Dungeons & Draogns 3.5.* The perceived need to buy the core rulebooks three years after the release of the previous version left a bad taste in some gamers' mouths. Of course, *Dungeons & Dragons* isn't the only offender when it comes to the "improvement" over previous editions. As another example, many subsequent offerings of Games Workshop render previous models of their figures unusable in their miniature-based games.

So how can game companies keep from alienating their customers, while still advancing their games?

Darned if I know. I'm just a columnist. But I have a few ideas.

Time is your friend. In general, the more time that passes between editions, the better (within reason). As best I can tell, about 16 years passed between the releases of *GUPRS Third Edition* and *GUPRS Fourth Edition.* That's a long time. And it meant that folks who picked up the new edition in 2004 did so with a reasonable amount of confidence that there wasn't going to be a new edition in a few years. Likewise the gulf between the first and second editions of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* was mighty (do you know how long those initial hardcovers were relevant?!), and the span between the second and third seemed meaty as well. But the time between *Third Edition* and the *3.5* books seemed awfully short to me. But, in some ways, Wizards of the Coast could say they mitigated that somewhat as well . . . read on.

Make it worthwhile to those who've been there all along. One thing I always thought was a great marketing maneuver was in making the first run of *Dungeons & Dragon Third Edition* hardcovers $19.95 apiece; the *Player's Handbook* even came with a CD-ROM! I don't recall the argument ever being made publicly, but I know that I was able to privately justify my own upgrade to the *3.5* books by pointing out to myself that I didn't spend all that much on the original hardcovers. In other words, I felt good about my decision to be an early adopter.

Another way to make gamers feel good is to do as best you can to make sure that old source material or supplements are still usable. For example, a great deal of the material from the first editions of West End Games' *Star Wars RPG* was more or less compatible with the last edition; the adventures could practically be picked up and run as is. (Of course, 95% of those old adventures hinged solely on "blaster" and "dodge" so it's not *too* difficult, but still . . .) **Make it look deliberate.** Especially if not a lot of time has passed between editions, it can be useful to make sure that decisions to upgrade are necessary and not merely a cheap grab for money. For example, when the *DC Heroes* RPG saw its second edition released in 1989, a mere four years had passed since its initial release. However, during that time the DC Universe had seen the largest event in its 50-year history shake the very foundation of each and every super-hero title it published, and continuing to release core rules that reflected the pre-shake-up world wouldn't have made sense. By 1989, the dust had largely settled, and it was time for a new edition.

But how can you make it look deliberate if there isn't an obvious reason for the revision? Well . . .

Maintain good communication. All companies benefit from maintaining close ties with their customers. This doesn't mean that every secret gets blabbed at every opportunity, but rather questions are accepted and answered with forthrightness and courtesy (including the obligatory "We don't know" or "We can't say at this time" phrases). Going back to the *DC Heroes* RPG, one aspect that got revised no less than four times (a neat trick in a game with three editions) were the gadgetry rules. They started out a mess, they evolved into a mess, and attempts at patching them seldom worked. But the head honchos behind the rules made no attempt at spinning this, and would give an impression of, "We tried again; hopefully these work better." During version updates in *Star Wars* (and again when the *MasterBook* system was being phased out in favor of the *D6 System*), West End Games used to release fliers that told what the big updates were, so you both didn't feel like you *needed* to pick up the new books and so you could make an informed decision as a consumer about whether getting the new edition was right for you.

All companies should work toward both giving their 100% each time they put something out there, and improving everything they're revising and rereleasing as best they're able. The trick is doing so in a way that doesn't alienate those who've been supporting you all along. And that -- like a sleek-finished MP3 player or a stirring keynote address -- is more art form than science.

--Steven Marsh

Aldous Buckminster Strathclyde: A Man Of The Leaf

for *Trail Of Cthulhu*

by Michael Anguiano

Aldous Buckminster Strathclyde has been called adventurous, aristocratic, bohemian, bored, callow, charismatic, dangerous, decadent, debauched, generous, glib, gregarious, handsome, iconoclastic, indifferent, intelligent, kind, learned, obnoxious, reckless, scandalous, self-absorbed, sophisticated, striking, sybaritic, wealthy, witty, worldly, and world-weary. All of it is true.

Standing just under 5'8", A.B.S. (as he is known) has a slim frame and delicate features that some have uncharitably derided as effeminate. His pale complexion and fine, sandy blond hair only add to the slightly waifish appearance. This perception has misled many, some to their deaths. Despite a dissolute lifestyle, A.B.S. continues to pursue the rigorous physical regimen that allowed him to achieve some small fame in athletic competitions, especially horsemanship and fencing. Consequently, he is quite able to defend himself against thugs, foreigners, and angry husbands.

A.B.S. would be the very picture of the idle rich, except that he is not idle. He maintains a very active social schedule, interrupted by his frequent travels abroad. He is very rich, coming from an aristocratic family that has distinguished itself in the fields of industry and commerce. Indeed, perhaps the only thing that can threaten the social and financial standing of the Strathclyde family is A.B.S. himself, for A.B.S. is a scandal to all of polite society, the blackest of sheep . . . which gets him invited to quite a lot of parties.

The indignation directed at A.B.S. has three primary sources. The first is his dissolute lifestyle. He is intemperate in his indulgence in alcoholic spirits, he is an open user and advocate of various drugs, and he is indiscriminate in his sexual tastes and appetites. Second is his association not merely with the cream of society, but with its dregs. A.B.S. is an active figure among the fringes of European society, including bohemians, Jews, freethinkers, jazz musicians, and anarchists, but especially among occultists. For their part, the various occultists have great respect for his keen interest, his esoteric knowledge, and his fat bank accounts. The third, and perhaps the most discussed, is the scandalous nature of his relations with his twin sister. Her tragic death has since muted this discussion, but polite society has a long memory. For his part, A.B.S. remains emotionally crippled by his sister's death. He pursues his distinctive lifestyle to distract others from his real work, and he pursues his real work to distract himself.

His real work is service to an underground organization of scholars, The Leaf & The Root. A.B.S. is a Man of the Leaf, working to track and monitor dangerous occult tomes and the groups who might misuse them. Occasionally, he is called into an operation against a growing threat. In this instance, his indifference to his own life is an asset.

Vital Statistics

Born 1899
Family: Prudence (mother), Elisabeth Beryl (sister -- dec.)
Drive: In The Blood
Occupation: Dilettante
Credit Rating, Flattery, Riding, Athletics, Languages, Occult, Pharmacy, Weapons

Inv. Pts: 24 (for two-PC game)
Gen. Pts: 65

Core Abilities

Health: 10

Sanity: 10   *Pillars of Sanity*   Epicureanism
Aesthetics & Art
Nihilism & Reliance on Self

Stability: 10   *Sources of Stability*   Neville McManus, solicitor & family friend
Reece Darlington, alienist
Eloise "Purdy" Purdue, society matron & friend

Skills

Academic

1   Art History
1   History
8   Languages: Eng. (native), Arabic, Cantonese, Fr., Gr., Hebrew, Kanji (r/w only), Latin, Sp.
4   Occult

Interpersonal

7   Credit Rating
6   Flattery
3   Reassurance
2   Streetwise

Technical

2   Art: music (piano), illustration/drawing
2   Outdoorsman
4   Pharmacy

General

14 Athletics
1   Driving
4   Firearms
4   First Aid
10 Riding
6   Scuffling
6   Sense Trouble
16 Weapons, with extensive experience in fencing

History

The sixth of seven children, Prudence Evelyn Strathclyde was the wild child of her distinguished family, with a love for travel, intrigue, and adventure. During such a trip to Siam in 1895, she disappeared from her lodgings in Phuket, along with Wendell "Del" Sebring, her bodyguard and erstwhile chaperone. She was 19.

In November of 1898, a group of embattled European missionaries was picked up by a U.S. Navy gunboat downriver from Lu-Chou on the Yangzte River, pursued by locals sympathetic to the Chinese Society Of Righteous And Harmonious Fists (the "Boxer" Movement). Prudence was among them, six months pregnant. In February of 1899, she gave birth to Elisabeth Beryl Strathclyde and Aldous Buckminster Strathclyde in the Windsor Hotel of Melbourne, Australia. When asked about their father, she simply smiled beatifically and replied, "He's with us no longer." With her children "Bitsy" and "Bucky," a radiant Prudence returned to London. She shrugged off her family's questions about the twins' paternity, giving the same evasive answer. When asked if Del was the father, she replied, "No. Poor Del, we lost him in Rangoon," and she refused any further details.

The twins were attended by a small staff of servants, raised with every privilege and indulged in all ways. Prudence was known to attend or even host parties that might include the most unsavory persons, usually with Bitsy and Bucky alongside her, to the quiet disapproval of the rest of the Strathclyde family. Nevertheless, their financial needs were quietly taken care of by Neville McManus, the family solicitor and a longtime friend, who oversaw much of the Strathclyde finances. Indeed, McManus personally oversaw selection of support staff and tutors for the twins, knowing that Prudence's attention would otherwise stray during such tasks. And so Bitsy and Bucky grew up in a most unconventional way, accompanying their mother during travels about the countryside, then the Continent, then the world. True to their mother's example, Bitsy and Bucky were bemused by or indifferent to issues of familial disdain, social acceptance, or even their own paternity.

Bitsy and Bucky were rarely apart. They shared lessons, toys, and friends as they grew and matured. Eventually, they shared lovers and vices as well. Some quietly suggested that the two had interest only in each other, with outsiders merely serving as amusement between them.

In their late teens, they began traveling without their mother's company, accompanied by one or more chaperones, whose duties were to handle matters legal and financial. It developed that Bitsy had a talent for business and money, while Bucky proved adept with languages and the occasional thumping of an uncouth native. Between them, they helped establish or expand a number of Strathclyde enterprises in various parts of the British Empire. Soon, they were supporting Prudence instead of her supporting them. Even the advent of the Great War did not spoil their fun.

And always their reputation followed them. Aldous Buckminster Strathclyde had the distinction of being the only man of his family line denied military service to the Crown strictly on grounds of morality. Within the family, they were quietly known as "the Devil's twins." The Strathclyde name, it seemed, shone brighter in their absence. Even Prudence's long-hushed pursuit of the occult was not as troubling.

By the age of 20, the two had somewhat tired of travel and so they settled in London. Soon they were notorious on the social circuit. In private, they were finally introduced to Prudence's occult studies and subsequently made a name for themselves in occult circles as well. And so they passed several years, happily shocking the neighbors and wrecking marriages.

In 1924, their house was reduced to charred ruin in a matter of minutes. Accounts vary as to the cause: an explosion from the upper floor (a passing carriage driver), a bolt of lightning from the heavens (the local vicar), unearthly flames springing from below and climbing the walls (a neighbor to the rear). Witnesses also reported various odors in the smoke, from cordite to opium to brimstone. Bucky had escaped, soot-blackened but unscathed, dragging with him the only two servants in the house. Elisabeth Beryl Strathclyde perished in the blaze. Her remains were interred in the family crypts without fanfare.

An inquest cleared Bucky of any responsibility for the blaze. The next day, he moved with the two servants to a small house in an unfashionable district of Cardiff. For the following year, he saw few visitors, did not go outside, and spoke only rarely. He later referred to this as his "Quiet Year." The notable exception was a single visit by Prudence, his mother, during which the servants busied themselves with chores outside. Soon, voices were raised in argument inside the house and, after 20 minutes, Prudence was thrown unceremoniously out into the street. The two have never spoken since.

In late 1925, Bucky emerged from his seclusion and returned to London, introducing himself as A.B.S. He re-entered society and quickly established that he could be quite scandalous without the presence of his sister. However, his associations with mystics and occultists become more probative. Under cover of colorfully sybaritic behavior, he began to distinguish those with true understanding from the poseurs and the thrill-seekers. A year later, he felt he had sufficient understanding and took a list of questions to Neville McManus. His first question: What are the legal implications of killing someone who's already dead in order to steal a book that does not exist?

McManus immediately recruited A.B.S. for the Leaf & the Root. This was the result for which he had hoped those many years ago, when he began choosing tutors for the twins. Indeed, he had done so for an entire generation of Strathclyde children, but only with A.B.S. had that come to fruition.

The Leaf & The Root

Occult studies indicated to A.B.S. that, to the extent that other intelligences may exist in the cosmos, man is merely an ant beneath their unconcerned feet. Consequently, it is up to mankind to preserve and protect itself. Knowledge and understanding would be key elements in any such effort. Unfortunately, those who would possess such knowledge are often not to be trusted with it. In such cases, action must be taken to safeguard humanity.

Thus did A.B.S. happen onto the agenda of the Leaf & the Root, which seeks to keep knowledge (and the books containing it) from those who cannot be trusted. The Leaf is a reference to the page upon which knowledge is written, and the Root is the secret understanding behind that written knowledge. As a Man of the Leaf, A.B.S. uses his various social contacts and personal charm to gather information on occult individuals, groups, and sources of knowledge. He's proven extremely adept at this, partly because of his native skills, but mostly because so many people assume he's just a rich, drunken buffoon. He passes this information to the Root, usually via Neville McManus, where the information from the Leaf operatives is collated and assessed. The Root maintains a small force of operatives when remediative action is called for, but often a Man of the Leaf will have firsthand knowledge of the relevant locale and thus must join the action.

Of course, some concentrations of dangerous knowledge, such as the Library of Miskatonic University, are regarded as being in relatively safe hands and therefore are not of concern. Private collectors are usually considered more suspect and therefore of greater interest to the Leaf & the Root.

In Play

A.B.S. is charming, handsome, rich, self-assured, and emotionally unavailable, with makes him irresistible to many women. He is a dedicated atheist, so he regards any religious devotee with bemusement at best, contempt at worst. He respects social conventions and mores only when it amuses him to do so. Outside of his investigative work, he doesn't find people very interesting and so can seem terribly bored in normal interactions; however, this is something of an asset in high society. Mindful of his own life, he dislikes seeing misery and so is quite generous with a good cause, but his typical demeanor of disinterest gives the appearance of being callous and shallow. He respects a marriage only as much as the persons in it, and thus sees no ethical concerns over intimate relations with a willing participant. He remains emotionally crippled by the death of his sister, despite the years since, and does not value his own life without her. In conversations, he skillfully evades questions about his father or mother, but he simply will not address any questions about his sister. He has never discussed the circumstances of her death.

A.B.S. has been a Man of the Leaf since early 1927 and takes his duties very seriously. His opinion on professional matters is well-respected by his peers. He zealously protects the secrecy of the Root and will only admit to the Leaf as group of persons who occasionally smoke together.

He dresses in the finest of clothes, if a bit gaudy. The gold chain of his watch fob is actually connected to a small silver cigarette case (tobacco). He usually carries an expensive lighter, a small waterproof box of matches, a small gold cigarette case (opium), an engraved flask (brandy), an inlaid flask (whiskey with a tinge of laudanum), an ivory snuff box, a Remington two-shot Derringer pistol, two stilettos, a thick wallet (several currencies), a stout walking stick of expensive wood, and a lovely set of keys that don't actually belong to any lock. He often has other pharmaceutical compounds in his bags, as well as an injection kit or other paraphernalia.

His sources of stability are Neville McManus, Reece Darlington, and Eloise "Purdey" Purdue. Of the three, only McManus knows of the real work that A.B.S. does. Darlington is an alienist who thinks A.B.S. would make a splendid case study. A.B.S. finds Darlington useful in making sense of his own life, so that he doesn't descend into another "Quiet Year." Purdey, a respected matron of London society, knew A.B.S. as a child and has seen the good man in a bad life. She defends him to others, if not defending his behavior, because she understands him. Indeed, she is the only person to have seen him weep for his sister.

Campaign Use

A.B.S. is ideal to a "Bookhounds of London" setting, but he travels widely and therefore is easily transported to any U.S. setting that might involve society connections, the idle rich, or the occult. He could be on a Leaf investigation, a Root mission, or simply wandering through looking for divertissement.

As a PC: A.B.S. has 24 Investigative points, suitable for a two PC game. For a three PC game, remove his skills in Art, Art History, History, and Streetwise. If another PC has the Follower drive, A.B.S. is an excellent candidate for their leader.

As an NPC: A.B.S. makes a useful support character to fill skill gaps for more scholarly PCs and can give them entrée to circles otherwise beyond their credit rating. He also doesn't care if the PCs insist on being in the spotlight.

As a plot device: A.B.S. is useful as a facilitator or diversion in any campaign involving occult tomes or groups, or perhaps to cause trouble for any PCs who are married. Additionally, several "question marks" from his background could provide campaign hooks:

- Prudence's whereabouts, 1895 to 1898. Leng? The Plateau of Sung? Cleveland?
- The twins' paternity. Perhaps they were "the Devil's twins" . . . or something even worse?
- The circumstances of Bitsy's death, and the contradictory accounts of it. Perhaps her remains in the Strathclyde family crypt will hold some clues . . . .
- Prudence's occult interests. When did she really begin her studies? Was her disappearance part of it? Were the twins part of it? Perhaps the twins still are part of it . . . .
- the last conversation between Prudence and A.B.S. Were they arguing about Bitsy? Was some sordid secret revealed? By whom?
- A.B.S.' continued grief. How far would he go to get Bitsy back? Or would he consider a "returned" Bitsy to be a despicable illusion of the woman he loved?
- the Leaf & the Root. Has A.B.S. been deceived as to their true aims?

Pyramid Pick

Sundered Skies (for [*Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds*](#))

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by David Blewer with Kevin L. Anderson, Paul "Wiggy" Wade-Williams, & Simon Lucas

Illustrated by Nicola Cardiff, Julie Dillon, Simon Fella, Slawomir Maniak, Daniel Rudnicki, Veronica Jones, & Cheyenne Wright

Cover by Daniel Rudnicki

178-page full-color hardcover; $34.99

The latest "Plot Point" setting for Origins-Award-winning *[Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds](#)* has much in common with two earlier titles is the range. Like *[Evernight](#)* and *[50 Fathoms](#)* before it, *Sundered Skies* is set in a world on the brink of great danger. In *Evernight,* the world is threatened by alien invasion and in *50 Fathoms* the world is being drowned, but in *Sundered Skies* the danger is yet to be revealed. But then again, the world of *Sundered Skies* has already been to hell and back . . .

Millennia ago, the world was shattered into a myriad number of islands floating in the sky. These range in size from the Draining Sea, a massive glacier mined by the Orcs for the ice shipped as water throughout the Sundered Skies to tiny affairs that hold no more than a single building. The highest, coldest, and wettest island is the Draining Sea, while the hottest, driest, and lowest is Deepsky Citadel, the Dwarven capital. Between them are islands consisting of tethered ships, shattered city buildings, and smaller islands connected by stone bridges. Most islands are more ordinary and consist of a single terrain type. However, no island is self sufficient, and each must trade to gain food and water. Transport of both these and passengers is made possible by skyships: sail, steam, or muscle-powered vessels that range in size from island hopping rowboats and sky sloops to frigates and sky galleons. Their appearance varies according to race. Drakin vessels have dragon wing-like sails, Dwarven ships are metal and steam turbine driven, Elven vessels are grown and can regenerate slowly, and Orcs prefer galleys rowed by Goblin slaves.

Navigation between islands is made possible by the use of a Waysphere, a compass-like device attuned to the navigator who must have handled the earth of the destination island. Travel in the Void between the islands is fraught with dangers: sky pirates, giant beasts, boredom, and even whole islands colliding. The greatest danger, though, is Glowmadness. Night never sets in the Void, and prolonged exposure will first drive sailors or passengers crazy with frustration, and then transform them into a debased creature.

The need for trade to continue means that war has been forbidden, with a Trade Council not only fostering trade, but also encouraging exploration and settling disputes. Each island is allowed to maintain its own laws and customs, but cannot have a standing army. Usually, though, an island will hire mercenaries or maintain a militia, while wars are fought in the shadows and conflicts are settled by Doubles or duelists. One obvious conflict lies within Heartland, the Elven nation, where the Order of the Raven or Boughbreakers have arisen to fight the Willow Queen and free the Wildings that the Elves create as slaves in the Fleshforge. Other conflicts, both religious and arcane, are more subtle affairs, only becoming apparent as *Sundered Skies'* campaign progresses.

Sundered Skies offers seven races to play. Dwarves, Elves, Humans, and Orcs are standard fantasy fare, though Elves

are part plant and have an Edge like Barkskin, Nettle Touch, or Perfume to reflect this. Drakin are natural sorcerers who serve and worship Dragons, the Chosen of which transform into Dragons. Transformed from Goblins by Glowmadness, the Glowborn are a new race that hates slavery. Wildings were created by the Elves from animals including birds, insects, and reptiles, but are now fugitives, cast no shadow, and are immune to Glowmadness.

In terms of professions, *Sundered Skies* suggests bounty hunters, explorers, scavengers, sky pirates or sailors, and sorcerers as possible backgrounds. It gives several setting specific Background or Professional Edges, such as Courier, Musketeer, Drakin Chosen, Oakthorn Armor (indicating that the character is an Elven ex-mercenary who still wears his bonded thorn-firing armor), and Untamed (Wildings able to change their fleshforged form at a moment's notice). Several Professional Edges reflect *Sundered Skies'* strong religious aspect, including Peace Monger (War Priests who limit and prevent conflict), Song Priest (priests of the Lord of Festival who oppose Glowmadness and frustration through song), and Wind Seeker (Wind Priests who speed and ease skyship travel). Several of these professions are reflected in the eight ready-to-play pre-generated characters.

Sundered Skies comes with its own dedicated pantheon. There is roughly one deity per race; for example, the Artificer is worshipped by Dwarves and engineers, while the Wild is the god of the Elves and the forest. All deities oppose the Lightbringer, the god of madness who delights in Glowmadness; and the Rotting One, the god of disease and the undead that infest many an abandoned island. The description of each god includes its symbol, associated powers (or spells), and duties and sins. The Arcane Background (Miracles) enables a priest character to use his god's given powers, just as Arcane Background (Weird Science) covers the powers of the Artificer's engineer devotees, and Arcane Background (Wizard) enables the casting of sorcerous spells.

Other setting material details people, places, and things, including sky ships and magic items, sky ship combat, creatures, important folks, and each of the major islands found in the Sundered Skies. This gazetteer is more of an overview, leaving a GM plenty of room to add his own detail. The background though, is written in stone, and that includes its secret background -- "A World in Hell" -- which is oddly placed for the players to see it. The book's Plot Point campaign is built around revealing this background.

Over a third of *Sundered Skies* is devoted to adventuring and the 30 or so Savage Tales that make up the campaign. The focus of the campaign (and indeed, any campaign) is upon the skyship, with the players owning and using one as explorers, mercenaries, scavengers, or traders. The campaign begins without them having a vessel, but this quickly changes after a scavenging mission goes awry.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The same Savage Tale also puts them on the trail of various religious artifacts needed for some imminent final battle. Acquiring these objects sees the party cast as stowaways aboard a giant undead barge, traveling to Hell and back, hunting an Orc-hating serial killer, and facing a mechanical pirate! Not all of the Savage Tales are actually tied to the campaign, but all are ready to run, triggered whenever the party visits a particular location or undertake a particular action. In addition, the adventure guidelines help the GM create adventures that can be run alongside the campaign and get much more out of the book.

Physically, *Sundered Skies* is a full color hardback with plenty of eye-catching and evocative artwork. Some of it is a little small, however. The book is decently organized and indexed, bar the odd placement of the secret background, while the writing does a good job of imparting a tightly woven background and setting. It is actually quite difficult to find fault with *Sundered Skies,* but if one must, it is that some Savage Tales suffer from an abundance of exposition.

What *Sundered Skies* delivers is a fantasy setting with a pulp-ish feel, which is no surprise given that it is for *Savage Worlds.* It takes various traditional fantasy gaming elements -- Elves, Orcs, their relationships and so on, plus gods and monsters -- and mixes them up with an understated swashbuckling thread of pirates, duelists, musketeers, and skyships, all inside a very self-contained setting. Not only is this self-contained aspect very much part of the background, but everything inside slots together in an easy-to-understand manner. Although a fantasy setting, the set up -- disparate and separate nations held together by a powerful body that brings order, between which the characters travel aboard their own vessel -- does feel reminiscent of both *[Traveller](#)* and *[Serenity.](#)* Indeed, there is nothing to stop a *Sundered Skies* campaign being played in the style of either game.

As a package, ***Sundered Skies*** has much to offer. It's a setting that is easy for both players and GM to buy into; an epic campaign that builds towards facing a big bad in true genre cliché fashion, while still leaving room for GM and players alike to explore the setting; but above all, a host of elements presented in an easy style that makes the preparation needed by the GM so very easy. Putting all this together makes ***Sundered Skies*** unfussy and undemanding -- in a good way -- gaming at its best.

--Matthew Pook

The Red Flame

by J. Edward Tremlett

Welcome back to our series of A-grade female superheroes with complex storylines who can fully compete on the playing field with the guys. Previously we looked at the dark and mysterious [Doppelganger](), and the bright and patriotic [Mrs. Liberty]() -- both of whom gained their powers by accident. This time we'll look at a self-made superheroine: Carrie Jane Orlowski, the idealistic young woman who tracked down the power of her recently-dead, favorite superhero, and became The Red Flame.

Carrie did it as a way to say "thank you" to the brave-but-flawed man who inspired her and saved her life. But she has since discovered what a thankless and terrible responsibility his unbelievable power is. Will she ultimately master the power and surpass her hero, or will she stumble and fall before she even gets up to speed?

This generic article looks at her curious origin, current problems, and possible predicaments. It also presents her stats, tips for using her, and many unanswered questions. The City could be any setting, and stat guidelines go Poor - Average - Medium - Impressive - Powerful - Way-Powerful.

The Red Flame

*"Look pal, I do **not** have time for this nonsense. Right at this moment I'm fighting time-demons in Australia, negotiating a peace treaty between two warring pantheons, and trying to locate the stolen Relic of a Catholic Saint who never existed in this reality until five days from now. And if I screw up even one of them, we are all **so** dead. So if you've got a problem with me using the minutes I can spare today to get this aid to those refugees, I suggest you keep it to yourself!"*

Two-fisted playboy Richard Walker, otherwise known as The Red Flame, had been the mystic guardian of Earth since the 1930s and was one of the earliest superheroes to wield real power. He had found the rippling, black cloak in the mysterious Red Temple while adventuring in Southeast Asia, and brought it back to The City to fight both mundane crime and threats beyond the understanding of mortal men. He could be several different places and times at once and create anything he wanted from the magic red flames inside that cloak.

He was also the best superhero ever in the eyes of Carrie Jane Orlowski, a young girl with what was charitably described as "a vivid imagination" by her humorless parents. From her youngest age she was followed by monsters intent on killing her. When she was all alone they'd leap out to do their worst. But then The Red Flame would magically appear to take care of them -- quickly and silently -- and vanish without even saying a word.

Her parents and a whole troupe of child psychologists didn't know what to make of her stories, other than a strange kind of hero worship. Eventually they realized that either she'd grow out of it or she wouldn't. And eventually Carrie realized she should just stop telling them about the monsters, because it wasn't like she was in any danger with The Red Flame around.

And he was, too; as a son of The City, hardly a day went by when he wasn't somewhere, doing something civic-minded (other than saving her from monsters). But since he was a local boy, his flaws were the stuff of local legend. When she got old enough, Carrie read his many biographies -- all unauthorized, all scandalous -- and learned about his recklessness and grandstanding before he became a hero. She also heard the salacious whispers about how he spent his time *out* of costume.

That didn't matter so much to her, though . . . especially after he saved her life *and* talked to her afterwards. Her senior year in high school, she was going home during yet another fight between heroes and villains, and was almost stepped on by a giant robot. But The Red Flame appeared and bound the metal monstrosity in a gigantic red box.

She told him she owed him. He, of course, said that no, she didn't. And when she said she owed him thanks for all the times before, and said that she wished there was someway she could repay him, he looked at her strangely and then smiled, as though he'd figured something out. Then he vanished without saying another word.

Carrie was puzzled, but in time she decided he'd liked the idea of someone doing *him* a favor, sometime. As the years went by she wracked her brain to figure out just what she could do for someone like him, but failed. She hoped she could talk to him about it the next time the monsters attacked, but she made it all the way through her degree in Social Services without a single one.

After she graduated, she volunteered for the Peace Corps in Thailand, wanting to give something back to the world (as well as defer her loans). Six months into her 27-month commitment, there was a horrible, reality-shattering battle, and The Red Flame was killed saving the world from something too terrible to describe. Carrie somehow knew that he died gladly, but that didn't make the loss any easier, or salve the regret for not having found a chance to help.

She might have just slogged on -- praying the monsters never came back -- if it wasn't for the commemorative issue of *City.* In one of the many interviews with his colleagues, one of the oldest said that, now that The Red Flame was dead, the rest of them were cleaning up after him. All of the magnificent things he'd created were falling apart, and they had to recapture and contain a number of menaces and nemeses from the past.

When the reporter asked why someone didn't just take up the mantle and fix those problems himself, the colleague said, "It's not something that can be handed over. Richard had to find that cloak and earn it. Until someone else does that, there's no Red Flame."

Find it and earn it? There was an idea. She'd often wondered if he hadn't been more than ready to hand the reins over to someone else. And if a bored and uncaring playboy like Richard Walker could find that power, and use it to help people, then why couldn't she?

In one of the few Red Flame biographies with information from the source, Walker spoke of finding an unnamed village in the northwest jungles of what was now Cambodia. It had sat within the ruins of a temple so old and strange that no one knew who had built it. After some time spent there he found the clues he needed to find the Red Temple and claim its prize.

He wouldn't say any more than that, of course; he didn't want any villains following in his footsteps. But Carrie had a good source of information: the Peace Corps assessment teams who were evaluating the conditions within Cambodia to put aid teams within the country. She made a few inquiries and discovered that they'd encountered a village that almost-perfectly matched Walker's descriptions. And that was all Carrie needed to know.

With a guilty heart she packed some of her things, stole supplies, and snuck away from her commitment. Once she was across the shared border, she hitchhiked her way to the ruined temple -- dodging police and predators -- and before long she was at its crumbling, tree-eaten walls. She was exhausted, and it was near dark, but she was also bug-eaten and down to her last riel. So she walked into the complex, hoping to find someplace to sleep; questions could wait until morning.

But there was no one there. The village was totally deserted, except for flying columns of vermin. As she explored, she caught glimpses of strange, fleeting shadows, and heard far-off echoes of what might have been footsteps or the beats of mighty wings. The light grew fainter, the Moon rose in the sky, and she became convinced that the vermin clouds were slowly following her. And she felt horrible, genuine fear for the first time in ages: If the monsters got to her now, who would protect her?

Carrie still doesn't remember much of the battle that erupted, then. She knows there were two different groups of monsters, this time: the roiling clouds of vermin and stone statues of bird-men brought to life. And she also knows that the two sides were fighting each other for the right to kill *her.* But what made her memory go sideways was that The Red Flame came to save her, and when she finally got a good look at her hero, she saw her own face under the cloak . . .

When she woke up, she was in the fantastic, vast Red Temple itself, hewn from glowing, red stone. She was taken by faceless monks wrapped in thick, burning red robes to the master of the temple. And when she met the stern and powerful presence -- also faceless, also wrapped in burning red robes -- he told her that she had proven herself worthy to take the mantle of her lost hero.

Indeed, now that she was here, reality had shifted so that she had *always* been worthy. That was why a near-endless succession of monsters and assassins had been dispatched to kill her from the time she was a child. And that was why The Red Flame appeared to save her from those magical creatures; she had subconsciously tapped into the power whenever one appeared, and created an echo of him to save her.

But he explained that the cloak was not a gift of power for its own sake, but a massive responsibility. To command the power was to fight creatures from beyond the realms of imagination, wrestle conundrums that vexed the gods, and work backwards, forwards and sideways in time to keep the many forces of evil and horror from assaulting the universe. She would spend the rest of her life focusing on titanic, mind-warping battles that mortal minds were not suited to contemplate, and would have to do it mostly alone. She could reply upon the master of the Red Temple for advice and support, of course, but in the end the decisions would be hers to shoulder, as would any failures.

It was an impressive speech, but after a while she realized that the Red Master was not merely talking to her, but trying to get inside her head. She saw into *his* mind, then, and discovered that the Red Master had done the same thing to Richard Walker. The playboy's penchant for reckless adventure had been converted into a burning desire to repent of his past excesses, and serve without question . . . and now it was trying to do the same to her.

Carrie did what any self-respecting person should: she summoned the power that had always been hers and put her foot down, telling the Red Master to leave her mind alone. The surprise and insult enraged the Red Master, and the resulting magical tug-of-war over the black cloak was cyclopean in scale. In the end, Carrie won, but only because she refused to back down, no matter what it threatened to do.

At that moment, Carrie put on the cloak, and became transcendent with power. She could see everything: all threats, all space, all recorded times . . . *everything.* And she was left with a million unanswered questions, a near-monumental list of messes to clean up, a "mentor" that didn't want to talk to her just then, and the first true understanding of how many threats she'd have to deal with, now that the power was hers to shoulder.

Was she happy? No. But she'd made her bargain with power, and had to stick with it. It's what Richard Walker would have done.

Characteristics

Age 25; American Citizen with no criminal record

Stats: Average Body; Impressive Mental; Impressive Spirit

Appearance: 5'7", 250 lb, short mousy brown hair, green eyes, plain features. Often dresses in sweats and T-shirts spouting various social causes when she's enjoying downtime.

Costume: The black cloak is long and heavy and burns red from the inside. Carrie is always wearing it, but when she lets it show she creates the same form-fitting red bodysuit with black buttons, boots and gloves that her predecessor wore. However, unlike him she doesn't wear a mask, preferring to keep the cloak's hood up and her face wreathed in flames to protect her identity.

Family: Father Charles H. Orlowski (50, not impressed), Mother Jane Hadrian Orlowski (51, not amused).

Power: The Black Cloak of The Red Flame

The Red Flame's connection to her power is the black cloak. It gives its wearer the power to:

- Create anything she can imagine, so long as she's familiar with the concept. All things so created operate at the Way-Powerful level, and remain until she dismisses them or loses control over the power. If she has a decent understanding of how such an object would work, she can set it in motion and keep it going even if she is not concentrating on it. However, if she has no real idea on the thing she created would work, it will only remain physically active so long as she's concentrating on it. That said, she is always connected to all things she has made, and knows if they're being handled or attacked.
- See events and/or travel anywhere she knows the location of, to any past date she can put a year to, in any dimension she knows the existence of. She can be there and come back instantly in real time, without worries of "relativity" distorting its flow or her perceptions.
- Be made instantly aware when things are "wrong" in the dimension she's currently in. This only applies to cosmic matters: time, space, and dimensional cohesion.
- Have access to the memories and exploits of all previous wearers of the cloak, which so far includes only Richard Hawkins.
- Communicate with anything or anyone, and read any language as though it were her own.
- Be protected from magic, blunt force, and mundane energy up to the Way-Powerful level. She will enjoy ideal health and immortality so long as she is a servant of the Flame, but will only look young when she's in costume. Her true age will show when she deactivates it.

The power has limits. She can't keep more groups of creations going than she can pay reasonable attention to at one time. She gets around this by going backwards in time, to pay attention to different groups at different times, but this becomes mentally exhausting after a while. She cannot be in more than one place at once, or see or travel into the future.

Her chief weakness is possession of the cloak, itself. If it is wrested from her, she will lose all connection to its powers, and control over everything she's made, until she's regained the cloak from its usurper. She would also revert to her true age, and whatever health problems she would have developed if she hadn't become The Red Flame will develop accordingly.

Current Situation

Carrie's first priority has been cleaning up after the previous Red Flame: making certain the things he set into place are back as they were, if not a little better. To do this she's made working relationships with his former colleagues, most of whom are willing to accept her as his replacement. They have been good sources of tactical advice.

Her second priority is countering the many threats facing reality at the present moment. An average week sees two god-fights, an incursion from a neighboring dimension, three attempts to rewrite history, and any number of blasphemous rituals. She's found she can do some creative scheduling and put some things "off" by dealing with them retroactively, but it can be confusing.

Her most rewarding task is using her powers to help people: feed refugees, protect victims of hateful aggression, and make sure international aid shipments get where they're supposed to. Government soldiers, bandit gangs, and militias have learned to drop their guns and run when they see red. (She also tried to make amends with the Peace Corps by sending a small army to help with the agricultural commitment she abandoned.)

She's been trying to repair the relationship with the Red Master, who is still trying to manipulate her mind. He thinks the job requires an unquestioning servant and refuses to see anything other than the big picture. When she can get him to give her advice, he withholds information and verbally bullies her, as he knows this will anger her and make her vulnerable to mental attack. So far she's kept her cool.

The one thing she hasn't done yet is explain herself to her parents. As far as they know, she's skipped out on her post-graduation plans -- which they didn't like, anyway -- and is hitchhiking her way across Asia. She's not certain how to tell them the truth.

As Friend

The Red Flame is distant, and never seems like she's all there. Sometimes she looks off into space for minutes without saying anything, mumbles something about scheduling "that" for later, and rejoins the conversation as though she never left it. She can't be counted on to make regular meetings or social functions, but when the bad guys roll out the big guns, she's amazing . . . even if she's holding back.

As Foe

The good news is that most crooks and supervillains will never tangle with her, as she's too busy with really big stuff. The bad news is that there's no guarantee that she won't help out one of the others, or take a break from the big stuff to do something small and rewarding, like foil a robbery or global takeover. And if you ever, ever mess with something magical or too big for words, she'll probably crash the party.

As Background

The super-watchers in the press are intrigued by the replacement, as she hasn't spoken to the press at all. Most of the time, she'll remain in the background, except during world-shaking crises. The characters will only likely encounter her if they engage in dimensional travel or high-stakes magic, or if they join one of the heavy-hitting superhero groups.

Unanswered Questions

- Carrie is painfully aware of just how hokey her origin sounds: she was *always* The Red Flame, even when she wasn't? While such a thing isn't outside the realm of possibility, she doubts it was that pat. Was something else protecting her? If so, how did she seize the power to defeat the Red Master? And why isn't it telling her the truth?
- Who was sending those monsters, and why did they stop coming so frequently? None of the evil presences Carrie has encountered thus far have proven to be the culprits. Are her previous nemeses hiding from her, now? Or are they waiting for the right moment to strike again?
- Why did the previous Red Flame act so strangely towards her when they finally talked? Did it have something to do with the power manifesting in her, or was there something else at work?
- What *is* the Red Master's problem? Why is he insisting on giving her a psychic lobotomy for the greater good? Did a previous wielder of the power turn evil? If so, why doesn't the cloak have any information about it?
- How long can she burn the candle at both ends before burning out? Walker turned to cheap thrills to escape the stress; what will she do? Is there an escape option other than death? If so, will she take it?

Feel Free to Visit Your Own Prison

This past week I started watching the new series of *Doctor Who,* thanks to the magic of plastic-metal discs that are all the rage with the kids this days. And by "started watching" (or "new series," depending on your world view) I mean Season One of the relaunch. Yes, I've been a bit behind on my hype.

As a result of my rejoining the world of popular culture that's unknown to 95% of my fellow country-mates, this contains a mini-spoiler of an episode from that season, so if you're squeamish about these sorts of things, you may want to read the rest of the column while squinting.

The first two-parter of that season had a situation where the heroes end up locking themselves inside a room to keep them from being captured by an enemy. It was a neat story, partly because it felt so claustrophobic (despite being a nice-sized room) and partly because it seemed like such a change of pace; at one point, the hero opens the room briefly, makes a taunting/menacing threat to the antagonists, and then seals himself back inside the room. At the end of that scene, I turned to the missus and commented, "Y'know, I don't think you'd see anything like that on *Star Trek.* 'I'll do everything in my power to stop you. Whoops; gotta go!'"

I've said before that I'm a huge fan of prison stories. They're a great way of starting a campaign; they're good for a one-shot adventure; they keep players on their toes. But seeing that episode made me realize there's perhaps a *neater* possibility, if the GM can work it out: The heroes place *themselves* inside the prison. After all, while starting an adventure with "You wake up in a cell" is a classic trope, it does remove a fair bit of choice from the heroes. But if the good guys are presented with a dilemma where they need to lock themselves up, for whatever reason . . . well, that has all the benefits of a prison tale, combined with the power of the illusion of free will.

Wwhat kind of reasons would cause the heroes to lock themselves in a cell?

It's the only way to get information or otherwise infiltrate a situation. In the comics and some detective shows, the hero will occasionally go deep undercover in a prison to solve a particularly thorny problem, usually by using his secret identity (or another identity). Batman went undercover into Arkham Asylum. Adrian Monk went to jail. And I'm sure there are others. It's a great hook -- "The heroes . . . surrounded by the worst scum of society!" -- and it's all the more delicious if the players think of it themselves.

It's the only way to survive a risky situation. Imagine the heroes know there's going to be an imminent bomb attack and they have access to a bomb shelter; what are they likely to do? Right; climb into the refrigerator. But *after* that, they might go to the shelter. After the attack, the shelter becomes covered in debris or other escape-blocking conditions, and the heroes are now stuck. Now what?

The heroes remain locked for the greater good. Envision a murder-mystery scenario, where the heroes are at a fancy hall or other party and they find themselves in a room that has become curiously locked, among a group where one is a killer. Unbeknownst to the others, the heroes find the key and can leave at any time . . . but doing so would enable everyone else at the party to leave as well. Do the good guys allow a murderer to go free, or permit themselves to remain locked in a room knowing that they're playing a dangerous investigatory game of cat and mouse with a killer?

The heroes find themselves voluntarily "trapped" not by walls, but by themselves. As a fantasy example, say the heroes have each been entrusted with a Sacred Flame of Truth, which is a candle that must be carried and permitted to burn uninterrupted for 24 hours. A few hours into their vigil, they witness something significant that entices them to investigate . . . but they must do so very slowly, lest the flame burns out. (If you want to limit activity to a single building, have it simply be windy outside.) Do the heroes abandon their vow and permit the flame to die? Do they allow themselves to be handicapped in such a way?

This scenario can also be applied to a modern or futuristic setting. For example, an important computer algorithm might be using computing power to generate a cure for an important ally, where time is of the essence. The heroes

learn of a significant threat that they could use their computers to help with -- perhaps to enter cyberspace or something else resource-intensive -- but doing so would delay the results of that computation (and possibly result in death or Something Else Bad). Do the players voluntarily allow themselves to be hampered by the lack of tech they've grown accustomed to?

In my mind and experience, part of the GM's job is to place the heroes in situations where they can be heroic. And heroism involves making difficult choices, coming up with creative solutions, and generally trying to muddle through seemingly impossible conundrums while staying true to values and goals. And if one definition of heroism revolves around doing the right thing when presented with the opportunity, then perhaps letting the PCs make their *own* prison is a good chance at making a memorable tale.

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Galactic Destiny

Published by [Golden Laurel](#)

Designed by Jonathan Mauro, Elegwen Ó Maoileóin, Richard Pulis, & Wayne Pulis

Illustrations & graphics by Marcel Chenier, Tristan Noone, Wayne Pulis, & Richard Pulis

Full-color boxed set with foldout mounted map board, 10 six-sided dice, 225 cards (50 each of Action, Senator, Event, & Sector; six Party; five Ministers; one Rebellion; & 13 Sector Abilities), seven sets of ownership counters (for six players & the Ke'Ras), 45 Corruption/Shadow tokens (two-sided), 25 track counters, & rulebook; $60

Still playing *Diplomacy* but find you have too many friends left when it's over? For a change of pace, try *Galactic Destiny.* The saga takes place on a much larger scale, and you can lose just as many friends if done correctly.

The object of the game is to achieve control of 10 sectors before evil overcomes known space. Barring that, anyone who can control the entire Ministry wins.

Three to six players play political parties vying for control of the galactic government. Starting with a small fleet and a sector under the control of their faction, they attempt to expand their holdings. The board depicts the galaxy, spiraling out from the center; that core is too cosmopolitan for anyone to easily take, but further out people are willing to listen to a good speech.

Turns go through the Galactic, Senate, and Intrigue Phases. The first is mostly a bookkeeping segment during which new senators become available and the events that color the turn are announced. It's also when the Republic finds out which Sectors are in turmoil and therefore ready to fall to the dreaded Ke'Ras, a race that nearly destroyed the galaxy in the last war.

Political deals and infighting rule the Senate Phase. Parties want their Senators elected to Ministries like Defense or Finance, and everyone can propose new laws (with a few limits). Players may levy taxes, expand the Republic Fleet, send it to fight the Ke'Ras for the public good, or decide on the toppings for the pizza. Seats go to those who can field the votes or cough up the Influence. Influence and Money make the world go 'round, and every Sector offers some of each to whoever controls it. Positions offer more abilities, but one need never hold an office to win the game. Finally, Senators may be prosecuted, resulting in fines or even death. This may be a politically motivated witch hunt, or the target may have incurred Corruption. Corrupt actions get results but reduce that character's voting ability; worse, it gives bonuses to the encroaching Ke'Ras, so eliminating the guilty may actually be the best thing for the Republic.

Finally, Parties expand their holdings during Intrigue. Sectors may be Invaded militarily or Campaigned in diplomatically. Each turn random Sectors become hotbeds of unrest where Campaigns may see success. Invasions are illegal (they generate Corruption), but the attacker may go anywhere. (The Republic Fleet may be sent to defend against, or assault, the Ke'Ras.) Each ship in combat rolls a six-sided die, and all results are added to the Command value of a Senator if he's sent along as Admiral. An empty Sector under fire gets a die and its own Defence Rating (if ships are there, the process is the same for the enemy commander). The higher total wins, though 5s or 6s destroy ships

and Senators as not-so-collateral damage.

Campaigns are gentle advances to the people in a Sector, intended to sway them to one's Party (sending Senators who match the Sector's dominant Party and race garners a bonus). The Senator uses his Diplomacy rating and spends Influence, and makes a die roll much like an Invasion. Campaigns are legal, though, and generate no Corruption. Aside from Money and Influence, some Sectors provide special abilities to the owner, like rerolls on combat dice. If a player takes over 10 Sectors he wins the game. Alternatively, a Party with enough political power to vote himself into all the ministry positions at once also wins. But if a 10th Sector falls to the Ke'Ras, they conquer the galaxy and nobody wins.

It's a hefty box, and one with a mighty nice selection of pieces. The models for the fleets are the best part, with some that look like sci-fi jets and one that resembles a sort of Death Star globe. There are good counters, nice decks of cards for the various people, places, and events, and solid Party placards with most of the game information on them (and another general reference "sheet" that goes into greater detail). The hiccups include some hard-to-read text on some Party sheets and annoying, tiny little markers for the Money and Influence tracks (better replace them with dice or numbered counters). And the artwork . . . well, it runs hot and cold, but mostly cold. It shows creativity, but not the refinement to look professional (akin to some early Doug Shuler).

In spite of the amateurish illustration (and the capitalization of every possible term), the game shows a maturity of design. Many games offer the chance to conquer by force or sway by savvy, but few promise player interaction and follow through. This one does. Making deals means survival. Gaining office and passing laws is such an entertaining addition (and one that actually operates as advertised), it adds exactly the flavor needed for such an enterprise. Throw in special abilities for senators (lots of assassinations . . . odd) and the unpredictability of galactic events and it approaches the real feel of commanding a political entity from all angles.

Galactic Destiny is complex enough it takes a few plays to get used to, and even then it's a pretty lengthy and argumentative game (often clocking in at four hours). Of course, if players are vicious enough it may not last that long, but eliminating foes isn't really possible and it distracts from more profitable pursuits. While there are only a couple of victory conditions, the avenues for getting there are many and varied; a Party can even choose to become the Rebellion, losing holdings in the Republic but gaining far greater freedom of action. Your friends may hate you after it's over, but they're coming back to play again.

--Andy Vetromile

The Omniscient Eye

How Dangerous Is the Last of the Red-Hot Lava?

Just how dangerous is lava? How quickly does it burn through steel, or concrete? How fast does it travel? How close can you stand to it without protection and not be seriously burned? How far can lava bombs be thrown by an active volcano?
--*Owen K.C. Stephens*

In some ways lava is among the less dangerous results of a volcanic eruption. This is not to suggest that it is safe, however. Broadly speaking, there are three categories of lava, with a fourth not known on the modern Earth; they vary in the composition of the molten rock, which in turn influences the temperature at which they erupt and the viscosity of the resulting lava.

The coolest lavas are of the felsic type, high in aluminum and silica. They erupt mostly at 650-750 degrees Celsius, though they sometimes reach 950 degrees Celsius or higher. They are highly viscous, and hence tend to flow slowly, often clogging their passage with partly-solidified rock. Gas mixed in with the lava tends to coagulate in large internal vesicles, which may cause explosions when they eventually near the lava surface. These lavas are associated with explosive and pyroclastic eruptions (see below). Their flows typically advance slowly, tens of feet per hour or per day; faster flows may cover 1,000 feet per hour.

Intermediate lavas have a greater proportion of magnesium and iron, and erupt at 750-950 degrees Celsius. They are less viscous than felsic lavas, and tend to flow more easily.

Mafic lavas are the hottest type known in the modern world; they erupt at 950 degrees Celsius or higher, potentially reaching 1200 degrees, and are extremely fluid, sometimes flowing nearly as easily as water. They are associated with gentle eruptions; the well-known Hawaiian flow patterns of aa and pahoehoe are formed by mafic lavas. Their particular hazard is that they often solidify on the upper surface while continuing to flow beneath the crust; they will typically be able to support a person's weight within an hour of the initial crust formation, even if the crust is still moving down-stream thanks to the lava flow beneath, though the surface will give slightly for some time thereafter. In the long term, these flows can form hollow lava tubes, as seen in many parts of the United States and indeed on the moon. These are, of course, the fastest-flowing lavas, and typically flow at about 1-2mph; however, they can reach speeds of 35mph cross-country if there is sufficient material to keep the stream fed.

Ultramafic lavas, such as the komatiite flows of South Africa, were even hotter and less viscous, flowing very rapidly; they erupted at temperatures of 1600 degrees Celsius. Modern conditions are not sufficient to generate such very hot lavas; the last ones are believed to have occurred around the Cambrian era, though there is some evidence to suggest that volcanoes on Io are erupting at about 1450 degrees Celsius.

While the hotter lavas are more immediately hazardous to someone standing nearby, they do have the virtue of being mostly predictable: they behave like a flow of extremely hazardous water. Cooler lavas have more irregularities in their flow; if a block solidifies and forms a plug, pressure behind it will build up, and the resulting explosion will be rather more dangerous even though it is not as hot as the fluid lava.

In terms of personal hazard, the amount of hot material is as important as its temperature: a pocket blowtorch will reach 1300 degrees Celsius, but is small enough not to be a major danger to its user. A fireman suggests that for an unprotected person approaching a large mass of lava distances of 35 feet for extreme discomfort, 15-20 feet for serious injury, and 10 feet for spontaneous combustion would be reasonable.

The highest-grade fire proximity suits are rated for short exposures to material at around 800 degrees Celsius and longer durations of radiant heat at 1100 degrees Celsius; these will cope safely with close proximity to most lavas,

though not if the wearer is unfortunate enough to fall in. While steels may soften at higher lava temperatures, most of them will not melt. Concrete, however, begins to lose structural strength at around 300 degrees Celsius, and by 600 degrees is likely to be disintegrating on a large scale.

While they are quite hot, the main structural hazard of pure lava flows is simply their mass. Like a landslide, they tend to scrape man-made structures out of their path (and then ignite them). Concrete walls have been used to divert lava flows with some success. They must be built very thick, both to resist heat and to stay seated in the ground and not simply be pushed away by the oncoming flow. This is also why lava defenses tend to be made to divert, rather than dam, a flow.

However, lava is not the only thing that will come out of a volcano. Where pressure is able to build up for some time, typically where felsic rather than mafic lavas are involved, a pyroclastic eruption -- which is an explosion of lava as a barrier is suddenly released or broken -- may take place. Much like the effects of the sudden opening of a soft-drink bottle, this eruption is driven both by the internal pressure of the lava reservoir and by the expansion of gas dissolved in the lava and coming out of solution as pressure is released. There are three main classes of pyroclastic effect:

- The pyroclastic flow, sometimes known as nuée ardente (burning/glowing cloud), is 10% or more solid matter mixed with hot gas. It is a heavy cloud, and flows downhill following terrain. It travels at between 50 and 100mph, and the gas components are at around 1000C.
- The pyroclastic surge is a more gassy and turbulent cloud, containing fluidized gas and rock fragments; it is about 0.1%-1% solid matter. Since it has much less solid content, it is a much lighter cloud than the nuée ardente and can often cross high terrain. It will flow at 200 miles per hour or faster. The town of Saint-Martin, in Martinique, was destroyed in 1902 by such a surge. Pyroclastic surges can be further divided into hot and cold surges, based on whether they are hotter or colder than 100 degrees Celsius (a hot surge can reach 800 degrees). Cold surges are usually the result of volcanic interaction with subterranean water (which often leads also to "phreatic eruptions" or steam explosions, as at Krakatoa in 1883 and Mount St Helen's in 1980) but even they are nothing like safe: carbon dioxide concentration can exceed 15%, which is fatal to most life.
- The pyroclastic fall is a general ash-fall, which can stretch many thousands of miles from the eruption site. The chemical hazard is minimal, though dust can cause choking.

Pyroclastic eruptions are also the commonest source of lava bombs (and their smaller taxonomic cousins, lapilli -- if the ejected blob of rock is less than 64 millimeters across it is not counted as a bomb). These tend to originate in high-temperature fluid lava. They can reach more than a meter in size, and at the Asama eruption in 1935 bombs of up to six meters in diameter were observed some 600 meters from the eruption seat. After the Kilauea eruption in 1924, eight-ton lava bombs were found 1,000 meters from the site. Smaller bombs have been found up to 12 miles from the vent, and often acquire aerodynamic shapes as they cool in flight. In spite of their name, lava bombs do not explode. They are merely fast-moving masses of semi-molten rock.

Overall the hottest eruptions are the least dangerous: this lava flows fast, but predictably. Cooler lavas are still hot enough to kill; being more viscous, they flow irregularly, and are more likely to be accompanied by explosions and other violent effects.

Thanks are due to Scott Lynch for information about the detailed hazards of close approach to extremely hot objects.

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--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!

The Hidden Opportunities of the Sewers

by Nicholas Lovell

The sewers that lie beneath a big city are a sprawling, interconnected, secret and intriguing place. They offer a parallel route through the city streets, a refuge for the oppressed or criminal and a wealth of opportunities for a GM to spring surprises, encounters and storylines on the players.

Background

For millennia, the primary drainage system of any city has been the natural watercourses. Effluent and garbage were dumped into streams and rivers, polluting the water and rendering it noxious and foul-smelling. The run-off included unpleasant by-products from industrial processes as well as domestic waste. The River Fleet, which flows into the Thames in central London, was a drainage waterway for the tanners, dyers, and slaughterhouses of the area such that the Thames often ran red, accompanied by a truly appalling smell.

Throughout the Middle Ages, most doctors and scientists subscribed to the miasma theory of diseases, associating high levels of infection with "bad air." It was not until 1854 that a British doctor by the name of John Snow linked a cholera outbreak in London to the drinking of polluted water drawn from the effluent-rich River Thames. Using a statistical analysis (and founding the modern discipline of epidemiology in the process) Snow demonstrated that the infections were emanating from a single water pump in Broad Street in Soho. This breakthrough, together with the mid-19th century reverence for engineering, led to a rapid construction of massive sewerage systems throughout Europe. Many of these sewers are still part of the drainage systems today.

The sewers had to cope with rapidly rising volumes due to the combination of growing urban populations and increased water usage with the widespread adoption of the flushing toilet in the mid-19th century. The flushing toilet provided a great improvement to public health and living conditions but lead to a massive increase in the amount of waste that the sewers, drains, and rivers had to carry away.

The majority of sewers combine the need for the removal of domestic effluent with storm channels to remove rainwater from the streets. This combination can be unpleasant after a particularly heavy downpour: in London in the early 21st century, the sewers overflow 50 to 60 times a year, discharging raw sewage directly into the River Thames.

Cities that were founded more recently (typically in the 20th century) have tended to separate the domestic sewage system from the storm drains.

Construction

Characters venturing into the underground world of sewers may very well be amazed by the quality of the construction. Most cities follow the same basic pattern, with small sewers leading from every street and alley to a number of large, main sewers. Where the city is located on a river bank, many of these sewers follow the natural tendency for water to flow downhill until they reach an "intercepting" sewer on each side of the river. The elegant stone embankments along the River Thames in London and the River Seine in Paris both hold these interceptory sewers (as well as subway lines, roads, utilities and more).

The small sewers are not very big. Typically about three feet in diameter, the only way to get through them is bending very low or, in the worst case, crawling on the belly.

The main sewers and the interceptory sewers are very different from these small pipes. In Paris, for example, the sewers follow the pattern of the streets very closely. Every thoroughfare has a corresponding sewer and the junctions have street signs to help the underground traveler locate their position. These sewers are enormous, often fifteen feet in

diameter. It is not unusual for there to be a deeper main channel for the sewage and a raised walkway that only gets flooded at times of heavy rain. It is possible to travel for some distance through these underground sewers without getting your feet wet.

The majority of Victorian sewers were built of tight-fitting brickwork with arched roofs. Earlier sewers, such as the Cloaca Maxima in Rome, were either built with barrel roofs in stone, or even simply out of timber supports laid across an open drain.

Modern drains are likely to be built of concrete and look more like subway tunnels than the typical image of a sewer system. The liquid is likely to be more fast-flowing in these tunnels as the walls and floor are smooth without the friction provided by the rough edges of brickwork and mortar.

Contents

Storm drains are the least unpleasant type of sewer. Since they only carry rain run-off, together with whatever gets swept into the gutters by the water, the bad smells are usually limited to decaying leaves and other vegetation.

Modern sewers are also not so bad. In a major city with little industrial activity, human waste is hugely diluted by water from toilets, baths, washing water and rainfall. As a result, while the place is not exactly pleasant, nor is it a place of overpowering nausea. The GM may consider, however, requiring a Will roll for a PC of a particularly squeamish or fastidious disposition to enter. A periodic DX check to stay upright on the slippery surfaces may also be appropriate, and combat would be likely to be at a -2 for treacherous footing.

However, parts of the sewer network can be much more unpleasant. In an area with many restaurants, like London's Leicester Square and Chinatown districts, huge deposits of rancid fat can build up on the floors and walls of the sewers, providing a breeding ground for insects and rats. This fat not only stinks but it makes the already slippery ground treacherous in the extreme. In *GURPS* terms, DX rolls at -2 to stay upright and combat at -4 would be appropriate. Similarly, in the region of an abattoir, such as the East End of London, the liquid will turn a deep red as blood is washed into the system.

The time of day also makes a difference. In the mornings in a modern city the water level will be at its highest (and smell of pine freshener) as the daily ritual of showering and flushing reaches its peak.

A medieval sewer may be much worse. Before the invention of the flushing toilet, there was much less clean water in the system. Heavy industry such as tanning, dying, and abattoirs would discharge their foul-smelling waste into the same drainage channels. This environment would require a Will Roll for all characters (modified for the particularly squeamish). Staying upright would require a DX-2 roll periodically, while combat would again be at a -4.

Disease

The sewers are not pleasant places but nor are they an instant health hazard. Municipal workers, often known as flushers, travel them every day, although they are usually equipped with thigh-length waders, protective boiler suits, helmets, emergency breathing apparatus and a harness. The harness is necessary because if someone falls into the muck, they may be too slippery to pull to their feet again.

The majority of infectious diseases that are waterborne -- such as cholera, typhus, dysentery, and the range of other fevers that decimated medieval cities -- are caught through drinking infected water. Simply walking in the sewers does not run a high risk of infection. Falling over and swallowing water significantly increases the risk, while it is also possible to catch these illnesses through open cuts or wounds. Fighting in the sewers (and the high likelihood of infected excrement entering the bloodstream via wounds) is not recommended.

Other diseases included gastro-enteritis (which has symptoms similar to food poisoning), Weil's disease (spread via rat urine and with flu-like symptoms), and infections of the eyes and skin.

Explosions

The atmosphere in a sewer can be dangerous. In 1929, an explosion in the sewer system of Ottawa killed one person and caused substantial property damage. The explosion flowed along the sewer system, erupting out of manholes in towers of flame. In 1992, 206 people were killed, over 500 injured, and 15,000 were left homeless after a series of enormous explosions in Guadalajara, Mexico destroyed several city blocks. In 1846, the build up of noxious gases in the River Fleet (which had been pressed into use as one of London's primary sewers) led to an explosion, disgorging a flood of sewage which swept away three houses in Clerkenwell.

The primary gas that is naturally occurring in the sewers is methane. This explosive gas rarely builds to a level that is likely to lead to combustion. However, industrial processes or illegal dumping of waste oil and other flammable chemicals can dramatically increase the odds, while in Guadalajara, a leak in a nearby gasoline pipeline allowed gasoline fumes to gather until a stray spark ignited the sewer system.

There are some risks in traveling the sewers with a naked flame. Modern visitors to the Paris Catacombs are warned that "an open fire can be fatal." Electric flashlights or shielded Davy lamps like those used by miners are preferred to a burning brand.

Floods

Even in cities without heavy rainfall, flash floods can and do overwhelm the sewers. It only less than a tenth of an inch of rain in an hour for the London drains to fill to bursting point and overflow into the Thames. In 2003, almost 1.2 inches of rain fell in half an hour. The London sewers overflowed and flooded the Thames with raw sewage, killing hundreds of thousands of fish and spreading germs and toxins, syringes, and condoms throughout the river.

In a realistic campaign, these flash floods are more likely to be like a fast tide swirling up around the characters rather than a wall of water. Staying upright or moving against the flow will be difficult and finding a way out of the sewers before the water reaches the vaulted roof overhead could be a matter of life or death.

In a more cinematic campaign, or in parts of the world where really heavy rainfalls occur, the sewers could shift from gentle stream to raging torrent in seconds. One consolation for characters is that in these circumstances, the vast majority of the water is merely run-off from streets and gutters, not human or industrial waste.

The majority of sewers have storm drains that discharge overflow straight into a nearby river. However, these drains usually have grilles on the discharge pipes to prevent unauthorized access. These grilles would also prevent PCs from exiting via these overflow pipes in a hurry.

Getting Lost

Catching Diseases Underground

While sewers are unsanitary places, certain precautions can make infection less likely. These modifiers assume an unprotected adventuring party. A properly-equipped team only need to roll if their faces or an open wound comes into contact with the effluent.

The GM should decide if any of the highly infectious diseases (Cholera, Typhus) are present in the city. In *GURPS* terms, players should make an HT roll to resist the disease (p. B443); a failure means the character catches the disease. Use the least advantageous modifier below, multiplied by the current prevalence of the disease in this particular city.

- *Entering or traveling in sewers:* -0
- *Traveling in effluent flow less than six inches deep:* -1
- *Traveling in effluent flow less than three feet deep:* -2
- *Face or open wounds enter effluent flow:* -3
- *Wound received in combat in the sewers:* -2

Prevalence of a disease:

- *Rare:* ×½
- *Common:* ×1
- *Current epidemic:* ×2

Contagious diseases are rare in modern cities with good public health. In most medieval cities and modern cities with poor sanitation and tainted water supplies, the prevalence would

The sewers are extensive, dark, and poorly-mapped. There are thousands of miles of sewers below many major cities and few municipalities are as generous as the Parisians in providing street names to explorers. Many manhole covers are sealed against unauthorized entry. An unprepared or unlucky party could find themselves trapped in the darkness, alone, scared and with nothing but the scurrying, scritching rats for company. Or worse.

Life in the Sewers

Sewers can support a wide variety of organisms even in a strictly realistic campaign. In a fantastic campaign, GMs can let their imaginations run wild. One oft-repeated trick is simply to make the denizens of the sewers swell to gargantuan proportions.

Humanoid: The extensive sewer systems of many cities could provide a perfect place to hide for many humans. Thieves, smugglers, loners, and people who dislike the society above could even live there. The Jewish Fighting Organization made the sewers of the Warsaw Ghetto their base of operations during World War II, while the French have made use of the Catacombs and sewers throughout their history.

The sewers could potentially harbor troglodytes who might be anything from the descendants of recent sewer dwellers to a lost race of humans. They would have in common an aversion to sunlight, pale skin, an increased ability to see the dark, and a discriminatory sense of smell. Similar humanoid cultures could include goblins, kobolds or orcs.

Animals: The sewers have long been a disposal ground for unwanted pets. While goldfish, school-experiment tadpoles and terrapins are harmless, other creatures may be less so.

The giant alligator roaming the sewers is a staple of fiction and lurid newspaper reports since sightings were first published in the *New York Times* in 1935. Naturalists are skeptical, citing the facts that alligators are susceptible to many of the diseases harbored in human waste and are cold-blooded, which means they need temperate climes. On the other hand, an alligator can survive months without feeding, waiting patiently for prey to come within range.

Many other animals are believed to have lived in the sewers. Rats are common. Snakes have been found in sewers, most recently a pet boa constrictor that escaped from a block of flats in Manchester in the United Kingdom. French sewer-mapper Emmanuel Bruneseau, commissioned to map the sewers of Paris by Napoleon Bonaparte, found a skeleton of an orangutan believed to have escaped from a zoo. In 1851, a herd of pigs was believed to be living in the sewers under Hampstead in London after a pregnant sow blundered into the underground system.

Insects also live in the sewers, particularly those that live on detritus such as cockroaches, sewer flies and millipedes. Predatory insects such as spiders and centipedes can also be found.

Plants: Few plants grow well underground. Lichen and some varieties of fungus can survive. A fungus that explodes on touch, spreading its spores across a wide area, could make for an interesting encounter with results ranging from humorous itching to deadly poisoning.

Monsters: In a horror campaign, any number of creatures could conceivably live in the sewers. Suggestions include acid slugs, faecal golems, slimes or oozes made of sewage material or the greasy, slippery fat deposits from a Chinese restaurant, and entities like the one that inhabited the trash compactor on the Death Star.

If a creature likes dank, dark caves with a plentiful supply of nitrogen-rich organic matter, they could well survive in a sewer.

Undead: In 2008, a sewage treatment works in Eastbourne, England hired a paranormal investigator after several staff

rarely be less than Common.

A particularly mean GM could require a roll for each major infectious disease (typhus, cholera, dysentery, and so on). Alternatively, there could be a single roll to determine whether a character has contracted one of the major diseases and a second roll for minor diseases like Weil's disease or gastro-enteritis.

For more information, see Beyond Contagion and Remove Disease: Optional Disease Rules for d20.

reported a zombie-like humanoid creature in their tunnels. The Catacombs of Paris, several hundred miles of quarry that became a series of massive ossuaries (bone depositories), are the final resting place for hundreds of thousands of human bodies. Many of these bodies are far from the original burial grounds, having been disinterred and moved as city churchyards became full.

In most major cities, the process of building underground sewers often involves digging through or around churchyards. Not all tunnelers will have respected the dead, possibly leading to phantoms seeking revenge for the disturbance of their eternal peace.

Sewers have often been used as a disposal process for dead bodies. The most commonly found cadavers are those of homeless people, but murderers have used the system to cover their tracks. One German woman murdered her husband and hacked his body into small enough pieces to flush down the toilet into the Dusseldorf sewers.

In short, there are endless opportunities for undead encounters in any sewer system.

Treasure

Most treasure in the sewer system is accidentally dropped or is evidence that has been flushed away. Valuables such as rings and necklaces can be accidentally lost through drainpipes, gratings, and toilets. Car keys and other items that are not intrinsically valuable can go the same way.

Disposing of evidence down the toilet -- whether it be drugs, a murder weapon or cash wrapped in bundles of plastic 0-- is not unheard of. Thames Water employees have found a live hand grenade in the system.

Treasure could conceivably have been hidden in the sewers by those who have used them over the years. Whether the desperate burial by a group of Jewish refugees in the Warsaw ghetto or a bank robber finding a niche to stash his haul while the heat dies down, the sewers are rich in treasure potential.

Adventure Seeds

Kidnap: The eight-year-old son of a wealthy American businessman living in London disappears. The Metropolitan Police are convinced it is a kidnapping and advise sitting tight until the kidnappers make their demands. But a trusted nanny swears she saw a creature -- man-sized, misshapen, hunched -- disappearing down a manhole cover at the same time the child disappeared. The PCs are hired to search the London sewer system for a missing child; do they find a human kidnapping gang, a tribe of Troglodytes, or a scared and exhausted boy who went exploring for a prank?

Assassination: Even the royal palace needs a sewer. The High Chamberlain has discovered a plot to blow up the king and the PCs are hired/ordered to prevent the atrocity. After many red herrings, the PCs discover that the assassins plan to transport barrels of gunpowder through the sewers in small wooden punts and detonate them during the king's annual jubilee celebrations . . . which is scheduled to take place in only a few hours.

Dead Men Walking: Throughout the city, reports emerge of ghostly sounds emanating from the drainage grills. Flushers tell of shadowy figures and phantoms. Is this their imaginations run wild? Is a criminal gang using the sewers as a hideout and deterring investigations through fostering supernatural fear? Or are the displaced dead, unceremoniously removed when the sewers were built, reclaiming their rightful resting places?

References

- *The Great Stink of London: Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Cleansing of the Victorian Metropolis,* by Stephen Halliday
- "Suppressed Transmission: Facili Decensis Averno: Going Underground"
- Alligators in New York sewers

"Tales of the Underworld," *The Guardian.*

One More Turn

Addictive Adventuring for RPGs

by Timothy J. Turnipseed

Greetings fellow gamers!

If you're anything like me, you are a large, black Iraqi War veteran from Mississippi.

That, and you love those console or PC computer games you just can't tear yourself away from. You know, the kind where you start playing in the early evening, and you keep trying to quit after "just one more turn" only to find the dawn sneaking up on you, coloring the sky?

Wouldn't it be great to run an adventure like that? One where your friends are so deeply immersed in your world and so eager to see what's going to happen next that they can't wait till the next game session?

Yes, I'm going to show you how to run an adventure so engaging your players will trouble getting up from the table to use the latrine, much less raid the fridge. I know whereof I speak, for I've run adventures for guys who have more real life excitement than you ever want to think about.

The Shoulders of Giants

First, I don't intend to reinvent the wheel.

There are plenty of books and articles that teach you how to run a great adventure, and many fine examples are available in the archives of this very magazine. In particular, I would recommend Steve Marsh's "Making (And Faking) Adventures", parts I through III, and "Plotting Like Old Man Jenkins" by Brian Rogers. Those articles alone would make you a much more effective GM. I'm just adding a dollop of ice cream to that slice of apple pie! (Then again, ice cream by itself is pretty good . . .)

What RPG Players Want

In my experience, almost all players want their characters to matter. Period.

They want to escape to a world where they are wanted and needed, and where their actions make a difference. They also want to share that experience with others.

Single-player computer games allow one to be the undisputed savior of the world. The minor weakness of these games is they restrict the freedom of the hero to a narrow script (though games like *Fallout* and *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* are so well-scripted they seem more open-ended than some human-run tabletop RPG sessions I've seen). The major weakness of traditional computer RPGs is the lack of social interaction; it's just you, buddy.

Massive Multiplayer Online RolePlaying Games (MMORPG) has the social-interaction thing nailed. It's not quite the same as having a live human nearby, but then again, you can reach out to a large group of buddies or strangers no matter the physical distance.

For most of these games, their main weakness -- and it is a crippling one -- is that the characters don't really matter to the world, do they? Kill an enemy? It will get better. Destroy something? It comes back. Accomplish a great mission? That mission is available to as many others who want it. If you fight bravely with honor, the game world will go on as before. If you fight cowardly with dishonor, the game world will go on as before. If you are good or evil, weak or

strong, clever or stupid -- indeed, if you delete your character and quit playing the game altogether -- the game world will go on as it always has before.

Every day in such MMORPGs is the movie *Groundhog Day*. Nothing you do makes a single bit of difference except to you and (to a lesser extent) your friends. Do whatever the heck you like, but only the game developers can change anything. This is the frustrating-yet-necessary weakness of all such games, for if only one character or team can achieve something, it ruins the game for the thousands if not millions of other people playing the game.

Table top RPGs allow social interaction *and* a chance for your players' characters to make a difference. Increase your players' involvement in a dynamic game world. Hook 'em by giving them projects to work on so they always want to know how their efforts turn out.

The Dynamic World: The Party is the Complication

A dynamic world is a changing world.

It is a universe where things are happening, and the heroes have to deal with those happenings and act to shape events to their advantage.

In every successful "one more turn" video game, the computer opponents are always making things happen. You have to counter their moves while making your own, and now you can't wait till the next turn to find out what happened!

The best way I've found to build a dynamic world is to have five or six active projects carried out by important NPCs. These don't have to be elaborate, just a short list for each actor. When the heroes are inserted into the world, they become the complication to all of these grand NPC plans.

Allow me to refresh your memory about complications.

In any good story, character A wants to get to goal C, but B is in the way. B is the complication that must be overcome before A can get to C and live happily ever after.

For instance -- Suzy (A) wants to marry her fiancé in a beautiful outdoor ceremony (C). But just when it's time for the wedding, there is a terrible thunderstorm (B)! You can't have a beautiful outdoor wedding in a pouring thunderstorm, can you? However will Suzy reach her goal now?

Rain is, of course, a minor complication. If you really want to make it tough for Suzy to reach her goal, you can have her fiancé tell her, "I think I want to become a hermit" and/or have an ex-lover come to the church and start shooting up the place. Overcome that, Suzy! Do you see how Suzy's wedding has suddenly become a whole lot more exciting?

Here are just three example NPC projects:

Major Villain (A)	Bystander (A)	Mayor (A)
I want to conquer the kingdom/world. (C)	I want a new job. (C)	I want to keep destructive fights out of my town/city. (C)
I will hire many henchmen, and a few really tough ones.	I will travel to the new bio lab/wizard's guild.	I will banish troublemakers.
I will steal the Brainscrambler/Overmind Spell from the new bio lab/wizard's	I will ask the leaders of the bio lab/wizard's guild	I need a police force and captain capable of evicting

guild.	for a job.	powerful troublemakers.
I will return the prize back to my base, modify it, and then use it to conquer the kingdom/world.	I will be hired at the bio lab/wizard's tower.	I will hire or ally with other law enforcers, or seek reinforcements from the king/government.

Note that these short sketches are by no means all-inclusive. For instance, where is the Mayor going to get the money to hire all those extra cops? With new, unpopular taxes? By accepting bribes? By sending a party of cops to clean out a nearby ruin in search of treasure . . . just in time to meet the PCs in the same "dungeon"? But you get the idea.

What will the Major Villain do when the heroes (B) shows up to complicate things? Will the bad guy send henchmen to kill or capture them? It's not like the villain has "Evil!" tattooed across his forehead; maybe he can trick the Party into an alliance?

What will happen to the bystander when the villain infiltrates or attacks the place she's gone to look for a job? What will happen to her if the heroes show up to stop the theft . . . assuming they do? Will the party be careful enough not to injure her? Will she see them as heroes or troublemakers? She is looking for a job because she needs to earn a living; are any of the PCs romantically inclined enough to support her? Will she be up front about her need for support, or will she try to make it all about love? Is she truly in love?

Will the Mayor see the PCs as heroes or troublemakers? And what will the Mayor do about the major villain? Does the Mayor even have a clue as to what that villain is up to? Has the Mayor been bought off by the scoundrel, or perhaps the baddie is a trusted friend or family member of the Mayor?

It is quite possible that the party may be so involved in their own projects (discussed below) that they completely miss all of the above. That's okay, except that you should probably get them involved before the villain's main goal is achieved!

But this isn't a problem. In modern or futuristic worlds, the news media can provide clues as to what is going on. In fantasy or historical settings, rumors in taverns, strange dreams/visions, or pleas for help can get the party hooked. If the PCs are truly clueless, just have the villain or the Mayor preemptively threaten or attack them; *that* should yank the party into the Main Plot like nothing else!

Please note that the Mayor and the Major Villain have a perfectly rational reason to threaten or attack the heroes if their NPC projects are to be achieved. They aren't just attacking because they've got nothing better to do than to give the players some excitement.

Note how the heroes' actions -- and, indeed, their very existence -- have a significant effect on the NPCs' plans. They're changing the story. They matter. And this extends not only to how they react (or trip over) existing plots, but also to how they create goals and projects of their own.

Personal Project Examples

Personal Advancement: Virtually every game system allows the characters to grow more powerful with experience, so to a great extent this task has been done for you.

Romantic Interest: A romantic relationship with an influential NPC -- one with a project, as above -- gives the player a project to work on that also affects the world.

Get A Job: A wizard/scientist-type character can be invited to join a research society or teach at a university. A fighter/soldier can be invited into a mercenary band, or perhaps to train soldiers for an NPC army. A thief/agent type character can be invited to scout, spy, or steal for an NPC group. In each of these cases, the character strives to

advance in the hiring organization while trying to balance obligations to the Party. If at all possible, ensure that the Party and the NPC organization do not have contradictory goals until the PC is fully committed to the NPC group!

Group (Party) Project Examples

Recurring Villain: I once had a party so deeply devoted to taking down the main villain that once they killed him, they lost all interest in the rest of campaign! Another time, I made a villain that was very hard to get to, and once they party got to him, he and his associates gave them such a vicious beat down that the party gave up and lost hope.

The answer to both of these problems is simple: Give them more than one main villain.

Nothing makes a party feel like they really make a difference than when they permanently take down a major villain they've been stalking for so long. And since there are other villains and other projects they can work on, they don't lose interest in the rest of your campaign.

Moreover, you can now make your surviving main baddies tougher, for the party is not so quick to lose hope once you've demonstrated that they really can take down a major villain. Plus, in a dynamic world, the main enemies are also gaining more power through experience themselves, right?

Multiple major villains open up all sorts of story possibilities. It is practical for the party to team up with a bad guy to take down another bad guy, but is it ethical? A powerful villain discovered attacking the minions or property of a famous rival can easily be mistaken for a great hero. And that NPC love interest? She might be a super-villain!

As a warning, don't go too overboard with this. You don't want a *Dragonball Z* situation where all characters of any consequence can blow up a planet. Most of the people your PCs run into should be quite normal. The party is special, after all!

Romantic Interest/Get a Job: Depending on just how influential that beloved NPC or job is, a personal project can become a party project pretty darn quickly. Just rotate which PC becomes the star of the show, rather than defaulting to the loudest or most argumentative player at the table.

Home Base: Your party can get seriously involved with establishing, maintaining, defending, and decorating their home base. Bases don't work too well for fantasy games, where heroes traditionally wander far from home in their epic quests. But a party base is expected in superhero games, and in space-opera games the party's ship makes for a perfect base that's also fully mobile. I have found that the need to improve and repair the base is also an excellent way to get rid of surplus party cash. In vampire-type games, each player tends to have his or her own individual home base (haven), so this becomes a personal rather than a party project.

Putting it all Together

There you are. Five or Six major NPCs in your game world have projects, and every one of your players may have two or three. You don't script PC projects; that's *their* job!

Once the player characters have all gotten together in whatever opening scene and/or battle you've arranged, stage the action by days. You simply say something like, "All right, it is the morning of Day One. What are you doing?"

This is the time for the players to tell you what actions, if any, they are taking to advance personal or party projects during the morning of Day One. (Note that exploring a dungeon or stopping the villain's evil plan counts as a party project.) Now you should take notes on a sheet of paper to determine how the party's actions to advance their projects are affecting -- or not affecting -- the NPC story arcs. Now determine what the NPCs have accomplished on the morning of Day One.

Just keep going like that. Morning, Day One. Afternoon, Day One. Night, Day One. Early Morning (after midnight to

daybreak), Day Two. Morning, Day Two. You get the idea. And make sure characters that have to sleep do so or else assign penalties as appropriate.

That's all there is to getting your players deeply involved in a dynamic game world. Yet whatever else you take from this article, always remember that your players want their characters to make a difference. They want to matter. Give the customers what they want, and they'll keep coming back for one more turn!

Pyramid Review

Kingsburg

Published by [Edge Entertainment](#) and [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Full-color boxed set with map board, five province boards, five sets of ownership counters (17 in each of five colors), 15 player tokens in five colors, 20 +2 tokens, king's envoy pawn, year marker, season marker, 21 dice in six colors, 60 wooden resource cubes, 25 enemy cards, & rulebook; $59.95

The court oracle has seen the future for the kingdom, and the call goes out across the land: "We're fixing to get waxed." *Kingsburg* is under attack by hungry foes who will descend upon the country year by year unless the outlying provinces are fortified to withstand the assault.

The object of the game is to have the highest score at the end of the fifth year.

Two to five players play feudal lords building up their border towns to protect the homeland. Hordes of evil sweep across the land in waves, and each player must gather resources, build structures, muster armies, and divine intelligence about the oncoming battles to be ready.

Each player rolls three standard six-sided dice in his color; occasionally players are awarded additional white dice. The lowest total goes first, followed by everyone else in ascending order. Dice are placed on the board, which is dominated by a large portrait gallery of all the notable people in the hierarchy. The king and queen sit at the top in the 17 and 18 spaces, with various builders, assassins, barkeeps, and soldiers on spaces 1 through 16.

All offer a boon to whoever places a matching roll on that space. Players may split dice among nobles but may only claim one at a time. For example, a player rolling 1, 3, and 4 could use everything for an audience with portrait 8. Alternatively he could try for all three of those numbers, or the 5 and 3, or the 7 and 1, and so on. Someone else may take what he wants . . . he could entreat 4, but if 3 or 1 get taken before it comes back around, those dice are useless. If no one else even has a single 4, he can concentrate on locking in 1 or 3 because he can grab 4 at his leisure. If a player has a special +2 marker, though, he could use that and a 2 on his die and get portrait #4.

Once dice are distributed, players receive their goods. Mostly these are resources like wood and stone, a chance to trade those commodities, and soldiers for use in combat. It could also be victory points, a +2 marker, or a spell that allows the player to peek at this year's villain. Each year has a random enemy drawn from the deck. Later years have tougher villains, and the cards show what the foe is (zombies, orcs, a dragon), its power level, and the consequences for success and failure in combat. Everyone mounts his own defense. Thus, anyone who's previewed the card face knows to expect a level-three orc horde and should plan accordingly. Everyone else knows only that the back of the card hints "3 – 5".

Resources produce buildings; these are on a player's reference sheet in rows and columns. Someone can start in any row, depending on the benefits they wish to receive, but must go in order: One cannot erect column IV without having built its predecessors in columns I through III. That's one of the rubs of the game. The big points -- churches and fancy and ornamental institutions -- are at the top of the sheet, but they're little use in combat unless the enemy is a demon. Fortification is mostly in the lower, less valuable rows. And the monsters? Well, they don't make it any easier; some destroy structures, and they always do it right to left and top to bottom, meaning high-point winners are lost first.

Losing also means the loss of resources or other unpleasant effects, while beating enemies grants resources or victory points. A draw means no effect. At the end of the fifth year, the last of the victory points are assigned and the player

with the highest total wins the game.

The component selection is good, with bright and colorful dice, wooden playing pieces, and markers made from good stock. The centerpiece of the whole thing, though, is the board with its gallery of colorful character pictures. The artwork is grand stuff, but there's still room for several tracks and clear labeling for the benefits offered by each figure (the dice usually end up on the picture).

Play takes about 90 minutes. The die mechanic used is a lot of fun, and puts players to the test. There are enough numbers to deal with to keep someone on his toes, but not so many choices that it's intimidating or impossible to track (though it certainly helps to be thinking of one's next play, lest one fall prey to analysis paralysis). There are also decisions aplenty and different ways to achieve victory, so staying flexible throughout the game is important.

The game has two faults. The first is that the best feature, the gallery of advisors, is unnamed. Their benefits are obvious but not their names or titles. It's a shame, because while the king and queen speak for themselves (and as an aside, the queen offers better rewards than her husband), one cannot intone solemnly, "I shall enlist the aid of Hrothgar the Mighty!" or some such without working out an identity from the rulebook. It's usually, "Yeah, uhm . . . I guess I'll take the barmaid-looking gal." The other problem is that it's never terribly mysterious who's going to win. There are few hidden points, so someone who's out in front going into the fifth-year battle is, barring awful accidents, going to stay in the lead. Still, beating back the forces of evil all five years is diverting in itself, so it's all a question of whence one draws one's satisfaction. The competition is solid, but instead of fighting for territory everyone is vying for the resources they need, and the mechanics allow one to decide not whether, but how, one participant is going to block another while getting what he wants.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Steal Away Jordan: Stories from America's Peculiar Institution

Published by Stone Baby Games

Designed by Julia B. Ellingboe

56-page b&w undersized softcover; $20

The subject matter for *Steal Away Jordan: Stories from America's Peculiar Institution* is as controversial, noncommercial, and as unglamorous as it is possible for an RPG to be. It is a storytelling RPG written to explore the existence of those that lived as property, the black slaves of the United States during the period of the antebellum or Old South. The creation of neophyte RPG designer, Julia B. Ellingboe, it is inspired by "Neo-Slave Narratives" (accounts of slavery written in modern times) such as Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred,* Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* and Margaret Walker's *Jubilee,* her aim being not to create an RPG about slavery itself, but about the lives of those who live within its shadow.

The game requires at least 30 six-sided dice; an ordinary deck of cards; and a single six-sided die marked with a skull instead of the one, which is the Skull Die. The book itself is illustrated with period photographs, illustrations, and advertisements. However, the writing is rough around the edges and the rules not as clearly explained as they could be, in one instance being detailed before they are relevant. Fortunately the book's appendices neatly summarize the game's rules. Nevertheless, this first edition needs both an editor's touch and further development.

A game begins with everyone deciding upon the setting: for example, a Caribbean sugar plantation, a Mississippi cotton plantation, or a rich Northern city hospital. Each setting determines the type of slave owned and of the characters possible. Initially these must all be slaves, but if a slave attains his freedom and so leaves the game before it ends, his player can create a non-slave character; he may even create a ghost or "Haint" if his slave dies. It is suggested that one slave be a Conjurer or Root Doctor, able to cast spells of protection, luck, love, and even curses. All slaves can cast simple spells, but a Conjurer is far more capable.

A player determines his slave's place of birth, age, gender, occupation, and possible skill, and from these describes three to five attributes with a sentence each. From this overall description, the GM sets a slave's Worth, measured in six-sided dice. For example, an attractive wet nurse in a Southron city is worth 13 dice, while an older insubordinate male still recovering from a whipping would only be worth 7 dice. Children will be worth less, but white men and women are worth much more, even double that of a slave.

A player also describes his character's relationships with his master and his fellow slaves, marking one a friend and one an enemy; finally, he sets three goals. These are further defined by a motive that drives the goal and a task that fulfills it. Goals can be discussed between the players, but not in front of the GM, who must leave the room during their creation. A "Haint" has lesser Worth and only a single goal. When he returns, the GM has one final task: He must name the characters. A slave might have a name by which he is known amongst his fellow slaves, but it is the GM who will assign him the name by which his Master knows him and by which he might be sold.

This is a powerful character process, one that enforces a character's position in both society and the game as property and slave, because it takes away from the players the very first control they usually have over their characters: the naming process. It will continue with the game's only statistic, Worth, which measures not a character's self-worth, but his value as piece of property.

Steal Away Jordan is played as a series of scenes during which the players push to fulfill their slaves' goals. A scene

involves just two participants, either two players or a player and the GM, both rolling to win the right to narrate the scene's outcome. When this outcome is of little risk, simple rolls are made, being termed Bargains if between friends or allies and Conflicts if against an enemy. If significant risk is involved, one that threatens a slave's Worth (such as acting open rebellion), then it is a Major Bargain or Conflict.

In a Simple Bargain or Conflict, the participants roll five dice each. The highest result wins the outcome, with all 1s rolled counting as negative points. Any rolls by either player of "Lucky Sevens" (combinations of 3+4 and 2+5, but not 1+6) are retained by the winning player as Bonus Dice for later rolls.

Rolling a Major Bargain or Conflict is slightly more complex. The participants roll not five dice, but their Worth in dice, plus Bonus Dice. Only Lucky Sevens count, a point being scored for each one, with a single re-roll allowed for any dice that did not score. The highest number of Lucky Sevens rolled determines the winner.

The Skull Die adds a further element of luck (in an already luck-dependent game). Kept prominently in view on the table, if it is picked up, it must be rolled by that player. Lower rolls have negative effects, a roll of the Skull indicating the character's death or a severe punishment, while higher rolls are more favorable. The Skull Die can be rolled simply as a luck die, to push a character's luck if his player is dissatisfied with the outcome of a Bargain or Conflict, or to determine a slave's punishment.

For example, Hester wants to take some cooking oil from the kitchen to use as a salve on her husband's recently beaten back. Her stake is successfully stealing the oil, while the GM's stake is that Hester's mistress will notice the theft and whip her. Hester rolls 1, 2, 2, 5, and 6, giving a total of 14 and one Lucky Seven, while the GM rolls 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for a total of 17. Unfortunately, Hester's theft has been noticed and she will be beaten. She can either take her punishment or push her luck to change the outcome, either way rolling the Skull Die. Mechanically though, a Bonus Die is at stake that can saved for later. What this means is that a series of Simple Bargains or Conflicts will be played out, not just to pursue goals, but also to gain Bonus Dice for Major Bargains or Conflicts.

Spellcasting by the Conjurer uses a slightly different but ill-explained mechanic, but essentially it grants cards revealed only when used. Black cards add to a conflict's point total, while red cards subtract.

Goals and the story are pursued over one or more sessions. Achieving a goal increases a slave's Worth, but can be changed or altered throughout a game, or added to as each one is completed. Ideally at the end of a session, when the players re-assess their relationships, just as the GM re-valuates each slave's Worth based on the session's events. The game ends after an agreed number of sessions, when players and GM alike are expected to discuss not the events of the story just told, but also their feelings about them. The players, in particular, are expected to give their characters a eulogy. Here the game veers into wanting to have been an educational tool. This is not an unworthy aim, but not previously supported, with a lack of history and background about life in the antebellum period, though some detail is given how each slave is brought to the Americas. A single example setting is given, but more would have been better, and if the game is to have an educational aspect, then a set of ready-to-play characters should have been provided.

It is this educational aspect that could have been *Steal Away Jordan's* real strength, because as a game its subject matter is too difficult, too strong. Gamers are not used to having so much control over their characters as the GM does in this game through the Worth attribute, and although this certainly fits the genre, it not only places them under the whip, it also does something else. It empowers the GM in a way in which no other game does by casting him in the role of both slave overseer and slave owner. This is a role that modern attitudes not only abhor, but one that the GM himself should feel very uncomfortable in undertaking. Unfortunately, *Steal Away Jordan* does not address how the GM should approach playing either role and this diminishes the game's educational potential.

Describing *Steal Away Jordan* as a game is also problematic, because this implies that a sense of enjoyment can be gained from its play. The idea of gaining any kind of enjoyment from playing either a black slave or a slave owner is an uncomfortable one. As a storytelling vehicle or framework to explore the issues arising from America's Peculiar Institution, *Steal Away Jordan* does not arouse such feelings quite (but only quite) as strongly; some elements of the game -- those for the Haint, the Root Doctor, and conjuring -- feel more suited to a game than a storytelling vehicle.

Steal Away Jordan is essentially a first draft, the writing and the layout being rough in too many places, and some

points seem more like placeholders awaiting further development. It is also ferociously underwritten in places, particularly the history and the background, and the final questions asked of the participants are perhaps glib. Certainly, these questions and much more need both addressing and development if the designer wants *Steal Away Jordan* to be used as an educational tool.

Yet *Steal Away Jordan* cannot be dismissed outright. Ellingboe is respectful of *Steal Away Jordan's* difficult subject matter throughout and the basic rules are highly effective in their enforcing of the position and role of the characters as slaves. This is most notable via a GM's control of fundamental aspects of the character creation process: determining a slave's Worth and giving him his name, and the Worth statistic itself, which is put on the line during Major Conflicts and Bargains. Ultimately *Steal Away Jordan: Stories from America's Peculiar Institution* is not without merit; although the "game" is well intentioned, it needs further development and an editor's touch if it is to be more than just a curiosity.

--Matthew Pook

Ignoring the Need to Explain the Background Noise

Ever since massive amounts of water have caused my midwestern state to live up to the terminology "flood plain," we've been dealing with various problems here at Chateau du Pyramid. Why, just today we had a huge tree get knocked over in a 20-minute rainstorm, about six feet from our apartment. And before that we've been fighting with various other problems, such as water damage next to our sliding glass door.

TREE!

One interesting thing about this glass door is it's right next to my office. (And by "office" I mean "strategically partitioned-off portion of living room that I pretend has a door like I'm Les Nessman.") One interesting thing about the water damage is that it's caused large amounts of mold to grow to the left and above the window. (The "above the window" portion was so water damaged that it's cracked, and will probably need to be repaired.)

Now, I'm not enough of an expert to know if this is *the* "black mold" that everyone's all scared of, or merely "a" black mold, but there's one other point of fact: Within a couple of weeks of our water damage, I've gotten something of a summer cold that doesn't seem to want to go away. Sniffles, cough, etc. Mold death plague? Cold? Hitherto unknown allergies? Cancer? Who knows? I've always had something of an aggravated and aggravating respiratory system, but it's never been anything I've needed to see a doctor about . . . it's just something that's part of my background noise, and -- like someone's knee that acts up whenever the weather changes -- it's not worth investigating much beyond cataloging the phenomenon.

But here, a third of the way in, I'm tying it into gaming.

One of the things I liked about the core setting of the *Fading Suns* RPG is that there's an overarching setting element where [NON-SPOILER ALERT!] the suns are fading. The stars are slowly dwindling, and they're expected to die out within a few centuries or millennia. Because of the timeframe, folks in the campaign tend not to worry about it much -- it's hard to muster much concern for a threat thousands of years away when there are alien symbiotes the next planet over waiting to devour you and everyone you love -- but it nevertheless forms a recurring background feature that symbolically serves the setting well. And, unlike similar campaign elements in TSR's *Dark Sun,* this plot point isn't really intended to be something that the heroes necessary solve or investigate; if I recall, the causes are hinted at, but never explicitly stated, and no clear path is provided for how the damage might be reversed (because, y'know, it's really easy to turn back entropy if you just put a little elbow grease to it).

Many RPGs have similar background elements that aren't expected to be explained, explored, resolved, or answered. They simply *are.* One good example is in *Traveller,* where all possible interstellar trips take one week (give or take), regardless of distance. (Impossible trips take substantially longer.) Why isn't it possible to go faster? Why is it exactly one week, which is a ridiculously convenient measure of time for us Earth-bound souls? Who knows? It just *is,* and it both helps immediately conjure the setting and guide the GM into what is and isn't possible. (Any story where the heroes need to hop to the next star system and hop back better be able to be without the protagonists for two weeks.)

In fact, attempting to visit some of these elements and explain them can be yawn-stifling at best, and chortled-disbelief-inducing at worst. Let's look at two examples. The Force from the *Star Wars* universe, which, in the original trilogy, was something that worked perfectly well as a background element without any additional explanation, was explained in *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* as being the result of midichlorians. Although there is some dispute among fans, there is general consensus that this ranks among the top 1,000 mistakes of *Episode I.* Another good example, from DC comics, is the "Godwave," which I've written about [before](). Suffice it to say, retconning it so that the Greek and Norse gods' powers are a result of the same wave of energy as that which gave the alien Superman his powers and the chemically splashed Flash his abilities is likely to meet with some fan resistance. (The big problem

here, of course, is that this explanation was pasted on decades after the fact, unlike -- say -- the White Event from Marvel's New Universe, which was planned from the beginning to be a unifying mystery . . . one that was ultimately solvable and satisfying.) As a further example for the reader, ask yourself if the fundamental existence of the Laws of Robotics in Isaac Asimov's stories and worlds best work as a background element that shouldn't be tampered with, or a plot point that can be further explained and elaborated as desired.

Some aspects of a campaign setting are meant to be addressed, poked, prodded, and queried. (What is the nature of these mutants in *Trinity?* Why does the Dark Side exist in *Star Wars?*) Others should be left alone, and -- if need be -- have it made clear to the players that there's no answers forthcoming. (Why is cyberspace like that? Why do this world's lasers go "ka-POW!" instead of blinding folks invisibly?) Because, in some ways, having some parts of the world be unknown and unknowable can often make the whole come together more satisfyingly . . . whether we know it or not.

--Steven Marsh

Famous People

Using A Famous Person NPC List to Enhance Your Games

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

"Who's the best lawman?"
"The best, how? You mean toughest? Or easiest to bribe?"
"Toughest."
"Joe Lefors."
"Got to be."
"Lefors never leaves Wyoming, never. You know that."
"He always wears a white skimmer. That's how you tell it's Joe Lefors, 'cause he always wears a white straw hat. Look at that guy out front."
"Who are those guys?"
-- Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (George Roy Hill, 1969)

* * *

GM: "He's guarded by Marius Certano, greatest and most famous bodyguard to ever live!"
Players: "Oh yeah? If he's so famous how come we never heard of him until just now?"

Who's Who?

Nothing helps undermine the mood of a game than meeting a "famous" person no one has heard of. Nothing makes a campaign jump to life quicker than when players have hooks into the game world. Combine those two thoughts and you get campaign information handouts. A "background" handout isn't a new idea. Most of them take the form of some kind of introductory fiction, or a comprehensive world history, or a quick rundown of campaign premises. One often-overlooked form of background handout is a Who's Who list of NPCs. This article will discuss writing such a list, and how to use it to make your games take off.

I used such a list to start my current, long-running *GURPS* fantasy game. It has proven to be the most referenced, and most useful, handout I ever made . . . with the sole exception of the weapon and armor cost lists, of course.

Some fictional worlds make great use of this, referencing famous folks off-screen long before they ever make an appearance "on screen." When they finally show up in person, the readers already understand why they are such a big deal. Examples include "Mario," greatest assassin ever, in Steven Brust's "Vlad Taltos" books. Glen Cook's Garrett P.I. series has "Glory Mooncalled," a famous general waging war in the Cantard. You don't see much of Sauron, but from the very start you know who J.R.R. Tolkien's characters are worried about. *That* is the effect you are looking for.

Why Do It?

A list of famous NPCs has some immediate and practical use in a game. Armed with a list of Famous People for the players to read:

- You can have NPCs can refer to them, news can center on them, rumors can float about them. You don't need to introduce a new NPC to hunt down the heroes if they know of a famous lawman; they'll be flattered and pleased, as well as worried, when they hear the most famous lawman in the West is after their outlaw characters. If a PC swordsman is getting better and better, have NPCs compare him to the most famous swordsman in the game world. The adventurer will realize that eventually that famously jealous and competitive swordsman is

going to come looking to see how good this upstart really is . . .

- You can get away with a much less detailed campaign write-up. If you've got outlines of the major countries and major cities (or major villages and towns in a smaller scale game) plus a list of famous NPCs, you already have enough to work with. You've got places to go and people to meet, and that means you have plot hooks and adventure seeds.
- And, finally, PCs will go meet these people on their own. Give them a hint about ancient necromancy, and they are bound to remember that the Famous People list includes an ancient necromancer; perhaps he knows more . . . or perhaps it is his magic they have come across! Tell the heroes they need to travel to a far-off land and they'll immediately know of a famous sea captain or daredevil pilot that would be willing to take the chance. It will seem less like an obvious "adventure plot" than coincidently hearing about said daredevil pilot after they coincidently find the map to the far-off land.

How Do You Do It?

There are a few things to keep in mind when making a famous NPC list.

Who Goes On It?

First, decide who'll go on it. Kings and rulers are useful, but in many campaigns folks will rarely come into contact with them. Names are usually sufficient in most "party of troubleshooters shooting trouble" campaigns. If you're running superheroes in Examplopolis, the Mayor is a good NPC to add to the list, but the President of Faroffistan isn't. If the President of Faroffistan is a ruthless super-powered dictator widely known for his incredible powers or sponsors a respect superteam, that's a different story. Major wizards, rival superheroes, fabulous swordsman, pop stars, and so are on a different story as well. Those are the types of NPCs you'll want to tell people about.

Use Categories

In all but the most egalitarian and uniform (or merely very small) worlds, it's worthwhile to break up these lists into categories. It helps the GM ensure nothing is overlooked. Categories in themselves help players by cluing them in to which categories the game world recognizes as important. If you're split is "rich" and "poor" you'll give a much different impression than if your split is "famous kung fu masters," "famous scholars," and "rulers."

In my fantasy campaign, I used two simple division: "famous wizards" and "everyone else." Because of the great emphasis my game has on major wizards, this split made sense. In a campaign with a different focus, different splits suggest themselves. In an Old West game, you could have Famous Lawmen & Judges, Famous Outlaws, and Politicians & Businessmen. In a Space Opera game, you could have Famous Bounty Hunters, Famous Pilots, and Planetary Rulers. The previous example of Kung Fu Masters, Scholars, and Rulers would suit a Wuxia-style game.

In any list, it is useful to add in a few entertainers and general celebrities: a famous socialite who hosts fantastic parties at her estate, the best-known bard, wildest film director, richest person in the world, the calendar girl, the latest teen singing sensation. Even if these people fade from view as the campaign rolls along (the teen singing sensation is replaced by another), they can be referred back to as background or to give verisimilitude to the game. "Oh, I remember her, she was that famous singer. We haven't heard about her in a long time. And now her agent wants to hire us to be her bodyguards? I wonder why."

Keep it Punchy

Use short, ringing descriptions. Keep the descriptions evocative rather than merely descriptive. "He's the maddest of the mad berserkers of the North" is a good start. You already know this guy is worth encountering!

Keeping it punchy will help keep it short, too. You don't need too much detail. A few sentences is usually enough. A few paragraphs will take forever, be less memorable, and pin you down. "Lives in an estate near the capital" is better

than an exact address, "Tall and furious" is better than "six-foot-four-inches and has Berserk."

In fact, leaving lots of details vague will let your players' imaginations fill in the rest. This can be fun when then finally meet the person: "I thought he'd be taller . . ." Leaving yourself wiggle room is critical for using the characters later. If one PC has a weakness (or a hatred!) for tall, brown-haired lawyer types, you can make the famous lawyer fit that description before they meet. The more specific you get early the more problems you'll have fitting them in as needed.

Keep it Accurate

These handouts should be generally accurate. I tend to make them around 90% accurate. That makes them trustworthy reference sheets for the players, and something they can rely on knowing. That still leaves enough room for errors, retcon changes, and simply adjustments to fit an ongoing game. If you make this handout too inaccurate, players won't trust it and you'll get less mileage out of it. It's not a rumor rag to tease the PCs; it's a helpful handout to immerse the players into the game world.

Get the Information Out Early

If possible, hand it out just before or after the PCs are generated. Both have advantages. If you hand it out before the PCs are generated, they can create their own ties to the NPCs. The NPCs can be masters, patrons, rivals, idols, or enemies of the PCs. This puts the generation of hooks into the hands of the PCs. If you hand it out after the PCs are generated, you can GM can add hooks from the NPCs to the PCs, and ensure NPCs exist that match the likely interests of the players.

Don'ts!

There are a few don'ts for making famous NPC lists.

First, don't go overboard. A couple dozen major NPCs across multiple categories is probably enough for even a fairly large campaign area. You don't need to write up everyone they could possibly have heard of, just enough that the missing NPCs don't seem to come out of thin air when you come up with them. You don't need to write the whole hierarchy of guildmasters for major guilds, just write up one or two famous members; the rest are implied, and during play you can define them in relation to the famous people the players already know.

Also, don't create NPCs that obviate the need for the PCs. Sure, another group of famous adventurers is fine, and so are other superhero teams or "impossible mission" teams. But don't go too overboard. If such groups are too prevalent, there isn't much reason for the PCs to get involved in any given problem.

This goes less of a problem for individual NPCs who do the same things as the PC. By all means have higher-powered wizards and better fighters and more skilled singers than the PCs . . . but do be careful they don't so closely duplicate the heroes' personality and traits that they occupy the niche that a PC will eventually fill. If you do, think about setting them up as a rival!

As with any rule, it's more of a recommendation than a prohibition; in some campaigns, being the side-lights might be the whole point. But in general, if the PCs expect to be the protagonists, an NPC list shouldn't be a list of people who do everything they'll want to do better than they can. It's discouraging and can undercut the verisimilitude of the game. Players will rightly wonder why they are needed for anything, and "they were busy elsewhere" and "they keep each other in perfect check" is easy to overuse.

Some GMs discourage players from taking notes or keeping long printouts (or even handy laptops) full of game information to refer back to. I encourage it; with the "famous people" list this is especially useful. Players will hunt through the descriptions looking for people who can match the profile of a just-met NPC or who displays knowledge they would need. Of course, GMs may wish to require a roll against an appropriate skill (Research, Gather

Information, Occultism, Know Hidden Pop Culture Lore, whatever). But such a list is best used as general information anyone can get. If you make them roll, give them a big bonus. Even people literally living under a big rock might know the most famous pop stars and legendary warriors.

Who's Who in Action: An Example

Here is a snippet of my fantasy campaign's handout. Some location names have been changed to more generic names.

Wizards

Archwizard Dread Blackstar: Blackstar is the Guildmaster of the Mage's Guild. He is better known for his political acumen than for his wizardry. He is, however, a skilled wizard and should not be underestimated. He is famously critical of the rival Guild of Wizards.

The Mottled; the Shambler; Shufflestep: Extremely powerful wizard, possibly human. The wizard known variously as the Mottled (or the Mottled Mage), the Shambler, and Shufflestep is deeply mysterious. The only thing known for sure is that he (?) is mummified. Although all three names are common, Shufflestep will be used here as a convenience. The actual name of this wizard is not known.

Shufflestep is well-known to be dead, but it is not known if it is still undead. Shufflestep was known as a great necromancer and diviner of things past and future. It was last heard from six centuries ago, when it was unearthed from its hidden tomb in the sandy reaches of the Great Eastern Desert by a circle of wizards seeking its aid to defeat one of the False Wizard-Kings. Shufflestep is said to be the creator of many necromantic spells, most of which are now lost. Many believe it recorded its spells inside its tomb before sealing itself in. Wizards and treasure seekers alike have sought its tomb for the knowledge and treasures said to be within. No currently living person claims to have found it and returned.

Shufflestep is the originator of the Rotting Death and Eviscerate spells.

Ilya the Changeless (?): Wizard; race unknown, sex unknown. Ilya Changeless's name is pure irony. Ilya can appear as a member of almost any race and sex thanks to exceptional command of illusion spells. It is claimed that when appearing as herself (himself?), Ilya is a medium-height humanoid dressed in dark brown robes. The robes suggest little about the figure within and the face, hands, and feet are concealed utterly within. Ilya's voice in this form varies from sentence to sentence, often changing wildly. Ilya is feared, or at least inspires suspicion. Ilya seems to keep remarkably up to date with rumors, and is suspected of using her/his/its changeable form to spy out information to use for some unknown purpose.

Rumors suggest that Ilya the Changeless was a Wizard-Princesses who pushed her research too far and lost control of her own body. Ilya is said to wander the known world, changing from form to form, interacting with people who never suspect they have just spoken to a great sorcerer (-ess?).

Famous Adventurers & Warriors

Count Johan Volkstein Explorer and adventurer. Count Volkstein holds a small but wealthy fief in the local kingdom. He is rarely there, however, instead choosing to explore the world by ship, horseback, or foot. Count Volkstein was the first man from the East to travel to the far west, even as far as the semi-legendary kingdom of Thule. Count Volkstein is regarded by most of his peers as both incredibly brave and impossibly foolhardy. He is known as a great source of stories, both factual and improbable, which is willing to trade for equally improbable tales.

Master Luc Goddard: Reputed to be the finest fencing master in the Southern Islands, he is much in demand by the wealthy for lessons. Master Goddard dwells in a chateau near the capital city. The Goddards have been teaching fencing for generations.

Master Henri D'Hecule: Rival to Master Goddard, Henri is the second-most respected fencing master in the Southern Islands. Master Henri dwells in the capital city, and maintains a moderate-sized salon there. Henri is a relative newcomer. The Goddards have been teaching for generations; Henri is the first instructor in his line.

Captain Faroukh Amil: Captain of the Imperial Privateer (read: Pirate vessel) *Alasiyan Princess.* He is said to be handsome, slick, and skilled with sword and sail alike. He is said to be the finest and boldest of the Imperial Privateers. He is ruthless, but is said to spare those who surrender without resisting his men. Captain Amil is famous for plundering a pair of wealthy Ilishi trading vessels off of the Tanganian Archipelago, all the while evading three pursuing Ilishi naval vessels who were hot on his heels.

Captain Amil's origins are unknown, but it is likely he was a common sailor from Al Kedam who rose through the ranks to command. Certainly, nothing is known that contradicts this origin.

* * *

In my campaign so far, the PC fencer has beaten Jean-Pierre L'enger in a duel that was kept quite hush-hush, earning her the enmity of Jean-Pierre and sparking quiet but persistent rumors of the results. They have interacted politically with the Archwizard Dread Blackstar, fought Captain Amil three times (finally killing him and most of his elite crew in the final encounter). They've unsuccessfully sought out Count Volkstein for a journey to the West and plan to meet with him once more. And Shufflestep awaits them, a meeting the party's necromancy inclined mage eagerly anticipates.

Conclusion

The advantage of a "famous persons" handout is that you don't need to flesh out an entire world. This gives the *appearance* of a fleshed-out world -- verisimilitude instead of truth. It also gives sufficient hooks for the PCs to act on, hooks for the GM to hang adventures on, and lends a bit of credibility to the world. It takes relatively little time to pull together, making it a high-impact item that's easy to make. You don't need to worry about the details, because vagueness only improves it. Now when you hand out your list and introduce a "famous" NPC, the players will already know who it is . . .

A Little Revolution, Now and Then

by Brian Rogers

"I went out drinking with Thomas Paine; he said that all revolutions are not the same."
-Billy Bragg

Here on the anniversary of American independence it's worth taking a look at the Revolutionary War to see what *hasn't* been done with it. Specifically, no one has added superheroes!

This is a strange omission. Yes, wars other than World War II aren't really a super's native environment: the notion of costumed super-humans didn't emerge until after the War to End All Wars, and post-WWII conflicts have been too complicated for comics publishers to wage except in alternate histories. Still, other venues have had no problem wading onto various temporal beachheads, from the Vietnam War in the *Wild Cards* books to the Great War sequences in *Promethea* to *Godlike's* all-World-War-II environment (never mind the [suppressed superhuman](#) columns). There's no reason why the tempering fire of the American myth should not receive a similar treatment.

It is not an experiment without perils. The problem of supers before the industrial revolution is the weakness of technology as a counter-balance to super-humanity. Prior to the invention of at least the revolver and preferably heavy, mobile weaponry, the average super is simply too powerful for military forces. How you resolve this problem determines a lot about the Revolutionary campaign.

The most obvious solution is creating British supers to confront the rebels on a level playing field. Given that this concept has the American supers as the heroes, makes the British supers . . . villains. This opposition could be as ethically clear cut (The Royal Executioner, whose axe that lets him summon the ghosts of all executed by the crown!) or as gray (The Loyalist, who matches you power for power while advocating that the war is harming more people than it helps) as you like. The empire has no shortage of heroic myths to draw upon without even touching on the morality of the conflict, and you can use the revolution as an excuse for some rip roaring fights between colonial heroes and the reborn knights of the round table. In any event, the purpose is the removal of super-humans from the human battlefield, so the war proceeds as it did before.

Or you could give the British heavy, mobile weaponry. It only takes one superhuman genius in the empire to provide Steampunk technology to counter the colonies' advantage. Perhaps [Edward Pellew](#) controls one or more transforming steamships that can stride inland as needed. This sort of technological balancing is in keeping with many WWII-era comics, where the Nazis fielded super-weapon after super-weapon against the allied super-humans. Again, this closes the power gap and keeps the war on an historic track without the effort of developing British supers who might well end up dead on the fields of war.

Speaking of dead on the fields, another option is down-powering the superhuman to put the conventional adversaries back into the game. The problem here is that war is a nasty dirty business, and such down-powered heroes might not last very long: the balancing point between overwhelmingly powerful and "might as well be a normal soldier" is difficult to find. There is still plenty of rolepaying opportunity even when the powers are just an excuse to keep the PCs alive long enough accomplish things.

Finally, you could just let them have an overwhelming impact:

- Perhaps the colonies need never ask the French into the war, and the world's history heads into uncharted territory. Europe might well panic at the sight of an upstart colony humbling one of the world's great powers. Massive forces could be arrayed against the heroes, perhaps ultimately leading them into a D-Day invasion some 175 years early.
- Or it might focus entirely on politics; as potent as the heroes are they cannot be on every front. The more powerful members take to the field, while the subtle ones engage in the espionage and politics that will secure recognition and economic aid. Such a game is ideal for a [League](#), with action shifting between the powerful

primary and subtle secondary groups.
- Or the overwhelming impact doesn't make the war worse, but prevents it altogether! History skews before we can see the whites of their eyes, with no guarantee that the United States will ever form, or ever need to.

Freedom, Justice, Society

In a world in political and economic turmoil, where a revolution is underway between one of the great states of Europe and its far distant colony, the rules are changing. In some cases it's ancient magics reborn, in others it is the sciences proving more potent than any dared dream, and for a few it is simply a measure of will. Whatever the reason, the very nature of war is being forever changed as a society dedicated to justice for the colonies is turning the tide.

Working late in his silversmith's shop, **Paul Revere,** perhaps overtired from his drilling with the minutemen, made an irreproducible error. Quicksilver fused with his skin and blood, and fire destroyed his shop . . . though Revere awoke streets away, at the end of a line of fire. When consciousness returned, he found that getting ready in a moment's notice is child's play, and he easily outdistances the fastest horse, his footprints a blazing trail towards independence.

John Adams' sleep was haunted by terrible things, from the small crimes man visits upon his brothers to the largest crime of all: tyranny. Unable to rest, Adams consulted with his cousin and his dear wife, and Sam decanted a solution: a sleeping draught to render him insensate for eight long hours. Instead, Abigail found her husband sleepwalking with the silence and horrific visage of a dream, unerringly drawn to those in need of help, or beyond help but demanding justice. Never comfortable with inaction, she stands at his back in his nightly endeavors, holding his horse and bearing a brace of pistols as her dearest friend makes manifest his dream of justice.

Inspired by John's example, **Sam Adams** continued his research into strange brews, eventually producing one that increases the imbiber's agility, puissance, strength, and durability, but -- as with all strong drink -- at the cost of his higher judgment and illness when sobriety returns. It is not without risks, but what is life (or war) without a little risk? Brewer, patriot, and superhero, Sam Adams is an intoxicating presence compared to his dour cousin, but none can doubt his effectiveness or power.

Nathan Hale woke with surprise to learn he had nothing to regret. America's greatest spy, able to don ghosts like a cloak to share their faces and memories, he slips past the enemy as a spirit for the revolution. His greatest wrath is saved for those who would hide atrocities in the war; to them he is divine vengeance made manifest. His intensity scares even his allies, and there are those who think that some part of him did die that day.

For years **George Washington** had been married to a terrible secret, the green glass grail and green gloves found deep in a West Virginian cave. Too honest to use this power to proclaim himself king but fearless enough to bend its infinite, malign, force to his will, he keeps his focus on the need to see this war through. The more support the fledgling nation gives him, the more sure his convictions, and the more potent his weapon.

Thomas Jefferson was a poet and inventor, philosopher and architect, driven near to madness to perfect the material and the spiritual worlds. With the discovery of the papers of the mythic Deadalus among his books he proclaimed himself the reincarnation of this Greek philosopher and inventor. He then proved it, reconstructing his wings and taking flight over Virginia. Armed with those wings, plus weapons and computational devices crafted by the greatest mind of man's greatest age, Jefferson is a hawk hunting for the freedom of the Americas.

"It's just a question," **Salem Poor** told himself, "of hitting the weakest spot with the strongest blow. And never giving up." Unlike his allies, Salem does not see himself as super-human. He has no gift of speed, visionary dreams, or weapons of power. What he does have is the mind of a warrior, the body of a brawler, and the unquenchable spirit of one who had already bought his freedom. Yes, compared to his allies' power his gifts might be the smallest thing imaginable, but never, ever count him out.

In the back country of Georgia **Nancy Morgan Hart** was a legend for her cunning and will; what her neighbors didn't know is that she was a legend everywhere else as well! The latest identity of the Greek sorceress Medea, given immortality by Hera for resisting Zeus' charms, Medea has become a force for order in a world gone mad. Hiding her

face behind a golden mask, when asked why she chooses to bring her magic to the aid of the colonies, her one word reply is simply, "Fate."

While these were the greatest names of the firsts among equals, there were others. Traveling along with the colonial army, **Molly "Pitcher" McCauley** became a symbol of the colonies' indomitable women; mounted on a black stallion and disguised by a canary wig, she became so much more: a devastating songbird of American freedom. Apparently blinded while rescuing innocents from a burning building, **Dr. Lyman Hall** learned that his eyes had been reversed and took this as a calling to be the doctor at mid-night, healing the wounded where only he can see. With the last stitch sewed, **Betsy Ross** inadvertently bound herself to the new nation her banner symbolized; as she came to mirror its prowess, she was drawn to the field as the Amazon of the Americas. **John Paul Jones** stands as a man between the sea and the land, gifted with the strength and endurance that hearkens to mythic nobility and a blessing that water will never drown him. Providing strange guidance to the society is a phantom who gives no name, though Hart has referred to him as **le Comte** when he thinks no one is listening.

The Founding Fathers

Philadelphia was where the age of marvels started as the home of Benjamin Franklin, the most renowned scientific mind of his age. An explorer, traveler, inventor, statesman, and builder of societies, Franklin was acknowledged as being fantastic, and in 1774 he demonstrated his new discoveries in electricity to three colleagues: the hot-headed Thomas Paine, his visiting correspondent Polly Stevenson Hewson, and Franklin's longtime friend the stalwart Dr. Thomas Bond. The resultant energies transformed them into beings more than human, revitalizing the aged Franklin and Bond even as it changed them physically . . . Bond tragically so.

The sudden appearance of the quartet -- powerful, famed, and dedicated to American independence -- ended the revolution before it began. The British stalled, opening diplomatic paths that granted the colonies additional freedoms that weakened their resolve without breaking them from the crown. Paine bristled, while Franklin was at war with himself, struggling to keep the colonies united towards independence in the face of a British charm offensive and having no wish to see an all-out war. Add to that his confusion concerning his relationship the widow Hewson, the need to find a cure for Mr. Bond's condition, and the endless scientific potential of their new abilities and even a man of Benjamin's expansive intellect can find himself stretched too thin.

The great wild card in this is Franklin's illegitimate son, William. A staunch loyalist, he rules the New Jersey colony with an iron fist, his authority backed not only by the crown but by offshoots of his father's technology. Franklin the younger claims to have improved on his father's work, but his first experiments with it left him a scarred face now hidden behind an armored mask. The father/son relationship is a bitter rift, further complicated by the existence of Franklin the youngest; William Temple is William Franklin's illegitimate son, being raised by his grandfather. Having been exposed to the energies of both men's experiments, Temple's potential is unknown and unguessable. The battle then, is for custody of the child, the science and the colonies, and in waging it the Franklins might reshape -- or destroy -- the world.

Unknown to both sides, chimerical beings from the web of stars are manipulating public sentiments towards what they hoped would be an all out war that would engulf the globe and leave Britain ripe for conquest. In the caves beneath Appalachia rest giant monsters from a bygone age that the right men could command, and to the ever expanding west were trackless wonders and worlds unimagined, all calling for the attention of the Franklin's Four Founding Fathers . . .

The 300th Transmission

"SHALLOW: Ay, that I do; and have done any time these three hundred years.
SLENDER: All his successors gone before him hath done't; and all his ancestors that come after him may: they may give the dozen white luces in their coat."
-- William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* I:i:7-8

Welcome to Transmission 300, or should I say, welcome back to Transmission 200! If good Slender and excellent Shallow, above, seem confused about time, cause, effect, duration, and all those good things, perhaps it's because this column aims to update the sprawling secret-historical reality-war background from Transmission 200 (or, depending on how you look at it, Transmissions 200-202) for the last 98 or so Transmissions since then. (This is actually Transmission 301, because we were delayed for an extra installment chasing a big Black Bird.) Ten years' worth of columns overall, mashed up with love and daring. I assure you, it's exquisite.

Real fast, then, a quick primer on our major players. (There are minor players, too, as you'll see; don't worry too much about them.) Remember, the factions switch sides as often as they switch realities. There are no permanent alliances in the Eka-verse (itself a sort of "banyan of realities"), only permanent Strangeness:

- The **Antarctic Space Nazis** and their Zeit-SS (ZSS), descended from Ahnenerbe research and pure evil.
- John Dee and the Rosicrucian imperialists of **MI-Infinity** (MI-8) want to magically transform the world into their green and pleasant land.
- The primordial **Reptoids** seek to recover the cold tyranny over Earth that they enjoyed 65 million years ago.
- The **Sphinxes** are truly alien natives of a rival mirror realm of the Earth, a major satrapy of which is known as India Ultraterrestria.
- Strike Force Chronos is the strong arm of the **Argus** group, the violent and stiff-necked American ultra-conspiracy that runs the Black Ops.
- The **Lemurians** are quasi-astral beings based in Shangri-La; their agenda is suitably unclear.

Some of the entries in this timeline are all new; others are modified, grown from their previous low-information state into plump new strawberries of reality. With all that recovered memory, we're ready to see some owls. So strap in, charge up, and get ready to count down from *300 . . .*

2.8 billion B.C.-450,000 B.C.: Any number of unknown high-technology Civilizations flourish until the coming of the ancient astronauts.

1334 B.C.: ZSS agents hide Hitler's soul from vengeful Allied necromancers, sealing it up in the Egyptian Valley of the Kings' Tomb 55.

1178 B.C.: Collapse of the quantum Troy under Reptoid attack.

841 B.C.: Jehu, a Lemurian warrior agent of the rebel Dionysos, locks open the hinge of Megiddo with a pyramid of heads.

753 B.C. MI-8 and the Reptoids divert the excess glory from Glozel to the small hill village of Rome, against opposition from the Lemurians and from a local Sphinx named Vertumnus (eventually deresolved into a sentient forest and shifted to another worldline).

323 B.C. In addition to the manticores, Alexander's conquests open the Way for the Sphinxian unicorns to enter -- and poke further holes in -- reality.

280 B.C.: Reptoid-driven completion of the Seven Wonders of the World defines a two-way ley line leading to a world of wonders and a world of monsters.

73 B.C.: Sphinxes launch mystical [Atlantean invasion](#) of Rome to weaken the Reptoids, [splintering the city](#) and [driving](#) it deep into the cantosphere. Reptoids cache a store of [vampiric](#) dragon-blood in one Rome as a Refuge.

70 B.C.: Reptoid sonic-temporal access system [overfunctions](#) under the stress of the Sphinx attack, blowing open almost all times to access.

226 A.D.: The Great [Orm](#), a "mad idiot god" of the Reptoids, attempts to take over the world, but is contained by the Lemurians.

303 A.D.: An MI-8 [agent](#) kills a Reptoid on a cantospheric chord, resonating throughout the eka-verse.

340 A.D.: Lemurians swallow a Reptoid outpost and expand India Ultraterrestria into the [Takla Makan](#), "accidentally" extruding [centaurs](#) into the Roman desert and dooming Rome.

451 A.D.: ZSS launches an [orcish](#) assault on one of the Reptoids' spare Romes.

535 A.D.: The Dolorous Blow [reality quake](#) also upthrusts [Dunwich](#), which becomes a beachhead in the cantosphere for the Sphinx Queen of the Dead.

1000: MI-8 patches the collapsed Reptoid experiment with [paratime](#) using a self-perpetuating [ring](#) cliometry; it [wobbles](#) and echoes.

1099: Argus' Templar ops bring [guns](#) to a knife fight.

1178: Multiple impacts during the [Canterbury Event](#) knock off multiple world fragments. They depart carrying virtually the only people who remember seeing the Canterbury Event, implying a targeted strike with Invisible Meteorites against sentient consciousness.

1296: Reptoids steal an [encysted](#) Sphinx from MI-8 custody in Scotland.

1322-1356: MI-8 agent Sir John [Mandeville](#) infiltrates and explores India Ultraterrestria; he may or may not have become a double agent for either Lemuria or the Sphinxes, and his network remains untrustworthy.

1395: Dick Whittington's cat commissioned by MI-8 to spy out the court of their rogue asset [Tamburlaine](#) in India Ultraterrestria.

1423: The Sphinxes smuggle [cherubim](#) spores into Reptoid fastnesses by implanting them in the minds of artists, accidentally starting Rosicrucianism.

1465: Decayed clan of [anthropophagous](#) Reptoids is exiled from all times simultaneously by the Reptoid King James of Scotland.

1493: While a Reptoid-ZSS double agent, the [current iteration](#) of Christopher Columbus opens the way to the [land of the dead](#); another Columbus dickers with [mermaids](#) for passage through the cantosphere.

1503: Lemurian asset (and possible heir to [Megalion](#)) Leonardo da Vinci captures the Sphinx *La Gioconda* in poplar wood, perhaps as a power play for his own plan.

1588: Another [major nexus](#) battle, as MI-8 throws all its resources including a [secretly resurrected Arthur](#) and a [dramaturgical inversion ritual](#) into defeating the [Spanish Armada](#) in all timelines. Various Armadas receive Reptoid, Sphinx, or ZSS aid; at least one Armada sails into a whole [other world](#).

1589-1613: John Dee's agent William Shakespeare crafts a series of [dramaturgies](#) designed to contain chaos ([1592](#)), generate Antichrist ([1592](#)), imprison and sterilize a goddess ([1593](#)), alchemically harness love and gold ([1594](#)), sacrifice the false king ([1595](#)), contain wolf-energies ([1596](#)), uncover druidic lore ([1598](#)), invoke Brutus-Cromwell ([1599](#)), evoke the athanor ([1600](#)), exalt Dionysos ([1601](#)), alchemically Unmake ([1604](#)), restrain Leviathan ([1605](#)),

destroy the world ([1606](#)), shield witches ([1606](#)), distill the true elixir ([1608](#)), cement the occult imperium in Bohemia ([1611](#)), and so forth. Shakespeare, and others, often use these dramaturgies for other, private ends both now and later.

1597: The rogue agent Tamburlaine's [necromantic strike](#) against Britain loosens the fetters of [Herne](#) the Hunter, to the consternation of his jailer-worshippers in MI-8.

1605: Lemurian agent Robert Catesby attempts to [blow up](#) Britain explosively, conceptually, and ritually; only the ritual has any effect, and that only a poetic one.

1611: Angry at not being invited to join the Rosicrucian-Reptoid-Argus [alliance](#) against Lemuria, the Sphinx [Eris](#) reverses the polarity of the alchemical marriage. Her apple seeds the Occult Empire and its implacable enmity to the independence of America.

1641: [Reality Cromwell](#) created as one of Dee's thought-experiments to remove the "Puritan strain" from Britain, after a visualization [accident](#) buries the island in monsters.

1674: At the cost of one of his selves, MI-8 analyst Robert Hooke encysts a Sphinx pocket-reality into [Bedlam](#), from where it will almost escape 123 years later via [Influencing Engine](#).

1692: [Sinbad](#) sails out of a roc egg in [Libertatia](#) (run by Lemurian refugees from [Irem](#), [benandanti](#) witches, American Templar pirates, and the Mandeville faction of MI-8), through the cantosphere via India Ultraterrestria, and into print and [eternity](#).

1751: An MI-8 Politickal Art operation drives [Mother Geneva](#) (a Sphinx) out of most Londons.

1758: The passage of [Halley's Comet](#) of ice and fire detaches a shell Earth from Earthly [physics](#).

1775: The faeries and Sphinxes continue their war against Argus in [Transylvania](#); Black Ranger Daniel Boone is hard-pressed. Argus cannot aid him while distracted by the Occult Empire in [Boston](#), and while they chop back a Sphinx-positive [invasive timeline](#) that has sent deep roots as far as [Revolutionary France](#).

1788: A manticore slips into [London](#) during the final fall of the Occult Empire.

1804: Taking advantage of a quantum [bullet hole](#) in American history, Argus agents [Lewis and Clark](#) explore America Ultraterrestria, calving back Lemurian territory. They are aided iconically by the Argus-grown tulpa, [Johnny Appleseed](#).

1809: The Lemurians [silence](#) [Meriwether Lewis](#); Clark is protected by the Reptoid magic he dug up.

1821-1824: The [Lamia](#) (likely a Sphinx) cripples and [consumes](#) an MI-8 attempt to assemble another poetic Circle like John Dee's. William [Blake](#) refuses to work for any faction; he is eliminated three years later.

1827: Second Grey spore attempt through [Roswell](#) stopped by Argus, which cultivates an American spore-avatar, [John the Conqueror](#), to help out in the future.

1833: MI-8 terminates ZSS sleeper construct [Kaspar Hauser](#), but not before the living pragmaclast can pass a [ring](#) to Richard Wagner.

1841: Lemurian agents unleash tailored conceptual retroviruses, creating [Reality Rust](#), metastasizing a mad underworld throughout [New York](#) Cities, and reifying a [Poe tale](#). However, the entropic field spreads throughout all space-time until even the Sphinxes are forced to intervene, establishing the [scarecrow](#) protocol around plague and panic to prevent utter chaos from enveloping everything.

1848: Sphinxes rapidly and easily suborn yet another MI-8 attempt at a poetic [Circle](#).

1854: Splashback effect from the [Levi Re-Creation](#) awakens the [New Motive Power](#), heralded by the fiery death (and

rebirth?) of the Chess-Playing Turk, a Lemurian carapace.

1872: Rogue MI-8 agent Phileas Fogg loops off a day in his time net, collecting Invisible Meteorites all the while.

1881: Argus and MI-8 duel over America's sacred kingship.

1898: Manticores suborn MI-8 asset John Henry Patterson and begin unlocking Africa for Sphinxian infiltration.

1900: Suspecting that the Land of the Dead will be more important this century, Argus apports Casey Jones there on the leyroad to join its iconic agent in place, John Henry.

1901: As the new century ticks over, the artemisiac Sphinx Vouivre awakens beneath the Alps; she immediately flows back in time to create an artistic Circle.

1902: Lord Kelvin's self-causal transmission bootstraps time travel into MI-8 hands, and weakens the twentieth century's reality from the beginning, opening a vibratory barrier in Central Africa loosened by manticore action.

1909: Weak between two huge impacts, reality folds back to the 1854 splashback under a Futurist assault. It is eventually contained by Rosicrucian art historians, but kills the King of the Cats. The loose reality shards (some the size of whole civilizations) wind up in the Grand Canyon.

1911-1913: The Sphinx inside the *Mona Lisa* escapes confinement for two years, during which she conspires with the Snake Goddess of the Reptoids to devastate the world in endless war.

1914: MI-8 agent Arthur Machen performs the Bowmen Working to screen reality against the Sphinx-Snake Goddess' ontoclysm.

1917: The Reptoid Dagon gains access to the dreams of H.P. Lovecraft, a Sphinx agent-of-influence, and gazes him into temporal paralysis. One of Lovecraft's dreams departs completely, and washes up in a German metropolis.

1925: Second occultation of Saint-Germain, Ace of Spies.

1926: Argus begins paving America's kundalini serpent line.

1931: ZSS Lebensborn asset Kim Philby recruited by Magog, a Lemurian giant affiliated with Tamburlaine; a Lemurian also recruits Argus asset Robert Johnson, putting the Black Ops on his tail.

1933: A series of ZSS hammer blows against the weakened century splits off Reich-5, but accidentally triggers, among other things, the return of the Great Orm, an infradimensional Reptoid.

1934: While Argus is distracted by the ZSS onslaught this decade, La Llorona establishes a Sphinxian beachhead in the Chicago cantosphere.

1945: The Trinity test produces a whole storm of realities, including Reality Urdha.

February 3, 1959: The day the music died. Later Argus forensics determined it was an MI-8 op intended to clear the way for their own Tavistock-trained brainwash artists.

1961: Argus' Dean Drive launch of four apes into space triggers a Lemurian quantum minefield, forcing Argus to get around it five years later with conceptual spaceports in four realities.

1968: The Mothman detonation weakens American reality enough that Lemurian pressure upthrusts Atlantis; the Reptoids, Sphinxes, ZSS, MI-8, and Argus put together a covert submarine squadron to combat the Atlanteans and Lemurians.

1969: Argus, the Ahnenerbe, and the Rosicrucians alchemically fix the Moon in a Three Magi Working, badly

weakening Lemuria, the Sphinxes, and the Reptoids on many crucial spheres.

2001: History restored from backup on January 1, 2001 after [four tries](). Purged virus disposed of in [Reality Zaius]() by the Reptoids.

2004: A [semi-aquatic rodent] [reveals]() [an amount] but soon goes back to [an art form].

The Kingdom of Innerwall

A Fantasy Campaign Setting for *GURPS*
Part I: Players' Information

by Steve Devaney

Art by Steve Devaney

In the Kingdom of Innerwall there are trees hundreds of feet tall, lily pads as big as rugs, and grass and flowers taller than a person's head. The caps of toadstools overhang forest paths and travelers can use a leaf as a tarp to keep off the rain. A titanic stone wall thousands of feet tall surrounds the entire realm, and what lies beyond its ancient thickness is a mystery. In some places along this wall there are towers so huge that surely they must be giant-made. Few souls have actually journeyed to see these enormous crumbling ruins and ivy covered battlements. Legends tell of heroes venturing into those places and returning with stories of the most fantastic nature -- a grandfather clock the size of a fortress, home to a cabal of mice sorcerers, a giant cat who sleeps in a huge arched window and plays riddle games only to eat the losers, a lute the size of a boat, which when plucked causes all within earshot to dance with glee.

But the greatest mystery of all looms in the misty distance -- an enormous castle, visible even now from my window as I write . . . far beyond the forests and the Big Water, in a land where it is rumored a giant still dwells.

--Valantius, Sage of Cathedrabough

Living in the Kingdom of Innerwall

At first glance Innerwall resembles the setting of a child's storybook. Mice wearing plumed hats stroll cobblestone city streets with rapiers dangling at their sides, mingling among squirrels in finely woven jerkins with ruff and lace. Frogs navigate gilded galleons around huge lily pads, and bespectacled moles build vast cities beneath the ground. Innerwall is home to humans as well, who stand no taller than squirrels, brushing shoulders with mice and other races in the marketplace. But Innerwall is not the setting of a child's storybook. Mice and weasels duel with rapiers at Brokenfountain Square in the city of Meeker. Beyond the Crickle Crack lies the weasel city of Skulk, where Prince Flim amasses his army, the Claw Horde to conquer the south. Pirates plague the shores of the Swan Sea and the Titan's Sea with blazing cannons.

Mousebuckler

The history of Innerwall is shrouded in misty forgetfulness. The present year is 198 PP (Post Persequor). The earliest memories of mankind begin in the midst of panic -- a fearful period of constant hiding and fleeing. This was a dark

time known as The Hunt, during which much of mankind was chased down and slain by enormous ravenous beasts. If it were not for the aid of the mice, which took mankind in and protected them, the race of men surely would have perished. For this reason there has always been a special bond between mice and men.

For Innerwall's animalistic denizens, history is equally vague; mouse sages tell of the Time of Awakening, which coincides with The Hunt. Before the Time of Awakening everything was a simple dream of dappled light and moonlit nights.

The surviving remnants of mankind eventually united and created the city of Cathedrabough, a network of walkways, bridges, and houses built high in the boughs of an enormous oak tree, known as the Tree of Larrenfall. This magnificent treetop metropolis would ultimately become the capitol city of the Kingdom of Larrenfall. The present ruler is young King Ulrem.

Most of Innerwall is at TL4. The printing press has been in use for the last 87 years, clockwork machines are becoming more common, and steam energy is on the cusp of being invented. Dirigibles ply the skies between Cathedrabough and Achren Halls. Powder weapons are gaining popularity but are still less reliable than the crossbow. The most common form of currency is coin, though letters of credit are not uncommon. The raising and breeding of rabbits (or hareherding) is one of the most common forms of animal husbandry in practice; unlike other animals in Innerwall, rabbits have maintained their animal intellect and serve as riding beasts, pack animals, and a source of food and leather. Other forms of animal husbandry include the raising of grasshoppers (roasted wild grasshopper is quite a delicacy though difficult to catch) and dragonflies, which are used as carrier pigeons. Bees are a source of honey, albeit taking it from them is an art unto itself. The diet of most humans is limited to grains, vegetables, fruits, berries, nuts, and various forms of insects. Fish often find themselves on the plates of the more wealthy.

Creating an Innerwall Character

The Kingdom of Innerwall assumes the use of the default *GURPS* magic system with a normal mana level. PCs can be a mix of humans and animals built with a suggested power level of 150 points. Some character types to choose from include knights or secret agents in service to King Ulrem; mice sorcerers; mole artisans; battle-loving weasels; and sagely humans, fascinated by the ivy-shrouded ruins of giants and their own forgotten history. Included below is a sampling of racial templates, though these are in no way inclusive; the GM should feel free to devise his or her own anthropomorphized races.

Bat   *101 points*

Contrary to common belief, the bats of Innerwall do not suffer from bad eyesight. Indeed, like the rest of Innerwall's animal denizens, they have been able to see in full-color spectrum since the Green Lord's curse. Bats appreciate the finer things in life and dress accordingly in colorful jerkins made of finely stitched cloth. They generally prefer to make their homes in dark areas and often carve elaborate dwellings in the hanging stalactites of dimly lit caverns, which they then illuminate with slow-burning candle lamps.

Attribute Modifiers: DX+2 [40].
Advantages: Flight (Winged -25%) [30]; Fur [1]; Sonar [20]; Temperature Tolerance [1]; Ultrahearing [5].
Disadvantages: Foot Manipulators 2 [-6].
Features: Squeaky Voice.

Bird   *85 points*

These colorful, feathered denizens of Innerwall love the air and wind, and often adorn their treetop towns with chimes. Their houses tend to lack floors, being instead fitted with crossbeams for perching. Many of them look at Innerwall's featherless citizens with pity for not being able to join them in flight. In a pinch a bird can always use his beak as

weapon.

Attribute Modifiers: ST-2 [-20]; DX+2 [40].
Advantages: Acute Vision 1 [2]; Enhanced Move ½ (Air) 2 [20], Flight (Winged-25%) [30]; Perfect Balance [15]; Striker (Piercing) (Cannot Parry -40%) [3]; Temperature Tolerance [1].
Disadvantages: Foot Manipulators 2 [-6].
Features: Feathers.

Crow   *140 points*

The eyes of a crow are black with secrets, and when the light shines upon them they glint with cunning. Already intelligent before the Time of Awakening, the crows are masters of intrigue. Unlike their smaller feathered-brethren, crows tend to have a jealous territorialism regarding the sky and are not pleased to share it with non-avian races.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+2 [20]; DX+2 [40]; IQ+1 [20].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM +1.
Advantages: Acute Vision 1 [2]; Enhanced Move ½ (Air) 2 [20], Flight (Winged-25%) [30]; Perfect Balance [15]; Striker (Piercing) (Cannot Parry -40%) [3]; Temperature Tolerance [1].
Disadvantages: Foot Manipulators 2 [-6]; Intolerance (Non-avian flyers) [-5].
Features: Feathers.

Frog   *63 points*

The frogs of Paddlebridge hoist mugs of honey mead and, with deep throaty voices, sing songs about the Big Water. No other race has such a love for life at sea. Frogs build fabulous ships of gilt wood and ply the waters of the Swan Sea as traders and merchants. The stilt-town of Paddlebridge is home to the largest shipbuilding company in the kingdom.

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Enhanced Move (Water) 1 [20], Extra Arms (Tongue) 1 (Long +200%; Not a Fine Manipulator -30%; Weak -25% (1/2 ST)) [25]; Nictitating Membrane [1].
Disadvantages: Cold-Blooded [-5].
Features: Low Voice.

Mole   *9 points*

Moles are a quiet people that spend most of the time in their underground homes. Being terribly nearsighted most moles where spectacles. The sunlight bothers them and many wear specially designed tinted glasses while traveling above ground.

Advantages: Acute Hearing 1 [2]; Claws (Blunt Claws) [3]; Discriminatory Smell [15]; Fur [1]; Temperature Tolerance [1]; Tunneling (Slow) (Tunneling Move (+2)); Vibration Sense (Air) [10].
Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted) [-25]; Short Arms [-5].
Features: Hidden Eyes.

Mouse   *68 points*

The mice of Innerwall stand roughly three to four feet tall. They are a nimble (and in some cases somewhat nervous) race that has lived side by side with humans since the First Days. Tending towards shyness, mice are precocious inventors and seekers of knowledge, and many of them are expert artisans.

Attribute Modifiers: ST-2 [-20]; DX+2 [40]; IQ+1 [20].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: SM -2.
Advantages: Claws (Blunt Claws) [3]; Enhanced Move ½ (Ground) 2 [20]; Fur [1]; Teeth (Sharp Teeth) [1]; Temperature Tolerance [1].
Features: Tail.
Skills: Climbing (A) DX+2 [2]-14.

Squirrel   *132 points*

Standing approximately as tall as humans, squirrels tend to have trouble taking life very seriously. They are by no means lazy but tend to prefer spending all of their leisure time in some mode of play. This can sometimes irritate the other races, particularly the mice, which are already somewhat nervous and tend to find the antics of squirrels a little disconcerting.

Attribute Modifiers: DX+3 [60].
Secondary Characteristic: Basic Speed +0.50 [10]
Advantages: Claws (Blunt Claws) [3]; Clinging (Only Rough Surfaces) [16]; Enhanced Move ½ (Ground) 2 [20]; Fur [1]; Perfect Balance [15]; Super Climbing 2 [6]; Temperature Tolerance [1]
Features: Bushy Tail, Teeth (Blunt Teeth).

Weasel   *210 points*

Bitten One

A weasel's body varies in length between 10 and 14 feet, with a bushy tail equally as long. Though they tend to slouch when standing upright, they still loom head and shoulders above the rest of Innerwall's denizens. Most of them tend to have terrible tempers, though a few have learned to control their anger and live among normal civilized society. Most weasels have a passionate hatred for their distant brethren in Skulk, whom they believe give weasels a bad name.

Skulk weasels bear a curse called Shawmock's Bite, an affliction that is passed through the saliva and which instills an incessant simmering and often uncontrollable rage within the victim. For this reason Skulk weasels are often called Bitten Ones, or the Children of Shawmock. All Skulk weasels are bitten at birth to perpetuate this aggressive nature. Bitten Ones live for combat. They tend to spike their fur with lime and color it with dies of blue and purple.

In combat many of them fight with wicked scimitars and braid spiked flails into their tails. After victory in combat Bitten Ones prance and jump about in their traditional war dance.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+4 [40]; DX+3 [60].
Secondary Characteristic: Basic Speed +0.50 [10], SM +2.
Advantages: Claws (Sharp Claws) [5]]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Damage Resistance 1 [5]; Discriminatory Smell (Emotion Sense +50%) [23]; Enhanced Move ½ (Ground) 2 [20]; Fur [1]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 1 [1]; Teeth (Sharp Teeth) [1]; Temperature Tolerance [1]
Features: Bushy Tail.
Skills: Climbing (A) DX+2 [8]-15.

Bitten One (-60 Points): Bad Temper (12 or less) [-10], Berserk (12 or less) [-10], Bloodlust (12 or less) [-10], Bully (12 or less) [-10], Callous [-5], Infectious Attack [-5], Intolerance (Total Intolerance) [-10].

The Kingdom of Innerwall

A Fantasy Campaign Setting for *GURPS*
Part II: GM's Information

by Steve Devaney

Art by Steve Devaney

The History of Innerwall

Many hundreds of years ago there lived a powerful king who loved to hunt and would often lead his court into the nearby forest to do so. One day he decided to surround this forest with a great wall so that only he and his guests could enjoy its beauty. He did not know that the forest was the home of another king, a fairy spirit called the Green Lord.

Ulrem

When the walls surrounding the forest were complete, the king decided to stage a hunt to celebrate. He declared that the hunter who slew the greatest stag would be bestowed a golden arrow.

Many hunters strung their bows and entered the forest in the hopes of attaining this gift, enraging the Green Lord even further. After the last of the hunters returned to the king's hall, and the bodies of the stags were piled high before the throne, the Green Lord appeared. To the dismay of the king's court he summoned all the creatures of the forest to gather around the king's castle, and before their eyes he waved his staff and threw down his curse. Every human being, except for the king himself, shrank in size. In fear the people of the kingdom scattered while forest predators hunted them like cats hunting mice. The curse had other effects. It stole the humans' memories of their former selves and used them to imbue many of the forest creatures with human intellect and cunning. The animals also inherited human characteristics, such as the fondness for clothing, the inclination to build houses and the ability to see in the full-color spectrum.

The shock of the Green Lord's curse left many people unequipped to survive in a world that had literally become too big for them. Not only had their world changed but the memories of their former selves were all but gone. They remembered their names and their loved ones, and even the skills they had, but could not fathom what had occurred prior to that sudden moment when everything changed. Fortunately they were not left completely naked in this giant's world, as all their personal possessions that they carried at the time of the curse were transformed with them.

Many of the people present at the King's castle were slain at the moment the curse was cast, though a group of them managed to escape with the aid of mice that lived in the great hall's wall. Among these survivors was Prince William, the King's youngest son. With the aid of these mice the survivors traveled south to the great oak tree of Larrenfall, where with the help of birds and squirrels they began construction of Cathedrabough. As mankind settled in to its new home they naturally looked to Prince William for leadership.

Nearly two centuries have passed since the Green Lord's curse. Mankind has adapted and even flourished in this environment, establishing the powerful Kingdom of Larrenfall as a nexus of civilization in Innerwall. The most prominent

religion among mankind is Crostmanism, which reveres the Martyr, also known as the Hanging Man. Crostmanism developed through mankind's hazy memory of Christianity and shares similar symbols and trappings. The Hanging Man died to save mankind; his enemy is the Deceiver, also known as the Sin Maker, who lives deep underground. Most of Innerwall's animal denizens worship nature and revere the sun and the moon, though there does exist a sect of mice who have converted to Crostmanism . . . only, in their belief, the Hanging Man was actually a mouse.

The King himself still lives, insane and immortal, a giant that wonders the crumbling remains of his old castle. Legend knows him as the Laughing Giant, for he constantly chortles and chuckles as he walks his lonely paths through abandoned ruins, his golden crown canted upon his brow.

Geography and Scale

The entire realm of Innerwall is confined within the walls of a gigantic abandoned castle. When the Green Lord placed his curse upon this castle, he pulled it from its native plane of existence and imprisoned it in its own pocket dimension. Should anyone ever be adventurous enough to scale the outer battlements and look beyond the walls of Innerwall, they would see only a steep cliff descending from the base of the wall into pale mist. Entering this mist is perilous. Those who attempt to descend the cliff are lost forever in the ether.

Since the castle is of such enormous size, the notion of proportion plays an important roll. For the purpose of calculating distance, all humans are at 1:12 scale; one giant-sized inch equals one foot to a diminutive citizen of Innerwall. (All measurements are given from the point of view of the PCs.) Before the King was cursed he stood six feet tall. Now in his form as the Laughing Giant, he towers at 72 feet. 440 giant-sized feet equals one mile to a diminutive human.

Innerwall is separated into five main sections: The Castle On Top of the World, Mitbailey, Gardengone, Saythernbailey, and Wutchtewer. Each section is delineated below.

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The Castle On Top of the World

1. This castle rests on a mountain in the northern reaches of the realm, and is of such enormous size that it is visible upon the horizon from almost anywhere in Innerwall. It is a place of great mystery, as it lies beyond the Big Water, nearly impossible to reach. Dark, dusty, and strewn with cobwebs, its cavernous halls and chambers are still furnished with giant-sized chairs, beds, chests, tapestries, and other such trappings. The keep is the home of two of Innerwall's most powerful denizens, the Laughing Giant and Sairial, his nefarious giant orange tabby cat.

2. Hall of Horns: Once the throne room of the keep, this huge hall is dimly lit in the day by tall arched leaded glass windows positioned high in the eastern wall.

Flying in Innerwall

Those of the feathered persuasion flit from tree branch to tree branch, while humans brave the skies with flying contraptions of wood, hot air, and sails. Magic spells that allow people to fly or levitate are a rarity and much-cherished when found. But regardless of how enticing the sky is, flying

The walls are adorned with large, colorfully painted shields and aging moth-eaten tapestries depicting images of the hunt. A 150-foot-tall mountain of antlers is piled in the northern end chamber in front of a 60-foot-tall gilded wooden throne that rests on a dais. When the Laughing Giant is not roaming Innerwall he can usually be found here, sitting in his throne and weeping into his hands.

3. Sea of Stone: This huge central courtyard is 1,200 wide and 2,400 long and is paved with large flagstones that are approximately 12 feet square. Enormous ravens dwell in one of the nearby towers and keep a watch out for errant mice. On occasion Sairial suns herself here upon the warm flagstones.

4. Drawbridge: Made of huge planks of wood, this drawbridge has been forever lowered across a 240-foot-wide moat that is choked with towering pussy willow and wide lily pads. The drawbridge is 90 feet wide and ends at an arched portcullis with a raised iron gate, bars spaced six feet apart. An agile climber could scale one of the thick chains bolted to the drawbridge, up into gatehouse to the gear-and-pulley mechanism that raises the bridge and lowers the gate. The mechanism still functions, though pulling the huge levers that operate it would require some ingenuity. Sabotaging this mechanism with the portcullis down and/or the drawbridge raised could trap the Laughing Giant within his castle indefinitely. Sairial can often be found here, sunbathing on the bridge or watching fish swim in the moat.

Mitbailey

too high in Innerwall can be perilous indeed, even for the realm's avian races. Flying with relative safety can be accomplished beneath the peaks of the titanic walls that surround and section off the realm, but attempts to fly higher than this invite the wrath of the ether storms, a phenomena sages have associated with the mysterious mists that imprison Innerwall. These storms blow in, seemingly from nowhere and rage with dark rain clouds, wind, lightening and thunder. Attempts to fly over the walls are often met with wood-splintering or feather-shredding disaster. Navigating an ether storm requires a successful Flight, Piloting, Riding, or similarly appropriate skill roll with a difficulty modifier of -9.

By far the largest section of Innerwall, Mitbailey is also the most wild. The Castle On Top of the World looms to the north. Just south of the castle moat the land slopes down into the fey Goldleaf Forest to the shores of the freshwater sea known as the Big Water, with its coasts lined with tall pussy willow and large lily pads. The Big Water is home to many different kinds of life, including the infamously huge Swallow Fish, capable of swallowing entire ships whole. Looming upon the sea's southern coast is the ominous Tanglewood Forest with its giant spiders and dark vales of twisted oak.

5. Island of Whispers: Sheer 100-foot stone cliffs skirt this entire island and a dense twisted wood known as Whispermist Forest covers it entirely. Rumor has it that the shadows among the trees whisper the fate of anyone bold enough to enter the woods.

The Green Lord dwells in a grove in the center of Whispermist. Just as he is a part of the trees and earth within the castle walls, he too must abide the curse. So here he sits, on an enormous throne grown from a living tree, waiting for the King's heir to come and swear the oath so that he and Innerwall might return to the world from which they came.

6. Achren Halls: Carved high in the cliffs along the southern shore of the Island of Whispers is a cave mouth that opens into an enormous crystal cavern with a natural chimney shaft, through which daylight shines in and spatters sparkling facets of light. Hanging above a ledge in the shadowy rear of this cave is an inverted forest of giant stalactites. Carved within these stalactites are the elaborate passages and chambers of Achren Halls, City of Bats. The bats of Achren Halls accept only the finer things in life; extravagant clothing, wines aged to perfection, and exquisitely crafted furnishings. Constructed in the fields above the cliff are a series of glass houses in which the bats keep thousands of silkworms. The silkworm farmers of Achren Halls have mastered silk production and their farms yield the city's primary export commodity. Achren Halls regularly sends emissaries and merchants in elaborately adorned dirigibles to Meeker and Cathedrabough.

7. Gate of the Eternal Fall: The tides of the Big Water ever flow to the east, toward a massive barbican that functioned as the castle's primary entrance before the curse. At this point they join into one rushing current. The current picks up strength as it courses into the gatehouse and bursts through the rusted portcullis of the outer wall. Ship captains do their best to avoid the eastern reaches of the Big Water for fear of being swept out into the misty abyss beyond the borders of Innerwall.

8. House of the Hanging Giant: Before the Green Lord's curse, this stone building was a church. It has long since fallen into dilapidation. Sunlight and rain fall in through a large hole in the structure's sagging roof, right above a 40-foot-tall altar covered with branches, leaves, and pinecones. Giant-sized wooden pews fill most of the main chamber with a giant sculpture of a crucified man on the wall behind the altar. Between the brick masonry in the western wall there is a small crack big enough for a mouse to walk into. This crack accesses a tunnel that eventually reaches the outer wall where one can stand and look at the eternal mists beyond Innerwall.

Gardengone

Before the curse this area was an enclosed garden and hedge maze where the King would come to walk and think. To the north is a leafy labyrinth of wide, shadowy ravines flanked by dense walls of hedges 30 feet thick and 100 feet high. This maze twists its lost way before exiting in a giant garden overgrown with rose bushes and grass taller than a man's head. An enormous dead tree known as The Dead Fingers dominates the western portion of the garden, beneath which waits the dark weasel city of Skulk. The weasels that live here bear the curse of Shawmock's Bite, an affliction that instills a frothing fury in even the calmest souls. To the south stands The Titan, a 100-foot-tall alabaster statue of a knight wearing full plate armor riding a horse. Its base is surrounded (and sometimes covered) by the waters of the Titan's Sea, which flow in from the south through a massive crack in the castle's wall.

9. The Dead Fingers & the City of Skulk: A circular wooden stockade surrounds the base of this 120-foot-tall dead oak tree, diligently patrolled by the Bitten Ones. Just within the stockade around the base of The Dead Fingers are the numerous longhouse barracks of the weasel army, the Claw Horde. Built around and onto the base of the tree are numerous wooden towers interconnected by a network of bridges and armed with ballista. A series of watch platforms has been built further up in the tree's dried branches.

A seemingly endless network of root-entwined tunnels honeycombs the earth beneath this dead oak tree. This warren is home to Prince Flim. It is a tradition among the Bitten Ones of The Dead Fingers that their leaders first gain land through victory in warfare before being crowned king. Though his father has passed away, Flim has yet to show himself worthy of the crown, and thus is still a Prince. As such, he is eager to prove his right for the throne of The Dead Fingers and plans to attack Saythernbailey as soon as he is ready.

The subterranean slave pits and arenas of Skulk are said to be some of the most horrendous places in Innerwall.

10. Crickle Crack: A 800-foot-tall stone wall separates Gardengone from Saythernbailey to the south. A 70-foot-wide vertical crack splits this wall, allowing the waters of the Swan Sea to the south to mingle with the Titan's Sea. Two stone towers, Raven's Peak and Farsee, are built into either side of this crack, placed here to guard the Kingdom of Larrenfall from invasion.

Saythernbailey

By far the most civilized of Innerwall's realms, Saythernbailey is composed of wide rolling grasslands and pleasant forests. Magpie Wood skirts the northeastern walls while the Forest of Lyre can be found to the southwest. The Swan Sea abuts the northern wall and the Rattlewater River snakes its way through forest and dell.

Saythernbailey is predominately governed by the human Kingdom of Larrenfall, the capital of which is the massive treetop city of Cathedrabough.

11. Paddlebridge: This frog town of wood and reed buildings is built upon stilts among the lily pads and pussy willow along the southern shore of the Swan Sea. Most of the frogs that live here are too proud to swim from house to house, preferring to navigate the waters with elaborately painted rowboats. Paddlebridge is primarily known for its master shipbuilders and some of the most beautiful galleons in Innerwall are built here. In addition to the frogs, there are a few humans, mice, and birds.

12. Meeker: This massive city-fortress stands vigil over the Arch of Mitbailey, the only known land-based entrance into the northern realms. A long 50-foot-tall stone wall with a gate and keep spans the entire width of the 250-foot-tall archway into Mitbailey. Sky ships and birds en route to and from the northern lands must travel through the Arch in order

to avoid the destructive power of the ether storms.

Further south the walled city of Meeker with its sturdy keep stands upon a hill overlooking the road to the Arch. The population is made up primarily of humans and mice, though all races can be found here.

13. Haihillamock & Cobblethrone: Haihillamock is a merchant town of stone and wooden buildings that rests upon a tall outcropping of rock and bushes over a bend in the Rattlewater River. Wooden docks line the river and a path carved into the sheer face of the rock climbs to the peak. A system of ropes and pulleys is used to raise and lower ship cargo. Humans and mice make up most of the populace, though all races are present.

The mole city of Cobblethrone is a network of subterranean passages beneath the earth and rock of Haihillamock. Much of the kingdom's precious stones are found within Cobblethrone's mines, though the moles also provide metal ore and coal.

14. Cathedrabough: This extensive network of walkways, stairs, bridges, platforms and buildings is built high in the boughs of the Tree of Larrenfall, an oak of titanic proportions that stands along the western fringes of the Forest of Lyre. The tree hangs over the Rattlewater River, ringed by a moat that is filled by the river's waters. A staircase twines its way up the tree's trunk, from its roots to the boughs above, and rope and pulley-driven platforms raise and lower all manner of cargo and livestock. The city's wide walkways team with pedestrians and rabbit-drawn carts. The population of Cathedrabough is primarily human, bird and squirrel, though all races of Innerwall are present here, even weasels (though the latter are free of Shawmock's Bite).

King Ulrem's castle, an elegant structure of carved wood, is located near the oak's leafy top. Though the King is only 15 years old he is wise for his age. He is well adept in the use of arms and wields a kite shield bearing the symbol of a blue dragon. The shield is a magical family heirloom, passed down from Prince William. Since no one in Innerwall knows what a dragon is, the symbol on the shield is a mystery to all; viewing it has a positive effect on morale for any warrior aligned with King Ulrem's cause, adding a +1 modifier to all Melee Weapon skill rolls to those within line-of-site of the shield.

King Ulrem's mentor, advisor, and court wizard Valantius is always nearby. This cunning old man is also the head of a network of spies known as the King's Shadow. All races are represented among these loyal secret agents, even weasels who often find themselves deployed on information-gathering missions in Gardengone.

15. The Stone Head: A massive stone head of a snarling beast (a lion, though no one in Innerwall knows what a lion is) juts from the great outer castle wall, spouting water into a lake and feeding the Rattlewater River.

Wutchtewer

Perpetually shrouded in the mists around Innerwall, this giant's manse looms beyond the Great Wall, to the east of the green lands of Saythernbailey. It is accessible only by an enormous stone bridge 480-feet-long and 100-feet-wide. Before the curse Wutchtewer was the home of the King's wizard and astrologer. Its chambers are filled with giant sagging shelves of musty tomes, tables strewn with alchemical devices, and astrological charts.

16. The Colossus: Standing guard halfway across the bridge to Wutchtewer is the Colossus, a giant suit of plate armor fused together by the mice artisans and sorcerers of Wutchtewer. Magic and clockwork gears enable this 70-foot-tall behemoth to animate and attack intruders. Rumor has it that a secret hatch in the giant's heel accesses a series of control rooms built into its chest and helmet, and that if anyone could get inside they could take control of its actions. Why the mice of Wutchtewer don't make more of these giant enchanted warriors to conquer all of Innerwall remains a mystery among the humans of Larrenfall.

17. Tower of the Sages: Just beyond Wutchtewer's outer double doors is an entrance foyer, lit in the daytime by tall stained glass windows high in the southern wall. The chamber's domed ceiling is a deep blue map of the heavens, which glows at night like a real sky. A blue and silver rug runs the length of the entrance foyer, and off to left side stands a giant grandfather clock, the interior of which is presently the home to a cabal of mice sages and sorcerers.

These mice are, among other things, the lore masters of Innerwall. They are very aware of how the Green Lord cursed

mankind as well as how to lift the curse, though they are not aware of the ceremony to preserve the intellect of the rest of Innerwall's races, should the curse be lifted. Fear prevents them from sharing this knowledge. They believe that lifting the curse will revert mankind to its original dangerous state, while returning everyone else to animal intellect; without extra effort by those who would break the curse, they are at least half correct.

18. Chamber of Stars: At the peak of Wutchtewer's observation tower is a giant circular chamber with a domed glass roof. Like the roof of the entrance foyer, the tiled floor here is a deep blue map of the heaven's constellations that glows at night. Dominating the center of the chamber is an enormous gear-run brass telescope fitted with a seat so that the King's astrologer could sit and contemplate the constellations. Presently the mice of the Tower of Sages have made this seat accessible to them via a series of pulley-driven lifts and scaffolding. It is possible for them to climb to a platform built on the seat and look through the telescope's eyepiece. At the moment the telescope is trained on the Castle On Top the World, though with ropes and a great amount of group effort the mice have learned to rotate and adjust the scope in any direction.

Running an Innerwall Campaign

Innerwall is a realm teeming with the opportunity for adventure. A good place to start a campaign is in Saythernbailey, as it is the center of human civilization. The PCs might patrol the region's northern borders in service to the King of Larrenfall, keeping vigil against potential weasel attacks. Perhaps they explore Magpie Forest in search of abandoned giant ruins, or enter the Forest of Lyre to gather its wood, famous for making musical instruments. They could be riverboat merchants, plying the currents and waves of the Rattlewater or the Swan Sea. Once the heroes become at least somewhat acclimated, here are some additional adventure ideas.

Weasels in Mice Clothing

The PCs are present at King Ulrem's court. They could be among his secret agents, knights, minor nobility, Crostmanism clerics, or apprentices of Valantius.

An envoy of mice claiming to hail from the Tanglewood Forest arrives for an audience with the King. They come bearing three chests of various sizes, gifts to His Highness. The first contains a four-foot-tall obsidian figurine with a cylindrical base and the head of a horse (a chess piece knight). Though no one present has ever seen a horse before, the figurine pulls at humanity's subconscious memory and the court is filled with awe. The second chest contains a band of gold one foot in diameter, the ring of a giant. Inscribed upon the band's inner surface is *Sunt Lacrimae Rerum;* this is clearly a priceless artifact and once again the court gasps in awe. The third and largest chest contains a silver, jewel-encrusted five-foot tall crucifix bearing a sculpted likeness of the Hanging Man. Everyone present is truly amazed. Those who worship the Hanging Man fall to their knees and begin to pray.

King Ulrem commands his servants to prepare a feast with the mice envoys as the guests of honor. Any questions regarding the objects' origins are met with vague answers. Unfortunately things are not as they seem. The "mice" are actually weasel assassins equipped with magic pendants that endow them with Perfect Illusion Disguises. At some point during the feast they make their attack against Ulrem; it will be up to the PCs to stop them. To make matters more difficult, the King wants at least one of them alive so that he can learn where they found the artifacts.

After examining the artifacts, Valantius hires the heroes to enter the Tanglewood Forest and find the place of their origin. Along the way they discover a camp of patrolling Skulk weasels. Through stealth and guile the PCs may be able to learn that the weasels found the artifacts in the ruin called the House of the Hanging Giant.

A Murder of Crows

For a long time many of the crows of Innerwall have objected to the non-avian races plying the skies, whether it be with magic spells or dirigibles of wood and hot air. So deep is their offense that a secret society has arisen among their ranks, the Murder of Etherian Purity, or simply, the

The Curse of Innerwall

Unknown to mankind there is a way to lift the curse. The direct male descendant of the king who built the wall must personally swear an oath to the Green Lord that he and his heirs will protect the forest and

Murder for short. The Murder's sole purpose is to sabotage sky ships and steal magic spells of levitation and flight, which they either burn or hoard away in secret vaults.

While aboard a sky ship destined for Meeker, the adventurers stumble upon a Murder agent sabotaging the craft. If they don't act in time the sky ship begins to plummet (requiring the quick donning of silk parachutes). If the PCs are forced to abandon the craft, the parachutes could be caught in a wind that pushes them through the Arch of Mitbailey, dropping them into a dangerous, giant spider-infested section of the Tanglewood Forest.

When Frogs Go Bad

The Knotted Tongue is a small riverside pub in the town of Paddlebridge, catering to the town's amphibian population. The King's agents have heard rumor that the pub's basement is used as a base of operations for a gang of frog pirates that have been terrorizing the villages along the Rattlewater and the coast of the Swan Sea. The heroes are hired to investigate by posing as smugglers interested in chartering a ship to bootleg a cargo of wild grasshoppers from Haihillamock to Cathedrabough.

War Machine

There are many men in service to the King who believe mankind should steal the Colossus from the mice of Wutchtewer, and use it against the weasels of Skulk in a preemptive attack. The PCs are approached by one of the King's agents who offers them the job of stealing it. Unbeknownst to them, he is acting independently, without the King's consent. Should the PCs accept the task they'll have to deal with angry mice sorcerers and perhaps even the fully functioning Colossus itself. Depending on what transpires, the heroes' actions could have terrible political repercussions on relations between Larrenfall and Wutchtewer, and the King is not pleased.

The Tower of Cloud

This adventure seed works best with PCs that are either knights of Larrenfall and/or secret agents in service to the King. News reaches Valantius that members of the Larrenfall navy, based at the Crickle Crack, have discovered an entrance into the crumbling giant tower northeast of the Swan Sea. The tower stands at the intersection of three massive walls, one of which separates Saythernbailey from Gardengone and the Dead Fingers. The entrance is a great stone archway 120-feet-tall, partially submerged in the waters of the Swan Sea. The interior of the tower is as of yet unexplored. Valantius suspects that the tower may provide a secret way into Gardengone and asks the PCs to investigate.

The sailors have dubbed this place the Tower of Cloud, because an ether storm perpetually rages at its peak. The ground floor is a flooded, 360-foot-diameter circular chamber, dimly lit by a tall thin window high in the east wall. Giant-sized stone steps built into the curve of the wall emerge from the water and spiral around the edge of the chamber ascending to the rest of the tower's floors. A chamber in the tower's peak has an open window in its north wall, framed by ivy leaves.

its creatures for as long as his family line exists. This responsibility would fall to King Ulrem of Larrenfall. Though young, he is a good king and would without a doubt undertake the oath if only he knew that it was required. At present, however, humanity is unaware even of the Green Lord's existence.

Lifting the curse restores Innerwall's nonhuman denizens back to their original animal intellect, a situation not entirely desirable to everyone involved. However there is a way to circumvent this unfortunate side effect. All anthropomorphized races desiring to retain their human intellect must send an envoy with King Ulrem to the Green Lord's grove where Ulrem must willingly and ceremoniously offer a drop of his own blood to each of them.

Once this oath is given, the entire realm is returned to its original plane of existence and mankind reawakens in the Goldleaf Forest outside of the castle walls, their size restored. The Laughing Giant dies, his body crumbling to bones and dust. Animal races that retain their human intellect also retain their original tiny size. It is up to the GM to decide where the realm returns to, though a mythical version of medieval Europe is an appropriate locale.

The Laughing Giant has become aware of this cure through dark dreams sent to him over the years from the Green Lord; he is even aware of the ceremony required for the non-human races to retain their intellect. But since he is unaware of the existence of his progeny, the knowledge only serves to madden him further. Even if he was aware of Ulrem's existence, he understands that lifting the curse inflicts his own doom. There is a leather-bound tome he keeps beneath his throne in which he scribes his thoughts and dreams. In this book he has detailed the rituals and ceremonies required to safely lift the curse. The book is seven feet tall, four feet wide, and one foot deep, and weighs 250 pounds. It is sealed closed with a locked latch, the key of which hangs on a chain around the Laughing Giant's neck.

The vines of the ivy are thick and intertwined, providing a +9 modifier to Climbing rolls. The decent from the window's sill to the base of the tower is 900 feet, an arduous climb to say the least. Heroes descending the vines find themselves on a thin, swampy strip of land between the Titan's Sea and the eastern-most wall of Innerwall.

One setback is that a giant owl lives in the rafters of the tower. He possesses fondness for singers and storytellers, but otherwise has no qualms with eating boring trespassers.

The Curse and the Cure

Windgrass Twoflowers is an ancient mouse sorcerer from Wutchtewer, and a long-time close friend of Valantius. The wizened mouse pays Valantius a visit in Cathedrabough, and while the two of them get inebriated on blackberry wine, Windgrass drunkenly divulges the possibility that mankind has been cursed, having once been giants themselves, and that there might be a way of lifting the curse. Before Windgrass regains his senses and shuts his mouth, he mentions that he has reason to believe the answer to the problem may lie in the Castle On Top of the World.

In truth Windgrass, through the use of Knowledge spells such as Projection and Memorize, in conjunction with Wutchtewer's telescope, has seen inside the Castle and even glimpsed the tome in which the Laughing Giant scribes his insane thoughts. He has seen enough to know that Ulrem's oath to the Green Lord will lift the curse, and suspects the book may contain a ritual that would preserve the intellect of Innerwall's non-human residence. Of this second ritual, he is unsure and because of this he is not entirely willing divulge further information.

After Valantius's incessant prodding he and Windgrass come to an agreement: Windgrass informs Valantius of the book and its location on the condition that, should the book be procured, it is not to be opened by anyone but Valantius and Windgrass. Valantius immediately begins to prepare an expedition to the Castle On Top of the World, but three days before his planned departure date Prince Flim of Skulk finally launches a two-pronged attack on Saythernbailey, with his ground forces assaulting the Arch of Mitbailey and his fleet of long ships attacking the two towers of the Crickle Crack. Flim's actions instigate all-out war with the Dead Fingers and Valantius is obliged to stay near the King.

The heroes are asked to go in his stead.

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Irregular Webcomic

Pyramid Review

Player's Handbook (for *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition*)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

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322-page full-color hardcover; $34.95

This is not *Dungeons & Dragons.*

Or at least if *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition* is *Dungeons & Dragons,* then it is not the *Dungeons & Dragons* as the gaming hobby has known it for some 34 years. For a mere five years after the last rules update, Wizards of the Coast have given what is the most well-known, number-one RPG the most radical of makeovers. This is, in fact, even more of a radical redesign than the intellectual property received when it was upgraded from *Dungeons & Dragons* to the First Edition of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.* It is, though, a redesign that is more in keeping with contemporary gaming -- more so than with either *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* or *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5.* For *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition* is heavily influenced by MMORPGs (Massively Multi-player Online Roleplay Games), such as *World of Warcraft,* and by the *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures Game.*

It is definitely not *Dungeons & Dragons* in the sense that, although Wizards of the Coast will still call it *Dungeons & Dragons,* the average gamer will not. With previous versions of the game -- including variants such as *Castles & Crusades* or Paizo Publishing's *Pathfinder RPG* -- still offering plenty of viable play, gamers are going to need to identify which version of *Dungeons & Dragons* they want to play. So to everyone bar its publisher, this is not *Dungeons & Dragons,* but *"4th Edition."*

Some things remain unchanged, though. The core rules are presented in the standard three volumes: the *Player's Handbook,* the *Monster Manual,* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide.* The game is resolutely a class and level system. It uses a d20 System. And, of course, the game is still about exploring dungeons (and then killing things and taking their treasure), and eventually encountering dragons . . . and maybe killing them and taking their stuff. ("Maybe" because, boy . . . are dragons tough in this game.)

The first changes are to the game's races. Humans, Half Elves, and Dwarfs remain unchanged, but Halflings are nomadic river folk rather than fur-footed Hobbits. Elves are split between the forest-dwelling Elf and the more magical Feywild dwelling Eladrin, a split reminiscent of the Wood Elves and High Elves of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.* These races are joined by two races inimical to each other. The Dragonborn are honorable warriors descended from an ancient empire, capable of breathing acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison blasts several times per day. Tieflings are horned humanoids descendants of men who bargained with dark powers and established an empire that dominated the world and destroyed the Dragonborn Empire. Although the Tiefling Empire has long fallen, as a race they are still not

trusted, being known for their infernal wrath, which is triggered when the Tiefling is hit, enabling its riposte to inflict greater damage. Each race grants a +2 bonus to two of the standard attributes (but no penalties), the same to two skills, plus various other bonuses and abilities. It also suggests three preferred classes for each race and provides descriptions of three sample adventurers as well . . . although with no game stats, making these roleplaying pointers. Gone are the Gnome and the Half-Orc, although the *Monster Manual* includes the minimal stats for the Gnome, the Drow, and other races, such that a player could create a character using those races (but not the Half-Orc).

4th Edition presents eight classes in the *Player's Handbook.* The core four of the Cleric, Fighter, Rogue, and Wizard are joined by the Paladin and the Ranger, plus two new classes: the Warlock and the Warlord. Gone are the Bard, the Barbarian, the Druid, the Monk, and the Sorcerer. Each of the old classes, bar the Fighter, has undergone major changes. For example, the Cleric no longer has access to the Domains and their associated spells, which loses the class some of the flavor it had in worshipping a particular deity. The Ranger loses its magic spells, concentrating upon martial prowess with either a bow or paired blades, while the Wizard no longer has a familiar, loses various spells (for example, Fireball is replaced with Fire Burst), and needs to specialize in an implement that defines some of his spells. Similarly, the Warlock's spells are defined by the nature of the Eldritch Pact between him and some ancient power, such as the Feywild, the Infernal Powers, or the Stars. The Warlord is a new martial class, but a tactical commander and supporter rather than a stand-up brawler.

Each class falls into a particular in-game role. Where in previous versions of the game, you could not really play without a party comprised of a Cleric, a Fighter, a Thief, and a Wizard, now you need to think Controllers, able to inflict damage to multiple foes (Wizard); Defenders, who are front-line combatants (Fighter, Paladin); Leaders, who inspire, heal, and aid (Cleric, Warlord); and Strikers, who inflict high damage to single targets (Ranger, Rogue, Warlock). This is the first of the many features in *4th Edition* taken from the MMORPG, because for Controller, Defender, Leader, and Striker think the Artillery, Tank, Healer, and DPS (damage per second). Of course, the *Dungeons & Dragons* party is now expected to comprise of one each of these roles, plus another, for a total of five characters.

Besides its own features, every class possesses various powers that can be used At-Will, Per Encounter, and Daily. For example, the Wizard has Magic Missile (At-Will), Burning Hands (Per Encounter), and Acid Arrow (Daily). Where Wizards and Warlocks have spells, Clerics and Paladins have Prayers, while other classes have Exploits. These are in addition to a character's standard weapon-based attack. However, the powers are quite detailed and are only listed level by level under each class, which is a problem. With no alphabetical powers list, referencing any one power is an awkward game-interrupting process that is necessary because the character sheet lacks the room to do anymore than simply note that the character has the power.

Most powers are designed for use in combat and specifically to inflict damage. Utility powers are used during an encounter to aid the caster or an ally, but do not inflict damage, such as a Rogue's Great Leap and a Warlock's Ethereal Stride. Clerics and Wizards also have Rituals, Prayers, and Spells like Comprehend Magic and Silence, their casting a time-consuming and costly process.

Characters can now ascend up to 30th level, divided into three 10-level tiers: Heroic (levels 1-10), Paragon (levels 11-20), and Epic (levels 21-30), which again feels like the progression in *World of Warcraft.* Also gone are Prestige Classes, replaced by Paragon Paths, which kick in at 11th level; and Epic Destinies that kick in at 21st. There are four Paragon Paths per class, and although they feel similar to the Talent Trees of *World of Warcraft,* each gives more focused specialization rather than a range of choices. Only four Epic Destinies are described, so we will have to wait for a new sourcebook for more.

Where characters once had access to over 40 skills, now they just have 17. Gone are background skills like craft and profession, with many other skills folded into one. For example, Thievery now covers Disable Trap, Open Lock, Pick Pocket, and Sleight of Hand, while Athletics includes Climbing, Jumping, and Swimming. A character has the appropriate attribute bonus plus half his level in each skill, but his class provides training and thus a +5 in four skills, plus more as he progresses. This is an easy streamlining of the skills rules taken from the *Star Wars: Saga Edition RPG.*

As with skills, the choice of Feats has also been streamlined, both reflecting the shifting of player choice from the Feats of *Third Edition/3.5* to the *4th Edition's* powers. What is interesting is that the Multi-Class Feat is now the only way a character can gain the abilities of another class. Essentially, in *4th Edition* characters do not dual or multi-class. All characters now have Healing Surges that enable limited self-healing during combat encounters and unlimited between encounters. Both Leader classes -- the Cleric and the Warlord -- have powers that can trigger another character's Healing Surges, which when combined with self-healing actually extends character endurance and play.

The Gygaxian Alignment model, restrictive as it was, has been radically overhauled. A player now has the choice of Lawful Good, Good, Evil, and Chaotic Evil, plus the soon-to-be very popular Unaligned. The default deities detailed in the *Player's Handbook* now fit this Alignment system.

Along with his extra Hit Points -- a 1st-level character begins the game with Hit Points equal to his Constitution plus class modifier, the latter added per level -- a character has something else to go with his *Gamma World Fourth Edition*-inspired Armor Class: Defense Values. The Fortitude, Reflex, and Will Defenses replace the old saving throws, working exactly like Armour Class in that a character no longer rolls against an effect to stave off its effect, rather the attack has to overcome the appropriate Defense Value.

To roll up a character, the *Player's Handbook* suggests three ways: assigning standard values plus racial modifiers, a clunky point buy method, or rolling dice (Roll 4d6, keep the three highest). The rules suggest that if the attribute modifier total less than +4 or higher than +8, then the character is either too weak or too strong. This serves to point to a homogenizing of the characters. The creation process then continues as normal: choosing a race and class, selecting Feats, Powers, and Skills, choosing Alignment and equipment. This is all easy enough for the average gamer, but made difficult for a player new to *Dungeons & Dragons,* due to the lack of an example.

Although the fundamentals of combat remain unchanged, the emphasis is on the combat encounter played out using miniatures on some kind of map or battle board. It is more tactical, less abstract, with ranges worked out in squares instead of feet, which can only make a game run without miniatures or map much harder to run. It is obvious though, that Wizards of the Coast wants you to be using their *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures* and *Battle Tiles,* although what the DM is expected to do to get the necessary figures for the player characters is Wizards of the Coast's guess. Unsurprisingly, the chapter for combat suffers from the same problem as character generation, in that individual rules are given examples but there is no one single complete example of combat from start to finish.

One odd inclusion in the *Player's Handbook* is that of magic items, which are more detailed. Even a +1 weapon comes with a lot more variation, as do the class-related implements: holy symbols for Clerics, rods and wands for Warlocks, and orbs, staffs, and wands for Wizards. Items come in basic versions but higher level versions are also available. For example, Dwarven Armor is available in level 2, 7, 12, 22, and 27 versions, giving both an Armor Class and an endurance check bonus of between +1 and +6, plus it grants a free healing surge once per day. Every magic item is like this, making them feel not unlike similar items found in *World of Warcraft.*

There is, though, little discussion of roleplaying in the *Player's Handbook,* and certainly there is no mention of it in the index. There are pointers on personality, Alignment, and mannerisms, but given that this is the number-one roleplaying game intended to introduce new players to the hobby, the effect is underwhelming. Nor is it helped by the brevity of the play example, which continues in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* where the only example of interaction between player characters and NPCs is not listed under roleplaying (for which there is no entry in the index again), but under the use of skill checks in non-combat situations.

Physically, the *Player's Handbook* is a nicely done book. The look of the artwork is more dynamic than before, and it has a muscular quality that feels reminiscent of certain MMORPGs. Strikingly, the text density is much, much lower than in previous editions, making it a much easier read, which can only be a good thing for new players of the game. That said, the index is not up to the task of serving a reference book such as the *Player's Handbook,* and this is in addition to the lack of a full listing of the powers and exploits intrinsic to the new design. This -- together with the lack of better and fuller examples of character generation, combat, and actual play -- leaves the prospective player unsupported in his efforts to learn the game; the result is that the *Player's Handbook* is just not as good an introduction to RPGs and the roleplaying hobby as it should have been.

Given *4th Edition's* emphasis upon the use of *Battle Tiles* and *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures* (or similar figures) it is no surprise that in play this new version has the feel of a tactical skirmish game played out on a board with a potentially strong roleplaying element, much like the board games *Descent* or *MageKnight: Dungeons.* True, these tactical and skirmish elements were present in *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition/3.5,* but they were not as explicit. Together with the combat/non-combat encounter split that adventures are now built around, they do go towards making *Fourth Edition* a game very much its own.

And that game is very much a streamlined version of *Dungeons & Dragons,* with a great deal of effort gone into providing players with a choice of options not only during play, but also at each and every level. Long-term players though will find a certain degree of homogeneity between the classes and their powers, each being equally as capable and powerful whichever their level, meaning that no class is more special than any other, like the cleric and the wizard used to be. In some cases, the choices are not particularly wide from level to level, meaning that there will be marked similarities between one player's 10th-level fighter and another player's. Doubtless, this will be solved with the release of new sourcebooks because the power and exploit format readily lends itself to new additions. What it does mean is that players have choices during game play as well as during character generation, and that is very welcome. Further with the majority of these choices not being expendable, it eliminates the old style of play where a party would retreat after one encounter because they had exhausted all their spells.

In making the game their own, Wizard of the Coast has created something that feels just a little less flexible than before, primarily because of the combat/non-combat encounter format, the emphasis upon miniatures, and the lack of an emphasis on roleplaying. This feeling may well be just down to first impressions, and may wear off after more support appears and after more play. What is definite is that the *4th Edition* is obviously not as compatible with previous editions of *Dungeons & Dragons* in the way that they had been with each other. What this means for the 30 years of histories that *Dungeons & Dragons* had created remains uncertain, but adapting anything published for previous editions of the game is going to be challenging.

Ultimately, the lack of compatibility between *4th Edition* and its predecessors can only be viewed as divisive, as the new game makes the updating and adaptation of an existing campaign a difficult prospect. And while *Dungeons & Dragons 3.5* will no longer be receiving any official support, compatible support will continue from third-party publishers. But then the *4th Edition* is only partly aimed at the long-time *Dungeons & Dragons* player. Rather, it is more firmly aimed at the new gamer who has played *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures* and wants something more, or (of course) the MMORPG gamer who wants more interaction and a less ephemeral playing experience. Otherwise, why so obviously incorporate the concepts of the MMORPG and then filter them through a miniatures game? If this is the case, though, then Wizards of the Coast has not done enough to make *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition* an easy game to get into and start playing, and for the industry's flagship RPG to miss such an opportunity with a new edition is disappointing.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition

Published by Wizards of the Coast

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Full-color hardcovers, 320 pages (Player's Handbook), 224 pages (Dungeon Master's Guide), & 288 pages (Monster Manual; $34.95 each

* * *

Player's Handbook

One word -- an abbreviation, really -- but it's a long one regardless: MMORPG.

The *Players' Handbook,* still the essential reference work for anyone dipping their toes into this exciting new venture called *4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons,* is by all accounts intended to be easy, accessible, and quickly learned no matter your experience with the *d20 System,* and it is that. Mostly. But that doesn't mean it's all good news.

A few of the character concepts remain the same, like six ability scores that determine one's mental and physical

capabilities: Strength, Dexterity, Wisdom, and so on. Landing a blow on someone still requires a 20-sided die roll and a Basic Attack Bonus against an enemy's Armor Class, health still defaults to Hit Points, and so on. Skills become more like those in *Star Wars,* with most of the bases of knowledge combined into just 17 overarching skills. But here's where the system starts to sound like a game of *World of Warcraft* or *City of Heroes.*

Most of a character's abilities are called powers, and these are chosen much like feats were in the old system. (In fact, feats are still part of the game and they look the same as powers. Heck, everything looks like powers.) Everything you can do has a similarity of presentation, but they're referred to by different names and come from different sources. If you're a cleric, your specific powers may be prayers; for a wizard, they're spells; for fighters, exploits; and so on. Building on this, the huge spell list from *3.5* is gone; the chapter on class describes wizards, and all his spells are listed there. The cleric also gets his prayers with his other class features. Only those things available to multiple classes are listed in another section. It's also worth noting powers are given a "source" -- for example, arcane for wizards and even martial for fighting abilities. The book promises other sources are slated for other volumes, like "psionics" when they get around to those characters.

These powers are of four types. The first three describe when it can be used: at-will (use it whenever desired), encounter (use it only once during a single engagement), and daily (use it once a day). So for example, a *magic missile* spell for a wizard is at-will (he can use it all battle long if he likes) whereas a *fireball* is only daily. The fourth type of power is utility. If a power isn't an attack to use against enemies, it's a "utility" that benefits the character or his allies. Characters receive powers from their race and their class, plus the "we-don't-call-them-powers" they get from feats and such. All of them list a range, an effect, and so forth. Duration is usually dependent on whether the hero wishes to sustain it, and how he sustains it defaults to the kind of action he's willing to put into it (a standard action, a minor action, etc.).

Further extending the MMO metaphor, classes are also categorized as roles. These aren't really requirements for a player, but it's how the books categorize different creatures and characters: controller, leader, defender, and striker. A cleric, for example, is a leader. Players don't have to live up to these expectations, but many of a cleric's powers help in a leadership position: healing others, giving a bonus to those inspired by him, and so on. A striker, by contrast, deals damage, and a defender soaks it up. There aren't as many classes as before, either. Clerics, fighters, paladins, rangers, rogues, warlocks, wizards, and warlords made the cut, with bards, barbarians, and others being left out (but again, those are promised for future books). Class "builds" divide most classes into two or more, like the great weapon fighter (he does as much sheer damage as he can) and the guardian fighter (who strategizes as he fights). Full-bore multiclassing is simplified -- certain feats allow you to take powers from another class, but players are now limited to two classes. Once the class is taken, a hero can build his repertoire from either class.

Advancement sounds new, but really just renames some of the previous edition's systems. Before, one strove for epic level (which was anything above 20th level, necessitating the purchase of a book to take one's PC further). Along the way, an adventurer would probably pursue a prestige class, which was a specialized version of their basic class (a thief could become an assassin, for example). The new system divides one's progress over 30 levels, into three sets of 10. Upon reaching 11th level, a PC chooses a paragon path that opens up several new power sets for him (the ranger can become the battlefield archer or the pathfinder . . .). At 21st level, the character may select an epic destiny. Working with the DM, this is something truly grand that the character thereafter works toward, usually with the expectation of ending his career at that point (or at least that's how the guide views it . . . they readily acknowledge players may want their alter egos to keep on keeping on). It may be gaining one's own kingdom or eliminating the army that slew one's village as a child.

Combat is not significantly different as far as the dice-rolling mechanics go, and it's nice to see they've simplified the actions; it's clear what can and cannot be done in a turn. There are still standard and movement actions, but also minor and free actions, and these can be "traded" in various ways (movement for minor actions, for example). Action points have come to roost from *d20 Modern* and *Eberron,* and spending these gets a PC another action.

On the other hand, someone seems to be trying to get some use out of all those swell miniatures. That wasn't unexpected; people saw this change coming and it's not something that hasn't been seamlessly done with other games like *Savage Worlds.* But every power in the book seems to reference character movement. If the group isn't using

figures, it soon will be. It's almost a necessity at this point to make use of most of the combat system. Playing it out in the realm of the imagination isn't impossible, of course, but that's a huge pile of text to pay for and not use.

Movement is about shifts, pulls, pushes, and so on. Shifts replace the five-foot step, while pushes and pulls cover everything from charges to telekinesis. Almost every beastie in the manual has teleport, fly, jump, or some variation that alters how the combat board changes at the drop of a hat, just like the player characters. It's a nice idea for adding a tactical layer that the previous edition didn't have, but it all seems so sterile. The likeness to a board game may help, but it may just as easily turn players off.

The artwork? Let's just say someone loves drawing dragonborn. Even when those folks aren't the center of attention, though, it's all good. For anyone who got spoiled with the paintings that were featured in all the hardbound books, the trend continues. The *Player's Handbook* is the lightest of the trio on illustration, but the pictures are indispensable. This time the real kudos go to the graphic designers. With all the statted entries for powers (and they run rampant throughout the pages), the team has been working overtime to make each one look smooth and solid. It's not as much fun to look at as art, but it's critical to the presentation.

What this book truly lacks is "roleplaying," and placing it in quotations like that isn't a jab, it's a necessity to highlight the obvious oversights. True, it is now more streamlined, but that'll work best for those not making the jump; bring any preconceived notions to the reading and it just makes comprehension that much harder. The system has become quite mechanical; after finishing the book it's striking to note how seldom phrases like "work this out with your DM" or "the DM will adjudicate how . . ." came up. Character creation is a cross-referencing nightmare, and while it may be intuitive to the new crop of computer-weaned wunderkind, it's a system set at a remove from the hands-on gamer of yesteryear.

The arrangement and order suffer here as well. Some games trot out concepts before they've been fully explained, but here it seems there's no good starting point to avoid being baffled. There's not even a glossary in this book (the *Monster Manual* has one, though). Spells are listed in the wizard class description, but the back of the book has rituals, another kind of magic they may employ. These cover some of the other popular spells (like extensive scrying attempts and speaking with the dead), but what's the difference? Where do they draw the line to decide what becomes a power and what a ritual? The answer is presumably time required, but finding out for sure is a quest in itself.

It's understandable that in this age of disposable entertainment, when everything hard can be done faster on a machine than on paper, that luring gamers old and new back to the table is a challenge. The *Players' Handbook* is an interesting way of framing an answer, but it raises too many questions to be a solid solution to the next step in roleplaying evolution.

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Dungeon Master's Guide

The new edition of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is like a breath of fresh air. While it may be true that there's little in the way of roleplaying material in the *Player's Handbook,* the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is chock-full of imagination-powered goodness.

It's worth noting what a reversal this is, not just for this edition but for the writing style in general that has prevailed at Wizards of the Coast during the tenure of *3.5.* Too many were the products that promised DM advice on the use of that book's particular topic, only to fall well short of the mark. But here we have one of the best examples of refereeing tips and tricks on the market.

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* takes the reader by the hand and gently immerses him in the world of roleplaying. Experienced hands, take note: You need this book, too. Some of it is information that simply bears repeating, but there's advice enough here that everyone is going to find something he can put to use at his table. It begins simply enough and progresses fairly logically, launching with the DM and his group. How do you do this thing called

roleplaying? What are the different kinds of players and what motivates each type? How do you keep everyone happy? As they go, they'll want new rewards and fresh challenges, and the book makes sure you can do that. From there it gets bigger, opening door after door until the fledgling DM can create an entire campaign or cosmos all his own.

Almost as good as what it is, is what it isn't: The *Dungeon Master's Guide* is no longer simply "the other half of the rules." It has its own identity, its own value. Sure, it still talks about traps and hazards, but they're now given a context that makes them useful in one's dungeon. In *3.5* that section read like an engineering class. Here it's an organic part of how a DM develops the idea behind a trap, not just its operating parameters, and how that challenge fits in with the surroundings. This book treats its audience like people instead of dispensing information like a parking-deck kiosk. (Though there are tables for average "treasure parcels"; if the book has a dry spot that could use even more streamlining, that's it.)

It would be a mistake to think there's no quantitative information in the book, though. The DM needs to know how to fudge results (a skill that even a seasoned DM can hone when getting his feet wet with a new iteration), and more practical guidelines are here for things like mounted and flying combat. One also needs the experience awards system; presented as a "budget," the DM determines how many points he wants to give to PCs for this adventure and uses the mechanics provided to make sure it's spread out as nicely as possible. This also accounts for the value of traps to overcome, and "solo" and "elite" monsters, creatures that could match -- or even smack down -- a party singlehandedly.

Skill challenges aren't all that new to roleplaying either (witness *Torg* and *Storyteller,* et al), but it's good to see them getting use in a *Dungeons & Dragons* game. Used mostly outside of combat to add elements of drama to the roleplaying portions, it requires the players to make use of skills, feats, and other powers to achieve objectives like haggling, navigating the jungle, or sparring verbally with a warlord. The team must amass a certain number of successes with their rolls and roles before they gather a specific number of failures . . . and a fiasco may make successes harder to gain. And just when you wish they'd give you an example to make it all clear, they give you an example. That's the right stuff.

Rounding the whole package out are odd sections almost no one needs on random dungeons and playing without a DM, and a sample town that's quite useful called Fallcrest where the party may start adventuring together. (There's nothing spectacular about the place, but then, that's what makes it so versatile.) If anyone needs a blank map of squares, there's just such a thing on the last couple of pages. Other bits of crunch include information about how to handle true artifacts (items that are part of the roleplaying experience and not just another way to bash the monster's head in . . . the section includes, oddly, the *right* hand of Vecna); battle templates (generic lists of monster "levels" -- just fill in monsters appropriate to the local environment or building and make that the standard defense for that den/forest/tavern/castle); and tables and guidelines for taking any creature or creatures and leveling them to exactly where the DM wants them.

To be fair, it's not as though no other game book has ever covered the roleplaying material handled in this *Dungeon Master's Guide,* so it may seem at least a little like Wizards of the Coast is playing catch-up with some of their competitors, but the hands behind this project are venerable ones and the work they present is top-notch. Of the three volumes, this one is clearly the easiest read; it's utterly digestible text, with good ideas on every page and no pandering in sight. Mechanics and statistics give way to the storytelling possibilities readers have long known Wizards to be capable of, and therein lie tales worthy of the telling.

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Monster Manual

Ding-dong, the witch is dead, where "witch" is a value equal to "hit dice." Just like the *Player's Handbook,* everything goes by levels here in the *Monster Manual.*

Once again, it's a collection that goes both long and deep to give DMs all the critters and long-leggety beasties needed to vex a capable party of adventurers, and they don't waste any time getting into the list. There are a couple of pages of "how to read the stat block" and then it's solid monsters (and a "monsters by level" list) from cover to cover. It's hard to categorize exactly what's been left out and what's included during the changeover without extensive comparison and contrast. Wizards of the Coast was up to *Monster Manual V* before they pulled the plug on the *3.5* version of the line, so some newer monsters occupy the pages and most, but not all, of the old favorites are still here. Know, though, that the rust monster will be sorely missed. Its old illustration does look a lot like some of the newer portraits, though . . .

The new stat block system is pretty sweet (from the point of view of brevity anyway), and it shows best in this volume. Combined with all the little type (a smaller font size is also specific to this book), it doesn't take much space on a page to convey a whole lot about a number of entries. But (and there's always a "but") it also seems someone's got an eye on supplementary material. Dragons, it is painfully obvious, are slated for their own guide . . . otherwise why mention other varieties but limit themselves to the chromatic species? Metallic versions are not presented, so there must be a *4th Edition Draconomicon* in the pipeline. There's a nice write-up for the demon prince Orcus, so that's surprising and different, but the lycanthropes entry that stretched over eight-and-a-half pages in *3.5* is only two scant pages here (with big illustrations). Clearly a streamlined word count alone does not account for that degree of conciseness. Can we expect a new *Eberron?* The warforged, those sentient constructs introduced as a PC race in that world setting, have found their way here (though they're no more detailed than any other playable race).

The monsters that are included aren't shying away from new ground, mind. It's not just a listing for a troll, it's also the war troll and the fell troll. New species and variations are given for every foe here, and while that means some duplication of stats, it gives a wider selection of enemies (fans of old-school simplicity just have to accept the changes . . . no more just springing a garden-variety "elemental" on players). Players can't simply assume their enemy is an orc, because those, too, gain levels and titles. They become more powerful, more capable . . . aaaand more delicious when XP time rolls around. Multiple stat blocks means more of those annoyingly homogenous "this power moves the creature X spaces" material to drudge through, but at least now every confrontation enjoys some measure of uncertainty and the heavy lifting on the monsters has been done ahead of time. The rules lawyers in the group are bid good luck remembering all those stats.

Of the three books this one has the most artwork, and it's fantastic stuff. The first part of that sentence sounds like an unnecessary observation until one considers the following: This book *so needs it.* Streamlined the text and stats may be, but there's almost nothing here in the way of description, no word-pictures illuminating things. Often the only clue to the monsters' powers is the stat block, so players must cobble together for themselves a complete and fully rounded image of what the creature is and does. Make no mistake, for the most part this information is all readily available there on the page, but it sometimes demands the reader make the connections himself, and that's no way to run a railroad. The pictures clearly depict the beasts, and those that don't are labeled. On the gripping hand, even then the text can be kind of wonky, with some of them indicating "top, left to right." Huh? How about "clockwise from top" or some language the rest of the world uses? (And thank heavens for labels on the azer beastlord, taskmaster, and rager; now we can tell one flame-faced warrior from another, uh . . . flame-faced warrior.)

This time, there's a far better arrangement of the monsters in this book. They take the names and put 'em alphabetically. Time was they'd have a general listing for monsters, then put several items that fit the bill under the same heading. Gone is the too-small print with all the underlining and fancy background elements that were intended to look like parchment. Done away with are the section headings that were the same size as the subheadings. No, here the monsters line up like good little soldiers and have their names along the edges of the page and everything. It's so clean it sparkles.

Whether one wishes to call it a triumph of the graphic design or the writing, it's a marvel how they got all this information in the space they did. Stat blocks and dry mechanics aside, each entry tells you what you need to know. Not only do you get several versions of the creatures, each has its favored tactics listed. What does it do? What does it want? What does it run away from? Now the story can be told. And the cleverest part, perhaps not necessary but still great to have, are the encounter groups. Monsters are no longer relegated to wandering out from behind a tree and hefting their club menacingly. These lists indicate what sorts of creature mix you're likely to get. Sure, some critters

are loners, but even the best of them might get enslaved by orcs. Hell hounds, for example, might be found as two firebred hell hounds, two azer beastlords, and one azer taskmaster . . . far more realistic than a monster sitting in a dungeon checking his watch as he waits. Each entry has every monster's level listed, the points the whole group is worth, and even the role the different beings "play" in that team. The taskmaster is the controller, the beastlords are soldiers . . . wait, soldiers? Yes, that's irritating. Monsters have roles within their groups just like player characters, but they have more roles open to them than PCs and those are described -- drum roll -- in the ***Dungeon Master's Guide.*** Sigh.

So the quality of the ***Monster Manual*** has the unenviable position of straddling the dandy ***Dungeon Master's Guide*** and the tiresome ***Player's Handbook,*** two books upon which the ***Monster Manual*** partly depends for its relative success. While it extends some of the ennui-inducing effects started in the player's manual, it at least facilitates some decent innovations that should help the DM take his game to a new plateau. A game's worthiness does not spring forth directly from its bestiary, but certainly a decent toolbox smoothes over several of the rough edges. The ***Monster Manual,*** in this respect, achieves what its source material does not.

--Andy Vetromile

Adding and Busting Myths in Your Game World

What do this week's articles have in common?

If you answered, "They've all been lumped into some pool of commonality by Random Thought Table," you're right. You're a smart aleck, but you're right. But let's move on.

Each article draws upon a mythology for its inspiration. We have a fantasy article that's full of the trappings of fairy tales and fantasy realms, reliant on those tropes. We have an American Revolution article that draws the bulk of its power and inspiration from the mythic aspects of America's formation. And Suppressed Transmission has drawn upon the mythology of the 15 score installments of that series. In fact, Suppressed Transmission is especially interesting, since the phrase "Antarctic Space Nazis" (along with many others) is especially evocative to readers of that series.

But let's back up a bit. The power of myths stems from their ability to conjure a bunch of ideas very efficiently. For example, if we speak of "Pandora's Box" -- the source of all evil in the world -- the very phrase conjures up a lot of powerful images for most folks . . . and it's imagery that survives a translation to other ideas or permutations (such as "Pandora's E-mail," "the Box of Man's Sorrows," or "the Pandora prophecy.") Likewise, in an RPG, if a vastly powerful malevolent being offers to grant the heroes a wish at the expense of some future favor or other intangible cost, those at the table don't need to be informed what a "deal with the devil" may (or may not) entail.

And it's easy to piggyback on existing legends with new information, which itself becomes "legendary." For example, Mjolnir, Thor's hammer from Norse mythology, already had some mythological power with it when it was borrowed by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby to outfit their oddly Shakespearean-speaking super-hero, also named Thor, for Marvel Comics. This version of Mjornir ended up acquiring a large number of *new* "facts" over the years: It has an inscription that reads, "Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor." It can generate storms and interdimensional portals. It possesses the ability to allow Thor to assume the guise of a mortal, with Mjolnir transforming into a walking stick. And so on.

And, as another example, that's where Kenneth Hite's Suppressed Transmission is particularly informative. Because over the past decade, Mr. Hite has built an astonishing mythology to build upon. All he needs to do is mention something along the lines of "polar fascism" and fans of the Transmission get an anticipatory shiver, in the same way that a fan of Thor might get a similar tingle when he notices an otherwise mundane gentleman thwack his cane into the ground, accompanied by the clap of thunder.

So how can you bring the power of myth to your games? Here are a few tips to get you thinking about the subject.

First, myths are often staked out in extremities, either in extremities of location or concept ("the monk who lives in the highest point on Earth" or "the fastest gun ever seen in the West") or an extreme rule ("you can never cross the streams" or "this person would never, evil kill"). Thus Marvel's Mjorlir has established "facts" such as "It cannot be destroyed" or "it cannot be picked up by anyone unworthy." Likewise "Antarctic Space Nazis" encompass two extremes: the modern ultimate evil in the coldest place on Earth, with ties to an even *colder* place. Myths are hardly ever crafted out of equivocation or hedging. Just try reading the following in your best gravelly movie-trailer voice: "Legend tells of a man who had some skills with one or more weapons who would occasionally help those in need. He is said to visit only when things look reasonably desperate, and leaves relatively few traces of his passing once he finishes the job, unless he decides to stick around for a bit afterwards."

These myths can take a while to fully take root in a game world (or, more importantly, in the players' minds), but once they do they can be incredibly evocative. After heroes hear about the volcano that destroyed an entire island city centuries ago, save for one survivor who is cursed with immortality and the need to roam the lands, their curiosity might be piqued. Once they hear about "the Wandering Ash-Man" twice, they may start anticipating the day they might ever meet this person.

Speaking of which, try to come up with a clever name or description. The "Wandering Ash-Man" is more evocative

and mythic than "That guy who survived that one volcano-thing."

Now, once you have a certain amount of mythology staked out, there's ample room for storytelling and game-play, by either reinforcing or denying the myths. Curiously, both can be powerful. For example, let's say there's a legend of the five mute crows, whose appearance serves as harbingers of the utter death of any city they visit. (This is a variation of the "extreme rule" example.) Once you mention a second silent crow hovering just outside the view of the heroes, the mental gears of the more observant players will start turning. And by the time you get to Crow #4, you should have the hearts of the players well and truly racing. Do they flee the potentially doomed city they are in? Do they try to capture one of the crows? What do they do? (And if you really want to get your players fretting without tipping your hand, introduce three of the crows and then have them meet someone who might be connected . . . say, a mysterious gentleman named "Onyx Crowe.") Regardless of the outcome, the PCs will be active participants in mythology; they'll either be first-hand witnesses to the Five-Crow Scourge (see? another interesting name!) or they will have thwarted the natural assumption of common wisdom. Of course, this assumes they survive.

A good mythology takes a while to fully establish, and is a constantly evolving, changing thing. But giving the players something to keep an eye out for, and then confirming or defying their expectations, is part of what makes collaborative storytelling so fun. And regardless of what the next issue of *Pyramid* brings, we'll try to keep it chock full of the good stuff that's been adding to our own mythology for 15 years; we hope you keep coming back for more.

* * *

On a completely unrelated note -- save for the mythic status of the gentleman in question -- this issue marks the departure of David Morgan-Mar's *Irregular Webcomic* from our pages. Fans of the series, fret not! You'll still be able to get your daily dose from [the usual spot](). In my near-decade at *Pyramid,* getting to collaborate with David on many of the *Pyramid* strips has been a definite high point for me, perhaps surpassed only by the thrill of getting to see new strips that I *didn't* have anything to do with days before anyone else. Thank you, David, for being part of our long, strange trip for the past five years.

--*Steven Marsh*

Words of Wisdom, Words of Fire

by J. Edward Tremlett

Magic, as any fantasy gamer might tell you, is powerful, campaign-shaking stuff. Too little and the party could suffer, but too much and the GM has to fry a lot of gray cells to come up with appropriate, satisfying challenges.

But while most RPGs require a long, slow climb to get to the really powerful stuff, sometimes the way in which the magic can then be dispensed is a little anti-climactic. If high-level magic seems like just another item to purchase at the end of a good dungeon crawl, or another super-cool skill to acquire, then something's being lost in translation. On the other hand, if just *learning* the magic is as much of an adventure as the circumstances in which it's used, then it gets its bite back.

This article focuses on ways to make magic seem more mysterious and guarded in any fantasy campaign, as well as more exciting and dangerous to find and learn. It presents tips on campaign creation, ideas on locating the high magic (and protecting it from being pilfered), and the dangers and detours involved in learning it. It could be used with just about any fantasy game *(GURPS Magic, Dungeons & Dragons, Warhammer)* on a game world where magic is commonplace, but not used by everyone ("Normal Mana" in *GURPS* terms). And it takes its cues from games -- not always "sword and sorcery" -- where unlocking ancient, magical secrets to solve a problem often creates new problems, challenges, and adventures.

Creation Considerations

If you want to run a campaign where finding and using magic is as adventurous as the situations in which that magic would be used, start out with that philosophy from the beginning of the game.

The best way to handle it -- especially if everyone has **GURPS Magic** -- is to tell the players that while lower levels of magic are fairly well known, and some higher-level spells have entered common parlance, the "good stuff" past a certain point is highly secret and jealously guarded. Wizards have fought duels and wars over the provenance and use of that magic, so their PC magicians aren't going to know what they are right off the bat.

Also let the players know that abilities, skills, spells, and magic items whose sole purpose is to let you identify specific spells and magic items (sometimes known as "meta-magic") will not be available at character creation. Likewise, those things which tell good magic from bad and identify spells (such as 0-level Magery and the Thaumatology skill in *GURPS*) will not work in that capacity. There may be meta-magic out there, somewhere, but the heroes will have to work to discover it.

Finally, inform them that you'll be mixing things around, so that the names, requirements, and effects of the "good stuff" may be vastly different from what's stated in their rule books. Thus there's no point in the players looking too far ahead, as the landscape further out will be new and unfamiliar.

If the heroes are going to start out as beginners, all that should be no problem. But if they're going to start out with some experience under their belt, then make sure to give them some more room to grow before the curtain of mystery fully enshrouds the path forwards. This will provide them with a comfort zone before they tread onto uncertain ground, as well as keep them from thinking you're some kind of magic-hating weirdo.

Words of Warning

No, really: *start this from the beginning.* Suddenly announcing, mid-campaign, that the players' mid-powered magicians not only wouldn't know what most of the higher spells are, but that they might not even know that there *are* any higher spells, is a seriously bad thing to do. For one thing, it might short-circuit the players' understanding about the magical culture of that game world, which ruins their sense of where their characters fit in. Worse, it may erode their confidence in the game master's ability to run things, or make them think the GM's angry at them for something they did in-character. All these can be serious game-killers.

Also, have any characters playing magicians describe in detail who their mentor was (if they had one), and what magical organizations they belong to, if any. Mentors may want them to report back news of any massively important spells they find, or they might send them off to do leg-work in that regard. Likewise, magical organizations might want them to do the same kind of service, or be full of people who are willing to sell or trade information . . . or just want to steal it from them.

Putting Spells in Their Place

Now that the characters are set up, take those high-power spells and segregate them between:

- the ones you want them to know the names, components/rituals, and effects;
- the ones you want them to know the names and effects, but not the components/rituals;
- the ones you want them to know the effects but not the names and components/rituals; and
- the ones you don't want them knowing anything about at all.

The things in the "a" category are general-knowledge spells that just about everyone has access to. They're readily taught by mentors, on the curriculum at most magical colleges, or available in spellbooks from the local Burnns & Knobble. Fellow travelers in the Art won't usually mind giving the heroes some help in figuring them out, or letting them know their various uses.

The "b" category, however, contains spells that are not understood except by those who have made them work, and they aren't readily sharing that info. That said, the information about the components and rituals *can* be readily learned or bought from the right people, provided those sellers don't mind losing some of their edge or handing the equivalent of a loaded gun to someone they can't wholly vouch for. But if they won't sell the information, it could also be stolen, provided the PCs are willing to risk the consequences.

Spells in the "c" and "d" categories are not for sale at any price. They are those world-shaking, highly-secret spells that the legendary magicians of old made work; whoever has this knowledge jealously guards it. Those with an ear for legends and lore might know the general effects of certain "c" spells, of course, though their names and requirements will be hoary secrets; these spells are possibly known to only a handful of powerful wizards, if not only one. And the "d" spells are things so ancient and powerful that no one currently living may know of them, as they have been lost to the ages. However, there just might be a few scraps of knowledge in the hoards of dragons, or the

Checks and Balances

If you're playing a game where what abilities cost point-wise isn't a factor, then details about how good or bad mentors or magical groups are is just background information for the GM to have fun with. With *GURPS,* or another system where the character creation involves balancing out advantages with disadvantages, the background becomes a good place to pick up both kinds of traits. Either way, the information will come in handy, later.

Whether a mentor or a group -- or the absence of such -- is an advantage or disadvantage should depend entirely on how much good the character gets out of them. If the mentor is a kindly, wise wizard of some repute who's willing to confide secrets to his pupils, only asking for the occasional favor, then that's a pretty hefty advantage. Conversely, if the mentor's a cantankerous curmudgeon who's as unknown as he is unimaginative, and has the character spending every waking minute out doing his legwork *or else,* that's a pretty hefty disadvantage. Between those two extreme poles is a point spread based on their attitude to students, power level, standing in the magical community, and requirements of those in their charge.

The same also applies to magical societies. The best kind are high-powered ones where you get more than you give, and which provide you with prestige and support. The worst ones, conversely, are full of nobodies, cause constant stress, give you nothing but scorn from others, and wouldn't cross the road to put you out if you were on fire. As with mentors, there's a point spread based attitude to members, average power level, standing in the magical community and requirements for members.

As for those without mentors or groups, it depends on the game world whether that's good or bad. Maybe a magician without a mentor or college is like a fish without a bicycle . . . there's no obvious

hands of liches . . .

The Quest for Spells

Once it's been established that higher levels of magic are kept secret (but not wholly safe), PCs can expect to run

across *some* of them as a matter of course. They'll find hoary old spellbooks and grimoires while raiding lost dungeons and ruined keeps, unearth weird staves and rings while slaying monsters and finding their loot, and be puzzled by weird dweomers while solving dangerous riddles in crumbling, abandoned cities.

Spells from the "b" category can be learned in trade for services, bought and sold, or found in relatively challenging encounters. But it's spells from the "c" and "d" category that the players will find on their adventures, alongside the greatest of treasures after overcoming massive challenges. In the end, those spells may wind up being worth more than all the gold the adventurers found alongside it.

The characters may not be able to recognize the true significance of items and events at the time, and may have to put them aside for much later. They may even unknowingly sell or abandon them, only to later discover that they should have held onto it! Likewise, some puzzles will have to be set aside until much later, when the party can return to the door they couldn't open those many moons ago and try again.

They may also be charged to find specific pieces of magic: lost spells, rumored spellbooks, and legendary artifacts. Kings may need the knowledge of a long-vanished wizard to save their kingdom, or perhaps to destroy another. Notable but not yet all-powerful wizards may hire them to help seek out information, or be the muscle on a quest to find it. Their magical orders might ask them to seek out the researches of a lost member, bring back a stolen spellbook after someone steals it, or steal a book from a rival order.

Or the heroes may undertake the quest on their own. GMs can weave small clues into the adventures, having them eventually point to a great magical treasure. Or perhaps the characters actively search for those clues without any prompting, piecing together various scraps of knowledge and uncovering the directions to a great cache of lost knowledge.

And then their troubles really begin.

Obstacles Laid for the Unwary

It's just possible that a kind-hearted old wizard, aware that his knowledge might be needed for the cause of right and justice, would put a harmless, unadulterated grimoire in an easily located storehouse as insurance for the day when someone will need his ancient lore to defeat evil, guarded by a few token traps and tricks to ward off the unworthy. However, it's more likely that the wizard isn't so trusting, the tricks and traps are genuinely deadly, and the grimoire will burn your hands to stumps if you don't read it correctly. It's also a lot more satisfying and fun.

The first barrier is getting to the hidden sanctum. Canny magicians who want to disappear from magical society don't mess around in that regard. They will go to the ends of the world . . . and beyond if needed. There may be rumors of hidden workshops in the stinking, poisonous bowels of an active volcano; in the crushing depths of the deepest ocean; and behind a door at the top of a ridiculously high and dangerous mountain spire. Others have had their entrances located behind miles of solid rock; suspended thousands of feet up in the air; or hidden inside some fantastic, still-living creature chained in the depths of the world. One powerful spell-worker set his fortress-turned-tomb endlessly wandering in space and time. It touches down but one day a year in the world of his origin, and does so in a totally random spot that could only be scried by knowing the true name of his first true love ("Rose"). One of his rivals went bankrupt and then mad trying to find it; when he finally found the object of his quest, he was never seen again. Many believe he fell victim to its no doubt equally-impressive traps.

Traps

When comes to ones set by Magicians, there are often two schools of thought. One is to give warning, either out of a sense of fair play or to help the worthy individual who may have need of the treasure in a true emergency. The other is less generous, and feels that a worthy person would be as careful as his intentions are good. If that hero should fail to realize the bridge over the chasm will collapse on the way back if the group weighs more than it did going across . . . well, there may be another worthy soul out there who *won't* make that mistake.

Those who believe in warnings often leave clues nearby: passwords on doors, instructional friezes on walls, color-coded bricks on the floor, and so on. Those who don't care to warn would-be thieves often prey upon ethical lapses (most often greed, as in the previously mentioned collapsing bridge). It's also common to punish haste and/or a lack of readiness, a lack of caution and wisdom, and -- most damning of all in their eyes -- pure stupidity.

There's also the question of whether such traps should be mechanical or magical. While a magical trap has the potential to be unerringly deadly to interlopers, there's a good chance that any fellow magicians amongst the interlopers might sense it coming, and either deactivate it or duck when their spells tell them to. Such traps tend to be flamboyant and/or deadly, allowing the constructing magician a chance to show his full repertoire of magical prowess: chambers quickly sealing and filling up with fire at irregular intervals; passageways with trick doors that won't open unless the one behind is completely closed, and then magically switch places with other passageways, teleporting their occupants somewhere else in the complex; curses that shrink the party down to the size of mice ever so slowly, so that they have no idea that they're getting smaller and just think the rooms and guardians are getting bigger.

On the other hand, while mechanical traps aren't as likely to be noticed by magic, some rogue who lives to fleece others is most likely well-versed in telling when something is "wrong," and he might have a good idea on how to jam up the trap. As a result, the mechanical ones tend to be grand, complex things: the slow, timed destruction of the complex, room by room, either when the entrance is incorrectly opened or the treasure is taken; hallways that collapse into an abyss if you move across them too slowly (or too quickly); "chain" devices that require a certain, loose object from one room to be exchanged with an object in the next to be able to move forward safely, otherwise the ceiling collapses on both rooms.

It should also be remembered that magicians can have a terrifying sense of humor. One notable wizard laid trap upon trap upon trap -- magical and mechanical -- around the dais upon which his spellbook rested. The traps were so complicated that one particular party had to come back at a dozen times to completely defeat them all, and they were so deadly that they often lost half their members each time. Once the prize was reached and the grimoire taken back and read, it was realized that the book was a useless fake. The *real* book was sealed in solid rock under the dais, requiring someone to become incorporeal and take it. And if they'd just gone incorporeal from the start, they could have bypassed *all* the traps and gained the book the very first time! Perhaps they should have remembered that they were raiding the workshop of a wizard known as "The Ghost" . . .

Learned vs. Divine

That's all well and good for people who have to *learn* their spells. But what about those who are given their spells by their gods, or other divine means, each day? Should they also have to suffer a veil of mystery? If they couldn't be trusted in knowing the secrets, why would their gods give them any spells at all?

One answer could be that the gods aren't omniscient, let alone perfect, and neither are their priests. Every religion in the campaign world probably has a list of shame: clerics and priests who fell from grace and had to be turned out or hunted down. Maybe some of them got to the higher-level powers and let the magic go to their heads. Or maybe they showed their true colors when those powers were denied to them, for whatever reason.

Another way to explain it would be that the religions are based on a never-ending program of initiations. No one knows the whole truth going in, either because it's too much to take in at once, or there are things that only senior, trusted members can be trusted with. Even the head of the order might be ignorant about certain matters, which must remain with the gods.

So perhaps those who learn spells by divine means have to undergo some kind of purification, test, or quest to prove they're both ready and worthy to receive such spells. This could form the basis of a

Guardians

When it comes to guardians, magicians have an entire bestiary at their command, thanks to various degrees of summoning spells. Such creatures are often picked for their ability to lay dormant -- and unfed -- for long periods of time, and for a lack of the intelligence necessary to escape the complex (or get its treasure for themselves). Often it's enough to create a vast array of golems, animated statues, clockwork soldiers, and the like. They aren't too smart, don't move unless they need to, and last nearly forever. Best of all, they are sometimes mistaken for mere objects instead of threats.

Then again, nor every magician can afford to make an army of alabaster guardians and set them at waiting in strategic locations. In that case, such wizards often populate the area with various "families" of creatures who can create their own ecosystem. As long as everything has something to feed upon, and someone to breed with, the protection can last for hundreds of years without having to repopulate with outside elements.

For larger, hungrier, and/or intelligent guardians, it's preferable to have such creatures ensconced in stasis about the place. That way, they only come to life when someone other than their summoner enters the complex, and go dormant once more when the invaders are dead or driven away. Such a precaution cuts down on the chances of the protectors stealing the things that they were set there to protect.

That said, a magician should be very wary of using highly-intelligent, magic-using creatures for security. Even if they're in stasis, the short times when they're out and about might be enough for them to figure a way to escape. One poor soul had his entire posthumous arrangement ruined when a dragon explored the complex herself, and wrested all its secrets over time.

Loaded Locks and Perilous Pages

So the PCs have defeated the guardians of the ancient wizard's sanctum, solved its many riddles, defeated its deadly traps, and claimed their prize. But now comes the really dangerous part: actually reading the spellbook. After all, not every trap is the sort of thing a thief can undo with time, tools, and good luck . . . some of them are *really* clever and nasty.

The most common traps put into a spellbook are mechanical. These are the kind that someone with an eye for such dangers might be able to detect and deactivate, but an unobservant magician might not see coming . . . especially one who proudly trusts his sense of magic to warn him of danger. They include such time-tested standbys as poisoned spikes that jut out from the lock when it's turned incorrectly; puffs of poison gas that waft out if the book is laid perfectly flat; and deadly electricity that discharges if both hands are placed on the book.

Less obvious are dangers that take a while to manifest. One wizard was infamous for writing with ink that was mixed with a slow-acting contact poison; anyone who followed the text with a finger was most likely dead within a day. Another impregnated the heavy, shuffling pages with contact poison, so that anyone who licked his finger and turned those pages was dead in minutes, while those who touched the pages with bare skin might last up to an hour.

A truly tricky trap is that of the time bomb. Once the lock on the spellbook is opened, an ingenious, almost silent mechanism springs into action, giving the reader one hour to read the book. If the book isn't shut before the hour is up, two volatile chemicals are mixed together, resulting in an explosion powerful enough to vaporize the book and seriously harming or killing the reader in the process. There are magical versions of this booby trap available as well, bringing fire, ice storms, or lightning bolts to the reader, or possibly teleporting book and its holder to some remote, dangerous location to die.

As for purely magical traps, they are legion, and usually consist of curses. There are curses to blind the one reading the

book, or make him forget how to read, or ignore crucial information, or forget everything read after an hour's time. There are curses that activate certain spells upon the reader once they're read (lightning bolts and fireballs are a favorite) and ones that turn the reader into something both incapable of reading and less likely to be found and identified by his allies (mice, cockroaches, or dust mites, for example). And there are curses that affect the ability to learn spells from the book, or using them thereafter; these sometimes depend on the intent or beliefs of the reader, but often apply to all who would examine the tome.

And, again, there are also guardians tied to the books themselves: creatures that are summoned when opening the book for the first time, or every time thereafter, or when reading certain pages. One writer was known to stick certain dread pages together as the last part of a summoning spell, and whomever unstuck the pages would finish the incantation and bring forth deadly creatures intent on killing him, retaking the book, or both.

One of the worst magical traps on record was a "grimoire" created by Myrddyn the Undying, a magician obsessed with cheating death at any price (except, to his credit, becoming undead). He died after a career lasting some 900 years, and a number of his rivals went looking for his hidden workshop, hoping to discover his secrets. One finally did get what was supposed to be his grimoire, but when he opened it and read it he discovered too late that it was the repository for Myrddyn's soul and memories. The dead magician's lifeforce snuffed the mind of the reader like a candle; the ancient wizard took over his body and then went about re-establishing himself as Myrddyn once more.

Textual Traps and Cryptographic Conundrums

Even if the magician can anticipate physical and magical traps in a long-dead sorcerer's book of spells, there's still one hurdle to leap: how do you know if what you're reading is true? A massive tome of chronicled experiments, recipes and finished products may be the truth, or it may be adulterated to a certain degree in order to safeguard against prying eyes and spell-pinchers.

One way to make your grimoire proof against casual spell-theft is to write such eyes-only information in a cipher. It's not for nothing that many initiates are instructed to learn to write backwards or to think in code: not only is it an excellent way to break old patterns of thinking and open oneself up to magical reality, but it comes in very handy when setting secrets down in writing. Codes can be relatively easy or exceedingly complicated, but it does a Magician little good if it's so complex that even *he* has to consult a key and a calendar to decipher his own handwriting in an emergency.

Another devious trick is to carefully place false information into a spell's description. Adding too much of one thing, or not enough of another, will ruin the ritual. And putting the wrong word in the wrong place, or adding certain gestures in key points, will defuse a casting. Again, the magician has to be careful about such sabotage for fear of falling victim to them himself, but it does wonders for stymieing one's rivals.

Perhaps the greatest defense against spell-theft, then, is to write a "suicide spell" -- one that seems to be fearsome and highly dangerous, but is, in reality, dangerous only to the caster. If the reader doesn't realize that the spell's true intention is to send the one who intones it straight to the bottom of the ocean, or to engulf him in a massive fireball, then it may be the last spell he ever learns. Hopefully the reader will realize, before long, that what the spell promises and what it reads like are two entirely different things . . . but haste often brings its own, terrible punishments.

The Punishment of Success

Maddening Manuscripts

Another way to make a spellbook more difficult to read could be to make the ideas contained within dangerous to one's mental health. Perhaps the writer was getting his magic from dark gods, dread dimensions, and Things Man Was Not Meant to Know. Or perhaps his understanding of the way things *really* work was so far ahead that full comprehension of his ideas tends to warp one's mind. Either way, reading such a work isn't going to do anyone's psyche any good.

If the grimoire is truly a dark or unsettling thing, filled with reality-shattering ideas, then the GM could require some kind of willpower check (in *GURPS* this would be a Fright Check). Success means that the reader can keep reading the work, attaining full benefits for doing so. Failure means either that the character has suffered some kind of mental problem or has been overwhelmed by

Having braved the dangers of acquiring and reading the grimoire, the party might be tempted to think that they've finally come out ahead. But once it becomes known that they have found a trove of powerful magic, a plethora of new problems may surface.

For one thing, if knowledge of their new-found lore becomes public, their status will change. They will no longer be also-rans but up-and-coming heroes. This means that those they once called equals are below them, and may be resentful. This also means that those they called betters are now on their level, and those former superiors might not be happy to have them there. And those who are even further above them -- perhaps the pinnacle of local wizardry -- may take notice of them, seeing them as threats or pawns.

All three levels are more than capable of trying to take what the party knows, either for their own gain or to shove the group "back where they belong." Those of "equal" or higher power are especially dangerous, because they may hire others to try and steal their new knowledge, either to keep themselves on top, or to go even higher than before. They may also use them as stepping stones to power, thralls, or scapegoats for their own schemes.

Even if the adventurers keep their magical gains secret, there's also a chance that the writer of the grimoire may have set up some extra guardians: unliving, animated things that are magically sensitive to certain signature spells of the dead magician. These may activate when those spells are cast, homing in on the one who activated them. Once they rend their victim limb from limb, they will then vanish once more. Such posthumous "copyright enforcement" takes a lot of foresight, power, and egotism to pull off, but it wouldn't be completely out of the question.

Another, more likely danger for those who acquire a new grimoire is that the author's friends, enemies, and rivals will come by to visit. Some will want to ensure that the secrets are in good hands. Others will want to buy the knowledge now that it's no longer in the hands of someone who knows better than to give it to them. Still others will want to take them away, possibly after wresting every piece of information the party got from the mind of its magic users.

And then there is the worst hazard of success: a lich on the doorstep, wanting a chat with the intrepid souls who wrested the secrets of his long-dead adversary, who now wants to take it from *them* . . .

the malefic ideas he's just been exposed to, and has to stop for a certain amount of time.

Whether the character goes insane or not, and how long he has to stop reading for, are matters that should be decided by the GM as best fits the game and system. However, GMs should be careful about exercising these options. If the game is set in a fantasy world that occasionally becomes horrific, then throwing the occasional mental health hazard at the characters isn't too much. But if every grimoire they encounter is going to have the party's magic workers clawing the walls and gibbering, maybe the group should be running *Cthulhu: Dark Ages* or *Ravenloft,* instead.

GURPS Martial Arts Case Study

Unarmed Fighting

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

"A man of courage wants no weapons"
--slogan seen on a T-shirt in Niigata, Japan

One of the classic fantasy gaming characters is the monk. With his fists and feet the monk can deal death as easily as a swordsman. In the movies, swordsman often use fists and feet for surprise attacks . . . even the "dirty trick" of a head butt never seems to result in a face-scarring parry with a sword. Kung-fu artists are rarely bested by armed cannon fodder who lop off hands and feet with casual sword parries. These hand-to-hand masters simply use their feet, fists, head, elbows, and knees to demolish their opponents. In *GURPS,* a character who tries this is begging to make use of Traits Gained In Play (see pg. B291), such as "One Arm" or "Crippled Leg."

Yet the "monk" is a popular character type, and cries for solutions to these problems are heard often. How can we make the an unarmed fighter a survivable option in a world of sharp or pointed objects?

Essentially, an unarmed fighter has three problems:

- you get hurt when people parry you.
- you get hurt when you hit hard targets.
- your weapons are relatively short-ranged and weak.

All three of these must be addressed to have a really playable unarmed fighter. So let's get started and address these, in order. We'll look at a spectrum of options from each, starting with what *doesn't* work but which often gets suggested, and then go onto what *does*.

You Get Hurt When You Get Parried

Your first problem is that if you succeed in hitting your opponent, armed parries (and Aggressive Parries and Jams) can injure you.

Approaches That *Don't* Work

Some approaches don't work especially well.

Deceptive Attack and *Feint* are often tossed out as solutions to this problem. But, essentially, "never let anyone parry you" isn't a real strategy. It's a desperate hope, like "my opponents will always miss" or "I'll never fail a skill roll." As character concepts go, "I'll be fine as long as I never get parried in the entire campaign" is a recipe for disappointment and failure. You can't Feint well enough often enough to do it. You can't get your skill high enough to Deceptive Attack everyone so well they can't touch you. Even if you could, that would only mean you could have done the same with Staff or Broadsword or Force Sword instead and been vastly more effective. The expense of building an effectively unstoppable attack is extremely high, and it's only going to be effective against lesser opponents. Your peers will be good enough to shrug off the penalties you inflict and you're back to "you get hurt when you get parried." Feints and Deceptive Attacks aren't useless . . . far from it! They just aren't the

solution to this problem. You need something more reliable, so you can Feint and Deceptive Attack when you want to attack more effectively instead of out of terror of being dis-armed or dis-legged by your target.

One way to partially address this problem is use grapples and grabs. Only your first attack really needs to follow a Feint and be Deceptive. After that, assuming you chose your targets well (grappled the weapon arm or arms, or grabbed the weapons themselves) you can eliminate the parry that might hurt you. Then you can follow with attacks that are vulnerable to parries, but only after you've grabbed onto the parrying weapons or limbs and ended any threat of those defenses being used against you. But it's generally banking on a whole lot of not being parried.

Armor Might Be an Option

One approach to armor is to calculate how much DR you'd need to ward off any damage to the arms, slap the Accessibility limitation on it ("Only against damaging parries from weapons," -20%) and Tough Skin (-40%) and you're good. You won't want to limit it by body parts unless you never plan on doing a Slam or Head Butt. The problem is that this isn't cheap in the amounts you might need, it's not proof against very high damage strikes, and it costs points that could be spent elsewhere. If you expect to fight a ST 13 guy with a broadsword, you'll need to resist 2d cut, which is 12 DR (costing 24 points) to ignore his parries. If you do allow this approach, it's probably good to require Iron Body Parts for any affected body parts before you can purchase this.

You could always wear armor, too. Arm-only armor, even Heavy Plate, isn't terribly heavy. But it's often counter to the image of an unarmed badass. Some bracers are in character, but wrist-to-shoulder armor plus heavy gloves, never mind leg and foot armor, isn't very handy. If you are armoring everything except for head and torso to survive parries, why not armor the head and torso as well? Then you've got an unarmed fighter who needs head-to-toe armor to fight. A mix of "parries only" DR and worn armor is workable but only in situations where you can wear the armor. It might pass muster in a fantasy game, but less so in a Shaolin monk game and not at all for a modern streetfighter faced with bats, knives, and the odd fire axe. "All I own are the clothes on my back, my meditation wheel, this flute, and my heavy plate arm and leg armor" isn't terribly stylish, either.

Approaches That *Do* Work

There are a couple approaches that do solve this problem, or at least alleviate it without throwing lots of character points at the situation.

Reduce the Effect of Armed vs. Unarmed Parries

Another way to reduce this problem is to change how weapon parries interact with unarmed attacks. Both of these will have a broad effect on a campaign; animal attacks, for example, will be much more dangerous!

Half Damage from Armed Parries. You can parry unarmed attacks with a weapon, and roll normally to see if you inflict damage. If you do, roll base damage and then halve it (round up). Realistically, most parries aren't swatting or cutting an incoming strike aside, they are not as strong as a normal attack. The priority is defense, not attack, and any damage inflicted is more incidental than deliberate. Thus, this can be considered "Harsh Realism for Armed Fighters."

This rule will make unarmed strikes less vulnerable, but it doesn't remove the problem; strong defenders and/or unarmored bare-handed attackers will still result in crippling. Half damage seems low for ST 10 fighters with shortswords, but for a ST 15 guy with a halberd (2+6 cut) or a ST 22 ogre with a greatsword (4+3) it's still sufficient to maim. This option might be more realistic, but it's only a partial solution to the problem of monks vs. weapons. Combined with wearing armor and buying DR it can work better, but it really only halves the cost or doubles the effective DR for the same cost.

No Damage from Armed Parries. Weapons can parry unarmed attacks, but they can't hurt them. Only a deliberate

fighting "work" in a campaign. If not, such characters will always remain second-best compared to armed fighting.

attack on an incoming strike can hurt it. Otherwise, you've turned the attack away with the flat of your blade, artfully avoided just enough to cause a miss, etc. You roll against your armed Parry normally, but you do not get a chance to injure the incoming limb. On a critical success on a defense, you do get in a "free" attack -- resolve normally as per *Parrying Unarmed Attacks,* p. B376.

This rule has the advantage of not making armed fighters more vulnerable to unarmed attackers and animals, but removes the "fear factor" inherent in attacking an armed fighter with bare hands.

Unarmed Etiquette in **Martial Arts,** p. 132 is literally custom-made to solve this problem. I suggested its creation and inclusion in the book to allow for simulating kung-fu movie reality. In the movies, you'll almost never see an armed vs. unarmed parry. You may see shields block punches. You won't see a swordsman draw-cut off the fingers of a punching karateka. In hyper-realistic or gritty movies you might, but generally it just doesn't happen.

There are some alternate explanations: the attack is Deceptive, it was a Dirty Trick, etc. Still, it's common to see fights with multiple strikes against an armed opponent who does nothing but try to Dodge (if that). It's generally a genre convention and a choreographic convenience: no whacking other actors and stuntmen with weapons, no need for Sam-Pekinpah-levels of bloodshed every other punch! Clash swords, fake a kick, the good guy wins. This makes for an excellent solution for a game featuring monks vs. armed fighters. The armed fighters still have the advantages of superior damage and reach, the unarmed fighters aren't vulnerable to being sliced up on their turn and their opponent's turn as well.

Using this cinematic rule campaign-wide eliminates this whole problem in one fell swoop. It's strong recommended for martial arts campaigns, and it makes a good "special power" for trained unarmed fighters.

The GM can tweak it to "Parry only" and allow Blocks versus unarmed strikes. This especially works well for more comedic settings, where shields are a great source of bruised knuckles and exclamations of pain; and for cinematic settings, where shields will be casually reduced to flinders by the massive punches of super-monks but be sufficient to ward off crowds of mooks.

Another option is to allow this as a perk, giving special access to this Cinematic Rule. The Unusual Training perk is perfect in this instance. GMs may require monks to buy it on a per-style basis, or per skill, or per defense disallowed (one perk for Parries, one perk for Blocks). It might be allowed only for Trained By A Master martial artists: They simply strike too quickly, at too opportune a moment, or with such deceptive swiftness that getting a weapon on the attack is impossible . . . but not such a quick, deceptive, or opportune strike that a good Karate Parry wouldn't intercept it!

You Get Hurt when You Hit Hard Targets

Now that we've got parries out of the way, what happens when you hit your target?

Approaches that *Don't* Work

Hitting soft spots is a very basic approach. Simply avoid hitting anything with DR 3+. Aiming for unarmored locations is one possibility, but it adds a lot of additional penalties. Plus, the most valuable locations to strike are usually the ones most heavily armored!

Approaches that do *work.*

Throws, Locks, and Sweeps are useful. If your opponent is well-armored and you can't avoid hurting yourself, you can grapple, throw, lock, or sweep your opponent. Use a Choke Hold instead of a punch, grapple and throw after a lock instead of trying to kick him into submission. Simply choose attacks that don't rely on smashing through DR in order to defeat the opponent. This is a very realistic approach; as armor grew heavier in the Middle Ages, striking arts declined in use, but grappling and throwing stayed as popular as ever. Many fighting manuals depict grappling versus armored opponents, often with an aim of taking them down so they can be finished off.

Armor is useful here. Unlike stopping parries, it's pretty easy to stop damage from Hurting Yourself (p. B379). Damage is only 1/5 of your own damage, and your DR does apply. It's much easier to control *your* damage levels. And if necessary, you can pull a punch or a kick and do less damage if you expect to hit heavier DR -- do enough to hurt your opponent (perhaps deliver a follow-on effect) but not hurt yourself in the process. Defensive Attacks can be used instead of pulling to both lower possible self-inflicted damage and net a bonus to defend.

Both worn armor or some form of innate DR are useful here. The former is much more easily accessible, the latter available only in certain campaigns or in very small amounts (usually 1 point) with Special Exercises or Iron Body Parts.

Hammer Fist reduces damage from "Hurting Yourself" to 1/10 from 1/5. It also reduces damage you inflict (or take from a parry) by one point. Combined with hand armor it dramatically increases the DR you can attack without fear of serious harm.

Elbow Strike, like Hammer Fist, reduces "Hurting Yourself" damage to 1/10 from 1/5 of your own damage. Further, it affects the arm, not the hand, so this can be useful if you have heavy arm armor or can't risk the easy cripple of your own hand . . . perhaps if you are already partly injured.

Get Up, That Didn't Hurt! is a final option. Simply do away with "Hurting Yourself" rules. Want to punch DR 7 heavy plate without injuring yourself? Go ahead! No worries, you simply don't take any damage. This kind of rule is best for simulating kung-fu-movie reality, where Shaolin monks cheerfully head butt men in armor, kick stones to pieces, or punch skulls without the slightest bruise to their knuckles.

Of course, it still hurts if you critically miss and bang into the floor, punch a wall or a shield, and so on. Only striking armor doesn't hurt.

Your Weapons Are Relatively Short-Ranged and Weak

With a weapon, you can't reliably access Swing damage. You generally don't get any damage multipliers, and your damage bonus is limited to whatever you get from high skills such as Karate or Brawling and not from more powerful weaponry. There are a few things that work pretty well, here. Plus they don't have much range; many are C only, others are reach C or 1. You will often have a hard time blowing through armor that weapons would easily overcome.

Weapons can solve the whole problem, but also make you an armed fighter. A happy middle ground are weapons like the kakute (***Martial Arts,*** p. 217), which aids grappling; and Brass Knuckles or a Bladed Hand, which can add lots of damage to your strikes. Brass Knuckles eliminate the problem of hurting yourself and increase damage. Bladed hands do both, and convert your damage to a potentially more useful damage type: cutting or impaling. Both retain the damage bonuses from martial arts skills, too, making them especially useful; however, they retain some of the other problems of fighting unarmed: short reach and parries that hurt the striker.

Armor is also helpful. A good pair of gauntlets not only gives you armor on your hands but also improves the damage you do striking. This is doubly useful because you inflict more damage *and* have DR to prevent yourself from being hurt. Handy!

Striker (Limb) is designed for unarmed fighters who've toughened up a body part to deal more damage. Striker (Limb) inflicts thrust +1 per die, and you can stack your unarmed damage bonus on top. A fighter with Striker (Limb, Shin) and Karate at DX+2 inflicts thrust damage at +3 per die with a shin kick and a normal Attack maneuver. If possible, get a Striker!

Of course, non-humans or video-game-inspired warriors may just have Striker. The same advice applies: Get one if you can.

Claws turn unarmed attacks from crushing to cutting and impaling at the higher levels. The most basic blunt claws add

bonus damage. Claws, especially blunt ones, get a whole column of discussion in **Martial Arts** (p. 42); refer to that section. Short version: They improve your damage, but you may have to take Bad Grip to buy Claws in a realistic or gritty campaign, or in some cinematic games.

Techniques can increase your damage and your reach. Techniques useful for extending reach include Jump Kick and its cinematic partners Flying Jump Kick and Flying Lunge. Otherwise, you're generally stuck with reach C or 1, extendable to 1 or 2 with All-Out Attack (Long). That's not a great option most of the time because it leaves you vulnerable to counterattacks.

Especially destructive attacks include Axe Kick, Exotic Hand Strike, Jump Kick, and any of the Wrench (whatever) techniques. Piledriver, Elbow Drop, and Knee Drop also greatly enhance damage. However, they are often dangerous to the attacker. Most of them involve one or more of the following: Committed Attack or All-Out Attack, increased chance of self-injury, need for a setup grapple, or being left in a disadvantageous posture. If you plan on using such techniques, learn not only the Technique but also other methods to mitigate the downsides. If you use Exotic Hand Strike, you need to aim only for unarmored locations. If you use lots of Elbow Drops (and thus end up prone), Acrobatic Stand is a great investment. And so on. Make sure you aren't trading up for damage but down in survivability!

Lethal Kick and Lethal Strike are worth special mention. They aren't trainable unless you have Trained By A Master, but anyone can attempt them (except perhaps in gritty, realistic games). They convert your kick or punch damage into Piercing, allowing for some excellent damage results against the Vitals. Both default to only -2 off the usual attack form. They are both handy, especially if you can combine them with another damage-improving method such as Power Blow, Claws, etc. Like Exotic Hand Strike, they are vulnerable to self-inflicted damage against any DR -- save them for unarmored targets.

Cinematic Skills help immensely. Pressure Points will let you cripple an opponent with little regard to DR and damage you can inflict. Breaking Blow will let you power right through armor. Power Blow will multiple your strength, and thus multiply your damage. All of these require some substantial point investment, but they are well worth it. Find one that suits your needs and focus on it until it's reliable in combat. Unless your hands can take the shot against an armored foe, Breaking Blow is superior to Power Blow. Against unarmored foes, Power Blow will let you take out foes in fewer strikes.

Imbuements are a heaven-sent gift to cinematic, unarmed fighters. They are not cheap and they are somewhat less reliable than advantages like Claws or Striker. But they offer a chance to greatly increase damage, convert it to different types, and even strike at range with your bare hands.

Some Imbuement skills are especially interesting for unarmed fighters. *Annihilating Strike* can help put the hurt back on folks who parry you. For high-damage unarmed fighters (say, Striker plus Karate DX+2 plus Power Blow backing by a good ST score) you might be able to scare opponents out of trying to parry for fear of losing their weapons! *Crippling Blow* can replace, or enhance, Chi skills. *Forceful Blow* can toss foes back and hopefully prone, making it harder for them to stop your following attacks. And *Project Blow* changes your blows to ranged weapons. That solves three of your problems at once -- getting hurt when you get parried, hurting yourself, and reach! *Telescoping Weapon* is similar but doesn't gain as many advantages as Project Blow does. Otherwise, almost any damage-enhancing, effect-enhancing, or armor-reducing Imbuement is a good investment for an unarmed fighter.

Final Thought

As noted in the sidebar at the beginning, this article is mainly useful for GMs seeking to allow unarmed fighters to compete equally -- or at least more equally -- with armed fighters. A selection of solutions for some or all of the three problems will allow this, and it will also greatly affect the flavor of a campaign. A game with Imbuement skills; Unarmed Etiquette in full sway; and "Get Up, That Didn't Hurt" will be wildly different from one that enforces Harsh Realism for Fighters and adds on only Half Damage from Armed Parries.

Careful selection from the above rules and suggestions for character design will allow for a more equal balance of

combat effectiveness. Armed fighters can retain their advantage of reach, damage, and ease of use. Unarmed fighters can draw on their large pool of techniques and ready accessibility of their tools. No weapons? No problem.

"-" is for DASH Express Souvenir Mistake

by Stefan Jones

Author's Note

The **MacGuffin Alphabet**, available from e23, is a collection of adventure seeds for **GURPS Space** campaigns. I'd been working on the book for over five years before a chance alignment of the planets imbued me with a sudden rush of creativity. I actually had some ideas left over after the 26 alphabetical entries were filled in. Presented here is one of them, labeled with the noble hyphen in lieu of a 27th letter.

Now, how to work in an ampersand . . .

The demise of DASH Express Lines seven years ago stunned the interstellar business community. How could one of the most respected cargo and passenger carriers go from a symbol of reliability to the butt of jokes in a matter of months? The post mortem revealed an all too familiar pattern of over-expansion, arrogance, and short-term greed.

One of the thousands who lost their jobs was Senior Mechanic Fatima Kyllingstadt of Tobyan Station, Antares-b IV. One day shortly after the collapse Fatima walked into the bleak rented warehouse which housed the local DASH legal settlement office. She demanded, for the fifth time in as many days, a check to reimburse her for parts she had used to refurbish the *P.S.S. DASH Excelsior.* The office staff admitted that it was a legitimate expense, payable in full and covered by the company's emergency funds. She was told to stop by in a few days to pick up a check.

Fatima noticed, on this day, a new pile of boxes in the corner of the warehouse. They contained DASH logo "gear": Pens, clothing, AckPads, pilot's wings, ornamental navigator's sextants, post cards, star liner models, and dozens of other items. The gear, meant to be given away as employee incentives or sold in souvenir stands, had been gathered from stock rooms and star port gift shops across the sector and dumped in the office that morning.

Fatima suggested a deal. She would take the gear in settlement for the company's debt to her. The staff was both delighted; they were just wondering which account would be used to pay for the stuff's disposal. But what legal and accounting strategy could be used to justify the deal? They cranked up an accounting law A.I. and asked it to create a contract which covered the situation. It produced a document which was signed and notarized on the spot. Fatima left to hire a transport truck, and the office workers congratulated each other for killing two birds with one legal instrument.

Fatima stored her haul and waited for the right moment to start sales. The opportunity came sooner than expected, in the form of a big-budget, heavily marketed historical 3V drama about the early years of interstellar travel. The founding of DASH Express featured heavily in the plot. Bitter feelings and contempt gave way to nostalgia, and items feature the DASH logo became a moderately hot collectable. Kyllingstadt's carefully timed electronic auctions brought in several hundreds times her investment; it wasn't enough to replace her lost pension, but it was enough to go wherever she wanted and start her own business.

Recently, an investment group decided that it was time to revive DASH Express Lines. It wouldn't be the old company, but it would look like it, and sometimes a perception of class and quality was all it took to get a competitive advantage. Working in secret, they explored the funding environment; began legal proceedings to acquire the rights; and sent out agents to reserve office, gate, and warehouse space at a dozen strategically positioned star ports. A high-end perception-management consultant was hired to arrange the announcement event. Brochures and prospectuses were printed; uniforms with the updated logo were tailored for the event's catering staff and Emcee. The last remaining Atlas class heavy shuttle with DASH colors was purchased, at enormous expense, from a collector. The craft's enormous hold was outfitted as an auditorium and ballroom for the official announcement.

A few weeks before the big day, the head of the law firm handling DASH's assets stumbled into the investors' morning meeting. He looked pale and had alcohol on his breath. He announced, in a stunned tone, that the rights to DASH Express's name, images, logos, service marks, and trademarks had already been sold. As a result of a overly broad machine-generated contract, they were owned by one Fatima Kyllingstadt. The technician was last seen arranging for transport to the Diadem cluster on the lawless, free-wheeling Chutt frontier.

Go, Speed Gamer, Go!

Quick! Grab a game, find someone near you, and go play it. Don't think about it! If you don't have any other ideas for what game to play, scoop up a handful of dice, dart up to someone in your household or show up unexpectedly at a friend's (or office-mate's) door and challenge them to a game of Speed *Yahtzee.* If they ask why, say, "Winner buys lunch" or whatever small stakes you need to keep the game going. Encourage speed; if they seem to pause or deliberate or inhale, offer the helpful tip of, "go go *go!*"

Back? Great.

Oh, don't lie . . . you didn't *really* go do it, right?

You did?

Wow.

Anyway, if you participated in this mental exercise, you'll realize that a speed version of a game is entirely different than the "normal" version. Some speed variations have their own rules already; check out fast chess, if you haven't already. For other speed variations, you'll need to come up with your own rules (see below).

What's different about speed games? Well, they challenge an entirely different set of mental muscles. Speed games usually force players to look for short-term good-enough solutions instead of the "best" solutions. Especially if penalties are severe enough, they can reward a player for making two mediocre moves in a row instead of making one optimal move but suffering one speed penalty. They're an especially good option for gaming groups where one or more players dawdle. (I've been in games of *Talisman* where players have spent 10 minutes trying to decide what to do. It's all I can do in such circumstances to keep from grabbing them by the shirt and yelling, "You've got less than six choices! If you can't decide, roll a die!") Depending on the players, speed variants also can be an excellent choice as an equalizer for players of different skill levels; if you're playing chess with a determined novice, then it might not matter to him if he has 10 seconds or 10 minutes between moves.

Some tabletop RPG gamers are already familiar with faster versions of their pastime. Any tournament players can easily conjure the rush that comes with trying to advance as far as possible in the dungeon before the time runs out. And LARPers know that, since their events are happening in "real time" (or much closer to real time than normal), there's a powerful incentive to try to get as much done in a game session as possible. And likewise it's entirely feasible for other sessions to happen in real time; see John Wick's Play Dirty for an explosive example. Some RPG systems also institute a variant "speed" rule where, if an action isn't declared in a reasonable period of time, that PC doesn't do anything that turn. (Our gaming table always referred to it as "drooling," and we also applied the term to whenever a player was absent or left the table for an extended period: "You took too long; you're drooling this turn." Or, "Ted's still in the bathroom, so Thagar is drooling.")

Fast versions of games might require different victory conditions or play rules. Playing a "fast" game of *Fluxx,* for example, probably isn't much different than a normal game of *Fluxx,* unless you change the rules so that failing to play within the allotted time -- say, five seconds -- forces you to either be skipped, draw a card, or discard a card (penalty chosen by the player to the right). Likewise a fast game of *Scrabble* might involve an escalating penalty for those who don't beat the time frame; the first player who doesn't make a word in the time allotted loses 20 points; the next person loses 40 points, the next 80 points, and so on.

For those who are trying to come up with their own speed-game variants, remember that the penalties should be both severe and designed to provide an advantage to those who *don't* falter. For example, if the penalty for our *Scrabble* variant wasn't an escalating point cost but simply the fact that you skip a turn, then -- in a two-player version of the game -- the next player in sequence might decide there's no need for *him* to hurry (since he's a turn up) . . . which might encourage him to allow his turn to get skipped while he thinks about his next move. Soon both players are taking as much time as they want, allowing turns to be skipped back and forth. And that defeats the purpose of the

endeavor.

Besides an increased pace, some speed-game variants allow for even more interesting possibilities. Going back to our *Scrabble* example, envision a version where anyone can play whenever they want to. The first player who places down a tile to begin a word gets (say) 10 seconds to complete his word; tiles can't be moved once placed. (If two or more people put down a tile at the same time, the tie might be resolved by rolling a die, flipping a coin, or perhaps even having each player bid one or more tiles that aren't replaced until next draw.) This radically changes the nature of the game, as multiple turns in a row are suddenly possible! You'll probably either need to get an official scorekeeper so no one is at a disadvantage, or change the victory conditions of the game. (Maybe the player who tallies the most played tiles is the winner. That number should be easy to keep in one's head or track with two 10-siders.)

Anyway, to give a classic game a new lease on life, play it fast. If nothing else, it'll make you truly appreciate those times you're able to consider your gaming moves for more than a few seconds, and you might learn something about your ability to think on your feet.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Amyitis

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Cyril Demaegd

Full-color boxed set with one Babylon board and one Mesopotamia board, 20 Garden tiles, 135 cubes in five colors (blue, red, black, white, & gray/neutral), four score markers in four colors (blue, red, black, & white), 35 resource tokens in five types (Barley, Dates, Salt, Palm, & Wine), 14 camel tokens, 30 silver coins (Talents), 56 cards (18 Craft cards, four Plant cards, 31 Court cards, two Amyitis cards, one First-player card), eight-page rule book, Double-sided full color quick reference sheet; $44.95

Amyitis is a game set in ancient Babylon, where the players take the roles of nobles with trade empires. They gather resources to buy plants and seed the great Hanging Gardens, one of the ancient wonders of the world. While doing this, the players also take other steps to gain the favor of the eponymous queen Amyitis, doing tasks such as building her palaces. The goal of the game is to be the player with the most favor when the Hanging Gardens are filled.

The pieces are of good quality cardstock, and the resources can easily be distinguished from each other. The boards are of solid stock, and most of the elements are clean and obvious in use. The larger, more colorful Babylon map will likely attract the eye first. Here is found the Hanging Gardens, the temple and harvest tracks, and the VP track around the outside. It is deceptive to the eye, but the softer, smaller, Mesopotamia map is the real game board as it is here that the trade pawn moves, resources, plants, and court cards are purchased and sold. On this track resides a single piece -- the Trade Caravan -- but all players jockey to advance it around the track to a city where what they are looking for.

The rules for the setup of *Amyitis* are clear. Each player starts with limited supply of camels and money to run his business. The camel tokens are expended to advance the caravan on the Mesopotamia map a square each. The unique part of this game is that players do not take every action that they can afford immediately. At the beginning of a "Round," the worker pool is dealt in sets of three cards, one each to the center of the table. At the end of the Round, temple donations are tallied, income earned, and the worker pool shuffled and redealt.

Between these events, (e.g., within a Round), players loop as often as they wish, each in turn taking a single action. The choice of actions are either hiring a single worker, paying a camel to move the caravan, or deciding to pass for the rest of the Round. As the worker pools are dealt in groups of three, the first card of each group is free, the second costs one coin, and the last costs two coins. These cards vary, such as priests to worship at temples for various rewards, farmers to earn trade goods (e.g., barley, dates, wine), caravaneers to provide camels, or engineers to provide water to Hanging Garden squares.

The caravan on the Mesopotamia map moves by spending camel tokens, and a player must be able to trade where it stops. As stated previously, this is the real play board, as it is here where players can buy plants to hang in the garden, hire bankers to raise money, acquire expert camel drivers, or build palace improvements. The last strategic choice that all players must choose at least once in each Round is to Pass. Once chosen, a player cannot choose a different tactic until next Round, but each time that his turn comes up again this Round, he earns a coin. This is the only conventional way to earn money, and thus the player who takes the most turns does not earn any money from Passing, since when he Passes the Round ends. When all but four tiles of the Garden have been filled, the game ends at the end of this Round, with the victor being the player who curried the most favor (after a few end-game totals are tallied).

There is a little more to it than that, as the placement of trade goods to be farmed on the two tracks are different. A player with a clean majority of workers in each track when it is filled gains a reward of a card to increase a garden's value. Similarly, the majority of priests in a temple gains extra rewards, but at the end of the turn. Placement of engineers in the garden area before they are planted also earns bonus points, and is a prerequisite to being able to plant gardens in adjacent tiles.

On the down side, the rules could use another editing pass; it appears that English is not the first language of the game. Some rules were unclear, and it took this reviewer's playtest groups several readings by several different players to get the rules down enough to muddle through. A few questions remained, such as: Do Palace cards' new VP values add their entire value, or just the difference from the previous card (e.g., Palace 1 grants 2VP, Palace 2 grants 3VP -- Does buying the Palace 2 card advance a player's VP counter by the difference -- 1 -- or by the card's listed entry, which is 3?) The quick reference sheet warns that "there are many options"; could they not spell out somewhere what the overall strategy is? From our experience, it is: buy an Engineer, buy trade goods, move the Caravan to the right city, and then buy plants for the garden.

Although the game is designed for two to four players (each game lasts about 75 minutes or more), we didn't see why the game couldn't support up to six players in theory; all that is needed is more colored cubes. The Leading players' advances will be tempered by passing players' increasing bankrolls, and his lack of income from Passing. The game is good, but it's more difficult to explain than to play, and this is exacerbated by the general lack of explanation in the rules. *Amyitis* will probably remain on players' lists of enjoyed games, but it won't be near the top.

--Eric Funk
   Special thanks to Webbs for being willing subjects, and to GoodGame for the trickle-down advice.

Pyramid Review

Incan Gold

Published by [Fred Distribution](#), [Sunriver Games](#), & [Funagain Games](#)

Designed by Alan R. Moon & Bruno Faidutti

Graphics & layout by Matthias Catrein, Rita Humphrey, & KC Humphrey

Full-color boxed set with rule booklet, "Faidutti-Moon Expedition Tents" instructions, 64 cards (eight Torch, eight Camp, eight Tents, five Temple, 30 Quests [15 Treasures & three each of five Hazards], & five Artifacts), & 110 Treasures (60 turquoise, 30 obsidian, & 20 gold); $19.95

In case this review of *Incan Gold* starts to sound familiar, it's because readers might know it better as *Diamant* (German for "diamond"). That version came out about three years ago, but quickly got a facelift and some changes -- not the least of which is the addition of artifacts -- to layer on new strategies. (If you buy this game you don't have to buy the original, should the question arise.)

The object of the game is to have the most treasure at the end of the game.

Three to eight obtainers of rare antiquities have found an ancient temple in Darkest Peru they're sure is brimming with glittering goodies. They took King Solomon's Mines for everything they had in the first game, so everyone feels pretty good about themselves as they proceed down the darkened hall, wary of the many traps and dangers that lie ahead. Everyone gets a tent and two action cards: the Torch and the Camp. One of the Artifact cards is shuffled into the Quest deck.

The temple is divided into five sections, tracked by numbered cards. Each step of the way, explorers secretly select one of their two cards. The Torch says they're going deeper into the recesses of the site and the Camp indicates they've had enough and are returning to base. Of course, no one is turning back until they have a little something in their backback . . .

Everyone reveals their choice at once and the next Quest card is turned up from the central deck. If it's a Treasure the money on it is split evenly among the heroes and placed beside the owners' Tents, while any remainder stays on that Quest. For example, a card worth five points gives four players one token each, and the fifth token remains behind. Players choose again, and another Quest is flipped up. This forms a trail of cards as the team goes into the temple, some with leftover treasure. In addition to the gold, turquoise, and obsidian they find, each segment of the journey offers one glorious Artifact; if that comes up, it's also left along the trail.

When someone's had enough of the cobwebs, he chooses his Camp card. He won't take a share of any more Treasure today, but anything next to his Tent is now placed under it; it's safe. All players leaving on the same turn again split any valuables abandoned in the tunnel if they can; two players could split two points left behind, but leftovers still stay put. Similarly the much-prized Artifacts cannot be divided, so these may be collected only if a single person leaves. If any other players keep plumbing the catacombs, the round continues for them; if everyone leaves satisfied, that day ends.

It's not all good news. There are five hazards lying in wait, like spiders and cave-ins. There's no effect the first time a Hazard card shows up: The ceiling creaks, something's skittering about in the dark, etc. But the second time a particular peril comes up (for example, the second spider card), the team is forced to abandon the tunnels. Any money next to their Tent is lost while those who pulled out in time may sit about the campfire, smoking cigars and mocking the unfortunate. As tokens go under the Tent card once the owner returns to camp, one must remember how much one's rivals have amassed.

If a Hazard ended the day, one of those two cards is discarded; there are three of each danger, so that problem could come up again (it's just less likely). If the Artifact card wasn't uncovered it stays in the deck, and another Artifact gets shuffled into the mix. Play continues in this fashion until the fifth day is complete, at which point Treasures are counted. Artifacts recovered during the first three rounds are worth five points; they're worth 10 on days four and five. The highest total wins the game, with Artifacts breaking ties.

It's another compact package from Fred Distribution and their partners, and again it's a tidy treasure all in itself. The cards are sadly thin, but the artwork is an improvement over the original iteration and the colored treasure tokens are fun to fiddle with (they appear to be plastic, but it's still fun to let them slip through your fingers and cackle over them). They come in three colors so players can make change, and while the booklet claims you get 30 obsidian the review copy had twice that many. Thin cards may actually work in favor of the Tent mechanic suggested: As a cute touch, a sheet is provided congratulating purchasers of the "Faidutti-Moon Expedition Tents." The "brochure" is really instructions on manipulating those cards (scoring them, folding them, or curling them around a dowel) so they hide Treasures. Making them three-dimensional means they share space in the plastic bin with the gems or the buyer disposes of that insert; either way, one takes the chance they flatten out some when the box is closed. Working the cards like Silly Putty can't be good for them long-term.

It's amazing how much difference even the smallest change in mechanics can make. The game was always an interesting exercise in pressing one's luck, but coupling the retreat option with the need to get out solo if one wants to snag the Artifacts makes it tough to second-guess the opposition. Every turn of a card may not have players sweating bullets but it certainly forces a hesitant breath, and the feeling of vindication that comes after getting out just as the expedition goes south on the group is truly gratifying. There's no chance of mechanically blocking what your opponents do, but playing psychological games provides a cool level of interaction that makes this smart little package worth its weight in ***Incan Gold.***

--Andy Vetromile

Punch, Kick, Flail, Stick?

Three New Fantasy Martial Arts Styles for *GURPS Banestorm*

by Leonardo M. Holschuh

GURPS Martial Arts contains an impressive number of different martial arts styles, many of which are perfectly suitable for use in fantasy campaigns set in the world of Yrth.

Most of the historical and modern styles may be used exactly as written, since the Banestorm could have brought any of them to Yrth at several different occasions. Or they may be used with the more generic backgrounds and descriptions, representing either local developments, or styles imported from other worlds affected by the Banestorm.

The three fantasy-themed, fictional styles described at *Martial Arts* also make flavorful additions to the Yrth setting: Smasha in particular can turn combat encounters with orcs into something truly frightening. Death Fist could be practiced by the Ministry of Serendipity's assassin wizards. Meanwhile, Fire-breathing Sahudese Dragon Men (or Women) could be the center of a whole demon-hunting campaign. The exoticness of these styles could bring a new level of wonder to combat-heavy games.

But, for those who would like a few more options, three new fantasy styles are described herein. They were written specifically for use with *GURPS Banestorm,* but adapting them for other fantasy settings should be an easy task.

Targeted Attacks List

Below is a list with all Targeted Attack Techniques used in the article, including defaults and maximum skill level.

- TA (Axe/Mace Swing/Arms): Defaults to Axe/Mace-2; cannot exceed Axe/Mace-1.
- TA (Axe-Mace Swing/Legs): Defaults to Axe/Mace-2; cannot exceed Axe/Mace-1.
- TA (Boxing Punch/Face): Defaults to Boxing-5; cannot exceed Boxing-2.
- TA (Boxing Uppercut/Face): Defaults to Boxing-6 or Uppercut-5; cannot exceed Boxing-3 or Uppercut-2.
- TA (Boxing Punch/Arms): Defaults to Boxing-2; cannot exceed Boxing-1.
- TA (Boxing Punch/Hands): Defaults to Boxing-4; cannot exceed Boxing-2.
- TA (Boxing Sport Punch/Face): Defaults to Boxing Sport-5; cannot exceed Boxing Sport-2.
- TA (Boxing Sport Uppercut/Face): Defaults to Boxing Sport-6 or Uppercut-5; cannot exceed Boxing Sport-3 or Uppercut-2.
- TA (Brawling Head Butt/Face): Defaults to Brawling-6 or Head Butt-5; cannot exceed Brwaling-3 or Head Butt-2;
- TA (Flail Entangle/Arms): Defaults to Flail-6 or Entangle-2; cannot exceed Flail-3 or Entangle-1.
- TA (Shortsword Thrust/Torso Chinks): Defaults to Shortsword-8; cannot exceed Shortsword-4.
- TA (Staff Swing/Legs): Defaults to Staff-2; cannot exceed Staff-1.
- TA (Two-Handed Axe-Mace Swing/Arms): Defaults to Two-Handed Axe/Mace-2; cannot exceed Two-Handed Axe/Mace-1.
- TA (Two-Handed Axe-Mace Swing/Legs): Defaults to Two-Handed Axe/Mace-2; cannot exceed Two-Handed Axe/Mace-1.

Deerwood's Axemanship *4 points*

The origin of this fighting style dates back to the times when the woodlands of Deerwood in Caithness were still a frontier, lawless territory. Those who dared to venture into the woods in search of game, lumber, and rare herbs were often subject to the attacks of barbarian orcs, bandits, wild animals, and monsters!

To protect themselves, woodsmen and women formed groups that entered the forest as organized expeditions. Sometimes, they were protected by mercenary guards; sometimes, they relied only on each other for defense. One such group was formed mainly by lumberjacks under the leadership of a man known as John Strong-Axe.

John had served for several years as mercenary before coming to what would become the Deerwood lording, and, though already past his prime, he was still a very strong man. Local folklore tells he could knock down oaks with a single axe stroke, that he once wrestled an ogre and threw him down a chasm, and that many fled at the sound of his war cry.

He perfected a style of fighting based on the use of heavy, two-handed axes (his new craft's tool) and brute strength. John taught his personal style to his men, who called it John's Axe or Axe-Wrestling. The success of his group at protecting themselves from the perils of the forest eventually gave them a reputation as able and fearsome fighters.

As the band's fame grew, so did its numbers. Some of the other expeditions started offering jobs as guards to any of John's men who were willing. After John's death, his followers continued to refine the style, which eventually became known as Deerwood's Axemanship.

After the region was finally pacified, the style lost much of its appeal and the number of practitioners diminished, but even today one may find a few masters, most of which accept pupils.

Modern Deerwood Axemen are known for their strength and toughness. They learn to fight primarily with the great axe. Bare-hands techniques are practiced for when the stylist is taken by surprise or is, otherwise, unable to use his axe. One-handed axe techniques are sometimes also taught.

For close combat and when attacked by multiple opponents, students drill in wrestling moves concentrating on the use of the stylist's physical strength (the Sumo Wrestling skill and Power Grappling perk). Common tactics against multiple opponents include charging and slamming targets to the ground and then engaging those still standing; shoving an enemy against another; and grabbing the nearest to use as a cover, hoping his allies will hit him by mistake or refrain from risking injury to a friend.

Stylists also learn how to deal with the limitations of the great axe. They train to change grips for different reaches swiftly (represented by the Reach Mastery perk, described below). They study how not to be encumbered by the axe while using Sumo Wrestling moves (the Shove Mastery perk, described below). They learn to carefully choose the correct moment and target to attack, creating and exploiting openings to reduce the chance of counterattack before an opponent is able to recover from a swing. (In game terms, stylist often use Feints and the Evaluate maneuver to increase chances of hitting and they aim for hit locations like arms and legs, hoping to render opponents unable to strike back.) Defensive Attacks (*Martial Arts,* p. 100) are used frequently, especially against more skilled opponents.

Some masters still teach other skills related to the style's origin among the woodsmen.

Skills: Brawling; Sumo Wrestling; Two-Handed Axe/Mace.

Techniques: Armed Grapple (Two-Handed Axe/Mace); Feint (Two-Handed Axe/Mace); Hook (Two-Handed Axe/Mace); Targeted Attack (Brawling Head Butt/Face); Targeted Attack (Two-Handed Axe-Mace Swing/Arms); Targeted Attack (Two-Handed Axe-Mace Swing/Legs).

Cinematic Skills: Breaking Blow; Kiai; Power Blow; Push.

Perks: Power Grappling; Reach Mastery (great axe); Shove Mastery (Two-Handed Axe/Mace).

Optional Traits

Primary Attributes: Improved ST.

Secondary Characteristics: Improved HP and Per.

Advantages: Hard to Kill; Hard to Subdue; High Pain Threshold.

Perks: Grip Mastery (Great Axe).

Skills: Axe/Mace; Camouflage; Herb Lore; Naturalist; Observation; Stealth; Survival (Forest); Thrown Weapon (Axe/Mace); Tracking.

Techniques: Armed Grapple (Axe/Mace); Feint (Axe/Mace); Targeted Attack (Axe/Mace Swing/Arms); Targeted Attack (Axe/Mace Swing/Legs).

New Style Perks

As per *GURPS Martial Arts,* perks with a † require specialization by weapon, as noted.

Reach Mastery†

Adjusting the reach of a weapon marked with an asterisk (*) in its Reach statistic usually requires a Ready maneuver, but you have practiced how to do it swiftly with one particular type of weapon. Once on your turn, before or after your maneuver, you can change your weapon's reach to any valid value. You must specialize by weapon.

Shove Mastery†

A fighter using Shoves with Weapons or Slams with Long Weapons (*Martial Arts,* p. 112) cannot normally claim his Sumo Wrestling damage bonus for a shove, or his Brawling or Sumo Wrestling bonus for a slam. This perk extends those bonuses to armed shoves and slams. You must specialize by weapon skill.

Warwick's Method   *7 points*

This method of morningstar fighting was created by a Cardien knight called Julius Warwick about 20 years ago. Though skilled in the use of many knightly weapons, Sir Warwick developed early a preference for the morningstar and diligently studied its use.

As the result of those studies, the knight developed a fighting method based on taking advantage of the flexibility of the morningstar's chain, and the use of a secondary weapon in the off-hand for both offensive and defensive purposes. When expecting to face heavy weapons or many opponents, preference is given to a medium shield as the secondary weapon; for dueling, a shortsword is normally used.

Sir Warwick passed on his method to his squires, who in turn taught it to theirs. Of those, a few are already full knights of their own and have taken on a fourth generation of students. Warwick himself is still alive, though old and retired.

One of the method's preferred tactics (for which it is famous) is to wrap the opponent's weapon or weapon arm with the morningstar's chain, preventing the target's use. This tactic is so basic to the style that students can buy the Skill Adaptation (Entangle defaults to Flail) perk as soon as they have spent 1 point in Flail (instead of 10 points in Style skills and techniques as per the normal rules). The entangle is most often done by stepping to the victim's weapon-side hex (making Block a harder proposition) and attacking the opponent's weapon or weapon arm. This is usually performed as a Deceptive Attack. If the opponent fails to defend, his arm or weapon is ensnared. To be able to entangle, a morningstar must have a chain long enough to wrap around the target (GM's discretion); therefore designs with longer chains are preferred by stylists.

The secondary weapon is used mostly for defense, until the stylist manages to snare the opponent. Then, it becomes the

primary offense (thrusting and cutting with the sword or bashing with the shield), while attacker uses the morningstar to keep the victim at bay.

Other tactics include the use of the chain to circumvent defenses (Deceptive Attacks) and to attract the opponent's attention to the secondary weapon while attacking with the morningstar (a Feint or Ruse). Mounted combat with the morningstar is also an important part of the style.

Some kicks and punches are taught for Close Combat or in case the knight is disarmed and, as truly trained knights, teachers of the Method typically also teach several other knightly skills not officially considered part of the style.

Skills: Brawling; Flail; Riding (Horse); Savoir-Faire; Shield; Shortsword.

Techniques: Cavalry Training (Flail); Entangle (Flail); Feint (Shield or Shortsword); Flail Blocking; Hands-Free Riding; Kicking (Brawling); Knee Strike (Brawling); Retain Weapon (Flail); Stamp Kick (Brawling); Targeted Attack (Flail Entangle/Arms); Targeted Attack (Shortsword Thrust/Torso Chinks).

Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack (Flail); Dual-Weapon Attack (Shortsword).

Perks:: Off-Hand Weapon Training (Shortsword); Skill Adaptation (Entangle defaults to Flail); Technique Mastery (Entangle).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Enhanced Block; Enhanced Parry (Shortsword); Status, Wealth.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Chivalry); Duty (To liege); Reputation 2 (Entangles weapon; Foes in combat, x1/3; Occasionally Recognized, x1/3)[-1].

Skills: Animal Handling; Axe/Mace; Broadsword; Games (Tournaments); Lance; Staff; Two-Handed Sword; Wrestling.

New Technique

Flail Blocking   **Hard**

Defaults: Block-2.

Prerequisites: Shield; cannot exceed Block.

Flails tend to wrap around shields, making it more difficult to successfully block them. However, an adventurer can train in methods to deflect a flail more efficiently, making it less likely to wrap. This technique allows a shield user to buy off the -2 penalty to block flail weapons.

Goblin Boxing   *3 points*

Yatrik-bohr, more often known in Anglish as Goblin Boxing, is a highly peculiar combat sport. It is believed that Yatrik-bohr came to Yrth from its home world, Gabrook, together with the firsts goblins caught by the Banestorm. How much it was changed from its roots in all these centuries is unknown, but some influences from human boxing can easily be discerned.

Yatrik-bohr's popularity is, currently, not very high; it is valued more as a form of fitness exercise and entertainment

than as actual combat training. Nonetheless, players can be found at any larger goblin community, and members of any race are welcome to learn. Masters commonly charge for the lessons.

What makes Yatrik-bohr peculiar is that matches occur between an unarmed fighter (referred as the "hands-player") and an opponent armed with a light quarterstaff (the "stick-player"; treat the quarterstaff used as a cheap quality weapon).

The stick-player can only defend, sweep, and trip with the quarterstaff, unless the hands-player is touching the ground with some part of the body other than the feet. At that point, it becomes legal to strike the arms, legs, and torso with swings only; thrusts are illegal. Any one solid hit gives the round's victory to the stick-player. The stick-player also wins if the hands-player leaves the match area (a circle eight yards in diameter) completely (i.e., with both feet) for more than 10 seconds.

The hands-player can only hit using punches. Any target above the waist, with exception of the neck, is valid. The legs can used to parry the quarterstaff. Grappling is not allowed, nor is grabbing the opponent's weapon. Clinches are resolved by shoving the opponent away. If the stick-player loses the quarterstaff, gets knocked down, or if he leaves the match area completely, the round's victory goes to the hands-player.

During a match, opponents alternate each round as hands- and stick-players. The winner is the first to win two consecutive rounds. Who goes first as hands or stick player is most often decided by bets (the side that bids highest in the match chooses how each participant will begin).

Hands-players try to keep the fight distance short (preferably at close combat) and punch-pressuring the opponent into leaving the circle. Stick-players wield the quarterstaff in a defensive grip and concentrate at not allowing the fight distance to close too much and sweeping the opponents feet from under him. Both sides normally fight with some protection: cloth or studded leather arm and leg armor, and hand wrappings.

Most Yatrik-bohr players are "amateurs," fighting for fun. These matches tend to have low bids; players pull their strikes and tend to fight defensively (Defensive Attacks); serious injuries are very rare. "Professional" fighters behave differently, financed by wealthy merchants, they bet high; strikes are harder, and more serious injuries are common. The stick-player's hands and arms often become a preferred target as the hands-player tries to make him lose the quarterstaff, and leg sweeps performed by the stick-player sometimes turn into true strikes, hoping to injure the leg and reduce the hands-player's mobility. A common legend among Yatrik-bohr players is that of even more brutal "underworld" matches, performed in pits with less rules and victory by knock out or death.

Skills: Boxing Sport; Staff Sport.

Techniques: Close Combat (Staff Sport); Feint (Boxing Sport or Staff Sport); Low-Line Defense (Boxing Sport); Sweep (Staff Sport); Targeted Attack (Boxing Sport Punch/Face); Targeted Attack (Boxing Sport Uppercut/Face); Trip (Staff Sport); Uppercut (Boxing Sport).

Cinematic Skills: Immovable Stance.

Perks: Iron Legs; Skill Adaptation (Trip defaults to Staff or Staff Sport); Technique Mastery (Staff Sport Sweep).

Optional Traits

Secondary Characteristics: Improved FP.

Advantages: Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Parry (Bare Hands or Staff); Extra Attack (may take the Multi-Strike and Single Skill modifiers); Fit or Very Fit; High Pain Threshold; Perfect Balance.

Skills: Acrobatics; Boxing; Staff.

Techniques: Close Combat (Staff); Feint (Boxing or Staff); Low-Line Defense (Boxing); Sweep (Staff); Targeted

Attack (Boxing Punch/Arms); Targeted Attack (Boxing Punch/Face); Targeted Attack (Boxing Punch/Hands); Targeted Attack (Boxing Uppercut/Face); Targeted Attack (Staff Swing/Legs); Trip (Staff); Uppercut (Boxing).

Sample Characters

Old Bill Carpenter   *385 points*

Bill is an old, yet still massively built, man. He was introduced to Deerwood's Axemanship at age 12, when he took apprenticeship with the village's master carpenter, who also happened to be a master of the style. At age 23, by now a young journeyman and a competent fighter, Bill decided it was time to see a little of the world. He took a job as a merchant's guard.

He traveled all around Caithness and even to Megalos and al-Wasif, working as guard and mercenary. About a decade latter, he grew tired of the life of a sword-for-hire and settled in a village near Redhall, where he took up his old craft again and eventually married.

Now, 20 years later, Bill lives comfortably. He has kept his old skills sharp through constant practice, and he still is a very strong man. His wife died a few years ago, and they didn't have any children. He taught axemanship to a few young men since settling down, but it's been a long time since he has had news of any of them.

Bill has a difficult personality and little patience for those he sees as boasters and showoffs. He is a master axeman and a veteran mercenary, and he has the scars to prove it.

ST 14 [40]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 13 [30].
Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 15 [2]; Will 15 [10]; Per 13 [0]; FP 13 [0]
Basic Speed 6.00 [-5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10.
Age 51; 5'10"; 190 lbs. White skin, brown eyes, and short black hair growing gray with a pronounced bald spot.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Christian region [0].
Languages: Anglish (Native/Accented) [-1]; Arabic (Accented/Broken) [3]; Goblin (Broken/Broken) [2].

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; Hard to Subdue 2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Status 1 (Craftsman) [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]; Weapon Master (Great Axe) [20].

Perks: Power Grappling, Reach Mastery (Great Axe); Shove Mastery (Two-Handed Axe/Mace); Style Familiarity (Deerwood's Axemanship) [4].

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Code of Honor (Professional) [-5]; Light Sleeper [-5]; Sense of Duty (Close Friends) [-5]; Stubbornness [-5].

Qurks: Believes that the great axe is the ultimate hand weapon; Distinctive Features (Battle scars); Intolerance (Boasters and showoffs); Talks in simple sentences [-4].

Skills

Axe/Mace (A) DX+4 [4]-16*; Brawling (E) DX+6 [20]-18; Breaking Blow (H) IQ+3 [16]-16; Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-

13; Carpentry (E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Climbing (A) DX+1 [4]-13; First Aid/TL3 (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Hiking (A) HT [2]-13; Herb Lore (VH) IQ-1 [4]-12; Kiai (H) HT+1 [8]-14; Leadership (A) IQ [2]-13; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-13; Naturalist (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Observation (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Power Blow (H) Will+1 [8]-16; Riding (Horse) (A) DX+1 [2]-12; Soldier/TL3 (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; Stealth (A) DX [2]-12; Sumo Wrestling (A) DX+6 [24]-18; Survival (Forest) (A) Per [2]-13; Swimming (E) HT [1]-13; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-14; Teaching (A) IQ+3 [12]-16; Thrown Weapon (Axe/Mace) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Tracking (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Two-Handed Axe/Mace (A) DX+6 [24]-18.

Techniques: Armed Grapple (Two-Handed Axe/Mace) (H) [3]-18; Hook (Two-Handed Axe/Mace) (H) [3]-15; Targeted Attack (Brawling Head Butt/Face) (H) [4]-15.

*Defaults from Two-Handed Axe/Mace.

Dame Lisandra of Durham *245 points*

Second daughter to a minor noble from the lording of Durham, Lisandra was a problem child who scorned traditional women's pastimes and insisted on playing with the boys. It was a relief to her parents when a female relative, a Knight of the Stone, accepted her as a page.

As a young squire, Lisandra decided to earn her spurs from a foreign knight, strengthening her claims to knighthood despite the common prejudice against women. So, soon after her teacher deemed her training complete, she left Caithness for the distant Cardiel.

There, she eventually managed to be accepted as a contestant in an important tournament. She proceeded to win at the joust. Sir Basil, an old knight, was so impressed with Lisandra's performance that he took her under his protection and invited her to spend a season as his guest.

Sir Basil not only give Lisandra her spurs, naming her a full knight, but also taught her the fundamentals of his old master's flail fighting method. Now Lisandra feels ready to return home and carve a place for her name between those of the great knights of Caithness.

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 12 [20].
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP12 [0]; Will 13 [5]; Per 12 [0]; FP 13 [3]
Basic Speed 6.00[-5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10.
Age 23; 5'8"; 141 lbs. White skin, dark brown eyes, and waist-long brown hair.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Christian region [0].
Languages: Anglish (Native/Native) [0]; Arabic (Accented/Accented) [4]; Latin (Accented/Accented) [4].

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; Status 2 (Landless Knight) [10]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Perks: Off-Hand Weapon Training (Shortsword); Skill Adaptation (Entangle defaults to Flail); Style Familiarity (High Medieval Knightly Mounted Combat); Style Familiarity (Warwick's Method) [4].

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Chivalry) [-15]; Obsession (Acquire fame as a great knight) (9) [-15]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Reputation 1 (As a female knight; Among traditionalists and misogynists; All the time) [-3]; Sense of Duty (Family) [-5].

Qurks: Broad-Minded; Gets offended if treated like a lady and not as a knight; Hates doing needlework [-3].

Skills

Animal Handling (Equines) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Axe/Mace (A) DX [2]-13; Brawling (E) DX [1]-13; Broadsword (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-13; First Aid/TL3 (E) IQ [1]-12; Flail (H) DX [4]-13; Games (Tournaments) (E) IQ+2 [4]-14; Heraldry (A) IQ [2]-12; Lance (A) DX+3 [12]-16; Riding (Horse) (A) DX+3 [12]-16; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Shortsword (A) DX [1*]-13; Survival (Plains) (A) Per+1 [4]-13; Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-13; Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-14.

Techniques: Cavalry Training (Broadsword) (H) [3]-14; Cavalry Training (Flail) (H) [2]-12; Entangle (Flail) (H) [4]-12; Stamp Kick (Brawling) (H) [3]-12; Targeted Attack (Broadsword Thrust/Vitals chinks) (H) [8]-11.

* Defaults from Broadsword

Jaaldig, the Merchant   *170 points*

Jaaldig is a middle-aged goblin with a reasonably successful career as a merchant. He started to practice Goblin Boxing after witnessing one of his late father's business partners being gravely hurt by robbers during a caravan. Not having any talent for magic, he decided that learning to fight would be a reasonable alternative.

He trained diligently for many years. He even took part in a few local tourneys, winning once. Nonetheless, he eventually had to relegate Yatrik-bohr to an irregular activity as he assumed his father's business.

Jaaldig deals mainly in cotton fabrics and wine, at the commercial routes between Ekhans and Serrun in southern Megalos. He is a competent fighter and merchant, and he has had to defend himself for real a few times during his merchant career, mostly with positive results.

ST 9[10]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP10 [2]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 13 [6]
Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.
Age 43; 5'4"; 113 lbs. Dark-green skin, brown eyes.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Christian region [0].
Languages: Anglish (Native/Native) [0]; Latin (Accented/Native) [5]; Goblin (Broken/Accented) [3].

Advantages

Business Acumen +1 [10]; Goblin [19]; Racial Impulsiveness (15-) [5]; Status 1 [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Perks: Skill Adaptation (Trip defaults to Staff or Staff Sport); Style Familiarity (Goblin Boxing); Technique Mastery (Staff Sport Sweep) [3].

Disadvantages

Addiction (Tobacco) [-5]; Code of Honor (Professional) [-5]; Miserliness (15) [-5]; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]; Sense of Duty (employees) [-5].

Qurks: Careful; Congenial; Does not believe in Yatrik-bohr underworld matches; Interested in Magic and mages [-3].

Skills

Accounting (H) IQ+1 [4]-13*; Administration (A) IQ+2 [4]-14*; Animal Handling (Equines) (A) IQ [2]-12; Area Knowledge (Ekhans-Serrun route) (E) IQ+2 [4]-14; Boxing (A) DX [1**]-12; Boxing Sport (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Connoisseur (Wine) (A) IQ+2 [8]-14; Current Affairs/TL3 (Business) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Merchant (A) IQ+3 [8]-15*; Packing (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Staff (A) [3**]-13; Staff Sport (A) DX+2 [8]-14.

Techniques: Feint (Boxing) (H) [0**]-13; Feint (Boxing Sport) (H) [2]-15; Low-Line Defense (Boxing) (H) [0**]-9; Low-Line Defense (Boxing Sport) (H) [3]-10; Sweep (Staff) (H) [0**]-14; Sweep (Staff Sport) (H) [5]-15; Trip (Staff) (H) [0**]-9; Trip (Staff Sport) (H) [2]-10.

* Includes Business Acumen bonus.
** Defaults from the equivalent Sport skill or technique.

* * *

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Pyramid Review

ZenBenders

Published by [Out of the Box Publishing](#)

Designed by Ariel Laden, Ellen Winter, Mark Osterhaus, Al Waller, & Matt Mariani

Illustrations & graphics by John Kovalic & Cathleen Quinn-Kinney

Eight picture cubes, one Out of the Box "die," instructions, 36 puzzle diagrams, plastic container; $9.99

Remember the tile puzzles of youth, with the pieces that slide about? With only one open space, there were just so many ways those squares could be shifted. Success meant completing a picture of some sort, but in the meantime one constantly had to give up what precious progress he had made to find the solution. Those puzzlers have graduated now, with Out of the Box's new *ZenBenders.*

The object of this one-player game is to complete the puzzle in as little time as possible.

The two biggest differences between the toys of yesteryear and this new breed of noodle-scratchers are a) the variations available and b) the addition of a third dimension. The puzzle is a round, handheld plastic base with space for nine playing pieces in a three-by-three arrangement, but instead of simple tiles the game uses "dice" or picture cubes. One of the nine bits is just a placeholder with the Out of the Box logo on it; it keeps everything firmly packed during delivery or storage, but gets set aside during play.

There isn't a single picture to be formed with these devices. Rather, a selection of associated images covers all sides of the eight cubes and, depending on the puzzle card used, the target arrangement changes. There are 36 diagrams divided into three levels of difficulty. A player pulls one out (they're all numbered and color-coded, so puzzles can be done in order or at random) and tries to get the cubes to match the pattern shown. This is where that third dimension comes into play.

Finishing the puzzle is no longer merely a question of sliding the pieces top to bottom or side to side. There's just enough space offered by the one missing cube for the dice to be "rolled" as they move so they show an adjacent facing. That may bring up one of the necessary images -- say, for example, the top-down and tail-wagging end of the wiener dog -- but it doesn't mean it's facing the right direction. A player may have to roll it over on different axes before the right picture is displayed in the right orientation, though that means having that open space where it's needed *multiple* times. Removing a cube from the tray completely is *right* out.

There are four themes available for purchase: the Dachshund (with wiener-dog beginnings, middles, and ends stretched everywhere); the Dragon (serpentine coils cover the pieces); the Quilt (green and blue colors alternate diagonally and lengthwise); and the Race Track (with roadways and little cars going in different directions). The dice are strong plastic and the pictures are melded onto the surfaces; they may wear away after many plays, but they look pretty good so far and they should last a lot longer than simple stickers. (Alas, the Out of the Box die doesn't do anything, and that's a shame because it's so pretty and colorful it demands to be employed *somehow.*) It all comes in a small plastic container with a clear plastic dome, and the rules and diagram cards all fit into the bottom of the container. Twisting it one way or another opens or closes the compartment and -- well, if they put that much thought into the packaging . . .

The puzzle diagrams are divided up into easy, medium, and difficult levels, and impressively, they're right. It's not worth getting into the math to figure out how they know which teasers are easier than others, but they're pretty much spot-on with their assessments. On the other hand, it is worth knowing that while the pictures underlying each theme are different, the puzzles offered aren't. Puzzle #1 for the Dachshund set is the same as the first diagram for the Dragon, for instance. Of course, whether the user can mentally divorce himself from the imagery to see the formulas underneath is another issue altogether. They offer up a two-player version in which, using a pair of games that use the same motif, rivals can try to finish the same puzzle in the fastest time, but the similarities from one set to the next mean the "different" challenges are really cosmetic at best and any two sets ought to serve fine.

The website also offers additional diagrams (though they also claim there are blanks for making one's own puzzles, and such an animal doesn't immediately present itself . . .). These pictures use a fourth border color so they're distinguishable from the original cards, but alas they aren't categorized by difficulty. Kids and adults can both find something worth occupying their time with this nifty twist on an age-old favorite, and the different levels mean an older player can easily handicap himself against a youngster. *ZenBenders* are compact, good for pick-up play, and highly transportable for long car rides. Oh, and it doesn't hurt that they're a good bit of fun. Out of the Box has taken another simple idea and turned it into tabletop enjoyment.

--Andy Vetromile

Four Oddities for Offices

by Alice Turow

We have visited the world of [strange office equipment](#) before. This time, however, we set our sights back a little further than normal, looking at a few oddities you'd find around the office that you *can't* smuggle home in a briefcase with the sticky notes.

Each one of the four ideas below are intended as a fixture or other mostly unmovable aspect of an office building (but applicable to other structures). Each includes a "Campaign Uses" section that details a plot seed or two, and an "Other Worlds" aside that gives ideas for how to use the idea outside the normal bounds.

Hold Storage

"Look at Bob, stoically remaining on hold. Bob is a real trooper. Why, as long as I've worked here, it's seemed like Bob has been in there, waiting, waiting, waiting.

"And like everyone else at this company, I don't want to disturb him until he's off the phone."

Almost everyone who works in an office environment knows what it's like to be on hold for an extended period, listening to the repeating drone of a reassuring phone message over and over. The "Hold Storage" phone system takes this one step further.

Someone who calls the "Hold Storage" system finds themselves greeted with the constantly soothing voice of someone who assures them that their call *is* important, and someone will be by soon to help them. The person on the phone feels as if they had free will; he can walk around his office or home (or wherever the call is being made), try to do work, and so on. But *all* such activity is entirely within the person's head. In actuality, the person in Hold Storage is suspended in time, in a socially acceptable coma-like state. Those who peek in on the victim will see that he's on hold; the victim might make facial gestures or other indications that he is alive and contemplating the Zen nature of what it is to be on hold . . . but otherwise, he is unmoving. In fact, time almost ceases to be for him; he doesn't age, excrete, require food, or otherwise do *anything*. Except remain on hold, naturally. Similarly, attempts at injuring or killing him simply don't work; his physical body is "locked" in time, blessed and cursed simultaneously. Such protection only extends to the immediate physical body; it would be possible to (say) steal the wallet of someone in Hold Storage, or undress him (although getting the sleeve of the phone-holding arm will prove challenging . . . see below).

Breaking someone free of Hold Storage is relatively easy; one simply needs to break the connection between the telephone and the victim. Pressing the "hang up" button, disconnecting the phone from the wall, or cutting the phone's cable are all ways of severing the connection. It is *not* possible to move or interact with the phone as it relates to the victim's hands; he is "frozen" and considered an unmovable force, and thus pushing the handset away from his head is not an option.

Although Hold Storage is mildly amusing when it happens to someone else, it's downright terrifying when one considers that the Hold's effects take place even if on *speaker phone* (or other mass- communication method). This means that someone who enters an office where a victim is in Hold Storage via a speaker phone finds himself trapped in time as well. Likewise if someone were foolish (or evil) enough to patch a Hold Storage effect through an office's intercom system, the entire building could be frozen.

Entering Hold Storage requires the ability to hear (or -- in the case of teletype machines -- interact with the phone in some fashion); thus keeping one's ears plugged is a good way to be protected from the Hold's effects. However, once a person is *in* Hold Storage, he cannot escape without outside intervention; if he were to (say) hang up or cover his ears, it would simply be his mind making him *think* he's done that. (And, because the mind would seek continuity with the experience, he would probably pick up the phone again at some point in the vivid- dream so he could continue to

remain on hold.)

Those who are trapped in the same Hold Storage together may *believe* they are interacting with others in the same room, but on both sides, this is simply a dream-hallucination conjured by the trapped mind. Likewise, those who find themselves in Hold Storage are aware that time is passing, and may feel vaguely annoyed at it, but they fail to comprehend the true temporal passage; someone suspended in Hold Storage for an hour is no more irked than someone who is trapped for nine years.

The Hold Storage is most commonly encountered when someone calls into the system, but it can just as easily be an external "threat." Many people have had dinners interrupted with a cold-call where they hear an answering machine upon picking up the phone, and the Hold Storage system can take this one further.

There are rumors that a version of the Hold Storage also exists that enables the listener to step outside of time; while he is on hold, the rest of the world stops for everyone else. This hold system functions similarly to the Stopped Clock, except that it can be somewhat portable. (Reports are mixed if it will function on a cell phone or if it only works on a landline; there might be two different "Portable Holds." Regardless, the cell-phone portable hold seems reliant on the battery charge of the phone; apparently it's a fundamental rule of the cosmos that, no matter how much the laws of space-time warp, cell phones still can't hold a charge.)

Campaign Use

The Hold Storage system makes an insidious trap in many ways. If the heroes are skulking around an office, there might be a periodic call on Line 3 (which the owner of the office knows not to answer) that is a Hold Storage call. If the heroes answer it via speaker phone, they're stuck until the office's earplugged agents come to rescue them.

It also makes a good means of providing an "origin story" (for PCs or NPCs) for sufficiently weird settings: One day, Sara called the customer-support line for her computer. The next thing she remembers, there was an earthquake that knocked something heavy onto the phone, destroying it . . . and Sara soon discovered that, while the phone system has remained bullet-proof, earthquakes were apparently still a problem in the 23rd century.

Finally, the Hold Storage actually has some useful properties. Chief among them is the ability to avoid injury and slow all metabolic activities. Heroes might keep a Hold Storage number on speed-dial at all times, intent on calling it in the event of becoming poisoned, trapped without air, or critically injured. After all, listening to a computer tell you that "someone will be with you soon" is better than bleeding to death, right? . . . Right?

Other Worlds

The concept of a "Rip Van Winkle" effect is very, very old, and the basic premise can be expanded or utilized at the GM's whim. The Hold Storage can be used "out of the box" with a concept such as "Siren Shells," a type of seashell that entrances listeners to stand motionless. Or, in any fantasy setting with sufficient scrying technology, an area might be scry-proofed in such a way that attempting to peer in with a crystal ball or other means backfires on the seer. Finally, it's possible that future memetic or aural technology will enable the Hold Storage's "paralysis by phone" concept to work as advertised . . . although, of course, what the future thinks of as "phones" might be radically different from what we use today.

The Stairwells of Madness

The sound of the shambling dead echoed in the stairwell, above and below him. He knew there was a research facility on Level 91 that would have supplies that could help, if only he could get there. He cursed his fading memories of high-school math as he left floor 89 behind. He knew his life boiled down to one question that he didn't know the answer to: Was 91 a prime? Was 91 a prime?

Whoever named the Stairwells of Madness was either being melodramatic or had a low tolerance for sanity.

Nevertheless, the name stuck, and those who know of them will invariably fall back on the name. Despite the dramatic nomenclature, the Stairwells have an unusual property that makes them either incredibly useful or irritating, depending on the world view: The Stairwells "skip" floors, depending on some predefined sequence "programmed" into the floors. For example, someone who took a "Skip 2" Stairwell who started on Floor 4 would walk up one flight of stairs to Floor 6, or down one flight to Floor 2.

The sequence that a Madness Stairwell follows need not be so mundane a sequence. For example, a Stairwell that follows the Fibonacci sequence might find the user traveling from Floor 1 to Floor 1 (!) to Floor 2 to Floor 3 to Floor 5 to Floor 8 to Floor 13, and so on.

There are two broad types of Stairwells: those that are absolute, and those that are relative. *Relative* ones tend to have names like "Skip 2" or "Down is Up." As the name implies, these Stairwells are "relative" to the person who utilizes them, and tend to assume the user is the "zero" point of the sequence. For example, a relative "Fibonacci" Stairwell where the user starts on Floor 9 would take the person "up" to Floors 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 20, and so on. (He would go down to Floor 9, 8, 7, 5, and 2). *Absolute* Stairwells usually have levels that connect in a way that's akin to normal stairs: consistent from usage to usage. Although still confusing, these Stairwells tend to make a lot more sense to most who encounter them. Such stairwells tend to have names that either describe the progression of levels, or else provide enough of a sequence that the progression can be deduced. For example, an absolute Stairwell based on the Fibonacci sequence would be called a "1-1-2-3-5-8" Stairwell; starting out at floor 5 would take someone up one floor to Level 8 and down one floor to Level 3.

Regardless of the type, it's entirely possible for a stairwell not to connect with some floors, or for the stairwell not to have an exit at the top or bottom. For example, a "2-4-8-16" absolute Stairwell lacks exits on Levels 1, 3, 5-7, and 9-15. As another example, someone who enters a "Skip 2" Stairwell at Level 4 would be able to get to Levels 2 or 6, but he would be unable to use that Stairwell to exit the building.

The distortion of space in a relative Stairwell ends up confusing people. Generally, if Stairwell's rule is such that two people would meet each other, then they can . . . but if the Stairwell wouldn't permit two people to meet, then they won't, even if in the same Stairwell at the same time! For example, if someone is in a "Skip 2" Stairwell who starts on Level 4 and goes up would meet someone in the same Stairwell who starts on Level 8 and goes down; they meet at Level 6. But if the person who's in a Level 4 Stairwell goes up, he wouldn't meet someone who starts on Level 7 and goes down; there's no intersection point, and there is literally no way for two such travelers to interact with one another . . . almost as if they weren't even in the same Stairwell. It's entirely possible to "pass" someone in a relative Stairwell of Madness; in fact, it's probably more likely than not!

Since absolute Stairwells always connect the same floors, it's not possible to "bypass" someone in one; someone who starts on level 2 of a "1-1-2-3-5-8" Stairwell who goes up will meet someone who starts on Level 8 and goes down . . . probably around the midpoint between Levels 3 and 5.

Less commonly, a Stairwell of Madness might "reverse" the expected ascent or descent of a stairway, although the direction a walker believes he is going is as normal. For example, someone walking upstairs from Level 1 to Level 8 on a "1-4-3-6-5-8" stairwell would pass through lower floors twice -- once from 4 to 3 and once from 6 to 5 -- but at all times he would feel he's going "up." As previously stated, some Stairwells allow travel to the same floor (such as the first floors of movement in a "Fibonacci" Stairwell), and some Stairwells permit ascenders or descenders to "loop" the building; a strategically placed Slinky on a "1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1" Stairwell could fall forever. In the case of Stairwells that cause a user to loop around or ascend/descend to the same level, it does not seem possible to interact with one's self.

As stated, movement on a Madness Stairwell is always consistent with walking a normal, physical stairwell; even using (say) a "Skip 25" stairwell to go up from Floor 7 to Floor 32 only feels like walking up one floor. For those who fully comprehend a building's Madness Stairwell, this can provide a consistent shortcut in many circumstances.

Buildings with Stairwells of Madness often have more than one, usually with radically conflicting rules. This can be especially infuriating in a tall building of seemingly identical floors, with no landmarks to determine where you're at. How do you know which floor you're on? How do you know where to get where you want to go?

Campaign Use

The Stairwells of Madness make a confusing building even more so; the generic nature of many modern office buildings coupled with the lack of windows or other identifications can make pinpointing location challenging. And in a situation where navigating via stairwells quickly is important -- say, any game with zombies -- trying to decipher what's going on with the stairs can be a difficult obstacle.

Perhaps more importantly, the Stairwells provide ample opportunity for "home field advantage" for adversaries or threats who make the office their home. How *did* Dr. Experimentus climb *down* the stairs to get to his secret helicopter on the *top* floor?

Other Worlds

The Stairwells of Madness are almost *better* suited for a true fantasy setting; envision a round tower of (say) 10 similar- looking small levels with Stairwells following four different rules. An action that is considered one of the most basic in all of dungeon- crawldom -- ascending and descending stairs -- turns into something mysterious and confusing. And, since they're not *traps,* per se, they won't register as such via most divination magic.

Mysterious crawling routes that take travelers to unexpected areas are nothing new for some space settings, and having hard mathematical rules for how they might be deciphered would make an excellent *Star Trek/Doctor Who*-esque quasi-scientific puzzle challenge. (See the movie *Cube* for one example of a scientific notion rigged into pathway determination.)

As a final example, Stairwells of Madness make a great in-game justification for the wacky nonsensical chases like those on the various *Scooby-Doo* shows, where people run off a door to the left and emerge on the right.

Hellevator

"Look, the Gruberman account . . . we need to put this to bed." J.V. looked at his watch nervously.

Linnell sighed. "Well, I'd like to, but there are questions."

"Yes, yes, questions, fine," J.V. said, talking faster as the elevator's number moved silently toward their destination. "But, in general, you agree that you can sell Gruberman's shares for $1.7 mil? Yes or no."

"Well, yes." The elevator door ringed as he continued, "But . . ."

It was too late; J.V. was out the elevator like a wet cat, while Linnell felt as if he'd made a decision far more momentous than he'd intended.

Many volumes discuss elevators that descend into Hell. More mundanely, many people have described elevator rides that were, in some fashion, hellish. But a true Hellevator has a power that is quite unexpected to those who anticipated a more fire-and-brimstone experience. Put simply, any agreement, promise, pledge, or commitment made in a Hellevator (with certain conditions) is absolutely binding, with the full weight of the universe behind it.

The special deal-sealing property of the Hellevator requires some conditions be met. First, the entirety of the agreement needs to be made with the Hellevator doors closed. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the Hellevator only works for [bilateral contracts](#) -- that is, both sides need to make a concession. Thus telling someone in a Hellevator, "I'm not using my soul; Ted, you take it." would not invoke the Hellevator's powers (since nothing is being given in return for said soul), but saying, "Ted, those donuts look great; I'll give you my soul for one!" might spark the Hellevator . . . *if* Ted agrees.

As a final requirement, the Hellevator has no power to compel someone who is *not* a party to the agreement, although it might compel someone to do everything in his power to pressure someone else. For example, the Hellevator would not activate if someone said, "If you give me $10,000, my son will kill someone for you." Even if the son is in the Hellevator, he cannot be forced to do something that someone else has agreed to. *But* if the person were to say, "If you give me $10,000, I will do everything in my power to make my son kill someone for you," *that* would be a binding agreement. Note that physical overpowerment or other coercion can allow someone dominion over a person or persons not part of the agreement; the classic example is "I'll give you my firstborn if . . ." Although the firstborn does not agree to the terms of the contract, he doesn't have to; he simply needs to be physically handed over (and he'd be free to do everything in his power to avoid this fate . . . which, if he's a newborn, isn't much).

An agreement *doesn't* require the tangible transferal of anything, nor does it require *belief* in a tangible transferal. The most common example of this is the deal-making atheist, who offers his soul (which he doesn't believe in) to someone in exchange for something else. Even though he doesn't believe in it, it can still be accepted and "given" as part of the contract. (Whether or not souls actually exist in the game world is, of course, a question for the GM.) Likewise someone can request something that he doesn't believe is possible to be granted, and the Hellevator will enforce that contract. Finally, *any* affirmative answer is treated as agreement; even if someone says, "Oh, yeah, *sure* I'll do that," as sarcastically as possible, the Hellevator still considers that as an affirmative.

Once a Hellevator deal is struck, both participants know it has been accomplished. They will feel a tingle that dissipates only upon the successful resolution of the contract.

In all other ways, the Hellevator acts as a normal elevator; there can be witnesses to the transaction (acting either knowingly as such or merely trying to get from one floor to another), but this is not a requirement.

The trivial example of Ted and the donut, above, demonstrates perhaps the most powerful and deceptive use of the Hellevator: Its powers do not require belief in the transaction taking place. This can result in curious deals being struck accidentally, which can be amusing or deadly . . . or both at the same time. ("If you get the mail and there are no checks today, I'll just die." "Sounds like a plan.") Nonetheless, given how rare it is for two people to agree to something bilaterally in the time it takes to ride an elevator, most often the Hellevator's powers are invoked in two circumstances: Either both parties are aware of the Hellevator's powers and try to invoke it as extra insurance for their agreement, or only one party is aware of its powers and he is seeking to trick the other person.

The "enforcement" aspect of the Hellevator is usually treated as a mental coercion of the highest caliber; provided one side has lived up to its end of the contract, the other will attempt to deliver his side to the best of his abilities. So, for example, if someone promises his kidney for a promotion on a Hellevator ride, and he receives a promotion from the other, he will feel compelled to deliver the kidney as soon as possible, as best he understands it. Whether this involves taking a trip to the hospital and requesting it be removed (which almost certainly won't work), going to the other person and making the arrangements (which might), or pointing a knife at one's self while raising his shirt is determined by the mind of the body that the kidney currently resides in. Note, however, that the terms of the deal *must* be met, in some fashion; even if the Hellevator agreement was reached as a joke or accident, the beneficiary -- say, the person owed a kidney -- can't say, "Forget about it!" and have that resolve the contract. No, a kidney was promised, and a kidney shall be delivered.

In all other ways, the Hellevator's contract is generally treated like any other supernatural "deal with the devil"; if one can think of a creative way to satisfy the terms of the contract, then the contract is considered fulfilled and the coercion ceases . . . even if the element provided reciprocally isn't what the person had in mind. Trying to break the terms of the agreement usually necessitates a fair amount of creativity, and almost always demands the seeds of the thwarting to be planted ahead of the agreement. For example, an offer of "my kidney" wouldn't be satisfied if the person ran out, bought a dog, named it "Kidney," and handed it over . . . but if the person happened to have a rabbit named "Kidney" all along, then that bunny would probably make for suitable reciprocity. Likewise, in English-speaking countries, most serious attempts at trafficking in the human spirit utilizes the phrase "immortal soul," as it's too easy to satisfy an ordinary deal for "your soul" with the heel of one's shoe (the sole). (As ever, the GM is the final arbiter to whether an attempt to circumvent a Hellevator agreement is successful.)

Campaign Use

The Hellevator is intended as much for PC use as it is NPC trickery or plot coercion. Imagine if the heroes learn that they can make a supernaturally binding contract with *anyone,* provided it's in the elevator of this one specific nondescript building; how do they go about luring others there?

One important concept regarding the Hellevator is that all deals must be resolved with the doors closed. Although there are times of day where some office-building elevators can be nearly empty, this still usually requires would-be deal-makers to be spritely in their plots.

The supernatural element of self-knowledge of a deal's activation also provides plenty of justification to get a plot started. An ally tracks down the heroes and casually mentions, "I think I might have promised to kill myself if the Institute rejects our latest exploration grant . . ."

Other Worlds

The basic concept of the Hellevator doesn't require any modern technology. In any setting that devotes a significant amount of time to mysteries and intrigues, there will be private rooms where deeds may be discussed and deals are struck in secrecy. A tiny musty study illuminated by skulls housing long-burned candles that cast shadows of furtive chittering creatures in the corners is at least as terrifying as an enclosed metal box suspended high above the ground with an instrumental form of "Stairway to Heaven" playing constantly.

In a science-fiction setting, nanites or other biochemical triggers can render pretty much the entire Hellevator remotely plausible. Even the "closed room/elevator" aspect can be retained, with a chamber that must remain sealed during the procedure to "cure" the nanites to the participants. And, given how important contract law is in some futuristic settings, having a guaranteed-enforceable contract would look awfully appealing . . .

The HyperCubicle

The time-crunch for completion was exhausting -- more so than Casey would reveal -- and he still couldn't believe the results. Never had he been so successful. The data on the hard drive was saved.

And now, thought Casey, I need to curl up. If my body's going to burn out like an ember, I hope it happens before lunch.

Consideration #1: When perceived from a certain point of view, a cube is little more than every possible iteration of a square taken along a third axis that is bound by the limitations of the square's edge unit. So, too, is a hypercube, a four-dimensional representation of every iteration of a cube along a new dimension.

Consideration #2: A cubicle is a projection of a three-dimensional workspace over a two-dimensional area, designed to facilitate productivity. A HyperCubicle is a projection of a regular office cubicle along every possible iteration of another dimension.

Many people believe that a HyperCubicle, being in some senses a tesseract, allows access to muck with other dimensions or times. Well, it doesn't, and the brochure clearly says so; the space-time continuum is already littered with such anomalies, and if you're looking to get well and truly lost in an office environment, seek out something like the Stairwells of Madness.

No, the HyperCubicle does something much more interesting: Those within the confines of a HyperCubicle find their reality is culled in some probabilistic fashion, sifting the actions and events of that confined area into a feasible but (in aggregate) improbable fashion. The most common type of HyperCubicle is one that sorts through all possible outcomes and discerns the one that most conforms to the successful outcome of desired actions. In other words, the "best-case scenario" isn't a situation . . . it's a place.

In game terms, assume that any deliberate action taken in such a HyperCubicle assumes the best possible outcome; for most game systems, this usually manifests as the best possible roll on any skill. (For *GURPS* this is easy; just assume all skill rolls are 3. For games with "exploding" dice or other rerolls, assume that the first batch of rolls all get the maximum necessary to reroll, then roll the dice normally; for example, in a game where all 6s get to "explode," assume that a roll of 5d6 returns five 6s with the first roll and then roll as normal.) Such a HyperCubicle allows for incredible results, provided such results could be achieved within a confined space (no one is going to break any long-jump world records via a HyperCubicle).

There are, unfortunately, some drawbacks of using such a HyperCubicle. First, it is physically and mentally draining; being within a HyperCubicle and drawing on its powers is the equivalent of spending it performing heavy exertion or other strenuous exercise in terms of fatigue or stamina lost (*not* in terms of exercise benefits!). This fatiguing effect assumes roughly one skill roll an hour. Attempting to improve this increases the drain exponentially: two rolls in an hour is twice as draining, three rolls is four times as draining, four rolls is eight times as draining, and so on. It is possible to work oneself to death in a HyperCubicle, although collapse from extreme exhaustion is more likely.

A second drawback of the cubicle was alluded to previously: The maximizing results are only permitted in situations where the skill-user has control over the outcome. For example, a random reaction roll from someone contacted via phone would be unaffected, but an attempt to charm or fast-talk would be modified. Likewise, if an office-mate across the way is making a difficult mathematics skill roll, shouting out helpful math tips from the HyperCubicle won't bestow any special abilities to that person (although in some game systems, it's possible to aid another's skill roll, which might still be possible at the GM's discretion).

A third limitation is that the person in the HyperCubicle has no choice about whether or not the maximizing power is used; the only option for those not wishing to utilize it is to not attempt any action all.

The final drawback of the HyperCubicle is perhaps the most serious. The area seems to draw its probability-altering power from an unlikely source: the skill user. The HyperCubicle employs its other-dimensional capabilities to reach into the time stream, plucking future successes and using them now. (It also seems that the brochure proclaiming it doesn't muck with the space-time continuum exaggerates as much as many marketing brochures do.) For systems that use critical successes, the next *two* critical successes rolled outside the HyperCubicle are rerolled. For systems that use multiple exploding dice, keep track of the number of dice that "exploded" and force the player to reroll that number of dice that would explode, *without* benefit. (For example, in the 5d6 example above, keep track of five 6s. Then the first five 6s that turn up on any future roll(s) are rerolled as if they never happened.) Finally, for systems that use a single exploding die or lack exploding dice or critical successes entirely, disregard the next two incredibly good rolls, depending on the game system (GM's discretion/whim).

Some HyperCubicles cull their futures from other possibilities. For example, a research facility may want to see what effect "everyman" results produce on their computers (in other words, all skill rolls are absolutely average). Or a psychological station might want to determine the effects of low morale on employees by subjecting them to the "worst-case scenario" HyperCubicle, where all skill results are critical failures. Still, the "best-case scenario" remains the most popular, for obvious reasons.

Campaign Use

The default "best-case scenario" HyperCubicle is incredibly powerful and is primarily intended as an in-game justification for some outrageous plot results. ("How did SinisterCo develop giant robots capable of attacking the world when the company has only been around for less than a year?" "Their scientists are using HyperCubicles.") Still, the game effects have been balanced with some significant drawbacks, and even if the PCs acquire one -- provided they aren't planning on devoting the rest of their gaming lives to sitting in a cubicle -- they will still have to venture out into the "real world" at times . . . where their players will certainly moan as critical successes are taken away from them at crucial moments.

As a final note, any ultimate showdown between PCs and an adversary using a HyperCubicle is going to be . . . interesting. Make sure you look over the PCs' character sheets ahead of time and try to determine what "all critical

successes, all the time" will mean to a combat. (Remember: You don't need permission to use a HyperCubicle's powers; it's simply enough just to be there!)

Other Worlds

A chamber where all results are maximized can be plunked down into many campaigns. In settings with heavy magic use, the GM will need to make sure that such a place doesn't become an assembly line for high-powered magic items (or, if it does, determining what effect that will have on the game world). Curiously, the ban against magic-item creation may *not* be as necessary in a modern campaign using the HyperCubicle as written; it would probably be a very interesting discovery for the heroes to come across a magic-item factory in the middle of a financial research firm!

Reality: The Customizable Whatever

One of the things I love about gaming as a hobby is that practically any part of it is customizable. I touched on some aspects of this last week, when I talked about concocting "speed versions" of your favorite games. But it applies to so much more as well.

As a counterexample, consider the act of watching a movie, a pastime beloved by trillions. There are a fair number of options with such an endeavor. You can watch in a theater, at home, on an iPod, at a drive-in. There are many *types* of movies one can watch, and dozens or hundreds of examples of each type. You can decide on the snacks. And there are a few more dials and knobs you can no doubt tweak on your own personal experience. But the core experience -- staring at and listening to a screen and giving the illusion of motion due consideration -- remains the same regardless of the trappings.

This isn't the case with playing most games. Take something as mundane as *Scrabble*. My wife and I tend to play it "open- faced"; in other words, we usually allow each other to look at the others' tiles and make suggestions. (For some reason, we find it a lot easier to find great words using the others' tiles than our own.) This is, needless to say, a vastly different game than that played at the World *Scrabble* Championship. I've encountered a dozen different groups who all play the various White Wolf offerings completely differently. A game like **GURPS** is a virtual chameleon, containing tactical hex-based man-to-man combat, vehicle-building subgames, character-creation "games," "roll the dice and see how pretty they look" roleplaying, and others. And so on.

Even among a group of gamers, everyone can bring their own experiences and perceptions to the game. For example, when I am part of the Thanksgiving poker game among my wife's family, many of them are there to play a serious game of poker, while I'm there to have fun and socialize with kin. (For some reason, I'm very popular with the other players.)

For roleplaying games, many articles and chapters have been devoted to catering to the various types of players, perhaps beginning with Aaron Allston's 1988 *Strike Force.* In addition, countless forum discussions and blog posts have been written adding to the dialog, helping to ensure that groups are as satisfying as possible to their members, and individual members have the tips and tools they need to make their games more satisfying. Of course, it's the customizable nature of the RPG that enables it to be so versatile.

So, as a brainstorming exercise, I thought I'd try to jot down all the things that one might conceivably customize with a game:

- Game type
- Specific game
- Rules variations
- Rules versions
- Rules add-ons
- Number of players
- Invited players
- Length of gaming session
- Venue of gaming session
- Instance of gaming session (how often does the group meet?)
- Rules focus (friendly? tournament?)
- Atmosphere (snacks? music?)
- Means of gaming (in person? via chat room? using Skype?)
- For RPGs:
    - Focus (on the PCs? on the plot?)
    - Tone
    - Themes
    - "Fairness"

And that's what I came up with after just a few minutes. Tweaking any of these can produce a radically different experience. (A modern version of **Talisman** is practically unrecognizable from its earlier editions; for example, the former can be completed within a human lifetime.)

Of course, one problem with customizability is that it becomes difficult to know *what* you need to do to get results that you want. It's like being presented with a grocery store and being told, "The tools are there; do what you want!" Oh, and you have no idea of what "cooking" is or what tastes good. Sure, you might stumble across something you like eventually, but it's going to be a long, slow-going process, and probably won't be as satisfying in the short term as if someone were to have held you by the hand and said, "Here, buy this, this, and this, put it in a pot with water, and cook the whole thing on medium for three hours."

This is the reason I suspect that movies have an easier time as a global pop-culture phenomenon than games do. (Not that games are any slouch, mind you . . .) Movies present their treasures much more easily, and it's generally simpler to discern what a viewer likes and doesn't like. In contrast, I've encountered many, many people over the years who claim not to like games or gaming. But it's hard to know *why* they don't like games. Each of the items on the list above (and no doubt more!) can be grounds for disliking a gaming session and -- if extreme enough -- grounds to be turned off of gaming forever. Again, going down the list, I can come up with scenarios for each one: "Well, not all gamers are meant for strategy gamers. And among those who might be interested, not everyone enjoys **Diplomacy.** And even if a player might enjoy **Diplomacy,** it's just not the same without the right number of players. And even with the right number, it only takes one player to ruin it for everyone . . ." And so on.

That's the dual edge of customizability.

Fortunately, many of these problems can be solved with communication; determining what players like ahead of time, where the comfort levels are toward experimentation and stuff that's "outside the norms," and knowing the willingness to take a chance every so often can all help a group of gamers make the most of their night of gaming.

Or mid-afternoon, if you prefer. Or weekend long game-fest. Or . . .

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Stunning Eldritch Tales (for [Trail of Cthulhu](#))

Published by [Pelgrane Press](#)

Written by Robin D. Laws

Cover and Illustrations by Jérôme Huguenin

82-Page Perfect Bound Book; $17.95

First, Pelgrane Press got the most appropriate author and one of the industry's best in the form of Ken Hite to write the best game of Lovecraftian horror since 1981. Now, it has achieved a double in getting another fantastic author to pen that game's first scenario anthology. That author is Robin D. Laws, the game is *Trail of Cthulhu,* and the anthology is *Stunning Eldritch Tales.*

This is a set of four scenarios written for *Trail of Cthulhu's* Pulp mode, so the play style is slightly more action and adventure orientated. Further, they are inspired by various particular subgenres found in the pulps, including man versus nature, masked adventurers, and international intrigue. In keeping with *Trail of Cthulhu*, this quartet is set during the desperate decade of the 1930s. However, with varying degrees of difficulty, they could be set in other eras, enabling a Keeper to run them in the 1890s of *Cthulhu by Gaslight, Call of Cthulhu's* classic 1920s, or even the contemporary time of *Cthulhu Now.* Moreover, the simplicity of Pelgrane Press' Gumshoe System -- used in the publisher's *The Esoterroists, Fear Itself,* and its forthcoming *Mutant City Blues* RPGs -- means that a Keeper could adapt these four to run with the rules system of his choice, including *Call of Cthulhu*, *Cthulhu d20*, *GURPS Cthulhupunk,* or the upcoming *Realms of Cthulhu* for [Shane Lacy Hensley's Savage Worlds](#) from Reality Blurs.

Each of the four scenarios is, of course, well written with plenty of good advice and several new rules for the Gumshoe System. No surprise there, given that Robin D. Laws created the Gumshoe System. The artwork, some of it taken from the *Trail of Cthulhu* core book, is superb, matching the high standards set by the core book.

The first of *Stunning Eldritch Tales'* four scenarios pits man against nature. "The Devourers in the Mists" literally casts the investigators ashore, shipwrecked on the beaches of a mysterious South Pacific island. Although their initial efforts focus purely upon survival -- the need for food, water and shelter -- the investigators suffer from a growing unease after they see strange lights on the horizon, hear chants and growls in the mist filled jungle, and feel as if they are under surveillance. Further clues as to the nature of their predicament are discovered in a second shipwreck and a crashed aeroplane - which, since the scenario is set in 1937, could be that of Amelia Earhart (or of another pioneering aviatrix). Of course, the presence of Earhart's aeroplane could merely be a shadow of the past or the future, depending upon when the Keeper sets the scenario.

With the scenario being all about survival, it is no surprise that the Outdoorsman skill is a must. A detailed guide to their survival needs is given, as is a set of six pre-generated characters, some of whom possess the Outdoorsman skill. The inclusion of this set makes the scenario suitable for tournament or demonstration play, which is supported with a guide for running the scenario at a convention. Alternatively, the scenario and its six player investigators can be used to kick start a *Trail of Cthulhu* campaign. It is inevitable that comparisons between "Devourers in The Mists" and the television series *Lost* will be made, but the scenario has none of the television series' unanswered meanderings, instead providing two or three good sessions of impending dread . . .

In answer to the question, what were the investigators doing in the Pacific before being shipwrecked? Could it be that they were traveling to or from the Orient, perhaps to play the second scenario, "Shanghai Bullets"? Set in the turmoil

that led up to Shanghai's fall to the Japanese, it combines international intrigue with a Hitchcockian Mcguffin hunt, hurling the investigators into a world of espionage, gangland rivalries, and the dichotomy of the International Settlement's glamorous exoticism and seedy poverty. This is a pot-boiler of a scenario built around the hunt for a powerful Mythos artifact. It is wonderfully supported with a rich supply of NPCs and background material. Indeed, this background material and the opening scenes of "Shanghai Bullets" are together so good and so atmospheric that any Keeper looking to run *The Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep* should purchase *Stunning Eldritch Tales,* first to help him stage the investigators' arrival in that campaign's Shanghai chapter, second to use as a further scenario in itself, and third to add the flavor and background that *The Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep's* Shanghai chapter needs.

The third scenario, "Death Laughs Last," brings the investigators back to New York and into the midst of a murder mystery. Wealthy philanthropist Addison Bright has been found dead, impaled by a javelin in his study. His family is rich enough to buy the investigators official permission to solve Addison's murder, in the hope that efforts will not only expose his killer, but also ensure that his reputation remains unsullied. This is a scenario in more traditional sleuthing mode that exposes the investigators to madness -- quite literally their own -- and, if things go awry, places them in danger of finding a whole new cause to which to devote themselves. "Death Laughs Last" also puts a definitely Mythos twist upon the madness of the costumed adventurer.

In the last scenario, "Dimension Y," a cutting-edge experiment exposes the investigators to a strange radiation. Maverick physicist Polton Williams invites the investigators to the inaugural demonstration of a new and radical device, the Y-Scope. Activation of this device throws up a single startling, impossible image, that of a five-sided cube, before the Y-Scope clanks to a smoke-belching stop. In the days that follow, all of the demonstration's attendees find themselves suffering from a series of increasingly intense nightmares and, eventually, waking visions that tear at their Sanity. In others, this is enough to drive them not only mad, but mad enough to commit utterly senseless murder. The investigators should come to realize that they are headed the same way, it only being a matter of time . . . With "Dimension Y," the author introduces the "Ticking Clock" scenario to *Trail of Cthulhu,* which calls for careful handling of time by the Keeper.

Any one of these four would play as a simple one-shot, but both "Devourers in the Mist" and "Dimension Y" would work equally as well as campaign starters. Although they are all good scenarios -- for any RPG of Lovecraftian investigative horror, not just *Trail of Cthulhu* -- the favorite one of the set would have to be "Shanghai Bullets" for the way in which it captures both its subgenre and a sense of the Paris of the Orient. Of course, fans are still awaiting the publication of a traditional campaign for *Trail of Cthulhu*, but *Stunning Eldritch Tales* is what a Keeper needs in the meantime: a fulsomely fearful foursome with which the author showcases just how good *Trail of Cthulhu* is.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Zooloretto

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Michael Schacht

Full-color boxed set with five Zoo Boards, five Zoo Board Expansions, 30 wooden Silver Coins, 128 Square & Circular Tiles, five wooden Delivery Trucks, one wooden Red Disc, & 12-page rule booklet; $45

Zooloretto is the 2007 Spiel des Jahres winner, a bright breezy game in which the players compete to populate their zoos with the most popular animals. Designed for two to five players, the boardgame comes nicely appointed, has a family friendly theme, and can be played in less than an hour. As to the title -- which perplexed my playing group -- it is actually taken from an earlier game from the same designer. Despite being a card game, *Coloretto* uses a similar set collecting mechanic, but where the aim in *Coloretto* is to collect colors, the aim in *Zooloretto* is to collect animals.

Zooloretto is component heavy, starting with the five identical Zoo Boards, one per player. Each board is divided into four quadrants, each with of three enclosures and a barn. The enclosures have tile spaces for four, five, or six animals, while around the enclosures are space for four Vending Stalls. Each Zoo Board also has an Expansion Board that adds another five-space Enclosure and another Vending Stall space to a player's zoo.

The 112 tiles are divided into three types: 12 Vending Stalls, 12 Coin Tiles, and 88 Animal Tiles. The latter are divided into eight species: Camels, Chimpanzees, Elephants, Flamingos, Kangaroos, Leopards, Pandas, and Zebras. These are represented by the square tiles, while round tiles represent the offspring of those animals that can mate. And yes, breeding Pandas in *Zooloretto* is infinitely easier than it is in real life.

The game's other components include 30 wooden coins in silver, a red End Game Counter, five Action Summary Cards, and one wooden tray per player. This represents a Delivery Truck and has spaces for three square tiles. The Action Summary cards, like the main rules, are written in both English and French. As with the boards and tiles, the rulebook is done in full color and -- besides explaining the rules fairly well including clear examples -- also comes with a mini bestiary, a set of tactical hints, and a set of frequently asked questions. At six pages long, the rulebook makes the game's play initially daunting, but with a careful read through or two, the basics of *Zooloretto* are easily grasped.

To set up *Zooloretto,* each player receives two coins, an Action Summary card, a Zoo Board, and the Zoo Board's Expansion Board (which is placed face down on the left-hand side of his Zoo Board). For each player, a Delivery Truck is placed in the middle of the table. If there are less than five players some animal species are removed from the game, with the remainder randomly sorted into stacks face down and a single 15-tile stack kept separate with the End Game Counter placed on top of it. Also kept separate are the Offspring tiles.

The game is played over several rounds with each round ending when every player has taken possession of a Delivery Truck. Until this happens the players take it in turn to each conduct a single action. During his turn a player can do one of three things. He can add a tile to a Delivery Truck still with spaces. He can choose one of the Delivery Trucks with one or more Animal Tiles and place it beside his Zoo Board. He can conduct a Money Action, which includes a wider range of options that allow him to make adjustments to his Zoo.

To add a tile to a Delivery Truck, a player simply draws a new tile and places it face up on a Delivery Truck that still has spaces. As soon as a Delivery Truck holds one or more tiles, it can be taken by a player on his turn. Doing so ends

his turn, leaving him unable to do anything until everyone has taken a Delivery Truck, except add the delivered tiles to his Zoo. A player receives a coin piece for each Coin Tile delivered, while Animal and Vending Stall tiles go into his Zoo's Barn or into the Enclosures and onto the Vending Stall spaces. Unfortunately, an Enclosure cannot hold more than one species -- unless you want to play Leopards versus Pandas, but that is another game -- and once it is full, no more animals can be added. If a breeding pair (indicated by the gender symbols on the tiles) is created when a player adds new animals to an Enclosure and there is space, then they will breed and the player can immediately add an Offspring tile to the Enclosure. In which case, everyone goes, "Aaaah." When the two smaller Enclosures (and the Enclosure on the Expansion Board if that has been purchased) in a Zoo are filled, the player will receive one or two Coins depending on the Enclosure size.

A Money Action consists of several options. A Remodel enables a player to either move an Animal or Vending Stall tile to or from his Barn. With an Exchange a player can swap the Animals between two Enclosures, or between the Barn and an Enclosure. Alternatively, a player can pay to Discard an unwanted Animal or Vending Stall tile, or even Purchase another from another player's Barn! Most Money Actions cost a single coin, but the latter costs two coins, one going to the bank and the other to the seller (who cannot refuse this Purchase). The last Money option is for a player to Expand, paying three Coins to turn over his Zoo's Expansion Board and so giving his Zoo a new Enclosure and Vending Space.

Play continues until only the stack with End Game Counter is left. The Counter is removed and one last round is played out. Once over, each player scores his Zoo, receiving points for each full Enclosure or fewer points if not an Enclosure is not full, and for each Vending Stall in play. He loses points for each Animal or Vending Stall tile still in his Barn at the end of the game. Scoring requires either a note pad and pen or some mental arithmetic.

At first glance, *Zooloretto* looks and sounds too simple, but play reveals that it needs a modicum of thought and tactics. During the opening rounds, player needs to decide which species he wants to stock his Zoo with, because he can only have a maximum of four species (one per enclosure). He also needs to find a way to gain Coins, either from the Delivery Truck or by filling one of the smaller Enclosures. Although this money will not affect his score at the end of the game, it will allow him to take Money Actions and so adjust his Zoo and potential end score.

The tactics really focus on filling the Delivery Trucks. Does a player try and fill a Truck with those tiles perfect for his Zoo, or disadvantageous to his rivals' Zoos? Does he take a Delivery Truck when it has one or two good tiles, or wait until it is full? If he takes it early this means that he can no longer participate in that turn, and so can neither continue seeding the Delivery Trucks still in play or carry out Money Actions. Of course, taking a Money Action means that a player cannot influence what goes into the Delivery Trucks. Later in the game, a player will definitely want to Expand his Zoo. Doing so gives him more choice in terms of what animals he populates his Zoo with. In fact *Zooloretto* is all about choices, because the only random element in the game is the tile draw and to some extent what the players do with them.

If there is a downside to *Zooloretto,* it is its set up, which seems lengthy and fiddly given that this is a family game. We solved this by sorting each component out into ziplock bags. Another problem is grasping the fact that taking a Delivery Truck ends a player's turn and prevents him from acting further, denying him any Money Actions. This only becomes apparent on the game's second round when the players have animals in their Zoos, because on the first turn no deliveries have been made and all Zoos are empty. Lastly, although the game is designed for two to five players, it does not play as well or as enjoyably with just two. We preferred to play with four or five players.

Zooloretto is far from a complex game, being perhaps on a par with, or just slightly more complex than either *Settlers of Catan* or *Carcassonne.* It is certainly more complex than *Ticket to Ride,* and so a step or two above a gateway game. Its theme gives it more of a family appeal than either of those games though -- for example, Alex, my 15-year old daughter liked it just for the animals and the art -- and makes it easier to grasp. Its ease of play and balanced options also makes it attractive to the hardened gamer, offering a lighter alternative that can be expanded with the pocket-friendly *Zooloretto Expansions* (five expansions in one pack, including a Polar Bear, this being a German game) or *Aquaretto,* a stand-alone game that is also an add on. However, the core game of *Zooloretto* remains an attractive crowd pleaser that stands up to repeated play.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Banishers (for *Mage: The Awakening*)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Written by Jackie Cassada, Matthew McFarland, John Newman, & Malcolm Sheppard

Edited by Scribendi.com

Art & design by Aileen E. Miles, John Bridges, Joel Biske, Vince Locke, Justin Norman, & Eric Williams

160-page black & white hardcover; $27.99

There's no White Wolf character lacking wall-to-wall enemies who have it out for that particular breed of PC, and mages are no different. One of their biggest, if least organized, foes is that group known as **Banishers.**

"Group" might be a strong word. These tragic figures carry all the weight of an "ordinary" mage but none of their joy. Somewhere along their Awakening, that moment when a person discovers there's a whole other world at work in tandem with this one, a world of magic and mysticism, something goes nightmarishly wrong. Instead of a chance to give oneself over to the wonder of this new viewpoint, the afflicted is rent away from the path, or chooses to turn away. They may suffer pain during the experience, or they may simply return to their old lives with an unsatisfying sense that what they knew is now meaningless. They blame magic for this hollow and desperate separation from their old circumstances, and they see it as evil.

Almost without exception they turn against those mages for whom Awakening was a pleasant and empowering occasion. The world, they think, is endangered by users of these dark arts, and killing or neutralizing those people should return everything to some semblance of balance, of normality. Of course, it's a mixed blessing that even though it was cut short, his Awakening has left that Banisher a self-loathing mage as well . . .

While the idea seems like a pretty straightforward one in execution, trust White Wolf to not leave things as simple as that. The new book offers insights about becoming a Banisher. How did things go wrong, and why? Was it something to do with the mage himself, or does something else interfere with the elevation of that person? Are they creations and tools of the mages' other enemies, or are they one more strange expression of the world of magic? Just to remove the suspense, the authors don't spell it out for anyone or give the One True Answer. They look at each possibility in turn (all Banishers are/were without some virtue, the creation of a Banisher is a hereditary trait, and so on) and discuss both in- and out-of-game terms why each theory seems plausible and why it doesn't hold up. In other words, as far as this volume is concerned it's up to the Storyteller to decide, but he can now make well-informed choices.

These are still mages, though, so if they haven't the backing of an experienced troupe of fellows, Banishers won't behave or be trained in the same manner as a mainstream mystic. How their education and use of magic differs is laid out, and they get their own cabal write-up at the back of the book. Their rotes may be dissimilar as well, though they may steal ideas from their victims or gain knowledge from trusting sources before the Banisher chooses to betray their benefactor. This is but one of many tools in a chapter full of artifacts and the like.

While the artwork is still the professional effort one expects from the Wolf, it must be said they don't always pull off a

good match, especially where specific NPCs are concerned. A number of characters are described one way in the text and look entirely different in the illustration. Marisol Ruiz, for example, is described as "a plain-looking Mexican woman," but the va-va-voom portrait makes her look like a cross between Elvira and Scarlett O'Hara. The Translators, members who interpret their Awakenings as alien abductions, are passed off as physically unremarkable 20-something science geeks, but their middle-aged pictures suggest run-ins with a psychic vampire. And Annabelle, a 60-year-old baby-boomer, a "lovely woman" with a "bright and vibrant smile," hardly looks female . . . and her unsmiling face possesses all the charm of a casualty list.

With the art issues laid bare, the book takes what could be a monotonous obstacle and shows what deep and complex creatures these people can be. It won't allow you to simply throw an army of these folks at the party (not that there's enough agreement among their type to form many large alliances), and they provide many, many examples of how layered and personal the Banisher experience can be. They can even be made into PCs, although these aren't really the heroic types. The writers make that much clear, so no one should expect brilliant advice that easily turns the cabal on its ear; playing them thusly is destined to be tough going.

Once more putting the personal drama first, this is a good lesson not just of how to use these mage characters but of how to humanize any formidable opponent so the slugfests turn into something better. Like its subject, ***Banishers*** stands to be a bit more than one expects.

--Andy Vetromile

Double or Nothing

A *GURPS Atomic Horror* Adventure

by James L. Cambias

Introduction

The investigators are summoned in a hurry to the Royal Air Force base at Watton, in Norfolk, England. The base is home to the U.S. Air Force 652nd Reconnaissance Squadron, which operates modified bombers equipped with giant cameras. The planes fly high and alone over enemy territory. During World War II the squadron operates modified B-17s to spy on the Germans; in the Atomic Horror era it has B-29 Superfortress variants watching the Warsaw Pact.

When the investigators reach Watton, the base is locked down tight -- all entrances are sealed, and the perimeter is guarded by airmen with rifles. At the gate, after very close scrutiny of their credentials, the heroes are allowed inside, accompanied by a pair of corporals with sidearms, who have instructions to take them directly to the commander. Inside the fence, the player-characters can see some enlisted men setting up several dozen four-man tents on the parade ground. No aircraft are flying, and to anyone with aviation experience it's obvious that the base is at a complete standstill.

The squadron commander is Colonel Charles Munson, who welcomes the PCs into his office and introduces them to his executive officer, Major Bynum. While Munson and the guests look on, Bynum explains the situation.

This morning the aircraft "Peek-a-Boo" (tail number 43-38162) took off at 5:50 a.m. for a photorecon mission over Saxony in eastern Germany. Radar tracked the plane as far as the Belgian coast. Expected return time was 9:30, but the plane didn't touch down until 10:17, and then again at 10:43. Due to a shift change in the control tower, nobody noticed the screwup until the plane's pilot, Capt. Finney, showed up for debriefing with Bynum at 10:55 and found himself already there. There are two identical planes and two sets of crewmen, and nobody knows which is real.

Involving The Player Characters

This adventure takes place on a military base, and as such requires PCs with some good reason for being sent there to deal with strange goings-on. Any military or top-secret government operatives could simply be assigned to the case. Quasi-legal investigators, like agents of the Company in *GURPS Black Ops* or Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green,* can get the appropriate fake clearance from their patron conspiracies. Freelance private busybodies are a bit more difficult to work in. If they've had contact with the armed services before, they could be called in, or they may have a personal connection to the base commander.

Munson reacted quickly. The planes are in a hangar under guard. The crews are confined to separate barracks (the enlisted men evicted to make space for them are the ones moving into tents on the parade ground). All leaves are cancelled and the base is locked down. The colonel is convinced one plane is an enemy fake crewed by spies, and wants the PCs to figure out which one.

The Plane(s)

During World War II "Peek-a-Boo" is an F-9C recon plane, tail number 43-38162. It's a B-17 with cameras in the bomb bay and all the gun turrets removed to let it go higher and faster. Nose art depicts a woman undressing, silhouetted in a window. In the Cold War era, "Peek-a-Boo" is a an RB-29 -- a modified Superfortress with armament removed. The nose art is the same.

There are two planes in the hangar at Watton, absolutely identical -- right down to the signatures inside the camera bay of the girls at the aircraft plant in Topeka who assembled the plane. There are slight differences in the amount of fuel on board -- plane R has about a hundred pounds more gas left in the tanks than plane L. There is one interesting anomaly: the plane on the left (plane L) has clocks which are 44 minutes slow compared to Greenwich (Zulu) time; the plane on the right (plane R) has clocks 62 minutes slow.

Searching the planes reveals little of interest: a couple of abandoned sandwiches, Cpl. McCarthy's stash of Airboy comics, and the German MP40 machine-pistol Lt. Segal has stashed under his seat in case he has to bail out over enemy territory. The photo reels from the cameras on the two planes are identical, with time stamps showing the plane was over Dresden at 7:35 a.m.

The Crew(s)

The pilot and commander is Captain William John ("Huck") Finney, age 32. Finney is keeping up a brave front for his men, but is becoming increasingly nervous. He is the only member of the crew who has actually seen his duplicate, and the experience disturbed him tremendously. He trusts Colonel Munson, but is afraid the "impostors" -- the other aircrew -- will somehow be able to fool the Colonel and get released. In addition to the skills and advantages listed on the template, Finney has Military Rank 4 (Captain), and Pilot-13.

Lieutenant Miles Adolph ("Rudolph") Bennett is the copilot. He's a cheerful young man, 28 years old, who is interested in chasing women, flying, and drinking. This whole weird lockdown business bores him -- he wants to either get back in the air or get off the post for a little R&R with the ladies. Bennett has Pilot-13 and Compulsive Carousing.

The navigator, Lt. Joseph Benedict ("Pope") Mira, is older than the rest -- 38 years old -- and much quieter and more philosophical. He is puzzling over the whole concept of identity himself, and wonders how he could tell if he was a duplicate. Of all the crews he is most likely to understand and accept what has happened. Mira has Navigation-13.

The camera operator is Lt. Irving David ("Seabiscuit") Segal, 26 years old. A suspicious man at the best of times, Segal is currently sliding into full-blown paranoia. He knows Colonel Munson is part of this plot, and he's starting to suspect maybe the entire Air Force command in Britain is involved. He also wonders if some of his own crew are traitors or double-agents. He immediately suspects that the investigators are part of the conspiracy. Segal has Photography-14 and Paranoia.

> ## Time Period
>
> The time period of the adventure can be any time from 1942 to the present, but it works best during World War II and the 1950s, when tracking radar was still rare and unreliable, and aircraft being out of contact with their bases wasn't particularly noteworthy. After 1960, reconnaissance airplanes had one- or two-man crews, and satellite photography became more important.
>
> With some tweaking the events could be moved back in time to as early as World War I, although the nationality of the airmen would have to be changed from American to British.

Sergeant John Eugene ("Hooch") Czerny is the flight engineer for the aircraft. He is 22 years old and an alcoholic. Czerny is desperate for a drink. He doesn't really care much about the whole duplicate plane business, he just wants a drink. Czerny has Mechanic-14 and Alcoholism.

The youngest crewman is Corporal Kevin Patrick ("Boner") McCarthy, the radio operator, age 19. McCarthy is upbeat and charming, sure that the whole thing is just some kind of weird mistake and the higher-ups will get it straightened out sooner or later. In the meantime, there's a bunk and three meals a day, so why is everyone complaining? McCarthy has Electronics Operation-14.

Debriefing the crew members results in the same narrative. On the return flight near Aachen they hit a rough patch and the controls went haywire for a second. Next thing anyone knew the engines were all out and the plane was in a stall. Capt. Finney put her in a dive, got the engines restarted, and flew home. The narratives diverge at the engine failure --

plane L got all four restarted, R made it home on three.

Both crews pass (or fail) all verbal identity tests the same way. Their fingerprints and genes are identical. Both are convinced they are real and the other guys are impostors. Any paranormal tests of truthfulness -- mind-reading, magic, superscience lie detectors -- will indicate that all of them are telling the truth.

Recovered Memory

The crews have no memory of anything unusual happening during the flight -- at least, no conscious memory. However, their experience has left traces.

All of the aircrew have developed a phobia about disk-shaped objects, especially flying ones. They aren't conscious of this, but all the men have taken to picking up their food and eating it by hand rather than from a plate. They won't willingly touch anything disk-shaped. The plane's officers no longer wear their official headgear because of its slightly disturbing shape. A thrown officer's cap or plate will provoke an automatic Fright Check from any of the airplane crewmen, even though they can't say why.

Telepathy or magical mind-reading can uncover signs of mental tampering. The psychic must win a contest of skills, pitting their mind-reading skill against the Brainwashing-18 skill applied by the crew's captors. If successful, it reveals a fleeting, garbled memory of seeing something huge, shiny, and saucer-shaped outside the plane, moments before everything goes black.

Breakout!

At an appropriate time, Lt. Segal-L leads Lt. Bennett-L and Sgt. Czerny-L on an escape attempt, as he has convinced himself that Munson is a traitor and needs to be reported to the High Command. His counterpart Segal-R tries to talk his companions into it but fails and writes an angry letter instead. The airmen sneak out of the barracks through an unguarded bathroom window and try to get to the base motor pool building, where they intend to steal a jeep and break through the perimeter fence.

If Colonel Munson learns of the breakout, he instantly leaps to the conclusion that the escaping airmen as the traitors, and that everyone else on that plane's crew are also enemy infiltrators. He details a couple of squads of MPs to track the fugitives; their orders are capture if possible, kill if necessary, but don't let them escape.

The Men In Black

The Crewmen

For simplicity's sake, assume all the airmen have the same basic attributes and skills. The only exceptions are those listed in the character descriptions. All skills are TL7. Total point cost is 75.

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 11 [20], IQ 11 [20], HT 11 [10]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1 thr, 1d+1 sw; BL 24 lbs.; HP 12 [2]; Will 11; Per 12 [5]; FP 11; Basic Speed 6 [10]; Basic Move 6.

Advantages: Fearlessness-3 [6], Fit [5], Military Rank (3) [15].

Disadvantages: Addiction (tobacco) [-5], Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Honesty (12) [-10], Overconfidence (12) [-10], Sense of Duty (crewmates) [-5].

Skills: Armory (heavy weapons) (A) IQ [2]-11, Brawling (E) DX [1]-11, Carousing (A) HT [2]-11, Electronics Operation (comm) (A) IQ [2]-11, Explosives (EOD) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10, First Aid (E) IQ [1]-10, Gunner (machine gun) (E) DX+1 [2]-12, Guns (pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-12, Guns (rifle) (E) DX+1 [2]-12, Knife (E) DX [1]-11, Parachuting (E) DX [1]-11, Scrounging (E) Per [1]-12, Soldier (A) IQ [2]-11, Survival (woodland) (A) IQ [2]-11.

Equipment: The men have their fatigues, which are getting pretty grubby by now. They have their flight jackets, wristwatches, and other pocket litter. None of them have a sidearm.

The Men In Black

Attributes: ST 16 [60], DX 16 [120], IQ 12 [40], HT 16 [60]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d+1 thr, 2d+2 sw; BL 51 lbs.; HP 18 [4]; Will 14 [10]; Per 12; FP 16; Basic Speed 8; Basic Move 8.

But there's something else weird going on. Soon after the player-character investigators arrive, someone else starts investigating the case. They're civilians in dark suits, with official-looking credentials from the War Department -- though the gate guards never saw them enter the base. Physically the four mysterious men in black are duplicates of Lt. Mira and Sgt. Czerny, but with blonde hair in a civilian style; there are two of each. The two who look like Mira call themselves "Indrid Cold," while the Czerny duplicates are "Mr. Apol."

Their purpose is to find and disintegrate the extra plane and crew. They don't care which ones they get, as long as the result is one crew and one plane. Pairs of Men In Black attack the barracks and the airplanes. The team after the plane use their nanotech disassembler spray to dissolve the aircraft. The ones going after the crews will kill them and (if possible) use their blaster weapons to destroy the victims' faces and hands.

The Men In Black don't care at all about their own survival. Twenty-four hours after they arrive at the base, nanodissemblers within their bodies activate and reduce them to puddles of goo. There is no medical treatment available on Earth in the 20th Century which can stop it. If the investigators get to examine them before that time, they can discover that the MIBs are perfectly fit and healthy -- but their digestive organs are weirdly atrophied, as if they have never been used.

Interrogating the Men In Black is difficult. They speak English with no accent, but their choice of words and manner of speaking is very odd. They don't use contractions, don't phrase anything as a question, and don't use any terms referring to emotions. They also have a habit of repeating the same statement or question two or three times in different ways.

If an interrogator can overcome the extremely formidable Willpower of the Men In Black, there is not much they can tell. They remember nothing at all before the evening, when they awoke on the foggy runway of the air base. They know their task and how to use their equipment, but little else. Their job is to eliminate the excess airplanes and humans. If asked who ordered them to do it, the Men In Black can say only "Our masters."

What's Going On

The plane was captured in flight by an alien spacecraft, and disassembled down to the atomic level for recording, then recreated and released. Then for some reason the aliens made a duplicate copy -- plane R -- and let it go. Was it just a mistake? Or is this some kind of weird "test" of humanity's mental adaptability? Only the aliens know.

Resolutions

If the investigators (and the Air Force) can stop the Men In Black from destroying the duplicate planes and crew, the aliens will make no more attempts. Either they judge the chance of success too small, or they want to study what happens next.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15], Damage Resistance (tough skin) 2 [6], High Pain Threshold [10], Night Vision 4 [4], Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Extreme Fanaticism ("the Masters") [-15], Low Empathy [-20], Terminally Ill [-100].

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL11 (pistol) (E) DX [1]-16, Climbing (A) DX [2]-16, Fast-Draw (pistol) (E) DX [1]-16, Judo (H) DX [4]-16, Jumping (E) DX+2 [4]-18, Karate (H) DX+2 [12]-18, Liquid Projector/TL11 (sprayer) (E) DX [1]-16, Observation (A) Per+2 [8], Stealth (A) DX [2]-16, Throwing (A) DX+2 [8]-18.

Equipment: TL11 Blaster Pistol with the omni-blaster option (see p. 280 of *GURPS Basic Set*), a TL11 Spray Can holding 10 doses of Disassembler nanomachine spray, programmed to destroy metal. The nanomachines die after 10 minutes. (See *GURPS Ultra-Tech* for details.)

Variants

An obvious variant adventure is to make the player characters the crew of one of the duplicate airplanes. They must try to solve the mystery, avoid being dissolved by alien agents, and battle the Air Force. GMs who really want a challenge can try running two sets of airmen at the same time.

Colonel Munson can't keep the crews locked up forever -- but he refuses to let
possible enemy infiltrators remain in his unit. Unless the investigators can give
Munson absolutely convincing proof of what happened, he insists on getting all the men involved out of the service.
Since this can't go before a court martial, Munson offers to issue medical discharges for the two crews, sending them
back to the States and stripping them of any security clearance they have. Fortunately all the men are unmarried.

If both duplicate airplanes survived, they are flown back to America via Iceland for study. Only one of them makes it.
The other vanishes in flight and is never seen again. The surviving plane goes into "special storage" somewhere in the
Southwestern desert and everyone does their best to forget about it completely . . .

Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way

Ideas for Structuring an Adventuring Group

by Steven Marsh

One element that gets glossed over in many adventuring groups is the notion of group leadership. Determining who has the final authority to force the party into a dangerous situation is something that had best be hashed out beforehand. In addition, toying around with leadership roles allows for otherwise similar campaigns to take on a decidedly different flavor. Really, one of the most distinguishing elements that separates a *Star Trek* tale from a *Star Wars* adventure is the command structure; the mere existence of a "captain" who holds absolute authority over the other PCs completely changes the flavor of an otherwise routine planetary survey.

Here, then, are a listing of some ideas for how a group of heroes might organize itself. Note that, for the most part, this article limits itself to the structure of the *characters,* not the players. However, there is possibility for overlap; if the heroes decide they're going to vote for the party leader, then the players are usually the ones who will do the voting. Still, some of the structure of these groups might be imposed by an outside force, which is usually in the hands of the GM; as such, the GM should make sure the *players* will have fun with whatever command organization is used . . . even if the *characters* don't care for it!

A Note About Leadership

Many players are uncomfortable with the idea of leadership, either the thought they might be put in command or with putting too much effort into picking a team leader. They might be at the gaming table for reasons other than taking responsibility, like wanting to be pointed in the direction of stuff to kill. That's perfectly fine; with few in-game exceptions (such as everyone else in the party being rendered insane or incapable of making decisions), there's little to force a player to have his character assume a decision-making role. But even those who don't want the reins of power directly might still enjoy the mechanics behind an alternate means of picking leaders; after all, some are born kings, and others are kingmakers . . .

The De Facto Leader

"In the name of King Elevar, I demand to know . . . who's in charge here?"
[long pause]
"Oh, I guess I am."

Many groups don't give the notion of who is in command much thought, until it comes time to make a decision as a group. Then, the character who has the most forceful personality -- which is often the *player* with the most forceful personality -- speaks the loudest and/or first, and everyone else goes along with that. For many groups, this is a perfectly fine way to operate. For one thing, if the purpose of an adventuring group is to get into mayhem, then having one person pick up the reins and speak for the group ensures that the action will commence as soon as possible.

On the other hand, it can lead to some unusual circumstances or incongruous results. For example, a character who's supposed to be a meek, scared Girl Scout might be played by someone more boisterous, resulting in a "leader" that the other players feel are out of place. As another problem, if there's more than one person who *wants* to be leader, this can result in an odd power struggle, with each desirous player exerting more and more personality until the other players are buried in decisiveness.

The Leader by Deed

The Leader by Dice

"And, so, brothers and sisters, I tell you, our leader is weak. Our leader is weak, and does not deserve to lead. And while he may try to convince you all otherwise with his silver tongue, I shall convince him with my iron blade."

Because of the existence of **Werewolf** and similar brutal, naturalistic settings, the Leader by Deed is perhaps the second-most common means of picking a leader. In this system, the group is run by a member who does something the rest of the group agrees makes him the leader. The most common deed is the "trial by combat": any member of the group who wants to be in charge can issue a challenge to the present leader, and some sort of ritual combat takes place to determine a victor. Such trials almost always have set conditions: to the first blood, until someone yields or is knocked unconscious, or (rarely) to the death. There will also probably be other rules; for example, **Werewolf** always assumes that the leader cannot be challenged in a time of war, and it often assumes that the challenged can declare the terms of the fight (whether special abilities can be used, the venue of the battle, the means of selecting a victor, and so on).

The Leader by Deed does not need to be chosen by a violent affair. For example, a group of exploratory scientists might value intellect or mental agility above all else, so when the time comes to elect a new leader, they may do via a chess match or a riddle contest.

As a plot hook, the Leader by Deed technique is also a good way to snag a party of PCs into another group. For example, in the *X-Men* comic books, Storm became the honorary leader of the underground group of mutants called "Morlocks" after defeating their original leader Callisto in a dual.

The Democratic Group

"Okay; it'll be sundown in an hour, and our moms are gonna kill us if we're late. But this map might be directions to King Parno's treasure. Who's in favor of trying to follow this map?"

With a Democratic Group structure, the group places no one in charge, but instead relies on votes for all major decisions (as well as some minor ones). These votes might either be public -- often a "thumbs up/thumbs down" -- or private (perhaps lots tossed into a hat to determine a course of action). Although much slower than methods using a traditional leader, the Democratic Group has the possibility for more roleplaying, as each decision is another opportunity to try to sway others to one view or another.

Because of the slowness of this method -- it's hard to convene a full-quorum vote to determine a suitable tactic for a battle -- groups that utilize this technique will often hand the reins of power over to someone temporarily: "We're about to enter battle; all those in favor of Tristan being tactical leader, say 'Aye.'" Smart groups will quickly come up with a plan for dealing with ties, which will either happen a lot (in groups with an even number of members) or sometimes (in groups with odd numbers that permit abstaining).

The Democratic Group method is a good one for groups that don't believe they *need* a command structure, but still want the feel of a formal decision-making process. For example, groups of children are often portrayed in movies and

As a separate issue or added to any of the techniques here, it's possible for groups to want to use their characters' abilities to determine who should be the leader. Perhaps leadership might be granted to the person with the highest Charisma score, or the one who rolls best on a Leadership check. There are a few problems with this approach. First, players often assume that the social abilities of other characters don't affect their PCs; it doesn't matter *how* attractive or persuasive the other character is, because at the end of the day, each player ultimately calls the shots for his own character. For another, it assumes a direct one-to-one correspondence between one ability and another to determine a leader; the real world is full of examples where the person who is the most charismatic or experienced has failed to acquire a position of leadership, so why should a group of heroes be different? If everyone can agree on a game-stat justification for picking a leader, then by all means go with that one; it can serve with the same speed as the "De Facto Leader" technique, while relying on an in-game hook rather than defaulting to the player willing to stand on the table. This technique *can* be useful for in-game "tie-breaker" needs. For example, a group that is run by a "Chain of Command" might find itself with two or more PCs who should be in charge, each with the same rank. Those players and/or the GM might decide to determine who is the leader for the rest of the session by having each make a Leadership roll.

books as using this method to one degree or another (usually supplanted by "The De Facto Leader" if one kid ends up being more dominating than others).

The Elected Leader

"And so, by the charter of the Hero Squad, this bimonthly meeting is brought to order. Our first item of business is to elect who shall lead us until our next bimonthly meeting . . ."

The Elected Leader is similar to the Democratic Group, except that votes are held at a certain preordained period, rather than before each decision. The process of the election is sorted out beforehand, as is the length of time the character remains the leader. Some common "terms of office" include:

The length of adventure/mission: After receiving an assignment or call to action, the heroes vote on who will lead them on that mission.
A set length of time: Like in the real world, the leader may have his position for a week, month, year, or any other pre-agreed duration.
A finite but indeterminate length of time: For example, a space-bound campaign might elect a leader in one of two circumstances: when they board their ship, or when they disembark. Even though the duration they spend in space or on a planet is not set, it is generally understood to be a finite length of time.

Groups that use some means of elections may find they develop or evolve an elaborate "rule system" for those methods, often in the form of bylaws, a constitution, or charter. For example, the Justice League had a system for electing its Chairperson that required a certain percentage of active members attend and that forbade Chairpersons from serving more than two terms in a row; there was also a clause that any one of the founding members could disband the Justice League entirely.

Again, like the Democratic Group, parties that use the Elected Leader technique would be wise to determine what happens in the event of a tie (or, if more than two candidates are allowed, in the event of a non-majority result). They would also be wise to determine who should be the "second in command," should the elected leader be unavailable, incapacitated, or killed; perhaps a vice-leader is elected at the same time as the leader, or perhaps the previous elected leader is presumed to take over until the next vote can be held.

The Random Leader

"Right! It's Tuesday; it's Tuesday. New leader on Tuesday. Time to roll dice! Big honor, leader, big honor. Chance to die first! Chance? Die? Get it? Roll."

The "Random Leader" technique is almost identical to the "Elected Leader," except rather than relying on an actual election, the band just randomly determines who will be in charge. The two most common techniques revolve around whose name gets tossed into the hat: "everyone who's interested in being leader" or "everyone, period." Of course, this technique method doesn't have to rely on drawing names out of a hat, and it can be determined by any random (or reasonably random) technique: rolling dice, drawing cards, drawing straws, and so on.

Note the "reasonably random" clause: It's possible for a party that believes it's utilizing this technique to actually be influenced by someone with sufficient Gambling, Slight of Hand, or similar abilities. (This would make a great "revelation" about a seemingly free-spirited group that has really been manipulated for some time by one of their own.)

Like the Elected Leader, this method usually assumes that there is a set length of time the "chosen" leader will serve for. This technique is good for those gaming groups who want to give all players a shot at being in charge (or, alternately, all those who might *want* to be in charge), but who may not be good enough roleplayers or forceful enough in their personalities to ensure that they get a chance to lead.

In the same way that the Elected Leader relates to the Democratic Group by a matter of degree, it's possible to abstract the chaotic element even further of a Random Leader system and make *all* decisions randomly. Such a course would probably only be taken by the most free-spirited groups ("Chaotic Neutral" to use classic **Dungeons & Dragons** parlance), or perhaps by those who believe that "fate" is actually ordained by the gods, and thus to choose actions "randomly" is the best way to do their will. But, regardless, it would be a difficult way to run a game.

The Ordained Leader

"How did you become king, then?"
"The Lady of the Lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water signifying by divine providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur."

Very common in literature and the real world and less so in gaming groups, Ordained Leaders possess some aspect or item that entitles them to lead over others . . . or causes others to *believe* they should lead. What this token of leadership is can vary greatly, from being born in the right order in the right family (your typical monarchy), to exhibiting a certain birthmark or other physical characteristic, to possessing a physical item or other symbol associated with leadership. In some cases, the token might actually hold some kind of power or ability that is seen as noteworthy; for example, possession of the conch shell in *Lord of the Flies* is seen as a de facto right and responsibility of leadership. Likewise if there is only one sword in the whole world known to kill the undead -- and the undead are becoming a problem -- then making that person the group leader might be a wise move.

This technique has some problems translating to a gaming table. First, whatever this token is may require GM fiat or other hand-waving. After all, the sole conch shell or magic sword known to the campaign is not something that one should just stumble across; for GMs who like to appear impartial, handing over an item of power and dominion over the other PCs might smack of favoritism. Second, there is often little *reason* for the other players (or characters) to go along with such a leadership scheme; after all, "strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government." However, it does have a suitably epic feel, and if the gaming group is willing to go along with it, it can be an interesting means of structuring a party.

As a means of turning this trope on its ear, it might be that one is "ordained" via another method described here. For example, suppose there are prophecies on the campaign world that someone with a birthmark similar to one belonging to a PC is destined to save the world. In this case, the birthmarked PC might not be the leader of the group, but rather, it could be whoever solemnly vows to protect that person; in times of trouble, the birthmarked individual is expected to duck and run for cover, which isn't a property terribly desirable in a leader. The real leader -- the Protector of the Mark -- might be decided by election, trial by combat, or other means.

The Situational Leader

"Look, Princess, we rely on you to make the decisions when we're planetside. But aboard my ship, what I say goes. If you don't like it, feel free to step outside."

The Situational Leader is a leader who is in control in some circumstances but not all. It was (and is) a very common method of dividing up leadership duties in the real world. For example, in medieval Europe, it was generally assumed that nobles were in charge of corporeal elements, while priests and the Church were responsible for spiritual matters. Thus, in a dungeon crawl involving a prince and a priest, the prince might assume he's in charge until it's revealed that the big adversary is a demon . . . at which point the reins of leadership are turned over to the priest. Likewise aboard pirate ships, the captain held supreme power only in times of battle; the rest of the time, the quartermaster usually possessed more power, including a great deal of shoreside responsibility.

This method of divvying up leadership is a terrific way to keep players happy; if there aren't many players who wish to possess some leadership capacity, then craft the characters to fill the niches of authority that the group agrees on. For example, in a space opera game, the captain of the ship might be in charge in ship-board encounters, while the diplomatic noble may be in charge on away missions; however, for any encounters in space or on land that involve the

mysterious Metaphysics, control may be passed to the Metaphysical Master in the party.

In fact, the Situational Leader is a great way to give a player a *sliver* of leadership. If one player wants the ability to dabble as a leader but doesn't want it be a full-time role -- even temporarily -- simply define that person has having dominion over a relatively small group of activities; for example, someone playing a college professor might be given supreme leadership capacity over any university interactions . . . which doesn't account for more than a half-hour of game time each session.

The Situational Leader is often just a smaller subset of the Organizational Chart Leader (below); the biggest difference is that Situational Leaders usually have very good reasons for being in charge of their domains, while Organizational Chart Leaders often rely on the strength of their bureaucracy or other title to enable them to assume command.

The Chain-of-Command Leader

"I am responsible for the lives of 203 men and women. You want to question my decisions? You may do so, in here. On the bridge of this ship, however, the only thing I ever expect to hear is, 'Yes, Sir.' Do I make myself clear?"

Anyone who's ever seen an episode of *Stargate, Star Trek,* or any military-themed show is familiar with the Chain-of-Command. This method assumes that there is a logical hierarchal system for determining who's in charge, and there can be an almost ritualistic means of determining how the order is passed on. ("You have just received orders promoting you to command of the starship *Plod'Evice* . . .") Using this method, the gaming group should determine how the chain of command will work in the party, making it as straightforward or convoluted as desired.

One nice thing about a "chain of command" campaign is that, in suitably strange circumstances, it can be possible for practically *anyone* to be put in charge of the ship. For example, by the end of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* series, it was possible for almost all the principle characters to be in charge of the *Enterprise,* and one classic *Star Trek* novel had Dr. McCoy unexpectedly thrust into the command chair . . .

Ironically, one of the oddities of many game systems -- especially those that are point-based -- is that it often requires points to be a Captain or other person with a great deal of power; this means that campaigns where PCs are all assumed to be built on the same point total, the person in charge is the *least* compentent, because he had to spend a bunch of the points he would've used on abilities to get his position of power! (This is perhaps the purest mathematical extraction of the [Peter Principle](#) . . .) This can actually work really well for some gaming groups; sure, there's someone in charge, but the nuts-and-bolts of actually *doing* those orders falls to other PCs, which means *they* get the spotlight when it comes time to actually do stuff.

The Organizational Chart Leader

"Captain, I regret to mention that utilization of company resources for personal gain is a direct violation of the Bureaucratic Order, and I must request that you relieve yourself of command until this matter is adjudicated by authorities. And before you get yourself in further trouble, I believe the deauthorization of your equipment also extends to the blaster you're pointing, Sir."

The Organizational Chart Leader is similar to the Chain-of-Command Leader, except that the actual power structure looks less like a ladder than it does a flowchart. Thus the campain might feature a fighter who holds control in all martial matters, a wizard who holds dominion over all magical affairs, a thief who handles all urban and legal matters, and a priest who deals with all spiritual ones . .. and the group is placed in situations where those situations conflict (say, a demon starting a fight in a city using a powerful spell). Unlike Situational Leaders, where leadership is treated more like a baton that's expected to be handed off in certain situations, the Organizational Chart Leadership expects everyone with a leadership stake to keep a hand on the baton at all times, waiting to snatch it back if need be.

One sample campaign that used this system and its resultant checks and balances fairly well was presented in the Random Thought Table installment "[Splitting Up Is Hard to Do](#)." In that sample *Star Trek* campaign, the ship's doctor

could declare anyone physically unfit for duty, the psychiatrist could find anyone mentally unfit, the chief bureaucrat could overrule certain decisions that would place the ship's components at risk, and so on.

In some campaigns, this degree of control can be *completely* arbitrary. For example, in a ***Paranoia*** campaign, it might make perfect sense to the Computer to divvy up a set of numbered cards among the PCs, each a number at the top and two numbers below that; the Computer explains that the number at the top is *your* number, and the numbers at the bottom of the card are those who the PC has command of . . . and, of course, there is no one at the "top" of the chain. (Keeping with the absurdity, a smart PC might avoid revealing his number to the others!)

No Leader!

"Well, I'm going down this dark corridor; if you all want to follow me, feel free."

Finally, it's entirely possible to have a group where there *is* no leader. Such a party would probably adapt other methods as the need arose, relying on a forceful personality in one circumstance, rolling dice in another, and deciding by vote to see a treasure hunt to the end. However, maintaining a truly leadership-less existence would probably require a great deal of work by the PCs, and they likely need a strong justification for doing so.

Conclusion

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, and it's entirely feasible to come up with something new or to mix and match these possibilities into something different (as was done in several of the examples). Hopefully the mere realization that there are other ways to organize a group of heroes will lead you to come up with ideas of your own, to boldly go and explore new frontiers . . . assuming that idea makes it out of committee, of course.

1,001 Knights (Well, 1,001 Plot Points, at Any Rate)

I saw *The Dark Knight* last weekend at a drive-in movie theater, on a double bill with *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. On the one hand, it was a good bargain (two first-run movies for the price of one!), and the second movie served as a "detox" to the Brendan-Fraserless first movie. On the other hand, there was no way the 90-minute fluff could possibly compare to the 2.5-hour mental beating that *The Dark Knight* gleefully served.

I won't talk too much about *The Dark Knight*. I like it . . . a lot. I think you should see it, unless you don't like dark movies, in which case you may want to avoid this one. However, I will talk about one element that isn't a spoiler, but touches on the movie long enough for me to declare my popcorn a business expense. (Of course, I'm totally kidding . . . it was a drive-in; we snuck in our own popcorn.) Namely, that there's a *lot* that's happening in *The Dark Knight*. In its last hour, I counted enough plot threads and story arcs flying around to fill a two-hour movie all by themselves. But the film never felt *cluttered*, and I was still able to follow everything despite the clipped (but not choppy) pace. I appreciated the fact that the movie makers assumed we, the popcorn-sneaking audience, would be able to keep up with a complex, fast-paced plot.

That's something that I've known for years, with my various gaming groups: folks who are invested in a story or fictional universe can keep track of a *lot* of happenings. They aren't perfect, and it's possible for stuff to sneak through. ("Wait: Wasn't there supposed to be a coronation in the spring, like, three years ago?" "Oh, yeah. Ummm . . . you all have had a new king for three years.") But for the most part, attentive participants -- especially gamers -- can keep track of numerous simultaneous plots, storylines, and developments.

Not all adventures need to have six things going on at once at all times. But why have a demon merely stepping through a portal, when you can have a demon stepping through a portal at the same time another adversary is attempting to escape through the *other* way of the portal? And, sure, you can have those two things going on, but you might also add that the person escaping seems to be exhibiting signs of the strange fever that was mentioned a few adventures ago. (Is that escaping bad guy now going to be taken care of by outside measures, or is he going to serve as a carrier for that crud? Do the heroes need to be worried about the blood from the wounds they inflicted upon him?) And so on.

There's little need to *force* stories to exhibit needless complexity; given enough balls bouncing around, they'll start colliding off each other soon enough. But providing two story elements a little nudge in the same direction can cause all kinds of mayhem, turning a generic "demon invading" story into something truly memorable.

Depending on the nature of your players, you might even rely on *them* for ideas. I can't tell you how many times, in my gaming, I've heard a player say something like, "Don't tell me: the escaping bad guy has that Death Plague we encountered last adventure." And I'll pause a moment, let the gears turn over on this previously unconsidered development, and reply with, "You guessed it. Yes, yes he does." They players feel smart, the adventure gets ramped up, and mayhem ensues. And everyone loves mayhem.

It's definitely bad to make an adventure or a campaign *too* complex. But, in my opinion, if given the choice between too complex and too straightforward, most players would choose "too complex." It's really hard for a simplistic plot to be memorable. But even though an overly complex adventure may reach train-wreck proportions, one would be hard-pressed to think of a train-wreck as anything *but* memorable.

Memorable, like the most recent *Dark Knight* movie . . . which, should you go and see it, I hope you find as inspirational for your gaming as I did.

* * *

Starting this Tuesday I'm out of town for the umpteenth annual [World Yo-Yo Contest](), helping to run it again. So if I don't get back to you in a timely fashion in the next week, I apologize in advance. And, if you're a regular, try not to burn the place down before I return, okay?

--Steven Marsh

Pulp Guns at the Movies

Pulp-Era Movie Guns in *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

As supplements to **GURPS High-Tech,** the publications **GURPS High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1** and **GURPS High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2** are detailed catalogs of firearms for use in campaigns set during the "pulp era," defined here as the 1920s and 1930s.

While both intended and suitable to support historical campaigns -- for example in gangster-infested Shanghai or in Spain during the Civil War -- the books were especially designed to be useful for adventures inspired by fiction set in those years: exploration of remote places or secret cities such as The Lost City of Gold; combat against ancient and recent evils; war between gangsters and G-men; and so on.

To this end, the books make numerous mentions of films and television series featuring relevant hardware. This allows the reader to see a particular item in action, but it also permits players and GMs to place a specific weapon from a film in the game. Here, the most important films mentioned are examined in a way similar to "Modern Firepower at the Movies."

A *[SPOILER ALERT!]* is in effect for all discussions of these movies.

The Mummy and *The Mummy Returns (Stephen Sommers, 1999/2001)*

While with the *Légion Étrangère* in 1923, Rick O'Connell carries two Chamelot-Delvigne Mle 1874 revolvers (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 7) in shoulder holsters (**High-Tech,** page 154), two Colt .45 Government pistols (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** pages 17-18), and a Lebel Mle 1886 bolt-action rifle (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,** pages 4-5).

Later in 1926, Rick has two Mle 1874 revolvers, plus a single Colt .45 Government, a Winchester Model 97 Riot pump-action shotgun (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** pages 22-23), and several sticks of dynamite (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** pages 32-33). Jonathan Carnahan has a Remington Model 95 double-derringer (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 6). Ardeth Bey arms himself with the BSA-Lewis Mk II aircraft machine gun (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,** page 19) from Winston Havelock's biplane. The "beastly" Americans use Colt .45 SAA revolvers (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 7), Colt .45 New Service revolvers (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 9), and Colt .45 Government pistols.

In *The Mummy Returns* (set in 1933), O'Connell is first armed with a S&W .45 Hand-Ejector revolver (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 11), later with twin Colt .45 Government pistols in shoulder holsters. The weapons in the trunk of his Rolls-Royce include a sawed-off 12-gauge Winchester Model 1887 lever-action shotgun (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 22), loaded with (anachronistic) plastic shotshells, a sawed-off 12-gauge Ithaca NID double-barrel shotgun (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 26), and an Auto-Ordnance Model 1928AC Thompson submachine gun (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** pages 28-30) with 50-round drums. He also has a stick of dynamite on him, just in case. Evelyn "Evy" O'Connell has a scoped BSA Number 2 Sporting bolt-action rifle (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,** page 9), while Jonathan is armed with a Lee-Enfield Mk I* bolt-action rifle (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,** page 9). Both have gun cases for these (**High-Tech,** page 160).

Lock-Nah is armed with twin Mauser C96 pistols (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** pages 13-14) and an Enfield SMLE Number 1 Mk III bolt-action rifle (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,** page 9). Other cultists use Luger P08 pistols (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 16), Steyr-Solothurn S1-100 submachine guns (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,** page 30), and (anachronistic) Beattie M2-2 flamethrowers (**High-Tech,** page 179).

The Sand Pebbles (Robert Wise, 1966)

This film is set in 1926. The gunboat *USS San Pablo* is armed with two Savage-Lewis MK VI machine guns (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 19) in addition to its two main guns. The sailors have the standard U.S. Navy small arms of the time: the Colt M1911 pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18), Springfield M1903 bolt-action rifle (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 8), and Colt M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 11) – the latter shown with the correct web belt for the magazines.

Last Man Standing (Walter Hill, 1996)

This movie is set in 1929. "John Smith" carries twin Colt .45 Government pistols (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18) in shoulder holsters (***High-Tech,*** page 154). In one scene, he's seen topping up 25 magazines, but it's unclear where he actually carries them all . . . Barkeeper Joe Monday has an antique Colt Model 1847 Walker revolver (***High-Tech,*** page 93).

Of the bad guys, only Hickey carries a Colt .45 Government; the others have revolvers. Fredo Strazzi has a Colt .38 Police Positive Special (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 7) and Giorgio Carmonte a Colt .38 Detective Special (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 13). A few guys, including Hickey, have the Auto-Ordnance Model 1921AC Thompson submachine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 28-30), and Doyle's boys even use a Colt M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 11) when they murder Giorgio. In the final shootout, Deputy Bob has a Winchester Model 12 Riot pump-action shotgun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 25).

Miller's Crossing (Joel Coen, 1990)

This movie is also set in 1929. The hitmen sent by Johnny Caspar to kill "Leo" O'Bannon have Auto-Ordnance Model 1921AC Thompson submachine guns (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 28-30) with 50-round drums (although seeing Leo use his captured gun, these should at least be 100-rounders . . .). Leo himself has a Colt .45 New Service revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 9) on his nightstand. His bodyguard Dana Cudahy has a CZ [Pi vz. 27] pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 20) ready on the table, but he never gets around using it . . .

At Miller's Crossing, "Tic-Tac" hands Tommy Reagan an Astra Mod 400 pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 19) to execute Bernie Bernbaum. Eddie "The Dane" carries a Webley Mk IV revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 12).

For the hit on the *Erin Social Club,* both Caspar's gangsters and the police bring everything they've got, including a Browning M1917 medium machine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 21).

Verna Bernbaum has a Colt .32 Pocket Positive revolver with 2.5" barrel (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 11). Caspar has a nickeled and pearl-stocked Colt .32 Pocket pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 15). Bernie shoots Caspar with a Colt .45 Government pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18).

Road to Perdition (Sam Mendes, 2002)

Again, this movie is set in 1929. Michael Sullivan has a Colt .45 Government pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18) in a shoulder holster (***High-Tech,*** page 154), a Colt .38 Detective Special backup revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 13), and an Auto-Ordnance Model 1921AC Thompson submachine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 28-30) with a 50-round drum and gun case (***High-Tech,*** page 160).

Connor Rooney also has a Colt .45 Government pistol, as do several of his father's men. Harlan Maguire has a Savage Model 1917 pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 16), which considering its .32-caliber round he uses for a

very optimistic long-range shot at the diner. He also employs a Winchester Model 97 Riot pump-action shotgun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 22-23).

Scarface (Howard Hawks, 1932)

This film is set in 1930. Antonio "Tony" Camonte and Gaffney's mob both make prominent use of the Auto-Ordnance Model 1921A Thompson submachine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 28-30), including as a car gun with the stock removed. Gaffney even demonstrates how to top up the 50-round drum . . . At the barber shop, Tony carries a Colt .45 Government pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18).

The Untouchables (Brian de Palma, 1987)

This film is also set in 1930. Eliot Ness uses a Colt .45 Government pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18), Winchester Model 12 Riot pump-action shotgun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 25), and in one scene, even a MK II fragmentation grenade (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 31). Sergeant Jim Malone has a sawed-off 12-gauge Colt Model 1878 double-barreled shotgun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 22) as his home defense weapon, but otherwise prefers the Auto-Ordance Model 1921AC Thompson submachine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 28-30). Police officer Guiseppe "George Stone" Petri carries a Colt .38 Police Positive Special revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 11) and a nickeled Colt .38 Detective Special backup revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 13), but also uses a Tommy.

[*King Kong*](#) ([*Merian Cooper*](#)*, 1933)*

This classic is set in 1933. Captain Englehorn and his first mate Jack Driscoll each have a Colt .45 New Service revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 9) in a military holster (***High-Tech,*** page 154). The *S.S. Ventura* carries an ample supply of long arms, including six Winchester Model 94 lever-action carbines (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 5) and at least nine Springfield M1903 bolt-action rifles (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 8). Carl Denham's personal weapon is a Savage Model 45 Super bolt-action rifle (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 13).

The U.S. Marines send four of their Curtiss F8C-3 fighter/bombers, each armed with twin Browning M2 aircraft machine guns (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 25) and a flexible Savage-Lewis M1918 aircraft machine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 19).

King Kong (Peter Jackson, 2005)

The remake is also set in 1933. Captain Englehorn has a Luger LP08 pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 16), while his second mate Ben Hayes is armed with a Colt .45 Government pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18). The *S.S. Ventura* carries 19 Auto-Ordnance Model 1921AC submachine guns (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 28-30) and at least a dozen Mauser Gew98 bolt-action rifles (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 6).

The New York National Guard is mainly armed with the Enfield M1917 bolt-action rifle (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** pages 10-11); they also use the (slightly anachronistic) Browning M1919A4 machine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 25), as well as a 13-pounder Enfield Mk I antiaircraft gun (below).

The U.S. Marines send six of their Curtiss F8C-3 fighter/bombers, each armed with twin Browning M2 aircraft machine guns (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 25) and a flexible Savage-Lewis M1918 aircraft machine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 19).

Enfield 13-pdr 9-cwt Mk I, 3" (U.K. 1915-1918)

This breechloading cannon was used by the British and other Commonwealth militaries during WWI as an antiaircraft gun. It is usually mounted in the bed of a light truck. (This is just like in the film, although neither the U.S. Army or any of the various National Guard units ever employed it . . .)

Dillinger (John Milius, 1973)

This movie is set in 1933-1934. In this (mostly historically inaccurate) film, John Dillinger and all his pals are armed with Colt .45 Government pistols (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18) in a shoulder holster (***High-Tech,*** page 154), sometimes even with two. When Homer Van Meter threatens a gas station attendant, he has a nickeled Colt .45 New Service revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 9). The gang has a number of Auto-Ordnance Model 1928AC Thompson submachine guns (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 28-30), usually used stockless and with the stick magazine; at the Little Bohemia Lodge they have the canvas carrying cases (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 29). During the bank robbery in Mason City (IA), Homer Van Meter and Harry Pierpont fire Colt M1918 Browning Automatic Rifles (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 11). (These seem to be post-war semiautomatic guns, as the actors have to pull the triggers rapidly in order to fast-fire . . .) The BARs appear again during the ambush in Little Bohemia, when Van Meter, "Baby Face" Nelson, and even a wildly screaming Billie Frechette use them. During the escape, "Pretty Boy" Floyd throws two MK II fragmentation grenades (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 31).

[FBI](#) Special Agent in Charge Melvin Purvis is normally armed with two nickeled Colt .45 Government pistols, but also uses a Auto-Ordnance Model 1928AC Thompson submachine gun. His agents are liberally armed with Tommy guns and Winchester Model 12 Riot pump-action shotguns (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 25).

The troops from the Indiana National Guard are armed with the Springfield M1903 bolt-action rifle (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 8), Savage-Lewis M1917 light machine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 19), Browning M1917 medium machine gun (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 21), and even a 75mm RIA M1 pack howitzer (***GURPS WWII: Motor Pool,*** page 26).

Bonnie & Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967)

This movie is also set in 1933-1934. In this (generally historically inaccurate) film, Cylde Barrow mainly carries a Colt .38 Police Positive Special revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 11) and a S&W .45 New Service revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 9), one in a shoulder holster, one tucked in his belt. During one of the bank robberies, he also has a Colt .45 Government pistol (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 17-18). Bonnie Parker later gets her own S&W .38 Military & Police, but a short-barreled, nickeled version with pearl grips. They also quickly acquire some Auto-Ordnance Model 1928AC submachine guns (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 28-30) with 50-round drums. The fictitious character C.W. Moss has a Colt .38 Police Positive Special revolver tucked in his belt when they are identified prior to the shootout near Platte City (MO), and later uses a Tommy Gun. During that fight, he also throws a MK II fragmentation hand grenade (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 31).

Most of the police are armed with S&W .38 Military & Police revolvers and Winchester Model 94 lever-action rifles (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,*** page 5). Former [Texas Ranger Frank Hamer](#) carries a Colt .45 New Service revolver with horn grips. In the final ambush, Bonnie and Clyde are riddled with Tommy Guns.

Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, **and** *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (Steven Spielberg, 1981/1984/1989)*

In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (set in 1934), Dr. Henry "Indiana" Jones is armed with a S&W .455 New Service revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 9) in [Shanghai](#); his friend Wu Han has a S&W .38 Military & Police revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** page 10). Gangster Kao Kan uses a S&W .38 Safety Hammerless revolver (***High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,*** pages 7-8) and an Auto-Ordnance Model 1921AC

submachine gun (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* pages 28-30) at *Club Obi Wan.* His brother Chen shoots Wu Han with a Webley Mk III Military & Police revolver (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 8). Later, Mola Ram's thugees use Martini-Henry Mk I rifles (*High-Tech,* pages 109-110), while Captain Phillip Blumburtt's troops have Enfield SMLE Number 1 Mk III bolt-action rifles (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,* page 9).

In *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (set in 1936), Indy again carries a S&W .455 New Service revolver in a military holster (*High-Tech,* page 154). He also has a FN-Browning HP pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 21) for backup in his waist pack (*High-Tech,* page 54), as seen in the Nepalese barroom brawl and on the *Bantu Wind.*

Barranca has an antique Remington Model 1875 revolver (below). Gestapo agent Ernst Toht has an (anachronistic) Walther HP pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 22). The Nazis mainly use (anachronistic) ERMA MP38 submachine guns (*High-Tech,* page 124). They also have Mauser Kar98k bolt-action rifles (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,* page 6) and StiHgr24 hand grenades (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,* page 30). The rocket launcher that Indy captures from the Nazis is a (very anachronistic) RPG-2 (*High-Tech,* page 148).

In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (set in 1938), Indy has a .455 [Webley-Green Army](#) revolver (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 12). Of special interest is the obsolete twin-barreled FIAT-Villar Perosa Mod 15 machine gun (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,* pages 19-20 – actually a prop gun built from scratch, with slightly different appearance) which Prof. Henry Jones uses so expertly to bring down the biplane they "borrowed" from the [Zeppelin](#)'s rack . . .

The Brotherhood of the Cruciform Sword uses the Mauser C96 pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* pages 13-14), Haenel-Schmeisser [MP28/II](#) submachine gun (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 28), and later the 7.65×53mm Mauser M1905 bolt-action carbine (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 2,* page 9).

SS-Obersturmbannführer Vogel has a Luger P08 pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 16) in Austria, but in Turkey carries a Walther HP (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 22); Indy also uses a captured one. The treacherous Walter Donovan shoots Prof. Jones with a Walther PPK pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 20). The other Nazis use the same weapons as in *Raiders of the Lost Ark,* but also have some Bergmann MP35/I submachine guns (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 31).

Remington Model 1875, .44-40 Winchester (USA, 1875-1888)

This is a single-action loading-gate revolver with 7.5" barrel.

San Seung Hoi Taan (*[Shanghai](#) Grand*) (*Poon Man-kit, 1996*)

This movie is set in 1935-1936. Nationalist agent Hui Man-keung initially captures and uses a (slightly anachronistic) Enfield Number 2 Mk I revolver (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 13). Later he prefers a Colt .45 Government pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* pages 17-18) with shoulder holster (*High-Tech,* page 154) and ankle magazine pouches (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 33). In the flashback scenes on the *Shanghai Express* he has a Nambu 14 Shiki pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 20). Most of the other triad gangsters also use these two types of handguns, although one employs twin Mauser C96 pistols (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* pages 13-14) at the tailor. The gangsters' long arm of choice is the (anachronistic) Enfield Sten Mk II submachine gun (*High-Tech,* pages 124-125).

[The Maltese Falcon](#) (*John Huston, 1941*)

This film is set in 1940 (but the novel is set in 1930). Miles Archer gets shot with a Webley-Fosbery .38 Automatic Revolver (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 10), which is incorrectly identified as .45-caliber and is never shown. Neither is Floyd Thursby's Luger pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 16). Joel Cairo is armed with a Colt .25 Vest Pocket pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* page 15). Wilmer Cook has a Colt .45 Government pistol (*High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1,* pages 17-18).

Weapon Tables

Revolvers

GUNS (PISTOL) (DX-4 or most other Guns at -2)

	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Wt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
5	Remington Model 1875, .44-40	2d+2 pi+	2	120/1,300	3.1/0.26	3	6(4i)	11	-3	4	$210	3	

Cannon

GUNNER (CANNON) (DX-4 or other Gunner at -4)

	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	EWt.	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC	Notes
6	Enfield 13-pdr 9-cwt Mk I, 3"	6d×8(0.5) pi++	5	3,300/13,500	2,500/20	1	1(3)	59M	-14	4	$50,000	1	
	follow-up	5d×3 [4d] cr ex											

✳ ✳ ✳

Special thanks to andi jones.

Mount Sigig Mac Telemh

by Nick Grant

Something has gone horribly wrong in the lab.

Isn't that always the case? This mishap was no run of the mill planar collision or dime-a-dozen demon unleashing, though. This time, something has really, really gone wrong in the lab.

Dr. Gamdrian Mac Telemh, prime wizard of Her Majesty's cabinet, while delving at royal request into secrets no man (nor dwarf nor elf) was meant to know, became the epicenter of an explosion that caused earthquakes throughout the kingdom.

Luckily for the state, the sorcerer's experiments were being conducted outside of the royal castle, in his private residence obscured by clouds atop Mount Sigig, where dwell the rock goblins. Royal decree has declared the mountain quarantined until an investigative party can be assembled to assess the nature and extent of the damage to the mountain, kingdom, and (gods willing that he's still living) our Great Doctor.

--Pole Star Gazette, 16th of August, 112 F.E.

Somehow the wizard Dr. Gamdrian Mac Telemh fused himself with the mountain. It's as though his anatomical body, the geological mountain, and the mountain's ecosystem all unraveled and were stitched back together with no differentiation between the three. This is a mountain where spleen worms crawl through forests of fingers, and lymph rivers empty into lidded ponds.

Though presented in a fantasy context, this setting could carry over to other genres as well. A science fiction campaign might include a whole planet that has evolved into a single organism, spawning identical stem cells that then grow into the inhabitants described in this article. A modern-day occult-tinged game could take the setting and simply change the back story, or could modify things a bit and turn the mountain into a tower, basement, or wherever.

Regardless of what setting the situation is dropped into, it can be incorporated in a few different levels. The GM could pick a couple features as part of a bizarre landscape, or just take some monsters for his normal game. To engage it a little more, the GM could use it as a dungeon crawl, with the Gamdrian's head being the big baddie at the end. Alternatively, the GM could get involved with the whole interplay between mountain, wizard, and residents and work out an entire storyline from this seed.

The Wizard and the Mountain

Gamdrian Mac Telemh, like most great wizards, had a magnificent ego. He experimented with the unknown too much, and now he is in an enormous amount of physical discomfort. He, and all the parts of the mountain under his influence, have two aims. The first is to end his physical torment. This could either be achieved by finding some magical way to reduce or eliminate his sensation of pain (why oh why did he not listen when the peasants asked him to research magical painkillers), or to undo his great work and restitch himself into a simple, physical, humanoid body.

The second drive he has is for more power. This new form, while uncomfortable, affords him previously unthinkable ability for arcane experimentation. The charkas, gestures, and incantations that he can now perform have the potential for weight and nuance that a human body just can't afford. No wizard in the past could intone a landslide, or gesticulate a forest. This drive has two ends: He wants access to powerful magic (aided by components, tomes, etc.), and he wants to conquer the spirit of the mountain.

Mount Sigig, like most great mountains, had been lying in a state of semi-sleep contemplating itself and blessing its worshipers. It had been peripherally aware of Gamdrian's residence on its peak before, but it had not given it any

serious attention. Now it is experiencing one of the deepest invasions of identity any spirit has undergone. It is bonded with Gamdrian, and it is unhappy. The mountain is, at this point, the inferior partner. However, if Gamdrian continues to burn his chi, he will eventually become exhausted, and then the mountain can reclaim its form.

The Goblins

The mountain had inhabitants before Gamdrian. Generations of rock goblins have made the mountain their home, and they worship it as their provider and the keeper of their ancestor's spirits.

Reactions to recent events have been split several ways among the goblin leadership. Tempers are still too hot and wills are still too mutable for any sort of consensus to form, but these ideas (sometimes conflicting) are starting to take hold:

1. The likenesses to humanoid form are an abomination that needs to be cleansed.
2. The likenesses to humanoid form are the mountain's approval of its goblin worshipers.
3. A new age is dawning, and this miracle marks the goblins as harbingers of the apocalypse.
4. The mountain demands increased and fanatical worship.

To more or less an extent, all the goblins on the mountain believe all of these. They are all very stressed right now and are equally likely to greet adventurers with xenophobic terror or throw them a feast as prophets and wise men.

Noteworthy Locations

This, while not an exhaustive list of interesting places on the mountain, provides several locations that present unique challenges on Mount Sigig Mac Telemh.

The Finger Forests

Knotted and gnarled, the wizard's fingers bonded with two pockets of trees on the mountaintop. At the floral extreme, they resemble normal trees that bleed when cut. At the faunal, they are giant fingers whose twist and pigment faintly resemble the woods around them.

The left and right hand growths present distinct challenges and rewards. The right hand is stronger, swifter, and mostly concerned with gathering up reagents: enchanted items, certain metals, and blood. The adventurers might be attracted to this area because of the food that litters the ground: slaughtered deer, mountain lions, and other natural animals who have been harvested for blood. Adventurers may be particularly interested in these when it's pointed out that consumption of most other things on the mountain would to some extent be a cannibalization.

Most of the trees in the right-hand forest act like large snakes that are rooted in place and work together. They trip, catch, and grapple the adventurers, with the end goal of ripping them apart and collecting their blood in the ground.

The left-hand forest is more dangerous, less aggressive, and guards more valuable treasures. The fingers of the left hand form a neat circle several miles away from the fingers of the right. These trees are taller and more elegant than their right counterparts. Many are adorned with huge metal rings, and several have tattoos or carvings etched into them. They gesticulate constantly, and the air around them sparkles with magic.

In the center of the copse is a pool containing all the things harvested by the right hand -- that is, all the things the left hand is interested in. It is a shallow pool of blood, in which lies the magic and metal items of any unfortunates to have been killed on the mountain. This area is a treasure trove. If the party chooses to pilfer anything, all of the fingers stop what they are doing and blast the adventurers with a huge variety of rays and enchantments. It should be very difficult -- but not impossible -- for the party to escape with treasures. Once they do so, the mountain is alerted to their presence, and everything should be much more hostile.

The Bloodfalls

Blood, lymph, and other fluids flow over this mountain. They aren't the war-stained and horrific blood of a battlefield or hell, but the life-giving blood of a functioning organism. Sometimes this takes the form of a spectacular crimson waterfall; sometimes it's a slow-bubbling pus geyser.

These features are difficult to interact with, but they can be useful. The function that would interest most adventurers is transportation. A capillary system runs through the mountain ever since the explosion, and at the bottom of the fluid-lakes and at the source of all the rivers, there are veins that can take the adventurers quickly between various points on the mountain.

The most obvious danger with this system is suffocation. The heroes might realize this and thus avoid this interesting method of travel. In that case, the GM should suck the characters through one of these veins to demonstrated that they can be traversed safely at all. Nonetheless, whenever a player decides to go through, there should be the potential for suffocation. The characters shouldn't die this way, but they can easily go unconscious, creating serious complications for them (depending on where they end up).

Another danger that these fluid systems present is heat. This stuff occasionally travels through very hot regions deep underground, and the sudden eruption of a spew of boiling blood could really jazz up an otherwise routine encounter on the mountain.

The use of these fluids in game could serve to make the player's lives more complicated, or give a good non-combat encounter. These could make areas slippery and dangerous (testing balance or climb); repulse the characters (testing fortitude and will); provide nourishment (testing wilderness lore, knowledge: anatomy, or healing); or simply provide obstacles (testing swim or jump).

Palm Cliff

The lines of Mac Telemh's palm are etched into a snowy cliff face on the mountain, and the whole face has become much softer. This location is guarded by goblin mystics who have taken on the long task of reading the palm.

This presents a different sort of challenge than others. While the Finger Forests were full of active adversaries and the Bloodfalls provided physical pitfalls, this is a place for social challenges and traps.

The actual magical traps will vary depending on the game system, but there should be a number of alarms, automatic magic missiles, and other low-end magical defenses surrounding the place. A cautious and perceptive party should be able to avoid them, but a reckless party ought to get stung a few times.

There are two types of goblins that the player characters might run into here: the shamans and their burly guards. The burly guards, as typical goons, are big, buff, and dumb. The only thing that makes these guys special is that they have extreme reactions to any social skills attempted against them. Intimidate either terrifies them or makes them furious. Charm either makes them spit in the person's eye or attack their friends. None of them have any clue what is going on, and everything that they and their fathers and their fathers' fathers have been taught is being turned on its head.

The shamans are a different story. They are inspired by recent events and supremely confident in their vocation because of it. Their reaction to the interlopers depends on a few things:

- Evading or disarming the traps increases the shaman's respect.
- The guards praising the party decreases the shamans' respect.
- The guards saying bad things about the group that decreases the shamans' respect.
- Charming or thoughtful spokespeople increase the shaman's respect.
- Providing insightful comments about the rock face increases the shamans' respect.

If the shamans respect the fortune seekers, they treat them well, and the cohort may get some aid from them.

Otherwise, the shamans are dismissive -- pedantically at first and violently after.

The Head

Despite the potential surfacing of eyelids, noses, and teeth elsewhere on the mountain, the intact head of Gamdrian Mac Telemh, blown into proportion with his hubris (which is to say, made huge) flails wildly 40 yards from the peak.

The head is conscious and intelligent, but its neck muscles are underdeveloped in such a way to make it entirely unstable. It also is usually in a great deal of agony, so unless the visitors make some attempts to stabilize it or mute the pain, it won't be able to communicate anything more complex than "eeeaaauguuuughh."

There are many things the GM could do with the head. It could be treated as the central villain at the end of the quest, complete with lightning blasts and control over landslides. Adventurers might need to defeat it to release its hold on the mountain. Or, at the GM's discretion, it starts bargaining after sustaining a significant amount of damage. It may even become a reluctant ally, especially if the group is powerful.

Another possibility is to make the head a quest-giver. If the player characters can assemble this and that and those components in the right areas, the pieces allow the wizard to restitch himself, and the adventurers would do a great duty for Queen and Country. He would have the goblins do it, but they're all too bloody busy staring at his palm.

It is important to note that the head does not have total control over the other anatomical-geographical features of the mountain. He might be able to gain control of one for some time with great concentration, but for now the body is too new, and the nerves are alien to him.

Fauna

Mount Sigig had a functional and stable ecosystem before the doctor came along. The doctor had a fully functional body before the Mountain came along. When the two fused, the systems integrated into each other. Sometimes they did so successfully; other times, less so. The new system is still finding balance as the ultra-specialized organs and the survival-focused animals come to terms with each other.

Spidands

These creatures, a fusion of spiders and hands, are particularly deadly. The constantly growing fingernails of a human hand were replaced with the venomous fangs and sacs of spiders. The continual replenishment of poison forces the spidands to purge regularly.

Luckily for adventurers, spidands are bound to their webs. Unluckily for adventurers, those webs are composed of nerves coated in a slimy dulling liquid. This means that the spidands can feel with precision any part of their web being touched, and with what force it is touched. They are quick to react and generally happy for an opportunity to sink their fangs into something soft.

There is one extremely large spidand web network on the mountain. A few outliers have their own independent webs on various spots, but for the most part, the creatures stay in one huge tangled mess.

Pink Worms

These small pink worms appear at first to merely be a strange-looking species of invertebrate. However, any sort of psychic (and some special sorts of medicine) quickly identifies them for what they are: small bits of Gamdrian's brain. Each of these contains a single idea, impulse, or hunch, which it radiates with a psychic force appropriate to an unbound wizard's brain.

These worms could serve as background color or an early hint as to what is going on with the mountain. Mentally

stable characters should be able to deal with these worms better than unstable characters, who should be more apt to interpret imposed thoughts as their own or coming from a higher power.

Pink Worms could burrow into the ear of a goblin or adventurer and form an obsession. As they meld into the brain of a host, they push their identity upon it until they have either been integrated or physically rejected from the organ.

The monsters could serve as a red herring, projecting ghostly voices into the heads of an adventuring party with seemingly no source. A detailed search might turn the worms up and form a powerful reveal to a party skeptical of ghosts. Alternatively, they might provide vital information about the experiment that led to the current dilemma, and so offer the first steps of an out.

The worms can come in waves or work individually. The party might find a whole nest of them comprising a complex memory, of a first love, say, or a parent. Or one worm might be found, radiating the memory of a scream with such force that it is almost audible.

Stomalopes

Several antelopes of the mountain seem to have bonded with Gamdrian's ascetic stomach to form the ravenous beasts known as stomalopes. Vaguely antelope shaped, these are flabbier and lack the attractive fur of their animal counterparts. They no longer move with pristine grace, but with a sort of insane urgency. These creatures consume without rhyme or reason. They are constantly looking to fill themselves, and they typically do so until they can no longer move.

The stomalopes are abominable, and they cast the doctor in a very negative light. They are not only unattractive beasts, but their previously noble natures have been replaced by a driving need to consume.

The creatures might also be used in a more story-oriented version of the mountain as evidence of Gamdrian's evilness. They are gross beasts that used to be something beautiful; only by unholy experimentation could they have been spawned.

Feature and Fauna Generation Chart

For this chart, the GM rolls 3d6 twice: once on the body chart, and once on either the feature or fauna chart. The result is some fusion the GM can use and explore with the players in the event that additional monsters are needed. For a fun challenge, the GM can roll multiple times on one of the charts and include all elements rolled.

Result	Body	Feature	Fauna
3	Uvula	Chasm	Fleas/Lice
4	Toes	Cave	Rat
5	Ribs	Waterfall	Frog
6	Skull	Pool	Eagle
7	Tongue	Plateau	Fish
8	Nose	Slope	Wolf
9	Throat	Lake	MountainLion
10	Spine	River	Deer
11	Hair	Copse	Bear
12	Eye	Boulder	Squirrel
13	Muscle	Clearing	Rabbit
14	Teeth	Overhang	Beaver
15	Lungs	Cliff	Raccoon
16	Ears	Swamp	Bat
17	Fingernails	Crater	Newt
18	Navel	Geyser	Scorpion

Pyramid Review

Hanging Gardens

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Din Li

Full-color boxed set with portable game board, 60 building cards, four building start cards, 49 point tiles, 20 wooden temples in four player colors, and one starting-player flower; $34.95

Hanging Gardens is a fast-paced, two-tiered, tile-matching game, distinct from its thematically similar sister game, *Amyitis*. While *Amyitis* is also by Rio Grande Games, and also involves the hanging gardens of Babylon, it is a multi-board game played over hours. *Hanging Gardens* is more streamlined in mechanics and goals. Here, two to four players place cards within their palaces to earn reward tiles from the Queen of Babylon. At the end of the game, which lasts around 45 minutes, combinations of tiles of the same color are worth extra points. The player with the most points wins.

Setup is the fastest phase of the game: The cards and tiles are shuffled and placed face down in the marked places on the board. Then, cards and tiles are turned face up into the corresponding areas. The point tiles are arranged with two each under the headings of 3, 4, and 5. Each player takes the temples of their color and a building start card, which displays six blank squares, or "Districts." Thus, for a four-player game, there are four face-up Building cards and six face-up tiles on the game board.

Players take turns to improve the Districts within their Palaces, the table space between the player and the game board. Each card has from one to three random illustrated terrains on it. The first step is to choose one of the board's face-up Building cards to deploy to his Palace. As the cards have six squares on them, and from one to three of the squares randomly have one of the four District types on them, it is a small puzzle to mesh them in his Palace. The Districts on this card must be played such that they are over an existing *card,* not the table or a temple piece (see below).

Once per turn, when a player has created a group of three or more adjacent terrain squares, they may place a temple on the most recent groupings formed with that card, and claim it as a Zone. Larger Zones are more valuable to the players, as they dictate which tiles they may draw. A Zone of three allows a player to draw tiles from under the heading of 3 on the board, a Zone of four accesses headings 3 and 4, and a Zone of 5 or more allows a player to draw from any of the headings. Additionally, a Zone of six or more permits the player to also draw an additional face-down tile from the draw pile. As a player is only issued five temples, their sixth and any subsequent Zones must be created by relocating a temple from the currently smallest Zone to a more advantageous group of terrains. As soon as a participant has taken a tile, he replaces it with one from the pile. After all players have taken a turn, the building cards are replenished.

The person tiles are worth varying numbers of points based on the number of tiles of that color that the player has accumulated. For example, if a player collects one Tiger tile marked 2/8/16, it is worth 2 points alone, and three of such tiles together are worth 16 as a set. Collecting more, a player must group them into the highest number on the card; in this example, three. Seven tiles are counted as two groups of three tiles and another group of one tile. There are also certain bonus tiles that are linked to sets which are worth more points if a player has at least one full set of that color tile.

Strategists may note that completing three or six features across building cards are the optimal points to accumulate as many tiles as possible. Tactics can also include trying to snatch tiles before opponents do, or taking less optimal building cards to prevent an opponent from claiming a tile. In the middle game, players will often rotate and free up

temples from two- or three-square domains, enhancing (and thus scoring) them in the next round.

Hanging Gardens comes across as two quick games. Fortunately, they are both well-balanced and entertaining. In one version, just score the number of victory tiles collected, ignoring the faces. In the other version, do not use Building cards, but take turns collecting a tile at a time. The only strange thing in the instructions is that those indicating that cards can't be played over temples should be in the card placement rules and not the temple placement rules.

The cards are clean, crisp, and the illustrated tiles are elaborate. The meeples resemble something from *Space Invaders,* but they are functional nonetheless. The box is worthy of particular note: Its compartments are full color and are designed to snugly hold all its pieces. It also ships with extra resealable bags to separate each player's pieces.

Hanging Gardens is a robust mid-level game, in difficulty and duration somewhere between [Tsuro] and [Settlers of Catan]. The whirling, overlapping construction may make a real estate agent's head spin, but it is all a day's work for a Babylonian noble.

--Eric Funk

Special thanks to my beloved for playing along and to Jameson Hogan for his green thumb.

Pyramid Review

Galactic Emperor

Published by CrossCut Games, Inc.

Designed by Adam West

Rulebook by Dan Schnake

Cover art by Stephen Hickman

Full-color boxed set with mounted foldout game board, 84 plastic starship figures (48 Fighters, 24 Cruisers, & 12 Dreadnoughts in six colors), six Home-sector Starbase tokens, 66 Empire Tokens (in six colors), six Ship and Combat reference cards, six Storage Facility cards, 38 Sector Tiles, 12 Technology cards, 66 Victory chits, 70 Mark (money) chits, 94 wooden cubes (40 Food, 36 Metal, & 18 Energy), seven Role cards, one Throne counter, one Direction card, and rulebook; $54.95

Having just lost its *Galactic Emperor,* the empire hovers near chaos. Someone must show themselves to be the worthy successor before things fall apart completely.

Three to six players become Dukes in the Galactic Empire. The emperor has been lost to tragedy, and his nobles find this terribly disheartening . . . or opportune (that works, too!). Each Duke gets a Fighter, a Home-sector planet, a Storage Facility, and some money and resources. Starting at opposing corners of a hexagonal map (made of even smaller hexes with the Omega Sun in the middle), the players are set to show that they have what it takes to own the Throne.

Whoever currently holds the most Influence over the Throne goes first in a round, picking one of seven roles. When a role is chosen, everyone performs actions related to that position, but the Chooser gets a bonus. For example, everyone buys and sells Food and Resources when the Merchant is taken, but the Chooser gets extra money. The Chooser also sets the value of goods by rolling four six-sided dice -- the results dictate the cost, but the Merchant exercises some control over the market by deciding which three results to keep.

The empty hexes are filled with Sector tiles during the Explorer phase. These counters show which spaces have planets and which remain empty space, and some areas produce needed materials. The Engineer builds the ships in a world's fleet, and during the Warlord role, players command their fleets to move and attack. The Scientist creates new technologies, like improvements to a fleet's capabilities or increased production on the planets -- but eventually, the Black Hole Sector tile shows up and the Omega Sun collapses. At that point, the Scientists and their innovations are exiled from the game. The Steward makes Sectors produce their Metal and Energy counters (represented by little wooden blocks). Finally, the Regent dispenses Influence -- players use these disks to show dominion over Sectors and to vie for control of the Throne.

A single Influence counter in a Sector establishes an Empire, while two make a Starbase. If several Dukes target one spot, they all lose an equal number of Influence, and only someone with tokens left over takes possession. These counters also defend in combat and, if it's a Starbase, allow placement of new craft. Ships move fairly slowly (it's not a huge map), but the Black Hole permits them to teleport. An engagement with the enemy's fleet or planets depends on dice rolls. Everything is ranked in combat, and something from a better class may destroy something else before it can

fire back (Dreadnoughts are particularly devastating).

After all the chosen roles are played out, the round ends and a new one begins with the Duke who last influenced the Throne. That player also decides whether actions are performed clockwise or counterclockwise this turn. As players take over new areas, they become more powerful, though eventually they probably butt heads with enemies over dwindling opportunities. When all the Victory tokens have been claimed or any one player has used his last Influence token to control a sector, the game is over. The player with the highest point total wins.

For a game so firmly seated in the self-confessed independent trench, this one has good production values. It still uses fine materials. The planets are colorful and there's nothing but love for the plastic ship pieces that make up one's fleet. It's easy to recognize which ships are which (the Dreadnoughts feel like drink coasters), and though they're all big enough to easily be picked up, they still fit on a hex (however, everything else probably has to be stacked on top of it if the Dreadnought is the first one down). The dice are questionable -- they have a single oversized pip on the "one" side -- but the biggest quarrel is the color scheme: It's all a dark space-blue, and that makes a blur of some of the components. In particular, the dice symbols in the marketplace, indicating where the Merchant is to place the results he rolls, are too dark to read easily.

Other than that, all is fine. There's plenty of balance built into this game, and with no single way to victory, players can enjoy finding different paths to success, as well as look for multiple combinations of game elements to help them reach their goals. (With more roles than Dukes, it's possible some victories could be had without ever resorting to some roles.) The technologies all appear to have their uses (though it's strikingly odd that one would research "Ambassador" or "Space Pirate"), so the game averts the problem of everyone ignoring the same dud of a development. No one can really run away with the game. Storage Facilities limit the Metal and Energy participants can save, Starbases and Empires are forces to be reckoned with (no need to litter the stars with firepower), and ships are useful but not all-powerful. While defending the borders is possible, it's never absolute.

Game play is listed at 90 minutes. Sadly, that's a bit of an overstatement (it should take at least two hours even for experienced players). But *Galactic Emperor* surely has tension and replay value, and those beat out the minor flaws every time.

--Andy Vetromile

Fantasy Fighting: Elven Styles

for *GURPS*

by Ernesto Pavan

Quick, smart, with the opportunity to build up a level of experience unreachable by members of less long-lived races, it is no surprise that elves can make superb martial artists. By the words of mortals, it seems that all elven warriors are superior bowmen or swordsmen (sometimes both); indeed, humans are prone to project their own legends and visions of the fighting arts onto a race with an almost mythical status, gifting it with the ability to perform preternatural feats with the most legend-heavy weapons. The bow and the swords are surrounded by mysticism in many cultures, so it is not surprising that "legendary" elves are depicted as masters of the weapons of knights, nobility's, and folkloristic "good rogues." Most of them actually live up to the rumors, since the sheer versatility of the bow and the sword is a priceless resource.

Real elves, however, are just like humans in their attitude: They fight with the most useful weapons according to the time, space, and surroundings in which they usually get involved into battles. Since the elven people tends to stay in a relatively small area and without the moments of forced expansion caused by a steadily increasing birth rate, armed styles vary little through centuries and millennia. The elves rarely meet new opponents to challenge them over long periods of time, so they have no need to change. However, invasions and hostile "first contacts" with other races occur often enough that elven fighting forms are not completely insular. Two styles born from intercultural (sadly, non-pacific) contacts are described herein: *Eitàmari* Fighting is a war art of the wood elves, while Golden Blossom was created as a self-defense style by a sorrowed father.

A Mild Disclaimer

This article makes some basic assumptions about elves: They are, on the average, more agile and coordinated than humans, extremely long-lived, and they have a strong reputation as masters of the bow and the sword. Although it incorporates hints about non-classic elements of elven psychology and society, these two styles are easy for GMs to adjust to their own campaigns. For example, if elves who invent weapons to use specifically against humans doesn't fit with the GM's vision, he could make the *tàlio* the weapon of giant lizards or dragon hunter, or discard it entirely. Likewise, if the GM cannot imagine elves fighting like tavern brawlers, change the name of Golden Blossom and turn it into a dark or degenerate elves' fighting art; the cinematic version is particularly scary, as a master could go around naked and then kill three men with a needled ring.

Eitàmari Fighting   *6 points*

Eitàmar ("spear wielders"; singular and plural) are elite among wood elves' warriors. Charged with the duty to defend the forest's bounds, they uphold it with every fiber of their muscles and every drop of their blood. They are far less fanatic and xenophobic than the outer world depicts them, but that does not make them softer than any other professional fighters' group.

Despite their reputation as unrivaled archers, wood elves regard the spear as the *essential* weapon of war. Besides its overall recognized effectiveness, it has two important advantages: It does not require much metal to craft, and it can be easily used in the depth of a forest, where swung weapons would be hindered by the branches. The *Eitàmar* prefer the *eità* (spear) above the *nimeitàla* (short spear) and the *eitàleia* (long spear). They consider the first too short and the latter too awkward to be useful. Sometimes, knowing that they are going to face humans, they use the *tàlio* (see "New Equipment," below) instead of an ordinary spear. Some add the *eìchor* (buckler) besides the *eità*, but they are a minority; generally, shield-bearing *Eitàmar* use it to deflect missiles and drop it before entering melee combat.

Practitioners wield the spear two-handed, mainly because that grip allows for a superior reach. They shun Committed Attack and similarly opening moves, but they do not fight defensively; they are expected to be able to attack and defend at the same time, capitalizing on their adversary's errors and working to open his guard. The Riposte defense option is rarely used, while counterthrusts and ordinary attacks (usually Deceptive) are routine. Against a foe with a shorter weapon, the *Eitàmar* plays a mobile game, striking and flying out without allowing her opponent to fight back. If the adversary has a longer weapon, she either tries to disarm him or quickly closes the distance and disables him (cinematic fighters usually do this by *jumping* against the enemy!). Staff techniques are a main part of the style, since they are both powerful on defense and useful to make prisoners (despite the rumor the elves themselves diffused, not every intruder is killed).

Eitàmari Fighting stresses the importance of knowing one's surroundings and using them against the enemy. Practitioners train in the depth of the forest, fight their way on uneven terrain, and even practice swinging from branches to make surprise attacks. They learn guerrilla tactics to balance numerical inferiority, a sadly common situation for the low-prolific elves. Some even specialize in removing sentinels, grappling them from behind and choking them with the *eità*'s haft.

Cinematic *Eitàmar* fighters seem to be everywhere, every time. They are indistinguishable shadows until they strike, but when they *do* strike, they do it fast and hard. Almost flying down the trees and between branches, sometimes chasing enemies without ever touching the ground, they kill without hesitation or remorse, knowing that a trespasser's life is worth a stone compared with the elven homeland's security.

Although spear throwing is not considered a war art by the elves, they practice a form of sportive javelin throwing to encourage positive competitiveness and to build strength and eye-hand coordination. The *Eitàmar* compete in such tournaments, but they are unlikely to use their throwing skill for anything else.

Skills: Acrobatics; Jumping; Spear; Staff; Stealth.

Techniques: Attack from Above (Spear or Staff); Counterattack (Spear); Disarm (Spear or Staff); Feint (Spear or Staff); Sweep (Staff); Targeted Attack (Spear Thrust/Face); Targeted Attack (Spear Thrust/Vitals); Targeted Attack (Spear Thrust/Vital Chinks).

Cinematic Skills: Flying Jump; Invisibility Art; Lizard Climb.

Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Defense; Flying Attack (Spear); Grand Disarm (Staff); Timed Defense.

Perks: Form Mastery (Spear); Grip Mastery (Spear); Sure-Footed (Tree Branches or Uneven).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Higher Purpose; Outdoorsman; Weapon Master (Hafted Weapons).

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Eitàmar's Vow: Never allow a trespasser to go unpunished; never leave a companion to fight alone; spare an enemy who surrenders); Duty; Fanaticism; Intolerance (Orcs or other racial enemy) *or* Intolerance (Everyone but elves); Sense of Duty (Toward all elves).

Skills: Camouflage; Climbing; Shield (Buckler); Survival (Woods); Thrown Weapon Sport (Spear).

Techniques: Breakfall; Choke Hold (Staff); Close Combat (Spear or Staff).

Golden Blossom   *4 points*

Lòntemalla ("golden blossom" or "beloved little one") is an odd style, at least if you know something about the elves. It is painfully pragmatic, with no philosophy behind it, nor an artistic value of any kind. In fact, its existence could be

explained only by the light of the elves' respect for their own history.

Three centuries ago, during an elf-human war, the three daughters of a weapon master were left at home by their father, who went to battle. The elves won the day . . . as the humans meant. When all the warriors where chasing the fleeing enemy, a small group of elite human soldiers slipped behind the elven lines and sacked their village. The sword master's daughters, caught in their home with no weapons, grabbed cooking knives and a chair's leg and tried to fight their way out. The only appreciable result was that they forced their assailants to kill them.

When the sword master learned about his daughters' fate, his heart broke. He swore never to touch a sword again, punishing himself for not having been there. He then developed Golden Blossom as a tribute to the maidens' courage and prowess, and named it after his feeling of sorrow. The result was a simple, easy-to-master, no-nonsense style, taught to every elf willing to learn it in order to defend herself and those she holds dear.

The knowledge that he could have trained his daughters like he was training the new style's practitioners destroyed the sword master's will to live: He died a century after, at the young age of 400 years. Golden Blossom's practitioners learn the use of the knife (a common tool and civilian weapon) and the staff (easy to find, to make, and to pass for a walking aid), plus a full range of close-combat strikes. More important, they understand how to use *any* item similar to those weapon as a true fighting instrument, just like the sword master's daughters with little more than house tools at their disposal.

The goal of a Golden Blossom fighter is to disable his foe quickly, avoiding direct confrontation. He favors the Evaluate and Wait maneuvers, especially the Stop Thrust and Stop Hit options (although the latter is somewhat rarer), aiming at the legs and the arms. After they land an immobilizing or crippling strike, fighters have the option to spare their enemy's life or to finish him from a safe distance. If a Golden Blossom practitioner is forced into a close position, her priority is to inflict pain on her opponent (usually with a punch in the face or by driving a knee into a sensitive point of a grappler's anatomy) and break free *immediately.* The longest weapon is of little use if someone heavier and stronger than you has his hands around your neck.

There a few tales of cinematic Golden Blossom practitioners; the style has no mystic component and is relatively young. The founder *was* a known weapon master, however, so tales of his ancient deeds tend to get mixed up with claims about the style's effectiveness. Particularly, there are constant rumors of elves capable of using *anything* as a weapon; such fighter should take all the optional and cinematic skills, and Weapon Master (Improvised Weapons are considered a large group).

Skills: Brawling; Knife; Staff.

Techniques: Eye-Rake; Hammer Fist; Knee Strike; Retain Weapon (Knife); Targeted Attack (Brawling Knee Strike/Groin); Targeted Attack (Brawling Punch/Face); Targeted Attack (Knife Swing/Arm); Targeted Attack (Knife Swing/Leg); Targeted Attack (Staff Swing/Arm); Targeted Attack (Staff Swing/Leg).

Cinematic Skills: Pressure Points; Pressure Secrets; Throwing Art.

Perks: Grip Mastery (Staff); Improvised Weapons (Brawling, Knife, or Staff).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Higher Purpose; Weapon Master.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Chaste Woman); Sense of Duty (Toward helpless people).

Skills: Axe/Mace; Broadsword; Two-Handed Sword. Cinematic fighters can take the Improvised! wildcard skill instead (see below).

New Wildcard Skill: Improvised!

Replaces Axe/Mace, Brawling, Broadsword, Flail, Garrote, Karate, Knife, Staff, Two-Handed Axe/Mace, and Two-Handed Sword for every item awkward enough to inflict a skill penalty when used as a weapon. Regardless of the listed penalty, always use your full skill level to wield improvised weapons. Note that Improvised! does *not* replace the weapon skill to use "true" weapons. You are a master of bottles, chairs and scarves, not of knives and flails!

Use Improvised! in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Jumping in combat situations. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons.

New Equipment: Tàlio

The *tàlio* is a weapon of recent invention. It was made to counter human plate armor, which is growing more and more common. It has no head, just a long, stiff metal point less effective against bare flesh but capable of piercing armor with relative ease. Normally, each haft is carved by the owner with animal and vegetal representations. Use a spear's stats, but change damage to *piercing* and add an armor divisor of 2. Cost is unchanged.

Pyramid Pick

Aces & Eights: Shattered Frontier -- A Roleplaying Game

Published by [Kenzer & Co](#)

Designed by Jolly R. Blackburn, Brian Jelke, Steve Johansson, David Kenzer, Jennifer Kenzer, & Mark Plemmons

Illustrated by Frederic Remington & Charles Russell with Bob Burke, Steven Cumming, Brendon & Brian Fraim, Bev Shideler, George Vrbanic, & Craig Zipse

402-page full-color hardcover; $59.99

The Origins award-winning *Aces & Eights: Shattered Frontier -- A Roleplaying Game* is as irredeemably old fashioned and complex an RPG as you are going to find on the shelves of your local gaming store. It is not an RPG of the Wild West but of the Old West, inspired by the classic period art of Frederic Remington and Charles Russell. Although it is set in an alternative history of frontier America, its treatment of the genre is as straight shooting as you can imagine. In other words, this is no *Deadlands Reloaded,* no *Wizards & Gunslingers,* no *Spellslinger.* Further, *Aces & Eights* is not only an RPG, but it can be played as a miniatures skirmish game that the RPG builds upon. All of this comes packaged in an incredibly sturdy and richly illustrated hardback that weighs in at over four pounds.

The game is old fashioned and complex in that it uses not one rule set for the whole game, but one for each aspect of the game and setting. It requires not just the standard polyhedral panoply, but also -- in a nod to more contemporary trends -- poker chips and a poker deck. Miniatures and a large-scale hex map are needed if the rules are used as a skirmish game. In fact, the old-fashioned nature of *Aces & Eights* may remind gamers with long memories of TSR's *Boot Hill RPG.* However, *Aces & Eights* is far better treatment of the Old West.

At the heart of that skirmish game is the system for resolving gunfights -- the Shot Clock. This is a clever plastic overlay with a series of concentric circles divided into four quadrants consisting of 13 segments. Each quadrant is marked by one of the poker-suit symbols. Whenever a shot is fired, the Shot Clock (or its companion, the Shotgun Clock) is laid over the silhouette representing the target, the center placed exactly where the shooter wants. Want to shoot the gun right out of Black Bob's hand or wing Pepperbox Pete with a round to his leg? Go right ahead, partner. Or just plug them in the chest to make sure that you hit. A 20-sided die is rolled to hit, modified by range, handedness, movement, visibility, personal and weapon accuracy, wound status, and so on to get a result. A total of 14 or less is a miss, 15 or more is a possible hit, while 25 and up puts the round exactly where the shooter wants. If the roll is 24 or less, the attacking player draws a single card to determine the direction of the round, matching the card suit to the quadrant and then counting out from the Shot clock Center to the numbered circle that matches the "To Hit" roll.

What this means is that a character can still be hit even if his assailant missed his exact point of aim. Thus, Benito the Bandit might have been aiming for Deputy Wyatt "Upright" Wainwright's noggin, but his less-than-sharp shooting could result in a complete miss if the round goes up or wide. Alternatively, if the round goes lower, the lawman could end up with a bullet anywhere from his neck to his thighs. Damage is nasty: A .41 derringer does 1d3+1 damage; a .45 revolver, d6+1, and a sharps .45 round, 2d6. (Characters have an average of 22 hit points.) And that is before you figure in the wound effects, which are determined by damage rolled and location. Shotguns are very nasty, inflicting wounds pellet by pellet. The publisher provides a complete tutorial for handling both the Shot Clock and damage on [YouTube](#).

Actions and movement are dealt with, not round by round, but on an ongoing basis. Starting with his Initiative and Speed as a base, a character tracks what he's doing in "Counts" (or tenths of a second). So when Deputy "Upright" and Benito the Bandit surprise each other in a bar, they go for their guns. Benito decides to stand (3 Counts), draw both of his revolvers (5 Counts), and open fire with both guns (1 Count). Deputy "Upright" is carrying a shotgun, so brings it to bear upon the Mexican (4 Counts), deliberately aims (4 Counts), and then opens fire. Actions continue like this until the end of the gunfight.

Overall, this is a fun set of gunfight rules that also covers thrown and projectile weaponry, with the use of the Shot Clock and the nasty damage effects imparting a gritty realism. It is not something completely unique though; Chameleon Eclectic included a similar device in its 1991 *Millennium's End RPG.*

The basic rules are quite short, but they serve as the foundation for the rest of the "Advanced" game. This starts with character generation, primarily a random process. The standard six attributes plus a seventh, Looks, are rolled on three six-sided dice. But each also has a fraction, rolled as a percentage (much like a Fighter's Strength was in *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*). Numerous secondary factors are derived from these attributes, including extra Build Points, which add to a standard base. More Build Points can be acquired by taking Quirks or Flaws such as Loco, Yellow Belly, or Trick Knee, which are worth more if they are determined randomly. Build Points are spent to improve an attribute (by increasing its Fraction); add Talents like Deadeye and Tough as Nails; and acquire skills. These are brought and expressed as a percentile, a player purchasing a skill base (equal to an attribute) and then one or more Mastery Dice (different for each skill) which are rolled and added to the base to get a total that is deducted from 100. The player must roll over the final total to succeed at that skill.

In terms of character progression, the game does not use classes, but instead expects a character to enter a Profession Path. A character can switch between Profession Paths, but entering one and completing its objectives grants Build Points. For example, Deputy "Upright" Wyatt tires of upholding the law and becomes a Gun For Hire. He will gain one Build Point for acquiring a signature weapon, another five for being involved in two gunfights, and so on. These Build Points are in addition to those awarded for participating in Remarkable Events -- that is, playing through adventures -- and for achieving personal goals. Other awards come in the form of fame and reputation.

As with combat, *Aces & Eights* uses the 20-sided die for brawling, but the participants can influence the outcome by betting poker chips, the number available determined by a character's Strength, Agility, and Endurance. The chips are used to increase damage, chances to hit, and shrug off damage. Specific moves cost a character chips; for example a Low Blow takes two blue (or Agility) chips and prevents the victim from spending blue chips on his next action, but it also lowers the puncher's reputation! The poker chips add a pleasing resource management aspect to the brawl.

The poker chips are used in a similar fashion to represent a horse's attributes in the chase rules, which also employ the poker deck to represent both range and possible hazards. The cards and dice are also relied on for the games' detailed gambling rules. Likewise, the dice come into play for the trial rules under frontier justice, each die representing a juror that must be swayed over the course of a trial. Together the dice combine to form disposition pods that are rolled to determine the outcome. The rules for horses, cattle ranching, cattle driving, and prospecting are more straightforward, but equally as detailed, and in most cases highly informative. Do you know where and how to brand cattle? I do now.

The bulk of *Aces & Eights* is devoted to campaign play and its campaign setting, the Shattered Frontier. This is an area coveted by Imperial Mexico, the Republic of Texas, Deseret, and the USA. The location is centered on the squatter towns of Lazarus and Muskeegie, as well as the nearby gold-bearing San Juan mountains.

The rough and ready town of Lazarus is fully detailed, including a listing of its inhabitants, while Black Horse is provided for the GM to make his own. The superbly detailed *Knuckleduster Cowtown Creator* (by Knuckleduster) would be very useful for such a purpose.

The year is roughly 1859, in an alternative North America where the Civil War was fought between 1851 and 1855 to a stalemate influenced by the European powers. Both the nations of this new America and its history are heavily detailed, the history perhaps overly so, being quite a dense read.

Although its layout is clean and simple, and the artwork attention-grabbing because it is comprised of classic Old West illustrations, *Aces & Eights* is let down by its old-fashioned organization and lack of an index. A lot of the options and background (but not all) are sequestered at the end of the book. It would have been easier for the reader if the background material had been kept together, and the rules had been treated similarly. Likewise, the advice for both playing and running the game could have been made more obvious. The rules are meant to be "modular" to aid in their learning, but the book's poor organization is a hindrance to both that concept and that process. Another problem is that only two targeting silhouettes are provided for use with the Shot Clocks, both showing the target standing. More are definitely needed.

I have to confess that I am not fan of Kenzer & Co's games, and to be blunt, I loathe *HackMaster* with a passion, considering it a joke about old school *Dungeons & Dragons* that never needed telling. Scorn and vitriol aside, *Aces & Eights: Shattered Frontier -- A Roleplaying Game* is an impressive revelation, far more worthy and deserving of its Origins Award for Best RPG. It provides the GM with a wealth of historical detail that covers every aspect of the Old West and a setting that, although an alternative history, feels very much as if it could have been. In fact, there is nothing to stop a GM taking the rules presented in *Aces & Eights* and using them to run a game in the Wild West. That this RPG does not tie itself to the history that we know means that both GM and players are free to make the Old West depicted in *Aces & Eights* theirs. The wealth of detail is backed up with several sets of rules that are not only detailed but fun to play, although the gunfight rules and the use of the Shot Clock will soon teach the players a healthy respect for the power of firearms.

Anyone wanting to run or play a straight take on the Western genre is hardly spoiled for choice, it is true. Yet for its sheer wealth of detail and entertainingly old-fashioned rule sets, *Aces & Eights* stands head and 10-gallon hat above the rest -- whatever they are. Physically, *Aces & Eights: Shattered Frontier -- A Roleplaying Game* is not just a heavy-weight book, but a sumptuous-looking one too, and its treatment of the Old West matches in both look and weight.

--Matthew Pook

The Need for a Slightly Uncertain Game Night

Change of pace: One intro, one thesis, *no* digression, tie to gaming.

It is the ability of our expectations not to be met that makes life worth living.

On some level I realized this when I determined there was almost no point in playing *Chutes & Ladders* (or, as it's known in much of the world, *Snakes & Ladders*). As I'm sure most of you remember, this "game" contained many moments of joyful ascension or gut-wrenching descent, as you landed on squares that would help or hinder your progress. And these moments were truly emotionally affecting . . . assuming your age is a prime or square number, and it's also less than five. But beyond that point, there's the nascent realization that *Chutes & Ladders* may not be the most demanding game in the world. (For me, the realization came when I concluded that I didn't need to find a friend to play *Chutes & Ladders,* since I could use a die to simulate the other player's turn. I can't recall how long afterwards I realized that, in lowering the number of players to one, I could reduce that figure even further.)

At that point, one's expectations with *Chutes & Ladders* are almost completely known: Each turn you will advance one to six spaces, which may result in you gaining or losing between 0 and X additional spaces. Mathematically speaking, a game of *Chutes & Ladders can't* deviate from that mathematical certainty . . . unless someone chooses not to play.

Let's step back a bit: What is fun about winning a game? It is *not* the act of winning. Otherwise, it's trivial to devise a game called *You Win!* (Rules: Roll one six-sided die. On a roll of 1-6, you win! On any other result, roll again.) Rather, winning is significant because it carries with it the opportunity of *not* winning. The mere act of playing a game where you *might* lose is what gives victory its significance.

It is this risk that makes the activity worthwhile. We've talked before about how [random rewards](#) can be much more psychologically fulfilling than consistent rewards . . . even if they're *greater.* But the truth is that if we expand the definition of "rewards" to "any outcome we find favorable," then this fact applies to even more situations. (Why is a good meal so satisfying in a restaurant? One very solid reason is because there was a chance it could be bad.)

Now, looking at our thesis again, some of you might be getting depressed; after all, it seems there are only two outcomes -- expectations are met (which we already know can't happen consistently or else there's no point), or the outcome is below expectations. But there's a third option: If an expectation is exceeded, then that has a similar psychological impact of not being met.

Let's look at another example: You're buying a gift for a romantic interest. The gift in question is one that the person wanted previously, so you're confident that it will make a good gift; in other words, your expectations will be met if the gift is accepted and appreciated. On the gift-giving day, not only does the recipient love the item, it is bragged about to friends and family, and remains a voluntary topic of conversation months later. ("I saw the Fu Bar you gave me last August, and I remembered how useful it's been; thank you again!") Now, if this outcome were achieved, your mental state would *not* be the same as if the recipient had accepted the gift, gone, "It's just what I wanted. Thank you." and then never mentioned it again . . . even though, in both cases, your expectations had at least been "met."

Similarly, why do we go to restaurants we know we love? Well, partly because there's a chance it'll be bad (as explained above). Mostly, because we have expectations that we're fairly confident will be met . . . and we *hope* will be exceeded. (As an aside, for another interesting take on this phenomenon, track down Harlan Ellison's short story "The Cheese Stands Alone.")

So, tying it back to gaming again, some of the most successful games in recent years take our thesis statement to ridiculous extremes. For example, ***World of Warcraft*** gives people many hours of random rewards (expectations thwarted and exceeded), enables people to meet and chat with friends online (more expectations), opportunities to meet for raiding groups that may or may not come to fruition, and so on.

For gaming groups that are out there, enjoying their Friday nights: Keep it up. But if things seem a little lacking in

your gaming sessions, consider the fact that things that don't work out as expected (for good or ill) are what make things memorable. And if the gamers all know that this week and next week are going to be similar to last week and the one before, maybe it's time to see about shaking up expectations. The folks who program **World of Warcraft** know that people *hate* going through a huge quest and ending up with almost no noteworthy treasure . . . but it happens anyway. Why? Because that hate makes the interesting loot all the more interesting. If the players know that the GM hates injuring or killing the heroes, and the players believe he never would, then the non-death/non-injury expectations provide no reward for being thwarted or exceeded.

Don't fear games not meeting expectations; it's the possibility for games to miss their marks in either direction that makes them worth playing. Instead, take a hard look at what aspects of your games that the players might have grown complacent about. If you think there's anything you can tweak that might make the game better (even if there's a chance it'll make things worse instead), give it a shot. Because, like *Chutes & Ladders,* if players already know exactly what the evening will be like before beginning, then minds will start drifting to what they can do that *isn't* so predictable.

And if you really want to drive the point home, tell them before hand, "Expect the unexpected."

--Steven Marsh

The Omniscient Eye

When Is a Captain Not a Captain?

"Captain" . . . a title to conjure with. Adventure. Responsibility. All that stuff. But who exactly can (and could) claim that title?

- **For starters, the Navy rank of captain is easily confused with the Army rank of the same name. (My native language has it easier in that regard, but heroes from Horatio Hornblower to Jean-Luc Picard use English ranks.) As a side note, I've read some sci-fi stories where Army captains would not be called "captain" aboard starships because there could be only one; is that a self-perpetuating fictional meme or based in reality?**
- **What exactly is the difference between a master and a captain?**
- **What are the proper formal and informal forms of address for commanding officers below the naval rank of captain?**
- **What about non-commissioned naval personnel in charge of some watercraft? Presumably a petty officer in command of a rowboat would not be called "captain" . . . but where is the dividing line?**
- **Are there precedents for more than one (rank) captain on a single naval ship?**
- **When is a civilian properly called the captain of a merchant vessel? Is his legal position different from the skipper of a sailboat?**
- **What about aircraft? Has the use of "captain" by airlines any legal meaning, or is it just a fancy label for the senior pilot?**

--Onno Meyer

The specific uses of various terms may differ between Great Britain and the United States of America, and an attempt has been made to establish both British and American current usage for both.

The title "Captain" is accorded to a man who has reached that rank in whatever branch of the Services, to a man who holds his "Captain's Ticket" in the Merchant Navy, and (by courtesy) to a senior pilot of civil aircraft.

International ranking structure:

NATO Rank Code	British Army and Royal Marines	U.S. Army, USAF, and USMC	Royal Navy	U.S. Navy	RAF
OF-5	Colonel (Col)	Colonel (COL/Col/Col)	Captain (Capt)	Captain (CAPT)	Group Captain (Gp Capt)

The Royal Marines rank alongside their army equivalents. However, when borne on the books of any of HM Ships or Naval Establishments, Royal Marines are subject to the Naval Discipline Act 1957. In those circumstances, many officer ranks in the Royal Marines formerly enjoyed greater status. Second Lieutenants were equivalent to Sub-Lieutenants and ranks from Lieutenant to Major were considered equivalent to one rank higher (OF-2 to OF-4). Lieutenant Colonels were considered equivalent to RN Captains with less than six years in the rank, and Colonels were equivalent to Captains with more than six years seniority. Higher ranks followed the equivalence on the table above. This state of affairs ended on July 1, 1999, when Royal Marine officer ranks were fully aligned with those of the Army.

In the armed forces of both Great Britain and the United States, "Captain" is a commissioned rank.

A Captain in the Royal Navy is a commissioned officer ranking immediately below a Commodore. A Captain in the British Army is a commissioned officer ranking immediately below a Major. A Captain in the Royal Marines has the same ranking as a Captain in the Army, as of 1999; see above for details prior to that point. There is no rank of Captain in the Royal Air Force; a Group Captain is of rank equivalent to an RN Captain or an Army Colonel.

Equivalent ranks in the British Services:

Royal Navy	British Army	Royal Air Force
Admiral	General	Air Chief Marshal
Vice Admiral	Lieutenant-General	Air Marshal
Rear Admiral	Major-General	Air Vice Marshal
Commodore	Brigadier	Air Commodore
Captain	Colonel	Group Captain
Commander	Lieutenant-Colonel	Wing Commander
Lieutenant-Commander	Major	Squadron Leader
Lieutenant	Captain	Flight Lieutenant
Sub-Lieutenant	(Second) Lieutenant	Flying Officer, Pilot Officer

There is a distinction between the rank of Captain and the position of captain aboard a vessel: In the RN, two classes of people may be "Captain." The captain of a commissioned vessel is the man commanding that vessel, whatever the vessel may be, and he may be of any commissioned rank. An RN officer with the rank of Captain may also be the captain of a warship, or he may hold no seagoing command but be, for instance, in charge of a section at an RN Training Establishment or be posted to one of the shore Establishments of the Ministry of Defence or at the Admiralty in Whitehall.

Only one person can be the captain of a British warship at any given moment, since only one has been appointed by the Lords of the Admiralty on behalf of the Monarch to hold that command. A Captain taking passage on board a vessel under another Captain's command is still *a* Captain (as an Admiral is still an Admiral), but he is not in the chain of command and is, to all intents and purposes, a passenger, not *the* captain. He may be senior in the Naval List, but he cannot legally give orders to the Ship's Company. If he is the senior Captain in overall command of a group of warships, any general orders he may give must be communicated to the captains of the ships, who will then direct the necessary specific orders to their Ships' Companies for the overall orders to be carried out. This applies equally to Commodores (at least since that became a permanent rank rather than a temporary job title) and Admirals: They may be in overall command, but they are not in specific command of the running of the ship, which is the business of the ship's commanding officer.

By custom, the title "Captain" was also bestowed on the commanding officer of any *commissioned* RN warship, that is, one with "HMS" as part of her name, however small the vessel and no matter what his rank. When he ceased to command that vessel, he reverted to his ordinary rank. If an officer with the rank of Captain is given passage aboard a warship commanded by a Lieutenant, the Lieutenant remains captain of the vessel and should be referred to as such.

A Lieutenant RN writes of current usage: "This depends on the size of vessel. A landing craft or RIB would have a Coxswain rather than a Captain, which would be reserved for a Ship commissioned in her own right. Don't know of a case where an NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] is the 'Captain.' We often refer to someone as 'The Commanding Officer,' shortened to 'CO,' but 'Captain' is right too, regardless of actual rank. In the modern day RN, our smallest commissioned warship is only a tiddly survey launch really (HMSML GLEANER), but there are auxiliary bits and pieces bigger than her without 'HMS.' Ship's boats and landing craft still fly a white ensign, but are not warships."

Similarly in the USN, according to a recently retired officer: "Is it a commissioned vessel? If not, he is the Officer In Charge (OIC). If it's a commissioned vessel, he is captain, regardless of rank. Thus, an officer in command of a commissioned vessel, whose rank is Lieutenant, is called 'Captain.' The big question is commissioned vessel vs. non-commissioned vessel. You can tell which is which from a distance because a commissioned vessel will be flying a

commissioning pennant. Smaller vessels: say your PBR (Patrol Boat Riverine) with nothing but enlisted on board, you'd have your Petty Officer In Charge (POIC). Still smaller, your motor whaleboat, you'd have your coxswain. Still smaller, your paint punt, you'd have 'Yo! Seaman Schmuckatelli! What the @#$# do you think yer doin?!'"

Historically in the RN, the proper formal address for a commissioned commanding officer below the rank of Captain was "Sir" or "Captain, Sir" for those below him in rank, just as it would have been for a Captain; "Mr. Jorkens" or "Lieutenant Jorkens" if the person was his superior. In general, and certainly when on duty, formality would be observed aboard ship. Informally, as for example during a run ashore, the form of address would depend on circumstances and the degree of friendship between individuals, as it would have between civilians.

Lieutenant RN writes: "We reserve 'Mr Whassisname' these days for Warrant Officers (Class 1 and 2) and Officer Cadets. You can call ratings Mr., but it is a little old fashioned. I am having to do it a bit at the moment because we are changing our ratings structure/job titles (again!) and I'm confused."

By custom in the RN, the senior rating in charge of a group of seamen engaged in particular duties held the title "Captain," as for instance "Captain of the hold," "Captain of the maintop," and so on.

Regarding the courtesy promotion of army Captains to "Major" when aboard a warship: This occurs in Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and has become usual for fictional purposes. A recently serving USN officer confirms that in his experience "[an army Captain] is referred to as 'Major Hackum' for the duration of his stay on board (bumped up one rank). Same for Marine Corps captains (equivalent to Army captains or Navy lieutenants)." It is only fair to add that another retired USN officer reports, "I have never seen the courtesy promotion Heinlein referred to," but it is possible that the situation did not happen to arise during his service.

I can find no evidence that such courtesy promotion was ever the custom in the RN. It would not be confusing to have two Captains Jorkens aboard one vessel, one in the RN and one in the Army, as might happen by a coincidence of surname: The RN officer would be just "the Captain," whereas the Army officer would be addressed and referred to as "Captain Jorkens," which is the Army custom. Similarly, if for some reason another Captain RN was aboard, he would be addressed and referred to as "Captain Hornblower" (as it might be) by an inferior or "Mr. Hornblower" by a superior or equal.

A serving RN officer writes: "I think we would call an army officer of the rank of Captain by rank and surname, something we would never need to do for our own CO. An additional Captain RN on board would present a problem best solved by introducing job title when referring to him, e.g., DFOST for Deputy Flag Officer Sea Training."

In the USN, "A Navy captain who isn't the vessel's commanding officer is called 'commodore' if he's aboard as part of the ship's company or as a passenger -- if they're having a party on board (with ice cream and cake) and there are a bunch of four-stripers, you'd be calling them all 'Captain.'"

The Master of an RN vessel was an officer whose sole business was the navigation of that vessel; he was appointed by the Commissioners of the Navy Board. His rank was equivalent to Lieutenant, but he was subordinate to Lieutenants in the chain of command aboard the vessel -- that is, they could give him orders if they were Officer of the Watch (commanding the vessel while the Captain took his watch below), rather than it being the other way about.

After 1674, the title "Master and Commander" was introduced as a rank between Lieutenant and Captain; it appears not to have been directly related to the position of Master, and it has since been abbreviated to Commander.

Lieutenant RN writes: "No Master any more as such, except as the shortening for the rank of Master at Arms, the equivalent of a Chief Petty Officer in the Service Police. The man who navigates is called 'The Navigating Officer,' 'The Navigator,' or commonly just 'Navs.' Used to be called 'Pilot' in WWII if films are correct, but that title we now reserve for either a pilot embarked to take one in or out of a port or the person who flies the helicopter."

The Master of a mercantile vessel is her captain, and the title Master refers to his having "taken his master's ticket."

Regarding civilians commanding British vessels that are not warships: The captain of a merchant vessel must hold his

"master's ticket." "Ticket" is the name given in the British merchant service to a certificate issued by the relevant government department (currently the Maritime and Coastguard Agency) after an examination into an officer's competence and experience. There are various levels of "ticket" indicating a seaman's competence for various positions: "extra master's," "master's," "mate's," "coastal navigator's," and so on. An officer will not be promoted "above his ticket" to a post for which he has not qualified by examination. His position is different from that of the skipper of a yacht for instance, because a ticket is not a legal requirement for a yachtsman in charge of a privately owned sailing vessel, and a yachtsman can call himself anything he wishes.

"Master" is also used in legal documents and at Boards of Enquiry to mean that person who is in command of a vessel or was in command at the time of the incident into which enquiry is being made, of whatever rank, whether Naval or civilian. However, this is a technical use designed to cover all the possible titles for a person in command and is not in general use outside the particular technical, legal situation.

In the context of civil aviation, "Captain" has no meaning in law. The formal term is "pilot in command." For example, the International Civil Aviation Organisation defines "pilot in command" as: "The pilot responsible for the operation and safety of the aircraft during flight time" (which includes all taxiing). The American FAA concurs: "The pilot in command of an aircraft is directly responsible for, and is the final authority as to, the operation of that aircraft." Similar provisions apply in other countries, but this responsibility does not extend beyond immediate operational concerns; for example, while a pilot in command may order the restraint of a passenger, he may only do so to the extent necessary to ensure the safety of the aircraft and may well find he faces a lawsuit after the incident is over.

The use of "captain" on aircraft originated with Pan American Airways in the 1930s; Juan Trippe, co-founder and president of the company, deliberately borrowed merchant-navy tradition for his "Clipper" flying-boat service in a bid to lure customers away from ocean liners to what was still considered a new and daring form of transport. The crews were put in naval-style uniforms rather than leather jackets, they processed formally aboard the aircraft, and they adopted naval terms of rank. The practice spread rapidly, and the airborne use of nautical terms such as "captain," "first officer," and "purser" is now universal even though they have no formal definitions in this context.

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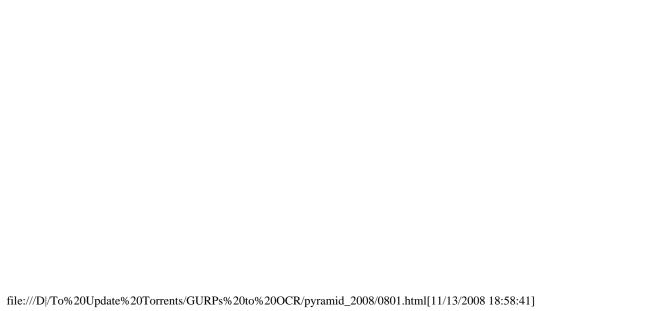
--by Chris Bell & Roger Burton West

* * *

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!

Sylvia Olivie, The Ghost Tour Guide

for *GURPS*

by N. Eric Phillips

Almost every city with a history has a ghost tour, where visitors go to sites to hear stories of spirits, murders, tragedies, and mysteries. From the horrors of the French Quarter in New Orleans, downtown Massachusetts, the oldest city of St. Augustine, and anywhere where a legend can live, there is ghost tour to entertain.

A ghost tour is also a great environment to pass information to the players during an adventure in games featuring supernatural themes. As the group searches for clues to a mystery, hints lead to the ghost tour as the answer. Someone might respond to the group's queries with "that sounds like a story I heard on that ghost tour."

Here, then, is a twist on one such tour guide, suitable for usage in many different urban settings.

The Tour

First, each member needs to buy a ticket, each costing between $15 and $30 depending on the tour's popularity. If they try and get information from the ticket seller, he will tell them that there are no freebies; all will be explained on the tour.

As the characters gather for their excursion into ghostly tales, they will meet their tour guide. Sylvia Olivie is a very thin woman in her early 30s, wearing a simple black sun-dress, with a cigarette hanging from her lower lip. She welcomes everyone to a night of legends, and begins the tour. The group moves from location to location, with each stop an interesting tale of the macabre.

If a player tries to push her for information about their quest, she will remind them that they have a limited time for the tour, and that there will be time for questions after the tour is over.

Finally, as they group marches past an old house on the way to the next stop, Sylvia tells them, "This old place is not part of the tour anymore, but may be of interest to you." She pushes the gate open and motions for them to approach the residence.

Inside they find the clue they were looking for. Leaving, they find the ghost tour has ended. Returning to the start point they find a few members of their group perusing the gift shop, but Sylvia is nowhere. If another member of the tour is asked she will not recognize the name Sylvia, instead responding with, "our guide was named Tracy." If asked to describe the tour guide they point out Tracy across the room. Tracy turns out to be a blond woman in jeans and a "ghost tour" t-shirt. If approached, Tracy remembers the characters on the tour, but leaving towards the end. She knows of no one named Sylvia, nor does anyone who works at the tour.

Making It Real

One of the challenges for the GM is to make the ghost tour as real as possible for the players. A couple of eerie ghost stories will go a long way toward this goal. Web searches for "true ghost stories" will turn up a wealth of interesting stories to use.

Who Is Sylvia?

As presented, Sylvia is a mystery without answer, wonderful for atmosphere. With a few changes, she can be more

integral part to the story.

Sylvia Returns: Sylvia may come back in another story, presenting information on another tour in another city. If the investigators have the means, they will discover she is a spirit or ghost herself. Eventually she might ask for a favor for all her help.

Revenge from the Grave: As a one-shot supporting character, Sylvia might be a ghost seeking to settle scores from beyond the grave. This idea works best best when the clue is very old. As the party investigates the old property they find the answer, and nearby they spy a photo from years ago: a photo of Sylvia in period dress, looking the same as she does today. A good ending would be to have the group see her in the shadows after the main adventure is over, nodding her head to them to thank them for resolving her pain.

Sylvia is Real: Instead of a ghost, Sylvia is a real person. The group can find her at the headquarters of the ghost tour. When confronted about how she knew what they were seeking she reveals she sometimes has visions, and can hear the thoughts of others. In the past she thought she was developing a mental disorder, but she soon found the visions were real. Though she cannot control the powers, while trying to get help someone became interested in her potential. They tried to kidnap her for secret research but her visions warned her away. Since then she has been in hiding. Now her visions tell her that the characters are the only ones who can help her.

In this case Sylvia would have several psionic abilities, though she has little training or control over them. Her powers would include Precognition, Psychometry and Telepathy. She has no talent in any of them (yet), and each has the limitation of Uncontrollable. The visions she gets are often terrifying for her as she experiences them. With time and the help of the gang she might learn to control her powers.

Here are *GURPS* statistics for this version of Sylvia.

Sylvia Oglivie   *100 points*

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]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Advantages

Mind Reading (Psionic; Uncontrollable (non-destructive power)) [24]; Precognition (Psionic; Uncontrollable (non-destructive power)) [20]; Psychometry (Psionic; Uncontrollable (non-destructive power)) [16].

Disadvantages

Enemy (Psionic Research Firm) (A large group (21-1,000 people)) (6 or less) [-15]; Wealth (Struggling) [-10].

Skills

Acting-11 (IQ-1) [1]; Area Knowledge (Local)-14 (IQ+2) [4]; Driving/TL8 (Automobile)-10 (DX+0) [2]; Fast-Talk-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Fortune-Telling (Tarot)-14 (IQ+2) [8]; Occultism-13 (IQ+1) [4]; Public Speaking (Storytelling)-14 (IQ+2) [4].

Steampunk Cyborgs

for *GURPS*

by Michael Kreuter

Steampunk has a bit more in common with cyberpunk than may be immediately obvious. Both are rather unrealistic views of a future, both can contain themes of oppression and a general "film-noir" feel, and both of them have cyborgs. What, you didn't think cyborgs were a big part of steampunk? Well, at least now there can be! This article presents a number of mechanical and clockwork bits that can replace a character's natural body parts, enabling "steamborgs" to be a greater part of your steampunk setting. Each provides different *GURPS* advantages and have certain other effects. Though each are given a cost in dollars, if the campaign requires character points to be charged for the advantages, the effective character point costs are given as well. Depending on how the campaign is structured, the GM might charge PCs one over the other, or possibly both.

Introducing steamborgs might have a number of different effects on the steampunk game world. Since these enhancements are rather expensive, they will probably be limited to the elite who wish to extend their lifespans. (Your heart can't fail as long as you remember to wind it daily!) Some may either envy them for their super-human bodies, but others may feel that what they are doing is unnatural; this article assumes a roughly divided reaction between positive and negative Reputation modifiers among different groups (effectively canceling out in point value).

On the other hand, if this technology were cheaper, rich entrepreneurs might purchase the "upgrades" for a large number of people, thus having access to a work force that is stronger and more enduring. If this were the case, those who receive steamborg technology may instead have a Social Stigma. But even if this happens, don't expect those who can afford it to skip on life-lengthening technology such as the lungs, heart, and kidneys.

Naturally, the other use for these is to replace body parts that are failing or missing. Such people may not have either a Stigma or Reputation, if the majority of people believe that this is a natural way to use our technology: to improve the lives of those who have been disabled.

That said, with an object like an Artificial Eye, some people may feel that this technology is blasphemous, as only miracle workers should be able to perform feats such as restoring sight to the blind. Such people may get a negative Reputation from religious groups.

In any event, before the GM adds steamborgs to the campaign, he should think about how it will affect the setting, just as he would with any other technological introductions.

Clockwork Heart TL(5+1)

The Universal Electric Company presents this miracle of modern engineering and precision tooling. Via ingenious clockwork and gold tubes, the heart's function is reproduced and this amazing device is presented as a replacement for fragile and weakened hearts. It is a revolution of modern medicine!

This device is slightly larger than an average heart, and is mostly made of brass gears and gold tubing. It is installed in place of a heart, requiring a three-hour surgery and a successful Surgery-3 roll. A critical success reduces this to two hours, while a failure adds two hours to the surgery. On a critical failure, complications occur and the subject is in danger of dying! (Another Surgery roll is required to get it under control, otherwise the subject does die.)

On the surface of the heart is a long tube that rotates to wind up a spring, which provides the power for the heart. A hole is cut in the chest, and this tube is fed through it. A key can be placed inside to wind it, and it needs to be wound daily, or whenever the character runs out of FP. Re-winding it takes five minutes and restores 1FP.

The heart provides +1 HT, and DR 1 (Vitals Only, Front Only, Tough Skin)(p. B46). If the GM wishes to charge character points, it costs 11 points. 3Lbs, $5,500

Iron Lungs TL(5+1)

This is another wondrous invention brought to you by engineers from the Universal Electric Company. This heavy bag is actually made of metal, but is still flexible enough to allow expansion and contraction associated with normal breathing. They're much sturdier than normal lungs, and are capable of a larger capacity. They include an advanced filtration system. Beautiful!

These "Iron Lungs" are a pair of lung-sized, gray metallic bags attached to the diaphragm to allow use as normal lungs. The bags are encased in a somewhat protective wire mesh, which provides the support for the bags.

Installing them requires a two-hour surgery and a successful Surgery-2 roll. A critical success reduces it to one hour, while a failure adds an hour. A critical failure means complications have occurred and another Surgery roll is required or the patient will be permanently damaged (-1 HT).

The lungs provide one level of Breath Holding (p. B41) as well as Filter Lungs (p. B55). This is the equivalent of 7 points. 5Lbs, $3,500

High-Filtration Kidneys TL(5+1)

Modern science has provided us with many miracles. Among them are the discovery of the innermost workings of the body. Such research has allowed Universal Electric to produce a synthetic kidney that is even more efficient than nature's! Become nearly immune to toxins!

These large (slightly larger than kidney-sized) metal boxes don't look like much, possessing two large stainless steel tubes, one marked "Input" and the other "Output." Universal Electric assures that inside the box are advanced filtration systems. It runs off of the body's own energy by hooking into the blood supply, which then flows through the filters.

Installing them requires a two-hour surgery and a successful Surgery roll. A critical success reduces it to one hour, while a failure adds two hours. A critical failure causes complications, and requires a successful Surgery roll or the patient is permanently injured (-1 HT). Once properly installed, the kidneys provide Resistant (Common: Poison, +3 to HT rolls)(p. B80), the equivalent of 5 points. 7Lbs, $2,500

Metal Arms TL(5+1)

These arms can attach to an empty socket, hooking onto the muscles and nerve endings that are left. Via clockwork and electricity, the arms are able to move just like your natural arm; amputees rejoice! This is one of Universal Electric's most successful endeavors accomplished, given the difficulty of simulating muscle movement. Now yours at competitive cost!

These heavy metal arms are filled with electric parts, clockwork and wires. Certain wires are attached to the nerve endings, for control of the arms. The clockwork needs to be wound daily, which takes five minutes, and the spring is in the shoulder. (For simplicity's sake, one can get a key that fits this and the Clockwork Heart, above.) The electric parts are powered by the clockwork.

They can be purchased to replace either one arm or both arms. Due to the fact that a large amount of the cost is involved in the surgery, replacing both arms isn't much more expensive than replacing one.

If one arm is replaced, it provides +1 ST (One Arm)(p. B40) and DR 2 (One Arm Only). This is the equivalent of 7 points after the disadvantage of One Arm (Mitigator: Artificial Arms -90%)(p. B147). If both arms are replaced, it provides +1 ST (Two Arms) and DR 2 (Arms Only), the equivalent of 8 points after the No Manipulators (Mitigator: Artificial Arms -90%)(p. B145) disadvantage.

Installing one arm takes two hours, while installing two arms takes three hours. Both require a successful Surgery roll. A critical success reduces the time by one hour while a failure adds one hour. A critical failure negates the +1 ST, and another surgery must be performed. 10lbs/arm.

Precision Mechanical Hand TL(5+1)

Designed to go with the Universal Electric Company's extraordinary Metal Arms, the Precision Mechanical Hand attaches in place of the usual hand on the Metal Arm. This hand was made with precision tooling and fine parts, and includes retractable screwdrivers and long grabbers, greatly improving manual dexterity. Marvelous!

These hands can either replace a natural hand or those on the Metal Arms above. Either way, both hands need to be replaced to receive the benefits. Once installed, they provide one level of High Manual Dexterity (p. B59), the equivalent of 5 points.

Replacing a normal hand requires a one-hour surgery and a successful Surgery roll. Critical success halves the time, while critical failure negates the advantage and imposes a -1 DX penalty when using fine manipulation. 5lbs, $2,500

Clockwork Legs TL(5+1)

Lost your legs in an accident? No problem! Universal Electric has your answer: fantastic clockwork legs! Currently available in two varieties: Standard and Running models. Stronger than normal legs, and the Running model is faster as well. Wind-up clockwork provides you plenty of energy to do what you need. Spectacular!

These clockwork legs are large, heavy, and monstrous things, filled with clockwork bits. Much like the arms, they attach to nerve endings with wires that transmit the electric signals in the body and translate them into movement. Both legs need to be replaced, or else there would be an imbalance.

Installing them requires three hours and a successful Surgery roll. A critical success halves the time, while a failure adds one hour. A critical failure negates the Lifting ST and adds one hour to the time.

The Standard model provides +1 Lifting ST (p. B65) and DR 2 (Legs Only), the equivalent of 8 points after the Legless (Mitigator: Artificial Legs -90%)(p. B141) disadvantage.

The Running model provides the above, but also Enhanced Move (Ground) for a total of 28 points.

Standard: $4,000, 20lbs
Running: $14,000, 28lbs

Artificial Eye TL(5+N)

The most amazing technology ever produced by Universal Electric! Utilizing special light-sensitive materials and advanced knowledge of how the eye works, we are happy to present you with artificial eyes. Restoring sight to the blind since 1879.

This glass eye goes into the eye socket and attaches to the optic nerves below. It is a very difficult surgery, requiring five hours and a successful Surgery-5 roll. Failure adds two hours to the time, while critical failure blinds the patient. Critical success subtracts one hour from the required time.

Once properly installed, the eyes provide Protected Sight (p. B78), one level of Acute Sight (p. B35), and DR 2 (Eyes), for the equivalent of 8 points. 0.1 lbs, $4,000

Additionally, lenses can be attached at a further cost, improving the sight of the eyes. Lenses screw in in under a minute and require no roll.

Aethersight Lens TL(5+N)

This lens for the Artificial Eye is made of materials that are actually sensitive to the Aether. Since every object interacts with the Aether, this allows the user to effectively see in the dark!

This lens for the Artificial Eye provides Dark Vision, the equivalent of 25 points. 0.01 lbs, $12,500

Infrared Lens TL(5+N) and Ultraviolet Lens TL(5+N)

Scientists have discovered "waves" of light that are not visible to us. But by finding materials that are sensitive to these waves, we can translate them to sight for our Artificial Eye!

These lenses for the Artificial Eye provide Infravision (p. B60) or Ultravision (p. B94) respectively, either the equivalent of 10 points. 0.01 lbs, $5,000

Telescopic Lens TL(5+1)

Ever need your field glasses, but were without them? Our new Telescopic Lens for the Artificial Eye solves this problem for you! Wonderful!

This lens has a telescoping lens on it, which allows the user to see in the distance as though it were closer. It effectively provides one level of Telescopic Vision (p. B92), for the equivalent of 5 points. 0.01 lbs, $2,500

Parabolic Ear Dish TL(5+1)

Bad hearing? We all get worse with the passage of time, but now you can do something about it! Installing this parabolic-shaped disc in your ear actually amplifies sound. Never ask people to repeat themselves again!

Installing this disc, which is precisely parabolic, is a very simple task, requiring only one hour and a successful Surgery roll. Failure only requires that the surgery be performed again, while critical failure means that the surgery must be performed again in 1d6 days.

Once installed, the dish provides one level of Acute Hearing (p. B35) and one level of Parabolic Hearing (p. B72), the equivalent of 6 points. 1 lb, $3,000.

The Nemorae of Emlyndaer

A Fantasy Ethnography

by Brett Evill

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a heroic reputation, must be in want of a wife."

In a neglected corner of the far northeast, a poor and hilly land of a few thousand square miles bulges defiantly into the Great Encircling Ocean. Or perhaps it is somewhere else; travelers' tales do get mixed up. Emlyndaer is far away, so naturally everything there is topsy-turvy. Among its people -- the Nemorae -- for a warrior to kill a monster, marry a princess, and inherit a kingdom is business as usual. Nemoraean adventurers in other lands (who are surprisingly numerous, what with the scarcity of dragons at home) think it unusual that we do things any other way.

Geography

Emlyndaer is a coastal country with a cool maritime climate; summers are mild and changeable, winters wet and cool. The mountains and high plains are shrouded in snow in the winter, but only one mountain, Brinn Noem, is snowcapped round the year.

The rocks are heavily-eroded limestones and sandstones making up a "dissected plateau." On the level of the ancient plain are hilltops, mesas, and tablelands spread with alpine meadowland. They are separated by sheer-sided, river-cut valleys and gorges, which wind to the sea on gradually-sloping bottoms. Minerals are scant, and the soils are thin, limy, and poor. Forests tend to fir, pine, and spruce on the slopes, but oak, beech, and chestnut are common in the valleys.

Economy

Around Emlyndaer's indented coast a minority of its people living by fishing, carrying nets to sea in curraghs covered with tallowed hides. Inland, the more typical Nemorae practice fixed transhumance, driving their sheep and cattle to the high pastures in summer, and stalling them in the valleys through winter. The climate is too cool and wet for wheat or barley, and the soils too limy for peas. They grow oats and some garden crops. Beehives and apple-orchards are important, but the main crop is hay and the chief foods are cheese, beef, mutton, and pork.

The cattle of the area are small and brown, giving rich (but not abundant) milk. The sheep are long-legged and black-faced. The white and blue-roan dogs of this region are huge shaggy beasts and are bred to protect the flocks from wolves and bears. The region's horses are a poor choice for cavalry, sturdy but not tall or fast; the land itself is similarly ill-suited for demanding horseback riding. The swine are practically wild. There are deer and chamois for hunting, plus several species such as ermine and beavers worth trapping for their pelts.

Some streambeds yield valuable chalcedony: agates, bloodstone, carnelian, and chrysoprase. This is exported for making cameos and seals. Jet and amber are found in small amounts. There are trifling deposits of bog ore that feed the local iron industry. Mining is otherwise rare. Some coastal areas produce a few freshwater pearls.

Clans of the Nemorae are largely self-sufficient, trading pelts and hides, excess food and wool, beeswax, medicinal herbs, and dyes for the few imports they need. Households make their own clothes, mead, and cider; slaughter their own meat; smoke their own bacon; and have at least a few men handy with axe, adze, and auger. Each clan has a smith, a potter, and a tanner. Trade volumes are small. Towns are few and far between, and cities are unknown.

Buildings

Nemoraean buildings are almost exclusively built of wood. Basements are rare, although druid-houses sometimes have cave entrances below or behind them. Roofs are shingled and steeply pitched to shed snow, and the walls are made of vertical slabs or staves of wood split from oak-trunks. Two-story buildings are common enough . . . not because land is dear, but because roofs are costly.

The residential and farm buildings of a household are arranged around a farmyard, with fences between them. Because of the risk of fire, the kitchen, bathhouse, and smokehouse are separate buildings. Besides its homestead in the valleys, each household also owns a summer house in the high pasture that is unoccupied during the winter; these homes are smaller and have fewer comforts.

The People

As befits their cool and cloudy land, the Nemorae are a pale-complexioned race. They tend to have red and golden hair, blue or green eyes, and long noses. Most are taller than the rest of the world, but they are not as heavy-set as some groups. Their aristocracy, the warrior class, are under heavy selection for prowess in battle, and tend to be more strongly built. The warrior class frequently marries those of foreign blood and therefore displays a wider range of coloring and physiognomy.

Society

The Nemoraean Household

The basic unit of society in Emlyndaer is the "household," a matriclan consisting of a group of related women and girls, together with their husbands and unmarried sons. Households are strictly exogamous and matrilocal: a man must marry into and join a different household than that which he was born in. The average size of a household is 90 to 100 people, consisting of twenty-odd married couples, and many more children than oldsters.

Nemoraean households live communally, in a complex of buildings that includes a dining hall, one or more residential buildings, a freestanding kitchen and a bathhouse, several storehouses, and associated farmyard buildings: cow byre, pigsties, henhouse, etc. Each married couple has a private room, but boys sleep in the dining hall and girls in the spinstery.

Households hold land, herds, and hives in common, and organize most productive activities collectively. Men tend herds, milk cattle, shear sheep, plant and harvest field crops, and mow hay. Women card, spin, and weave wool; make cheese; brew mead; prepare food; and make clothes. Even when they cooperate they tend to take different roles: at the annual slaughter the men kill and butcher the beasts while the women cure the meat and make bacon and sausages.

The head of a household is the most senior married woman, termed the "queen." Her husband, the "captain," is in charge of men's business. A queen and her husband lose their places if they divorce, if either of them dies, of if a more senior heiress marries. Paternity is unimportant to the Nemorae; a child or woman takes his status from his mother, and a married man takes his from his wife. Thus it doesn't matter who anyone's father is, and an unmarried mother faces no particular catastrophe.

The Clan

Households that hold adjacent lands are grouped into clans, which usually claim kinship in a vague way. The size of a clan ranges from five to 20 households (averaging about 10), and therefore from 500 to 2,000 people of all ages.

The homesteads of separate households in a clan are seldom clustered into a village. They are built for convenient access to scattered meadows in branching valleys. The shared life of a clan is lived not on a village common or in a

village square. Rather, common ground is reaffirmed in the annual journey to the summer pastures; in the work of the clan's craftsmen; in periodical festivities; and in the business of the druid-house, the chieftain's hall, and the *nemeton* (sacred enclosure, with bank and ditch and sometimes standing stones).

People of the common class seldom visit other clans, so they tend to marry people from other households in the same clan. The exceptions usually result from meetings in the high pasture in summer. A young man who marries a girl of a different clan perforce migrates into a society of strangers.

The Noble House

In each clan is one household above the others, the warrior house of the clan. Its homestead is usually central, adjacent to the druid-house, the smithy, and perhaps one or two other homesteads. This is usually much like other homesteads, except that its dining-hall, the chieftain's mead-hall of the clan, is more grandiose than usual, and is a public place of the clan.

The economic advantages of the warrior house are limited, and accrue mostly to the men. The Nemorae pay no taxes or rents, but the warrior house's herds are apportioned out among the commoner households to tend them in the pasture, milk them, and shear them, delivering cheese and wool to the owners' dairy and spinstery, and herds to their byres at the onset of winter. In addition, commoners do half the planting, harvest, mowing, and stacking of the warrior's crops and hay. This leaves the warriors free to hunt, to raise horses, and to teach their sons the arts of war.

The Children of the Gods

The Nemorae celebrate four great annual festivals, at which much sexual license prevails. The children begotten at these festivals (or who are passed off as being begotten then) are considered to be the children of the gods and divine principles that sponsor the feasts. Other children with extraordinary gifts and strange personal features may also be considered children of the gods. Children of the gods are sent at puberty to seminaries run by the Order of Druids. At the seminaries, children of the gods are trained in fortune-telling, medicine, magic, and theurgy. According to their accomplishments, the students may graduate as augurs, magi, or sacerdotes (the highest grade).

When they return to their clans, the augurs and magi rejoin their households. Sacerdotes are allowed to live in the druid-house so long as they remain nominally celibate: a married sacerdote or the mother of a living child must live in her (or his wife's) household.

The druid is the clan's leader in religious affairs and its representative to supernatural powers. He (sometimes she) has absolute authority over the druid-house and all who live there. When the druid dies, marries, or gives birth to a live child, the arch-druid of the tribe (see below) appoints an unmarried sacerdote to be the new druid. Widowed and divorced sacerdotes are eligible, but not favored. If there are no unmarried sacerdotes in the clan, the arch-druid appoints one from another clan.

Bards

The Nemorae are fond of music, and claim to have invented part singing in counterpoint. Most people know and can sing their appropriate parts (bass, baritone, tenor, or descant) in dozens of folk classics. Many can also play the harp, flute, or pipes. Young people who show exceptional promise in music may be nominated by the scald of their clan to the summer school of the College of Bards. Examinations are held at the annual Eisteddfod in the fall, and a student who passes becomes an ovate. An ovate may return for a second year of training, and on passing a second examination becomes a bard.

Bards have special privileges. They are entitled to limited hospitality at any chieftain's hall, including that of the chieftain of their own clan. Bards often wander about for at least a few years; the good ones can live on gifts from satisfied audiences for their wants. Lesser bards must peddle pins, needles, and ribbons to support themselves, and eventually abandon the calling.

A bard may return for a third year at the summer school, but it is generally advised that one prepare for several years before attempting this. At the end of this time he presents an original composition at the Eisteddfod. If this is deemed acceptable, he is acclaimed as a member of the College. Members have additional privileges: They are immune from any punishment by any chieftain or king except exile from his lands, and they are eligible for teaching positions at the summer school. On the other hand, they are forbidden from singing lovesongs and bawdy songs.

Each year, after the Eisteddfod, the fellows of the College elect three members to be new fellows. Any member who wishes to be considered a candidate must perform a new major work of his own composition at the Eisteddfod. Fellows have still greater privileges -- they are eligible to be examiners and judges at the Eisteddfod -- but they are further restricted to performing only "serious" music.

The tales told by bards are immensely important to the Nemorae for various reasons, and therefore a bard's truthfulness is a critical point of honor. If a bard lies and is discovered, the fellows will expel him from the College, revoking his privileges and immunities. If a fellow lies, the other fellows will put him to a humiliating and painful death.

Clothing Marks Status

The usual garment of a Nemoraean woman is a gown of woolen twill, with a fleece-lined mantle to go over it in the rain. Women of the warrior class can afford furs, expensive colors such as red, saffron, purple, and black, and may wear gowns of fine wool with a linen or even silk shift underneath it.

The usual garments of a Nemoraean man are a pair of high-waisted twilled wool trousers held up by leather suspenders, and over those a long-sleeved tunic belted around the waist. Warriors in rich households wear finer tunics and may add a linen shirt. The men's outer garment is a hooded cloak, sometimes of fine, oiled leather, fastened with a brooch. Fleece-lined or fur trousers, over-tunics, and cloaks are usual in winter.

Children of the gods wear brooches and belt-buckles decorated with acorn or oak-leaf motifs. The badge of a sacerdote is a silver oak-leaf brooch, and that of a druid a golden oak-leaf.

Warriors and bards cloaks are hooded, but they seldom wear the hood up. Instead, warriors wear hats, and bards wear "bonnets" (large berets). Warrior's hats are often affected from the costume of other cultures, and even men of great status may wear very shabby ones. Members of the College of Bards are privileged to wear red bonnets and harp-shaped brooches; fellows wear sky-blue bonnets and gold harp-brooches.

Government (Loosely Speaking)

Officials of the Clan

There are seven figures of authority in a Nemoraean clan: the chieftain, the queen, the champion, the dowager, the druid, the scald, and the hayward.

The queen is the central figure, though her actual authority extends only to the running of the warrior house. She is much like the queen of a commoner household, except that the rules of succession in the warrior house are different. The queen's husband is the chieftain, ruler of the clan inasfar as tradition and general liberties admit of anyone being ruled. Ideally, the dowager is her mother and the champion is her son-in-law; but things can get complicated if the queen has no married daughters, or if the queen's mother is not the only ex-queen in the house.

If the queen has no married daughters, then one of her brothers-in-law will be champion. Or if she has neither married daughters nor married sisters, one of her uncles-by-marriage. Or failing that, the husband of one of her first cousins, and so forth. If there are several men eligible to be champion the chieftain chooses the actual champion, and can change his choice at any time.

The most senior ex-queen is dowager. But if there is no ex-queen, the most senior widow of the warrior house is

dowager. Unlike the queen, the dowager is a ruler of the whole clan, and may be actually more influential than the chieftain.

When the chieftain or queen dies, or if they divorce, the champion becomes chieftain, his wife becomes queen, and he (as new chieftain) chooses a new champion. All seniority is reset. Unlike a commoner queen, the queen of a clan cannot be displaced by a more senior woman marrying.

The scald of a clan is the keeper of its lore and traditions, entitled to advise the chieftain, particularly concerning precedents. When the skald dies the bards of the clan elect one of themselves to be the new scald. Bards who have done well in contests have an advantage, as have members of the College, and fellows have a greater one. But the voters also take into account the candidate's character, knowledge of clan lore, and household affiliation.

The hayward is a representative of the commoners, whose duty is to advise the chieftain concerning pastoral matters. At the winter festival each commoner household elects a nominee other than its captain, its queen, and the current hayward, and of those one is chosen by lot to be the hayward for a year.

The Banquet Model of Government

Clan government is carried out in the chieftain's hall between sunset and dinner. The chieftain and the queen sit side-by-side on a large throne, with the dowager in a chair on the chieftain's right, the druid in a chair on the queen's left, and the scald sitting either on a stool or on the steps of the dais. Petitioners are marshaled by the champion, and each presents his complaint to the chieftain. The hayward, the scald, the druid, and the dowager are each entitled to advise the chieftain on each case, and when the arguments die down the chieftain delivers his decision. Executive and judicial business are not distinguished, and legislation consists of the chieftain thrashing out with the scald a policy that he is going to apply to such cases in future; this may, if his successors follow it, because part of the lore of the clan.

As a sign of approval or sympathy, the chieftain may invite a petitioner (or a defendant) to stay to dinner.

Government is carried on amid the racket of people setting up trestles for the dinner of the warrior house. If the business of court drags on too long, the nobles (including the chieftain) may get hungry and impatient.

Visiting bards appear and perform at the chieftain's hall at dinner-time, bringing news and sometimes messages from other chieftains or the king. The most important news is that which discusses the recent exploits of unmarried heroes. A good song and welcome news will earn the minstrel gifts besides his dinner.

On Clans and Tribes

Clans with adjacent lands (and usually shared dialect) are grouped into tribes, and in each tribe one clan is the royal clan. The chieftain of the royal clan is the king of the tribe, the champion of the royal clan is the war-lord of the tribe, and the scald of the royal clan is royal scald of the tribe. But the dowager, queen, and hayward of the royal clan have no special authority in the tribe. The druid of the royal clan may be (but most often is not) the arch-druid of the tribe.

The king settles disputes between the clans of his tribe and handles external relations. In return his household receives tribute from the warrior houses of the clans. Each year, from each clan, the king is presented with a cow with calf at heel, a ewe with lamb at heel, the king's own weight in oats and apples, and a gallon of honey. On special occasions in the king's reign (his accession, the marriage of his eldest daughter, the going-forth of his eldest son) he also receives gifts from the clans specified by tradition: a saddle from one perhaps, a sword from another, a hawk from another, etc.

One of the clan druids in each tribe is arch-druid of the tribe. When an arch-druid dies -- or marries, gives birth to a live child, or is chosen as a great druid -- the Third Druid (see "Great Druids" below) promotes another druid in the tribe to be the new arch-druid. Then the new arch-druid appoints a new druid to clan whose druid died (or whatever happened). Thus no one clan can provide two arch-druids in succession. The Third Druid tends to favor the druids of royal clans, nevertheless fewer than half of arch-druids are druids of their royal clans.

The High King of Emlyndaer

The high kingship of Emlyndaer is an almost purely nominal dignity, and yet one of great prestige. Nine great treasures belong to the high king, of which four are in the hall of the current high king, three in the custody of other tribes, and two missing. The high king neither wields much power, nor collects more than token tribute, but tribes and coalitions of tribes have fought over the high-kingship before now.

The high king is responsible for protecting the nation against disaster, so the tribes must follow his champion to war at his call. If disaster does befall then the Great Druids are charged with revoking the high-kingship and offer it to another tribe, and the treasures are supposed to be handed over. It is not unknown in history for the Great Druids to declare that they will give title to the Nine Treasures to the tribe of whatever hero saves the nation. Once an unmarried warrior won such a promise of the high kingship, and brought it to wife's tribe when he married . . . a very strange event by Nemoraean standards.

The Great Druids

The Order of Druids is led by five Great Druids: the Druid of the Well, the Druid of the Wood, the Third Druid, the Druid of the Peak, and the Druid of Smoke and Ashes. When a great druid dies (or marries, or bears a live child) the survivors move up the hierarchy in the order listed, and the new Druid of the Peak consults omens and then chooses some tribe's arch-druid to become the new Druid of the Well. That druid ceases to be druid of his clan and arch-druid of his tribe, and is replaced as though he had married.

The Third Druid travels constantly, under a *geas* never to sleep two nights in a row in the lands of the same clan. The others each have a druid-house in a certain mystic place. They meet at the House of Smoke and Ashes at the solstices, and on other occasions when summoned by the Druid of the Peak to appoint new arch-druids, depose high kings, and so on.

Warriors-Bachelor

A man cannot marry into his own household, so if a young man of the warrior class marries within his own clan that will entail a reduction of status to herdsman. To live in the manner to which he is accustomed, he must forsake the clan of his birth and seek a wife elsewhere. When he does so he takes neither wealth nor status with him. Thus he must win the favor of a bride and the approval of her parents and the dowager of her house, and he must do it by his personal qualities. Good birth, good looks, and charm will take him only so far. To get a comfortable billet in a royal house, or to stand a chance of succeeding as a chieftain or king, a name for prowess and cunning as a warrior is essential.

When he is full-grown, at the spring festival a young warrior sets forth on his first "campaign." Ambitious herdsmen may do the same. Their fathers or chieftains equip them as they can: a horse, a sword, and armor for a chieftain's son, perhaps; or a longbow and a leather jack for a herdsman. They become warriors-bachelor, and embark on a period of wandering. Alone, or with companions, or joining bachelor bands, they seek "the bubble reputation" even in the dragon's mouth. They hunt monsters, swarm upon invaders, and often sign on as mercenaries in foreign lands.

Many die, of course, especially of the ill-trained and lightly armed. Most of the rest marry junior maidens of minor warrior houses after a season or two of undistinguished campaigning. The ambitious, those who are encouraged by early success, and those who are so unfortunate as to love of girl of high standing often campaign for years on end, fighting for fame and trophies.

To win fame, warriors must have the help of bards; the relationship is reciprocal as bards' careers are enhanced by having good material to report. Bards therefore frequent the same places, and follow the same courses as warriors-bachelor do. When a band of young warriors sets off for foreign lands in search of deeds of derring-do, a bard will often travel with them.

Note that bards are by no means excluded from a little light heroism on their own accounts, and nor are augurs, magi, or even sacerdotes. (It is not possible to be both a druid and a chieftain as one cannot be both married and unmarried, but there is no harm in having two strings for your bow.)

Threats and Opportunities

The few easy routes through Emlyndaer are lined with the ruined castles and posting-houses of bygone attempts at subjugating the Nemorae, and the eastern borderlands are belted with abandoned fortresses and outposts built to hem them in. These ruins, the round barrows and stone huts of an earlier and forgotten people, and caves in the limestone all offer shelter to bandits, beasts, outlaws, and monsters. There are tree-giants and stone-giants, wolves, bears, cave-trolls, and cyclopes; even ghosts and draugr. Lycanthropy is endemic, though the Nemorae practice cremation, which prevents epidemics of vampirism.

For commoners these amount to a serious annoyance. For warriors-bachelor they are *not enough.* No sooner does the chieftain of the threatened clan turn out his warriors to face a threat than warriors-bachelor swarm from all over to convert the threat into an accomplishment. The bachelors are young and strong, skilled and well-equipped, and (given the popularity and accuracy of Nemoraean epic poetry, and the inclusion of bards and sacerdotes among the bachelors) surprisingly well-versed in monster lore. They massacre bandits, they slaughter ogres, they winkle trolls out of their dens, they they terminate plagues of werewolves.

There simply aren't enough opportunities in Emlyndaer for a band of warriors-bachelor to display the prowess and cunning that will get them really good marriages. The ambitious ones go abroad to make their names, often acting as mercenaries, pirates, or even as particularly flamboyant bandits. Trophies mean more to them than treasure. Nemorae do the most extraordinary things simply to get a name for doing them. They infiltrate castles, free captives, and overthrow tyrants to show they can. They kill dragons and capture cities not because it is easy, but because it is hard.

Authoritarian military states bordering on Emlyndaer don't last long.

The Nemorae in a Campaign

Emlyndaer can be used as a strange foreign land for PCs to visit: if they are unmarried and heroic the Nemorae will tacitly assume that they are in want of wives, which ought to afford a little material for a comedy of manners. Alternatively, it makes a splendid place for a PC to have come from if the player is keen on giving a conventional fantasy setting the "stranger in a strange land" treatment. You can set a whole campaign in Emlyndaer, either casting the heroes as foreign men with few social prospects in their own countries, or with the players portraying Nemoraean adventurers. Adventurers have a natural place in Nemoraean society, which is an advantage. Also, the complicated succession rules and parallel hierarchies of the royal governments, the Order of Druids, and the College of Bards offer a campaign rich in intrigue. But these advantages are lost on players who are not basically interested in portraying a character with a very different point of view.

This article has described Emlyndaer as a country in a fantasy world, but it is readily adapted to another genre of speculative fiction; the Nemorae could be the culture of a backwater planet in a science-fiction campaign, or occupy a distant land in a planetary romance, or even a hidden valley or isolated plateau in a "Lost Worlds" campaign. Adapting the costume and racial type to a different climate is easy, but you have to take a little care with the economy: Nemoraean social structure meshes poorly with an economy dependent on agriculture or skilled manufacturing.

If Emlyndaer is used in a fantasy world, the GM will have to work out how the Nemorae use the setting's model of magic, and how they relate to your gods (if any). If battle magic is widely practiced, warriors might teach it to their sons and daughters, and commoners might teach their children herding magic and household magic. The Order of Druids might teach magic to sacerdotes, or to sacerdotes and magi, or to magi only; and sacerdotes might use either arcane magic or divine magic, depending on how those things work in your world. And the College of Bards might teach musical or naming magic.

If your world allows that different peoples might have wholly different religions, the Nemorae could be pantheists who believe in reincarnation ("children of the gods" would be "children of the Oak"). But if your gods are active and universal then different sacerdotes might be dedicated to different gods and the intrigue over the druidical offices than much more complicated. And if gods send vocations to people other than the recognized children of the gods you might have non-druidical miracle-slingers, who would be natural adventurers.

The GM will have to decide whether each clan's druid-house and *nemeton* (its sacred clearing in the forest) have magical or spiritual properties. The *nemeton* is the ceremonial space, more likely to count as consecrated ground. The druid-house is more like a presbytery or monastery than a church; it is basically a residence, not a place for religious ceremony. On the other hand, it might contain the laboratory of generation upon generation of magicians, sacred treasures might be kept there, and its magical defences and curious features might have been built up over centuries.

Pyramid Review

Ticket to Ride: The Card Game

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Alan R. Moon

Illustrated by Julien Delval

96 Train cards, 46 Destination Ticket cards, 6 Big City Bonus cards, 12-page full-color multi-lingual rule booklet; $25

As its title suggests, ***Ticket to Ride: The Card Game*** is a new variant of the multi-award-winning ***[Ticket to Ride](#)***. The board game, which has gained the reputation of being an excellent "gateway game" by which people can be introduced to the advanced board game hobby, is known for its mechanical simplicity and ease-of-play, and these two factors, when combined, give ***Ticket to Ride: The Card Game*** quite something to live up to.

Designed for two to four players aged eight and up, ***Ticket to Ride: The Card Game*** has much the feel of the board game, but it adds a twist or two because the board itself is not present. Like the original board game, ***Ticket to Ride: The Card Game*** is still all about claiming railway routes running across the USA during the 1890s.

Inside the much smaller box -- in comparison with the board game, that is -- you will find the usual multi-lingual rulebook and 148 large, full color cards. Just like the board game, these cards are mostly divided between Train cards and Destination Ticket cards, and just like the board game, the Train cards are collected to claim the Destination Ticket cards, score points, and so win the game. A new card type is the Big City Bonus card, which awards points at game's end. These are similar to the board game's "Longest Route" card, which is awarded to the player who has connected the longest continuous line of American and Canadian cities. In the card game, the Big City Bonus cards are instead awarded to the players who make the greatest number of connections to the USA's largest metropolises -- Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and Seattle.

The Train cards make up the bulk of the game's cards. They are similar to the board game's Train cards in terms of their color and the wagons depicted. In addition, each color/wagon combination has an associated symbol, which also appears on the Destination Ticket cards, enabling someone with color blindness to play. As with the board game, the Locomotive card is actually a multi-color card (its symbol is a multi-petal star, rather than being a solid shape) and acts as a wild card during play.

Each Destination Ticket card lists two North American cities -- for example, Seattle-Atlanta or Dallas-New York. One of the cities always corresponds to a Big City Bonus card, although sometimes both do. Each Destination Ticket card also gives the number and color of Train cards needed to complete and claim that route, plus a points value awarded for completing the route. For example, the Seattle-Atlanta route requires one black, one green, one red, and one orange Train card to complete, and it will score a player 17 points. So the first real difference between the card game and the board game -- beyond the lack of a board -- is that you need different colored Train cards to claim a route, rather than a set of cards of just the one color.

At game's start, each player receives one Locomotive Card, seven random Train cards, and six Destination Ticket cards, of which he must keep at least one. Another five Train cards are dealt face up in the Draw Area, just as in the board game, while the Big City Bonus cards are put to one side. In order to get the Train cards needed to claim routes and score Destination Ticket cards, a player draws from those face up in the Draw Area or off the top of the Draw

Deck. He plays the cards face up from his hand onto the table in front of him in an area known as his Railyard, and then moves them from here face down into his "On-the-Track" stack where they will be safe. Of course, this cannot be done all in a single turn, and there is the danger that while a player has Train cards in his Railyard, they can be stolen by rival players.

A player's turn consists of two steps. In step one, he must take one Train card of each color in his Railyard and place them face down in his "On-the-Track" stack. If his Railyard is empty (as it is at game's start), this step is ignored. In step two, the player can perform one action from a choice of three. The first is to draw new Train cards, two either from those face up in the Draw Area or from the Draw Deck. If a Locomotive Card is taken from the Draw Area, it counts as if the player had drawn two cards, just as in the board game.

The second action is playing Train cards into his Railyard. This must be as a suit of two or more Train cards of the same color, or exactly three cards, each a different color. A suit must be played face up so that all of its cards are visible. Locomotive Cards can only be played as part of a single-color suit. A player cannot place Train cards into his Railyard if their color matches those already in Railyard or that of another player. He must wait until the cards of that color have been cleared and placed on the respective players' "On-the-Track" stacks in the first step of their turns.

Alternatively, a player can rob the Railyards of the other players. If he can place a suit of a single color containing more Train cards than an opponent has in his Railyard, he forces his opponent to discard the Train cards of that color from his Railyard. This is known as "Train Robbing."

The third and last action a player has in step two is the drawing of new Destination Ticket cards. He can draw up to four cards, and he may keep or discard as many of these as he likes.

Play progresses until the Train Deck is exhausted, after which everyone gets to play one last turn. Scores are then calculated, which involves each player matching the colors of his Train cards from his "On-the-Track" stack with the colors on his Destination Ticket Cards, with Locomotive cards working as wild cards. Completed Destination Ticket cards add to a player's score, while incomplete ones reduce it. In a four-player game, when the Train Deck is exhausted, players calculate their totals, and then continue playing with four new Destination Tickets and the Train Deck and the Destination Ticket Deck refreshed from the cards used so far. When the Train Deck is exhausted a second time, the new scores are added to the old, and then final tallying occurs.

Final scoring consists of each player determining how many of his Destination Tickets he completed that connect to each of the six Big Cities. The player with the most for each Big City receives its associated Big City Bonus card and adds it value to his score so far. The player with the highest total wins the game.

Ticket to Ride: The Card Game feels very much like the board game. After all, it has several concepts in common -- claiming routes, collecting color suits, and the draw mechanic. Yet there are also some very marked differences. The first is the need, over multiple turns, to move cards from the Railyard to the "On-the-Track" stack, which also makes a player vulnerable to the second difference, Train Robbing. The latter is not unlike claiming routes in the board game to block other players, but it is not permanent because a robbed player always has the opportunity to play more Train cards later. This also means that it is not as frustrating as blocking routes is in the board game, and further, it means that players interact more than in the board game.

The third difference is that Train cards go into a player's "On-the-Track" stack face down and cannot be examined until scoring at game's end. Playing *Ticket to Ride: The Card Game* becomes a test of a player's memory as he tries to match the Train cards that he thinks he has in his stack with the Destination Tickets in his hand. This also means that, unlike the board game, a player has no idea of either his score or his progress until the game's end. Of course, this rule could be dropped, but play would stagnate as players spent time shuffling through stacks to check Train cards against Destination Tickets, because that would be their only method of checking their progress.

As a two-player game, *Ticket to Ride: The Card Game* feels just too random. This was exacerbated by one particularly unpleasant rule. In the board game, when three or more Locomotive cards appear face up in the Draw Area, all five face up cards are discarded and redrawn. In the card game, this is not case and in one game, we ended up with five Locomotive cards face up in the Draw Area. If one player took one of these, it probably would have revealed

an ordinary colored Train card and so given the next player a choice (and thus an advantage) in what cards he could take in his turn. For us, we were stuck drawing cards blind from the draw deck, and we felt that the rest of the draw deck could have just been dealt between the two of us and the game ended there and then. This was one rule that we changed for subsequent play.

The other problem with ***Ticket to Ride: The Card Game*** is that its rulebook is underwritten and the rules not always clear. Primarily, there was some question as to how the cards are laid out in a player's Railyard and whether or not Train Robbing affects just the one opponent or all of them.

A three or four player game feels less random and has more scope for interaction. Indeed, much like the board game, more players makes ***Ticket to Ride: The Card Game*** a much tighter playing experience, as well as more vicious with a greater incidence of Train Robberies. It is also a longer game: For two players, it should last about 30 minutes, and double that with four players.

Ultimately, whether you are going to like ***Ticket to Ride: The Card Game*** depends on your reaction to its memory aspect and the aggressive nature of its Train Robberies. Devotees of the board game are likely to be put off by both, but personally, I like the interactive nature of the latter and dislike the blind nature of the former. Together though, they do make for a different playing experience and a different game than the other titles in the *Ticket to Ride* series. If I had never played the board game, it is probable that I would not feel quite so poorly disposed toward ***Ticket to Ride: The Card Game,*** but it is just not as enjoyable as the original ***Ticket to Ride.***

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Rock!

Published by [Out of the Box Publishing](#)

Designed by Anita Janes, Max Winter Osterhaus, Ellen Winter, Al Waller, Matt Mariani, & Mark Osterhaus

Illustrations & graphics by John Kovalic & Cathleen Quinn-Kinney

60 full-color cards & two rule sheets (English and Spanish) in a tin box; $9.95

Out of the Box Publishing has taken a lot of simple ideas from something small to something clever, and it doesn't get much simpler than a round of rock-paper-scissors. While the title has been somewhat abridged, the company has launched a card game called *Rock!,* which pretty much marks the first innovation for "Rochambeau" in the last 2,200 years.

The deck contains 60 cards, and these are divided into two even piles of 30. Two players each take a deck into a hand and simultaneously flip over their first cards so the pieces lie next to each other in the middle of the table.

(It's important to take a moment here to clear up a critical point: the rules to rock-paper-scissors. The participants both smack their fist into their hand three times. On the third strike, they form one of the three symbols. If the fist remains clenched, that's a "rock." If the middle and index fingers are extended, that counts as "scissors." And if the palm is flattened completely it's considered "paper." A rock symbol beats scissors because the stone can be used to smash the scissors, while the scissors beats paper because cutting paper is what they do. And the rock gets beaten by the paper because the latter "covers" the former and because the internal logic is lazy and not very imaginative.)

The cards in *Rock!* all show some form of rock, paper, or scissors. The first player to call out the winning card takes that trick (it's not important who played the "winning" card -- just who called it right first). If someone calls it wrong, the other player wins. For example, if a rock and paper card appear, the first to declare "paper" gets that throw ("throw" is what they call a round of the regular RPS game . . . *Pyramid* is nothing if not educational). The victor gets both cards and the next pair is drawn. If the two cards are the same, it's a tie and no one calls anything -- if someone tries, they forfeit the cards to their opponent.

When all 30 cards have been played out, both players count what they've taken in. Cards are the same as points, and the one with the most wins.

The cards aren't as thick as they could be -- in fact, it's kind of scary how thin these are. It comes in handy at shuffling time, but there's real danger in creasing a card accidentally when you take into account that players are going to be slapping cards down in the heat of the moment. (The playing of the cards doesn't have to be fast, just the speed of one's recognition, but try telling the players that.) Perversely, the tin the game comes in is a sturdy, handsome item with a lid that snaps on. It's not a tight fit; they call it a "travel tin" and it does seem to travel well, but it won't stay locked shut if one drops it from chest-level. One final irony -- be careful closing the tin because the cards and rules are a snug fit, and if the thin cards get caught in between . . .

The artwork is endearing and then some. Rather than simple pictures of rocks, sheets of paper, and scissors, they include Stonehenge, paper airplanes, Swiss Army knives . . . not every illustration is different but give them points for trying. Sadly, the artwork and the tin are the best features this item has to offer. With a cardboard frame and plastic

insert to display the game for buyers, it's sobering to realize more went into packing and marketing than giving the game real longevity. If it sounds limited or easily described, it is. It's nothing more than what it sounds, and only the count keeps someone from duplicating -- even improving on -- the effect with a standard deck of regulation playing cards. It's fun and funny exactly once, though fortunately the two-minute estimated playing time is a highballed figure (it's more like one, though pros can whittle that down to about 30 seconds).

Rock-paper-scissors has gained incredible popularity in the last few years, mostly as a one-note joke that won't die, and generating an intricate version of something so ridiculously straightforward is just the sort of thing Out of the Box excels at. If anyone could pull off a new spin, it would certainly be them. Alas, *Rock!* doesn't really rise above its "source material," and the underlying game is an inexpensive way to pay too much for what amounts to a gimmick.

-- Andy Vetromile

Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Unholy Piles of Bones

Amazingly, I've never told you the story of *Ravenloft* and bones. This is clearly an oversight . . . one which I'll rectify now.

Now, I confess that it's not *my* story. But it's the story of a dear friend (hi, Robert!), and I'm sure he wouldn't mind if I stole it.

Anyway, my friend was in a *Ravenloft* campaign being run by another friend, who shall remain nameless to protect the innocent (at least, as innocent as one can be after a couple of years of college). Anyway, the GM loved the idea of *Ravenloft,* but he didn't quite get the whole "horror" thing. This wasn't for lack of trying. He read the source material, he understood the rules, and he tried to keep the players engaged.

But his idea of interjecting "horror" into the campaign was to litter bones in every scene. We're not talking an atmospheric skull in the corner, or a femur that has a rat crawling through the ball socket. No, every scene had lots and lots of bones. Bones littering the street. Piles of bones in random corridors. Mountains of bones in important rooms. There was nothing else atmospheric *but* the bones.

The other players were all of the engineering-school sort, so they eventually noticed this and allowed their analytical natures to take over. The three most interesting realizations they came to were:

1. For there to be as many bones as had been described, the various kingdoms they encountered must have been occupied at one time about 100-fold over current populations, and all those extra citizenry must been been converted directly into usable bones.
2. Unless, of course, the bones weren't from any mundane source. They devised that one possible means of escaping the prison plane of Ravenloft was by somehow finding one of the conduits to the Elemental Plan of Bones that Ravenloft seemed to abut against.
3. Regardless, all available magic and spell-research efforts would be best utilized toward devising a spell of *transmute bones to fireball scrolls.* (Material component: 10,000 pounds of bones? No problem!)

Although it lasted a number of sessions, the *Ravenloft* campaign wasn't quite as successful as all parties involved might have wanted.

The biggest lesson I can take from this anecdote -- outside of the fact that I've wanted to include a spell of *transmute bones to fireball scrolls* in a silly game for years -- is that establishing atmosphere doesn't require that it be scooped on like a five-year-old left in charge of his own whipped topping for the first time ever. (There's the ancillary lesson of "don't be a one-trick pony when it comes to building atmosphere," but that's pretty straightforward.)

In general, one idea to consider when trying to build a setting is to try to use as *little* atmosphere as is necessary to establish the desired mood. For example, try describing an office using one fact to establish the desired mood:

- "The beige cubicles extend in all directions, and there's a background murmur of a typical workday. Within a few seconds of your entering the area, a smiling young man dressed in business-casual steps up and asks, 'Can I help you all with anything?'" (optimistic, reaffirming)
- "The beige cubicles extend in all directions, and there's a background murmur of a typical workday. The sound of no less than three nonstop printers churning out pages, coupled with the smell of their toner and the slight charge of ozone, gives you a slight headache." (hyper-busy, bustling)
- "The beige cubicles extend in all directions, and there's a background murmur of a typical workday. There's a faint sound of crying in the background that you can't pinpoint, which no one seems to notice or move toward." (oppression, sorrow)

Including too much atmosphere is a restatement of the "six-foot cockroach problem"; once you establish that "six-foot-tall pile of bones" equals "scary," it doesn't work to go to "12-foot-tall pile of bones" for "twice as scary." Likewise the

bustling atmosphere of having three printers churning can't be "ramped up" by doubling it to six; rather, additional details are the most economical way of amplifying the effect. ("You hear the constant ringing of digital telephone systems, all answered by the second ring with the uniform greeting, 'Thank you for calling Federated Incorporated'; the staccato effect of the phones answered at different time makes it sound like an office campfire round.")

When it comes to establishing anything in an RPG -- setting, character quirks, background history -- a little can go a long way. You can always add more later if if discover there a need or demand for more details. Or more bones.

--Steven Marsh

Mythic Alternates for *Infinite Worlds*

by Loki Carbis

One of the most closely held secrets of Infinity Patrol is the existence of worlds in which one or more myths are literally true. Not only does the mythic version of each world described in various **GURPS** sourcebooks exist, but alternate histories also exist for each of them. Perhaps fortunately, these alternate myth parallels tend to occur in skerries, which has the effect of making them less accessible to outtime penetration.

For obvious reasons, this information is considered to be among the most dangerous of all parts of the secret that could leak out. Just consider what might happen if Reich-5 learned of a Norse parallel, or if the Cabal learned of virtually any of them . . . although there are those in the Infinity Patrol who suspect that the Cabal may actually be responsible for the existence of some, if not all, of these alternates.

Except for the various Arthurian parallels, all of these worlds are considered Class Z by Infinity. The Arthurian worlds, with the exception of Marrok-1 (Class Z; see below for details), are Class R worlds.

The Mystery of Myth

The question of how exactly these alternate timelines come to exist in the first place is a vexing one. Although numerous mythic timelines have been catalogued by Infinity in the course of its explorations, most of them are characterized by extremely high resistance to change. In fact, the vast majority of them are paradox-proof, fixed timelines.

Logically, this would imply that changing them in such a way as to create alternates would require immense power, although it should be noted that the majority of these timelines are either High or Very High Mana (and some of them are what can only be described as Ludicrously High Mana). Given the nature of these timelines, the most likely sources of that power are either magical or spiritual in nature. The likeliest suspects, in no particular order, are as follows:

Gods: Especially trickster gods (such as Loki or Eris) or gods whose portfolios cover time in one way or another (such as Chronos or Yog Sothoth) have the power to create such alternate worlds. However, most gods are confined to a single timeline; any of the above listed gods, or others like them, breaking free to roam the infinite worlds would be a catastrophe.

Banestorms and Hellstorms: The mechanics of these events are still poorly understood at best, but it is clear that they involve conjunctions of separate timelines in some fashion, and thus it may be that they can also break other timelines.

Powerful magical items, most notably the Healer of Worlds (**Magic Items 3,** p. 70). Infinity and the Cabal are both constantly on the lookout for the pieces of this item.

Reality quakes: although if the current understanding of reality quakes is correct, they should be impossible on worlds with Fixed Time...

The Cabal: This is possibly the scariest idea of the lot. At this time, so far as can be determined, the Cabal has no connection with or knowledge of any of these worlds, and keeping them Secret is a priority.

The Norse Myth Skerry

Sif-1

On this parallel, a less-deeply-sleeping Sif prevented Loki from cutting off her hair. As a result, Loki never bargained with the dwarves Brokk and Eitri for its replacement -- and thus, the sequence of events that led to the creation of several of the great magical treasures of the Aesir, most notably Odin's spear Gungnir and Thor's hammer Mjolnir. Without these weapons to protect them, the Aesir are over-matched at Ragnarok. Instead of destroying the nine worlds entirely, the battle is lost by the gods, and the giants (under the command of Surtur) and dead men (under the command of Loki) conquer the world.

A hundred years later, this Myth parallel is a horrifying world of eternal night, ruled by the giants and the undead, split into several small kingdoms that constantly intrigue and skirmish with each other. Only the youngest sons of Odin -- Hermod, Vali and Vidar -- and the sons of Thor -- Magni, Modi and Ull -- live to reclaim the heritage of Asgard. But they, along with the precious few mortals who escaped the fires of Ragnarok, fight more for survival than anything else.

Balder-6

Frigga gets the mistletoe to promise not to harm Balder either. Invulnerable, the bright god is not slain by the treachery of Loki, and Ragnarok is (apparently) postponed indefinitely. However, the gods and their servants must ever be wary, as the temptations of Loki could always convince someone or something to rescind their promise.

Odin-2

Odin's sacrifice of himself to himself fails, and after hanging from Yggdrasil for nine days, he remains just as dead. Fortunately, Thor and Loki succeed in rescuing him from the clutches of Hel, and Loki later performs the same sacrifice with greater success. With his newfound wisdom, Loki's loyalty to Odin and the Aesir increases, and although he remains sharp-tongued and mischievous, his pranks are much less malicious thereafter. With both Loki and Balder fighting on the Aesir side, victory at Ragnorak is assured.

The Greek Myth Skerry

Troy-3

Unlike the other two Trojan parallels (which are at year 3 and year 7 of the ten-year war, respectively, and appear to contain no diversions from the established myth cycle), Troy-3 is an alternate. The point of divergence occurs shortly before the war itself. A more ruthless Odysseus sacrificed the life of his son to convince Agamemnon that he had indeed gone mad, and thus, he escaped going to war. But without Odysseus' wiles, the Greeks were also unable to recruit Achilles. Deprived of their best and brightest, the Greeks last only 4 and a half years before Hector succeeds in killing the Atreidae and scattering the rest of the Greek leaders.

The survivors returned home to discover that the supposed madman had not been idle in their absence. The peerless cunning of Odysseus has bound most of Greece to him in decidedly unequal trading and diplomatic agreements -- although his own wife, Penelope, enraged by his killing of their son, now leads an Amazonian guerilla army against him. The remains of the house of Atreus, led by Clytemnestra, are all that stands between the king of Ithaca and total dominion over Greece. But when the returning warriors learn what is going on, the situation erupts into outright civil war.

Two years before what would have been the end of the Trojan War, Greece and its colonies are still riven with discord, while the Olympians squabble amongst themselves and attempt to help their respective favorites. And across the Aegean, Hector, Aeneas and Paris plot a war of their own . . .

Daedelus-3

Icarus heeds his father, and the two make their escape successfully. After drifting around Greece for a time, they find a

home at Laertes' court in Ithaca, and an alchemical-industrial revolution led by Daedalus and his chief apprentice, Odysseus, has begun to transform this world beyond recognition -- while in Olympus, Athena and Hephaestus plot the overthrow of Zeus as their influence grows.

Hercules-8

Herakles fails to divine the secret to defeating the Hydra, and even his might falls beneath its ever-multiplying heads. As a result, Herakles does not sail with the Argo, and its voyage fails, robbing Greece of many of its greatest heroes, such as Theseus, Jason and the Discouri. Now monsters and tyrants rule almost all of Greece . . . and across the Aegean Sea, Priam of Troy plots his conquest.

Paris-1

Paris chooses Hera as the most beautiful goddess, and becomes the ruler of all Asia. Now Trojan civilization stretches from the Hellespont to Nippon, and as the great king's heirs -- each one with their own godly patron -- await his death, a continent-wide civil war threatens.

Paris-2

Paris chooses Athena as the most beautiful goddess, and becomes the wisest man in the world. Upon his visit to Sparta, he is attracted to Helen, but sensible enough to master his feelings, and instead negotiates a dynastic alliance with Menelaus that will be sealed with his marriage to Hermione. Unfortunately, in doing so he arouses the jealousies of both Agamemnon (whose son Orestes was to marry Hermione) and Odysseus (who was Athena's previous favourite). A Spartan war is brewing.

The Egyptian Myth Skerry

Isis-5

On Isis-5, when Isis was attempting to resurrect Osiris, she found all but one of the thirteen dismembered pieces of her husband. But in this timeline, the missing piece was not his generative organs, but rather his heart, the seat of the emotions, thoughts and will in Egyptian Myth. Refusing to resurrect Osiris as a mindless shell, Isis instead continues her search -- and Horus is never conceived.

In the absence of Osiris and Horus, other gods are more important. Thoth takes a greater leadership role, Sekhmet is the patron of warriors (not just of combat) and Set's role remains more equivocal. The lack of a king in heaven is reflected by turmoil in the human realm, and Amenhotep IV's monotheistic vision of Aten lives on for centuries after his death, and leads to a greater cultural blending of the Egyptian people with their Hebrew slaves, as the two monotheistic traditions slowly merge into one.

Of course, now that Isis has at long last found the missing piece, there are going to be some changes . . .

Sekhmet-1

In this world, after Ra and Apep struggled once more for rulership of the sky, and their human followers contended on the ground below, Ra was ultimately successful. But the appropriate rites were not observed, and Sekhmet, the bloodthirsty goddess of war, was not placated. Now all men grow quick to anger and fights break out over the smallest matters; it cannot be long before a war of all against all threatens the entire world . . .

Thoth-1

In this parallel, the resurrection of Osiris proceeded smoothly until Isis asked Thoth for the necessary words to

resurrect her husband. Thoth pretended to comply, but in fact gave her other words to speak - words that made him the ruler of the gods and all the earth. Now, thousands of years later, this one piece of trickery has led to an advanced, technologically superior Pharaonic Egypt ruling most of the world, still under the guidance of Thoth (and his ally, Anubis). But first contact with alien races is inevitable -- and their gods may not be so easily deceived.

The Aztec Myth Skerry

Cortes-7

Cortes-7 appeared to be a normal historical parallel until it reached the local date of 1519. In this parallel, when Hernan Cortes first set foot in Mexico, he was immediately transformed in body and mind, becoming a powerful and immortal avatar of Quetzalcoatl. Taking precedence over Moctezuma, the god used his powers and the knowledge he found in Cortes' mind to lead the Aztecs on a war of conquest up and down the Americas.

Within a hundred years, hearts were being cut out of sacrificial victims atop pyramids from Patagonia to Baffin Island. And understanding the technological advantages of the Spaniards, Quetzalcoatl has made the acquisition and reverse engineering of European technology -- particularly weaponry and shipping -- a priority.

Now at the local date of 1817, the Aztecs, still led by their immortal god-king, are poised to invade Spain itself.

Nanauatl-1

At the dawn of the Fifth World, when the gods attempt to decide between Tecciztecatl and Nanauatl, as candidates for the new sun, it is the wealthy Tecciztecatl, rather than the humble Nanauatl, that is chosen. Tecciztecal is a proud and arrogant sun, who burns men he deems insufficiently respectful to him; which unfortunately is nearly all men. Aztec society increasingly becomes nocturnal to avoid the malign sun, and only the werejaguar priests of Tezcatipoctla can resist its deadly rays.

Quetzal-2

At the creation of the earth, it is Quetzalcoatl's foot, not Tezcatlipoca's, that is eaten by the monstrous Cipactli. In later years, Tezcatlipoca is a god of more benevolent aspect, especially after his marriage to Xochiquetzal, who chose him over Tlaloc. Under the guidance of the twin gods, a kinder, gentler Aztec culture emerges. Aztec diplomacy and science unifies the Americas in time to meet with and form an alliance with Leifson's Vikings when they land in Vinland, and the spread of Christianity in Europe is balked.

The Arthurian Myth Skerry

Arthurian parallels, as noted in *GURPS Infinite Worlds* (p. 136), are among the most commonly occurring of the various myth parallels. And because Arthur's reign presents so many turning points, it has far more than its share of parallels, although almost all of those yet discovered are recognizably variants of one of the three "Camelot" timelines.

Guinevere-1

In this timeline (Q6, current date AD 430), the false Guinevere remains the Queen of England, and the Round Table is sundered, although amicably. In Britain, Arthur and his knights continue to rule wisely and justly, if with a certain malaise, while in France, the court of Lancelot and the true Guinevere continues to grow in importance and influence, and Lance's Knights of the Lake are becoming as well-known and widely-respected as those of the Round Table. Soon, the first tourney between the two orders will occur -- an occasion that the papacy, Morgan le Fay and numerous other opponents of each realm have been waiting for all too eagerly.

Marrok-1

A terrifying offshoot of Camelot-1, in which the werewolf curse of Sir Marrok proved infectious. One by one, Marrok has transformed nearly all the other knights of the Round Table into werewolves. Now, in the local year AD 453, only a few knights, notably Galahad and Percival, remain free of the curse. Arthur is missing, presumed dead, and only Merlin's magics stand any chance of stopping the lycanthropic plague -- if, that is, Nimue can be persuaded to free him . . .

Lucius-3

This timeline is marked by two major diversions from that of Camelot-1. First, Merlin succeeds in fending off Nimue when she tried to imprison him, and imprisons her instead. In 415 AD, when Arthur is crowned the Roman Emperor, Merlin persuades him to rule in person rather than through a regent. Arthur moves his capital to a rebuilt Benoic, in France, and as the years go by, his and Merlin's plans become ever more expansionist.

The Goddess Fortuna

for *GURPS*

by Michael Kreuter

There exists a goddess who is extremely powerful but fickle, cruel and wild. No sane person would worship her, as her nature makes her extremely dangerous. Eons ago, the other gods turned their backs on her and excluded her from the pantheon. The organized religious orders have banned her worship and deny that she even exists, except in an abstract way. Indeed, she is not even like the other gods; her domain is everything, her position is everywhere, her power absolute. The priests of the established pantheon are likely to kill anyone who they find devoted to her, and they occasionally even go on campaigns to seek out her followers and try them for their crimes: They are found guilty and executed on the spot by Judges of the Righteous.

Nevertheless, she gets a lot of prayers. Where there is a gambler, thief, ne'er-do-well or con artist, where someone is clinging on to a last hope or a lost cause, when someone is dying when they wish they weren't (or not dying when they wish they were), she is prayed to. While no one else is watching, she is honored, worshipped, and supplicated. Her temperament often makes this useless, for she doesn't care for trite formulas. Instead, she admires audacity, bravery, creativity, and cunning.

She is Fortuna -- luck, chance, fate, fortune. And she exists.

The Domains of Fortuna

Luck: Fortuna is the mistress of all things related to chance. She is probability, randomness, and happenstance. This is her most important aspect; her other areas of power stem from this. At her whim, dice roll as she pleases or cards are dealt a certain way. Even more sinisterly, a person could happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time just because of random chance. A wagon happens to hit a stone and the future king is thrown off and is adopted by commoners. The man someone is hired to kill turns out to be his father.

Decay: This is Fortuna's sinister side emphasized. The universe is in a constant state of decay, and her priests know this. The decay is guided by the logic of chance; as such, Fortuna can speed it up or slow it down as she wills. Her priests can tap into this power as long as she finds favor in them.

Priests and Worshippers of Fortuna

>Fortuna has "priests" and "priestesses," but they aren't officially sanctioned by her. Anyone can choose to call themselves a priest of Fortuna, but that doesn't mean she will endow them with any special favor. The opposite is far more common: If someone is favored by her, he may be considered her priest, regardless of whether he takes the title. Even considering the unpredictability of her patronage, those whom she is often fond of can gain great power over chance and probability, as well as decay.

Hierarchy in the church is loose and unstable. There is no official ranking, but those who are more favored by Fortuna are given more respect by the others. Note that due to her fickle nature, the priests Fortuna favors one day may change for any reason or no reason at all.

As they have to constantly worry about being discovered by the Judges of the Righteous, the priests of Fortuna do not have temples, nor are groups of them usually found gathered in one spot. They never openly adore her either, though it is widely agreed even among her priests that this would be a waste of effort.

Her worshippers are even more loose-knit. Given that she does not desire direct praise, it is hard to call oneself a worshipper of Fortuna anyway. But those who pray to her the most -- the gamblers and thieves, beggars and vagabonds -- they are her congregation.

Nonetheless, even relatively strait-laced and forthright citizens know of her existence. They are not as steadfast in their convictions, but when down on their luck and in desperate times, they too will offer up a prayer.

Judges of the Righteous

The other gods fear Fortuna and have excluded her from their pantheon. Besides the fact that she is so different from them, they restrict her because her power actually scares them. Rather than risk her fickle wrath coming down on them at irregular intervals, they have suppressed public worship of her in hopes of reducing her influence. Although they are very strong personally and can perform miracles, most other gods need disciples to carry out their will to the people, because they are not omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent. The other gods believe that a lack of followers can similarly reduce Fortuna's power.

This is one of the major things that scares them about Fortuna: She seems to be omnipresent and omnipotent; the effects of chance and decay appear to occur regardless of the efforts the pantheon makes against her and her followers. The gods still try, because there is something else they fear from her priests: Their magic is dangerous. It is subtle and nearly impossible to trace. Unreliability only makes it more hazardous in the hands of the unfavored, and creative uses make it extremely deadly in the hands of those who are. (And since she prefers those who are creative, this makes the situation even more alarming.)

This is the point of the Judges of the Righteous. They are warriors chosen by the priests of the pantheon to root out Fortuna's priests, try them for crimes against humanity, find them guilty, and execute them. The steps are not necessarily in that order, and the faster they get to the execution stage, the better. The Judges are ruthless, skilled, and often violent. They are rarely fine examples of devout holy men, but brutal killers with a thirst for blood. Pay for a Judge of the Righteous is extremely good indeed, and therefore they are mostly barbarous, greedy mercenaries.

Only occasionally do the rare ones among them, the bright and faithful, use magic of any sort. Even when they do it is direct and unsubtle, often taking the form of lightning bolts sent down from their gods, or blazing infernos swallowing up the guilty.

Priest of Fortuna Template   *46 points*

Attributes: ST 8 [-20]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 9 [-10].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 9 [0]; Basic Speed 4.75 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0].

Advantages: Clerical Investment 1 [5]. * 96 points chosen from among Daredevil [15], Honest Face [1], Innate Attack (Corrosion; Malediction +100%; Unreliable 11 or less, -20%) [16/level], Luck (Wishing, +100%; Unreliable 11 or less, -20%) [24] *or* Extraordinary Luck (Wishing, +100%; Unreliable 11 or less, -20%) [48] *or* Ridiculous Luck (Wishing, +100%; Unreliable 11 or less, -20%) [96], Serendipity [15/level], or Shtick [1].

Disadvantages: Enemies (Judges of the Righteous; Hunter; 9 or less) [-30] *and* Secret (Priest of Fortuna; Possible Death Results) [-30]. * *One* of Impulsiveness (9 or less) [-15], Trickster (12 or less) [-15], *or* Weirdness Magnet [-15].

Skills: 10 points chosen from among Acting, Disguise, Fast-Talk, Fortuna-Telling, Gambling, or Occultism, all (A) IQ-1 [1]; Thaumatology (VH) IQ-3 [1]; Theology or Hypnotism, both (H) IQ-2 [1]; Mind Block (A) Will-1 [1]; Autohypnosis, Dreaming, or Meditation, all (H) Will-2 [1]; or Detect Lies (H) Per-2 [1].

Judge of the Righteous Temple   126 points

Attributes: ST 14 [40], DX 12 [40], IQ 8 [-40], HT 13 [30]

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14 [0], Will 8 [0], Per 8 [0], FP 13 [0], Basic Speed 6.25 [0], Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: 60 points chosen from among Hard to Kill [2/level], Hard to Subdue [10], High Pain Threshold [10], Higher Purpose (Destroy all followers of Fortuna) [5], Damage Resistance [5/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Legal Enforcement Powers [10], or Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages: -80 points chosen from among Bad Temper [-10*], Bloodlust [-10*], Bully [-10*], Impulsive [-10*], Incurious [-5*], Obsession (Destroy all Followers of Fortuna) [-10*], Overconfidence [-5*], Sadism [-15*], Selfish [-5*], or Unluckiness [-10]

Skills: 15 points chosen from among Brawling, Crossbow, Fast-Draw (Knife), Fast-Draw (Sword), Forced Entry, or Knife, all (E) DX [1], Axe/Mace, Bow, Boxing, Broadsword, Two-Handed Axe/Mace, Two-Handed Sword, Wrestling, or Whip, all (A) DX-1 [1]; Judo, Karate, or Flail, all (H) DX-2 [1]; Armoury (A) IQ-1 [1].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Felix Nothus, a High Priest of Fortuna   322 points

It is said that Felix was born to Fortuna herself, who took human form and impregnated his mother. He denies this, saying that he knows his father and that he was a good man. The whispers continue, asserting that this story is just what he wants them to think.

Not to give credit to the tale, but his life has been rather blessed. His birth coincided with the end of a two-year draught and the beginning of a truly prosperous time for his family's farm. His father believed him to be a wonderful good-luck charm, and he would always bring the boy along to sell the produce. It was during one such market-day that would be fateful for all of them.

Felix's father was showing off his wares when a nobleman passed by the stand and bought an apple. It was so delicious that he asked the farmer to supply food for a grand party he was having. The next day, Felix's father showed up with his wife and Felix, then eight years old. They were all given wait-staff clothing and allowed to prepare and serve.

Felix, being so young, was excused from most of the duties. He mainly fetched drinks for nobles that found him charming. It was there that he met two important people, two priests of the pantheon: Lux and Sospes. Lux kept a wary eye on him, suspicious of his good fortune and disdainful of his brash nature. Sospes, on the other hand, delighted in both characteristics.

Felix forged a relationship with Sospes over the next few years. It was in the greatest confidence and secrecy that the priest revealed to Felix that he did not follow the pantheon, but instead was a worshipper of Fortuna with the audacity to openly join the accepted priesthood.

Somehow, Lux had caught such rumors of this, both Sospes' allegiance and his relationship with Felix. He was plotting to capture them both for questioning when, during a freak and sudden storm, a lightning bolt his the temple and burnt it to the ground, killing him.

ST 6 [-40]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 14 [80]; HT 14 [40].
Damage 1d-4/1d-3; BL 7.2 lbs.; HP 6 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 6.50[0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.

Advantages

Clerical Investment 3 [15]; Daredevil [15]; Innate Attack 6 (Corrosion; Malediction +100%; Unreliable 11 or less, -20%) [96]; Ridiculous Luck (Wishing, +100%; Unreliable 11 or less, -20%) [96]; Serendipity 2 [30]

Disadvantages

Enemies (Judges of the Righteous; Hunter; 9 or less) [-30]; Secret (Priest of Fortuna, Possible Death Results) [-30]; Impulsive [-10]

Skills

Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]; Detect Lies (H) Per-2 [1]; Disguise (A) IQ-1 [1]; Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1]; Fortuna-Telling (A) IQ-1 [1]; Gambling (A) IQ+2 [4]; Hypnotism (H) IQ-1 [2]; Meditation (H) Will-2 [1]; Mind Block (A) Will-1 [1]; Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]; Thaumatology (VH) IQ-1 [4]; Theology (H) IQ-1 [2]

Judge Lex, a Judge of the Righteous   *400 points*

Lex is one of the extremely dangerous kinds of Judges of the Righteous. He is smart and vengeful, having a personal reason to hate the followers of Fortuna. His father, Lux, was a priest of the pantheon, and he brought him up to be righteous, just, and kind. However, when he was 12 and his father was chasing down a follower of Fortuna, a freak lightning storm burned down the temple he was in, killing the older man. Lex immediately forgot the ideal of kindness but fervently reinforced in himself the principles of righteousness and justice. He always blamed Fortuna for his father's death, and he believed it to be divine will that he should destroy all her worshippers. He approached the elder-most priest of the pantheon, who consoled him about his father's death and asked to train as a Judge of the Righteous. Lex was surprised, but the young man proved to be an effective Judge.

ST 14 [40]; DX 16 [100]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 14 [40].
Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14 [0], Will 8 [0], Per 8 [0], FP 13 [0], Basic Speed 6.25 [0], Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages

Alcohol Tolerance [1]; Ambidexterity [5]; Clerical Investment 1 [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Damage Resistance 5 [25]; Danger Sense [15]; Hard to Kill 5 [10]; Hard to Subdue 5 [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Higher Purpose (Destroy all Followers of Fortuna) [5]; Innate Attack 4 (Burning, Surge +20%) [24]; Innate Attack 4 (Crushing, Incendiary +10%, Explosion +50%) [32]; Legal Enforcement Powers [10]; Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages

Incurious [-5]; Obsession (Destroy all followers of Fortuna) [-10]; Overconfidence [-5]; Unluckiness [-10].

Skills

Armoury (A) IQ-1 [1]; Bow (A) DX+2 [8]; Boxing (A) DX [4]; Brawling (E) DX+3 [8]; Crossbow (E) DX+2 [4]; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX [1]; Fast-Draw (Sword) (E) DX [1]; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]; Judo (H) DX-2 [1]; Karate (H) DX-2 [1]; Flail (H) DX-2 [1]; Broadsword (A) DX-1 [1]; Knife (E) DX [1]; Whip (A) DX-1 [1]; Axe/Mace (A) DX-1 [1]; Two-Handed Axe/Mace (A) DX-1 [1]; Two-Handed Sword (A) DX-1 [1]; Wrestling (A) DX-1 [1].

Using Fortuna in Your Campaign

Fortuna was designed with adaptability in mind. As written, the ideas and NPCs listed will fit into just about any fantasy setting where there is an established religion that has a large amount of social or political power. Other than that, the specifics can be altered any way that fits. Examples and suggestions appear below.

Worship of Fortuna is open and legal: This creates open friction between the established religion or religions and the Church of Fortuna. If either faction is powerful enough to be above the law, overt bloodshed may occur. If not, their actions will be carried out underground. Naturally, if one of the groups has public support, they can utilize that influence to flush out members of the other.

The opposing religion is a cult: Perhaps neither the cult of Fortuna nor the opposed religion is established and recognized. Alternatively, combining with the above, only the opposed church is a cult. If either is the case, the struggle will be secretive. In this instance, the cult of Fortuna could have public support and use that power against their enemies. More likely, both the religions will be cults, working without governmental knowledge. Whether either group is legal -- and whether their fighting is legal -- is up to the GM. This also works in a modern conspiracy setting, with both groups being occult secret societies. (The GM will have to adapt things a bit more for a modern setting; see below.)

The opposing group is not a religion: In some settings, especially a modern one, the opposed group won't be a religion, but perhaps a non-religious occult group or a governmental agency akin to the Men In Black. If this is the case, the GM may decide to have certain advantages come from high technology. Either or both religions are wrong -- maybe one of the religions, or both, are deluded. Fortuna may not exist, but perhaps neither do the deities of those against them. Where they get their powers, if they indeed have any, is unknown or unclear. Their fight becomes even more tragic.

Fortuna can be used in many different genres, too, with just a little tweaking. Suggestions for these appear below, including PC roles and adventure hooks.

Fantasy: This is the "default" genre for Fortuna and her followers, so the templates require no changing. PCs can be worshippers of Fortuna, attempting to avoid the Judges of the Righteous, or Judges themselves, hunting out the worshippers and bringing them to perceived justice. Alternatively, the PCs can be neither, but instead caught up in the crossfire. They could be accused of being followers of Fortuna by the Judges of the Righteous, or they could have been targeted by Fortuna on one of her fickle whims, and her followers could be exacting her retribution (or, again, perceived retribution) on the PCs. Maybe a priest of the pantheon hires the PCs to help him hunt out a particular priest of Fortuna who has been elusive. He might force them into it with social, political, or even physical might. Perhaps the priest of Fortuna then begs the PCs to help protect him!

Modern: For a modern game, the weapons skills will have to be updated to various rifle and pistol skills. The cults will probably have to be changed a bit, using one of the suggestions outlined above. The PCs might again be in either cult, or neither. Perhaps the heroes must protect the secrets of the cult of Fortuna while eluding the government agents that are after them. Or the investigators are the government agents, seeking out the cult's secrets.

Science Fiction: A science fiction game will be similar to a modern game, though the weapon skills may include beam weapons and force swords. The cult of Fortuna might use psionic-like powers, though not necessarily worshipping a goddess. (Or maybe they are!) Those who oppose them could be intergalactic agents. In the finest tradition of the genre, the PCs can be traveling scum -- mercenaries and smugglers -- who happen upon the cult on a backwater planet. Then the religious group might become the key to winning a war tearing through the galaxy, or it might be a terrible super weapon that threatens destruction of the universe!

Horror: In this genre, the PCs should not be in either group, because doing so would be too empowering to be horrifying. In fact, it could be even more effective if the players don't even know about either group in the beginning. However, tragic things can start happening to them without any apparent reason why, only to have them find out that the goddess of chance is upset with them. This can be horrific because of the nature of the magic involved: It is untraceable and subtle!

The Gambler in *GURPS*

by Rob Kamm

Only one man in a hundred plays poker by the odds. Luck's only important when you sit down with men who play as tight as you do. When I find that out I quit. That's gambling.
--Bret Maverick

Past articles, especially "[Bet on It](#)" and "[Appendix Z: Gambling & Dice Games in *GURPS*](#)" have examined how to model different types of gambling games in *GURPS.* These rules, presented for *GURPS Fourth Edition,* expand on those articles and look at creating a Gambler character.

Familiarity Bonus

The Gambling skill offers a bonus of +1 to +5 to Gambling for "familiarity with the game being played" (p. B197). This bonus is based on the character's level in another appropriate skill. Which skill offers this familiarity bonus depends on the game to be played. Card and dice games use an appropriate Games skill specialization. Sports book bets should be based on Current Affairs (Sports), an appropriate Animal Handling, or an IQ-based roll against the skill used in the contest. However, if a bettor cannot examine or watch the contestant for at least a few minutes, only the Current Affairs skill may be used. Hustlers working marks should use their Gambling skill as usual; skills like Hobby Skill (Pool) offer the bonus.

Roll against the appropriate skill to learn if a character gains the familiarity bonus. This roll should be waived for whomever chose the game or for other story reasons. A critical success is worth an additional +1 to the Familiarity bonus (see below), and a critical failure means that the character only thought he knew the game; he gets a -4.

Familiarity bonuses should be equal to the relative level with the skill up to the limit for the game. Billiards games allow up to +3, card games +2, dice games +1, lottery games +0, and sports book games +4.

Example: James joins a card game. He rolls against his Games (Card Games) skill of 15 (IQ+2), and realizes that he understands the game being played. He has a familiarity bonus of +2 (IQ+2 = +2, the maximum for card games). If he rolls a critical success, the bonus becomes +3.

Deception Games

Many card and a few dice games include an element of deception, often in the form of bluffing. Successful gamblers can both conceal their emotions and read those of others. A quick contest of Acting-2 and Body Language rolls are appropriate here, with the loser suffering a penalty equal to 1/2 the margin of victory (round up). Zero-sum games often have multiple players; in this case, roll each skill only once for each and use the average penalty.

It takes some time and play to learn another player's reactions. Do not apply this penalty for the first hour of play -- only in subsequent hours. Players with high Acting skills may try to show fake tells to throw the others off; this is subsumed in the Acting roll and does not require an additional roll.

Example: James (Acting 12), Jack (Body Language 15), and Roger (Body Language 13) are playing poker. James rolls a 13 to conceal his reactions; Jack and Roger an 11 and 15 (respectively) to read them. James missed his Acting-2 by 3. Jack made his Body Language attempt by 4, and Roger missed by 2. James' average penalty is [([-3 -4] + [-3 +2])/2 = -4]. He'd better know the game well or get very lucky!

Hustling

Some games pit one gambler against another in an all-or-nothing contest, pool being a classic example. When playing in tournament or head-to-head, Quick Contests are fine. Save Regular Contests to represent very important games. However, playing marks for money is a function of the Gambling skill.

Cheating

Sleight-of-Hand cheating is obvious, but it doesn't help with lottery or sports book betting. A successful Hold-Out roll before a card or dice game may also give a player a way to cheat. If the Hold-Out attempt is successful, add the degree of success to any subsequent Sleight-of-Hand attempts. Alternatively, this bonus may be split between several different cheating attempts to reflect the use of multiple extra cards, etc.

Other cheats include Mediums who persuade a ghostly confederate to affect play (Bonus to Gambling equals a Reaction roll -10). Telekinesis works in dice games and some lottery games (e.g. roulette or wheel of fortune); make an IQ roll. The bonus equals to the degree of success (maximum 4). Mind Reading is even more helpful because the person can read what the target is thinking, providing a +6 against a single opponent in zero-sum games.

Penetrating Vision lets you look through things, not the other side of them and is therefore not useful to card players! Likewise, Clairvoyance isn't helpful to a card player without enhancements that allow it to be used very quickly and without obviously concentrating on something other than the game. However, a clairvoyant confederate with a suitable means of communications would be worth +4 to any deception game.

Creating a Gambler

The first step to designing a gambler is to decide what kind of games you will play. A sports bookie requires a different set of skills and advantages than does a dice gamer.

Some thought should also be given to other traits. Cultural Familiarities are very important to gamblers who travel abroad, and lacking an appropriate one generates the usual -3 penalty. Failing to have a particular Cultural Familiarity will not prevent your other skills from granting familiarity bonuses to your Gambling skill. You know how to play similar games and can extrapolate from them, but you won't know the local strategies and variations.

There are some advantages that gamblers may find particularly valuable. Empaths and Sensitives get a +1/+2 to their Body Language skills with a successful check. A successful Intuition check grants a +2 to Sports Book games. High Manual Dexterity is natural for some kinds of cheating. Lightning Calculator is useful for some dice and card games (+1 bonus). GMs should decide if Lightning Calculator is relevant to a particular game, but if the mathematically inclined character gets to choose the contest, this bonus should be allowed. Bonuses from Single-Minded and Attentive work for most card games but are irrelevant to book, chance, dice games, and most hustles. Business Acumen Talent offers a bonus to Gambling, but may not be appropriate for all characters. Independent Income might represent some unusual winnings ("I won a share in the Dry Gulch silver mine back in '47"). Pitiable and the Honest Face perk help someone get into a game; they might also be helpful for folks who win too often. Eidetic Memory is useful for tile games (+2/+4). Finally, GMs should be creative about bonuses for Rapier Wit; +1 to Gambling for a successful check in competitions is appropriate.

Certain disadvantages are career stoppers. Easy to Read gives +4 on any attempt to use Body Language against the gambler. All but the simplest card and dice games are beyond the Innumerate, and most other games should suffer a -4 penalty. Killjoy's -3 to Gambling may be reduced to -1 in deception games because there are no emotions for others to read. Non-iconographic characters cannot process the graphics on cards; Games (Cards) and Gambling with cards cannot exceed default. Characters with Short Attention Span cannot gamble for more than a single hour at a time, and if the game requires concentration (like most card games and hustles, and some dice games), they suffer a -2 penalty. In bluffing games, Truthful characters must make a control roll to avoid an additional -2 to their Acting skill roll.

Other disadvantages limit your options at the table. Kleptomaniacs are not required to cheat, but they must make control rolls to avoid grabbing money from the table if everyone else gets distracted. Overconfident characters must

make the harder of a Will or Control roll to avoid chasing a loss and betting beyond their stake. Shy characters suffer their usual penalties, unless the game is moderated somehow (online, renting a private box at the arena, etc).

Common disadvantages include Debt, which might represent owing a share to a stake horse. Addictions and Alcoholism are typical in many settings. Reputations are highly variable, with frequency of appearance dependent on setting (photographs of modern gamblers are transmitted between casinos, a difficulty not encountered by card sharps in the Wild West). Known cheaters usually have a bad Reputation among other gamblers (a small- or medium-sized group depending on the campaign), worth -2 or worse (and can easily lead to violence).

Traits

Perks

Always Wins the Last (Hand/Throw/Game): Gives a +2 on the last (minimum 3) Gambling roll representing several hours of play. Select either card, dice, or hustling games. Multiple players at a game may claim this bonus.

Honest Face (p. B101): Allows a +1 to Reaction Rolls for finding a game. Hustlers get a +1 to their Gambling skill when playing marks.

Loud Mouth: You are obnoxious at the table, -1 to any Body Language attempt made on you while playing. Often accompanied by negative reputations from other players, and positive ones from spectators who enjoy your antics.

Lucky Shirt: When wearing a particular item of clothing you gain a +1 to your Gambling skill (no more than once per day or game if it runs more than 24 hours).

*Named Possession (**GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks,** p. 19):* In some settings, this might be applied to pool cues.

Poker Face: Gives a +2 to your Acting skill when trying to mask your emotions at the table.

*Equipment Bond (**GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks,** p. 9):* Pool sharps may take a variation of Weapon Bond with their favorite cue, with the bonus going to Hobby Skill.

New Talent

Card Sharp: Acting, Body Language, Gambling, and Observation. Reaction bonus: Other gamblers and fans of the game. *5 points/level.*

Gambler Template   *80 points*

You are a gambler, hustler, vagabond, or high roller. Life is best enjoyed at the track or seated at the green felt tables.

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

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: 30 points chosen from among DX 12 [20], IQ 13 [20], Appearance [variable], Business Acumen [5/level], Cardsharp [5 per level], Cultural Familiarity (Alien Culture) [1 each], Fashion Sense [5], High Manual Dexterity [5/level], Independent Income [variable], Less Sleep [2/level], Luck [variable], Signature Gear [variable], Wealth [variable], Alcohol Tolerance [1], Always wins the last (Hand/Throw/Game pick one) [1], Equipment Bond [1], Honest Face [1], Loud Mouth [1], Lucky Shirt [1], and Poker Face [1].

Disadvantages: 20 points chosen from among Addiction [varies], Alcoholism [-15 or -20], Appearance [-4 or -8], Charitable [-15*], Compulsive Gambling [-5*], Debt [variable], Fat [-3], Overconfidence [-5*], Overweight [-1], HT 9 [-10], Reputation [variable], Skinny [-5], Social Disease [-5], Unfit/Very Unfit [-5 or -15], Wealth [variable], Attentive [1], Congenial [1], or Habit (any) [1].

Skills: Gambling IQ+1 [4]. * 5 points chosen from among Carousing (E) HT [1]-10, Connoisseur (any) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Current Affairs (Travel) (E) IQ [1]-12, Disguise (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Escape (H) DX-2 [1]-9, Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Holdout (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Jumping (E) DX [1]-11, Law (Local) (H) IQ-2 [1]-10, Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-12, Savoir-Faire (Mafia) (E) IQ [1]-12, Sex Appeal (A) HT-1 [1]-9, Sleight of Hand (H) DX-2 [1]-9, Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-11. * *One* of these skills packages:

1. *Card Player:* Acting (A) IQ-1 [2]-11, Body Language (A) Per-1 [1]-11, Games (Cards) (E) IQ [2]-12.
2. *Dice Player:* Games (Dice) (E) IQ [1]-12 *and* raise Gambling to IQ+2 [4]-14.
3. *Sports Book:* Current Affairs (Sports) (E) IQ+2 [4]-14 *and* raise one Savoir-Faire skill to IQ+1 [2]-13.
4. *Hustler:* Hobby Skill (an appropriate game to play) IQ+2 [4]-14 or DX+2 [4]-13 *and* raise Fast-Talk to IQ [2]-12.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Pyramid Review

Felix: The Cat in the Sack

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Friedemann Friese

Rules by Henning Kröpke & Friedemann Friese

Graphics & layout by Maura Kalusky

Full-color boxed set with 55 cards (50 cards in five colors, four mouse cards, & one cat in the sack card), one wooden start player marker, 76 plastic mice/money tokens (68 black & eight green), & rule booklet; $14.95

Rio Grande Games has released plenty for animal lovers of late. Designer Michael Schacht alone is responsible for *Zooloretto, Coloretto,* and *Aquaretto.* However, *Felix: The Cat in the Sack* could be for cat fanciers or cat haters, depending how one spins it.

The object of the game is to have the most points at the end of the ninth round.

Three to five players use mice as bait to lure unsuspecting cats. Once captured, they're gathered in a sack (which hints at sociopathic tendencies, but it's hardly the strangest metaphor for a game) and auctioned off to the highest bidder. Each player has the same 10 cards consisting of cats (the nice ones are worth points while the scruffy losers have a negative value), a rabbit (worth nothing), and a pair of dogs. A random card is removed from each player's hand before play; not knowing what was discarded makes it harder to anticipate results.

Five common cards occupy the middle of the table, four mice cards (labeled two, three, four, and six), and one "cat in the sack" card. Mice are the currency in this game (they're also called points) and are represented by plastic tokens placed on those cards. A "first player" is chosen and he secretly selects a cat card from his hand. The second player places one next, and so on, forming a second line of cards (in a three-player game, "dummy" cards are placed randomly in line from an unused color). The first card in the row is revealed and the first player must bid tokens or pass; subsequent players must up the bid. If someone passes, he's out and takes the tokens from the next mouse card in line; the first to bail gets the two tokens from the two card, the second gets three, and so on. Furthermore, every time a player passes the next cat card is revealed, exposing more information about the contents of this sack.

The last person standing must pay his bid (everyone else gets their money back plus any mice they scored) and collect the cards. Any bunnies are worthless bluffs. If a big dog is played it chases away the highest-scoring cat in that set; the small dog does the same to the smallest feline. Two or more canines in one set chase each other playfully and ignore the cats entirely (the dogs are discarded). The bid winner then becomes the start player for the next set of cards.

After the ninth round, the game ends and everyone totals their score. Cute cats are worth points while the ugly moggies lower one's score. Remaining mouse tokens are counted as points. Whoever has the most wins the game, hefts his sacks full of mewling animals, and carts them away to goodness-knows what end.

The component mix is simple, but utile. The wooden "start player" counter is an amorphous blob apparently meant to be an open sack (leave it out in favor of, say, a coin and the whole affair might have fit in a slightly cheaper tuck box; perceived value gets its due here). The plastic mice tokens are a familiar sight to Tiddly-Winks fans, and the cards are

of average stock but above-average size. Kids will like the bold colors and easy-to-read and -handle format. The rules are simple and they do cover the big matters, but the editing and translation have left them with issues of their own. Reading them is the literary equivalent of being stuck in stop-and-go traffic.

If one likes card-counting games, this should please. A good memory is a sure advantage, even without the one card that's subtracted prior to commencement. Alas, for anyone not so blessed there's a definite feel of randomness to the whole thing. Educated guesses only carry one so far, and with all the possible combinations of what can happen within a single hand, strategy is a tough thing to pin down even in the short term. Being the start player is no small consideration either, so at least the action sees a lot of changeup. Playing time is around 20 minutes total.

Felix: The Cat in the Sack can still be compelling even if the thought players put into it doesn't always yield steady results. It's ideal for pitting adults against kids while introducing the young ones to another layer of math (no doubt the oversized cards are no accident), so while it may not bring the game group to the table it should bring the family together.

--Andy Vetromile

Do the Impossible, then Move on to the Tricky Stuff

For all you old-school, pre-Fourth Edition **Dungeons & Dragons** players out there: Why is the spell *magic missile* so popular?

Probably part of the answer stems from the fact that it is much more useful for starting wizards in standard dungeon crawls than most other spells.

"As you enter the room, a skeleton rises from the debris on the ground and swings an axe at you."
"Time to make my one spell count! *detect magic!*"
"Okay; you successfully discern the thing that killed you is, in fact, magical."
"**Yes!** Posthumous information is the new winning!"

However, there's one thing that *magic missile* had going for it that practically no other spell did: It didn't miss. And when you're dealing with your average "don't let the moderately sized rat kill me!" wizard, the ability to *never* miss with at least one spell is really compelling.

I've talked before about letting the players do impossible things as a reward or plot enhancer. But the same premise of "doing the impossible" can form the basis for an adventure, or even a campaign!

Probably the purest example I can point to with this is my classic (in my mind) campaign outline for the **d20 System** called "The Last Year of Your Lives." For those who haven't read it and have no interest, the basic premise is that the heroes discover they *can't die.* If they take enough damage to die, they just fall unconscious and regenerate. (Of course, the heroes also learn they only have a year with this amazing ability until they *do* die . . .)

There's fertile ground in the prospect of building a campaign around something impossible. One of the reasons that *Star Wars'* lightsabers sparked the imagination is that they seemed so unfathomable; they look and behave like swords, but they're compact, and seem to be able to cut through anything! Here, then, are a few more "impossible" ideas that popped into my head.

- In a sci-fi campaign, the heroes are "world hoppers"; that is to say, wherever they are, they can teleport instantaneously from one planet to another. There's no control about where on the world you end up, outside of the fact that it'll be (relatively) safe. Although where the hoppers end up tends to vary from week to week, it seems to be consistent within that week, and universal. (Thus a group of PC hoppers will all teleport as a group to the same spot on a new world, but if they teleport to Mars to Earth to Mars again, they'll end up roughly where they were when they teleported to Mars the first time.) Although it's an amazing -- impossible -- power, it's not all that unbalancing. Sure, you can avoid the week-long "jump" in a spaceship to get to another world, but if it takes you a week to navigate from "where are we?!" to a place of interest, then you don't come out *that* ahead.
- For whatever justification, the heroes are always in mental contact with one another. Always. (Presuming they're alive or conscious, of course.) Again, this power is impossible, it's neat, and it allows for adventure possibilities (and, no doubt, "get rich" schemes). But it's not much more empowering than cell phones and a really good cellular package. And, perhaps most intriguingly, it gives a great resolution for that age-old problem: "Let's split up." (The answer is, "Sure! But we'll *still* be there with you!") As an added possibility, maybe anything one member of the party *perceives* can also be perceived by everyone else; no more keeping secrets!
- What if anything in direct contact with the heroes is unbreakable, provided it's considered to be a single conceptual unit? For example, a sword could be swung indefinitely without fear of breaking. A pilot holding onto the wheel of a car could plow it into a building, leaving the car unharmed (although it may stop, if the building is too reinforced to make a hole for the four-wheeled intruder). An intimidating hitman PC could leap out a window with an information source, clutching him by the arm and demanding information before they hit the earth (which, of course, won't affect the victim). And so on. This is another possibility that is patently impossible, and encourages player creativity, but shouldn't be astronomically unbalancing. (Remember: Things you hold can't be broken. People who shoot you or swing swords at your exposed head can do just fine.)

Of course, when allowing folks to do the impossible, it's often good to limit it in *some* way, lest the game spiral out of control. In "The Last Year of Your Lives," the limiting factor is both the one- year hard limit and the soft limit that "ability to heal" doesn't mean "invulnerable to damage" (getting tossed into a volcano would be a *real* inconvenience). Each of the examples above has some aspect that keeps the ability in check in some fashion. Nevertheless, with a relatively minor impossible change, a game world can feel completely different. How different is a *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* campaign if the heroes are the only ones able to hop around the galaxy instantaneously? How much fresher is your standard dungeon crawl campaign if the adventurers can secretly communicate with each other in all circumstances? How different is a cyberpunk campaign with the "unbreakable object" power for the party?

Very often, when gaming groups try to find something new to play, they try making things more difficult for the PCs: "Sure, a western campaign is fun, but what if we add horror monsters . . . with *lasers!*" But it can be just as refreshing to ramp up the *heroes* instead and, in so doing, open up vistas and possibilities in what had seemed a tired genre.

So start looking at your world with impossible eyes. You might discover that *anything* is possible -- and fun.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Unhallowed Metropolis

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What if the dead rose in the Victorian era? How would the highly class-conscious society with its ritualized approach to death cope? Both questions that you would think should be answered by a Victorian era set Deadworld for ***[All Flesh Must Be Eaten,](#)*** but not so. Instead, and in the absence of such a Deadworld, both questions are answered in ***Unhallowed Metropolis,*** a post-apocalyptic, neo-Victorian RPG heavy on atmosphere and setting, but whose vision is never quite realized in terms of its mechanics.

The first outbreak of the Plague occurred in 1905, the dead rising and falling upon the teeming masses of the age's great urban centers. Millions died. Cities burned. Indeed, by 1920 it is thought that less than a third of the world's population still survived. In England, martial law was imposed, the military and the unions turning the remaining industrial facilities into great fortress. Even then, people were not safe, for when someone died, he was likely to rise as mindless animate a mere five minutes later. The process of Reclamation took decades, but one by one, the major cities were retaken, cleared of animates, and refortified against the bands of the undead that wandered the Wastelands.

Two centuries later and the society of the Neo-Victorian Age of 2105 is confined to these great cities, the effects of the Plague and the Reclamation has limited both social and scientific progress. Outside, the former bucolic countryside is a Wasteland, subject to the Blight that strangles all greenery. It is home only to the wandering bands of animates, some it is even thought directed by an unknown intelligence in the sepulchers that many un-reclaimed towns and cities have become. Inside the 50-foot walls of London millions live in desperate squalor, surviving on the vat-grown scop, fearful of another Plague outbreak, and spooked at the tales of vampires, ghouls, and other creatures rumored to reside in London's deep tunnels. Overhead crackle the great Tesla Towers lighting the constant smog and ash-laden air pumped out of the city's barely regulated industries and her great crematoria, where all of the recently dead are sent by law. The tower arrays broadcast the galvanic energy that powers both ordinary devices such as torches and radios, and the massive electro guns manned by the Deathwatch on London's walls that are used to fend off the frequent animate attacks. The Deathwatch is also tasked with putting down Plague Outbreaks and food riots alike. Everyone wears something against the choking air: for most a simple cloth mask, for the well-to-do and the wealthy a beautifully fashioned gasmask in a style that Unhallowed Metropolis defines as "Gasmask Chic." Only the aristocracy escapes the immediate need to send its dead to the crematoria, though a member of the Mourner's Guild is required to sit in silent vigil over the body lest it rise.

In terms of characters, ***Unhallowed Metropolis*** offers seven options, six of which are defined as Callings. The Aristocrat, the Criminal, and the Doctor can be found in any Victorian-set RPG. Particular to ***Unhallowed Metropolis*** are the Dhampir, the Mourner, and the Undertaker. The Dhampir is a half-human, half-vampire creature that ages

slowly and possessed of an alien grace and a violent hatred of the full undead. The Mourner -- invariably a celibate woman who has entered the "Quiet Service," the Mourner's Guild -- is perpetually in mourning dress (including a combat corset) and armed with the Exculpus, a heavy Kukri-like blade used to cleanly behead the risen dead, her duty to stand vigil over the recently deceased of the aristocracy and the wealthy. The Undertaker is a bounty hunter, licensed to exterminate the undead. Most are ex-members of the Deathwatch, others more rarely ex-Mourners, while the Scalphunter is unlicensed and must sell his bounty at a loss to licensed Undertakers.

Each calling provides its own Features. For example, the Undertaker receives the Features Familiarity: Animate -- does not need to make Fear tests against animates; Monster Hunter, which allows the Undertaker to substitute various stunts instead of specialities for his Occult skill, such as Mortifier (being able to impersonate an animate); and Tough, able to ignore the penalties of Serious Wounds. A Calling also provides several Qualities (Advantages), starting skills, and Assets. The seventh option is the customized character, not really a Calling as it lacks Features, although the rules suggest that Narrator can allow a customized to take elements from other Callings at his discretion.

Having selected a Calling, a player spends 25 points in five attributes and another 25 on skills, with both skills rated between one and five. For each skill level, a character can have a speciality -- for example, Convulsive-Shock Therapy for Psychology or Mortuary Law for Thanatology, or stunts for combat skills, such as Preferred Weapon or Riposte. These form part of a character's signature fighting style. A character can also have Qualities and Impediments such as Good Tasting (to the undead), Private Anatomy Theatre, or Syphilis. Finally a character purchases equipment.

To undertake an action or test in *Unhallowed Metropolis,* a player rolls two 10-sided dice and adds the appropriate attribute or skill to beat a Difficulty Factor. This raises a problem given that only the attribute or skill is added, not both, leaving a high chance of failure. For example, to beat a moderate Difficulty Factor of 11, a player must roll 8 or more, leaving a 30% chance of failing. It is worse in combat, where an opponent's Co-ordination attribute is added to the Difficulty Factor, or twice the attribute if he is evading. Skill specialities, Calling Features, Qualities, and Stunts do provide bonuses, but nevertheless, it does not feel that it is enough. This might be intentional.

Every character is morally corrupt, represented by three Paths: Physical, Desire, and Drive Corruption. A Path is rated between zero and five, but a character starts with a point in one Path, which he can never remove. For every point in a Path, he also suffers from an Affliction, such as Illness for Physical Corruption, Hedonist for Desire, and Dissolution for Drive. A character's highest Path is also the number of times per session a player can force a re-roll or Second Chance on any dice roll. If another Second Chance is needed beyond those allowed, a price must be paid; the increase of a Path by one point. Given the high failure rate of skill or attribute tests, the need for Second Chances is seductive and corruptive. A Path can also be increased by calling upon the Devil's Luck to survive a lethal situation or even through roleplaying.

Should a Path ever reach five, a character is doomed, but he can find Redemption and reduce his Paths; this can be roleplayed and Second Chances cannot be taken. The problem is not with the Corruption rules, *Unhallowed Metropolis* being intended as a tale of morality after all, but that the slide into corruption is so steep by design and characters are forced down this slide because the rules are written with a high failure rate.

Combat is deadly, and it's easier to determine damage than land the blow itself. Damage rolls are rolled on two 10-sided dice modified by location and weapon type, plus a character's Vitality attribute for melee weapons. For example, a cutlass' damage modifier is +3 while the Magwitch Gravedigger Shotgun's modifier is +9. Rolls of 12 or more inflict Serious Wounds, 17 or more Incapacitating Wounds, and 21 or more Fatal Wounds. Each wound inflicts various penalties, with Incapacitating Wounds also inflicting Complications, such as a torn muscle or collapsed lung. Oddly, these Complications take effect at the end of combat, not during.

The extensive equipment is wonderfully flavorsome, including weapons like the Schreck-Hutter Requieter, a high-velocity-stake-firing pneumatic rifle for use against vampires; and the Van Haller Lightning Gun, which rips an animate apart with galvanic energy. Doctors can purchase an Alchemical Lab or Artificial Womb; Undertakers may buy the Dust Kit for collecting evidence of a destroyed vampire for its bounty; and the injured can acquire prosthetics like the Oraculum (an eye capable of looking into the spirit world), the Rattler (a device to allow speech after the removal of a lung due to the smog), and Ticker, a clockwork heart that needs winding every six hours.

The undead in *Unhallowed Metropolis* come in various -- mostly familiar -- forms. They include the "fresh, decay, or desiccated" animate or zombie (plus the zombie lord, capable of directing zombie hordes; and the modular, able to control separate body parts), the vampire (feral or intelligent); the dhampiri; and the ghoul, a Lovecraftian creature thought to have been afflicted by the Blight, that ages into an immobile bloated thing. Ghouls live in tribes and can be found under London. Apart from the actual rules for each, much of this is presented as journal notes, giving it an overwritten feel and -- in the case of the dhampiri -- a sense of repetition.

The chapter on Neo-Victorian science does not suffer from this, but it does highlight *Unhallowed Metropolis'* emphasis on the biological and the alchemical over the physical, already hinted at in the lack of a Scientist Calling and the presence of the Doctor Calling. Neo-Victorian science is fascinated with a cure for the Plague, the recreation of life, and the hunt for the anti-aging Elixir Vitae. Medical science is highly advanced, capable of curing most diseases and replacing limbs . . . though only for the wealthy, of course. Included in the copious listing of drugs is a formulation known as "Hyde," which turns the imbiber temporarily into a 'thrope (or lycanthrope).

It also adds a new Calling though: the Anathema, an artificial -- almost human -- creature created by alchemists that is both more capable and more flawed. Alchemists can also create Homunculi, used as either laboratory assistants or menial workers; Lesser Homunculi, who are more animal than man; Mercurials, which are reanimated dead. Medical science also hunts for a way to create the perfect and easily controlled Thrope or supersoldier, previous experiments having escaped and gone feral. Lastly, Galvanists employ electricity to animate Prometheans, creatures stitched together from bodily parts. Both monsters and science are highly flavorful, as much a nod to the horror writers of the 19th century as they are to the creatures of Universal Horror.

Besides discussing the setting's antagonists, scandals, and plot seeds, the section for the Narrator also highlights several divides inherent to *Unhallowed Metropolis.* The first is between the combat capable characters (Dhampir/Mourner/Undertaker) and the non-combat-capable (Aristocrat/Criminal/Doctor), the latter left cowering during combat and the former left out of sight in social situations. This is certainly exacerbated with the game's emphasis on combat through its stunts, but the style of combat this encourages, along with the book's art, verges on the cinematic; the gritty mechanics just do not support this. The other divide is social. This isn't due just to conflict between lack of social stunts versus combat stunts, but also how do characters like the Aristocrat/Dhampir/Mourner come to associate with the Criminal/Doctor/Undertaker?

Physically, *Unhallowed Metropolis* is a good-looking book, with an interesting range of artwork that includes photography illustrating the game's Gasmask Chic. Particularly good are the anatomical illustrations of the undead. Unfortunately the book really, really needs an index, its absence making the oddly organized book difficult to use.

Unhallowed Metropolis never lacks for atmosphere or ideas, but it is difficult to know what to run with it. The social and combat divide does not help with this. Neither does the limited number of Callings. Given the setting, it would have been good to have Callings for the Detective, the Engineer/Scientist, the Psychic or Medium, and the Journalist, amongst others . . . or just a freer method of creating characters. Of those absent, the Detective is available as a download, and the Psychic and Medium will appear in the forthcoming supplement, *Unhallowed Necropolis.* And despite the setting being London, the city never quite comes alive. A map and more detail, such as newspapers and the like, would have helped. Further, although the monsters are nicely detailed, they are really just creatures to kill, and more of their secrets for the Narrator would also be useful, including information about the Sepulchres.

Were it not for the underpowered mechanics with their absolute necessity for the Second Chance rolls, the social/combat divide, and the lack of Callings, *Unhallowed Metropolis* would receive and deserve a thorough recommendation. Yet they mar an otherwise fantastic setting, which by itself is strong enough to receive that thorough recommendation. Do what you will with the mechanics -- modify or replace them -- for the Neo-Victorian Age of *Unhallowed Metropolis* is so rich, so evocative that you can almost feel the ash on your tongue.

--Matthew Pook

Hunter's Law

An Alternate Campaign Frame for *GURPS Black Ops* (or Other Modern Supernatural Campaigns)

by Nicholas Dowbiggin

The career of international mercenaries, infamous underworld figures, or freelancing intelligence operatives usually involves providing intelligence, security, and wetwork for anyone that can afford their price, against anyone these button men are pointed at. In the humdrum day-to-day life of such capable individuals with no allegiance, there might once come an opportunity where they are offered an unbelievable sum of untraceable assets, and the possibility of repeat employment, to provide such services for a man they will never meet doing something that sounds truly insane.

These are the stories of those who -- when confronted with said opportunity -- replied by saying "Double the price."

In the world of special ops, a darker vein of work exists just below the surface of everyday crime and extremism. In the past, these black ops were performed by highly dedicated agents working for the preservation of humanity. But in recent years a new breed of operative has been introduced into the secret war against paranormal threats to human civilization. These dogs of war have no flags, no ideals, and no law . . . except for that which they are paid to have by their employer, Mr. Hunter.

Hunter Who?

Mr. Hunter is a deux ex machina, a plot device that serves as the basis for alternate scenarios using ***GURPS Black Ops*** or any other game of modern world humans fighting a secret war against supernatural creatures. The PCs are high-profile cinematic anti-heroes, modern mercenaries one day hired to perform a mission that brings them kicking and screaming into the same type of covert operations against monsters and other strangeness that groups like The Company and illuminated conspiracies have been fighting on one side or the other throughout history.

This serves as a departure from the usual themes of such games, which include giving oneself wholly to a cause either willingly (such as those recruited into The Company) or unwillingly (in the case of those being manipulated by the shadowy cabals). By focusing the action on glamorous amoral freelancers, the tried-and-true themes of "government secrecy" and "losing one's humanity by peering too long into the abyss" are replaced with a devil-may-care attitude and high weirdness best characterized by films such as *Resevoir Dogs* and *Repo Man.* These unprepared freelance squads, called Trouble Teams, are unused to working together and previously unaware of the true existence of the paranormal; by doing so, the game is able to take on a tone of surreality which can serve to inject more comedy or horror (or both) into the modern genre of "man vs. monster" by blurring the absolutes that typically implies. Mr. Hunter might have his own noble or ignoble reasons for hiring the agents to high-kick vampires and destroy demon cults by any means necessary, but any agenda or morality will be completely lost to the "heroes" as they alternate between fear of the unknown and the thrill of hunting the most dangerous game of all, without the budgets and restrictions of behavior imposed on other black ops entities.

Hunter Gear

Trouble Teams have access to anything theoretically available in the modern world (TL8 and below), including any one-of-a-kind items that exist, or could theoretically exist, in the real world (such as the Hope Diamond or the body of Jimmy Hoffa). To curb embezzlement and global economic collapse, luxury items and liquid assets like gold and diamonds are rarely supplied, but the only complication with priceless items that can be easily tracked is picking them up. In theory Mr. Hunter has the wealth to purchase even things that traditional wisdom says can't be bought, but some

objects have stubborn handlers and will require the Trouble Team themselves to steal it, in which case the materials needed to do so will be provided. Gear granted to the team will always be of the highest quality unless requested otherwise. During missions everything is supplied for the team by Mr. Hunter's associates, allowing the agents to go anywhere and do anything, but likely not in the lap of luxury.

The more destructive or chaos-causing the object, the more likely the request will go through. In the field it's easier to get access to a magical ancient Zuni relic or a space shuttle than it is to get bags of gold or a deluxe suite with a hot tub. However, in between missions the agents are lavished upon with profane excesses and many unfathomable opulent gifts, from designer drugs that directly stimulate the brain's pleasure centers to harems of cloned A-list celebrities. Since money is often devalued in the eyes of those who work for a man like Mr. Hunter, these gifts that money cannot buy are used to keep them coming back for more insanely dangerous and unbelievable missions.

Direct contact with Mr. Hunter himself never occurs. Mercenaries are hired, organized into teams, and provided with directives, lodgings, transport, and requisitioned gear by business associates of the highest professional caliber, with corporate offices and private residences all over the world. There is no support structure to speak of. If the mercenaries need a magic spear or the [Large Hadron Collider](#) to complete their mission, they'll get it (or be told where they can get it for themselves) . . . but if they need to send something back to the lab to be analyzed or get intelligence on the area of operations, then they're out of luck.

Hunter's Blind

Besides unlimited material resources, the main mission-related benefit to working for Hunter is the influence and power available to those acting on his orders. Successful repeat operatives are given special signet rings to wear at all times, both on and off mission. Showing these rings gets them into five-star hotels and restaurants, past corporate security in all areas of international business, and encourages the police to look the other way for anything less than assassination of a public official or possession of a nuclear bomb (which is unfortunately likely to come up during the sorts of missions they're deployed upon as well, considering the resources at their disposal). When determining who among the members of normal society, from the highest to lowest strata, is bought and paid for by Mr. Hunter or one of his alternate identities, the sky is the limit.

This combination of material support, a lack of an organizational structure or mission intelligence, and the ability to literally get away with murder (without judgment by some shadowy committee like Argus either) provides the perfect recipe for chaos which provides all sorts of opportunities for both the GM and the players. A normal *Black Ops* game usually involves a considerable amount of effort or GM fiat to keep the conspiracy under wraps and the public unawares. But in the case of the Trouble Team they have no conspiracy to protect and could very well end up on a the nine o'clock news flying through a crowded city with a nuclear bomb suspended from their helicopter. Besides erupting society in chaos, the mercenary campaign frame allows for dangerous lifestyles even outside of the missions that would probably be beyond the average Company operative housed at The Academy. After all, without a conspiracy or an organization providing support, who's to say the Trouble Team won't be tracked back to their penthouse suite by the same vampires they tangled with a month ago in Paris, just as they were about to enjoy the benefits of working for the world's richest man? Finally, the diverse origins of the troubleshooters provides the opportunity for a wide and implausible variety of skills and specializations to emphasize the use of off-the-cuff plans rather than practiced doctrine against the bizarre enemies they will face. Whereas the traditional Black Ops get to use alpha-stage teleporters and special xenobiology training, the mercenaries will have to improvise with kung fu, free running, and whatever dangerous toy or exotic item it gets in their heads to ask for.

Hunter Be Hunted

The true identity of Mr. Hunter and his real motives can act as a gauge for the levels of horror, comedy, and general weirdness in the game. The more bizarre Mr. Hunter's objectives, the more lighthearted the game can become, as the mercenaries struggle to meet nonsensical demands that seem to have nothing to do with the basic mission of hindering their supernatural enemies and rival organizations. Unfair rewards and inner-party paranoia can go in the direction of creating fear or giving the players the opportunity to stab each other in the back in a way satirical of office politics.

There is an entire of genre of dark humor dealing with this sort of tone, which fits the mercenary campaign structure like a glove without resorting to orders to bring back the blood of virgins or whoopie cushions to inject additional scares or laughs into the game. Mr. Hunter's identity can also serve to create an overarching plot structure, as the team learns more and more about their employer's mission through their operations and intermittent contact through various levels of flunkies and middle men. Is he a current or former member of Argus who decided to fight the good fight his own way? Does he have a personal stake in the battle for control of Earth as the head of a secret society or member of an alien race? Or perhaps he's simply a man with an unimaginable amount of money and a fascination with some very odd trophies . . .

Alternate Hunters

Of course, a game in this frame doesn't have to be contemporary. If the nights of the modern day are getting too crowded, try different eras. There will always be a call for dauntless soldiers of fortune to do the impossible against the unthinkable in the service of the unknowable. The PCs could be in the service of Citizen Venator in ancient Rome, M. Chasseur in Enlightenment France, or other enigmatic and powerful men throughout the ages with their own agenda on how to deal with the horrors that have plagued human history. If other eras don't appeal to the group, try mixing and matching other modern high weirdness settings and scenarios. Add in a dash of *Warehouse 23* and Mr. Hunter could be using the Trouble Teams to amass his own personal collection of highly dangerous and unusual esoteric items by any means necessary. A pinch of *Atomic Horror* and the freelancers could very well be a new breed of bounty hunters tracking down and capturing cryptozoological specimens for their employer's private zoological garden. The mysterious and possibly eccentric nature of Mr. Hunter's requests also make the scenario and ideal choice for crossing over *Black Ops* with the bizarre secret war of *Illuminati.* Wherever there is weirdness there are countless hooks to involve people crazy enough to do outrageous things in order to capture or kill such phenomena for ungodly sums of money.

Super Social Traits

for *GURPS*

by Robert J. Grady

Comic book heroes and villains are larger than life, and warrant larger-than-life reactions from ordinary people. How do you define these traits in *GURPS* game terms? How do you quantify the advantages and disadvantages that come with being a recognized hero or villain?

Reputation

The average hero or villain will not have a Reputation. That may seem illogical at first, but most of the time, people react to who the character is, rather than an abstract measure of public esteem. People avoid fights with supers because they are physically powerful, cooperate with known do-gooders because they have Honesty, and despise villains who have Sadism because they are cruel. In a potential combat situation, a +1 to +5 reaction modifier applies for being more powerful, and using a large modifier for a super-powered hero against an ordinary person is entirely reasonable.

Who *does* have a reputation? Heroes and villains who operate in a particular region acquire a Reputation for that area. For instance, a hero based in a certain city gains a bonus for that city, while a nationally recognized super-team earns a reputation in that nation. Usually a +1 bonus suffices, with a +2 appropriate for a more extreme reputation (such as a terrifying vigilante, or a true paragon of goodness and justice).

Some heroes are actual celebrities. Characters who are extremely powerful are likely to be recognized by name by just about everyone, with a bonus ranging from +1 for someone who has been on the news repeatedly up to +4 for those who are heroes even among heroes . . . or villains among villains.

In general, Reputations, as a hero or villain, will be positive. Heroes inspire fear in their foes and admiration from the public, while super criminals intimidate law enforcement and attract followers, sycophants, and associates. A negative Reputation indicates either incompetence or hate. A hero with a negative Reputation may have been blamed for a disaster or may be reputed, justifiably or not, as being a dim bulb.

A villain with a negative Reputation is probably either a laughingstock, or is known for such randomness or destructive personal characteristics that no one would trust them, even for a moment, and even ordinary people oppose the person and attack him if at all possible. Cooperating with such an individual might be just as dangerous as trying to flee!

A Reputation may represent an antagonism; during a Cold War era game, Soviet and U.S. supers might regard each other with a -2 penalty, quickly resorting to name-calling or even blows. In less morally black-and-white settings, the above might be attenuated by circumstances, and some Reputations will be based on mundane kinds of celebrity. For instance, a speedster may have an enhanced reputation from starring in a reality show. A pattern of faux pas or unappealing personal characteristics can create a negative Reputation.

In general, most beginning supers can get by with no Reputation at all. Hometown heroes should consider a +1 or +2 in their usual haunting grounds. Characters who can and do stop invasions should probably have a global reputation worth at least +1, reflecting their influence. Members of recognized groups or agencies also benefit from a shared Reputation. Characters like Superman and Magneto probably have a +4 from everyone on Earth, all the time.

Social Regard

Social regard depends on *what* you are, not who, and so varies by campaign setting. In a classic Silver Age game, heroes and villains might warrant Respected and Feared, respectively, from anyone who sees them in costume or using their powers. Only quiet, stay-at-home supers would lack Social Regard in such a setting. In the postmodern setting of White Wolf's *Aberrant,* super-powered "novas" might all possess Feared 2, provoking a sense of awe from ordinary human beings; even respected celebrities and champions are regarded with reverence, not familiarity or comfort. In the *Wild Cards* books, people with powers are universally admired and envied, so anyone who is a genuine "ace" would have Respected 1.

In a setting where mutants or other people suffer from a Social Stigma, they cannot also enjoy Social Regard. Likewise, characters with a similar nature probably do not gain Social Regard. For instance, if mutants are feared and persecuted, then someone who acquired her powers in a freak radiation accident may be exempted from the Social Stigma, but she probably does not have Social Regard either (and some people may not make the distinction). However, powerful individuals with a very different background might have Social Regard. In the Marvel Universe, mutants are a persecuted minority, but Thor warrants Social Regard (Feared). People are simply not comfortable talking with a god. Not only is Thor different in nature from a human, but his existence may be theologically challenging to some religionists or disconcerting to believers in science. In the *Wild Cards* books, super-powered "aces" get Social Regard, deformed "jokers" get Social Stigma, and deuces (people with trivial powers) draw reactions according to their behavior and the prejudices of those they meet.

Social Stigma

In the Marvel universe, being a mutant is an invitation to prejudice and is worth a Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen). In an era of mutant registration or racial warfare, this could become Social Stigma (Minority Group). If the hero lives in a dystopian future where supers are the pawns of the government, take Social Stigma (Subjugated). In a future where psis or supers are subject to mandatory government service, Social Stigma (Valuable Property) might apply. A character of a very threatening nature, such as a demon or a "bio-energy vampire" might take Social Stigma (Monster) instead of -- or in addition to -- any of the above.

Obviously, supers can suffer from ordinary Social Stigmas, too. Kid sidekicks must endure Social Stigma (Minor), and there are plenty of places in the world where being the wrong ethnicity can still cause a lot of problems. Villains, of course, have Social Stigma (Criminal Record).

Status and Rank

In most cases, people in heroic or villainous identities have Status based on their position, and it's usually above average. Adventurers who belong to prominent super-teams or agencies probably have a little status from their Rank. For instance, an adventurer in a UN-backed super-team would have Administrative Rank, which could grant some free status. In other cases, it's the hero's secret identity that has the Status.

In some campaigns, simply being a super might be worth some Status, similar to what is described for Social Regard, above. In such a world, power individuals are the rulers, or fast becoming the rulers.

In a modern egalitarian society, characters will generally not have more than one or two points of Status independent of Rank. Possible sources of Status could include scientific research, being a licensed professional, or even a sanctioned hero.

Other Things That Influence Reactions

Classically, supers are very stylish characters. Appearance, Charisma, and Voice could apply . . . and don't forget Fashion Sense! Truly mythic characters might have all of those. Visibly scarred or freakish characters could have Unnatural Features and may suffer from a reduced Appearance. Heroic characters may have Honesty, at least in optimistic, four-color games. Villains might have Bully, Callous, or Sadism. Anyone could have Fanaticism or

Overconfidence.

Endless speech-making, ranting, fussing about minutia, mindless adherence to a name and costume theme, giggling, and shameless publicity-seeking could all be Odious Personal Habits. However, in some comics, people don't seem to mind all of those things, all of the time. In that case, such traits are simply Quirks.

Legal Enforcement Powers

A civilian hero has no Legal Enforcement Powers. Like an ordinary citizen, he can help out with natural disasters or use reasonable force to prevent crimes. If he flaunts the law -- for example, by breaking and entering or by using an illegal weapon (such as a sword in most modern locales, or a gun in many cities or most of Europe) -- the person becomes a criminal. A civilian hero has to justify his behavior to the civil and criminal authorities. Note that many jurisdictions can and will deputize heroes on a temporary basis when they are needed to deal with extraordinary threats; although such a status is fleeting and limited, it can protect the hero against many forms of liability.

Some heroes, especially those in Silver Age-inspired worlds, enjoy a good deal of cooperation from the police; they won't be arrested for trivial reasons. Effectively, they have a low level of Legal Enforcement Powers [5] with the Informal (-50%) limitation (*GURPS Supers,* p. 33). Note that this is a restriction in some ways. If a hero actively supports the police, he can taint evidence or violate civil rights through his actions, potentially harming the prosecution of a criminal case. Heroes acting independently are simply held to a reasonable standard of behavior, whereas the police are responsible for reining in their confederates and ensuring due process.

Heroes with some kind of special sanction, such as being part of a government agency or government-backed corporation, or holding a permanent special deputy status, have formal Legal Enforcement Powers [5]. In addition, local heroes and members of an official team have Administrative Rank, whereas members of a police force have Police Rank. In many cases, a hero's prestige outstrips their day-to-day duties. For instance, although a super-strong crimefighter probably does not command a squad of specialists, he does receive a fancy title and can get out of a lot of regular grunt work. In those cases, Courtesy Rank is applicable. For instance, if a group of high-powered, high-profile supers are recruited to form an elite response team within a large organization, they may all hold an Administrative Rank of 0 or 1, but a level of Courtesy Rank nearly that of the team administrator.

Only employees of actual law enforcement agencies will have Legal Enforcement Powers [10], and only members of a police state would have Legal Enforcement Powers [15]. Obviously, associates of international teams would be limited to Legal Enforcement Powers [10], but they would probably not have less than that, since they can frequently claim a higher legal authority than local government. Members of an international team of civilians, or an international team of emergency responders who routinely battle criminal groups, might have Legal Enforcement Powers [10] with Informal (-50%), reflecting that their right to intervene is respected, even though local authorities are under no requirement to cooperate.

Private investigators and security specialists do not have Legal Enforcement Powers, but they typically can carry and use a variety of devices and some weapons not available to the general public. To gain such a license requires a thorough background check and demonstrated competence (a relevant skill at 13 or more, Police Courtesy, a good Reputation, and so forth would go a long way). Furthermore, it can be revoked immediately for violations of the law, especially breaking and entering. However, PIs or guards who respect the law and the police can expect to be well-treated by the law and the courts. Carrying a sword, nunchaku, staff, or the like would require this kind of license at a minimum. This kind of license costs no points; its advantages (minor and specific) are largely cancelled out by the requirements of holding the license, like many other professions.

Legal Immunity

Members of international hero teams or special national agencies might have Legal Immunity [5]. If they are accorded the right to maintain a secret identity and to avoid searches, mask checks, and so forth, this is equivalent to a diplomatic pouch [+5]. Some individuals are so formidable and revered they effectively have Diplomatic Immunity at

some level, with the Informal (-50%) limitation. For instance, no one would think of arresting Superman for anything unless they were just looking for trouble.

Sometimes, supers have legal immunity for mundane reasons. Marvel's Black Panther, for instance, is ruler of Wakanda, while Doctor Doom rules Latveria. In the *Batman* story line *A Death in the Family,* the Joker becomes a professional diplomat, temporarily halting his arrest and prosecution.

Security Clearance

Some supers have a security clearance as part of their job. For instance, a government-backed team might have a security clearance for NSA and Homeland Security databases related to crime, natural disasters, and supers. In other situations, the arrangement is more informal. For instance, Captain America has Security Clearance (Informal, -50%) with a number of institutions, simply because he has a sufficient Status and Reputation to make people want to help him. While other heroes function on a "prove that you need to know" basis, people often assume Captain America needs to know.

Villains can also have Security Clearance. They may be working for rogue government agencies, representatives of hostile governments, or even associates of criminal cartels, megacorporations, or alien invaders.

Most heroes do not have Security Clearance. They usually have the information they need as a result of their Legal Enforcement Powers and Rank. Those lacking both probably also lack official connections.

Secret

A secret identity is a common Secret, but far from the only one. Other secrets for heroes include a criminal past, the circumstances that granted them their powers, previous misuses of their powers, or personal characteristics they would not want known to the public at large. They could be related to or formerly involved with a villain; they may even have let him escape in the past.

Agents of recognized teams or government agencies do not have Secrets, except for those their employer lets them keep. If a member of the team has a truly problematic Secret their boss does not know about, they are vulnerable to blackmail and are nearly certain to be unmasked eventually.

Sometimes, people are secretly clones or alternate timeline replacements. This can prove jarring to people they have deceived, whether a good justification for the charade existed or not. Being a clone and not knowing it is a Secret Disadvantage (p.B120). However, if the player knows this and the character does not, it's a Delusion ("I am the real X") [-10].

Duty

In general, freelancer heroes do not have a Duty. Members of an organization do, even if it's just to their employer.

A simple alliance is not normally a Duty. Instead, the group of people are bound together by common interest.

Villains can also have Duties. They may be lackeys of corrupt agencies or foreign despotisms, or they may belong to close-knit criminal societies. Some may even rule small countries (often fictional in the real world) and have a certain obligation to perform at least minimally as a head of state.

Examples

Here are some general examples of suitable advantages and disadvantages for various kinds of super characters based on campaign style.

Golden Age Adventurers

In the early comic books, common origins were rare, and a hero's style tended to be more individual rather than the standard capes-and-tights superhero the genre eventually gravitated toward.

Mystery Man or Woman: A civilian do-gooder with a secret identity would have Secret [-10 to -30], with the consequences of unmasking ranging from a total disruption of the hero's civilian life and possible misdemeanor charges to prison time for breaking and entering to assassination by vengeful mobsters. A well-established hero might have a +1 or +2 Reputation locally.

Lawman: An extraordinary detective, G-Man, marshal, or the like, these heroes have Legal Enforcement Powers [5 or 10], Police Rank [Varies], and Duty [Varies]. Being a G-man is worth at least a +1 Reputation by itself, and this type of character often commands a higher bonus based on his personal reputation. Some may have Legal Immunity (Informal, -50%) [3], if their clout allows them to ignore technicalities and finesse the courts. The agency is a dependable Patron.

Private Eye: Being a private detective offers at best a justification for a Reputation. A successful investigator might have a +1 Reputation among the criminal and corrupt. His Reputation with the police may be positive or negative, depending on whether the private eye is seen as an asset or an amateur glory hound. Private detectives or reporters with a good rapport with the police may benefit from Security Clearance [5], allowing them to visit crime scenes and talk with the chief of police and the coroner.

Patriot: Patriots are a special agent of the government, probably military intelligence or military police, a federal marshal, or even an appointee of the president or Congress. Appropriate traits include Administrative, Police, or Military Rank 3 or more [Varies]; Legal Enforcement Powers [10, or 15 in a police state]; Legal Immunity [20]; and Duty (Extremely Hazardous) [Varies]. Being a national agent is worth a minimum of a +2 Reputation; for those who are secret agents, this applies to their political and intelligence colleagues. The hero's identity is not a Secret, as being killed in the line of duty is just part of the job description. In fact, an Alternate Identity [15] might be provided as a courtesy. However, the character might have an Enemy and a formidable Patron (Almost all the time; Equipment, +100%; Special Abilities, +50%) [270].

Vigilante: The vigilante seeks and punishes the guilty whom the law won't touch. They most likely have Secret (Vigilante) [-30]. A crusader of any talent warrants a +2 Reputation. Contact or Security Clearance (Informal, -50%) [3] could represent knowing someone on the inside of a law enforcement agency.

Adventurer: Not exactly a costumed super, this person is someone who uses his natural talents or powers for good. This is basically just a positive Reputation.

Villain: Generally, Secret [-20] applies . . . make that [-30] for cop-killers, conspirators, or terrorists for someone harboring a secret identity. Otherwise, the person is occasionally hunted by the appropriate law enforcement agency, which is an Enemy and possibly one or more heroes. Being a famous villain is worth about a +1 Reputation, with the awe of his criminal might balanced by disdain from honest citizens. Being a convicted criminal is a Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5]. A criminal that doesn't "pass" in normal society suffers from Status -1 [-5]. A member of a criminal cartel might have Criminal Rank and might (or might not) be lucky enough to count the cartel as a Patron.

Silver Age Super Buddies

Here are some examples of heroes of the Silver Age of comics, abiding by the Comics Code. Good triumphs over evil, every time.

Hero: Despite his activities, the typical costumed civilian is a law-abiding citizen. The police like this person, and good folks don't pester him about his secret identity except out of nosiness. The authorities tolerate the hero's extra-societal standing as a champion of justice, which could be reflected with Legal Enforcement Powers (Informal, -50%)

[3]; Legal Immunity (Informal, -50%) [3]; and Social Regard (Admired) [5]. His identity might be a Secret [Varies].

Special Deputy: Well-trusted by the authorities, the special deputy holds a variety of real and honorary titles and clearances, including Legal Enforcement Powers [Varies]; Legal Immunity (Informal, -50%) [5]; Security Clearance (Informal, -50%) [8]; and Social Regard (Admired) 2 [10]. He has a personal reputation that supports his special status.

It Really Is You: Saving the world is this character's full-time job. When the world is in trouble, they don't call him; he calls them. Heroes of this type can expect to have such advantages as Legal Enforcement Powers [15]; Legal Immunity [15]; Security Clearance (Informal, -50%) [8]; Social Regard (Admired) 2 [10]; and Reputation +4 (Everyone; All the Time) [20].

Villain: The most common disadvantage for a typical villain is Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5]. Someone with a secret identity has a dangerous Secret [-20 to -30]. If there is a warrant out for the person, that's an Enemy (probably with a low frequency) [Varies]. Unless the evil-doer is just hired muscle or notably incompetent, his Reputation is probably worth between +1 and +2 in his area of expertise or stomping grounds, but -2 from heroes and law enforcement!

Silver Age Social Commentary

While the heroes are still do-gooders, the situations they get into are considerably more complex.

New Breed: The character is of a new breed of humans with special powers, hated by many who do not understand them. The "new breed" are plagued by metaphors for adolescence, racial discrimination, or being a sexual minority, which is best reflected with Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5]. Many discover their abilities as adolescents, which warrants Social Stigma (Minor) [-5] as well. They might also have Unnatural Features, and if they're really unlucky, a disturbing Appearance. For example, oddly colored skin probably warrants Unnatural Features [-3], while a long tail and non-human facial features is [-5], the maximum. In times of racial warfare, Social Stigma worsens to Minority Group [-10].

Misfit of Science: The hero gained his powers through accident or deliberate tampering. This carries no particular stigma, although some bigots will not make the distinction. Having an unusual appearance or being a largely unknown to the public might give the character the Social Stigma of being a New Breed, even though the person isn't technically one.

Hero: The person has a generally positive reputation for doing good, which provides a Reputation with no breaks. A secret identity is a Secret [Varies].

Maligned Hero: Sometimes it seems no good deed goes unpunished. While the character probably has a loyal faction of fans, society at large regards him as a dangerous person. In general, his admirers are a small group of people who react at +3, while the rest of the world reacts at -1 ("Hey! It's him!"); this balances out to 0 points. If the maligned hero is actively wanted by the authorities, this qualifies as a form of Enemy (Hunter) [Varies], plus Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5] if the authorities have identified the person and charged him with a crime. Having a Secret Identity is worth -30 points, as the police and criminals would both love to get their hand on the character. Someone who does not have a Secret Identity qualifies for Status -1 [-5] as a drifter and outlaw.

With the Government: Being a member of a government agency generally qualifies the character for Legal Enforcement Powers [10] and Rank [Varies]. If the person has a secret identity, it's a bona fide Alternate Identify [15]. The price is an Extremely Hazardous Duty. Generally, being with an agency is worth a +2 Reputation. If the person is allowed to walk around in a costumed identity and courier alien artifacts, strange meteorites, and the like without interference, that's Legal Immunity [10]. If the agency is given free reign to solve problems, Legal Enforcement Powers graduates to [15]. Reporting directly to the head of government or the legislature means Legal Immunity [20]. Naturally, the hero has a Patron, who may or may not be there when he needs them, but whose influence is almost boundless on a national level.

Alien Dignitary: Being a friendly alien with an unspecified legal status is usually good enough for Legal Immunity [5], albeit with Social Stigma (Minority Group) [-10]; while the person isn't going to be impounded for being an "illegal alien" or flying around in an anti-grav craft, someone might choose to lock up the hero for the purpose of "scientific study." Being an actual alien diplomat is worth Legal Immunity [15]. Being a friendly on Earth by permission is Legal Immunity [10].

Response Team: The character is a member of a special response team. As long as they keep their hands clean, local laws and technical infractions will be ignored. Administrative Rank [Varies]; Legal Immunity (Informal, -50%) [5]; Security Clearance [5]; and Extremely Hazardous Duty [Varies] represent this profession. Being a member of a reputable team is worth a +2 Reputation for everyone they serve, whereas a similar personal Reputation will get a character invited to such a team. Fledgling teams of fledgling supers can depend only on their backer! If the team is supported by a government, government agency, or powerful employer, that counts as a Patron.

Villain: Generally, flaunting the law indicates a Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5] Someone who lives outside normal society also gets Status -1 [-5]. Reputation generally ranges from -2 (laughingstock) to +2 (untouchable). A member of a formal crime organization benefits from Criminal Rank and, if in good standing, a Patron, whose value hinges on the villain's level of material support and his access to other super-criminals.

Modern, Post-Modern, and Deconstructed Supers

Players and GMs can mix and match the above to produce an Iron Age or modern comic book setting. In general, theses eras look most like the Silver Age Social Commentary options, but with throwback elements to Golden Age and Super Buddies style heroics.

Some settings dispense with comic book conventions entirely or mostly. In that case, the players and GMs need to consider carefully the following:

- who backs them,
- who seeks to harm or stop them,
- how ordinary people react to their status,
- how ordinary people react to their abilities,
- how ordinary people react to specific characters,
- how their peers and enemies react to them,
- what their responsibilities are,
- what their privileges are, and
- when they are called on to perform specific duties.

The answers to these questions make it trivial to determine the right mix of social advantages and disadvantages needed to best represent the characters' esteem among their peers, enemies, and the public eye.

Dr. Fredrick Tempus and His Daughter

for *GURPS*

by Michael Kreuter

Dr. Fredrick Alfred "Fatty" Tempus is the world's foremost temporal researcher. He is credited with the invention of the world's first practical time travel device: the Personal Temporal Travel Device. When asked how he was able to come up with something that had perplexed scientists for so long, he replied, "Many years of hard work followed by five minutes of brilliant insight." What exactly that insight was, he leaves vague. "You know, it's that thing where you're just sitting thinking about cheese and ham sandwiches when *boom!* it hits you, and suddenly all your work makes sense." When asked how it works, he winked and said, "Trade secret, though I bet it'll be reverse engineered soon enough."

However, his device has not yet been figured out by other scientists. His company, Temporal Travels Company, is doing extremely well, and even though the devices cost $250,000 a piece they come with a lifetime warranty. (As Tempus says, "Broken timepieces (pun intended) are replaced without question!") However, the purchasing license makes it clear that Temporal Travels is not liable for any damages incurred doing the use of the device. Additionally, they are not responsible for illegal uses of the device.

The man himself is a bit of an enigma. He doesn't let many people get close to him, except for his daughter Jessica, of whom he is rather protective. She's 19 and lives with her father in Tempus Manor. Scientists who have had the unique pleasure of working with him say that he is brilliant, if a bit hard to please, stubborn, and somewhat uncaring about things other than research. He would contest this claim; when he's doing research he's doing research, not holding small-talk with his colleagues. He does truly care for his daughter, though he doesn't speak of his daughter's mother. It is also said that he has a number of odd habits. He rarely jokes, but occasionally laughs, and his laugh is a bit of a cackle. When thinking, he cocks his head to one side (or the other), and he constantly wrings his hands. Despite only being slightly overweight, he has earned the nickname "Fatty."

He has produced a number of interesting gadgets which are shockingly above the normal level of technology. Many of them are prototypes he utilizes himself in a lengthy beta-test, none of them quite ready for mass production. He has released a number of successful products, from the Precision Relative Chronometer (which speeds up during travel at near light speeds such that the time is correct for those around you, to account for time dilation) to a special alloy that doesn't gain mass at near light speeds. (His research closely tied time travel with light speed travel.) While not all of these inventions are produced by his company, he gets royalties from most of them. They provided him with a substantial income, though it wasn't until his discovery of time travel that he became truly wealthy. Governments have purchased numerous copies of his device and set up agencies to regulate them. Ever since developing time travel, he has produced derivative devices such as the Universal Timer, the only timer which can be set to a negative value so that it will go off before it is set; and the Absolute Chronometer, which changes based not only on time zone, but also adjusts for time travel.

Some people dislike the very idea of time travel, saying it is not natural, will upset balance and order, and (needless to say) could possibly produce paradoxes which would have an entirely unknown effect on the very fabric of space-time. Some actually hold protests outside of Tempus Manor or the Temporal Travels Company headquarters. Dr. Tempus consistently declines to comment on them, but secretly fears that they may be right.

Secrets and Fears

Dr. Tempus has other secrets, in fact, two very big ones. The lesser secret is that he killed his wife, accidentally and unintentionally. During one of his earlier tests he convinced his wife to step into a parachronic box with the intent of sending her just a few seconds into the future. He was going to stay behind to monitor things. After she got into the

box, things started to go wrong. A fuse blew, a fire started and the doors to the temporal chamber were stuck. Susan Tempus burned alive. Fredrick has still not gotten over this, and blames himself entirely for her death.

His second secret is even bigger, because if it got out not only would he be looked upon as a fraud, but people would begin to question the integrity of the time-space continuum itself. In fact, Dr. Fredrick Tempus never discovered time travel. He was handed it, complete and finished, in the form of the wristwatch that is so common now. "Worse," he was given it by his own future self. Immediately upon receiving it, his younger iteration began to disassemble and reverse engineer it. Eventually he was able to duplicate it, and used the original to go back in time to give himself the duplicate. Effectively, time travel did not come from anywhere, yet it clearly exists.

Dr. Fredrick Tempus in Campaigns

There are a number of things the GM can do with Dr. Tempus, depending on how he wants the campaign to play out. Given the fact that he developed (and "invented") time travel, it is probable that time travel will be involved in the campaign and the PCs will eventually acquire this technology in the campaign, if not outright be given it. Dr. Tempus can be a kind of patron who gives the characters their first time travel devices. Perhaps he has an errand he needs them to perform sometime in the past, or perhaps they're part of one of the first tests.

Alternatively, he could be an adversary of the group. Utilizing his mastery of time travel and significant wealth he might well pose a distinct challenge for the players. His reasons for doing so are likely tied to his secrets; if the heroes are on the verge of finding out one or the other (or both!), attempting to learn then, or even unwittingly stumbling too close to the truth, Tempus might go after them. Another good reason might be to protect his daughter, but it would take an unusual campaign to have her cross agendas with the heroes.

The actual situation regarding the way in which he "discovered" time travel is intentionally not described in extraordinary detail. Exactly what happened, and what the paradox implies, is left up to the GM. Perhaps another agent somehow initiated the chain of effects, and time travel actually came from that outside element. Other possibilities include that this is only one of many possible timelines, or even universes, and this is how time travel was invented only in this instance. Perhaps the PCs are from a universe where paradoxes like that don't occur, and they are extremely put off.

Jessica Michelle Tempus

Jessica Michelle Tempus is Dr. Fredrick Tempus' 19-year-old daughter. She lives with him in the Tempus Manor, just outside of town. She is currently attending the local college, which happens to be her father's alma mater as well. She is a fairly bright girl, majoring in mathematics. While not attending classes, her hobbies include playing piano, painting (her cats are her favorite subject), playing the piano, poetry, bicycling and shopping, which she admits to doing too often. Jessica is also quite beautiful and charismatic; although she has attracted the attention of a number of young men at school, she is currently single. Since the death of her mother she has worn her emotions on her sleeve, although no one holds this against her. She has taken up a lot of the work her mother did before dying, including keeping the house and helping run the Temporal Travel Company. She can't bear to see pain and suffering, especially of those in financial need. With her father's approval, she donates significant funds to many charities . . . not counting the money she spends shopping. Due to her often extravagant spending, she is not extremely wealthy despite her father.

She loves her father dearly, but she knows to be careful around his experiments. In fact, she may well be more cautious and sensible than her father, which is probably what he needs most at the moment. Despite the fact that she often rolls her eyes at her father's latest research that will "revolutionize the world," she has actually inherited a few traits from her father . . . such as his curiosity, which can make her downright nosy at times, especially in her father's affairs.

While she does know the circumstances of her mother's death and has forgiven her father because it was accidental, she does not know her father's secret regarding the discovery of time travel.

Jessica in Campaigns

Jessica is likely to appear by her father's side, or even in her father's stead. The players may, upon meeting her, use her to get to Dr. Tempus. Whether they do this through coercion or sweet-talk depends largely on the PCs, their goals, and the campaign at large. Note that she is much more liable to be susceptible to the latter than the former, given her nature. Despite this, the fact that she doesn't date indicates she would probably not respond well to romantic advances. The heroes' best bet might be to have another woman befriend her.

After that, they might convince her to let them meet her father. Even so, she loves her father dearly and will protect his secret regarding her mother's death. However, she doesn't know about his secret involving his "discovery" of time travel, and it is up to the GM how she should react to that. If the PCs tell her and she is disgusted by her father's lie, she may lose her Patron advantage and the PCs will likely gain Dr. Tempus as an Enemy. Still, she has a loyal streak and is just as likely to stay by his side.

Fredrick Alfred "Fatty" Tempus   *150 points*

ST 8 [-20] DX 8 [-40] IQ 17 [140] HT 9 [-10]
HP 8 Will 12 Per 16 [-5] FP 9

Basic Lift 13 Damage 1d-3/1d-2
Basic Speed 4.25 Basic Move 4

Advantages

Gadgeteer [25], Gizmo (3) [15], High TL (1) [5], Intuitive Mathematician [5], Photographic Memory [10], Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30]

Disadvantages

Absent-Mindedness [-15], Bad Sight (Nearsighted) (Glasses) [-10], Curious (12 or less) [-5], Guilt Complex [-5], Overconfidence (12 or less) [-5], Overweight [-1], Secret (He's a fraud) (Utter Rejection) [-10], Selfish (12 or less) [-5], Stubbornness [-5], Unfit [-5], Workaholic [-5]

Quirks

Cackles like an evil scientist on occasion [-1], Cocks his head to the side when thinking [-1], Doesn't talk about wife's death [-1], Nickname: "Fatty" [-1], Wrings hands constantly [-1]

Skills

Accounting IQ/H - IQ-2 15 [1], Administration IQ/A - IQ-1 16 [1], Computer Operation/TL9 IQ/E - IQ+0 17 [1], Computer Programming/TL9 IQ/H - IQ+0 17 [4], Electronics Operation/TL9 (Communications) IQ/A - IQ-1 16 [1], Electronics Operation/TL9 (Parachronic) IQ/A - IQ+2 19 [8], Electronics Operation/TL9 (Scientific) IQ/A - IQ+0 17 [2], Electronics Operation/TL9 (Security) IQ/A - IQ-1 16 [1], Electronics Operation/TL9 (Temporal) IQ/A - IQ+2 19 [8], Electronics Repair/TL9 (Communications) IQ/A - IQ-1 16 [1], Electronics Repair/TL9 (Computers) IQ/A - IQ-1 16 [1], Electronics Repair/TL9 (Parachronic) IQ/A - IQ+0 17 [1], Electronics Repair/TL9 (Scientific) IQ/A - IQ-1 16 [1], Electronics Repair/TL9 (Temporal) IQ/A - IQ+0 17 [1], Engineer/TL9 (Parachronic) IQ/H - IQ-2 15 [1], Engineer/TL9 (Temporal) IQ/H - IQ-2 15 [1], Mathematics/TL9 (Applied) IQ/H - IQ+0 17 [4], Mathematics/TL9 (Pure) IQ/H - IQ+0 17 [4], Physics/TL9 IQ/VH - IQ+2 19 [16], Science! IQ/WC - IQ-1 16 [12], Weird Science IQ/VH - IQ-3 14 [1]

Jessica Michelle Tempus   *100 points*

ST 8 [-20] DX 10 IQ 12 [40] HT 12 [20]
HP 8 Will 12 Per 12 FP 12

Basic Lift 13 Damage 1d-3/1d-2
Basic Speed 5.5 Basic Move 5

Advantages

Appearance (Beautiful) [12], Charisma (1) [5], Common Sense [10], Gizmo (1) [5], High TL (1) [5], Intuition [15], Patron (Wealthy Father Fredrick Tempus) (15 or less) [30]

Disadvantages

Charitable (6 or less) [-30], Compulsive Spending (12 or less) [-5], Curious (12 or less) [-5], Easy to Read [-10]

Quirks

Careful [-1], Nosy [-1], Often rolls her eyes at father [-1], Doesn't date [-1], Paints kittens [-1]

Skills

Accounting IQ/H - IQ-2 10 [1], Acting IQ/A - IQ+1 13 [4], Area Knowledge (local) IQ/E - IQ+0 12 [1], Artist (Painting) IQ/H - IQ+0 12 [4], Bicycling DX/E - DX+0 10 [1], Computer Operation/TL9 IQ/E - IQ+0 12 [1], Detect Lies Per/H - Per-2 10 [1], Diplomacy IQ/H - IQ-2 10 [1], Electronics Operation/TL9 (Communications) IQ/A - IQ-1 11 [1], Electronics Operation/TL9 (Scientific) IQ/A - IQ-1 11 [1], Fast-Talk IQ/A - IQ-1 11 [1], Forgery/TL9 IQ/H - IQ-2 10 [1], Housekeeping IQ/E - IQ+0 12 [1], Mathematics/TL9 (Applied) IQ/H - IQ-1 11 [2], Mathematics/TL9 (Pure) IQ/H - IQ-1 11 [2], Mathematics/TL9 (Statistics) IQ/H - IQ-1 11 [2], Musical Instrument (Piano) IQ/H - IQ+0 12 [4], Physics/TL9 IQ/VH - IQ-2 10 [2], Poetry IQ/A - IQ+0 12 [2]

Pyramid Review

Growing Hunger (for the *Last Night on Earth* Board Game)

Published by Flying Frog Productions

Design and rules by Jason C. Hill

Graphic design, photography, and layout by Jack Scott Hill

Art by Jason C. Hill, Jack Scott Hill, James Ma, & Matthew Morgaine

Miniature Sculpts by Gael Goumon

Full-color boxed set with rulebook, two L-shaped outer boards, four Hero figures, four Hero character sheets, seven Zombie figures, 25 Hero Card deck expansion, 25 Zombie Card deck expansion, three scenario cards, two sheets of counters; $39.95

Those Zombies, the ones with the *Growing Hunger?* Since this is a supplement to ***Last Night On Earth,*** they'd better hurry up if they want to eat.

Flying Frog Productions surprised everyone in 2007 with their homebrew zombie game with the customizable boards, and like those flesh-eaters, it won't stay dead. It's more of the same staggering fun in the company's first follow-up.

Four new characters jumpstart the action. Amanda the prom queen is good at hiding from the Zombies, and male characters fight harder when she's around. The sheriff gets some help from Detective Winters, a well-equipped cop who sidesteps injuries. Sam is a hulking former military man who soaks up punishment and ignores Zombie ploys in turn. And Kenny, the picked-on bag boy? The kid's wound tighter than kite string and just waiting to let loose on something.

If the group wore out the original scenarios, here are three new ones. The Heroes wipe out the manor house in "Burn It to the Ground!" while the Zombies raze everything else in "Zombie Apocalypse." Meanwhile, "Plague Carriers" demands house-to-house elimination of special Zombies before nightfall. Woodinvale gets somewhat more cosmopolitan with a pair of new L-shaped outer boards. Their locales, like the library and antique shop, let Heroes rummage more freely, giving them better control over their cards (though they still lose the game by emptying the deck).

One can never be too rich or too thin, or have too many ways to kill Zombies, so both Hero and Zombie decks get an infusion of new cards. There are pump shotguns and fence posts (yes, fence posts) to smack things with, and a few more Heroic cards that allow really devastating effects. The bad guys get new methods of manipulating the walking dead (more movement choices and ways to pop up where the Heroes least expect or want it). Then again, there are also more "How often does this come up?" cards. *Catfight* debilitates two female Heroes sharing a space, for example, but finding the right time to use it is serendipitous at the outside. A small supplement-specific symbol on the cards allows owners to separate them later if they like, though the sigil isn't in evidence on other components.

The production values are as stunning as before. Once again, the company employs camera stills on the cards instead of hand illustrations, and both these and the new L-boards are brighter and easier to enjoy (sure, it's a dark game, but artistry no one can see is no selling point). The box brims with extra counters (gasoline, minor characters, a dirt-

furrowing meteor strike); most are included without context, but players will find them way cool.

One of the most important features is the seven red Zombie figures. That makes 21, and while the pawns aren't "new" (different color, same molds), the rules have many ways to put them to use. They may be tougher-to-pulverize super-zombies or have "Grave-Dead" powers that set them apart from the herd (like faster movement or more Fight Dice). They're ideal for homemade scenarios or filling out crowd scenes.

A number of optional rules are offered for both sides, cleverly rated with dots. For example, if everyone agrees to the four-dot benefit Zombies Auto Spawn (undead are always added at the end of a turn), the Heroes might get the three-dot Free Search Markers (counters that yield good stuff from empty structures) and the one-dot Well-Stocked Buildings (particular items can always be found in specific locations). There aren't many such tweaks, so the consistently high Zombie bonuses mean the Heroes need multiple advantages to counter; alternatively they can simply serve as handicaps. Flying Frog has done its homework regardless, because these advantages seem well-balanced.

In fact, it can be pleasantly infuriating how equitable the scenarios are, leaving players in the dark until the bitter end about the outcome. It can be disappointing to see things favor a player for the "wrong" reasons (the Heroes valiantly beat the Zombies back from one winning condition only to see the horrors succeed because the baddies claim an alternate provision, like killing X number of Heroes). Nonetheless, it all ensures an even playing field.

With a five-minute mini-game (coupling two L-shaped boards into a smaller map) putting the icing on a rather visceral cake, Flying Frog Productions has managed to maintain their unexpected lead on the zombie market. Their sensibilities seem to be right on target whether they're designing a game or producing it, and ***Growing Hunger*** is going to feed the ravenous desires of more than just the undead.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Qin: The Warring States

Published by [Le 7ème Cercle](#)/[Cubicle 7](#)

Designed by Romain d'Huissier, Kristoff, Neko, Pierre Buty, and Florrent

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Qin: The Warring States (pronounced "Chin") is a French RPG from Le 7ème Cercle inspired by books such as *The Water Margin* and *The Art of War* and films such as *Hero* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.* This is an RPG set in ancient China, specifically in 240 B.C. during the period of the Zhongguo, or "The Middle Kingdoms," which were comprised of the seven Warring States that arose from the ashes of the Empire. Of the seven, only one stands ready with not just soldiers and spies enough to dominate and conquer the other six, but also the mandate. The goal of Lü Buwei, regent of Qin, is to attain Tian Xia, the union of all things under Heaven, by conquering all of the lands of the Zhongguo.

Qin: The Warring States is a game of wuxia action, though it's not the immediate high-powered, high-wire action of [Feng Shui](#) (although that will come eventually). Nevertheless through the command of a Tao, a character in *Qin: The Warring States* can act on the Laws of Creation and so impose his will upon the world. With the right Tao, a character can jump further, higher, understand an object's weakness, be inspired to create a new object, enhance his perception, step deeper into the shadows, focus his attention, or simply change his luck.

Where some heroes have learned ways to impose their will on the universe, a rare few study Taoist doctrine. Such a scholar comes to understand the universe's true nature, becoming familiar with Yin and Yang and the relationships between the five elements. In doing so, he learns to control his own Chi. As a Fangshi, he can become a practitioner of one of the Four Ways of the Tao. The difference between someone who knows a Tao and a Fangshi is that where the Tao merely manipulates the laws of the universe, the spells and techniques practiced by a Fangshi manipulate the fundamental parts of these laws.

The Four Ways of Tao magic are Internal Alchemy, External Alchemy, Divination, and Exorcism. External Alchemists devise elixirs, ointments, and pills in search of immortality as do Internal Alchemists, who instead rely upon the flow of their Chi. Divination enables a Fangshi to determine what might happen (as opposed to what will), practice Geomancy, and commune with spirits. Lastly, an Exorcist protects the mortal world from the world of spirits. By stopping the dead from returning, he can maintain the balance between the Yang of Life and the Yin of Death.

Although Taoism is primarily the domain of the Fangshi, it is entirely possible for any character to learn the rudiments of the way. Thus, a physician could complement his medical schooling with knowledge of Internal Alchemy, while a courageous Wu xia (knight-errant) or a learned magistrate could find himself in situation where an Exorcism technique would prove useful. Such a character is possible from the outset, and although he may not be quite

competent, he at least has potential.

To create a character a player divides 14 points between five Aspects or attributes -- Metal, Water, Fire, Wood, and Earth. These correspond to the character's physical, social, mental, and mystical attributes. An Aspect of 2 is average, while 5 is legendary. The player selects one Gift, which usually allows the character to re-roll a test, such as Etiquette with "Ease of the Courtier," or provides a small bonus, such as with Claws of the Tiger, which adds a character's Fire value to his blade damage once per session. He also selects a single weakness, which is usually more general in its effect.

Another 15 points are spent in skills, none of which can be higher than Expert (a value of 3). Since Expert levels costs 10 points, most characters start with a mix of Apprentice or Competent level skills. Lastly, another 15 points can be spent on the character's Taos, Combat Techniques, and Magical Powers. Combat Techniques (such as Double Blow, Two Weapons, and Double Target) represent the advanced, spectacular moves so beloved of the genre, and they encompass close and ranged combat. Most characters buy from at least two of these groups.

The process produces reasonably competent characters, a player free to design the character that he wants. The book lists various character types, though, suggesting the Taos, Combat Techniques, and Magical Powers for each; however, a player does not have to abide by these. The character types are diverse and include Official, Craftsman, and Traveling Salesman alongside the expected Mercenary, Fangshi, and Assassin.

Mechanically, *Qin: The Warring States* uses a Yin/Yang dice roll for its tests. Simply, two 10-sided dice are rolled (read as 0-9, not 1-10), and the lower number is deducted from the higher. The result, which can never be a negative number, is added to an appropriate Aspect or Aspect plus skill to beat a Success Threshold. Results of any double mean that character's Yin/Yang is in balance, and he achieves not only a critical success, but also gains some Chi points. Chi is lost when a double zero or a critical failure is rolled. Chi can be spent to modify a dice roll. In an emergency, a character can sacrifice his "Breath of Life" or Hit Points to gain *and* spend some Chi if he has none. Chi is primarily spent to fuel both Taos and Magical powers.

Combat -- from initiative and attacking to parrying and damage -- uses the same Yin/Yang dice roll. It is meant to be relatively free flowing and includes the use of Tao, Combat Techniques, and Magical Powers -- much like the genre it is emulating. That said, the setting emphasizes armed over unarmed combat, so it is not quite what the Western audience perceives as a martial-arts setting. As long as a character possesses enough Chi and enough Combat Actions, he can combine his abilities as he desires. For example, Kwai Chen Tai, a Fangshi Exorcist, believes that a brothel is home to a Fallen Woman, a vengeful spirit who is preying on its clientele. He uses "Blessing of Wood" to create a wand that will easily strike at supernatural creatures and then "Talisman of Control of Lost Spirits" to create a talisman that will immobilize her. So prepared, the Exorcist goes to the brothel where he discovers that the Fallen Woman already has her next victim in her embrace. Kwai Chen Tai acts quickly, using his "Direct Hit" Combat Technique to first strike the Fallen Woman's hand and so distract her. This gives him the chance to use Direct Hit again to slap the talisman on The Fallen Woman's forehead and so stop her.

In terms of background, *Qin: The Warring States* provides a varying amount of depth across a range of subjects. It offers not just descriptions of daily life in the Zhongguo, but also descriptions of the seven Warring States and their major personalities, of faith in the Zhongguo, of Heaven and its inhabitants, and of the scholarly traditions followed in the Zhongguo. Included with each description are details of the game's metaplot, hinting at the story to come in future supplements. In general, though, the material describing the Middle Kingdoms will be too removed from the player characters to be of use to the GM, and some adventure hooks would have been useful.

Also covered is the setting's attitude toward morality and social standards, which can cause a problem: A woman's place in the Zhongguo means that she cannot become an adventurer. Although historically accurate, this is restrictive by modern standards and an impediment to play, though the book provides a way out of the situation. For the woman wanting freedom, her only choice is to seek exile in the Jiang hu, the World of Lakes and Forests. Lying on the margins of the Zhongguo, it is home to those noble clans who have fled the Middle Kingdoms and gone to the Wu lin, the World of Marital Arts. Here reside the Da xia (the knights-errant of myth and folklore), martial artists, barbarians, and outlaws. The Jiang hu is not as detailed as the Zhongguo, which is a shame given that it is more immediately

playable, especially for those who wish to play female characters.

For the GM, there is a bestiary, which includes various ghosts and demons; an explanation of the Zhongguo's back story; advice on running *Qin: The Warring States;* and an adventure and a bibliography. The bestiary is too short, and the monsters quite powerful. The scenario, "Towards a World of Forests and Lakes," is designed as a prologue to the main campaign. Set near the borders of Qin, it does mean it will be difficult to have female characters, but the scenario's title is an obvious hint as to its outcome. Written for beginning characters about to enter adulthood, a GM could run this with any of the eight sample characters provided in the book.

Physically *Qin: The Warring States* is a nice-looking hardback done in sepia tones throughout, plus full color plates for the sample characters. The artwork is evocative and if the writing suffers from the occasional odd turn of phrase in the translation, the book is still easy to read and understand. The inside front and back cover are used to provide a decent map of the Warring States. Its real problem is the lack of an index, which, for an RPG that is as different as *Qin: The Warring States,* is regrettable.

Qin: The Warring States also suffers from an emphasis on combat and combat-oriented characters, there being more Taos for them in addition to their Combat Techniques. This is not to say that non-combat characters such as Fangshi, Scholars, Courtiers, or Officials are unplayable. A campaign could focus as much on court intrigue or bureaucratic investigation as it could upon general adventuring, though Fangshi characters will find that the skill requirements are fairly high in comparison to non-magical characters. Another problem is that the levels for both the Taos and the Magical Powers only go up to 4, so at the moment, a character can only progress so far and the GM is limited in what he can assign to his major NPCs. This highlights the lack of support for *Qin: The Warring States,* although English publisher and distributor Cubicle 7 has several supplements being translated.

By all accounts, *Qin: The Warring States* is very popular in France, and it is not difficult to see why. The setting evokes the feel of the big wuxia films that have proved popular with Western audiences. Although the Yin/Yang dice mechanic strives to represent the genre's influence, the game's Tao rules are more evocative of the source material. There is nothing wrong with the Yin/Yang dice mechanic -- it is unobtrusive and uncomplicated -- but the intended free flowing use of the Taos demands that a player employs them imaginatively and, in so doing, imitate the genre. And despite a lack of support and some of the background being not quite useful, those issues can be fixed with future supplements. It is in the evocation of its genre that the RPG excels: *Qin: The Warring States* simply shines as a game of heroic and mythic fantasy set in Ancient China.

--Matthew Pook

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Start Spreading the Hues

I was at GenCon last week and, in fine convention-going tradition, I seem to have caught some sort of con rot, which is akin to mummy rot found in many old-school bandage-wrapped monsters, only instead of ancient bandages the horrifying scraps littering my body are receipts for convention parking which, when added up for the weekend, exceeds what I spent on gaming for my first four years of the hobby. Anyway, this was (is?) an odd illness in that the only significant symptom was a non-life-threatening fever -- hovering shy of 103 for almost a day -- that was sufficient to knock me off my feet for 20 hours a day. (In my normal, sane universe, "fever" almost always coincides with another, more noteworthy symptom, and its significant presence absent anything else is akin to needing to disassemble a car down to the bolts because the "check engine" light came on but nothing else otherwise seemed amiss.) Hopefully I'll have a bit more GenCon-related goodness next week.

Darth Vader

Pancakes

Anyway, like much of the tabletop-gaming audience, most of the *Pyramid* readership skews older. I wasn't part of the first-gen of RPG buyers -- I was a critical hit of some haploid around the same time original ***Dungeons & Dragons*** editor Steve Marsh was doing his craft -- but I was fairly close, having entered the hobby in the early 1980s. So I wasn't far removed from the time where color was optional . . . for the cover. (Or, indeed, where having a "cover" was a necessary thing.) I remember buying the early ***Enemies*** books for ***Champions*** and feeling inspired to think, "Gosh! I can generate a book that looks at least this good with my portable manual typewriter!" And I remember picking up West End Games' ***Star Wars RPG*** and realizing it had *two* colors on the inside pages! Unlike today, the notion of a full-color gaming book back then would be the equivalent of saying, "I want to design a hardcover RPG that's 256 pages . . . where all the pages are hardcovers!"

Back in those days, "dice" were these little balls of soft plastic-wax you would color with a crayon to get them to have visible numbers (it took me years to understand what the purpose of the crayon was), and the quality was of a sort that you were reasonably assured of having more or less the number of sides you were supposed to on a die. (Again, I'm not part of the hardcore "chits in a cup" old-school crowd, although I remembered feeling quite clever when I devised the same method for coming up with random numbers without dice when I was 10.) But different-colored dice were certainly beyond my ability to make a reality for the first half-decade of my gaming.

Today, however, most gamers possess on their desktops an arsenal of printing and organizational efforts that eclipse what might have even been imaginable 25 years ago. If I buy a 256-page full-color PDF -- a phrase which contains at least three alien ideas for a 1985 gamer -- it is not outside the realm of possibility for me to print it myself, in full-color. My binding options are still sadly limited (comb binding only), but it's still possible.

Now, it's entirely possible that gaming will slip entirely into the computer realm any day; it's been threatening to do so since 1988's "Dungeon Masters Assistant, Vol. 1: Encounters" for ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.*** But I don't see that happening anytime soon, and even games that I play solely online still generate a *lot* of printed pages for me. Tabletop games, of course, generate incredible amounts of paper.

So what I'd like remind folks today is that, even if you've been gaming for decades, there are many, many options to use color as a fun and -- most importantly -- useful tool in your games. Color printing technology, while not trivially cheap, is inexpensive enough to let you justify running off handouts of useful information utilizing color. And there are a few more options you might not have thought of. Here are a few from my brain, mostly derived by thinking about what *wasn't* possible last millennium.

Colored paper: When I help run the World Yo-Yo Contest, one of the things we do is make sure all judging sheets are on different colored paper. (A two-handed event is on different-colored paper from a one-handed event, which is different from a top-throwing event, etc.) That way, even if sheets are mixed up or mislaid, it's trivial to sort them by competition division again. And it's much easier to spot an errant pink piece of paper in a random pile of white paperwork than its chromatically challenged counterpart.

The same technique can be used in a hundred different ways for gaming. Maybe PCs have different-colored sheets than NPCs. Maybe each faction or "splat" has its own color of paper. And some games were *made* with color in mind . . . envision the mayhem you can have with different-colored handouts in ***Paranoia!***

Colored paper is more expensive than its regular stock, but not prohibitively so (usually two to three times as much as the white stuff). If you don't need 500 sheets, search around for your local copy shops; the odds are very good they're willing to sell it to you by the sheet at not-horrible costs. (By "local" I mean "locally owned"; I have never, ever had any affordable luck at a chain shop.)

Colored ink: Figure out what parts of a character sheet or other handouts would be useful in color, and then do it! Some ideas include denoting what parts of a character's abilities are derived from magic or super-powers so that, if deprived of them, you only need to ignore everything that's (say) green. Or perhaps you want to include a lengthy list of NPC contacts in a town, and each one is color-coded for hostile (red), friendly (blue), neutral (black), or unknown/varied (brown). Or maybe you want to color-code tactics in your NPCs, using red (first-tier abilities), green (back-up plans), and yellow-green (last resorts). And so on.

Colored pencils: Colored pencils and highlighters can be a great way to draw attention to bits you need to know at a glance. It's especially useful to color along the top edge of documents or packets (so you can tell at a glance which direction a sheet or booklet is supposed to be oriented).

Colored dice: Again, the ability for gamers to pick and choose the components of their gaming has grown exponentially in the past few decades. Think about what possibilities there are for different colors of dice. Some ideas include:

- Throwing different-colored damage dice at the same time as an attack roll, so that -- if the hit is successful -- you speed up play. (It also gives you an idea of how strong a blow was even if you missed, which can be helpful in roleplaying.)
- Having different dice mean different things, as outlined in Justin Bacon's article "Dice of Destiny."
- If combat actions are simultaneous, have each player have his own colored dice into a "pit"; it's not useful (outside of being a bit faster), but it's fun to have everyone's eyes darting over the same pile of dice trying to figure out if they succeeded.
- Perhaps different color dice as a set have different meanings. For example, imagine a ***Vampire*** or ***Call of Cthulhu*** adventure where part of the appeal is knowing that one of the other PCs may be a traitor/monster/whatever. One or two players might have a set of dice in a certain color that the GM informs them are *only* to be used when investigating that central mystery; the player may *say* he's helping Todd with the lockpick, but if he's using the black dice, it means he's examining Todd's actions for clues to see if he's Cthulhu in a trenchcoat. And if Todd picks up that something's wrong? Well, the investigator might get more information more quickly than he bargained for . . . Of course, this technique only works if both player and GM are confident in the other's ability to pick up non-verbal clues. ("Right. I'm helping Todd. See? Got the *black dice* here, for my 'Helping Todd' roll. I'm *helping* Todd . . .")

You don't want the simplest of sheets to look like an explosion of a Crayola convention in downtown Las Vegas, with a million different hues all competing for the attention of your rods and cones. And it'll take careful consideration to make sure you don't either waste resources (especially with expensive color prints) or buy things that don't end up getting used (such as lots and lots of dice). But our minds are made to register and acknowledge color quickly, as might have been proven if you started reading this article and suddenly developed a craving for my famous Darth Vader Pancakes. If you're looking for an underutilized resource in the personal gaming world, forget tapping R.A. Salvatore or H.P. Lovecraft . . . instead, try asking your friend Roy G. Biv.

--Steven Marsh

Bromium

by Stephen Dedman

Introduction

Bromium, a tide-locked Chthonian world, was discovered by an automated probe searching for habitable planets. It was assigned a survey number and dismissed as unsuitable for terraforming and too remote to be worth further exploration. However, a former prospector working for the survey service, Jordan Michaelides, noticed its density and sent her daughter Zoe out to stake a claim on the mineral rights. By the time faster starships made mining Bromium's platinum-group ores profitable, four generations of the Michaelides clan had built a small habitat on the planet's dark side, powered by solar panels on the sunward surface.

Heavy Metal Mining Inc. contested the legality of a family business' claim over an entire planet, and found a judge willing to prohibit the Michaelides' clan from extending their operation further, and granting HMM an equally large claim and the right to explore the rest of the world. HMM began building a small starport and basic refinery, and offered to buy the clan's holdings. The family refused and continued mining.

HMM's main base on the world, a dome at Tennant Hill, is some 11,000 miles from the clan's habitat at Gordion, but this has not kept employees of the two rival companies from each other's throats. No one can agree who first sabotaged the other's mining equipment, but after the power cable between the solar farm and the Michaelides habitat was severed, endangering the lives of the entire clan, attacks escalated until Bromium became regarded as an unofficial war zone.

The battle has mostly been between robots using destructive but legal mining equipment (explosives, drills, lasers, and the like), but humans are not immune; anyone venturing into disputed lands is advised to go heavily armed. The fact that ships visiting Bromium are likely to carrying either high-grade platinum-group ores, high-tech mining gear, or luxury goods for the miners, has also attracted pirates to the system.

HD 8394 (Chrysopoeia)

Primary Star HD 8394 (Chrysopoeia): Spectral Type F7; mass 1.25 solar masses; age 3.1 billion years; effective temperature 6400 Kelvin; luminosity 2.93 solar luminosities; Diameter 0.0065 AU.

Orbit 1 (Chrysopoeia I, a.k.a. Bromium): Orbital Radius 0.14 AU; diameter 1.13 (8960 miles); density 1.1; mass 1.243; world type standard (Chthonian); trace atmosphere; 0% water coverage; average surface temperature 764F (680K, infernal climate); surface gravity 1.243; tide-locked. No moons.

Orbit 2 (Chrysopoeia II, a.k.a. Lityerses): Orbital Radius .29 AU; diameter 1.37 (10864 miles); density 1; mass 2.57; world type standard terrestrial (wet greenhouse); dense nitrogen atmosphere; hydrographics nil; average surface temperature 656F (620K); surface gravity 2.57; apparent day 33.7 hours. No moons.

Orbit 3 (Chrysopoeia III): Orbital radius .44 AU; diameter 0.018 (143 miles); density 0.7; mass 0.00004; world type tiny terrestrial (rock); trace atmosphere; hydrographics nil; average surface temperature 373F (463K, infernal climate); surface gravity 0.0126; apparent day 23.9 hours. No moons.

Orbit 4: Orbital Radius .74 AU: asteroid belt.

Orbit 5 (Chrysopoeia IV, a.k.a. Ploutos): Orbital Radius 1.2 AU; diameter .67 (5313 miles); density 0.9; mass 0.27; world type standard terrestrial (ice); nitrogen compound atmosphere, standard pressure; hydrographics nil; average surface temperature -208F (140K, frozen climate); surface gravity .6; apparent day 15.1 hours. 3 moonlets.

Orbit 6: Orbital Radius 2 AU: asteroid belt.

Orbit 7: Orbital Radius 3.6 AU: asteroid belt.

Orbit 8 (Chrysopoeia V, a.k.a. Taxila): Orbital Radius 5.7 AU; diameter .028 (222 miles); density .3; mass .000006; world type small terrestrial (ice); thin nitrogen-methane atmosphere; hydrographics nil; average surface temperature -265F (104K, frozen climate); surface gravity .008; apparent day 29.5 hours. No moons.

Orbit 9 (Chrysopoeia VI, a.k.a. Tmolus): Orbital Radius 9.8 AU; diameter 10.77 (85,406 miles); density .3; mass 300; world type medium gas giant; surface gravity 3.23; apparent day 12.1 hours. 2 moons, 12 moonlets, spectacular rings.

Orbit 10 (Chrysopoeia VII, a.k.a. Gordias): Orbital Radius 16.7 AU: diameter 8.22 (65,185 miles); density .18; mass 100; world type medium gas giant; surface gravity 1.48; apparent day 16.5 hours. 4 moons, 9 moonlets.

Orbit 11: (Chrysopoeia VIII, a.k.a. Adrastus): Orbital Radius 30 AU: diameter 9.24 (73, 273 miles); density .19; mass 150; world type medium gas giant; surface gravity 1.75; apparent day 8.2 hours. 5 moons, 8 moonlets.

Planetary Characteristics

Class of primary star: F7.
Mean orbital distance: .39 AU
Orbital eccentricity: 0.3 (perihelion .36 AU, aphelion .42 AU).
Obliquity (axial tilt): 22°
Annual period: . Year .047 Earth years (17.16 days)
Apparent solar day: tide-locked.
Diameter: 8960 miles (1.13 times Earth's).
Density: 1.1 times Earth's.
Surface gravity: 1.243 g.
Volcanic activity: light.
Tectonic activity: Moderate
Average surface temperature: 1009°F (816K) day face; -377°F (46.3K) night face.
Hydrographic coverage: 0.
Atmosphere, composition: n/a.
Atmospheric pressure: trace.

Population & economy

Habitability: 0
Resource value modifier: +2 (very abundant resources).
Affinity: 2.
Settlement type: outpost, approx 97 years old.
Technology level: 11.
Carrying capacity: 80 million people.

Population: 600 humans
Population rating: 2.
Average annual income per-capita: $260,000 (*GURPS* dollars).
Typical wealth: comfortable.
Economic volume: $156 million per annum (*GURPS* dollars).

Government

World unity: Factionalized.
Government type: Rival corporate states (one tribe/clan, one technocratic).
Control rating: 3 (Michaelides), 4 (HMM).

Installations

Spaceports: Class II ground facilities at Gordion and Tennant Hill.

Planetology and Ecology

Bromium has no native life, and none has been discovered on any of the other planets in the system. At any given time, up to 60% of the inhabitants will be exploring the planet in ATVs (*Ultra-Tech,* p. 225), though they rarely venture further than 200 miles from either their habitats or the terminator (the border between dark side and sunlight). As a result, while all of the planet has been surveyed from orbit, much of it remains unmined. HMM has plans to tunnel under both sides, but there is enough high-grade ore close to the surface that open cut mining near the terminator remains more profitable.

Apart from the climate, a major problem for settlers on Bromium is that a variety of factors make navigation difficult (-5 to any Navigation rolls) and any form of communication beyond line-of-sight ranges extremely unreliable. The most common "creatures" on the planet are "longnecks," very simple robots which act as mobile relay stations. Most other land vehicles (manned or otherwise) that leave Gordion or Tennant Hill are followed by a train of longnecks, which station themselves approximately 10 miles apart to keep the vehicle in contact with base. When a relay fails, the vehicle is on its own until the chain can be restored; this has made longnecks a favorite target for saboteurs. Overconfident or unlucky prospectors who lose contact with their respective bases can expect to wait 8d hours before any serious attempt is made to find them; neither the clan nor HMM has the extra resources necessary to conduct many search-and-rescue missions. Vehicles who stray beyond communication range are frequently targeted for attack by the other side.

These problems have made the Michaelides family particularly interested in long-range communication, including telepathy and ESP, and they sponsor psionic research on several planets.

Society on Bromium

The habitat at Gordion is home to 93 members of the Michaelides family, some direct descendants of Zoe Michaelides, others who've married into the family, plus a few clones. On Petros, drones and non-volitional AIs (not including swarmbots) outnumber humans by at least five to one. All children have at least one petbot, and most have an android servant/bodyguard as well. They tend to be wary of outsiders, but actual Intolerance is rare; the clan depends heavily on free traders for transporting goods and people in and out of the system, and many family members marry offworlders rather than their own relatives (the others tend to rely on cloning for reproduction, and sex androids for recreation).

Code of Honor (Asteroid Miner) and Sense of Duty (Family) are instilled in family members from an early age. The Greed and Workaholic disadvantages are also common, but Laziness is a taboo trait; anyone unwilling or unable to

work at least 12 hours out of every 24 is soon shipped offworld. When not working or sleeping, clan members like to unwind with normal indoor pastimes, especially ones that involve high stakes gambling on everything from backgammon to wrestling matches.

The company's hierarchy is largely determined by seniority, but never at the expense of competence. Years of confinement and relative isolation have led to family members speaking their own dialect -- a creole of Balkan Romany and Macedonian -- among themselves, though all speak the Standard trade language at some level (the company's computers are occasionally called upon to translate).

The Heavy Metal Mining habitat at Tennant Hill (population 200) is restricted to company personnel, though they will reluctantly admit outsiders in an emergency. The miners living there are mostly heavy worlders (***Bio-Tech,*** p. 66) or cyborgs equipped to deal with the high gravity; most have some level of the Greed disadvantage, and the Bad Temper, Bully, and Workaholic disadvantages are also common. Many of the more successful prospectors also have the Absolute Direction and Danger Sense advantages.

Economy

Bromium exports high-grade ores. The two main habitats are equipped with robotic minifacs and total life support, and can produce any necessities, though most manufactured goods (especially luxuries) are imported. There is no tourism, despite the often spectacular auroras.

Freelance prospectors are tolerated as long as they don't stray onto territory already surveyed by either the clan or HMM. Trespassers are usually presumed to be claim-jumpers or saboteurs, and often shot on sight.

Transportation

The most common form of transportation on Bromium is an Exo-Spider ATV (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 225) fitted with earth-moving gear. Larger wheeled trucks (usually automated) are used to carry equipment to, and ore from, base camps along rough trackways. Starship visits are irregular, as a fixed schedule would make it easier for pirates to set up ambushes.

Security

Bromium has no standing defense forces, but HMM has human and robot security personnel, and all the miners in both camps have some combat skills and can assemble into a militia when needed. Miners and most robots venturing out of the habitats will also be armed, or equipped with some form of equipment which serves as a ranged weapon. Michaelides and HMM ships visiting the system are also heavily armed, or escorted by fighters, but these rarely remain longer than is needed to pick up and drop off cargo.

Deva Stykos, Heavy Metal Mining employee   *160 points*

Like many at Tennant Hill (and some who married into the Michaelides clan), Deva Stykos was an independent prospector who'd worked claims on several worlds without ever making enough to satisfy her. She was attracted to work on Bromium by the prospect of steady meals and life support, a steady wage with the prospect of huge bonuses, and access to large quantities of high-grade explosives. Heavy Metal Mining, conversely, was impressed by her range of useful skills: there are a few specialists at Tennant Hill, but most of the workers are expected to be able to do at least two jobs competently until they become expert at one, or quit.

Like most at Tennant Hill, Stykos has been working on Bromium for less than the six standard months of her probationary contract; only one in three return from their first vacation, though most who do then remain for several years.

Most miners encountered on Bromium (and some of Kona Gibaldi's crew) will be broadly similar to Stykos, though often with different combat skills and Mechanic or technician specializations. Standard crew for an ATV is two humans and two robots (usually an android and a techbot).

Ht 5'2", Wt 200 lbs, Size Modifier 0, Age 34.

Appearance: Olive skin, tightly curled dark brown hair, brown eyes; a muscular square-faced woman with big feet and hands.

Languages: Standard (native) [0]. TL: 10. Cultural Familiarity: Human. [0 points]. Native gravity 1.21

Attributes: ST 13 [0*]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 12 [20]. [40 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d/2d-1; BL 34; HP 15 [0*]; Will 12 [5]; Per 11 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]. [5 points]

Advantages and Perks: Absolute Direction [5], Alcohol Tolerance [1], Fit [5], G-Experience 2 [2], Heavy Worlder [46], High Pain Threshold [10], Improved G-Tolerance (0.5) [0*], Power Grappling [1], Racial ST Bonus 3 [0*]. [70 points].

Disadvantages and Quirks: Appearance (Unattractive) [-0*]; Attracted to tall slim men [-1]; Callous [-10]; Code of Honor (Asteroid Miner's) [-5]; Duty (Company) (6) [-2]; Greed (12) [-15]; Huge fan of zero-g spectator sports [-1]; Incompetence (Sex-Appeal) [-1]; Mild phobia of psionics [-1]; Overweight [-1]; Stubbornness [-5]; Won't drink anything stronger than beer, but drinks a lot of that [-1]; Workaholic [-5]. [-43 points]

Skills and Techniques: Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Battlesuit/TL10 (A) DX+2 [8]-12; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Projector) (E) DX+1 [4]-12, (Rifle) (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-11; Current Affairs/TL10 (Sports) (E) IQ [1]-11; Driving/TL10 (Construction Equipment) (A) DX+2 [8]-12, (Heavy Wheeled) (A) DX [2]-10, (Mecha) (A) DX+2 [7]-12; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Sensors) (A) IQ [2]-11; Explosives/TL10 (Demolition) (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; First Aid/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-11; Freight Handling/TL10 (A) IQ [2]-11; Gambling (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Geology/TL10 (Hostile Terrestrial) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Hazardous Materials/TL10 (Radioactive) (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-11; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-12; Mechanic/TL10 (Construction Equipment) (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Metallurgy/TL10 (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Navigation/TL10 (Land) (A) IQ+2 [1]-13†; Prospecting/TL10 (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Sumo Wrestling (A) DX [2]-10; Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-11; Vacc Suit/TL10 (A) DX+3 [10]-13. [98 points]

* Free from Heavy-Worlder
† +3 for Absolute Direction

Gear (outside dome): Plasma Torch; two HEMP Smart handgrenades; 4 lbs High-Energy Explosive with detonators; Space Biosuit; Gripboots; Survival Watch; Pocket Pack. Always travels with a canister of Blast Foam.

Kona Gibaldi, Pirate Captain   *220 points*

Kona Gibaldi was born on Nusantanna, the oldest child of two soldiers on what was then a military oligarchy. Like her parents and siblings, she joined the army as early as she was able, and was barely eighteen when a successful rebellion (largely financed by offworld corporations, including HMM) resulted in Nusantanna's army being disbanded and many of its officers being charged with war crimes. After Kona's sister was killed in battle and her father sentenced to rehabilitation, the surviving Gibaldis opted to join mercenary companies rather than stay on their homeworld.

Over the next few years, the Gibaldis found themselves being hired by some of the same businesses who'd sponsored the coup on Nusantanna, and Kona cultivated some useful contacts in HMM. When HMM sent her company to 'liberate' a mineral-rich island nation on balkanized Aganju, a massacre ensued, leaving her C.O. and her mother dead

and the orphaned Kona in command. HMM gave her up, and she was blamed for the deaths in the failed coup and charged with 114 counts of murder. With the help of a few friends, she escaped from Aganju and retrieved some of the treasures she'd stashed away, including an old but heavily modified tramp freighter. Rather than buy a new identity, she decided to become a pirate, using her knowledge of various businesses (including HMM) to predict their shipping schedules.

Gibaldi's ship, the Ochosi, is often to be found waiting in ambush in the Chrysopoeia system's asteroid belts. Gibaldi and her human crew-mates spend much of their time in cold-sleep waiting for the robots to report a suitable prize passing within range. Some of her crew have also worked on Bromium and have insider knowledge of their operations.

Gibaldi hates HMM, but has a grudging respect for the Michaelides clan. This won't stop her robbing them, but she is more likely to be merciful to anyone working for them, usually choosing to ransom them for a modest sum rather than selling them as slaves or spare parts.

Ht 6'1", Wt 160 lbs, Size Modifier 0, biological age 48.

Appearance: Dark brown skin, red-brown mohawk, green bionic eyes; a tough-looking athletic woman with a heavily scarred torso and obviously prosthetic legs.

Languages: Standard (native) [0]. TL: 10. Cultural Familiarity: Human. [0 points]. Native gravity 1.03

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 12 [20]. [90 points]

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24; HP 15 [0*]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.25 [5]; Basic Move 7 [0]. [10 points]

Advantages and Perks: Charisma 2 [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contact (Business)(Effective Skill 12), (6 or less; Usually Reliable) [1]; Contact (Street)(Effective Skill 15), (6 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [1]; Fearlessness 1 [2]; G-Experience 5 [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Improvised Weapons (Brawling [1]. [45 points]

Bionics: Boosted Reflexes [18]; Eyes (two; Nictitating Membrane 2, Night Vision 2, Telescopic Vision 1, Thermal Imaging) [0], Hand (one, DR 2) [1], Legs (two; DR 3, Basic Move +1, Super Jump 1) [15]. [34 points]

Disadvantages and Quirks: Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Bad Temper (15) [-5]; Bloodlust (15) [-5]; Broad-Minded [-1]; Code of Honor (Mercenary's) [-10]; Collects souvenirs of every planet she visits and every ship she raids [-1]; Compulsive Spending (9) [-7]; Doesn't gamble, and thinks it wastes luck [-1]; Enemy (Heavy Metal Mining; 6 or less) [-15]; Enemy (Interplanetary War Crimes Investigators; 6 or less) [-15]; Greed (15) [-7]; Horrible Hangovers [-1]; Sense of Duty (Crew) [-5]; Loves very spicy food [-1]; Mild uniform fetish [-1]; Social Stigma (Known Criminal) [-5]. [-83 points]

Skills and Techniques: Acrobatics (H) DX-2 [1]-10; Administration (A) IQ [2]-11; Armoury/TL10 (Small Arms) (A) IQ [2]-11; Beam Weapons/TL10 (Pistol) (E) DX+2 [2]-14, (Rifle) (E) DX+3 [8]-15; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-11; Carousing (E) HT [1]-12; Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-11; Current Affairs/TL10 (Business) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12, (Headline News) (E) IQ+1 [1]-11; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-10; Driving/TL10 (Mecha) (A) DX [2]-12; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Electronic Warfare) (A) IQ [2]-11, (Sensors) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Explosives/TL10 (Nuclear Demolition) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Fast-Draw (Grenade) (E) DX+1 [1]-13*, (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-13*; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-11; First Aid/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-11; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-11; Freight Handling/TL10 (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Gunner/TL10 (Beams) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Guns/TL10 (Grenade Launcher) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Hiking (A) HT [2]-12; Housekeeping (E) IQ [1]-11; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-11; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-12; Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-11; Law (Military) (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Leadership (A) IQ+3 [4]-14†; Observation (A) Per [2]-12; Piloting/TL10 (Ultralight) (A) DX [4]-13; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ+1 [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-12; Soldier/TL10 (A) IQ+2 [8]-13; Spacer/TL10 (E) IQ+2 [4]-13; Stealth (A) DX [4]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Survival (Mountain) (A) Per [4]-13; Swimming (E) HT [1]-12; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Vacc Suit/TL10 (A) DX+2 [8]-14. [99 points]

* +2 from Combat Reflexes

† +2 from Charisma

Gear: Assault Flamer with Underbarrel Electromag GL (25 mm); Space armor with Space combat helmet; Heavy Laser Pistol with Blinding Mode; Large Superfine Vibroblade Knife; Sonic Stunner; Ablative foam can; Pocket Medic; Survival Watch.

25mm grenades (in bandolier): 3 Shaped Charge; 3 Tangler; 2 Radiant Prism; 2 Paralysis Gas 25mm grenades; 1 EMP; 1 Expendable Jammer; 1 Strobe.

Gibaldi's souvenir collection includes a large range of sidearms, melee weapons, pieces of assorted uniforms, and medals, as well as assorted non-military items.

Adventures on Bromium

Energy Crisis: The heroes' ship is chartered by a company of bounty-hunters and mercenaries seeking to wipe out pirates lurking in the system. The plan is to take the power plant offline while the ship crosses one of the asteroid belts, and send out a distress signal. As expected, robots home in on the ship and attack, apparently doing only minor damage . . . but when Kona Gibaldi's ship approaches, the power plant won't reboot.

Have the robots disabled them, or was it sabotage by one of the mercenaries? If so, who was it, and why? And can the engineer repair the damage in time to get the ship's weapons and engines back online before they're boarded?

Punctuated Equilibrium: A meteor strike (or missile attack or sabotage?) holes the dome at Gordion and damages the life support system badly enough that nine of the inhabitants have to be evacuated to the HMM dome a few days before the PCs arrive in the system. The day before the PCs land, one of the evacuees -- the attractive unmarried 17-year-old Zoe Michaelides IV -- is raped and murdered.

The clan blames the HMM miners, who claim it was a crime of opportunity by a Michaelides. The clan offers to pay the PCs luxury rates if they'll shelter the evacuees on their ship and stay in the system until repairs to the dome are finished. Then, someone suggests that the PCs, as the only impartial observers, investigate the murder and make a ruling.

Who actually killed Zoe? And which side is willing to pay more in bribes?

Best Served Cold: Shortly after taking off from Gordion, the heroes' ship suffers a major malfunction and crashes on the planet's dark side (possibly sabotaged?). The pilot should be able to land it without any casualties, but getting it to fly again it will require parts that can be fabricated in a nanofac. This will require a 120-mile trek across the frozen wastes just to get within communication range of a Michaelides base camp, with the added risks of becoming utterly lost, or being shot for trespassing, before they can call for help.

Undermined: After both HMM and the clan start losing longnecks and other mining machines at an unusually great rate, some Bromians begin wondering aloud whether some alien lifeform might be responsible. If so, it's either invisible, able to teleport, or able to burrow well enough to disappear without trace . . . and it might not be native to the planet. Each side offers a $50,000 reward for the first person to bring in one of these aliens, resulting in cryptoxenobiologists and monster-hunters flocking to the planet -- many of them woefully underprepared and needing rescue.

Wrong Bet: After the clan and HMM draw up new borders and agree to a ceasefire, some younger members of the clan tell the heroes they have a cache of black market military weapons that they no longer need. Rather than selling them outright, however, they propose gambling . . . and if the PCs lose, they have to destroy a number of HMM longnecks or other robots.

The Economics of Time Travel

by William H. Stoddard

"Because a spacelike four-vector reverses its direction in time with a suitable change in the observer's reference frame, a procedure that sends a message faster than light is, in some reference frame, sending it backwards in time. It follows that the technology used to move the author (or reader) along a spacelike trajectory could also be used to send messages from future to past, raising a variety of familiar problems with causality. This may explain why Professor Krugman, in his model, assumed that the planetary futures markets were perfectly informed."
--David Friedman, *Ideas,* March 12, 2008

Stories about time travel often assume that time travelers are rare. They may be victims of a freak accident or intervention of a superhuman power that hurls them into the past or the future. They may be the inventors of the world's only time machine, or pioneers in exploring other times. Or they may be agents of a corporation or government agency that has exclusive possession of the secret of time travel, and restricts its use.

But technologies often become more widely used over time. The first heavier-than-air flight made the Wright Brothers famous; a generation later, pilots were still seen as heroic daredevils; but a century later, air travel is an industry. Space travel may be starting the same evolution. If time travel also turns into an industry, how will it be organized economically, and how will it affect the larger economic system within which it operates?

GURPS Infinite Worlds distinguishes between Plastic Time, in which time travel into the past may change the past and thus the present; and Fixed Time, with a single timeline that time travelers cannot change. The distinction doesn't apply to one-way time travel into the future; all of us travel into the future anyway. But it comes up with time travel into the past, and with two-way travel into the future (which amounts to travel forward to the future, followed by travel backward to what has now become the past). Any sort of backward movement in time, whether of material beings or simply of information (as in stories of prophecy), has the prospect of changing the past and generating time paradoxes.

But it's hard to imagine any sort of economic system operating in Plastic Time. Economic transactions are usually two-sided. But if any transaction between the past and the future destroys the future and creates a different future, the two-sidedness fails. This essay's speculations will assume that the timeline is at least fairly stable (Plastic Time with High Resistance), if not outright unchangeable (Fixed Time). They'll also assume a single timeline, rather than parallel or diverging worldlines -- that's the subject for a different essay!

The Time Travel Industry

First, then, let's examine the economics of time travel itself.

To start with, how is the time travel industry organized? Does one firm control all time travel, or are there a few competing big carriers, or innumerable small enterprises?

Industries with only a single firm can come about in a variety of ways. They can be the product of outright government grants, as in the monopolies and patents of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, where a ruler sells an exclusive license to deal in some commodity in his domains, or gives it to a favorite. They can also result from market competition, through economies of scale: If a bigger firm can operate at lower costs per unit, the natural outcome may be that an economy can only support one firm in a given industry. It's usually assumed that a monopoly will limit the supply of its product, to force the price up, and engage in price discrimination, giving better rates to favored customers; but not all monopolies work this way. Government regulation may limit a monopoly's rates, as in "common carrier" laws and traditional utilities regulation; or a monopoly may even choose to cut its prices and seek out new uses and new customers, as Alcoa did when it was the only supplier of primary aluminum in the United States . . . perhaps because it anticipates that failing to do this will encourage other firms to compete with it.

On the other hand, an industry may have multiple firms that compete with each other. Competition can take a variety of forms, from strategic maneuvering among a handful of big firms ("oligopoly") to a system with innumerable small firms that cannot influence the market in any way, but are limited to selling everything they produce at one standard price ("perfect competition"). The smaller the resources needed to engage in an activity, the closer it's likely to come to perfect competition. If a time machine costs a trillion dollars, the world may not even have one; if it costs ten dollars, practically anyone can set up in business as a time traveler.

However, the technological costs of time travel aren't the only ones that have to be paid. Would-be time travelers may have to pay a premium for their trips.

Consider a well-known historic event: the Crucifixion. To hundreds of millions of people, the execution of Jesus by the Roman government is the central event of all human history; to many others, it's important or at least interesting. If time travel could take people to the ancient Near East, how many people would want to make the trip to that event, whether to share in its spiritual impact, to witness the historical truth, to sell video footage to the mass media . . . or to prevent it from happening, whether out of misguided personal devotion to Jesus or because they wanted to prevent the rise of Christianity? Even assuming that the interventionists were screened out, the number who would make the trip if they could would almost surely be greater than the total population of Palestine when Jesus was alive. And that's not counting the equally large numbers of people from future generations who would also want to make the same trip, and, with time travel, could do so. Obviously they couldn't all be accommodated; if nothing else, a sudden influx of a million strangers into Palestine would be bound to make the Roman government suspicious and leave a historical record.

A bureaucratic organization could deal with this in a variety of ways, from establishing priorities to holding a lottery. For a market system, though, the natural way to deal with it would be by setting a price high enough to keep out all the excess people who couldn't be fit in. Economists call this kind of pricing *economic rent;* it represents a price paid not to pay the costs of producing something, but to exclude other people who would like to own or use it. For example, a popular athlete or movie star can be paid at an incredibly high rate, not because it takes that much to induce him to work -- he may have started his career willingly working for a fraction of his current pay rate -- but to outbid the other teams or movie projects that want his name, image, and fans. Economic rent naturally applies to commodities and services that exist in a limited quantity and can't, or can't easily, be increased: fertile land; or the labor of a uniquely talented person; or, in this case, a place in the crowd in Jerusalem during a specific Passover in the first century. The economic rent for a commodity may be much greater than its production cost; for example, the price of operating a time machine might be only a fraction of the rent for a specific time interval in a specific place.

Of course, collecting rent only works if you have secure possession of the thing you're renting. There would need to be a system of property rights in segments of the past, and possibly even a temporal title registry. If it were maintained by a government, it would have to be stable enough to survive, and maintain the same policies, from the start to the end of the period in which time travel was available. Lacking such stability, there would need to be some sort of anarchistic legal regime that had settled on clearly defined rules.

How could ownership be established? The usual rule for turning unowned objects into property, "first come, first served," seems hard to define in a world with time travel! An organization that became interested in the Crucifixion, or Waterloo, or any other famous event, and found that other organizations had claimed the available places could send its people back in time to make earlier claims. One possible answer would be to have the organization that was first on the scene in the past be able to exclude time travelers who arrived later. A really famous event might have historical management teams assigned to its site a century or more early, holding a place in line for the people who would actually witness the event -- the only limit would be the point at which it cost more to keep the site occupied continuously than access to the event could earn. The first inventor of a time machine might arrive outside Jerusalem and find himself intercepted by very polite corporate security people from a later millennium.

The same kind of limits will affect trade between past and future. Time travelers wanting to buy, say, bronze sculptures from ancient Assyria, if they were trying to supply countless billions of people in future millennia, could bid up the price beyond what the Assyrians themselves could afford, draw the entire Assyrian population into supporting the manufacture of bronzes, or even use up the ancient world's entire supply of copper and tin, destroying the very supply

of bronzes that attracted them. To avoid such paradoxes, trading rights in specific past eras would also have to be restricted, either bureaucratically or through a system of property rights.

How would such trade be conducted? Notice that the people in the past would see visitors coming to their lands, asking for their most beautiful possessions, and in return offering goods and services that they could not duplicate -- if not machines and other durable goods, perhaps medications that could cure an otherwise fatal illness, or information about what was going on in a distant land, or what would happen in another 10, 20, or 50 years. The exchanges would look a lot like the ancient Roman formula for sacrifices -- *do ut des:* "I give so that you give" -- with the time travelers playing the role of gods working miracles for the benefit of their worshipers. This might even have been how the sacrificial religions of the ancient world got started! Or ancient peoples might invent religions of their own resembling the "cargo cults" that emerged in New Guinea after contact with the West.

Time Travel and the Economy

With this discussion of trade, we approach the other aspect of time travel: Once a society had a time travel in place, how would its larger economy operate?

The Price of Time

One of the most important determinants of how a market economy works is the interest rate. For debtors, this is the price they pay to borrow money or buy things on credit; for creditors, it's the return on their investment. H. G. Wells' novel *The Sleeper Awakes* dramatized returns on investments, with its Sleeper's assets, held in trust, growing into a vast sum of wealth that controlled the entire economy in his name. But the Sleeper's trance was effectively a form of one-way time travel. In principle, any way of getting from the past to the future -- whether by suspended animation, stasis fields such as Vernor Vinge's "bobbles," or getting into a time machine -- could produce the same effect, at least if the time traveler had advance warning and could set up an investment portfolio for later reclamation.

But if this kind of time travel is generally available, a lot of people may be interested in this option. In effect, time travel lets you make an investment, let it grow for a decade or a century, and then collect the accumulated interest. This is going to look like free money to a lot of people. The natural tendency will be to attract more and more funds into time travelers' trusts . . . and by straightforward supply and demand, if the supply of loanable funds increases, the price of a loan, the interest rate, will drop. If time travel is really routine, to the point where an entire population use it to surf forward over the centuries, the basic interest rate will fall nearly to zero.

"Basic interest rate" here means the interest rate determined solely by time preference, or the desire to obtain a benefit now rather than waiting until later. In principle, time travel short-circuits time preference: if you can jump ahead a year to collect the return on your investment, there's very little reason to prefer a reward now to one a year from now.

The downward pressure will be even sharper if two-way time travel is possible. Even if forward time travel is free, it requires jumping into the future, away from the people and places you know -- whether to see them suddenly become older, or to outlive them. Many people will be reluctant to do this. But if you can pay a quick visit to the future, collect the yield of your investments or the products of your projects, and come back to now, there's no reason not to.

An economy with a zero interest rate is going to look quite peculiar. No one will be able to gain increased wealth by making investments and letting them grow. The present value of a string of payments will simply be the sum of the payments, with no discounting. So, for example, the monthly payment on a thirty-year mortgage will be 1/360 of the purchase price. After all, the seller can time travel forward to collect the whole string of monthly payments in one lump sum.

A time traveling society won't have one economy, but two. Consider a parcel of land, for example. If it has any usefulness at all, it can be rented for some monthly amount. And this rent can continue effectively forever. Even if it rents for a dollar a month, all those dollars will add up, to an infinite sum. So no area of land, however small, can ever be exchanged for any amount of any good that can be consumed, or that wears out over time, or gets used up, however

large the amount or however precious the good. Land will trade only for land, or for other perpetual goods.

On the other hand, a lot of things that we now think of as durable or perpetual will be seen not to be. For example, ownership of a building is normally treated as a durable good, in contrast to rent, which pays only for the right to occupy the building for a week, a month, or a year, a right that can be consumed or used up. But time travelers will be well aware that the building itself will wear out in several decades or centuries. Its value will be the sum total of its rents in that span of time; it's probably a large sum, but not infinite.

It might seem that there is a way around this economic split, though, and one that a time traveling society may want to take. When a landowner in current society sells land, what he's selling is all the rights to the land from the time of sale forward. But if time travel is possible, it might be more convenient to sell the land only in finite spans of time. For example, the owner of a lot in Philadelphia might choose to sell "the described lot between January 1, 3001, and December 31, 3200" to one person, and "the described lot between January 1, 3201, and December 31, 3400" to a different person. Instead of selling a space parcel, he would sell a space/time parcel. And each of those spans would have a finite value. But, in fact, this just makes the problem worse. If you owned a lot at the instant when time travel becomes legally recognized, you would then be able to make people pay you for every time span in which the lot would ever be occupied, at any time in the future. And that could add up to an effectively infinite amount of money. If nothing else, the inflationary effects would be unimaginably huge.

Another way to resolve this would be to declare that people can't own land infinitely far into the future. If you leave 2008, and time travel to 2108, perhaps you might be able to claim some rights in the land in 2108. But you would have no rights in the land in the years in between, and no right to collect income from it for those years. Someone else would take over ownership, and collect the rents, while you were out of circulation. And assuming people weren't immortal, because everyone would live a finite number of years, everyone would have only a finite claim to payment for land.

Of course, this could be complicated to administer. But if people could travel into the future, and bring back information, it would be possible to have perfectly accurate knowledge of who would be occupying the land in which year. At that point, the problem would be rather like scheduling flight reservations.

Knowing the Future

But this raises another problem about time travel, one that Robert Heinlein dealt with in his first published story, "Life-Line." A large part of the economy is driven by the uncertainty of the future. For example, insurance companies sell policies to people who aren't sure if they'll live or die, or if their houses will burn down or not, or if they'll be well or sick. What happens if people can get perfect information from the future? Suddenly all the people who know they'll have problems will rush to buy policies, and the ones who know they won't need insurance will let their policies go. Insurance companies will go out of business; the only way to meet the cost of a crisis will be to find out about it in advance, and put the money aside.

In the same way, gambling will stop being workable. If you can look up who won tomorrow's horse race, or this year's election, or what was the winning number in the state lottery, everyone will know how to bet. Elections will look very different when everyone knows which candidate will win before the first ballot is cast; hardly anyone will bother to vote.

It's even possible that money would disappear. The main reason people keep a cash balance is to hedge their bets and safeguard against uncertainties. But if you can get a schedule from your bank telling you every payment your future self made over the next 12 months, you'll know exactly when you're going to need money, and exactly how much. There's no reason to tie up your funds in cash even a minute before you have to make payments. Instead, you can put it into useful possessions, and then plan to sell them in time to raise the cash when you need it. And with the help of time travel, of course you'll know who will buy them, and for how much. So the demand for cash balances will drop nearly to zero, and the value of money will plummet.

Of course, we're assuming that it's impossible, or at least difficult, for a time traveler to change the past. But in this

case, it's not the time traveler who changes the past; it's the knowledge that time travel is possible. And, in fact, that very knowledge will destroy many of the institutions that time travelers could gain leverage from in trying to change the past. No one will be able to get rich betting on a sure thing if no one ever places a bet, for example.

Bear in mind, too, that physical time travel isn't needed for these problems to arise. Reliable prophecy creates exactly the same situations.

In short, time travel leads to more than just the standard paradoxes, such as the grandfather paradox or the paradox of closed-loop histories. It also creates economic paradoxes. A time traveling economy would look radically different from any economy that has ever existed. GMs looking for interesting plots could do well to read an economics textbook or two, and asking how one-way or two-way time travel could wreck their assumptions.

Suggested Readings

- David Friedman, *Price Theory: An Intermediate Text.* A guide to essential economic theory by an economist who's also a serious science fiction fan and a published fantasy author.
- Donald Kingsbury, *Courtship Rite.* A classic of science fiction, portraying a society based on economic optimization. One of its fundamental ideas is the limitation of "clairvoyance" (used by Kingsbury to mean foreseeing the future) by paradoxes of human behavior, in a society that systematically rewards successful predictors.
- Gerald P. O'Driscoll, Jr., and Mario J. Rizzo, *The Economics of Time and Ignorance.* An examination of the role of time in economic processes by two adherents of the Austrian school, which regards it as central to economic theory.
- H. G. Wells, *When the Sleeper Wakes.* The classic novel about letting the interest pile up while you skip ahead through time.

Pyramid Pick

Things We Think About Games

Published by [Gameplaywright Press](#)

Written by Will Hindmarch and Jeff Tidball with John August, Pat Harrigan, Fred Hicks, Ken Hite, John Kovalic, Michelle Nephew, Philip Reed, S. John Ross, Mike Selinker, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin

164-page b&w softcover; $25

Despite a plethora of games available at your local gaming store and online, comparatively few books exist about games and gaming. Most titles that are available are more likely to talk about being a better GM than they are about being a better player. *Things We Think About Games* is a new addition to this niche, one that goes further than simply handing out advice to only the GM and the player. It is aimed squarely at the games player, the games referee, *and* the games designer, not just of the *one* game, but of the whole gaming spectrum. Board games. Card games. Computer games. Miniatures games. Roleplaying games. Video games. War games. In other words, the whole kit and caboodle.

And the counsel comes in the fewest number of words possible.

Each piece of advice given in *Things We Think About Games* is written in the form of a Koan. A Koan is a Zen Buddhist question, statement, or story, one that defies logical understanding -- but not intuitive understanding -- such as the well-known question, "Two hands clap and there is a sound; what is the sound of one hand?" Fortunately, the advice provided by *Things We Think About Games* is rarely as esoteric as a Zen Koan, but it does defy comparison, because there has never been a gaming book like it. Indeed, its nearest equivalent being *The Little Book of Calm.*

Each gaming Koan in *Things We Think About Games* is assigned its own page where it appears in bold text. Sometimes it is accompanied by an explanation, sometimes not. This does lead to an awful lot of white space in *Things We Think About Games,* but then we are meant to concentrate on what's on the page, not what isn't. *Things We Think About Games* is not *that* esoteric. Fortunately for what is on the paper, every one of these gaming Koans is interesting, provocative, thought-provoking, and to the point.

Some are as simple and as obvious as "**Take your turn, already**" (Gaming Koan 002) or "**You cannot convince someone who is not having fun that he is**" (Gaming Koan 096). Some are obvious, but need a little explanation, such as "**In a tabletop roleplaying game, the characters are all wearing pants**" (Gaming Koan 023), which essentially means that most characters are going to be sane enough to put trousers on at the start of the day, so a player does not need to tell the GM that his character is doing so. Conversely, if neither character nor player are sane, or decided not to get fully dressed that morning, he probably needs to provide the GM with more detail is typically necessary.

There is design advice too. "**Clarity is vital**" (Gaming Koan 074), "**You have three pronouns available to use in your game rules: she, he, they**" (Gaming Koan 075), and "**Make your rules easy to reference**" (Gaming Koan 079) are all so to the point that as a reviewer I want to buy extra copies of this book, mark these pages in exceedingly bright color (or crayons) and post then to certain publishers. I would name them, but my editor says that I can't, so send me an e-mail if you really want to know. Other advice, like "**When you design the turn structure of a card game, the players should draw a new card at the end -- not the beginning -- of their turns**" (Gaming Koan 020), is just clever. Some advice, such as "**Symmetrical play spaces are boring**" (Gaming Koan 034), still has me scratching my head.

The authors compile and categorize 101 Things we think about games in ***Things We Think About Games.*** Each is numbered and marked with appropriate tags -- all games, fun, design, teaching games, history, play, and so on. There are also an extra six Things in the introduction by Wil Wheaton and the rest contributed by industry luminaries. Some of these are variations on other gaming Koans, but hey, some of them are worth repeating. Rounding out ***Things We Think About Games*** is John August's "7 Lessons Learned From *World of Warcraft*" (the first part of the book that I showed to my partner before letting her read the rest of the book) and "Cliché, Combat, Fellowship, Anarchy, and Enigma," an essay from S. John Ross on the five elements that comprise games and games worlds.

In all honesty, when you sit down to read this book, it is probable that you will find a few Things that will be already familiar to you. Then again, there will probably be more than just a few Things that will be unfamiliar to you. Nevertheless, both types of Things are still pithy and worth thinking about. In Robin D. Laws' forward, he talks about how in our hobby the lines between the creator (that's him), the critic (I'd like to think that was me), and the practitioner (that's you) is very, *very* fine. His point is that we are all gamers. The point of ***Things We Think About Games*** is that it is not exclusive. It should be read by every gamer.

A good gamer, though, will read it more than once.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Nefertiti

Published by Rio Grande Games

Designed by Jacques Bariot, Thomas Cauet, & Guillaume Montiage

Art by Alexandre Roche

Translated by Kurt McClung

Full-color boxed set with game board, four reserve tiles, 20 pawns (16 servants & four counters, in four colors), 30 coins in two denominations, 12 royal seals, 46 gift cards, one Akhenaton card, 13 character cards, two six-sided dice, one "market closed" tile, one ankh memory counter, reference sheet, & rules; $49.95

Pharaoh Akhenaton is throwing the biggest birthday bash the Nile has ever seen for his lovely queen, *Nefertiti.* Anyone who wishes to be in his good graces (and remembered favorably when the time comes for political appointments) has the chance to earn his backing by obtaining for her the finest and rarest of gifts.

The object of the game is have the most points when the last market closes.

Players (two to four of them) start the game with a little seed money. The board shows four cities where they can scour the markets for offerings to their queen. Gifts are represented by cards at each bazaar, and in order to get those items the nobles must send their servants to fetch them. Each market closes under its own circumstances, however, based on a different game mechanic. As pawns are placed at various locations, players check to see whether the requirements have been met.

It may be that the market remains open until there are four pawns on it, or one each of three colors. Another is arranged in levels like a pyramid; when a servant occupies every level of the structure, it shuts down. Still another may demand pawns be placed in a tic-tac-toe arrangement. Each space has a number, and that's how much the occupant has to pay at closing (if he can't he must relinquish a gift). Arrive early, get the best space . . . though to one player that means "cheapest" and another might want "highest bid." The high bidder gets first pick; he may take two gifts, or the one card that has the royal seal. Money is paid into the market's reserve. In descending order, other pawns get a card (so long as the supply holds out), or half the money in the reserve.

That market doesn't reopen until another one closes (the "market closed" tile shifts about the board in this fashion). When a bazaar reopens, it "flips" to its other half where there's a new set of conditions for closing it, a new set of gifts to grab, and a new royal seal. The seals are spent for an advantage in the game; characters beside the board can be hired to steal something from someone, force a trade, score added points immediately, or borrow money, among other things.

Akhenaton is hiding somewhere near the bottom of the gift-card deck, and when he shows up it means it's almost time for the party. The remaining markets are exhausted and then scores are tallied. The queen loves originality, so it's best to be the only one to offer her a particular kind of gift. Each species of gift references the points and the number of players; the more players who possess that type of prize, the fewer prestige points each such card is worth. One also receives points for any money and seals not spent during the game, and the highest total wins.

The selection of pieces is pretty simple, but what there is passes muster easily. Wooden pawns, thick market markers, and heavy-stock tokens and counters all contribute to the game's value. The art evokes the Egyptian way of life, and the design of the game is clean and crisp. Then again, the price tag on this item shows the economy is catching up to someone along the supply line. At fifty bucks (for a relatively small game) the cost increase is noticeable, the lovely equipment notwithstanding.

The setup may seem spare, but the strategy involved is anything but. It's not hard to grasp the individual mechanics for each market, but placing pawns to one's best advantage is no simple thing. Few treasures are won by a single player in this game, and even if one could take them alone it would be cost-prohibitive. Success comes only to those who make a concerted effort to play well with others, whether those others want the "help" or not. One cannot just take the "best" spots because the definition changes . . . and they're never enough to close the market anyway. Judging position vs. cost is paramount, and since one usually ends up spreading out to several markets without knowing which will close first, when it comes time to pay the piper one's coffers may come up short.

Nefertiti is a wonderful work that keeps people on their toes and guessing. The fun factor makes replays palatable, and since it's a quick way to blow through 45 minutes it can be the appetizer or the main course. Just the right gift is pretty easy to find here.

--Andy Vetromile

Adventure Favorites (Dungeon-Crawl or Otherwise)

Over on the *Pyramid* [message boards](), I made a comment that some of the classic "dungeon crawl" adventures still get my blood pumping even two decades later, with the variety of the encounters. I was asked by Rob Kamm if I wouldn't mind detailing some of those favorites, perhaps in a column. Ever happy to make a reader happy *and* snag a column idea at the same time, I heartily agreed.

Of course, when we're talking "20-year-old adventures," for the most part we're talking ***Dungeons & Dragons*** (***Advanced*** or otherwise). I'm trying to think of beloved examples not from that game, but it's slow going.

I'm also hampered because the bulk of my "classic" stuff is in boxes that are stacked atop each other, behind other boxes, in a closet whose back I last saw when I moved into our current apartment over two years ago. So I apologize if I missed some treasure hidden in either my memory or a musty box. This isn't meant to be an exhaustive list so much as a catalog of some adventures that jump to my mind when I think "20-year-old adventures that get my juices flowing."

Q1: Queen of the Demonweb Pits: This one sticks out in my memory because it was so different from everything that had gone before. It takes place on the plane of the Abyss, and a good chunk of the "adventure" describes how the normal rules the heroes are used to -- regarding spells, how the world works, etc. -- are different than they might be expecting. Most notable in my mind was the difficulty in getting *to* the main part of the adventure, the "dungeon" of the Demoness Lolth herself. The four levels of the abyss that formed the "dungeon" to get to her were actually three criss-crossing Escher-like paths, with a fourth layer floating *above* the other three. Although there were teleporters to facilitate movement between the levels (if the heroes can figure out how to use them), the most obvious means of navigating between the layers -- taking advantage of the fact that the levels overlap and underpass each other -- won't make a difference if the heroes don't figure out that one of the four levels can't be accessed like the other three can. In addition, the encounters on that fourth layer are each mini-campaigns themselves, suitably epic and definitely taking advantage of the "otherwhere" concept that is the alternate plane.

Sadly, the rest of this adventure is a "kill 'em all" dungeon crawl for all intents and purposes. One thing I always appreciated was that the "encounter" with Lolth was actually about four or five encounters, with the assumption that she had enough tricks up her sleeves to retreat backwards to other parts of her abode.

C2: The Ghost Tower of Inverness: This was actually the adventure I had in mind when my mind wandered backwards a few decades for "quintessential" dungeon crawls. Perhaps most interesting to me is the fact that the "Ghost Tower" isn't immediately obvious or discoverable, and the heroes could waste a lot of time not even discovering the "beginning" of their adventure. In addition, environment was a key factor of this adventure, and the adventurers needed to remember their surroundings and use them to their advantage if they hope to survive or even thrive.

S3: Expedition to the Barrier Peaks: This one could be treated like a standard dungeon crawl, but that would be completely missing the point. *[SPOILER ALERT!]* Set in the ruins of a spaceship that crashed long ago, much of the fun of this adventure comes from trying to figure out what the heck is going on, including how to operate the strange wands with triggers, the unbreakable "glass" cards that provide access to various doors, and suits of armor that provide abilities where "magic" doesn't seem like a suitable adjective.

UK1: Beyond the Crystal Cave: Although not really a "dungeon crawl," I loved this adventure because it's one of the only "classic" adventures where combat is well and truly secondary to interaction and investigation. Set in a pocket-dimension garden, the heroes explore this strange (and very British) world where they need to deal with leprechauns, fate-torn lovers, maddening mazes, and time-distortion oddness. Because of the latter, this is one of those deceptive adventures that can greatly alter a campaign if the heroes aren't careful . . . even if they're entirely successful.

Ravenloft: Another one that can be combat-heavy, I always loved how this one's set-up was different from game to game. Bad-guy motivations, locations of major items, and more were determined *in game* through a tarot-esque

reading. It also had one of the best maps of the 1980s.

Ghost Toasties: I'm relying on my original memories of this adventure for West End Games' original ***Ghostbusters*** game, so if my nostalgic flashbacks have obscured a less-than-stellar adventure, I apologize. (Yes, I know it's also not a "dungeon crawl" . . .) ***Ghost Toasties*** was an adventure that I recall having a good mix of stuff to do, including puzzles to figure out and choices to make. (It certainly seemed more interesting than many ***Star Wars*** adventures from West End Games, the bulk of which can be barreled through with a liberal application of Blaster and Dodge.) And it was written by none other than *Pyramid* alumnus Scott Haring, so it must be worth tracking down! (In a brown box in the back of my closet of doom . . .)

Mystery of the Snow Pearls: This was a solo adventure for the old "Companion" set of ***Dungeons & Dragons,*** and is quite probably the best solo ***Dungeons & Dragons*** adventure I've played. Although not a "dungeon crawl" for the entirety, the climax of the tale still takes place in a "dungeon," and I feel fine including it here. Again, a wide mix of riddles, choices, and dilemmas make this a true example of what ***Dungeons & Dragons*** can (and should) be, and it's one I return to every other year or so to experience again.

One thing I think I'd take away from many of these is that, in many of my favorites, "getting there is half the fun." In other words, the mere act of having to *find* a dungeon (or figure out how to get into it) goes a long way toward building it up in my mind . . . perhaps because it is such an effective means of explaining why a location is noteworthy in the first place, as well as explaining why it's relatively intact for the heroes to wreck mayhem.

Of course, there's also something to be said about the mere act of nostalgia, of transporting myself mentally back to an era when I hadn't seen everything and done everything, when that dank opening into a dungeon was the first. But classics are classics for a reason, and I find myself with an urge to return to my own dungeon (closet) in search of treasure (brown boxes of loot).

--Steven Marsh

Ten Creepy Everyday Objects

by Michael Kreuter

Sometimes, even in non-horror campaigns, you need to inject a brief scene of subtle horror into your game. Perhaps the event is not even horrific so much as it is slightly disturbing or unsettling. In horror campaigns it is necessary to break up the action; not every scene can involve horrendous monsters and soul-sucking abominations. Sometimes you need something that's only slightly creepy to build up to the true horror, or sometimes you just need to give them a break between scenes. Occasionally, you can use something that seems creepy at first, but turns out to be nothing out of the ordinary. On the converse, sometimes things that seem ordinary can be rather creepy! Ten everyday objects that can be used to this effect are outlined below, each with a discussion on why they can be unsettling and how you can use them in a campaign.

Mirrors

An in-depth discussion on mirrors and different beliefs regarding them is found in Kenneth Hite's "Mirror, rorriM."

Mirrors can invoke fear because they represent self-reflection. Man looking into himself can be quite terrified at what he is, or more commonly, what he has become. Mirrors also represent vanity, which may be a trait which someone is trying hard to avoid, and would be terrified that they have given in. Doing so could even bring about their destruction! (Note Narcissus, as mentioned in the above article.)

Also as mentioned, mirrors are often portrayed as portals to another world. Malevolent entities can come through them to attack, or people can enter this other world through them to a world where all their base assumptions are backwards. Note the mirror motifs presented in Lewis Carroll's *Through The Looking-Glass.* This world can be presented as not only confusing, but terrifying.

Another disturbing thought can be presented when one is faced with a mirror. Looking at one's own reflection reminds the viewer that they are a normal person, who looks just like everyone else. Although they are "inside" themselves, looking out, they will come to the realization that they are not the only people who feel like that. It reminds those who gaze upon their reflection that they are but one of very many.

Mirrors also provide a means of looking at one's own body, which can be unsettling. One's consciousness is normally entirely inside one's body, so to look at it is like having one's consciousness outside the body. It is almost a minor form of an Out of Body Experience, which causes the viewer to begin questioning the very nature of consciousness in the first place.

Using mirrors as a creepy occurrence in a campaign presents the GM with a number of options. The first thing the GM must decide is if he is going to make the mirror actually possess supernatural powers or not. Either choice is just as valid as the other, but it does depend on the mood that the GM is trying to create. Generally, if he wishes a more subtle horror, he should make the mirrors mundane, while if he wants to get to some serious horror, he can use the mirrors as conduits to things that are even more disturbing. The two are not mutually exclusive, either. Perhaps an even creepier occurrence would involve the players never quite knowing whether the mirror was supernatural or not.

Supernatural uses of mirrors often involve evil beings coming from a mirror world, using the mirror as a portal. Sometimes they aren't able to exit the mirrors, but appear in them anyway. Perhaps they can possess people who look at them in the mirror. Alternatively, maybe the mirror isn't a portal to another realm, but it shows otherwise invisible creatures in our own realm. No matter which is chosen, this does not have to be explained magically. It could just as easily be the characters going mad, a horrific event in its own right.

If the choice is to present the mirror as mundane, there are a number of ways to make interaction with a mirror horrific. If there is a mirror hung in a poorly lit room and one doesn't know that there is a mirror there, the reflection can be

mistaken for another person. Once it begins to match the viewer's movement, it will tip him off that something odd is going on. He may not immediately assume that it is a mirror, however. He may think that it's someone who is watching him as closely as he is watching it. This is especially effective if he approaches the figure, because it will begin walking toward him, too. This can become supernatural as well, if the figure is actually some kind of entity in the mirror.

Another classic use of the mirror is to have the PCs pass by mirrors and telling them that they think they see something in the mirror in their peripheral vision, but not seeing anything when they look. If the RPG system being used has a mechanic for making a roll to see if the characters notice something, make them roll here, but no matter what the result tell them the same thing: They glimpse something but can't make out what it is. It can also be effective to give the characters a strange sense of being watched. Whether this is true or not, and whether it is due to otherworldly entities that live in the mirrors or merely because they are made of one-way glass, is left up to the GM, depending on the mood she wishes to create.

These uses say nothing of special mirrors that may be magical, which are also often prominent in mythology and fiction. (A more detailed discussion is given in the aforementioned article on mirrors.)

Clocks

Clocks can be scary because they represent the passage of time, which cannot be stopped. Nevertheless, with each tick we are brought one second closer to death. Clocks, then, remind us of our own mortality. Moreover, they remind us of our complete lack of power against time, a dimension that we don't actually fully understand. We perceive time as change, but perhaps it is actually a spatial dimension. Naturally, not all players will find the latter inherently creepy, but many will dislike the idea that they are going to die!

Clocks chiming are also vaguely creepy, especially if it is the only sound that can be heard. This can signify loneliness. They can also be chimed at an appropriate time to be an omen of ill fortune. Popularly, they chime midnight when something ominous is happening, because that time is often associated with evil due to instinctive fears of the night and the creatures that inhabit it.

Use of clocks to create fear is even more subtle than those with numbers. The clocks themselves often aren't the creepy part, but what they represent can be. If the GM is going for the supernatural, then perhaps all the clocks in an area run backwards or speed up for a brief moment. Perhaps they all stop, and are stuck at a pertinent time. A clock that is somehow wrong can also be unsettling, such as one that chimes 13 times or a digital clock displaying 6:66.

Dolls

Although animate dolls are unquestionably scary ever since the world was introduced to Chucky, even those that are inanimate can cause a chill to run up the spine. Often this is because we have a fear that they might be able to move after all, but only do so when we're not looking. The trouble and fear regarding dolls is that they look human, so we are easily able to imagine them being mobile. Often the scariest part is not that we suspect that they can move, but that we can never catch them moving. Alternatively, the fear might be that they are completely soulless. We are able to fabricate something that is a reasonable facsimile of humans, but we cannot give them life. Porcelain dolls are even scarier, possibly because their fragility reminds us of our own.

A little girl, particularly one with curly blonde hair and fair complexion, who appears someplace where she often isn't supposed to be, is made much scarier by possessing a porcelain doll. It is the juxtaposition of innocence and terror that creates the fear there.

There are plenty of ways to use dolls to create horror in a campaign. The most obvious of which is to make the doll animated. A popular explanation is possession by demons, but it's also possible that the doll is simply like that. Usually the animated doll will be malevolent, or else it wouldn't be as terrifying.

If you do include an animated doll, it is best to do so gradually. Don't let the characters see the doll moving. Have it show up in various locations, wherever they happen to go in a house, for example. Keep this believable, as though it could have been moved in the times they saw it, albeit possibly by an unknown person or force. Then you can let them see it with more frequency, such that it begins to become odd that they run into it every time they enter a new room. Eventually they may try things such as locking it up, but allow it to escape without unlocking or destroying its bonds. This is a very popular theme in ghost stories, even those reported in real life.

Cars

There has been fiction about cars being sentient (or robots in disguise!) with varying outlooks on whether the cars would be benevolent or evil. On the horror side of it, cars are often murderous (see 1977's *The Car*). Cars are scary for a similar reason as dolls. Their headlights and grill resemble eyes and a mouth. But unlike dolls they seem more inhuman, but possibly animate. It is always scary when something inhuman acts with its own volition.

At the same time, cars represent technology, and technology is also often portrayed as a source of horror, or something that can turn on us in unexpected ways. (***GURPS Screampunk*** covers this.) What happens when we realize that we are all but slaves to the machine, and must feed them gasoline? The environmentally conscious may also find their pollution quite disturbing.

Using cars to add horror is possibly a bit more difficult if it's not going to be a main plot point that there are animate cars. Perhaps they are being possessed by demons along with a number of other items. However, cars don't have to be animated to be scary. Especially at night, if the characters are walking along a road a car can suddenly rush up with its high-beams up, blinding them and causing them to scatter. Possibly a truck blares its horns when the characters find they are facing it on a narrow road, or maybe an enemy driving a car is trying to run down the characters on foot.

Toilets

Toilets represent a childhood fear: toilet training. As such, they will be fears mostly for children, but these fears have a way of coming back under stress. They also look like they could be human, with the bowl being the mouth and the flushing lever an eye of sorts. Despite the fact that they are held in place by their pipes, this can be a very fearsome thing for a child.

Toilets also represent human waste, which can be a sort of "gross-out." Be cautious when using something like this in a campaign, but realize that this is one of the things that makes us fear toilets.

In addition to living toilets, a more realistic fear is that something will come from it. It will be filthy, often coming from the sewers, which adds to its disgust. This is probably the more convenient way to use toilets in a campaign. If the mood is creepy but not supernatural, a rat (or swarm!) might crawl up the pipes. If something more sinister is going on, it might be a tentacled Lovecraftian horror.

Decorative Weapons

Someone coming at you with a weapon is always going to be scary, though if you're a veteran this will mostly be the adrenaline that is needed for the fight. This is not a subtle fear at all! A weapon mounted on the wall is more discreetly creepy. Since weapons exist as a tool used to harm something -- and many weapons are used solely for harming other people -- having one on your wall advertises the fact that you own one and probably condone the injury or death of other people. This is a statement more about the owner of the dwelling than the items themselves.

Animated weapons appear in some fantasy fiction, especially video games. One method of using decorative weapons is to have the heroes somehow trigger them so they fly off of the walls, but this lacks the subtlety mentioned above. It can be just as good to include a description of a mounted weapon as a way to build atmosphere.

Wigs

Wigs are often made of human hair, and to be wearing another human's body parts could be quite unsettling, despite the fact that it doesn't actually hurt them to harvest it. The best way to use them in the campaign may be to have a bunch of wigs on wig-holders, the head-shaped stands. The stands are faceless, but seem to stare at you, while the wigs only serve to make them seem more human.

Kitchen Knives

Kitchen knives are not weapons, but that may be what makes them even scarier. They look sharp and dangerous, and they usually come in groups, as though they were teeth. They are a favorite item for the telekinetic to launch, as well as a commonly grabbed item for defense. This is because of their prevalence. They are much easier to acquire than weapons.

There are different ways to include kitchen knives, but most of the time they will be found in a kitchen. They may be hanging in a row, gleaming in a dim light cast by a flashlight or torch, or they might fall on an unwitting character as he tries to get something off of a shelf. Depending on how you play it up, it can add a creepy atmosphere.

Stuffed Animals

The children's toys, which are just as often caricatures of animals as they directly resembling animals, are creepy in a manner similar to dolls as discussed above. Real animals that were stuffed via taxidermy are creepy in a different way. One can never be sure whether they are alive or not, even if they assume that they are not. They stare at you with their glass eyes, but don't see. Or possibly they do, therein lies the fear.

A few stuffed animals, or mounted heads, can be added to a darkened room to increase the scary atmosphere. It is especially effective if the character is swinging a flashlight around and then suddenly catches their eyes, such that they will gleam. At first they might be scared, but then they will find that it is merely a stuffed animal. This will cause them relief, which if the GM wishes can be subverted by making it a live animal, instead.

Music Boxes

Music boxes, and more specifically music box music can invoke a sense of innocence and child-like wonder. On the other hand, it can also invoke a feeling of child-like powerlessness. Both can be used to create a creepy effect. Most commonly the music is juxtaposed with a creepy event, or a child being used as a creepy villain has a music box playing whenever she is around. Try using music-box music to mark the advent of this villain and see if your players learn to associate the two. Alternatively, play music box music whenever the players are faced with a being they can't hope to defeat in combat. They will be able to associate these, too.

Luck and Her Accouterments

for *GURPS*

by Michael Kreuter

In some settings, luck is a very real and tangible force. It (or sometimes she) is usually presented as a fickle force. It ebbs and flows, granting a boon to someone one minute and ignoring or even working against them the next. Sometimes people are subject to the whims of an ineffable force, the desires of which are beyond man to know. Sometimes the force is disturbingly human and personal, such as that controlled by a capricious goddess of fortune. At other times, it is entirely impersonal and just as much a law of nature as gravity. Depending on the mythology, people may be able to sway this force one way or another, perhaps through magic or through more mundane rituals. They may even pray to a goddess of luck, but this is often a last resort. Goddesses (and they are almost always goddesses) of luck are too flighty to care for worship.

A few individuals are smiled upon by luck more often than others. We call them lucky. Whether the force is impersonal and they are just a 'magnet' for it, or a goddess or other entity has actually taken special interest in them, things just seem to go well when they are involved. There are a number of ways to model lucky characters in roleplaying games. In GURPS, there are a number of 'lucky' advantages, including Luck, Super Luck, and Serendipity. But to emulate a character who revolves around luck, who manipulates that curious force or is a favorite of a goddess of luck, more is needed. In particular, a method of modeling the nature of luck is required.

New Power Source: Luck -25%

Luck is an odd power source. It is when a character possesses an ability simply because he's lucky! Unfortunately, luck is not an entirely reliable source. For one thing, it is Fickle (***GURPS Powers*** p. 110), and requires an unmodified reaction roll when it is used. Depending on the campaign, the GM is free to interpret this as being the whims of a supernatural entity, or simply due to the unpredictability of an unknown force.

Luck also requires that the character be superstitious, but follow it as rigidly as a 5 point Code of Conduct. He will carry shamrocks and rabbits' feet, hang horseshoes over his door, and avoid ladders, black cats and mirrors. He must throw salt over his left shoulder after spilling it. The reasons for this can vary at the GM's option: Perhaps these things are actually sinks and sources of luck energy, or perhaps for whatever reason the goddess of luck demands it. Superstitions differ by culture, and in radically different settings can be entirely contrived by the GM. Failure to adhere to this -- especially if he does something unlucky -- will force him to make amends, depending on how severe the unluckiness was. If it is something minor, perhaps acquiring a lucky charm or finding a four-leaf clover will suffice. For a larger infraction, he will have to take a significant risk and succeed, whether that risk is physical, emotional or even financial. Fortune favors the brave. Or at times, the foolish.

Below are advantages that work well with the Luck power source and a brief description of why it fits or how it can be explained in a way that makes it fit. Additional notes appear for some advantages.

Affliction (p. B35) -- Only applicable if the affliction either grants Luck or some sort of penalty to skill rolls, and even then only with a character who actually has control over luck.

Catfall (p. B41) -- Rather than being nimble enough to always fall on your feet, you're just lucky enough to always fall in a manner that does less damage!

Charisma (p. B41) -- You happened to doll yourself up specially that morning, or are wearing something that the person to whom you are speaking really likes.

Combat Reflexes (p. B43) -- It's not that you have superior reflexes, it's just that you're lucky enough to be on alert

when things happen.

Damage Resistance (p. B46) -- You're not often hit in a vital location or you turn in the right way to change an otherwise damaging hit into a glancing blow.

Danger Sense (p. B47) -- Similar to Combat Reflexes, but you manage to see something at the right time or react to a sound no one else hears.

Daredevil (p. B47) -- Fortune aids the daring! You get a lucky bonus when doing something risky.

Destiny (p. B48) -- You might be one of those who have a destiny decided by fate, although those who do rarely see much use out of the destiny during day to day life. As such, it is a difficult advantage to claim as part of the Luck power source, though the GM may allow it if she wishes.

Fit/Very Fit (p. B55) -- While the fatigue regain doesn't fit quite as well, the bonus to HT rolls does. You happened to drink your orange juice that morning to replenish your blood during a fight, or you remembered to take your vitamins.

Gizmo (p. B57) -- You always seem to have the right little gadget on hand when it is needed, simply because you're lucky enough to have brought your favorite pair of nose hair trimmers with you.

Gunslinger (p. B58) -- Rather than being a good shot, you're a lucky shot!

Hard to Kill/Subdue (p. B58-9) -- Many characters tend to find themselves not dying or otherwise being incapacitated, usually because they just have good chances of living through something.

Intuition (p. B63) -- You have a knack for picking the correct option, not because of some sixth sense but just because you're lucky!

Longevity (p. B66) -- You are lucky enough to avoid the worst effects of aging.

Luck/Super Luck (p. B66/B89) -- These are the quintessential luck skills, though Luck itself is a little bit unwieldy to be fitted with the Luck power source due to its fickle nature. Not only does it make the Luck even less reliable, but it also makes a lot more rolling. A GM may wish to forgo the Luck power source on this one, and only impose the "Required Code of Conduct" Limitation for -5%.

Perfect Balance (p. B74) -- Again, you are not extremely dexterous, but you don't fall anyway simply because you never place your foot in an unfortunate position.

Serendipity (p. B83) -- This is another typical luck advantage. Note that the GM will make the reaction roll in secret before giving you a serendipitous event.

Silent (p. B85) -- It's not that you make less noise, just that people don't seem to hear you.

Slippery (p. B85) -- You're not literally slippery, or even lithe, but enemies can't seem to grip you as well anyway.

Unkillable (p. B95) -- You're so lucky you never even die!

Visualization (p. B96) -- Rather than yourself being improved by careful planning, things just happen to go the way you imagined it, which makes it a lot easier. Other than that, it needs no modification.

Wild Talent (p. B99) -- You've never done this before, but you give it a shot anyway. You're lucky enough to succeed well more often!

Naturally this list can be expanded to include any advantage that the GM and player agree can be explained with "being lucky."

Luck Talent

The Luck talent is a new talent. This costs 5 points/level and gives a bonus to Gambling, Games, Stealth, Strategy, Tactics, and Survival. The reaction bonus is to gamblers and the generally superstitious.

Stealth, Strategy, and Tactics may seem like odd choices for a Luck talent, so they require explanation. Stealth, much like the Luck-aspected description of Silent, simply makes other people more likely to overlook you. Your Strategy and Tactics don't actually improve, but you're more likely to stumble onto a lucky move.

Luck Pool

Another idea for incorporating a luck force into your game is to give each character a pool of Luck Points (LP). The more LP a character has, the more inherently lucky he is. However, this luck is drained when used! Model this as an Energy Reserve (Luck) (*GURPS Powers* p. 119). Now each luck-based advantage needs to have the "Costs Fatigue" limitation, as well as the -5% "Can only be used with ER." Good advantages to use for this purpose appear in the list above. Other than that, follow the usual rules for Energy Reserve.

Note that this limits Luck twice. Not only is the character limited by the number of Luck Points they have, but they are limited to using it as often as their level of Luck allows them. If the GM wishes, she can waive the time limitation, and instead apply Costs 3 Fatigue to level 1 of Luck, Costs 2 Fatigue to level 2, and Costs 1 Fatigue to level 3.

Players may also wish to "spend" their LP to improve skill rolls. For this ability, make them buy 1 level each of Extra IQ and Extra DX with three limitations: "Accessibility (Only on Skills)" for -20%, "Costs 1 Fatigue" for -5%, and "Can only be used with ER (Luck)" for -5%. This totals to 14 points each, or 28 points for both. This will let them trade 1 LP for a +1 to most skills, but no more than that unless they spend more than 28 points. The GM can treat this as a 28pt/level advantage. Each level allows the player to trade 1 LP for a +1 on a roll. Although it is largely up to GM fiat whether she lets the players make this trade before or after the skill has been rolled, taking a cue from the Luck advantage says that it should be allowed after a roll. This makes LP a valuable resource that can be used in a predictable manner, and should be carefully guarded.

The GM may wish to create an elixir that restores LP. This is far more common in a fantasy setting than others. He may wish to model it after the Healing potion (*GURPS Magic* p. 217), except that it restores LP rather than FP.

The Luck Pool mechanic should probably not be combined with Luck as a power source because it limits luck abilities twice, and creates extra bookkeeping.

Instantly Trapped

by Nikola Vrtis

Sure, challenging adventurers with monsters and henchmen is fun, but sometimes it isn't enough. You need something sneakier, something that takes ingenuity to overcome, or something just plain different. You need a trap.

In the same way that many games let you roll up adversaries on the fly, coming up with interesting hidden perils can be just as easy, especially if you have a standard deck of 52 playing cards and this article. Simply shuffle the cards and deal yourself the detailed outline of an instant trap. Examples of this system are at the end of this article. (Of course, if you don't want to make it obvious that you are coming up with a trap on the fly, you can deal out a few ahead of time. Alternatively, you might keep a deck of cards hidden in the bathroom, and hope no one notices the shuffling sound when you excuse yourself.)

Object Trap

For a hazard associated with one item (such as a box, door, computer keyboard, lock, etc.), draw *one* card and compare it to this chart. Reference the value of the card to determine how much harm it does to the person who triggers it; the higher the value, the deadlier it is (aces low, kings high). Use the suit of the card to decide how easy it is to determine the existence of the hidden danger and how challenging it is to disarm or avoid: A heart or spade is moderately difficult, while a diamond or club is extremely difficult.

Color	Rank	Result
Any	A	No trap, but it sure seems like one is here! Draw a second card to determine what sort of peril seems to be sprung. However, this version does no damage. If you get a second ace or a face card, there used to be a trap here, but someone already disarmed it.
Red	Odd number	Electrical or energy shock
Red	Even number	Squirt of toxic goo or other liquid
Black	Odd number	Caustic or poisonous puff of gas
Black	Even number	Sharp dart or blade
Any	Face card	The trap is somehow enhanced and does an additional level (die, wound level, etc.) of damage. It might be technically more potent or magically enhanced. Draw another card to determine the type of obstacle and how much injury it causes. Additional instances of this result are cumulative.

All instant object traps release after a failed disarm roll or an attempt to use the item without first checking for traps. To evade a sprung hazard, use the same difficulty as needed to figure out its existence.

Large Traps: General Details

For larger hazards -- ones that can affect multiple people -- draw *four* cards and cross-reference their suits and values to these charts. Rely on the first two cards to determine some aspects common to two types of hidden perils, and the

last two cards to figure out characteristics of specific traps.

First Card: Type of Trap

Use the first card to decide which type of endangerment the adventurers come across.

Suit	Result	Notes
Heart or club	Pit	A big opening that the characters can fall into.
Diamond or spade	Ranged Hazard	Holes at a distance from the adventurers shoot out projectiles.

First Card: Difficulty to Locate and Avoid

The first card also dictates how challenging the trap is for the characters to discover and evade or disable.

Rank	Result
A	In plain sight.
Any number card	The trap is hidden. The higher the number, the more difficult it is to find and avoid or disarm.
Any face card	The threat can only be found and disarmed by using magic, psionics, super powers, or similar extraordinary measures.

Second Card: Trigger

Use the second card to determine what sets off the hidden danger.

Suit	Result	Notes
Club	Pressure plate or location trigger	Stepping on a certain area in front of, near, or on top of the hazard causes it to be sprung. A pit trap may open under the victim (if there's no chance to escape the endangerment) or in front of the space (if there's a way to avoid the peril).
Spade	Switch	By turning a handle, flicking a switch, moving a bottle, or some other seemingly mundane action, the trap is sprung.
Heart	Tripwire	A thin cord is stretched across the area where people will walk. It could be at ankle height (if hidden) or at chest height (if visible). In a modern or science-fiction setting, the thread could be replaced by a laser light beam.
Diamond	Unusual trigger	The peril has a less common trigger, such as sensor that detects a visual cue or certain minimum levels of sound, body heat, or air displacement. The mechanism could be technological or magical in nature, depending on the setting.

Second Card: Initiative

Sometimes there's a delay between when the trap is triggered and when it does its thing. Use the second card and this chart to figure out just how much of a delay there is.

Rank	Result
A	The trap is sprung before any character has a chance to do anything.
Any number card	The trap releases when its "number" comes up in the rotation or initiative order. (The number may need adjusting to turn it into something more meaningful for the preferred system. For systems that can't utilize a number, the higher the number, the longer the delay.) In the case this number ties a character's turn in a round, the trap is sprung after a character has his chance to act.
Any face card	The trap goes off after all other characters have had an opportunity to do something -- including looking for or avoiding the trap.

Large Traps: Pit Specifics

Third Card: Depth: To figure out how deep the pit is *in yards,* multiply the number on the third card by 3. Number cards equal their value, while aces are 1, jacks are 11, queens are 12, and kings are 13.

Third Card: Size of Pit's Opening: Use the third card and this chart to decide how many average-sized humans could fall easily into the pit if it opened under them all at once. Note that a larger or smaller number of individuals may actually end up in the pit.

Suit	Number
Heart	2
Spade	3
Diamond	5
Club	6

Fourth Card: Starting Contents: The fourth card and this chart help determine what's in the pit before victims tumble in. If desired, the GM may swap out something else for one of the suggestions given here. (In particular, if the heroes are missing a vital fact that allows for the adventure to continue, having a clue at the bottom of a pit trap makes for a good "consolation" prize.)

Face	Suit	Result	Notes
Any except A	Heart	Empty	There might be a few rocks, bones, or minor treasure at the bottom, but nothing that would cause additional injury.
Any except A	Spade	Creature	Something else is down here. Whatever it is, it's vicious, hungry, and will try to get out of the way of anything falling from above. It waits until the body or bodies hit bottom before attacking.
Any except A	Diamond	Spikes	Spikes of metal, bone, wood, or rock line the bottom. Depending on the system, pointy things at the end of a fall either increase the amount of injury caused to the victim or change the type of damage to something more deadly (such as impaling in *GURPS* or Killing Damage in the *Hero System*).
Any	Club	Liquid	There are several inches of liquid (water, mud, etc.) at the

except A			bottom. It softens the fall a little, but it prevents a person from sitting comfortably and could get into supplies and ruin them. Alternatively, the walls and floor are coated in a gooey substance. This increases the difficulty of all physical actions until the slippery stuff can be cleared off or dealt with.
A	Any	Padded	Grass, leaves, pillows, or some other cushy material lines the bottom. This reduces the amount of damage done to the victim from the fall.

Fourth Card: Difficulty to Get Out: Cross-reference the fourth card on this chart to discover the nature of the walls and how much assistance they offer on their own to escapees.

Face	Color of Suit	Result
Any number card	Red	Rough walls, with plenty of hand- and footholds (such as roots, cracks, or rocks).
Any number card	Black	Rough walls, moderately difficult to climb.
A or any face card	Any	Smooth walls that can only be scaled with special equipment or abilities.

Large Traps: Ranged Hazard Specifics

Third Card: Number of Portals: The number on the third card dictates how many openings exist in this trap. Number cards equal their value; treat aces as 1, jacks as 11, queens as 12, and kings as 13.

Projectiles released from the portals target the closest victim. If there are multiple dangers, divide the projectiles as evenly as possible among the potential targets, or however makes the most sense. (For example, if you decide the projectiles are emerging from the eastern wall, then the tiny gnome standing to the west of the huge troll might escape unharmed.)

Third Card: Damage: Use the suit on the third card to figure out how harmful the projectiles are. (Before using this system, devise values for the damage levels appropriate to the challenge you wish to provide. In general, 1 is trivial for all groups while 4 can be "seriously hampering," "catastrophically threatening," or even "total party kill.")

Suit	Damage Level
Heart	1 (minimal)
Diamond	2
Club	3
Spade	4 (deadly)

Fourth Card: Type of Projectile: The fourth card also indicates what type of projectile comes out of the holes.

Suit	Result	Notes
Heart	Toxic goo	Viscous globs in the GM's choice of color shoot out of the portals. Protective gear resists against damage from this stuff at

		twice its normal defense, but the goo increases the difficulty to perform physical actions until it's dealt with.
Diamond	Hard objects	These might be arrows, darts, spikes, stones, needles, or small javelins. A greater damage (figured earlier with the third card) could mean one larger object or more of them in the shot.
Club	Energy, electrical, or magical beams	Laser beams or magical blasts (such as lighting bolts) come out of the openings.
Spade	Combination	Draw two more cards and cross-reference against this table. If the results are the same, double the damage. Otherwise, the trap shoots out multiple types of threats. If this comes up again, draw another two cards and keep adding projectiles.

Fourth Card: Attack Ability: Use the fourth card to decide how well the projectiles can find their targets. The higher the number, the more accurate the trap is; jacks are the lowest face card, followed by queen and king, with ace being the highest. (*Example:* To get a quick attack value for **GURPS,** the **Hero System,** the **d20 System,** or the **D6 System,** add 3 to the number card. Consider jacks as 11, queens as 12, kings as 13, and aces as 14. In **GURPS,** this is the *effective skill* that the GM uses to decide on combat accuracy, while in the **Hero System,** this is the modified *OCV*. In the **d20 System** and the **D6 System,** this is the *attack roll*.)

Range: Unless the set-up of the area where the hazard is dictates otherwise, all projectiles fly toward their victims at short to medium range.

Examples

After the player characters have waded through numerous mooks, the GM decides it's time to give the adventurers a new challenge. He calls a break, shuffles a standard deck of cards, and pulls out this article.

An immense wooden chest resides in the next room. There are supposed to be a couple of guards protecting it, but the GM sends them home and goes for an *object trap* instead. He first draws a king of hearts. Being a king, it's a deadly trap, but the suit -- hearts -- indicates that it's moderately difficult to locate, disarm, or avoid. Referencing the first table, he finds that the trap is "somehow enhanced." He draws a second card to see what's enhanced. It's a three of clubs, a black odd numbered card, which translates to a "caustic or poisonous puff of gas." So! An extra deadly gas trap on the chest. He wonders how well the heroes will survive this one . . .

The GM then clears a few hallways to lull the investigators before they come across a *large trap.* This time he draws four cards: king of spades, five of diamonds, queen of spades, and jack of hearts. The king of spades tells the GM that this is going to be a ranged hazard that can only be found by extraordinary measures. It's perfect as the final challenge before meeting the big boss!

The five of diamonds indicates that this hazard has an unusual trigger. The GM decides that a certain noise level -- anything above a whisper - sets it off. The card also indicates that the trap will go off somewhere near the beginning of the round in which they first could encounter the threat. Only a few of the adventurers are going to be fast enough to beat this challenge!

The GM uses the queen of spades to learn that there are 12 openings that are going to release or discharge something, and they all shoot something quite deadly. The jack of hearts tells him just what those projectiles are: toxic goo. What a mess! With this card, the GM also discovers that the attack ability is exceptionally high.

By the time the GM adds a few of his own details to the traps, the break's over and everyone, including the GM, is ready to begin.

Pyramid Review

Play Unsafe

Written and Published by [Graham Walmsley](#)

74-page PDF; $9
74-page b&w softcover; $18

The indie games sector has been providing innovative ways to play and questioning how we play via new games, means, and situations for several years now, proving itself to be a viable niche for what would otherwise be some very non-commercial -- but nevertheless interesting -- games. *Play Unsafe* does exactly that: It provides a new way to play and a new way of questioning how we play, not just of a specific genre or a specific situation, but *all* of them. The means, though, are not new.

With *Play Unsafe,* author Graham Walmsley draws on the improv classes that he took and two works by the improvisation teacher and director Keith Johnstone, *Impro* and *Impro for Storytellers.* Readers could, of course, read both of those books, and they could take their own improv class, but Walmsley has kindly already done that for everyone. In *Play Unsafe,* he takes that experience and explains how improv can be applied to the games that people play. Not just Indie staples such as *Dogs in the Vineyard* or *Primetime Adventures,* but hobby standards also, such as [*Call of Cthulhu,*](#) *Dungeons and Dragons, Traveller,* and *Vampire: the Masquerade.*

Divided into five chapters, *Play Unsafe* addresses an aspect in each. In "Play," Walmsley suggests that we are working too hard at our gaming and that our gaming is too serious, the solution being to stop trying. Stop trying to be good and stop planning. Instead, try being average and being more obvious. In "Build," he suggests that participants typically block the ideas of fellow players and so hinder the game itself, whereas people should be accepting and working everyone to move the game forward.

Roles within a game are explored in "Status." The chapter suggests how people portray and react to their roles, and how changes in status can be used to tell stories, such as "in winning a starship in a game of cards, how we would go from mere ship's pilot to ship's captain." In "Telling Stories," the author goes into more depth and examines various techniques to improve stories. There is, for instance, breaking routines -- setting up a situation or routine ("You are walking through a busy market . . .") and then changing it (". . . when a pot whizzes past your head to shatter on a wall."). He admonishes gamers to deliver on their promises; that is, if a fortress is said to be impregnable, the players should find themselves having to break their way in. He talks about reincorporating or justifying an item mentioned during play. He discusses adding moral dilemmas to the game. These are more complex tricks than found in earlier chapters and, while aimed at the GM, a player needs to read this section as well if he is to understand their use.

Lastly, "Work Together" looks at how a player can be good player. Not only does he talk about being a good player in a good way -- such as letting another player have a good time, losing gracefully, and trusting each other -- but being a good player in a *bad* way. Here Walmsley suggests methods such as screwing with the other players, taking risks, and doing things you do not want to do. However, he returns to being a good gamer with advice on energy and gaming, and fitting in with a group. This is more straightforward counsel, but still good advice nevertheless.

Physically, *Play Unsafe* is a plain affair, light on illustration and anything in the way of a sophisticated layout. The writing style and layout give the book an unfussy feel, making it a much easier read than it could have been, considering its subject matter and the fact that it comes from the indie Sector. Both reasons might put off some gamers from giving *Play Unsafe* -- or indeed "Unsafe Play" -- a try.

The fact is, *Play Unsafe* will not be for every gamer. Some may find its concepts too radical. It likewise is not really something to be read by the novice gamer, unless he comes from an improv background. To get the most out of *Play*

Unsafe will take the whole of the gaming group to read and embrace the concepts in the book, and that too seems a radically big step. Even if the whole group isn't gung-ho about sweeping changes, an individual player could still read the book and bring some ideas to the gaming table. There are plenty within its pages, and if in applying just a few of those clearly presented ideas that individual games better and improves everyone else's game, then *Play Unsafe* will have served its purpose.

-- Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Key Largo

Published by [Paizo Publishing](#)

Designed by Paul Randles, with Mike Selinker & Bruno Faidutti

Edited by Vic Wertz

Art & graphics by James Davis, Ben Huen, Andrew Hou, & Drew Pocza

Full-color boxed game with mounted game board, five wooden boats, diving helmet ("first player" marker), life preserver (day marker), 130 cards (wrecks/treasures, five actions per player, & encounters), 15 divers, 40 counters (hoses, tridents, & weights), money, & rulebook; $39.99

Some games come with an emotional pedigree, and *Key Largo* is one of those games. For those who are fans of *[Pirate's Cove,](#)* know that this comes from the same designer, Paul Randles, who died of pancreatic cancer five years ago. Indeed, this game was at one time meant to be a thematic sequel to the other, with players in a new age searching for the booty left behind by those who sank during the Age of Sail.

The object of the game is to finish as the richest player.

Three to five boatmen are plying their trade on the famed islands during the closing years of the 19th century. They get a ship pawn, money, a diver, and a hand of five action cards (everyone has the same hand). Everyone starts at the dock and chooses two cards for the turn, one each for the morning and afternoon. These are one's activities for the day, revealed simultaneously and resolved clockwise beginning with the starting player. How they play out depends on who else had the same idea.

The thrust of the game is diving for treasure in one of the many wrecks at various depths in the surrounding waters. Little card decks represent the sunken ships, and claims are staked by placing one's boat atop a deck. A successful diver gathers cards, and these are of a few different treasure types like gold, jewels, and artifacts. There are two values, the number of crates found and the end-of-game value. The latter is a standard amount awarded for holding onto it until the finish, but treasure is worth more at market. The rules differ slightly for each type. Gold, for example, is always worth the same per crate while goods are worth more if only one seaman shows up to deal . . . more people glut the market. Artifacts are the opposite: More players in the market means they command a higher price.

Profits buy valuable goods and services, the costs of which also vary. If one's last diver was scared out of the business by a monster, one must hire a new one at the tavern. Like goods, the more people who search for divers, the more the manpower costs. Old sailors can be plied with booze to spill their guts about which decks are most valuable, and thieves are ready to steal treasures from one's rivals for the right price. Where the tavern traffics in people, the shop offers equipment. Better gear allows access to deeper wrecks, for instance, and monsters can be chased off with a trident. Finally, if someone is short on cash he can take tourists to watch the dolphins; it's not much but it's a safe and sure pastime. At the end of the 10th day, any remaining treasures are sold off and the richest sailor wins.

Paizo does its best to emulate European board game standards, and its best is pretty good. The counters and tokens are solid cardboard, and the wooden ships are substantial and can be measured against the output of the EEU. Even the

money is firm paper, though the currency is rough enough to require a double-check when counting one's earnings. The really swell part is the artwork: The diver illustrations are a giddy delight worth a giggle or two. The plastic insert for component storage isn't too useful; ditch it to make room for all the bits, or eschew the use of the many resealable baggies the company threw in so everything can freely "pour" into the slots. Oh, and the rules are somewhat bigger than the tray so eventually the booklet (which adds a nice little history that recalls the game's bittersweet journey) may get bent or folded.

The game is evenly balanced and wrapped around a fine set of mechanics, taking only three-quarters of an hour a game. Players have but one of any action, so the order is paramount and it doesn't hurt to be a bit psychic. Never mind second-guessing friends; anticipating the resulting costs gets tougher as the game progresses. If an action is spent buying another hose, will the deeper, more valuable wreck for which it was bought already have been ransacked? It forms an entertaining lottery. Optional rules add more fun, like the aforementioned thief and some neat encounter cards. These may allow more equipment purchases or artificially inflate the number of people at the market when one wants to sell artifacts, for example.

Any game that makes it to market is a labor of love for the creator, but in the case of **Key Largo** it's clear just how much affection went into its refinement after Mr. Randles passed away. The special thanks section of the credits is a who's who of Why You Play Games, and with Mike Selinker and Bruno Faidutti presiding over the festivities, the last hurrah from a talented designer finds itself on an even keel.

--Andy Vetromile

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

You're Only Human . . . Unless You're Not

Here in the states, we're currently on Year Seven of our four-year presidential election cycle, which is looking to rap up sometime between November and January. We're also on Year Three of the forthcoming 2012 election, which looks to be a rousing clash against the incumbent -- who's disliked by half the country -- and the other party's candidate, who looks like they'll be running on a platform of change.

Tangentially related to the political process, I find myself about to make a statement that seems obvious, but will hopefully back it up with something less-than-obvious that will pertain to (yes!) gaming. Strapped in comfortably? Great.

We humans have structured our communal experiences for ourselves, who are all fellow humans.

Still with me?

Sure, it's obvious, but the implications are interesting. For example, I've heard it be said that the greatest limiting factor of movies as an artistic medium is the limitation of human [bladder](). In other words, humans can only sit uninterrupted in a spot for at most three to four hours before nature calls louder than the 7.1 Dolby Stereo SurroundSound. Likewise humans -- especially modern audiences -- have limited attention spans and abilities to listen to (say) a political speech of longer than an hour or so.

Again, because we're humans.

Now, once you realize that many, many aspects of our daily interactions are determined by our base humanity -- especially limitations and obstacles that we may not think of as pertaining to the idea at hand -- you realize how absurd it is to have inhuman sapient species retain the the bulk of "human" quirks. Not all creators of fantastic races make them "humans in rubber masks," of course. For example, It's amusing to note that, after an interminably long deliberation on the ents' part in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, they *finally* reached the conclusion that they would consider helping the Fellowship . . . now they only need to deliberate on actually doing that.

But for the most part, the speeches of the millennium-living elves tend to be about as long as humans', and even goblin storytellers tend to sound a lot like their human-y counterparts. But why would a species that considers 20-year-olds to be their "elders" devote a significant percentage of their lives listening to one story? It's quite possible to envision goblin "bards" packing as much as possible into their tales, since their reduced lifespan means they have a lot of living they'd want to cram into their allotted time. Goblin tales might more resemble jokes than stories, with a pacing completely different from human expectations: "Shtolk walked into a cave, with a stick, and he sees a monster with a shiny thing! The monster goes, 'Stop or I'll-' and Shtolk stabbed him. Shtolk got the shiny thing; who knows what the monster would do? Who cares!" (Conversely, a typical elven anecdote might resemble those long, rambling, seemingly pointless stories told by relatives, times 10.)

Random aside: I was always bothered by when Captain Kirk says of Spock, in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan,* "Of all the souls I have encountered in my travels, his was the most . . . human." Spock hated his humanity and did everything in his power to suppress it at every opportunity. Were Spock alive at the time and capable of feeling emotion, he might have been insulted. Random aside over.

Some concepts would be completely alien to species with shorter lives, and many ideas that do cross over might have wildly different interpretations to those with a different timespan. For example, some humans consider the "[99-year-lease]()" to be a good stopgap between lifelong estates and more temporary rental or leasing arrangements. But elves might consider a 99-year-lease to be the same way we consider a 10-year mortgage, while goblins might envision a 99-year-lease similarly to how we might consider a 500-year arrangement.

As another example, the decision for humans to bring a child into the world is treated with a fair amount of gravity and import; not only does the mere act of gestation tie up a significant percentage of one's life (1-4%, depending on life

expectancy), but there's a great deal of time expected to be tied up bringing the child to maturity. Humans tend to place a great deal of concern and protection on mothers and the idea of motherhood, for reasons that are obvious to us. But these views are . . . well, human.

For example, consider what might happen if gestation brought with it a host of powers and features (increased toughness/strength, heightened senses, unusual abilities, etc.), presumed to be designed by evolutionary forces (or the gods) to keep the mother safe for the 10 years it takes a child to develop? There might be an entire "adventuring class" of heroes of this species who use these powers to further their race's goals, making other races squeamish about how these people place their unborn children in harm's way. As another example, a turtle-oid race I designed for a space setting came from a world of abundance almost entirely devoid of dangers; as such, I said that they tended to protect their eggs until they hatched, then left them to their own fates . . . "After all, if the maker hadn't intended for us to get into trouble by ourselves, we wouldn't have been given these hard shells to protect us!"

If you're trying to interject a bit of flavor into a species, robot, or something that you're trying to portray as inhuman, give some thought to what *makes* us human, and turn the idea on its ear. Do the reverse, amplify or negate the tendency, or do something tangentially related. For example, envision a species using something that sounds to our ears like "laughter" as part of its respiration process; it's is a form of near-constant hyperventilation. If it's amused or paying rapt attention, it *stops* "laughing," because it has -- in essence -- forgotten to breathe during that time.

Or maybe a short-lived race find any political process lasting longer than an hour to be too troublesome to worry about, so the process of choosing a leader tends to be a very short affair. (This idea proves, once again, that RPGs are primarily about wish fulfillment.)

--Steven Marsh

The Airship Buyer's Guide for 1922

for *GURPS*

by Tracy Ratcliff

At the beginning of 1922, any intelligent observer expected that the airship would be an important part of the Air Age. The papers were filled with reports and rumors of airship test flights and projects. Manufacturers in Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States advertised their new concepts. From concept artwork and advertising claims, along with a large dose of imagination, these airships are now outlined for the discerning *GURPS* vehicles buyer. (For more information and background, see David Morgan-Mar's "Floating on Air.")

In a rigid airship, a framework forms the shape of the hull which contains gasbags of lifting gas. A non-rigid holds its shape only with the pressure of the gas inside the gasbag. A semirigid's gasbag maintains its form through pressure reinforced by a framework keel that runs from bow to stern.

Luftschiffbau Zeppelin

"The Zeppelin organization today is prepared to build, deliver and operate rigid airships for any purpose."
Zeppelin: the Story of a Great Achievement, 1922

The Zeppelin company built the first practical rigid airships for commerce and war, and had built nearly 100 by the end of World War I. After the war, Zeppelin had changed from producing wartime aircraft to peacetime products so well that there had been a boardroom battle over dropping the speculative airship business in favor of already-profitable products. With the battle won by the airship partisans, Zeppelin flew the LZ120 Bodensee in the winter of 1919-1920. The Bodensee made daily round-trip flights from Friederichshafen in southern Germany to Berlin, tourism flights over Berlin, and experimental flights to Stockholm from Berlin. To build on that success, a book with sketches of five types of concept airships was published in the United States in 1922.

Type 1

The first type was a small rigid airship with 20,000 to 30,000 m^3 (700,000 to 1.1 million cubic feet) of hydrogen, suitable for aerial tourism and short-range interurban transport of 400 to 500 miles. Zeppelin gave only brief mention of military uses, but the Type 1 could have been used as a coast guard and short-range anti-submarine scout. The ship had a main body containing the gasbags, three engine cars (two one-engine cars and an aft car with two engines), and a passenger gondola. The gondola had the control bridge forward, with room for three officers and the radio operator, the passenger compartment with roomy seats and a wide aisle in the middle, and a small kitchen and toilets aft. In the main hull were seats and hammocks for the crew, along with cargo, fuel, and ballast. The Type 1 had three sizes.

The *Type 1a* was the Bodensee as it originally flew, with a gasbag of 20,000 m^3, 121 m (397 ft) length and 19 m (62 ft) diameter. Too small to be a very profitable passenger transport, it was low-cost technology demonstrator. Although it could hold a crew of 16, normally only 12 flew the ship.

The *Type 1b* was the Bodensee after its 1920 refit and its sister ship LZ121 Nordstern. With a gas capacity of 22,500 m^3, 131 m (430 ft) length, and 19 m diameter, it had the payload to be profitable.

The *Type 1c* was stretched to a gas capacity of 30,000 m^3, 161 m (528 ft) length, and 19 diameter, with a potential passenger load of 80.

Type 2

The Type 2 was a 50,000 m^3 (1.8 million cf), 175 m (574 ft) long, 26 m (85 ft) diameter ship, designed for training and mid-range travel of 1,000 to 2,000 miles over 10 to 24 hours, such as an overnight Berlin to Rome flight. Big enough to train for long-distance airships, but small enough to be inexpensive, the ship had a main body, three double-engine gondolas, and the passenger gondola. The seats were deep tall benches set in two pairs facing each other on either side of an aisle. Each bench held three passengers for day travel, or converted into two berths or a double bed for night travel. The gondola had the bridge, passenger seating, and a small kitchen and washrooms aft. Cabins for the captain and officers were in the main hull forward, with hammocks for the crew forward of the cargo area amid ship.

Type 3

The Type 3 was a 60,000 m^3 (2.1 million cf), 190 m (623 ft) long, 26m (85 ft) diameter fast mid-range ship, with a dining salon and convertible seating. The ship had a main body, nine engine cars (one double, eight single), and a passenger gondola. The gondola had a bridge forward, captain's cabin and radio room, passenger seating, a dining salon, and a kitchen and washrooms aft. Cabins for the officers were in the main hull above and forward of the bridge, with hammocks for the crew forward of the cargo area amid ship.

Type 4

The Type 4 had two variants. The Type 4a was a 100,000 m^3 (3.5 million cf), 238 m (780 ft) long, 30.5 m (100 ft) diameter 40-passenger long-distance transport with transatlantic range. The ship had a main body, one double-engine car and 10 single-engine cars, and the passenger gondola. The gondola had the bridge, captain's cabin and radio room, convertible passenger seating, and kitchen and washrooms to the rear. Crew quarters and cargo were arranged like the the Type 3. With a passenger compartment too small for a lounge, this was a technology demonstrator rather than a profitable first-class ship. The similarly-sized Graf Zeppelin carried 20 passengers in better comfort, and sailed almost exclusively on the South Atlantic route (Friederichshafen, Germany to Seville, Spain to Recife, Brazil to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) with its gentler winds.

The Type 4b was a dedicated airmail carrier, filling the same role in the air that fast mail packets served at sea. It held only cargo and 12 passengers willing to pay heavily for the privilege of crossing the Atlantic in only three days. The ship had a main body, two double-engine cars and eight single-engine cars, and the command gondola. The gondola had the bridge forward, with the captain's cabin and radio room behind that, and a 12-seat passenger lounge aft. The passengers slept in eight cabins (four small single cabins and four double cabins) in the main body above the passenger lounge and just aft of the officer's four double cabins. Crew hammocks were forward of the cargo area in the center of the ship.

Type 5

The Type 5 was a 135,000 m^3 (4.8 million cf), 263 m (863 ft) long, 33 m (108 ft) diameter transport carrying 40 first-class passengers across the Atlantic. With a dining salon and large kitchen, and the engine power to deal with North Atlantic winds, it could have carried passengers comfortably and reliably from Germany to the United States. The airship had a main body, nine engine cars (six single-engine, three double-engine) and the passenger gondola. The gondola had the bridge forward, the captain's cabin and radio room, a 40-seat passenger lounge, a dining salon, and the kitchen and washrooms aft. Crew quarters and cargo were arranged like the Type 3.

History

The airships that Zeppelin built during WWI were used as bombers over Paris and London. Although the damage was slight compared to the German bombing of WWII, the Allies' anger for the bombing bedeviled Zeppelin between the wars. The Bodensee and Nordstern were seized as war reparations in 1921, and in 1922 the Allies stopped Zeppelin from starting any new airship construction. Zeppelin was allowed to complete the LZ126 for the US (as the Los Angeles), but Allied restrictions were not lifted until 1925.

Vickers

"THE ONLY RIGID AIRSHIP BUILDING COMPANY IN GREAT BRITAIN THAT HAS BUILT LARGE AIRSHIPS TO THEIR OWN DESIGNS"
Vickers catalog, 1921-1922

Vickers Ltd. had long been a British military contractor, and during WWI had built and designed a number of successful airships, including the rigid R.80. Vickers displayed a model of a transatlantic passenger ship in 1919, and during 1921-22 put out a pamphlet of designs Vickers would build to order.

Rigids

The Vickers rigid airship design was offered in two sizes, 1.25 million cubic feet and 3.5 million cf of hydrogen, and for naval or passenger use. All four designs had a small "pulpit" at the stern for a machine gun or observation deck.

The small naval design was an improved R.80. The ship had a main body, with two one-engine wing gondolas in the rear and a twin-engine gondola forward that also contained the bridge. The ship was 535 ft long and 70 ft wide. It had the range to patrol thousands of miles from shore, as did the large naval design.

The small passenger ship added a gondola suspended from the main body amid ship that held the passenger lounge. Passengers slept in berths in the main hull. It had medium range suitable for transcontinental travel.

The large passenger design uniquely put the passenger space on top of the hull. An elevator carried the passengers from the keel of the ship up to a lobby with washrooms. Forward of the lobby were small four-berth cabins and the smoking lounge at the forward end. Aft of the lobby were the dining room, passenger saloon and an open deck aft. The ship had six engine gondolas, a small control cabin far forward, and an observation lounge far aft. The airship carried up to 100 passengers (although the deck plans show cabins for only 80). It was advertised as transatlantic ship, but its lift was too low for it to carry that many passengers from London to New York non-stop in practice. The ship was 800 ft long by 100 ft wide.

Vickers did not illustrate their large naval design. Presumably, it was the large passenger ship with the passenger gondola on top removed.

Nonrigids

Vickers offered two nonrigid designs, updated from the WWI Coastal Scout, for naval service and "private or sporting use." Both had a hydrogen gasbag with a car suspended on cables below.

The car on the smaller 70,000 cf passenger version had exposed side-by-side seats for the pilots forward, followed by seats for four passengers, a work station for an engineer, and a pair of engines. For a naval scout, the ship had a crew of two pilots, two gunners/observers and an engineer. This ship was 145 ft long by 30 ft wide.

The car on the larger 100,000 cf passenger version had seats for six passengers along with the 3-man flight crew. The large naval version could carry 4 gunners/observers. This ship was 170 ft long by 36 ft wide.

Nonrigid Parsevals

Vickers held manufacturing rights from Parseval, a German nonrigid builder. The ships had a streamlined gondola suspended by cables below a well-streamlined nonrigid gasbag for a steampunk look. Vickers offered Parseval ships in two sizes, and for naval and passenger service.

The gondola for the passenger ship had a bridge forward, chairs and tables for the passengers, a washroom and small

galley, and a pair of engines aft driving a single large propeller. The naval version would probably have eliminated the passenger accommodation but kept the long gondola for structural strength.

The passenger ships were suitable for interurban flights. The naval versions could patrol several hundred miles from shore.

The small ship was 318 ft long by 80 ft wide with a capacity of 360,000 cf, and the large ship was 340 ft long by 56 ft wide with a capacity of 500,000 cf of hydrogen.

History

In the political and economic troubles of post-WWI Britain, plans for airship development were winnowed down to the Imperial Airship Scheme. Vickers (as Airship Guarantee Corporation) won the contract for the R.100, built in competition with the Royal Airship Works and their R.101. The Imperial Airship Scheme ended with the crash of the R.101 in 1930. The R.80 served briefly as a trainer before being scrapped along with the rest of the WWI-era British Airships.

Luftschiffbau Schütte-Lanz

"Deal for Schuette-Lanz Patents Will Found Big Industry Here, Say Americans"
New York Times headline; March 11, 1922

Luftshiffbau Schütte-Lanz was started in 1909 as a competitor of Luftschiffbau Zeppelin. Professor Schütte invented many of the devices that made the German WWI rigid airship program so successful, and his company built around 20 airships during the war. In 1922, those inventions and the services of Professor Schütte were bought by General Air Service, an American company planning a transcontinental airship line using three of Schütte's designs. All used aluminum frames instead of the plywood used in the wartime Schütte-Lanz airships, helium for lift, and diesel engines.

SL101 Atlantic

The SL101 had a gas capacity of 95,000 m^3 (3.35 million cf) and was 229 m (750 ft) long by 30 m (97 ft) wide. The ship had a main body, five cars each holding a pair of engines, and a passenger gondola. GAS planned to use this ship for its transcontinental lines, beginning with a 10-hour service from New York to Chicago.

Although named "Atlantic," it lacked the lift for passenger cabins and for fuel to fly non-stop from New York to London with a full passenger and freight load. It had passenger seats like airplane, and could carry 50 or fewer passengers on a transatlantic flight.

SL102 Panamerica

The SL103 had a gas capacity of 205,000 m^3 (7.24 million cf), 298 m (977 ft) length, and, 38.5 m (126 ft) diameter. The ship had a main body, five twin-engine gondolas, and a passenger gondola. GAS planned to use the SL102 design for New York to South America flights. The ship had enough lift to provide comfortable cabins and large lounges like the Hindenburg.

SL103 Pacific

The SL103 had a gas capacity of 150,000 m^3 (5.30 million cf), 274 m (900 ft) length, and 35 m (114 ft) in diameter. The ship had a main body, five twin-engine gondolas, and a long narrow passenger gondola. The control bridge was very far forward, just below the nose. Below that was the passenger entrance, with the passenger areas aft. GAS planned to use the SL103 for non-stop transatlantic flights. The passengers travelled in very small cabins or convertible benches.

Based on the SL103, Schütte-Lanz designed an aerial equivalent of the Norwegian Arctic exploration ship, the Fram. The airship had a plywood structure at the tail and midsection for clear radio reception in large radio direction finding loops. The ship could deploy and retrieve a small motorboat from the center of the ship, and had observation platforms on the tail and top of the hull.

History

Professor Schütte had patented his inventions, but the Imperial German government took control of all airship patents for the duration of WWI so all German airship manufacturers could use them. At the end of the war, with the Imperial government gone forever, Zeppelin had no intention of giving up using those patents. In Germany, Professor Schütte settled for a pittance in 1922, while in the United States Zeppelin's lawyers tied up Schütte until General Air Service collapsed.

SCA

The Germans were the masters of the rigid airship, but the Italians were the masters of the semirigid, and produced dozens before and during WWI. After the war, all Italian airship manufacturers were combined into the state airship construction company Stabilimento di Costruzioni Aeronautiche. Engineers, including a then-unknown Umberto Nobile, continued to design new ships. SCA converted a partially built bomber into a passenger excursion ship, the *Roma*, one of the largest airships flying after the war. In 1921, the US Army bought the *Roma* as core of its new airship fleet.

SCA Napoli

In 1921, SCA announced plans to build a new ship larger than the *Roma*. The *Napoli* had a hydrogen gasbag of 54,000 m^3 (1.9 million cf) above a large triangular keel that held crew quarters, passengers, cargo, and 12 engines. The ship was 149 m (489 ft) long, 27.4 m (90 ft) wide, and resembled a much larger version of the later ships designed by Nobile. The ship held up to 100 passengers, but only 50 for overnight trips. As a military vessel, the *Napoli* dropped payload for fuel and long range, running at 43 mph using only four engines.

History

US newspapers had followed the American test flights of *Roma* obsessively. When the ship hit power lines and burned in February of 1922, the reports made extra editions and front-pages, as did the investigations that followed. The US Army abandoned airships. SCA, under the direction of Nobile, would design six nonrigids which including the famous Arctic explorers Norge and Italia, before Italian airship work ended in the late 20's.

Goodyear

"Goodyear is prepared to build today any type of balloon desired, from the smaller sizes to the huge trans-Atlantic liners"
Goodyear ad, 1920

Goodyear in 1922 was very interested in airship manufacture. They had provided the gasbags for several pre-war American airships, and had followed British and German wartime advances. They had built several B and C class ships for the US Navy based on British experience. They were at the time deep in negotiations with Zeppelin for Zeppelin patents and engineers, and in 1923 would form a Goodyear-Zeppelin division devoted to airship development.

Goodyear Pony Blimp

In 1919, Goodyear built the Pony Blimp, about as small an airship as practical. Holding only a pilot and two passengers in open cockpits suspended by cables beneath a gasbag with 35,350 cf of helium, the ship was 95.5 ft long, 28 feet wide and 40 feet high. Goodyear hoped this design would stimulate demand for larger, more practical, airships.

Goodyear 1922 Concept Non-Rigid

This ship, illustrated in a sketch in 1922, foreshadowed the K-class blimps that served in WWII. The Goodyear form was already established with the control/engine car attached directly to the helium gasbag envelope of 185,000 cf, 169 ft long and 48 ft wide. The ship still had external bracing cables, and the car followed WWI design. The officers stood in a large bridge forward, followed by an area for gunner/observers with the twin engines inside the car turning the props through shafts. The ship was designed for coastal anti-submarine patrols.

History

While Paul Litchfield, president of Goodyear, was fascinated by airships, he insisted that someone besides Goodyear pay for them. Goodyear-Zeppelin would easily win the contract for the Navy's scout rigids *Akron* and *Macon,* but the crashes of both ships would end the Navy rigid airship program. Goodyear's cautious program of experimentation with small blimps during the 1920s would lead to progressively larger contracts from the Navy as WWII approached.

Adventure Seeds

Murder on the Western Mail: Aboard a Zeppelin Type 4b speeding through the Atlantic night, 12 wealthy passengers are crammed into small lounge. When one falls dead, is it a heart attack, or something worse?

Lord Takes Aerial Tour of English Countryside: Position offered: Gas and fuel Lord Blatherspeake's Vickers Small Scout. Fuel his lordship with martinis. Ensure that *Morning Shout,* and *not* the *Evening Yell,* has good pictures of his lordship's comic encounters with angry bulls and fresh-faced farm maids, while managing said bulls and farm maids. Ensure neither the *Shout* nor *Yell* discover "Airman Smith" is actually wife of Conservative whip, and that his lordship is spending large sums to convince his creditors that he is still credit-worthy.

Polar Aurora: Why are goons from the Delancey mob lurking around the hangar of the Schütte-Lanz Polar Expedition? It's just coincidence that a naval gun mount has been stolen and Nikola Tesla is missing. . .

The Airships

Gasbags are surprisingly resistant to damage. Treat these vehicles as having Injury Tolerance: Diffuse (B60, B380, B558). All prices are in *GURPS* $; divide by 11 to get 1922 US$.

Range is still-air range to dry tanks, but air over the North Atlantic is never still and commercial operations require substantial reserve fuel. An airship needs seven to eight thousand miles range for reliable US to Europe service.

TL	Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	DR	Range	Cost	Loc.	Stall	Notes
PILOT/TL (AIRSHIP)															
6	Goodyear Pony Blimp	82	-4/2	9f	0.5/23	1	.35	+8	1+2	2	500	$220,000	ES	0	
SHIPHANDLING/TL (AIRSHIP)															
6	Zeppelin Type 1a	248	-4/3	10f	0.5/41	21.5	5.2	+11	16+21	2	1050	$5,290,000	3sS	0	
6	Zeppelin Type 1b	253	-4/4	10f	0.5/40	24.1	6.1	+12	16+30	2	1200	$5,640,000	3sS	0	
6	Zeppelin Type 1c	275	-4/4	10f	0.5/36	33.5	11.1	+12	16+80	2	1200	$7,020,000	3sS	0	
6	Zeppelin Type 2	330	-4/4	10f	0.25/37	55	15.3	+12	31+32A	2	1900	$10,300,000	3sS	0	
6	Zeppelin Type 3	345	-4/4	10f	0.5/45	64	16.5	+13	55+80A	2	2000	$11,900,000	9sS	0	

6	Zeppelin Type 4a	387	-4/4	10f	0.25/42	107	16.3	+13	52+40A	2	6000	$16,700,000	9sS	0	[3]
6	Zeppelin Type 4b	395	-4/4	10f	0.25/42	107	12.9	+13	58+12A	2	7000	$16,500,000	10sS	0	
6	Zeppelin Type 5	415	-4/4	10f	0.125/38	146	15.7	+13	52+40A	2	9700	$20,900,000	9sS	0	
6	Vickers Sm Rigid Naval	278	-4/4	10f	0.25/33	38	3	+12	20A	2	6800	$7,450,000	2sS	0	[1]
6	Vickers Sm Rigid Passenger	300	-4/4	10f	0.25/33	38	8.9	+12	29+50A	2	1400	$7,390,000	2s2S	0	
6	Vickers Lg Rigid Naval	355	-4/4	10f	0.25/38	106	9	+13	37A	2	10000	$16,100,000	7sS	0	[1]
6	Vickers Lg Rigid Passenger	422	-4/4	10f	0.25/37	106	15.9	+13	59+100A	2	5000	$17,300,000	7s2S	0	[3,4]
6	Vickers Sm Scout Passenger	107	-5/3	10f	1/24	2.1	0.625	+8	3+4	2	285	$497,000	ES	0	
6	Vickers Sm Scout Naval	107	-5/3	10f	1/24	2.1	0.825	+8	5	2	285	$497,000	ES	0	[2]
6	Vickers Lg Scout Passenger	118	-5/3	10f	1/28	3	1.325	+9	3+6	2	390	$670,000	ES	0	
6	Vickers Lg Scout Naval	118	-5/3	10f	1/28	3	0.925	+9	5	2	390	$670,000	ES	0	[2]
6	Vickers Sm Parseval Naval	165	-5/3	9f	0.5/28	3	4	+11	5A	2	2000	$1,570,000	S	0	[1]
6	Vickers Sm Parseval Passenger	170	-5/3	9f	0.5/28	3	5.45	+11	7+30A	2	390	$1,470,000	S	0	
6	Vickers Lg Parseval Naval	187	-5/3	9f	0.5/30	11	5.8	+11	8A	2	585	$2,150,000	S	0	[1]
6	Vickers Lg Parseval Passenger	174	-5/3	9f	0.5/30	11	7.85	+11	11+50A	2	2250	$2,010,000	S	0	
6	Schütte-Lanz SL101	380	-4/4	10	0.5/41	98.5	44.5	+13	45+100A	2	2400	$15,300,000	5sS	0	[4]
6	Schütte-Lanz SL102	509	-4/4	10	0.25/44	204	56.1	+13	45+100A	2	6800	$27,000,000	5sS	0	[4]
6	Schütte-Lanz SL103	447	-4/5	10	0.25/41	149	56.1	+14	45+100A	2	4100	$20,700,000	5sS	0	[4]
6	Schütte-Lanz Arctic Ship	447	-4/5	10	0.25/41	149	20	+13	50A	2	16000	$21,300,000	5sS	0	[5]
6	SCA Napoli Passenger	309	-4/4	9f	0.5/38	58	15.6	+12	46+100	2	7000	$14,500,000	S	0	
6	SCA Napoli Military	309	-4/4	9f	0.5/38	58	4.4	+12	31A	2	12000	$14,900,000	S	0	
6	Goodyear Concept 1922	118	-4/3	10f	0.5/30	5.2	1.5	+9	5A	2	2900	$616,000	S	0	[1]

[1] In peacetime, unarmed. As fleet scouts, up to 12 Lewis Mk II machine guns.

[2] In peacetime, frequently unarmed. As anti-sub patrols, one or two Lewis Mk II machine guns or Savage-Lewis M1918 machine guns (High-Tech p. 131, 137) and bombs are part of the load.

[3] Marginal transatlantic range, limited to summer travel.

[4] Transatlantic range with reduced passenger/freight load used for extra fuel.

[5] Load includes a motorboat, use the TL7 Speedboat (p. B464).

Selected References

These are both available on the Internet and have floor plans for some of the ships.

- Vissering, Harry. Zeppelin: the Story of a Great Achievement (Wells and Company, 1922). http://www.archive.org/details/zeppelinstoryofg00vissrich
- Vickers, Ltd. The Vickers Airship Catalog (no publisher, 1921-1922). http://homepage.ntlworld.com/forgottenfutures/vickers/vickers.htm

Pyramid Review

Final Flight (for *Call of Cthulhu*

Published by **Pagan Publishing**

Written by John H. Crowe III

Cover by Richard Sardina

Illustrated by Marius Hamilton & Heather Hudson

30-page b&w softcover; $9.95

What's this?! A brand new release from Pagan Publishing that is most definitely not a reprint and arrives on the shelves at your local gaming store all but unannounced? It is not a supplement for *Delta Green* -- ***Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity*** is due soon though -- nor is it an anthology of scenarios like *Mortal Coils,*, or a campaign like *The Realm of Shadows.* It is, in fact, a single scenario, and also a bargain.

Written by John H. Crowe III (the author of both *The Realm of Shadows* and *Walker in the Wastes*), ***Final Flight*** is set in South America in 1938 with the investigators as passengers aboard a flight bound for Bogotá from Curaçao in the Dustch West Indies. As the scenario's cover shows -- in one big spoiler -- the flight is destined to come to a bad end. Crash landing in the Amazon basin, the passengers and crew of the Pan Caribbean Flight 101 will not only have to survive the perils of the jungle, but find their way back to civilization. This still leaves the question of how the passenger plane was brought down.

This is where the scenario gets interesting with a series of small but strange events hounding the flight and hinting at more to come. They culminate in the aftermath of the crash itself. Some of the passengers and crew are clearly dead, other injured, and a lucky few having escaped with mere bruising. Hopefully, this will include the investigators. In the minutes after the crash as people slowly recover from the immediate shock, the limited sources of light available -- probably a cigarette lighter or a flashlight -- reveal that one of the passengers, one Marcial Marcos Dominguez, has either suffered disfiguring head injuries or is something far from human!

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The truth is, that just as in Marcus L Rowland's "Fear of Flying" from Fearful Passages, the passenger at the heart of Final Flight is, in reality, a Serpent Man. Unlike "Fear of Flying," this Serpent Man is as much a victim of the crash as the investigators, and more, because he was the intended target of the deliberate crash. Marcial Marcos Dominguez defied the cabal of Serpent Men sorcerers and scientists that he was once part of, and have now exacted their revenge, which is unfortunate for the passengers and crew. Unfortunate in that they are stranded in the middle of the Amazon jungle with vengeful Serpent Men. Fortunate in that Marcial Marcos Dominguez is equally unhappy with the situation and probably the most powerful ally that the investigators or survivors can have in their situation.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Final Flight is not a traditional ***Call of Cthulhu*** scenario. There is almost no investigation involved (well, perhaps a little afterwards if the survivors can get back to civilization) and instead the investigators must concentrate on husbanding the few resources available and perhaps on taking the fight to the enemy. The resources available are indeed meager, literally what the passengers carried aboard Flight 101. In fact, ***Final Flight*** goes into more detail

about what equipment the survivors have access to than it does the details of survival. This is a shame, because more rules on that would have given the scenario value beyond what it describes.

The real problem with *Final Flight* though, is in what it is not. It is for *Call of Cthulhu,* but not for classic *Call of Cthulhu,* that for the 1920s. Nor does it state this on the back cover blurb, though the image of the Douglas DC-2 on the front cover should be a clue. Being set in 1938 also makes it difficult to run *Final Flight* as part of an on-going campaign. It could then be run as the start of a campaign, or a one-shot or a convention scenario, but *Final Flight* does not support this, since there being no pre-generated characters.

Another problem is that *Final Flight* leaves one aspect of its story dangling with no means to resolve it. The beings who attacked Flight 101 have a hideout nearby and the scenario includes a path to and a basic description of it. What it does not include is a map or a more detailed description of the hideout. Rather it suggests that it is unlikely that the investigators will locate or infiltrate this hideout. So why provide both the level of detail about the hideout and a mention of a path to it?

And lastly, why include another version of the *Call of Cthulhu* investigator sheet in a 30-page scenario?

These issues aside, *Final Flight* contains everything necessary to provide a session or two of desperate horror survival gaming. With a little adjustment it could be set back in the 1920s, perhaps replacing the Douglas DC-2 with an earlier passenger airplane or an airship. It could even be set much later, in the 1950s or 1960s. Similarly, it need not be run using *Call of Cthulhu* at all, its set up being perfect for ***[Hollow Earth Expedition: Pulp Adventure Roleplaying,](#)*** *Pulp Hero,* or ***[Trail of Cthulhu.](#)*** Above all though, *Final Flight* does its desperate horror survival gaming at a very pocket friendly price.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Vanished Planet

Published by [Vanished Planet Games](#)

Full-color boxed set with mounted foldout map board, 55 Creature tokens, 60 small wooden tag tokens (10 each in six colors), 18 large wooden tag tokens (three each in six colors), 20 Goal cards, 29 Event cards, 11 Creature Growth cards, 100 Resource cards, 50 Personnel cards, 30 Technology cards, 18 Upgrades cards, 12 Equipment cards, Resource score pad, & rulebook; $39.95

Many games ask players to do lofty things like save the world. *Vanished Planet* demands an additional step: First, *find* the planet.

The object of the game is to put the Earth back where you found it before a mysterious entity destroys the sector.

One to six players portray various Earth neighbors. Their homeworlds sit in the six corners of the hexagonal macro-map, but Terra no longer resides in the center. A massive accident has switched it with an amorphous Creature whose expansion threatens the sector. Communication with Earth is possible through a series of old Satellites; these dispense missions in the form of Goal cards, offering some task the human scientists need done to restore their planet. These relays are threatened midgame, and if the Creature wipes them out someone has to build a replacement.

Most missions involve transporting Resources, trained Personnel, or Equipment somewhere on the board, and travel is increasingly difficult as the sextants (sections of the board) are cut off by the expanding monster. On his turn, a player sends Ships to "tag" locations scattered across the board. These may be stations, Planets, or Asteroids, among other "terrain" features. Selected sites produce Resources each turn -- Ore from an Asteroid, for example, or Energy from a Nebula -- and these are used for improvements. Players may do a limited bit of horse trading among themselves to improve their hand. Every race's turn is colored by an Event card, most of which are helpful but some of which may steal Resources or otherwise slow progress.

Colonists are trained to be Doctors and Engineers and such, and they in turn build Technologies and Equipment. Some devices are simply Goal-card MacGuffins that add flavor when players do something to score Goal Points, while others have concrete effects on play like improving Ship movement or protecting travelers who pass through the billowing monster. Mines are detonated in the Creature's path to offer a temporary reprieve from its encroachment.

If the monster's pseudopodia consume the various homeworlds, the game ends in defeat. Alternately, if the players work together and complete sufficient points worth of Goals, Earth is restored to its rightful position among the stars and the monster is exiled whence it came.

This game has some hefty components in it, though they aren't without error. The map is a thing of beauty with its colorful images of little cosmological features and a quick reference for the various improvements and their costs, but the symbols done on a purple background are hard to make out. The Creature tokens are simply black circles but they're a bit plump for the hexes they're meant to occupy. More wooden bits in a game is nice, yet the small tags scuttle easily from one's grip and the larger ones (Ships) are flat with the same results. The cards thankfully do not suffer from the same issues of lousy stock that characterize too many recent games. The rulebook didn't skimp on size or quality but it could use better organization (and half of it is the first chapter of a novel in this setting). The artwork can be juvenile, but some shows proto-Dan-Smith quality. Occasionally things are referred to by different names, probably holdovers from a developmental iteration of the game, but it's not too hard to figure out what was intended.

If there's an overwhelming beef with the game it's bookkeeping. There are a lot of cards, and one's "builds" cascade down a tech tree that's daunting to manage. The score pad helps, and the charts also boil one's needs down to a parenthetical "collect the following list of basic Resources." That takes some of the feeling of immersion out of it, but it's digestible.

Now the unabashedly good news: This is a fine abstract strategy game. It sets up a really cinematic premise, then comes through like a trooper. Few games fully deliver on their promises, but ***Vanished Planet*** provides just what it says it can. The games (lasting one to two hours) are superbly balanced, and many of them come right down to the white-knuckled wire. It can be as much fun solo as with a group. The company recently released a free [expansion](#), downloadable alien cards that make the races different in more than just name. The clever thing is they're two-sided: A player may choose the face with improved abilities and racial advantages, but that jacks up the points needed from Goal cards to finish. If it gets to be too easy players can up the Goal-Point requirement or add Creature-based Event cards for a greater challenge, keeping an already entertaining game fun and fresh.

--Andy Vetromile

The Dark Reign of the Golden Pshent!

A Cthulhu-Flavored Hidden Disaster Campaign for *GURPS*

by J. Edward Tremlett

Some heroes strive after greatness. Some have it thrust upon them. And some are picked by evil, capricious gods to be their unwitting hands on the Earth.

Such is the case of Dr. Elmer C. Wyatt: a mild-mannered Egyptologist who, during what seemed to be routine translation work, was visited an evil god in disguise. Now, in the otherwise total vacuum of magical superheroes, only he, The Golden Pshent, is the mystical guardian of Mankind!

Or so he thinks.

The truth is that, under the "advice" of his spirit mentor, he is slowly setting up the world for the time when the stars will be right. By gathering dangerous, ancient artifacts for "safekeeping," putting rival cults out of the way, and fighting beings that might endanger his god's plans, he is aiding and abetting the prophesied apocalypse. Will he wise up in time? Will someone stop him? Or will his be the innocent hand that turns the key and lets the monsters loose?

This article presents the bones of a Supers campaign that can be played in one of three eras: the "silver age" of post-World-War-II superheroes, when the Golden Pshent starts his crimefighting career; the darker '80s and '90s, when his evil master gets him to do something really bad; and the Cthulhupunk future, when the Ancient Ones' reign on Earth is almost complete. For existing campaigns, the Golden Pshent can make a welcome ally with a bad secret, or a plot device for introducing some mild-to-wild horror content into the game.

The *GURPS* sourcebooks for *Cthulhupunk, Egypt,* and *Horror* will be needed to fully realize the story as written. GMs can improvise their own stats and background as needed if they'd rather not dig up the books in question.

The Ancient Darkness

In the beginning were the Ancient Ones: vast, strange presences whose gifts to Mankind were trans-cosmic invasion, war and harrowing insanity. Those who sought the favor of these ancient gods were playing with forces far beyond anyone's control. And those who sought to stop the horror were few and far between.

Over time, Man learned better. The worship of the Ancient Ones was replaced by less-destructive gods. Pockets of ignorance remained, but these were watched by those who knew too much, and conspired to spare others of such terrible knowledge. In time there was very little known of the dread presences and their attendant creatures, and but for a few fools, the world was almost scoured clean of their influence.

Unfortunately, the pendulum swung back. Archaeology began to uncover the ancient beds of the Ancient Ones, and the dangerous secrets that had been long-buried were coming to light once more. And Mankind, teetering in dangerous directions due to foolish politics and new, deadlier methods of warfare, was still not ready to handle such knowledge.

The Council of Secrets

Calvino Bastari, the Victorian occult scientist known to the world as the Scarlet Mask, was the first to understand how terrible these secrets were. His battles against the worldwide network of the Ancient Ones' cults took him from the darkest places in Africa to the brightest cities in the New World. Everywhere he saw the growing cancer of the dread presences, taking hold of the ignorant and the learned, the poor, and the powerful.

The signs were clear: If something wasn't done soon, Mankind would be set upon by these monsters, yet again.

So, in 1894, the Scarlet Mask sought out some of the other heroic magicians and sorcerers of his time -- powerful and wise savants of the Art who, like him, had seen the signs approaching. They banded together as the Council of Secrets, and swore to do whatever they could to stop the Ancient Ones and their agents, and hide the knowledge from Mankind.

In the twilight time between the centuries, the Council struck. Cults were eradicated, networks crushed, artifacts stolen, and ancient tomes spirited away for safekeeping in Doctor Vril's Endless Library in Rochester, New York. Other, more mundane heroes of the time were baffled by these strange "crimes," but the magicians they consulted were either on the Council and claimed ignorance, or were genuinely unable to pierce the illusions the Council wove to conceal their presence.

By 1912 there was little or no evidence that the Ancient Ones and their servants had ever walked the Earth. Except for small pockets of resistance -- long driven underground -- the resurgent worship of the Ancient Ones had been largely nipped in the bud. It appeared that Mankind had been once more saved from its folly.

The Culling

Their grim task seemingly over, the Council of Secrets underwent a magical prohibition to never speak of what they had learned, and then disbanded. Some members died, and others vanished into their studies, but many remained to see the terrible world events that came next.

Not a single member of the Council of Secrets survived World War II. Every one was killed in action at home or in a theatre of war -- destroyed by a foe or vaporized, as if snuffed out by an angry god. The last to fall were Scarlet Mask and Doctor Vril, who hurried back to Rochester on some urgent errand they could not speak of. They never made it.

The deaths were blamed on the carnage of the war. But the truth was that Dread Nyarlathotep, the most powerful of the Ancient Ones, had begun to weave a terrible revenge against the Council of Secrets from the day they first met. And only now -- now that there was a war to blame their deaths and disappearances on -- did he pull the strings of the pattern and make it happen.

Such are the ways of gods.

Enter Elmer

In 1954, Dr. Elmer C. Wyatt, assistant head of Stanford's Archaeology department, was given the rather tedious task of translating "lesser" cuneiform tablets. It was part of a massive backlog or artifacts found in the ruins of Amarna, which was the royal city of the monotheist "heathen pharaoh," Akhenaten. The translation work was well beneath his true capabilities, but Wyatt worked day and night, hoping to find some momentous discovery.

Most tablets were copies of official missives between the pharaoh and emissaries of other empires, along with the occasional royal pronouncement. But lurking in the pile was something extraordinary: a description of a new ritual of the Pharaoh's high priests, dictated by Akhenaten himself. And in it he revealed the secret name of his new god -- Nyhar-Rut-Hotep. . .

Elmer read that name, and the room went black. The sounds of unearthly music became all he could sense about him. Then came light -- strange, unwholesome, and pulsing -- and he found himself in a great, ebon throne room, whose dark pillars went upwards for an eternity, under a gigantic, black and green sun.

Walking down from the throne was a man whose skin was as black as the night, dressed in the raiment of a pharaoh of old. The man bade the cowering Elmer to rise, and identified himself as the Black Pharaoh: an immortal guardian of power whose name had been all but forgotten by Mankind.

Once, in Ancient Egypt, Akhenaten sought to protect his people from evil under the Black Pharaoh's direction. But the Pharaoh was struck down by the forces of evil. And ever since, the Black Pharaoh had been trapped in limbo, waiting for a worthy soul to say the secret name of the god of truth, and free his immortal servant from his tomb.

And now that time had come! Would Elmer accept the Black Pharaoh's aid, and become his servant in the cause of right and justice? Would he accept the power and wisdom of the ages to protect the Earth from timeless foes and ancient evils? Would be devote his life to serving Mankind in the name of Aten, and shepherd his race through the difficult times ahead?

Oh yes, Elmer would! His new mentor supercharged him, giving him powers and understanding beyond mere men. And on that day, after being given a golden, Egyptian double crown -- to signify his dominion over the worlds of matter and spirit -- he became. . . *The Golden Pshent!*

Arena One: The Silver Age

The Golden Pshent enters the world of superheroes with a bang, helping fight off an invasion of elder entities. He is the only one who understands the nature of the enemy, and can formulate a plan against the intruders. And, after he is seemingly killed in the awful battle, but comes back to help end it, he earns the trust of a number of notable heroes.

Ever thereafter, when there's a mystical problem, all supers know to call for the Golden Pshent. As such, Elmer stays very busy: "rescuing" magical artifacts from certain cults, dispatching strange entities, and working to loosen the grip that the traditional occult (evil magicians, demons, monsters, and ghosts) holds on the world. He also assembles a massive depository of dangerous weapons, books, and objects, and keeps them ensconced so that none but he can have access to them.

(No one sees that a much more dangerous group of cultists -- those dedicated to Nyarlathotep -- is spinning its evil web, relying on the Golden Pshent's presence to mask their own.)

In the background, Elmer uses his mentor's "foresight" to make sound investments, becoming independently wealthy. He creates a mystical stronghold in upstate New York -- the Mastaba -- and uses it to warehouse the dangerous items he "rescues." He also uses it to imprison creatures the Black Pharaoh counsels are too powerful to destroy, but too dangerous to simply be banished.

No other hero knows about the Mastaba, but a minor stage magician turned supervillain named Tophat manages to find it. He breaks in and steals one of its forbidden books, but loses his sanity when he flees through the hero's prison, and sees what's there. Ever after Tophat remains a thorn in the Golden Pshent's side, as he discovers *exactly* what the hero is doing, even if the hero has no idea. . .

Play: The Golden Pshent makes a super ally for medium-level heroes who don't have much, if any, magical knowledge. That said, his aid comes with the understanding that any magical materials they encounter must be handed over to him for "safekeeping." His stern insistence on this matter may lead some to wonder about his real motives.

Another interesting angle is to have the PCs be magic-based supervillains who have banded together. The Golden Pshent has either foiled them before, or they realize it's only a matter of time before he does, so they go after him. Such characters should know nothing of the Mythos or what his actions are leading towards. At some point they may encounter Tophat, who knows more than anyone should about their foe. But will they believe him?

Plot: Unless he's stopped, the Golden Pshent imprisons a number of "wild" entities who must be contained (until needed by his true master). At the instigation of his mentor, he begins researching his forbidden books to find a way to secure Earth from these entities. And after the Space Age begins, he settles on a plan to put powerful wards in orbit about the Earth.

Crunchy Bits: Elmer's invulnerability comes from the Stone Soul advantage from *GURPS Egypt,* pg. 80. His soul is in the tablet that let him contact the Black Pharaoh, locked up in his vault with the rest of the dangerous things. His

magical knowledge is courtesy of his mentor, who sugarcoats the truth about Mythos matters, but provides mostly-total disclosure on "lesser" magical menaces, along with access to the spells needed to stop them. Stats for generic Ancient Ones and their dread Minions can be found in *GURPS Horror,* pp.46-47, and the rest of the book is a goldmine of monsters to fight.

Arena Two: The Lead Age

By the late '80s, many of the heroes from World War II are either dead or long-retired. Their children and youthful admirers now bear their names and abilities, but not always very well. For just as society has become more materialistic and militarized, so have its heroes. Poisoned by ideas of dark knights and grim guardians, lured by the promise of the gun, they dispense vigilante justice with official approval, often maiming and killing.

In this time, the seemingly-ageless Golden Pshent is still very active, giving assistance to gun-totting heroes who can't shoot ghosts and those who wonder why the sorcerer they gunned down last month is back again. As before, he demands they hand over the magical paraphernalia, and, as before, they comply. He is no longer shy about being overly violent when denied anything, and his methods of punishment are rather *creative.*

Elmer has long-since sunk his wealth into purchasing a well-regarded private aerospace company, Crown Avionics. He begins designing the satellite-based Network that will provide protection against the Ancient Ones, but he needs something else: an extremely powerful artifact called the Eye of the Ancients. The Eye "blinds" the creatures and their minions to the holder's presence, so, by extension, a world cloaked by it could appear to be invisible.

According to the information he could find, the last person to the Eye was a certain Dr. Vril. He put it in something called the Endless Library before he vanished in World War II. Finding that library takes a great deal of Elmer's time and effort, and then it takes him even longer to find a way inside.

Meanwhile, Nyarlathotep's cult has prospered. By taking control of key industries, politicians, and media outlets worldwide, it begins to poison society. Ancient monsters and their minions trickle back in with the cult's aid, and, so humbled, fulfill their proper function once again.

Play: This setting pits the old heroic values of justice tempered by the law against harsh, often bloody revenge. Will the players embrace the law or the bullet? Or will they play magic-based villains who oppose the Golden Pshent for their own reasons? Tophat is still out there, scheming against his foe.

Another wrinkle is that new magic-based heroes have come of age. But the Golden Pshent *hates* these newcomers; made paranoid by years of cult-busting, he sees them as meddling in affairs they have no business in. However, his mentor advises him to keep his enemies close, and to pretend to befriend them. Maybe they'll help him get into the Endless Library?

Plot: Throughout 1994 and 1995, the Network is placed in orbit. In 1996, the satellite web goes online, but the Ancient Ones are not fooled as planned. Instead, they are *attracted* to Earth, and their passage is made easier by the Eye. Realizing disaster has fallen -- and unable to contact his mentor -- the Pshent retreats to the Mastaba, but gets there just as it's breached by mercenaries (hired by Nyarlathotep's cult) who make off with its treasures and let its prisoners loose. Distraught, Elmer finally makes contact with the Black Pharaoh, who takes great delight in showing his servant exactly what he's done. The knowledge destroys Elmer's mind, and the cultists take his body away for their master's dark purposes.

Crunchy Bits: By this time, Elmer has read a few of the works in his keeping, and has a decent Mythos Lore score and knowledge of some of its spells and workings. The Network is 19 geosynchronous satellites, placed in an asymmetrical (and unsettling) pattern around the world, each with an equal sliver of the Eye of the Ancients within it. The Network can still function so long as five satellites remain, but under that number the field collapses, and the effect falls apart.

Arena Three: The Dark Age

The nightmarish future history detailed in ***GURPS Cthulhupunk*** takes place mostly as described . . . starting in 1996. The only difference is that, by 2041, Nyarlathotep's pawns are more in control that any of the other gods' groups, so that the End Times are not stymied by mythos infighting. Horrors from other realities slip through the Network, and embed themselves in stolen flesh, re-activated temples, and other horrid locales.

The publicly-lauded Supers of this era are corporate-sponsored media-entities with no moral fiber. They beat up "villains" (other corporations' "heroes") while starring in uncensored, 24-7 reality shows. Genuine heroes exist, but they are underground nobodies who live in fear of being tagged by the corporate Supers. Meanwhile moral decay and societal breakdown gets worse as Mankind becomes more and more like its hidden masters.

Pshent Inc. (formerly Crown Avionics) is a major corporation, with massive holdings in entertainment, armaments, and aerospace. Its board is essentially a rubber-stamp body for its mysterious director, Dr. C -- the pathetic creature that Elmer has become. A great deal of the corporate and moral darkness in the world can be traced back to his company's dealings, and the terrible state of current superheroics is directly attributable to his entertainment division's reality-based programming (including *Who Wants to Kill Dr. Terrible?*, *A Date with The Atomizer!*, and *Justice Satellite of Love*).

Play: This era could be the setting for an interesting meditation on heroism in the face of soul-deadening exploitation, horrific opposition, and the looming End of All. But if you'd prefer to keep the mood heroic, then rather than starting out in this time, PCs could travel to the future in some fashion and see what will happen if things aren't stopped. Alternatively, time travelers could be sent back to either previous era to stop those things themselves. Will the heroes help them?

A third option has the player characters *being* the time travelers: true heroes who sacrifice their own timeline by changing the past. Such an action would strand them in a simpler, nobler age, as there would be nothing waiting for them at home but possible non-existence. Can they hold to their mission parameters, and resist the temptation to change the past too much?

Plot: Elmer C. Wyatt is little more than an empty vessel, occasionally puppeteered by his god. Killing him would do little, and destroying Pshent Inc. would only stymie Myarlathotep's Earthly operations for a time. But destroying the Network would send certain Ancient Ones off straightaway, and make it much harder for those who remained to come back should they be banished or "destroyed."

Crunchy Bits: The Golden Pshent is a Mummy (***GURPS Horror*** pp. 60-61) that stumbles around its "boardroom suite" in a stupid mockery of life until Nyarlathotep (***GURPS Cthulhupunk*** pp.104-105) infests it to order the stockholders around. When in public, "Mr. C" uses illusion-based spells to appear perfectly normal, only dropping the disguise if directly attacked by Mythos magic.

The Luck College

for *GURPS*

by Michael Kreuter

In some settings, magic may be used to alter probability. Indeed, this is the major function of magic in some worlds. There are some spells that already emulate this, such as Bless and Curse (***Magic*** p. 129). If the GM wishes to give mages even more control over probability, he can introduce a new college of magic where all spells relate to manipulating some sort of karmic "luck-energy." This is the Luck College. Note, however, that in a setting with a goddess of luck, she might get very angry at mages messing around in her domain. Alternatively, she might be bemused that them even trying, or even be the patron of such mages. The goddess Fortuna could be used for such purposes, and take any stance on the issue that the GM wishes.

If the Luck College is being used, the GM may wish to move Bless and Curse to the Luck College. They are prerequisites for other, more powerful luck altering spells.

Nudge Fate   *Regular*

After casting this spell, the target's next die roll is either improved or penalized by one, at the caster's option. Then the spell is dispelled. Note that it lasts an indefinite period before being used. The caster must touch the subject for the full duration of casting.

Duration: Until a die roll is made by the subject
Cost: 2
Time to cast: 1 second
Prerequisites: Magery 1 and at least one spell from each of 10 different colleges.

Item: Any. The spell is cast on the item and affects the wearer. It has only one "charge," however the wearer may choose when to activate it in the case of the positive casting, or the next die roll after it being put on in the case of the negative version. Energy to create: 10 times the amount to cast it.

Tilt Fate   *Regular*

This works as Nudge Fate, except the die roll may be improved or penalized by any amount up to three, at the caster's option.

Duration: Until a die roll is made by the subject
Cost: 2 times the amount the caster is affecting the roll
Time to cast: 1 second times the amount the caster is affecting the roll
Prerequisites: Nudge Fate, Magery 2

Item: As per Nudge Fate

Sway Fate (VH)   *Regular*

The target's die rolls are improved or penalized by one as long as the spell is maintained. (Caster's choice.) The caster

must touch the subject for the duration of the casting.

Duration: 1 second
Cost: 10
Maintain: 5
Time to cast: 1 minute
Prerequisites: Bless, Curse, Tilt Fate, Magery 2, at least three spells from each of seven colleges

Item: A ring, which affects the wearer as though the spell were constantly on.
Energy cost to create: 500

Force Fate (VH)   Regular

As Sway Fate, but rolls are improved or penalized by any amount the caster wishes, up to three.

Duration: 1 second
Cost: 10 per point changed
Maintain: Half the casting cost
Time to cast: 1 minute per point changed
Prerequisites: Sway Fate, Magery 3, at least four spells from each of five colleges

Item: As Sway Fate
Energy cost to create: 50 times the cost to cast on a person.

Alter Probability   Regular

This spell stays "on" until it is used. Once used, the target may utilize the Luck (p. B66) advantage once. The caster must touch the subject for the duration of the casting.

Duration: Until used
Cost: 20
Time to cast: 1 minute
Prerequisites: Tilt Fate, Magery 2, at least two spells from each of 10 different colleges

Item: A rabbit's foot, four-leaf clover, horseshoe or other object of good fortune. It has one charge, which the bearer may use whenever he wishes.
Energy cost to create: 500

Lucky Day (VH)   Regular

Once cast, this spell makes the target have incredibly good luck for 24 hours. At least one random happenstance will occur in their favor, as per Serendipity (p. B83). The caster must touch the subject for the full duration of the casting.

Duration: 24 hours
Cost: 50
Time to cast: 10 minutes
Prerequisites: Force Fate, Magery 3

Item: A ring or amulet, It constantly affects the wearer as though he had Serendipity. (Or an extra level of it if he already possesses it.)

Energy cost to create: 1000

Unlucky Day (VH)   *Regular*

Once cast, the subject suffers Unluckiness (p. B160) for 24 hours. The caster need not touch the subject for the duration of the spell, but must be familiar with him and, ideally, possess an item with a connection to the subject. (Such as article of clothing or lock of hair.) It can be cast without such an item at -10.

Duration: 24 hours
Cost: 100
Time to cast: 1 hour
Prerequisites: Lucky Day, Magery 3, at least one spell from each of 12 different colleges

Item: A ring or amulet. It constantly affects the wearer as though he had Unluckiness. For this purpose, the caster does not need an item associated with the target, since the target can be anyone who wears it.
Energy cost to create: 2500

Alter Destiny (VH)   *Regular*

This spell allows a mage to change the outcome of any roll already made in the past second before the beginning of the casting of this spell. The roll is re-rolled as per Luck (p. B66) but the caster decides which roll to use. (If it is one being made in secret, the caster just tells the GM "best" or "worst.")

Duration: Instantaneous
Cost: 20
Time to cast: 1 second
Prerequisites: Alter Probability, Magery 3, at least two spells from each of 12 different colleges, Luck, Super Luck or Serendipity advantage

Demand Fate (VH)   *Regular*

This spell allows the caster to use Super Luck (p. B89) once, on any roll that is either going to be made in the second after this spell is cast or has been made in the second before the spell was begun to be cast. The caster determines the outcome.

Duration: Instantaneous
Cost: 100
Time to cast: 1 second
Prerequisites: Alter Destiny, Magery 3, at least three spells from each of 12 different colleges

Bestow Greatness (VH)   *Regular*

This spell grants the subject a Destiny of any value the caster wants, be it 5, 10 or 15, positive or negative. Despite this, the caster does not know what the Destiny *is,* just the value. The subject need not be present, but the caster must be familiar with him and possess an item relating to them. Should they not possess said item, the effective skill is -10. On a critical failure, the caster gains the negative destiny of whatever value he was trying to bestow.

Duration: Permanent
Cost: 500 for a 5 point destiny, 1000 for a 10 point destiny, 1500 for a 15 point destiny

Time to cast: 1 hour for a 5 point destiny, 2 hours for a 10 point destiny, 3 hours for a 15 point destiny
Prerequisites: Alter Destiny, Unlucky Day, Magery 3, at least three spells form each of 12 different colleges

Item: Any item. The spell is cast on the item, rather than the person, and the item has the destiny instead of the person, though usually the item will have to do with the wearer. Examples include "this sword will be used to slay the king" or "all owners of this item will befall an untimely death."
Casting Cost: 10 times the cost to cast on a person.

Martial Arts Case Study

Gameable Myths

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

Some martial arts myths are insidious and persistent -- everyone seems to know someone who knows this guy who had to register his hands as deadly weapons. Or they know this guy whose teacher could kill a man with one blow. Or they've seen a guy who could catch a fly with chopsticks, proving his ability to, uhm, catch flies with chopsticks.

Most of these myths are hard to dispel, but reasonably easy to disprove. But where is the fun in that? Or more to the point, how can you make your game more fun by making some of them *true* in **GURPS** terms?

Here are a fistful of martial arts myths to use in your campaigns!

#1: My Hands Are Deadly Weapons!

If this myth is true, all martial artists reaching a certain level of skill must register their hands with the authorities. Failure to do so can result in legal penalties; you're effectively carrying a concealed weapon without a license to do so.

In some settings, this may not be purely penal. By registering your weapons, you may be able to claim self-defense in any fight. You may be required to inform your opponents ahead of time in order to claim this. If so, remember this handy phrase:

"I must warn you, my hands are considered lethal weapons . . ."

This perk can be bought at any time, as a style perk or as a general combat perk -- so you need at least 10 points in a style or 20 points overall in combat skills. You don't have to buy this perk, but if you don't, you forgo its benefits . . .

New Perk: Lethal Weapon. Your hands and feet are lethal weapons. You must register your hands as such with any legal authorities when you arrive in town. Failure to do so means you may suffer legal consequences; exact penalties depend on the setting. If you have registered and inform your opponents before a fight, you are legally clear. In cases of doubt, this is a +5 on any Law rolls or reaction rolls from a Judge or other representative of the law. A Lethal Weapon who informs his opponents of his status may claim a +4 circumstance bonus on his Intimidation roll, and gains a +1 to Reaction Rolls to determine if opponents choose to flee or surrender instead of fighting.

Disadvantage: Secret: Unregistered Black Belt. You are a Lethal Weapon, but keep it a secret to avoid any legal entanglements or to surprise your opponents. This is a -5 point Secret, resulting in legal consequences if discovered (usually, Social Stigma: Criminal).

#2: True Masters Need No Weapons

In many genres armed fighters are at a real disadvantage against unarmed fighters. Those brave enough to chance their hands against armed fighters do so with the knowledge that their hands are mightier than any man-made weapon.

This is best handled with the Unarmed Etiquette rule from **GURPS Martial Arts,** p. 132. Using this genre switch, armed fighters will be at a pronounced disadvantage against those who forgo weapons. Armed fighters will still be able to deal with other armed fighters, and push around non-fighters. But the true masters will defeat them no matter what weapons they choose to carry.

This also holds true against firearms. In fact, masters can dodge bullets with relative ease. Anyone with Trained By A

Master can ignore the rules for Tricky Shooting (*GURPS Martial Arts,* p. 121); such tricks don't work on them. No dodge against a firearm is penalized, even if the campaign is otherwise using penalties for multiple dodges (see Limited Dodges, *GURPS Martial Arts,* p. 122). A martial artist can always Dodge normally against firearms. You must defeat a true master with your fists, not with your H&K.

#3: The Black Belt is Just the Start of Training

In some real schools, this is basically true; the lower ranks are used to grade beginners. Once you've demonstrated sufficient skill in all the basic techniques, you're promoted to 1st degree black belt (shodan, in Japanese). Afterwards you are treated less as a beginning student and more as a ranking member of the dojo. A notable style that does this is Judo; Japanese school clubs are full of Judo black belts . . . it's the basic level for competitive players.

But one variation of this myth holds that "true" learning doesn't occur until after you become a black belt. Until they, nothing you learn does more than pave the way to the true learning. Here is one way to implement that:

Until a stylist has at least DX or IQ in all skills, and has a total of at least 10 points in the style, he *cannot* improve any techniques. In order to improve techniques, buy optional skills, or acquire any other style perks, the stylist must purchase the "Black Belt" perk below.

New Perk: Black Belt (Your Training Begins Now). You have achieved a Black Belt in your style. You may purchase techniques, optional skills, and optional techniques. You receive a +1 to reaction rolls from other members of your style, and from anyone in another style who lacks this perk. You have passed your basic training and are on the road to true learning!

In a cinematic game, you can only achieve a Black Belt from someone with both this perk *and* Trained By A Master or Weapon Master. Any lesser teacher can't give you the true learning you need to get this far.

#4: A Black Belt Means You Are a Master!

Other schools take the opposite approach of the above, reserving a black belt for true mastery. Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu uses this approach, with black belts being handed out only to very experienced and high-level competitors. Many films and other fictional treatments, and those with little knowledge of real-world ranking systems, take this approach as well. A black belt means you are a master.

Of course, not all styles use black belts . . . but this myth tosses that foolish notion aside like yesterday's white belt. Of course you can be a Black Belt in Shaolin Kung Fu, or a Black Belt in Jeet Kune Do, or a Black Belt in Sumo! You probably wear the belt, too. Only truly, visibly Western styles will lack Black Belts, and masters of those styles suffer from their inferiority.

In order to buy this perk, you must have at least 40 points in your martial arts style, and buy this as a Style Perk.

New Perk: Black Belt (True Mastery). You have achieved a Black Belt in your style. You receive a +1 to reaction rolls from anyone with a martial arts style (i.e. one who has a point in any Style Familiarity). In addition, you gain a +1 in Contests of Skill against opponents who lack this perk. You have mastered your style, and few can stand against you!

In a cinematic game, you must have Trained By A Master (or Weapon Master, for armed styles) if you are a Black Belt (True Master), and vice-versa.

#5: Ethnic Badass

Certain weapons, usually Asian martial arts weapons or obscure ethnic weapons, get a reputation for their utter fearsomeness. This may be because of their demonstrable artistry and craftsmanship (high quality examples of the

katana, for example) or because of their simple, low-tech nature (such as the staff).

The Ethnic Badass modifier (which is always capitalized, because it's so badass) makes any example of the weapon better. Better than what? Better than its weight, craftsmanship, design, etc. would realistically make it. Better than anything else.

Ethnic Badass: Ethnic Badass weapons gain a +1 to hit and a +1 to damage. They also gain a (2) Armor Divisor when used against inanimate objects (specifically excluding worn armor) -- these weapons can trash scenery even in the hands of a relatively weak fighter. Ethnic Badass weapons aren't fragile, either; any Ethnic Badass Weapon has a +1 HT and double the HP of a weapon of the same material and weight. Further, an Ethnic Badass weapon gets a +1 in any contest of skill against a fighter armed with a non-Ethnic Badass weapon. Ethnic Badass stacks with all other quality, material, or weapon modifiers; such weapons are just simply the best.

For example, everyone knows the Kukri is an Ethnic Badass weapon. Therefore am Ethnic Badass Shortsword-sized Kukri would do sw+2 cut, thr-1 imp, have a +1 to hit, +1 in contests of skill, and have HT 13 and 23 HP. When used against trees, concrete support posts, metal bars, etc. it will also divide DR by 2.

Variation: Rarely, such weapons are only Ethnic Badass in the hands of a trained fighter, not in the hands of an Elementary School kid telling his friends about his cool replica katana. In order to claim the Ethnic Badass bonuses (including increased HT and HP!) the wielder must have at least DX in the appropriate weapon skill.

Now, you can take that fistful of myths and fight!

Furry Friends and Fuzzy Foes

Introducing Furries into a Campaign

by John Monahan

Calli and I moved through the woods as quickly as we could, but we had to be quiet. The hunters were after us tonight. As we approached a small clearing, I felt Calli freeze. Instantly my hackles went up. Whiskers twitching, ears pivoting, I tried to get a hint of what had alerted her. Then I caught it, a brief whiff of canine and gun oil. The Lupos were just ahead.

Furries are basically anthropomorphic or human-shaped animals . . . or animal-shaped humans, if you prefer. The savage wolf/man, the inscrutable cat-like alien, and the shaggy-yet-loyal sidekick are all members of the furry tribe. Humanity has been fascinated by them for almost as long as we've been humans. How many cultures have tales about shape shifters and werebeings, or tell stories of animal spirits and gods that interact with humans?

Humanity didn't leave them behind when we entered the modern world. We integrated them into our culture. Look no farther than our cartoon friends, Bugs Bunny or Mickey Mouse. Pick up the latest manga, or rent the hottest anime DVD. Read the *Red Wall* series by Brian Jacques, *Ringworld* by Larry Niven, or *The Pride of Chanur* by C.J. Cherryh, to name just a few. And don't forget Chewbacca of *Star Wars* fame.

Furries can fit into a number of campaign types, and play a variety of roles for the GM. They can work equally well in serious or silly campaigns. They can be outsiders in a human-centered campaign, or adventure within an entire furry-centered universe. They can be the products of strange magic or weird science. They're naturals for fantasy or science-fiction campaigns, but can be blended well with historical settings as well. Imagine a band of furry adventurers in ancient China or Egypt. Picture Viking bears or ninja cats. Think of the old west full of furry bandits and long eared gunslingers. (Bunnies and burros, anyone?) The possibilities are endless.

What follows are a pawful of furry races that can be integrated into almost any campaign. They are designed for **GURPS** *Fourth Edition,* but are easily adapted to other systems. Try not to get scratched or bitten. Make sure your shots are up to date, and have fun.

Ursoids   *40 points*

Bear men, or man bears, will obviously share many of the characteristics of their wild cousins. Bears are big, tough, and ferocious, but they somehow manage to be lovable. In the wild, they can be found anywhere from tropical jungles to arctic ice flows, and their ingenuity and determination for finding food is legendary. This versatility would make Ursoids useful for a variety of campaigns.

Physically, Ursoids are big. They're covered with fur that can range anywhere from black to white, with many shades of brown in between. The fur is heavy and gives them excellent protection from the elements. Although they are powerfully muscled, they have a tendency to put on extra weight. This often gives them a heavy-set appearance. Their strength and toughness as well as their intimidating size would seem to make them tailor made for rolls as fighters, guards, or thugs. They would undeniably be a fearsome sight in combat, but it would be a mistake to lock them into this roll alone. In many Native American traditions, bears are associated with healing medicine. Imagine an eight- or nine-foot-tall furry cleric or shaman.

Attribute Modifiers: ST +5 (Size modifier -10%) [45]

Advantages: SM +1 [0]; Acute Smell/Taste 3 [6]; Claws (Sharp) [5]; Damage Resistance 1 [5]; Hit Points + 3 [6];

Teeth (Sharp) [1]; Temperature Tolerances 2 [2]

Perks: Fur [1]

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Fat [-3]; Gluttony [-5]; Loner [-5]; Sleepy (half of the time) [-8]

Sample Character: Grimley   *100 points*

The woods are the only home that Grimley has ever known, and for the most part, that's just fine with him. The forest tends to all his needs, and he tends to the forest. But every once in a while, he does get curious about the others, the ones that live beyond the trees. He's actually met some of them. They make him uncomfortable, but the ones who come in with proper respect for the woods aren't too bad. The ones who aren't respectful, who come in trying to hurt the forest or its residents . . . well, it could be said that they are now nourishing the trees.

Some of the outsiders tell wild stories that Grimley likes to listen to: strange tales about cities and castles, oceans and deserts, all kinds of stuff. He's not quite sure how much of it to believe. Maybe, one of these days, he'll have to check it out for himself.

Attributes: **ST** 15 [0], **DX** 11 [20], **IQ** 11 [20], **HT** 12 [20]

Dmg 1d+1/2d+1; BL 45; HP 18 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]

Ht 8'1", Wt 500 lbs. Size Modifier 1, Age 28. He has shaggy, medium brown fur, brown eyes and an unkempt, gruff appearance.

TL: 3; Cultural Familiarity: Woodlands; Languages: Human or Elvin (whichever is dominant in his neck of the woods) [0]

Advantages: Ursoid [40]; Absolute Direction [5]; Outdoorsman 1 [10]

Disadvantages: Sense of Duty (Nature) [-15]; Curiosity (Mild) [-5]; Shyness (Severe) [-10]; Wealth (Struggling) [-10]

Quirks: Gruff [-1]; Loves sweets [-1]; Grumbles when annoyed [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (E) IQ [1]; Axe/Mace (A) DX +2 [8]; Brawling DX +2 [4]; Cooking (E) IQ -1 [1]; Camouflage (E) IQ +1* [1]; First Aid (E) IQ [1]; Fishing (E) IQ +2* [2]; Naturalist (H) IQ +2* [4]; Survival Woodlands (A) IQ +1* [2]: Tracking (A)) IQ +2* [4]

* Includes Outdoorsman 1

Vulpines   *35 points*

Vulpines are as flexible and crafty as their fox ancestors, and like the fox, they often have a reputation as being tricksters and rogues. Foxes may be the smallest of the canines, but are also the most adaptable. They inhabit virtually every continent and can be found in habitats ranging from Arctic tundra to African desert.

The two most distinctive physical features of the Vulpines are their large ears, providing them with exceptional hearing, and their long bushy tails. Another unusual feature of Vulpines is that in the dark, their eyes may reflect available light. This gives them excellent night vision, and gives their eyes a distinctive glowing, golden appearance. Although reddish-brown is common, their fur can range in color from white through gray and brown with an occasional individual that's entirely black.

Vulpines could be used to add some subtlety and finesse to almost any campaign. Their high IQ would give them an advantage as spell casters, and their reputation as tricksters would lend them to swashbuckling adventures. (Note that the Trickster disadvantage might not be mandatory for all Vulpines, but they do show a fairly high incidence of it.)

Attribute Modifiers: ST -1 [-10]; IQ +1 [20]

Advantages: Acute Hearing 3 [6]; Acute Taste/Smell 2 [4]; Claws (Blunt) [3]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Night Vision 3 [6] Teeth (Sharp) [1]; Temperature Tolerance 1 [1]

Perks: Fur [1]

Features: Tail [0]

Disadvantages: Curious [-5]; Loner [-5]

Sample Character: Toshi   *100 points*

It's a big universe out there, and Toshi wants to see as much of it as she can, and maybe even get a little piece of it for herself. She's spent far too much of her life on this dead-end world, and now it's time to find a starship and make her move. With her good looks and charm, and a little bit of luck, there's no telling just how far she can go. All she needs is just one more decent score, and she'll have more than enough for an off-world visa and a ticket to the stars. Of course, before she heads out, there is that big-mouthed security captain that needs taking care of

Attributes: ST: 9 [0], DX 12 [40], IQ 12 [20], HT 10 [0]

Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16; HP 9 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]

Ht 5'2", Wt 115 lbs. Size Modifier 0, Age 23. She has well kept reddish brown fur, golden brown eyes, and a thin, athletic build with an attractive, young looking face.

TL: 9+; Cultural Familiarity: Western (native) [0]; Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Vulpine [35]; Attractive [4]; Smooth Operator 1 [15]

Disadvantages: Greed [-15]; Overconfidence [-5]; Sense of Duty (Companions) [-5]; Trickster [-15]

Quirks: Flashy Dresser [-1]; Likes to Flirt [-1]; Believes She's Lucky [-1]; Restless [-1]

Skills: Beam Pistol (E) DX +2 [4]; Brawling (E) DX +2 [4]; Carousing (E) HT +2* [2]; Climbing (A) DX -1 [1]; Computer Operation (E) IQ [1]; Detect Lies (H) Per* [2]; Electronic Operation Security (A) IQ [2]; Diplomacy (H) IQ -1* [1]; Fast Draw Pistol (E) DX +1† [1]; Fast Talk (A) IQ +2* [4]; Sex Appeal (A) HT +2*,‡ [2]; Stealth (A) DX +1 [4]; Streetwise (A) IQ +1* [2]

* Includes Smooth Operator 1
† Includes Combat Reflexes
‡ Includes Attractive Appearance

Lutrines   *24 points*

Wet and wild, the Lutrines are the descendants of otters. Just like their ancestors, they are inquisitive, flexible, and love to play. This might give them a reputation for being flighty or undependable, but the fact that they are equally comfortable in or out of the water can literally add another element to a campaign.

Lutrines are long and lean. They're covered with dense brown fur that protects them from the chilly waters they frequently inhabit. Like the Vulpines, they have excellent night vision, with eyes that seem to glow in the dark.

Their high dexterity would tend to lead Lutrines to the roguish professions, as would their ability to make quick watery escape. Imagine, however, what a semi-aquatic mage could do with a few water-based spells. Why not make use of their natural affinity for water by turning them loose upon the high seas? They could make ideal sailors and merchants, not to mention how much fun they could have as pirates.

Attribute Modifiers: ST -1 [-10]; DX +1 [20]

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Breath Holding 2 [4]; Claws (Blunt) [3]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Flexibility [5]; Nictitating Membrane [1]; Night Vision 2 [2] Teeth (Sharp) [1]; Temperature Tolerance 2 [2]

Perks: Fur [1]

Disadvantages: Curious [-5]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Increased Consumption 1 [-10]; Skinny [-5]

Sample Character: One Paw Jax   *100 points*

He may be a bit down on his luck now, but there was a time when Ol' One Paw was the captain of a fine ship. What a time that was, sailing the briny seas. Ah, the adventure, the danger, not to mention the loot . . . he loved it all. He'd still be at it too; if it wasn't for a certain scurvy dog and those disloyal bilge rats he talked into following him. They mutinied, and took Jax's own ship right out from under him. Not that he's bitter, no, no, but just you wait. One of these days, and sooner than you think, he'll have his own ship again. What a day that'll be. He'll take the helm, and sail the seas again. Of course, if he should happen to meet a certain scurvy dog along the way, what a day that'll be!

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

Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]

Ht 5'10", Wt 115 lbs. Size Modifier 1, Age 42. He has dark brown fur with a fair amount of gray, green eyes, a long and wiry looking build, with a large steel hook replacing his left paw.

TL: 4; Cultural Familiarity: Western (native) [0]; Languages: English (native) [0]

Advantages: Lutrine [24]; Acute Vision 2 [4]; Charisma [5]

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Pirates) [-5]; One Hand [-15]; Obsession (Regain a Ship) [-10]; Overconfidence [-5]; Sense of Duty [-5]

Quirks: Always Wears Red [-1]; Curses Frequently [-1];

Skills: Area Knowledge (E) IQ [1]; Boating (Unpowered) (A) DX [2]; Brawling (E) DX +1 [2]; Carousing (E) HT +1 [2]; Climbing (A) DX [2]; Crewman (Seamanship) (E) IQ +1 [2]; Crossbow (E) DX +1 [2]; Fast Draw (Sword) (E) DX +1* [1]; Fast Talk (A) IQ+1† [2]; Gambling (A) IQ [2]; Intimidation (A) Will [2]; Knot-Tying (E) DX [1]; Leadership (A) IQ +1† [2]; Melee Weapon (Knife) (E) DX +1 [2]; Melee Weapon (Main-Gauche) (A) DX +1 [4]; Melee Weapon (Shortsword) (A) DX +1 [4]; Merchant (A) IQ [2]; Navigation (Sea) (A) IQ [2]; Shiphandling (H) IQ [4]; Stealth (A) DX [2]; Strategy (H) IQ [4]; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]

* Includes Combat Reflexes
† Includes Charisma 1

Tangentially Regarding the Vampire Who's Bemoaned the Fall of Rome for MCXVIII Years

I made a comment to my wife that, since our adorable offspring had destroyed the one we gave him (a fake in book form designed to teach this sort of thing), we simply didn't have one in the house. I could see her making the mental trip from room to room, realizing that I was correct. She then countered with the fact that there also wasn't one to be found in her parents' house, outside of two broken ones still used for decoration, and -- although less certain than about our own place -- I believe she's right. It wasn't until I made the memory-trip to *my* parents' house that I was able to conjure an example . . . although I don't know how helpful it'll be to my two-year-old's education to know that the closest one I can reliably imagine -- indeed, the *only* one that I'm aware of -- is 1,200 miles away, hanging on the kitchen wall, next to the seductively easy microwave oven.

What am I talking about?

An analog clock.

From my computer to the VCR to the microwave to the cell phone to the televisions to the clocks by our beds, we can view many, many forms of digital clocks in our abode. But there isn't a single example in our household of the timekeeping form that, a generation ago, was the *only* way to tell time. (My scanty research indicates that indicate that digital watches weren't big until 1974, and digital clocks didn't hit the scene until the 1950s. I'd say that [nixie tubes](#) were involved, but Wikipedia said that they were too expensive at the time they were being used for clocks until I edited it.) So I'm realizing that teaching my child to read an analog clock -- although something I will feel compelled to do someday -- is about the same at this point as teaching him to read Roman numerals. It's only slightly more useful than knowing how to use a card catalog.

There are many points in history where skills and abilities that were once *de rigueur* slip away. For example, there was a time when knowing how to conduct a formal duel was just part of SOP for many parts of society (including [vice presidents](#)), but nowadays it's just not on the radar of most educational curriculums. Likewise most extensive high-school-parking-lot knowledge of the care and operation of carburetors has been utterly lost.

Incorporating this into games (that's what we do around here!), it can give a fair bit of flavor to a character to saddle a character with some bit of obsolete or unfavored lore. Someone in a cyberpunk world with an obsession for analog timepieces and sound equipment would make him instantly distinguishable from his more high-tech counterparts. Someone in an urban-based 1920s ***Call of Cthulhu*** campaign (or even a 1950s Atomic Horror game) could steadfastly cling to his horse instead of following the tide of history in embracing the automobile. And a hero in a modern setting who maintains a meticulous 1950s-style bomb shelter would certainly be distinct . . . *and* he'd have a headquarters!

In a game with "tech levels" or anachronistic skills, it's trivial to represent this; simply give the character one of these oudated abilities. Likewise a game with specializations or other ways of fine-tuning skills can take a descriptor that's evocative ("Wait . . . you're taking 'Mechanic (Carburetors)'?!"). And the GM may give you a discount for taking something obviously useless, or he might offer all the players a small number of character points or skill slots to devote to less-than-optimal choices. I've both been in and run campaigns that dictated X number of points needed to be spent on pointless skills; it worked pretty well.

Because one of the interesting things about having these useless abilities is, you start looking for a way to use them . . . both as a GM and a PC. Sure, folks laugh at someone who uses vacuum tubes in a digital age, but one electromagnetic pulse later you're still in the game while they're rebooting (assuming you're not a scorched shadow on the wall, of course). Likewise a horse might seem like an odd choice in an urban campaign, but your Model A isn't going to investigate and perhaps rescue you when you're late and it's hungry. Such abilities probably shouldn't come up constantly (otherwise they're not "useless" or "obsolete"), but taking advantage of the opportunities when they present themselves is truly satisfying.

In a lot of ways, clinging to obsolete knowledge is completely congruous with PC creation. After all, most gamers play heroes who are more confident and competent than their more mundane counterparts . . . and what says "ultra-competent" more than being able to use outdated abilities and remain competitive? It's one thing to be a brilliant modern inventor; it's another to be one who favors the slide rule and can still keep up with his graphic-calculator counterparts ("What? The physical aspect of seeing the numbers line up helps me think!").

And, of course, there might also a certain symbolic appeal in conceiving of a character who favors an "outdated" technique or knowledge, designing it for a game that forgoes fancy computer graphics or high-speed video-game gratification . . .

--Steven Marsh

Infinite Technomancy

for *GURPS*

by Bobby Derie

In many *GURPS* games, the technology level (TL) is a fundamental characteristic that provides a general guideline as to how primitive or advanced a character or setting is in comparison to others. Players in *GURPS Infinite Worlds* campaigns are liable to find themselves encountering many settings and characters with TLs higher, lower, or comparable yet divergent from their own. One popular aspect of the *Infinite Worlds* alternate TL settings is the technology curve taking strange twists and turns, and defying general conventions. TL(5+1), for example, features equivalents to TL6 technology, but based on TL5 principles or devices with some extra material or application -- perhaps the widespread use of industrial magic in a world that underwent an Alchemical Revolution, or steampunk devices in a setting where electrical circuits were never developed.

Many of the Technological spells presented in *GURPS Magic* are unique in that, unlike other spells, they are tied to a given tech level. Magicians who learn a Technological spell at a given TL and then have to interact with another TL -- whether higher or lower -- find themselves at a disadvantage, as given on the table for Tech Level Modifiers (p. B168). A rarer yet trickier problem is a character dealing with how Technological spells work in an alternate TL setting, or who learns a spell at an alternate TL and then tries to use it at home. This can readily become a problem in campaigns like *GURPS Infinite Worlds,* where player characters are routinely exposed to characters, settings, and artifacts from worlds and cultures with different TL levels than their own -- and no few of them with alternate tech levels, to boot. The following rules provide guidelines to players and GMs using Technological spells in various TLs.

Anachronistic Training

As skills, Technological spells can serve as prerequisites for the Anachronistic Training technique (*GURPS Infinite Worlds,* p. 183). This represents a character's additional training to apply their spells in different tech levels. A techwizard might still face a familiarity penalty when handling an unfamiliar piece of equipment, but this greatly expands the range and utility of their tech level-dependent spells.

Often when handling anachronistic Technological spells, the character should specify the tech level they are attempting to cast the spell at in order to allow the GM to properly judge its effect.

Example: Silverhand, a cybersorcerer with Seek Machine/TL9-12 and Anachronistic Training (Seek Machine)-3, can locate the nearest machinery of TL6-TL9 without suffering a penalty when she casts her spell. Her player can narrow the number of potential "hits" by specifying a specific tech level when casting the spell.

Anachronistic Training for spells is generally only available in a mana-positive setting with multiple TLs and a tradition of Technological spells. Worlds such as Merlin-2 (the setting of *GURPS Technomancer*) likely have anachronistic training programs for wizards that have to work in nations with lower tech levels, and the Cabal no doubt instructs its wizards in anachronistic spell techniques as well. Given the few magicians in their ranks, Infinity Patrol members might have to figure it out for themselves, though ISWAT may offer a crash course when sending a spellslinger off on a mission to a low-TL world.

Of course, there's nothing to stop a magician from acquiring a Technological spell at a higher or lower TL than their own if they encounter sufficient technology, or an appropriate grimoire, but they still run into the same problems when attempting to use that spell against a device at another tech level.

Example: Silverhand is in a TL8 supers campaign, and she has downloaded the knowledge of TL11 alien technomystics -- perfect for dealing with superscience devices. However, she still faces a penalty when applying those

TL11 spells to modern TL8 tech.

Characters who start out the game with high-TL Technological spells should probably take a 10-point Unusual Background; Anachronistic Training for those high-TL spells would bump it up to a 15-point Unusual Background.

Parachronic Training

Settings and devices with an alternate TL poses a different challenge. Generally, the Tech Level Modifier is based on when the alternate tech level diverged from the "regular" tech level (if less than or equal to the character's TL) or its equivalent tech level (if higher than the character's TL)

Example: As a TL8 character, Silverhand would consider a TL(6+2) device as TL6 (skill penalty -3) for purposes of using her TL8 spells on it. If she encountered a TL(8+2) device, she would treat it as TL10 (skill penalty -10).

Anachronistic Training for Technological spells is not as useful in dealing with these alternate tech-levels; instead, a new technique, Parachronic Training (presented below), is relied. When attempting to cast a Technological spell at a TL that is both lower and alternate, use the greater penalty.

Example: Silverhand knows Awaken Computer/TL10-15 and Anachronistic Training (Awaken Computer)-1, and is trying to use the spell on a TL(6+2) mechanical brain. The equivalent TL of the brain is 8, which with her Anachronistic Training means she would normally only suffer a one TL difference (-1) penalty, but the alternate technology progression is a two TL difference (-3) penalty, which is the greater penalty and so applies to the test.

Parachronic Training may also function with other skills with the GM's permission. Being even more rare than Anachronistic Training, Parachronic Training should be worth a 10-point Unusual Background if taken at character creation, or a 15-point Unusual Background if taken with Anachronistic Training and/or high-TL spells.

The Cabal is the only organization that has a large body of lore in Parachronic Training for spells, though the Templars of Yrth are rumored to know something of the matter. Individual Infinity Patrol agents may pick up the rudiments on their own. Any relatively advanced magical societies that had regular travel and dealings with races from or on other worlds are also likely to develop Parachronic Training.

Disturbingly, at least to the Infinity Patrol, Reich-5 is in just such a position to develop both anachronistic and parachronic cross-training programs. Thankfully, they don't yet have access to enough alternate technologies and Technological spells to truly abuse the possibilities . . . yet. Reich-5 does have its own psibernetic and occult technologies, however, which could become very dangerous if they figure out how to turn magical energy into electrical power, or vice versa.

Characters may, of course, also choose to learn or research Technological spells at alternate tech-levels, following the guidelines on Improving Skills in Alternate Tech Levels (p. B513). The penalty associated with the artifacts of TL(2+7) race who based their technology on orgone or nacreous radiation might mean it is easier (and cheaper!) for player characters to find or develop spells that work with such tech instead of seeking out parachronic training that may well not exist.

Parachronic Training   *Average*

Defaults: Special (see below).

Prerequisite: Any one TL skill; cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

This technique allows you to use the prerequisite skill without suffering a TL penalty for applying methods of alternate technology levels. Each level of this technique removes one level of TL penalty from an equivalent TL skill.

Example: Silverhand knows Purify Fuel/TL8-11 and Parachronic Training (Purify Fuel)-2, and takes no TL penalty for using the spell on TL(6+2), TL(7+1), or TL8 fuels. She would get only a one TL different (-1) penalty for using the spell on TL(5+3) fuels.

Parachronic Training cannot remove the penalty for futuristic gear or methods, even if it uses an alternate tech level. The GM may still enforce a familiarity penalty for unfamiliar equipment. You must buy this technique for each skill separately.

Parachronic Training and Anachronistic Training are complementary with each other; if attempting to use a skill at a lower TL that is also an alternate TL, apply both techniques as appropriate and use the lower penalty.

Example: Silverhand knows Essential Fuel/TL7-12, Anachronistic Training (Essential Fuel)-1, and Parachronic Training (Essential Fuel)-1. She receives no penalty for converting TL(5+1), TL6, TL(6+1), or TL7 fuels into their Essential equivalents. She would take only a one TL different (-1) penalty for converting TL5 or TL(4+2) fuels.

Superscience and Technological Spells

Tech levels marked with ^ designate worlds and societies with superscience achievements, technologies that violate the physical laws as this world knows them -- not unlike magic, as Arthur C. Clarke famously pointed out. Superscience technologies fall outside the normal paradigm of tech levels, and it can be difficult to puzzle out -- even if the character has a higher TL than the superscience setting! When faced with a superscience device, nothing short of re-training, following the guidelines on *Improving Skills in Alternate Tech Levels* (p. B513), will allow a character to use Technological spells on them without penalty. Without that particular training, increase the difficulty of the Tech-Level Modifier for IQ-based technological skills (p. B168) by one TL (minimum; GMs may choose to use more) to reflect the vast gap in understanding behind the working of the device.

Example: Silverhand is attempting to disarm a contramatter bomb (TL7^) with a Malfunction/TL8 spell and Anachronistic Training (Malfunction)-1. Normally, Silverhand would not face any penalty handling a TL7 device with her Anachronistic Training, but given that it is a superscience device, the TL difficulty increases by one TL (going from "Skill's TL" to "Skills TL+1"), giving her a -5 penalty to the test.

Infinite Technomancy

With the endless variety of the infinite worlds, sometimes the fundamental considerations on which many spells and technologies are based are different. In a world with broadcast power or an omnipresent energy source such as orgone, Power spells may become difficult to adjudicate (if necessary at all) -- do you need to see the Tesla tower to cast Draw Power, or will Seek Power be rendered useless since the "power source" is all around you? Artifacts and partial or damaged devices recovered during missions and adventures can be examined and even duplicated using Reveal Function, Schematic, Repair, and Rebuild spells -- the investigator might not know what it is or how it does it, but the boys in the lab can figure that out later.

In many settings, magic may be technology, with golem-limbs instead of cybernetic prosthetics and geomantic arcfurnaces that convert the ambient energy of ley lines into electricity. Cultures that develop high and alternate technologies are also likely to develop Technological spells that are different than those listed in ***GURPS Magic.*** Two possible alternate tech-levels from ***GURPS Infinite Worlds*** are discussed below.

Leviathan Technomancy

The TL(1+8) 'A'Ntheleioi of Leviathan (***GURPS Infinite Worlds,*** p. 129), given their aquatic environment and the acoustic nature of their technology, might learn spells like Sonar Hearing. The power source for much of their mysterious technology is nacreous radiation, which might depend on complex enchantments, and is often used as a weapon.

The subject can "tune" her hearing to the frequencies used by sonar, whales, dolphins, and other cetaceans.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 2 to cast. 1 to maintain.

Prerequisite: Keen Hearing.

Item: Jewelry or shells. Only affects the wearer. Some enchanters create items (conchs, typically) that turn the sonar signal or song into an audible one; this allows the 'A'Ntheleioi to communicate vast distances beneath the water. The users tune the devices by concentrating. *Energy cost to create:* 150.

'A'Ntheleioi Blast Wand

This meter-long flute-like device is made of a strange alloy. It fires blasts of nacreous radiation (as the spell Radiation Jet -20) at targets within three yards. This device requires a nacreous battery, a technomagical item that contains enough power for three charges. The battery uses a specialized Draw Power spell to convert its normal energy into mana to allow the magic item work.

Component Spells: Radiation Jet variant, unknown others, plus a battery with a Draw Power variant.

Asking Price: $60,000

Azoth-7 Technomancy

Azoth-7 (*GURPS: Infinite Worlds,* p. 112), the TL(4+2^) civilization undergoing an Alchemical Revolution based on Isaac Newton's calculus of angels, is a perfect example of an alternate technology that diverged due to the introduction of industrial magic. Propel/TL(4+2^) spells may drive their space-faring ships, and the local Animate Machine/TL(4+2) may well call one of the lower angels of orders into an automaton or device -- or on a failure, a demon! It is likely that the magical mathematics that govern this world affect how magic operates. Visiting wizards may well find that their Technological spells subtly affected, if they work at all.

Pyramid Review

New World: A Carcassonne Game

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Klaus-Jürgen Wrede

Illustrated by Franz Vohwinkel

Translated by Jay Tummelson

95 Land Tiles, 30 Wooden Settlers in five colors, Starting Board, 2 Wooden Surveyors in white, Rules Pamphlet, and Rules Summary Sheet; $29.95

An alternative title for *New World: A Carcassonne Game* might be "*Carcassonne: Go West,*" for although it is undeniably a *[Carcassonne](#)* variant, the most striking feature for a fan of the series is that it is played in just one direction. Technically this is from right to left, but since the theme of *New World* is exploring and settling the lands of British America and beyond during the 17th century, that bearing can only mean westward. This quite literally marks a change of direction for the tile-laying, meeple-placing, award-winning *Carcassonne* series.

Designed for two to five players, devotees of the *Carcassonne* series will find much that is familiar in *New World.* In the original *Carcassonne,* players take turns drawing tiles that depict a combination of cities, cloisters, and roads, with farms for in between these three. When adding a tile to the board, a player can place a meeple (as the playing pieces are known) or knight in the new city, a thief on the new road, a monk in the new cloister, or a farmer in the new farm. If at any point during the game a city or road is completed, or a cloister surrounded with other tiles, then the player with a meeple in that feature scores points and gets his meeple back. Farmers remain in their fields until the game's end when they score points for the number of cities they serve.

The game plays much the same in *New World: A Carcassonne Game.* There are differences, however: Shopkeepers are placed in the towns, and robbers move in on the trails. Farmers need to stay at home in their farmhouses and wait to be surrounded by other tiles, which is just like cloisters in *Carcassonne*. This is ever so slightly confusing to those familiar with the original game. The trapper, meanwhile, takes the place of the farmer in the original game, being put on the plains and remaining on the board until the end of the game. He does not score for the number of cities he connects to. Instead, like in *Carcassonne: Hunters & Gatherers,* he provides points for the number of animals that he can trap. (The animals are represented by the bear, bison, and wolf symbols on some of the tiles.) Fortunately for the trapper, there is no saber-tooth tiger symbol to steal some of the trapped animals as there is in *Carcassonne: Hunters & Gatherers*. Of course, the unfamiliar use of farmers and trappers is not the only new thing in *New World: A Carcassonne Game.*

In addition to stovepipe hat-wearing meeples, *New World: A Carcassonne Game* adds a combined scoring and starting board. The right-hand side of this board is marked with a standard scoring track, while the left-hand side depicts the eastern seaboard of North America and the three towns of Jamestown, New York, and Plymouth. The starting board is just 10 tiles wide or rather 10 tiles in height because the upper and lower edges mark the northern and southern limits of the play area. The players place the tiles beginning from this board and go in a westerly direction.

The game also adds a new type of meeple: the surveyor. Larger than the other meeples and in white, the surveyor is probably the nastiest addition to the *Carcassonne* family to date. The two surveyors start the game on the easternmost tile column, the one on the starting board. Whenever a feature -- a town, a road, or a farm -- is completed, the most

easterly surveyor is moved to the left by one column. If the completed item has a meeple in the same column as a surveyor, the player scores extra points -- even more if there are both surveyors in this column. After a surveyor has been moved, any meeples left behind to the right or east of the surveyors still in an incomplete feature are returned to their respective players without scoring any points.

This means that the players are forced to keep placing tiles to the left or west of the surveyors, attempting to complete features before the surveyors pass them by. The surveyors act as both a timing mechanism and a driving force, compelling the players to keep one question uppermost in their minds, "Is it safe to complete this feature?" A second question quickly follows: "If I complete my feature and force the surveyors to move, will it prevent the others from completing a feature and thus from scoring?" How often a player needs to answer either question depends upon the number of players. In a two-player game, this doesn't happen often. With three players, the questions come up quickly enough, and in four- or five-player games, they occur almost every turn.

The surveyors affect the game in two important ways. The first is that players will finish and score features more quickly, leading to lower scores. This is balanced by the second effect -- players place tiles to avoid completing a feature, preventing the movement of the surveyors and lost scoring opportunities. Yet because the play area in *New World: A Carcassonne Game* is so narrow, a player often finds himself forced to place a tile in the only legitimate choice remaining and exactly where he did not want to.

Physically, the tiles in *New World: A Carcassonne Game* nicely follow the game's theme of settling the Americas. The plains have an untamed feel, and the log-walled towns sport a rough quality. The somber, earthy look of the tiles is a little dark though, making the animal, trading post, and farm icons difficult to see for some players. Other players might also object to the Union Jack flags that appear on some of the town tiles. They are just a historical element though, and just as with the shields in *Carcassonne,* score extra points when the town is completed. The trading posts on the trails work in the same fashion.

The rules do require careful reading as the addition of the surveyors and how they score adds complexity to the game. Nor are the instructions perfect, as they do not explain how incomplete features are scored if they touch the top and bottom of the play area. Likewise, they do not address the question of what happens if the surveyors are on the most westerly tiles and a feature is scored with no new tile to move to. The surveyor bonus for completing features with meeples in the same column also differs between the rules and the summary. The reviewers stuck to the +4 bonus for each surveyor given in the rules. Overall, the rules feel rushed and not as clearly explained as other titles in the series.

The question is, though, as thematically good as the uni-directional play and the surveyors are -- and they are good -- is the inclusion of both worth a whole new game? Could the starting board, new tiles, and surveyors not have been repackaged as a new way to play the original *Carcassonne,* rather than a whole new game? Probably not, since such a version would not work with the "settling America" theme of *New World.* However, perhaps it could have been done as an expansion for *[Carcassonne: The Discovery](#)*.

What *New World: A Carcassonne Game* does offer is an interesting new direction in which to play *Carcassonne* using an equally as interesting rule in the form of the surveyors. Their presence makes *New World* a far more competitive and tighter game than other *Carcassonne* titles (especially with more players). Combined with the smaller playing area, this forces the players have to more carefully considered in the placement of their tiles. Additionally, the reduced playing area also makes the game feel small and thus at odds with its "big" theme. Much like *Carcassonne: A Discovery, New World: A Carcassonne Game* is more of a hobbyist's game than a family game, one that fans of the series should certainly try. But for the newcomer, the [original](#) is still the most playable and most accessible.

-- Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Wealth of Nations

Published by [TableStar Games](#)

Designed by Nico Carroll, Robert Carroll, Monte Lin, Ray Long, and Peter Hansell

Art by Gregor Benedetti and Peter Hansell

Full-color boxed set with foldout game board, six reference cards, 108 Flags (for six nations), 60 tiles (15 Farm, 9 each of Generator, Academy, Mine, Factory, and Bank), six Market boards, 240 wooden Commodity cubes (60 Food, 50 Energy, 50 Labor, 40 Ore, 40 Capital), 200 Monetary notes, 30 Promissory notes, nine Automation tokens, one first player marker, and rulebook; $49.95

It's nation-building time again. Taking place roughly around the early 20th century (judging from the illustrations used), *Wealth of Nations* is a chance for people to become countries, each building up an economy that plays to its strengths while it diversifies.

The object is to end the game with the most points.

Players (from three to six) choose various starting packages of money, tiles, and Commodities. The board is a hex-shaped area made up of smaller hexes (five on a side), and tiles fit into those spaces. Each tile has dots, and each dot produces a Commodity -- for example, an Academy tile creates Labor cubes and Farms make Food. The edges of some tiles have half-dots (or even one third of a dot), so placing multiple tiles together into a Bloc increases the output faster than the cost.

Players may trade between themselves to get the Commodity cubes they need, or they can buy and sell to the various Markets directly (each Industry has its own board with cubes for sale). The more they sell, the lower the costs become at the glutted Market. Different cube combinations are needed to claim spaces and place new tiles; to "power" the tiles' yield; and to automate the industry (so it uses one Ore instead of multiple Food cubes). If money is tight, Promissory notes give a player money but place him in debt. Ideally one can navigate the development tree long enough to create larger Blocs and better Industries, like Banks.

The game ends when one player uses his last Flag to claim a space on the board; all but one of the tiles sets are exhausted; or the board is filled with Flags and tiles. Players get points for tiles and unspent money, and deductions are made from their score for each Promissory note of debt they haven't paid off.

The production values on this gem are, in many ways, through the roof. There's an endless supply of cubes (wooden, naturally), and the playing surfaces are all mounted. The Markets even have tiny little indentations so cubes sit in a shallow hole. The tiles could be thicker but they're serviceable. The real disappointment is the reference sheets -- these aren't just thin, they're flimsy. Finally, the rulebook is terrific. The print is big, and the illustrations are useful and highly informative, with examples aplenty. It leaves few questions unanswered.

Play of the game isn't as dependable. The system is easy enough to describe, mostly because it is a simple set of mechanics (the box is spot-on when it says it takes about 90 to 120 minutes to play). Unfortunately, the word-picture

falls short when trying to give an idea of how much has to be juggled at once. It's not enough to know what needs to be done now; a player must be able to visualize what comes next -- a new Factory, a Bank, Flags placed where the new expansion is supposed to go. There are a lot of numbers on the Market boards and a good deal of math and preplanning to occupy one's thought processes. Having a Bank is good because it offers money, but it won't allow someone to manipulate the Commodities any more directly.

Seldom is it a question of whether the other players will trade with the person who produces a lot of what everyone needs; it's merely the details of the trade this time around. Going into debt isn't awful, which is nice. Promissory notes don't automatically drop anyone into a losing position and paying them off is doable. They only take a nation so far when trying to purchase Commodities from the Market, though, so bartering is almost invariably the preference. In fact, it's disappointing how little use the Markets serve outside establishing a baseline cost for goods, especially when one considers how big a part of the game they're obviously intended to be.

The nations one plays are listed in the book, all of them barely disguised caricatures of real countries or powers of the time, but these are purely window dressing. Special national "abilities" might make a neat supplement, but right now, it would just be one more thing to keep track of. **Wealth of Nations** does, strangely, convey a good sense of what it must have been like trying to take a "Great Leap Forward" -- it generates an atmosphere reminiscent of political tracts and human exploitation -- but what players probably expect is a game of economic strategy. There is one, but it's an imperfect financial system that puts a heavy load on the players' shoulders. It is perhaps ideal for those with a head for figures and business, but less so for the casual gamer.

-- Andy Vetromile

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

The Doorway Lambs

a Generic Horror Adventure

by Steven Marsh

"The Doorway Lambs" is an adventure designed for any modern-based campaign with horror overtones. It can either be used in a "realistic" investigative campaign, in which case the culmination will have an atmosphere akin to a horror movie like *Se7en;* or in a more supernatural world, in which case the climax can present a truly horrific choice to the heroes. And perhaps the most horrific option lies in between: In a world of supernatural truths, how can you tell if the decisions you make are real and not the result of madness?

History

This history is presented as an aid to the GM to understand the backstory of the adventure. It should *not* be spoon-fed to the players at the start of the adventure. Some aspects of this information are common knowledge, but only if there's reason to ask (or reason to know). Ideally, then, some of this background should be presented to the players before the adventure begins (such as the economic situation of the town, perhaps the legend of unsolved murders, and similar details). The rest of the information can be found by investigative heroes with enough inclination and skill. Note that none of the information *has* to be acquired for the adventure to progress; if the players aren't proactive enough to discover what's "really" going on, they can endure the horrors of the ending without understanding the big picture.

The adventure takes place in the small town of Bluehollow. Bluehollow was founded over 100 years ago, coming into being as an exploratory checkpoint for cataloging the wilds in the area. The lakes and streams around Bluehollow are home to excellent fishing opportunities, and the temperate climes and ancient forests are a camper's dream. Although Bluehollow has a relatively small population of just under 10,000 residents, tourists tend to add 10-20% to that number at any given time. Because of some complex political maneuvers dating back to Theodore Roosevelt's administration, Cartier County -- where Bluehollow is incorporated -- boasts a jigsaw arrangement of privately and publicly held land; most of the private land is protected at the state and federal levels for various reasons. The upshot of this arrangement is that development around Bluehollow is limited for 50 miles in any direction; Bluehollow is the largest town for 15 miles, and the nearest city of any import is a 90-minute drive (less owing to distance than the treacherousness of the roads). As a result, not only is Bluehollow a perfect tourist destination, there isn't much else that *can* be done in the area without untangling the skien of developmental regulations and problems.

This arrangement suited the town fine for over 100 years, and "Bluehollow" and "nature tourism" are synonymous in the state. (A popular advertising slogan promoting Bluehollow is, "You can't see all we offer in a lifetime, but it's fun to try.") However, the town's fortunes changed somewhat 50 years ago, when a series of unsolved murders shook the town to its foundations. Five teenagers were brutally slain at a lakeside campsite near Bluehollow, over the course of five days, one a day. Bluehollow police kept almost all details of the investigation secret, including where and how the teens were murdered. Then, as quickly as the killings began, they ended just as mysteriously. Nonetheless, the deaths received national attention, and Bluehollow's tourist trade took decades to recover. At the time, many people in Bluehollow had suspicions over who was responsible, but no one had any proof . . . especially because their number one suspect disappeared at the end of the spree. In time, the massacre became known as the Starfish Murders (and, by extension, the killer known as the Starfish Killer). They remain unsolved and almost forgotten except by true-crime buffs.

What Really Happened 50 Years Ago

In some ways, a half-century is the blink of an eye to the long view of history; to today's 30-year-old, the disaster of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* holds little more relevance than the assassination of President Kennedy. So it is with

Bluehollow. While its citizens have a vague collective understanding of the murders, the fact remains that a very small percentage of its populace has any direct memory of the events of the Starfish Murders. Although little remembered by most, there was a primary suspect, whispered of as a loner and "kook" by most in the town: Matthew Burner, middle son -- and black sheep -- of the prominent Burner family. The Burners were responsible for most banking and money-handling in Bluehollow until those interests were purchased in the mid-1990s and the family moved out of town.

But not Matthew Burner -- he disappeared days after the last gruesome death. What has always confounded investigators of the homicide is that Burner disappeared so quickly and completely, leaving no trace of his whereabouts.

In fact, the whispers were true: Matthew Burner *did* commit the murders. And his disappearance was almost as calculated as his original plan.

The Original Starfish Murders

Matthew Burner believes he is saving the world; he might be right (see "The Truth," below). Burner, an introverted bookish member of his family, found himself drawn toward mysticism and the occult at an early age, and he dabbled in things man was not meant to know. In particular, he discovered that there exists an incalculable evil struggling to breach the dimensional barrier, eager to taste the blood of the innocent. A half-century ago, he learned that this creature was very, very close to piercing the veil between its world and the mortal one, and the young man sought to keep it contained. Burner believed he had found a ritual that would contain the entity for a thousand years; unfortunately, it relied on sympathetic magics: To keep sated that which sought innocence, innocence must be sacrificed. The five teenagers Burner murdered were chosen because because he believed they were all virgins.

Unfortunately, he was only correct about four of the original victims. As such, his ritual was not as effective as it should have been. The being remained trapped, but the efficacy of the magic was such that it could only hold it at bay for 50 years rather than 1,000.

Although Matthew Burner didn't know that, fate intervened to allow him a means of keeping abreast of the situation. As Burner fled town after his ritual was complete, he stayed at a hotel some 100 miles outside Bluehollow. Burner was using a fake identity that he had purchased on the black market, which had formerly belonged to Corporal Anthony ("Tony") Paluzzi, a veteran of the Korean War who committed suicide in 1956. While resting in his hotel room and contemplating his next move, Burner overheard a scuffle in the adjacent room. Investigating, he discovered two men having a heated dispute: Major Theodore ("Ted") Abalone and Captain Christopher Carlson. Burner arrived just in time to see Abalone fatally shoot Carlson, and Abalone turned his attention toward Burner. The two struggled for the gun, with Abalone ending up mortally wounded. Matthew Burner carefully considered his options and came to a decision: He sat down in their hotel room, waiting.

Within 20 minutes, Bluehollow police were on hand to arrest Burner, but -- because the matter involved the death of military personnel -- Burner was quickly turned over to federal authorities. Burner (going by Tony Paluzzi) struck a deal that seemed awful for him and greatly relieved his superiors: Burner/Paluzzi would plead guilty to both killings, accepting a sentence of 100 years. In return, the Feds would do two favors. First, they would keep the matter out of the media as much as they could ("Paluzzi" said his family would be heartbroken, and it'd be better if he just disappear). Second, because Paluzzi claimed to be a nature lover, he requested his sentence be served at the federal penitentiary along Bucktail Lake . . . which happened to be right outside Bluehollow. Federal prosecutors eagerly accepted this deal; the choice of sentence location was not that unusual (even though the medium-security prison would not have been an ideal first choice), and the fact that Major Abalone and Captain Carlson were in a hotel together in the first place would have proven embarrassing to the military at the time, so the need for media silence was seen as an asset.

No legal authorities in either Bluehollow or the nearby federal court system ever realized that they also had in their custody the Starfish Killer, or that he was on permanent sentry less than five miles from the original murder sites.

The Passage of Time

Three decades later, in the late 1980s, an idealistic law student named Amy Davies seeking to do *pro bono* work investigated various prisoners at nearby Federal Correctional Institution, Bluehollow. Since FCI Bluehollow was a medium-security facility, Amy was surprised to learn of one inmate sentenced to 100 years for a double-murder. She investigated the circumstances surrounding it. Despite "Paluzzi"'s protests, Amy uncovered most of the secrets surrounding the deaths of Abalone and Carlson (including the fact they were probably in a relationship and the fact that Paluzzi was likely guilty of little more than self-defense), although she never uncovered the truth about Paluzzi's double identity. During this time, Paluzzi was surprised to find himself falling as much in love with Davies as she was with him, and the two were married (despite the protests of Davies' family). As a compromise, Davies retained her family name.

During a conjugal visit in 1991, Davies found herself expecting a child (despite precautions), and Patrick Davies-Paluzzi was born early the next year. As the years progressed, Davies found herself drifting apart from Paluzzi. The pressures of maintaining her lawyer practice in Bluehollow, along with the strain of Paluzzi's incarceration -- perhaps coupled with his unwillingness to allow her to fight for his freedom -- caused them to drift apart, and they were divorced in 2000. At that time, Patrick dropped the "Paluzzi" from his name, becoming Patrick Davies.

Several years ago, as he entered his teenage years, Patrick began rebelling against his mother's rigid life, and he sought to connect more fully with his father. In 2006, over the course of months, the father revealed the entire truth (as he knew it) to his son: the false identity, the circumstances of his incarceration, the unknown murders in his past, the reasoning behind it. Because prison interactions are monitored, Burner did so circuitously, over the course of months, relying on Davies to discern the truth. ("You want to know what I did before? Check the woods, son. Check the woods.")

Fascinated with his father, Patrick Davies was determined to pick up the mantle left by his father's incarceration. In Davies' own investigation, he discovered (or came to believe) that the signs his father had noticed that led to the original Starfish Murders were coming to fruition again; he has not shared these theories with his father, but he is instead planning on taking action himself.

Timeline

1958 - Original Starfish Murders, arrest of Burner/Paluzzi
1987 - "Paluzzi" meets Amy Davies
1990 - Davies weds Paluzzi
1992 - Patrick Davies-Paluzzi born
2000 - Amy Davies and Paluzzi divorce
2006 - Patrick Davies learns truth
This year - The events of this adventure

Today

The woods around Bucktail Lake are going to receive some visitors. Unfortunately, for some of them it will be the end of their lives.

"The Doorway Lambs" is designed as a standard "slasher" film plot, and it has been crafted to be adaptable to a large number of adventure types, ranging from somewhat realistic to Lovecraftian horror. Unfortunately, the open-ended nature of the plot, coupled with the variable nature of the heroes, means many specifics cannot be explained in detail. Thus, adventure presents a day-by-day accounting of what will transpire unless the heroes take extraordinary measures.

The Premise

The Original Killings

Although not important to the plot, here are the names and ages of the original victims, in the order they were killed.

- Jesse Mayer (brother of Jennifer) -- 16
- Jerry Tass -- 15
- Jennifer Mayer (sister of Jesse) -- 18
- Scott Forrest -- 17 (not a virgin)

Bluehollow's premier religious teen organization, PuriTeen, has organized a camping trip on the grounds around Bucktail Lake. PuriTeen members pride themselves on being somewhat removed from the temptations of normal teen life, instead devoting themselves to religious scholarship, volunteerism, and "having fun, *not* sex." Although some in Bluehollow see PuriTeen as a joke, for the most part, the citizens think the kids' hearts are in the right place. Even though some members are forced into the organization by their parents, it is a relatively sincere group.

The Bucktail Lake ParTy (as it's known, with "ParTy" emphasized as "par-TAY") is designed by organizers to give a coed gathering of would-be members, with parental organization and supervision. Patrick Davies is a member of PuriTeen, and he plans on using his peers as the focus needed to stop the evil from entering the world.

The Campground

The Bucktail Lake Campground has been designed as a middle ground between those who desire full comforts at a campsite and those who want to "rough it" in tents. The main structures at Bucktail Lake are permanent 10-foot-square canvas tents, built on wooden platforms; they can sleep six uncomfortably, and four or five in relative coziness. Each tent area features running water, a fire ring, picnic table, and a grill. Every two tents also share access to an electrical outlet.

The campground has six tents clustered in three areas; each set of two tents is within 100 yards of the other. The PuriTeen group has been given control of the entire campground, even though they are only planning on using two clusters of tents (two tents for the girls and one tent for the boys). Between the three clusters of tents are two bathroom and shower facilities, which are also permanent structures. Each facility is divided into men's and women's sections, and each section has two toilets and one shower.

All the tents are within 50 yards of Bucktail Lake, which is roughly crescent-shaped, with the far end of the lake approximately five miles away. The far end of the lake is also where it abuts FCI Bucktail, but because of the haze, on the lake it's incredibly difficult to see unless you know it's there (and even then, it appears as a slightly darker gray building against the gray of the fog).

Besides the clearings for the tents, Bucktail Lake Campground is primarily noteworthy for the number of trees; the forest extends in all directions, and the density is such that visibility is severely limited in most places.

- Cindy Avalon -- 17

These five were on a camping trip; most of the parents disapproved of the coed gathering or didn't know. After Jennifer was killed, they discovered their car broke down (it had actually been sabotaged) and tried to make a stand. During the night, Scott fell and broke his leg, causing the teens to try to defend themselves in the woods. After Jerry was killed, they ran panicked through the forest (carrying Scott), getting horribly lost in the process. A storm that evening obliterated any signs of their presence (except the car). Burner tracked down the remaining teens, knocked them unconscious, tied them up, and murdered them over the remaining three days. He killed them ritually in the way described under *Day One (Evening),* below.

Investigation of these people will not yield anything interesting, although the GM is free to bring up any red herrings as required to keep the heroes suitably dazed. In particular, replacing one of these names with a distant cousin of a PC or similar bloodline tie can make for a creepy fact to introduce.

Getting the Heroes Involved

There is no set way to introduce the heroes to "The Doorway Lambs." Here are some ideas:

- The heroes' vehicle breaks down near Bucktail Lake, and they stumble across the PuriTeen gathering just as the storm from Day One hits.
- The heroes are part of a neighboring camp that floods because of the storms on Day One; they are seeking the higher ground of the Bucktail Lake Campground.
- The heroes are called as investigators to research what happened on Day One, and they become trapped by the storms.

Regardless of how they become involved, the PCs become part of the adventure and have their fates tied to the teen group . . . although the group might not care much for that until they realize how much danger they're in.

The Ritual

Patrick Davies believes he needs to kill one victim a night, over the next five nights, to have the optimal chance of keeping the evil from penetrating the mortal world. He thinks that the ritual will still work -- with limited results -- if the required number of victims is compressed over fewer days, or if the victims are not pure. (He's less sure it will be effective if he takes *more* time.) As such, he plans on trying to slay his peers as discreetly as possible, hoping to avoid discovery. If he *is* found . . . well, then, he hopes that he can finish the requisite number of students before he's subdued.

The Group

The PuriTeen group is composed of 12 teens and three chaperones, with each chaperone responsible for four teenagers.

Group One

- Amy Davies (chaperone; mother of Patrick)
- Carol Wendell (older sister of Jane)
- Penny Cantor (daughter of the Mayor, Simon Cantor)
- Lily Parker (girlfriend of Adam)
- Debbie Avalon (distant cousin of one of the original victims)

Group Two

- Sara Tomlan (chaperone; mother of Bill)
- Jane Wendell (younger sister of Carol)
- Terri Young (daughter of Lief)
- Casey Ortiz (girlfriend of Pete)
- Amelia Fall (daughter of Patricia Fall, noted reporter and town gossip)

Group Three

- Lief Young (chaperone, father of Terri)
- Patrick Davies (son of Amy)
- Pete Weatherly (boyfriend of Casey)
- Adam Tender (boyfriend of Lily)
- Bill Tomlan (son of Sara)

Note that this assembly has been designed primarily for combining realism with ease of GM organization and understanding. If an additional group is desired, add another one of boys. If fewer people are desired, it can be scaled back to two groups of teens (one boy, one girl); shuffle around the organization, leaving the victims.

Also realize that, although brief notes are provided for each teen, none of them have the level of detail that Patrick or Amy Davies do; as such, if the PCs investigate each person in line, the fact that the GM has a lot more information on those two names than the other is going to be a red flag.

For maximum efficacy in the information-gathering portion of the plot, each of them should be fleshed out with enough red herrings to waste a bit of the heroes' time, but not so much that they can't figure out probable dead ends. Remember that, in a small town, practically everyone is tied to everyone else if you go back far enough, and some very Byzantine (but unrelated) relationships are possible between the various NPCs.

The Timeline

The Weeks Before

Patrick Davies spent the better part of a month exploring Bucktail Lake and its campground. He is completely familiar with the area and has taken a large number of precautions; if the game system allows for bonuses for area familiarity, he should receive them to a large degree. Unlike his peers, he won't get lost (even once inclement weather changes the landscape), and he can sound convincing when he misleads his peers about the nature of the area. Furthermore, he can be assumed to have any number of boobytraps, caches of weapons, and other tricks available as appropriate to the plot. Anything he laid down would have been done the day or two before the camping trip, so it's unlikely anyone would have discovered these beforehand.

Day One (Day)

The PuriTeen group arrives in the evening and establishes their respective camps. Unfortunately, in the half-hour between when the youth group left Bluehollow and when they got to Bucktail Lake Campground, the weather has begun turning incredibly sour. Although not raining yet, the teens recognize the probability and scatter to use the facilities, take showers, and get cleaned up before the storms hit.

During this time, Patrick pretends to take a shower, climbs up his stall, drown into down the adjacent stall (both in openings he prepared), and silently subdues and ascends with one of the girls (Terri Young). He keeps her bound and gagged atop the roof of the restroom, waiting until the evening to claim his first victim.

Day One (Evening)

That evening, the rains do indeed come, with an unusual fury. (Whether this is due to the capriciousness of the weather or a sign that the evil Patrick seeks to contain is up to the GM; however, Patrick will definitely use the storms as a sign of the latter.) Flash flooding ends up destroying the vehicles that brought the teens there, and it also creates unpassable conditions on the roads. In addition, Bluehollow itself is experiencing massive problems due to the floods; even if the teens get in contact with the outside world (which they should), they quickly learn that the authorities are unable to send much help, either because of the weather (Day One) or the lack of resources (Days Two through Four).

Terri's absence does not go unnoticed, but the storms keep anyone from searching for her. The chaperones hope she will return once the storms abate.

Like most of his peers, Patrick excuses himself during the night to use the facilities, and he escapes to the top of the restroom to sacrifice Terri. He does so in the way required by the ritual: with the victim tied and positioned such that each of the arms and legs form a radial pattern with each other of approximately 72 degrees each along with the head, so that the overhead appearance of the prone victim resembles a starfish. Patrick then dons a mask -- similar to what his father used -- that is completely white save for a five black lines radiating outward from the center of the face, in the same pattern sought to replicate in the victims. Patrick uses the method dictated by his ritual, which involves cutting the victim to death. Although the white mask tends to attract the splatters of blood from the slaying, Patrick has several copies of it hidden around the campsite; finding a used mask (or a cache containing a fresh one) can be eerie reminders or clues for adventurers.

Day Two (Day)

When the morning comes and Terri doesn't return, the trip is called off. Unfortunately, the chaperones quickly learn of the situation -- "We can't leave?!" -- and seek to do damage control. Patrick applies psychological coaxing ("I feel so helpless just waiting around . . .") to goad the others into trying to look for Terri. Lief takes the bait, and the groups split up into parties of three and four to find Terri. Patrick becomes part of one of the groups of three (with Pete Weatherly and Jane Wendell), intending to lead them to one of his traps. If he can ensare two victims at once, then the

need to separate someone the next night is lessened.

By this point, the heroes should have become part of the adventure and can help however they like. Terri's body is still atop the bathroom, but finding any clues is almost impossible because of the aftermath of the storm.

As the groups hunt for Terri, a separate group (*not* containing Patrick) is captured by one of Patrick's traps -- a large net that has entangled them all. Although that group isn't in any danger, the heroes will probably investigate them first, leaving Patrick free to guide his victims to a different trap (a pit); Patrick can avoid falling in and has a good shot at subduing his peers.

The heroes may hear the screams of the two in Patrick's group. If so, and if the murderous teen knows that others have heard, he flees back toward the others (cutting himself if necessary), pretending to have been ambushed by a maniac with a knife. A group who wants to investigate where Patrick claimed to be ambushed is lead by Patrick them toward a different area, with another trap that may capture the heroes. Patrick then makes a show of rescuing the PCs and even knows enough about the traps to get seemingly injured himself; he tries to make it clear from this encounter that he's one of the good guys.

Day Two (Evening)

The remains of the group cluster together. If the PCs are with them, they probably need at least three tents (if not more), meaning there is still a separation between the groups.

Unless prevented, Patrick sneaks out during the night and kills his second victim (Pete Weatherly). He has made the preparations such that he can be *very* quick if need be.

Day Three (Day)

The group may not know what's going on yet; if Patrick has been lucky, there have only been disappearances and odd traps in the woods.

This day, the teens learn that -- despite the dangers posed by the high winds -- a helicopter is scheduled to land and rescue the survivors. Unfortunately, a gust of wind brings the vehicle crashing into a tree, destroying it and creating enough confusion for Patrick to subdue his fourth victim (Penny Cantor) and hide her with the third victim. The destruction by the helicopter also sets fire to the campsites, owing to the tenacious nature of jet fuel. This destroys the tents and forces the group to find their own means of survival through the cold evening. If the heroes have not discovered Terri's body, the destruction of the bathroom she was sacrificed atop may provide the first physical clue of foul play.

Day Three (Evening)

Again, unless halted, Patrick sneaks off and kill his third victim (Jane Wendell). If he needs a distraction, he's willing to use "I hear something!" as a pretense to sprint off into the woods. This may or may not give the PCs a chance to investigate him, and it might provide an opportunity to encounter more deadly traps.

Day Four (Day)

By this day, the party recognizes that they are in danger somehow tied to the Starfish Killer. They should be in full survival mode, probably spurred by the PCs. Fortunately for Patrick, he may already have his fourth victim waiting. Patrick plays this day by ear. If he has a victim in hiding, he agrees with any proposals that rely on everyone staying put. If he doesn't, he still agrees with the suggestion, but he seeks any opportunity to claim his next victim.

Day Four (Evening)

Once more, Patrick sneaks off and makes his sacrifice (probably Penny Cantor).

Day Five (Day)

This is the final day. If Patrick has been undiscovered, then he plays this day similarly to the previous, trying to remain invisible to the crowd. If he is suspected, or if the group has made concentrated efforts to keep everyone accounted for, he points out that, being 18, he can't possibly be the Starfish Killer; he'll cast suspicion on the two senior chaperones, Sara Tomlan and Lief Young, since both of them are old enough to have committed the original murders (although they would have been *very* young). If this theory is finding any purchase, Patrick notes that it was Lief's daughter who went missing first, and the young man proposes that the other murders might be mere smokescreen for his need to kill his own child to cover some dark secret.

Although the past few days have been clear, the skies look more and more threatening as the day progresses. Patrick bides his time, waiting for an opportunity. He sees the coming of a second storm as proof that what he is doing is right.

Day Five (Evening)

Patrick tries to use psychological tactics to keep the entire group on edge. In the end, he's not above revealing himself as the killer if it throws everyone off-guard enough to claim his final victim. As far as Patrick is concerned, what happens to him isn't important so long as he's successful in his mission.

If the heroes have been clever or have uncovered most of the mystery, then the final climactic scene should take place once Patrick has another victim ready to kill, with the PCs there to interrupt; see "The Dilemma," below.

What's Going On?

This adventure allows for "iPhone investigation" -- combing electronic archives or hacking into databases as much as they can from afar. In fact, it's been designed with that in mind, as most other sources of information are locked off to the heroes. The GM will need to control the flow of information according to the needs of the adventure. Fortunately, because the weather is so abysmal, it's easy to do; cell tower reception that allows for investigation one hour might be down the next.

The Starfish Murders

Unless the heroes did research on the murders before they arrived (perhaps as part of the premise that brought them to the campsite in the first place), they are unlikely to even know about them until after the first or second murder. At this point, they probably learn of the legends from the remaining kids or the chaperones.

Although no feature pictures and few books have been written on the topic -- there was just too little to go on and it wasn't a "media sensation" at the time like metropolitan serial killings in later decades were -- investigation likely reveals publicly known information about the original killings. This includes the location (Bucktail Lake), the year (1958), a description of the original murders, the lack of suspects, and the fact the slayings just stopped.

An excellent result on research rolls might reveal the name of the presumed murderer: Matthew Burner. However, for more person-to-person interaction, it's probably best if this piece of information comes from asking the chaperones what they have heard of the incidents.

Matthew Burner

Investigating Matthew Burner reveals that details about him stops in 1958. He didn't disappear, per se, but no sources mentioned him any more. Contacting other Burner family associates (which may take some time, since they no longer

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The Powers of Patrick Davies

Patrick Davies is a "slasher"

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live in Bluehallow) reveals that he did, in fact, disappear; he was the black sheep of the family, and everyone assumes he died of a drug overdose or something similar. If presented with rumors that Matthew was the Starfish Killer, how the contact reacts depends on how close she was to Burner. Everyone had heard of the rumors, but only some believed it. His more distant relatives are likely to find the rumors credible, based on brief interactions with him at family functions. His closer relatives -- mother (the father is deceased), brothers, and sisters -- all are convinced that Burner would have been incapable of doing such a thing. Although he didn't like interacting with the family, his close relatives admit, his obsessions were of a quieter nature; they can't believe he would ever hurt anyone deliberately.

The Burner/Paluzzi Connection

Although this information shouldn't be gleanable until about Day Three (given the amount of time it would take to hit this point), it is possible for intuitive and clever investigators to make the link between Matthew Burner and Tony Paluzzi. Searching for unsolved murders does *not* reveal anything useful (although any number of red herrings are possible). Likewise, looking for Burner in the legal system proves fruitless, as does hunting through state records for any violent crimes of the area.

However, a search for *federal* crimes turns up an interesting possibility, in the form of Tony Paluzzi. Paluzzi stands out because his arrest comes within a week of Burner's last known whereabouts (if the heroes are able to pin it down that far by talking to the Burner family), *and* Paluzzi has no other record for two years prior to his arrest . . . and that record is when he checked himself out of a veteran's hospital after being watched for signs of extreme depression. (No record of Paluzzi's suicide exists, but Paluzzi's hometown newspaper mentions an unknown body in a 1956 report of a suicide; enterprising players can put the pieces together.)

The Paluzzi/Davies Connection

The connection between Paluzzi and Davies is much easier to come across; since Amy Davies and Paluzzi were married, there is an electronic "paper" trail documenting that fact. There is also evidence of the link between Paluzzi and Patrick Davies. Amy does not divulge this information herself, and pressing her too hard for details is likely to get her to talk to Patrick. This would then tip him off that investigators are after him . . . making him much cagier and dangerous.

If the heroes discover that Paluzzi is Matthew Burner, they still don't have a clear suspect; there are at least three obvious choices (Matthew Burner, Amy Davies, and Patrick Davies). Given the campsite's proximity to FCI Bluehollow, the heroes might want to cross the lake and try to meet Paluzzi directly. This should be encouraged (especially on Day Four), as it should lead to an interesting and powerful scene between the heroes and Paluzzi/Burner. However, any means of crossing the lake should be unreliable, and too small for more than a couple of PCs (maybe the whole group, but definitely not enough to consider trying to ferry everyone to safety at the prison).

Prisoner Paluzzi

villain in the classic mold of all other horror-movie threats. He is not inherently supernatural (although he believes he's working toward supernatural ends), but he is incredibly prepared. He is also in very good shape (albeit deceptively so), and he has an incredibly high pain threshold. Again, if the heroes are investigating, there should be a couple of opportunities before the climactic battle to encounter him, with the requisite slasher "I know I got him!" double-takes that make the encounter so deadly. Although Patrick does *not* want to kill anyone more than is necessary to complete his ritual, he is willing to use his traps to injure and entrap the heroes to keep them out of his way. (And, of course, if the heroes discover too much too soon, then a trap might keep them knocked out for a couple of days until Patrick can get closer to his goal.)

However, Davies would be absolutely no match for a group of PCs armed to the teeth; as such, the GM should try to structure the group so that they're not Marine Commandos about to fight with Cthulhu-esque darkness, but rather more mundane people who are either caught up in a bad camping trip or are sent to aid the PuriTeen group. If the heroes do have excessive arms or equipment, perhaps much of their gear can get destroyed during the first rainstorm.

Investigating Paluzzi through the penal system does not reveal anything untoward; Paluzzi has not escaped or had any departures, and his only recent regular visitor has been Patrick Davies. (Amy Davies stopped by several years ago to finalize divorce proceedings.) Paluzzi has been a model prisoner, and he is highly regarded by everyone at FCI Bluehollow.

Although Paluzzi appreciates that his son knows his past, he does *not* realize his son's current actions, nor is he aware of his son's belief that the evil Paluzzi sought to contain is scheduled to make another appearance. Paluzzi is deeply concerned that his son might have thrown his life away like he has his.

His interactions with the PCs depend on their attitude toward him. If they seem sympathetic -- or if they make it known they have ties to Things Man Wasn't Meant to Know -- then he may reveal what he did in 1958, although he does *not* say why; he speaks in vagueness about how he "did what needed to be done" and how he "didn't have any other choice." If pressed, he asks the guards to escort his prisoners out. If they seem belligerent or likely to thwart or harm his son, he does not talk about anything willingly.

The Order of Info

Note that it's possible to stumble across the truth in some other order: Investigating the campers might reveal that Amy Davies was married to a federal prisoner, and his link to Patrick Davies shouldn't be difficult to determine. From there, the heroes might search for a link between Burner and Paluzzi, or try to talk to him directly.

A Note on Pacing

Again, it's stressed that all this information should *not* come about in a deluge. The heroes should piece together the facts bit by bit, perhaps finding their Internet connections failing at critical moments, or receiving cryptic half-notes in their e-mail boxes from their contacts. For an adventure where it's desired for the climax to occur on Day Five (before the killing of the fifth victim), a rough sequence of what can be found when might resemble:

Day One: Information on the Starfish Murders (*not* the rumored person behind it); remember that Day One the heroes may not even know there *is* a murderer loose.
Day Two: Information on Matthew Burner, including contacting him.
Day Three: The link between Burner and Paluzzi.
Day Four: The link between Paluzzi and Davies.
Day Five: Any loose ends, before the finale.

Note that, unless the heroes use extraordinary measures, they should not be able to discern *why* the Starfish Murders (old or new) are occurring; that information should be saved for Patrick's big climactic scene. However, that scene might work best if they learn that either he or his father have dabbled in the occult.

The Dilemma

The entire adventure builds toward this plot element, and it is considered the climax. Which day it happens on depends on how clever and determined the heroes are to discern the truth.

The investigators have tracked down Patrick, who is probably be about to commit another sacrifice. Since the heroes almost certainly do not know the motivations behind the murders, it is at this time that Davies explains it them: "Don't you see?!? I'm trying to keep the darkness from crossing over! It thirsts for blood, for innocence. Weigh the scales, and see the cost in lives; six souls, including my own, to save six billion!" Davies can provide whatever documentation seems reasonable to back up this claim (at least in his own mind); most likely he has a copy of a book that details the threat and describes what must be done.

It is in this way the core dilemma of the adventure is revealed: Is it ever acceptable to sacrifice humans without their consent, for the greater good?

The Truth

How the adventure resolves depends on what the heroes do (obviously) as well as the true nature of the threat.

In a realistic campaign, there is no stellar evil. Matthew Burner was completely delusional and wrong about his original goal, and he managed to bring his son into his sick world. In this case, Davies is both a killer and a victim. This may not stop the heroes from doing what they need to to save an innocent life, but it can be tragic-horrific to convince someone who believes he's doing great good that he's an unimaginable monster.

In a Cthulhuian campaign where the supernatural is real (and known to be so by the heroes), the heroes might be placed in an extremely difficult position, either needing to stand by and allow evil to be done -- or perhaps even become an active participant in that evil -- or standing by and allowing the world to be consumed by darkness.

For perhaps the most horrific option, in a campaign where the investigators know that the supernatural exists, they might not be able to determine the truth of Davies' account. Do they attempt to bring his plan to fruition, knowing they are little more than monsters themselves if they do so; or do they thwart him and realize that, in so doing, they might allow an even greater evil to prevail? If the stakes are high enough, how sure do you need to be to act decisively? This ending can inspire a sense of dread waiting, akin to *Rosemary's Baby.*

In any options where the heroes can verify the truth of the proof that Davies offers, they may seek to find an alternate solution to the dilemma. To a certain extent, this is encouraged; it's what heroes do, after all, and the mere fact that the PCs are placed in a situation where they need to either aid a serial killer or risk the end of the world is more than enough horror for some groups. However, it is not in keeping with the spirit of the adventure for there to be any quick or easy solutions. The most obvious solution is to find *willing* victims . . . perhaps even the PCs themselves. The ritual that Davies is working off of requires five victims total; depending on when he is discovered, the heroes may only need one or two more people willing to be sacrificed to bringing the ritual to fruition. Even if the volunteer isn't an innocent, he may still suffice to buy some time; after all, the last usage of the ritual only had four of the five victims

as virgins (although no one knows that), and it still worked for 50 years. One possible candidate might be Amy Davies; if she knows what is going on, she may be inclined to believe her son's account and volunteer to be the final victim. Of course, asking anyone to make the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good requires excellent persuasion abilities, a convincing argument, and quite possibly several rolls. Another candidate is Patrick Davies; he's still a virgin, and he would gladly sacrifice himself if it would stop the threat (although the heroes must be willing to be his killer). Finally, it's possible that the victims Davies has claimed so far are enough to buy the heroes some time to try to investigate a less psychopathic resolution to the problem. If so, this adventure should serve as the springboard for a lengthier adventure where the heroes try to track down a more permanent solution.

As a complication, this dilemma can be brought more forcefully home by the rise of ominous signs: thunder, lightning, howling winds, and so on. Such acts of "nature" (?) can serve to blot the sky enough to make the climactic scene occur in darkness, even if it's noon. Of course, unless it's obviously supernatural, such phenomenon don't provide any direct guidance or resolution; after all, it's hard to tell the police, "I helped a psychopath kill a teenager because it was raining."

The Resolution

How the adventure resolves is, again, very much up to the GM (to decide on the truth) and the heroes (to decide on their course of action). If the ritual is allowed to go to fruition, regardless of the reason, Davies surrenders to the heroes or authorities, as appropriate. Although he confesses to the murders, he remains absolutely silent about what he knows and why he has done what he did; he is completely docile and compliant in all other ways. If the heroes were involved in any way in helping him, he completely denies their involvement.

If Davies is thwarted, he does not surrender without a struggle . . . to the death, as far as he is concerned. If he is subdued, he -- again -- remains silent about what he knows. He will *not* be meek, but he instead tries to escape as forcefully and cunningly as he can. If he is eventually presented with information that his believed threat is no longer a danger (for example, the heroes go out and find an alternate solution via another adventure), he reverts to docility, as above.

Of course, if the ritual is not completed, then there might be other consequences, up to and including the end times.

The End of Innocence

One thing that I always kind of miss about new campaigns and new gaming groups is that there's a certain learning curve that comes with being an adventurer. Once the lessons of adventuring are learned by a *player,* they tend to remain ingrained throughout the adventurer's career.

For example, once players learn that fallen foes can be stripped of loot, there isn't an adventure denouement from that point on that doesn't involve stripping the final bad guy of anything valuable. This is the case regardless of the genre; it's difficult to run a game where the bad guys have powered armor or the mastermind has an orbital laser without needing to worry about incorporating PCs in powered armor or smiting foes by remote control in future games. (I imagine somewhere there's a *Star Wars* RPG campaign where the Rebellion has enough looted stormtrooper armor to outfit a legion of incognito heroes.) Sure, the Batman might have a giant robot dinosaur in his batcave, but in the Real World the caped crusader would be chasing criminals down the streets of Gotham while riding a mechanical T-Rex.

Likewise there comes to be a "standard operating procedure" that arises within games, even when it may not make genre sense to do so. Timid professors always carry a handgun, just in case; priests make sure they stab the body of a fallen foe one more time, to make sure it's dead; little kids reveal plans of sophistication that would make Sun Tzu proud. (As an aside, my wife and I pass the time on long car trip with books of situation puzzles of the "a man is dead, surrounded by 53 bicycles; why was he murdered?" variety. It's easy for me to ask questions while I'm driving and it makes the time pass fast. Unfortunately, having done many hundreds of these puzzles, we now have an SOP that always involves four questions: 1) Does this take place in modern times? 2) Is there anyone historical or famous in this question? 3) Is there anyone else involved with the story? 4) Is everyone human? It's amazing how often #4 turns out to be "No.")

In a way, it's hard to fault people for falling back on what works because . . . well, it *works.* If the purpose of a game is to win -- or to try to make the best life you can for your fictional character -- then *not* doing things that are in your best interest is foolhardy. But in terms of making an interesting story, it can lead to difficulties. For example, a staple of many ghost stories is the splitting up of the heroes for sleeping arrangements (usually ladies in one room, gentlemen in another), where one group encounters some entity that the other group does not. I suspect such encounters are *much* rarer in the RPG world, where dictates of "You all need to split up" would probably be met with, "Oh, heck, no!" (This is one of the things that makes me somewhat fearful about the playability of Cubicle 7's ***Doctor Who RPG,*** since so much of that setting relies on the heroes "forgetting" to take simple precautions from week to week.) Because I value it so much in my own games, there are a few techniques I've used to bring back a sense of wonder to my gamers. Here are a few that jump out in my mind:

Play Something Else. If you switch to a game where the rules are completely different -- not just in terms of how the dice are rolled but in how the protagonists are supposed to approach the world -- you can end up with something truly special. I suspect this was one of the reasons why **Vampire: The Masquerade** took off; the very act of playing it almost ensured you would regain that sense of wonder, because none of the old rules apply. Loot? Most fallen foes won't have anything you can claim, and those that do often possess things that aren't of any use to other vampires. (The best loot you could claim -- the power of the blood -- carried with it a huge social price.) Plans? Go ahead and make whatever plans you like; there are vampiric powers out there that can automatically thwart most plans. So (for example) even if you take your usual precautions against being overheard, there could still be another vampire *right next to you,* listening invisibly.

The Last Shall be First. Another way to encourage a sense of wonder is to punish those who seem too jaded. This is actually a very classic trope in monster movies or other hard-action films; it's often the case that the ultra-prepared armed-to-the-teeth grizzled sort is the second person to get eaten (right behind the "prove to the audience this threat is real" death). It's usually the character who takes some but not all precautions, is contemplative but not deliberative, and is neither brave nor cowardly that ends up prevailing in many movies and books.

Carrot! Of course, besides "punishing" the overly prepared, it's perhaps even better simply to reward players who remain in character with extra experience points (or the game's equivalent). That way, if someone's playing a callow

schoolboy who's coming up with plans like a master *Counter-Strike* grunt, he'll advance more slowly than someone who's playing the same character more "correctly." (Of course, if such techniques help keep the character alive, then it doesn't matter how many extra experience points the corpse gets.)

*I Want You to **Live!*** As a final note, I've found that my players in long-running campaigns are far less likely to come up with brutal SOP protocols if they know that I'm not out to get them for not doing so. After all, such techniques usually evolve because the GM "punished" characters who didn't do them. Perhaps the threat they didn't check to see if it was dead jumped up and attacked them. Perhaps the enemy that they didn't loot turned out to have some incredible goodies that another NPC took and utilized. If the players come to realize that you won't do that (at least, without an entertaining reason), they're less likely to try to eliminate all such flaws from their characters. Put another way, people are more inclined to make mistakes, and accept the responsibility of mistakes, if they know that such mistakes won't prove crippling.

In a lot of ways, we play games to regain the sense of wonder we had when we first started playing games, when everything was new and nothing taken for granted. And although that feeling can be elusive, it's still possible to find it again if the gaming group trusts each other and works together.

* * *

Two weeks ago we ran a review of *Play Unsafe* where the prices listed were higher than what's actually being charged for the product. It's since been corrected, so if that book interested you but you thought the price was a bit much, you may want to check it out again. (And I won't even mention that I also fixed the author's name that was consistently wrong throughout. Sorry, Graham Walmsley!)

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Catan Dice Game

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed by Klaus Teuber

Art by Tanja Donner, Harald Lieske, & Volkan Baga

Set with six specialty dice, score pad, & rules; $12

By now it seems like the island of Catan would be lousy with settlers, and would need new immigrants about as much as the island of Manhattan. But as long as gamers keep buying them, Mayfair is going to keep jamming the people in there. This time they're going to do it with just "dem bones" in the *Catan Dice Game*.

The object of the game is to end with the most points.

One to four players are pioneers on Catan, but this time they don't have the comfortable confines of a board. Instead, each player receives a score sheet with a tiny map of the island, a list of the things one may build, and a track for keeping score. On his turn, the player throws the dice to see what he has to work with.

The dice are six-siders, but with special facings: wood, grain, sheep, brick, ore, and gold. After the first throw the player may decide to keep some results and reroll others. He gets a second and third throw, but he must keep whatever has shown up by then. A small chart on the scoring sheet shows what is required to build items. For example, a brick and a wood on the dice means the player can construct a section of road. Bigger projects require more dice. If the player is lucky enough he may be able to build a couple of items in a turn, though it's rare.

Items cannot simply be thrown together according to the results, though. The sheet also shows a little map of the area, with the roads, cities, and so forth already displayed. If the player wants to build a settlement, he must first build the sections of road leading to that settlement. Furthermore, the locations increase in value -- the first settlement is worth three points, the next worth four -- but a player must build them in order. He can't skip one just so he can dedicate resources to the higher-value items deeper into the map. He can't "save" results from turn to turn, but if he builds a knight on one of the hexes, that space shows a "Resource Joker," another piece of material the player may use in addition to the dice rolls.

As things are constructed, the player circles them on his sheet. At the end of each turn, he tallies what he made and puts those points into the next open box on the track. If he failed to build anything that round he puts an X in the corresponding space, and that subtracts points from the final score. Play then passes to the left. When all players have filled up the 15 boxes of the track the game is over, and the highest score wins.

There's not much to the components of this game, and if one is willing to ditch the box there's even less to worry about. (That would be a shame; it's a nice box. Heck, most bigger boxes ought to be this solid.) The rules can fit in one's pocket, but once the game has been learned it rivals riding a bike for need of memorization. That leaves the dice and the score pad (plus a pen or pencil; no writing implement is included), and those travel easily too. The dice appear to be light wood, and the symbols are not just colorful, they're recessed in the surfaces. The only snag there seems to be that the ore is dark and the gold is, well, gold . . . but depending on the lighting the two similar "rock" designs can look even more alike.

No denying it: The element of random chance in this game is high. Some players undoubtedly balk at such a notion, so

they're probably not the audience. But since it takes only a few minutes to play it's ideal filler during a long gaming night, and it's perfect for long trips with the family. Solitaire may also have limited appeal for some, but it's entertaining trying to beat one's previous high; think of it as practice.

Though it claims to play one to four players, the only real limits are the people who can crowd around the playing surface, the number of sheets in the pad (60 of them, though a photocopier extends this lifespan), and the patience of the 60 people passing a single pencil around the circle. It's also likely the more people engaged in playing, the tighter the scores end up; the averages allow a wide spread, but it has to have limits. Still, no reason one should dismiss the idea of adding a couple of extra faces to the table; it's not as though the game ends up taking too long. **Catan Dice Game** might be simple but it knows to tap into the average gamer's desire to make the dice do want he wants.

--Andy Vetromile

Botswana Rising Revisited

for *GURPS Infinite Worlds*

by Mark Gellis

First explored it nearly a decade ago by Homeline Scouts, Botswana-1 -- originally introduced in the article "Botswana Rising" (which is required reading for this article) -- has proven to be a place of adventure and intrigue. This article updates the previous one and brings it fully into the cross-dimensional conflict of *Infinite Worlds.*

Botswana-1 is a low-mana Q7 world. The local year is 1880. In many ways, Botswana-1 is very similar to Homeline in 1880. The principal divergence point is in 1860, when King Khama of Botswana convinced a number of African leaders to organize along the lines of European nation-states. Germany was among the first to formally recognize and invest in these new nations, which has led to it becoming the most influential European power south of the Sahara. A half dozen African nations are currently engaged in a process of industrialization and will soon be able to hold their own, not as global powers perhaps, but as the equivalent of lesser European powers such as Sweden and Belgium. In time, when West African oil is eventually discovered, they may become even more influential.

A second divergence point is that successful early ventures with rigid airships has led to their rapid adoption in various parts of the world (such as Africa, where they complement railroads) and an overall optimism about scientific progress around the world. (Edison claims he will have a true airplane developed by 1885.)

Most of Botswana-1 is still TL5, but various early TL 5+1 and TL 6 devices such as telephones, steam-powered automobiles, electrical lighting, and, of course, airships are beginning to appear in more advanced regions like Europe and America.

One may assume that anyone native to the timeline only needs to learn one specialty of each technological skill, such as Mechanic (Lighter-Than-Air); any training would have accounted for the local blend of technologies; whatever TL is listed will simply designate the kinds of technology with which the particular character is most familiar, on the off chance they are required to travel to another world or another timeline.

Visitors to Botswana-1 might consider investing in a couple of levels of the Anachronistic Training technique (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds,* pp. 183) to reduce or eliminate penalties on technical skills.

The Infinity War

Centrum, if they have discovered this timeline, will probably try to break German influence in Africa and Russian influence in India as a stepping stone to establishing a British-dominated global government (which they will already have infiltrated) they can use as a precursor to absorbing the timeline into Zone Green. Signs of Centrum activity would include an increase in the assassinations of German, Russian, African, and Indian political leaders, intellectuals, and inventors, or anyone else who might stand in the way of British global domination. Sabotage of German and Russian operations in Africa and Asia are also possibilities.

At present, there is no hard evidence of Centrum activity on Botswana-1, but there have been enough incidents that Homeline is keeping the timeline under observation. It is, of course, entirely possible that these incidents are part of some purely British maneuvers in their version of the Great Game. The British of Botswana-1 are confident in their culture but are also slightly more anxious and militaristic than in Homeline history, and they are actively engage in espionage around the world. Although they do not believe England is in any danger of invasion or annihilation, they see the Germans and Russians in a manner similar to how the Americans viewed the Soviets and Chinese during the Cold War, not simply as rivals for trade but as a threat to their influence in the international arena.

The attitude is evident in their culture. Popular literature is full of courageous British agents uncovering foreign spy rings planning to steal secrets, kidnap scientists, plant bombs, or encourage native revolts. In fact, in a strange case of life imitating art, at least one German agent has been brought to justice by what appears to be a group of wealthy young amateur detectives inspired by these works of literature. (The young men -- the police have assumed that they are all men, although there is no proof of this -- have remained anonymous, simply calling themselves the Angels of England.)

Mostly, Homeline wants to maintain the status quo on Botswana-1; the timeline does not appear to be heading towards any global disaster. In fact, some cliodynamicists believe that if Germany can maintain its level of influence in Africa, Britain will be less willing to risk a war and more willing to resolve any differences via diplomacy, and as a result World War I -- and, ultimately, the rise of the Nazis -- will be avoided. Of course, if they are mistaken, World War I could end up being even bloodier than it was on Homeline.

Because timelines on Quantum 7 are relatively difficult to reach, there are not as many Homeliners on Botswana-1 as one other timelines. Tourists wishing to experience a Victorian or Edwardian world are more likely to visit one of the appropriate myth parallels on Quantum 4, 5, or 6, and mining is far easier on uninhabited worlds or those with only primitive civilizations. However, Time Tours organizes some vacations on Botswana-1 ("Africa by Dirigible!" is quite popular) and some research takes place here as well, particularly by scholars interested in African and German history.

The Supernatural

It is also unclear whether the Cabal has learned of this timeline. Because it is a low mana world, using magic is difficult here. However, there is enough mana that a skilled mage could work some powerful spells. Even more important, innately magical creatures such as vampires that depend on having at least some mana in the environment can survive here. If any vampires do exist on Botswana-1, however, they keep themselves well hidden.

So far, Homeline surveys have revealed no widespread supernatural elements on the timeline. At the same time, there are vast areas of this world that remain unexplored even by the native European powers. There are stories of strange beasts that live deep in the jungles of the Congo and the Amazon -- most likely they are nothing more than hitherto undiscovered varieties of leopard, boa, and crocodile, but some of the stories are rather unnerving. There are also stories of lions who act with what seems to be almost human cunning, beasts somehow able to turn the tables on even the most experienced hunters. Similar stories exist about certain bears and wolves in Siberia and North America.

One aspect of the physical laws on Botswana-1 that Homeline already suspects but has not yet been able to prove is a kind of sympathy for the dramatic. In almost every universe, people who have the simple courage to try are often rewarded for it, but on Botswana-1 fortune -- that is, the laws of probability -- really does seem to favor the brave. So far, no genuine superpowers have been observed, but some people appear to have cinematic levels of skill, ability, and luck. (It is not known if the Angels of England are, in fact, "cinematic" heroes, but it would surprise no one at Infinity if this turned out to be the case.)

Local Heroes

Botswana-1 is a good setting for campaigns featuring cinematic British agents facing off against German and Russian foes. In such campaigns, the heroes might never learn about the Infinity War or even come into contact with anyone connected with it.

Botswana-1 could serve perfectly well as a stand-alone pseudo-Victorian setting. Aside from the early appearance of some TL6 technologies and a greater German presence in Africa, it is close enough to our world that designing campaigns should be relatively simple for GMs already familiar with the period.

For those designing cinematic characters, such heroes can be expected to have high ability scores, high levels of skill, and advantages such as Luck, Daredevil, Serendipity, Danger Sense, or even Unkillable 1. Budgets of 200 points would not be unreasonable.

If players would like to take the role of the mysterious Angels of England, such characters can be either highly dramatic or even cinematic, with heroes such as the Lone Ranger, Zorro, the Scarlet Pimpernel, Alan Quatermain, Fitzwilliam Darcy, and Sherlock Holmes as their models. While the Angels are believed to be exclusively men, there may be some female members (quite possibly the sisters or cousins of other Angels). For such campaigns, budgets of 300 points would be reasonable.

One difference between these literary heroes and the Angels is that the latter are mostly fairly young, only a few years out of university, and many are very idealistic. They are also all rather wealthy and socially well-connected. They keep their membership in the Angels a closely guarded secret; they believe their ability to investigate crimes and other strange occurrences would be compromised if people knew they were members of a crime-fighting organization. However, if a few close friends and family members learn the truth it would not be viewed as a crisis. And if the truth does come out, they will simply carry on and continue to fight as best they can for justice and England.

Such characters could prove a serious challenge to any secretive group with a possibly nefarious agenda, such as a lodge of Cabalists, a network of German or Russian spies, a nest of vampires, or a team of Infinity Patrol agents.

Campaigns can take place anywhere. In Britain, German or Russian spies may be engaged in all sorts of nefarious activities from stealing plans for new battleships to planning the assassination of the Prime Minister. In India, the success of African nations has inspired native leaders to press for independence (or, at least, for some kind of home rule with a Parliament consisting of native elected representatives). Russia, seeking to weaken the British position in Asia and gain a warm water port, has eagerly supported these native leaders, providing money, information, and, on occasion, weapons. The Indian leaders are fully aware that the Russians are helping them to advance their own interests, but mutual advantage is often the basis of international friendship; many of the Indians are confident that Russian allies would be an improvement over British masters.

In Africa, Britain dominates Egypt, France dominates the Saharan states, and Germany dominates the southern half of the continent. All three seek to gain the allegiance of Benin, Congo, Uganda, Ghana, and Botswana (and everyone uses Liberia -- technically independent but very much a client state of the United States -- as a neutral meeting ground for everything from smuggling rifles to exchanging captured agents), making central Africa of hotbed of espionage and political intrigue.

Not surprisingly, Africa is also an ideal setting for groups of player characters who are German, French, or American agents. India makes a good setting for Russian agents or native reformers (who might be forced into hiding if the British government declares their activities seditious and tries to arrest them).

For players seeking a Hammer Horror experience, British heroes might be asked to investigate strange occurrences in London or in isolated parts of the country like the Hebrides or the Cornish moors. No recorded examples of vampires, werewolves, or mummies appear in the records of the British government on Botswana-1, but perhaps this only means that such creatures are rare and furtive, hiding deliberately or simply knowing instinctively that they must never allow anyone to see them and then live. It may also turn out that some government records are only open to agents who have already encountered the supernatural.

Any of these agents might find themselves facing off against teams of Homeline or Centrum operatives. British agents, for example, may gradually become aware of a shadowy group that seems to be infiltrating the British government, its financial institutions and newspapers, and so on. And no one is really sure who these people are. They have money that simply cannot be traced. And the people have histories that make no sense; it is easy to find people have known them for years, but go back a few years more and it is impossible to find anyone, anywhere in the world, who remembers them. It is as if they somehow came out of thin air. What makes all this even stranger is that sometimes someone else, someone who is as mysterious as their opponents, steps in to lend a hand. And with both of these groups, the British agents will occasionally sense that the people they are investigating do not feel foreign as much as they feel *alien.* Could they be . . . Martians?

This does raise the issue of what would happen if the British agents somehow learned that parachronic travel exists. Would the Homeline agents send them all to Coventry or would they try to recruit them? If the heroes are Angels,

Infinity would almost certainly take the latter course of action. It would not take much, after all, to turn them into an I-SWAT team and Infinity knows better than to waste that kind of talent.

If it is Centrum agents rather than Homeline agents who are involved, the outcome might be quite different. Centrum is willing to kill anyone it sees as a threat. Or, if Centrum thinks its agents are about to be caught, the Forum might decide that this is a good time to reveal themselves to certain wealthy and powerful members of the British establishment and begin to covertly assist them in taking over not only England but the entire world. If this happens, the British agents (or the Angels) might find themselves with entirely new challenges. Depending on the degree of subtlety Centrum employed, it could be a while before Infinity realizes what was going on.

Homeline Heroes

Botswana-1 would make a good location for a group of Infinity agent player characters. Infinity has its hands full on Botswana-1, mostly because (as is often the case) there are too many real or potential cases to investigate and not enough agents.

The cover story on Botswana-1 is a fairly standard ruse. Two years ago, Infinity purchased Graham-Carter, an import-export firm established in the 1790s. The agent-in-charge for the local Penetration Service team poses as an American who made it rich a few years ago by finding gold in what many had believed was an exhausted gold mine. (The mine was, of course, exhausted, which made it cheap to purchase; the only reason for doing so was so that it would not draw attention when someone no one had ever heard of suddenly showed up with enough money to buy an import-export firm. It was then a simple matter to bring in the gold from another timeline and fake the discovery of one last mother lode.)

Graham-Carter has offices in London, New York, and (most recently) Monrovia, but it buys goods from almost everywhere in the world, so Infinity agents posing as agents of the company have an excuse to show up almost anywhere on Botswana-1, ostensibly to investigate some potential new import. The company always shows a profit (sometimes by exporting goods such as African art pieces from Botswana-1 back to Homeline) so no one asks too many questions about the eccentric methods its American owner sometimes employs. The main safe house is a nondescript townhouse a short walk from the London office.

One minor complication facing the Homeline agents stationed here is that most of the employees of Graham-Carter are natives of Botswana-1 and have no idea the company is a front for Infinity. There is always the possibility that a well-meaning accountant will discover an irregularity in the company finances or that some other discrepancy will pose a threat to the ruse. The agent-in-charge is scheduled to rotate back to Homeline in about year, at which point he will "retire" and "sell" the company to his successor; the transition should go smoothly but this is always a risky period because people are naturally curious about a newcomer with money.

The current agent-in-charge says the most interesting but at times the most difficult part of his job is the ongoing series of social obligations such as parties and charity events that he must engage in so that he does not look suspicious; this includes having to fend off a seemingly endless supply of fortune-hunting young ladies. On the bright side, he has been able to develop a genuine appreciation for both brandy and good cigars. GMs whose players enjoy social intrigue might find this ongoing challenge to maintain appearances a good source of adventure seeds.

One common mission is rescuing tourists. Most Time Tours are completed without problems, when there are less than a dozen agents on the entire timeline it seems that someone is always getting lost in the Carpathian Mountains, surviving a dirigible crash in the Sahara, or getting kidnapped by Russian-backed Indian revolutionaries. Quite apart from Infinity considering itself responsible for the safety of all Homeliners visiting other timelines, there is the concern that The Secret might somehow be revealed. If a guide or a tourist is killed or incapacitated, it may be only a matter of time before some disguised camera or electrozap pistol is revealed for what it is. On a timeline that has already developed early photographic and electrical technologies, such items could raise questions that Infinity would much rather remain unasked.

Another mission is investigating possible Centrum activity. At present, most missions consist of following up on some

event like an assassination, a disaster with international ramifications like a series of dirigible crashes, or the unexpected election of a politician who might be a Centrum puppet, looking into what happened and trying to find proof of Centrum involvement. Sooner or later, such proof will show up. Botswana-1 is an ideal candidate for absorption into Zone Green, so if Centrum is not already here, Infinity feels confident that it is only a matter of time before they show up. It is sometimes frustrating to Infinity agents that they cannot be more proactive, but there are not enough agents on Botswana-1 (or agents on other timelines who can be spared to add to their numbers) to investigate every possible threat.

Once Centrum involvement is identified, however, the mode of operations would shift; then, more missions will focus on identifying possible Centrum plots and assets, and on countering or neutralizing them in one way or another. And Homeline would dedicate at least a few extra agents to Botswana-1.

Other missions may involve research. One area of interest is supernatural creatures and other unusual species like dinosaurs that may be lurking somewhere in the jungles of the Congo or the Amazon. So far, such creatures have not been observed on Botswana-1, but the researchers at Parachronic Laboratories assigned to study the timeline think there is a good chance they do exist.

Of particular interest to the Paralab researchers are the rumors of unusually intelligent animals. If the rumors are true, these creatures may be shapeshifters of some kind or represent some strange parallel evolution where nonhuman sapience has developed alongside human sapience.

Anti-crime missions are another possibility. Smuggling and human trafficking are sometimes problems. And there is always the risk of a team of well-armed criminals with TL 8 equipment and no compunction about revealing the Secret trying to steal the local versions of the Crown Jewels or the Mona Lisa.

And, Finally, the Cabal

Homeline does not know it, but the Cabal has been on Botswana-1 for centuries. It has never been a major battlefield for its warring factions, but it has long been used by some Cabalists who are either World Jumpers or who know plane shifting spells as a hideout or as a quiet and out-of-the-way backwater where they can pursue unusual lines of research undisturbed. The mana is thin here, but magic does work in this world. And there are those were born with the Gift, who could learn to use magic if they were properly trained, and a few Cabalists have found proteges here to nurture.

Magical creatures, although uncommon, do live here; the stories about shapeshifters and preternaturally intelligent beasts are quite accurate, although such creatures wisely keep themselves hidden in the wildest places of the world and rarely allow anyone who learns the truth about them to live. The same is true of the half-dozen vampires currently using a ruined abbey near the Italian Alps as their home.

One could easily build a campaign around a group of Cabalists who have come to Botswana-1 to build a lodge of their own. (At least one would have to have some plane shifting ability.) The campaign would center around delving into the occult secrets of this world, recruiting new initiates for their lodge, gaining the support of more powerful members of the Cabal and surviving the machinations of others. Once they achieve their goal of establishing a lodge, they can explore further mysteries and increase their wealth and power while protecting themselves from hostile Cabalists and other supernatural threats, agents of Infinity and Centrum, and, of course, that annoying league of fair-haired do-gooders, the Angels of England.

There She Blows!

An Introduction to Whaling-Ship Settings in RPGs

by Dagny Scott

Once upon a time, young men embarked on perilous journeys in order to bring light to their homeland. Then they came home and entranced the tavern-goers with stories told of exotic locales and beautiful women who lived in climates and cultures where no one had found it necessary to invent shirts. They also told of monstrous beasts they hunted, the largest creatures known to man, so large that any careless action could be fatal to many men, and any hateful action . . . well, not many who'd seen those were around to tell the tales.

The land is the United States, and the intrepid adventurers were whalers, and in addition to hunting after the world's largest animals, their search for new hunting grounds resulted in a new era of exploration.

The Whaling Ship as a Game Setting

Have you been searching for something out of American history (besides the tried and true Westerns) to use as a setting for a really great adventure game? The whaling ship is a good place to start looking. It's a natural way to bring together a wide variety of adventurers and keep them in one setting, regardless of any individual motives the players might conceive for their heroes.

Whaling ships attracted a wide variety of people: white farm boys from all over New England (as well as other parts of the United States), fugitive and freed slaves who found refuge in the Quaker town of New Bedford, and Cape Verdeans and Pacific Islanders who were often picked up along the way as extra help.

And once a whaling voyage sets out, it's not likely to return for at least six months. Many voyages last for three to four years.

The American Whaling Industry

The peak years for American whaling were in the mid-19th century. The earliest long-distance whaling voyages started around 1814, when the Treaty of Ghent ended the war of 1812 the British Navy got out of American ports.

New Bedford, Massachusetts, with its population of humble, peaceful Quakers seemed an unlikely place to develop an industry which would make men rich in the especially violent hunting of the sperm whale, yet it became one of the major whaling ports, alongside the nearby island town of Nantucket. At its peak in 1857, the New Bedford whaling fleet consisted of 329 vessels valued at $12 million and employing over 10,000 men.

The Process of Whale Hunting

The process of whale hunting is a task that challenges all your senses. First: vision. A lookout is constantly employed in the ship's search for whales. The lookout sits high up in the masts and looks for whales, calling out "There she blows!" when one is spotted.

Each whaling ship carried three to five whaleboats at its sides, as well as spares. A whaleboat would carry six people: a boatheader (usually a captain or officer), a harpooner, and four crewmen who rowed with long, balanced oars.

The boat would be equipped with two harpoons, which were attached to long spindles of hempen rope. The harpoon, if successfully thrown, would attach the whale to the boat. Once attached, the whale was known as a "fast fish."

The harpoon did not kill the whale, however; that was accomplished with the help of two lances, which lacked the hook-shape of the harpoon.

The whaling boat also carried with it a small bucket, which was used not only for baling water out of the boat, but also, at times, from preventing the rope from catching fire when pulled quickly by a whale who tried to escape. They also carried a hatchet for the really desperate times when the line had to be cut to protect the boat and men.

But if all went well, the whale could be dragged back to the ship and hung by its side to prepare for the cutting-in, wherein layers of blubber were removed.

Plot Hooks for a Whaling Adventure

The Gam

When two whaling-ships came near each other, the captains (at the very least) would visit one another to share information and news from home. A whaling ship at the beginning of its voyage might share letters for loved ones at home with a ship on its return voyage.

In *Moby-Dick,* the captain of the *Rachel* entreats Ahab to help him find crew members, his son included, who were lost while in their whaling boat, hunting a sperm whale. Ahab refuses, bent on seeking Moby-Dick, but few captains would have made that decision.

The gam is a great opportunity for another ship's captain to entrust a quest to the group of PCs.

The Ship Destroyed

One real-life whaling story offers a plot hook equally as compelling as either of those books, and that's Owen Chase's *The Loss of the Ship Essex, Sunk By a Whale*. In 1820, the ship Essex was destroyed by the attack of a sperm whale, and the crewmen that survived found themselves in tiny boats in the middle of the ocean, with insufficient supplies. Suffering from dehydration, malnutrition, and tobacco withdrawal, the men eventually succumbed to cannibalism to survive.

Mutiny

Mutinies were rare on whaling ships, considering their long voyages and harsh conditions, but they happened. In *Moby-Dick,* Starbuck considered killing Captain Ahab, whose reckless monomania was beginning to ruin not only the profitability but also the safety of their ship. In the end, however, he lacked the will.

As an adventure idea, the GM can place the heroes in a position where their captain is endangering their lives, and give them their choice of responses.

Jumping Ship

In Herman Melville's early sea adventure, *Typee,* we're barely introduced to the whaling ship before the two main characters jump ship to avoid a tyrannical captain. On the mysterious Marquesas, the native Typee tribe seems hospitable, but there are things the sailors are not allowed to see. The question remains: Are they really noble savages, or are they just fattening up their guests for a ritualistic cannibal feast?

Whaling in Various Types of Games

The setting of the whale fishery is clearly robust enough to be its own sole basis for a historical game, but that's not its

only use.

One obvious twist would be to incorporate horror elements into the whaling story. If the process of spearing a giant mammal with the capacity to wreck ships isn't frightening enough for you, remember that in the Lovecraftian mythos, Cthulhu lives somewhere off the coast of Australia, and the deep ones of Innsmouth are descendants of a local man and a woman from the South Pacific. It's not hard to put together the works of a man from Rhode Island with the New England whale fishery.

Also, although this article focuses primarily on the American whale-hunting endeavors, the whale fishery actually goes back much farther than that. Many native populations such as the Makah of the Pacific Northwest hunted whales in small boats launched from the coast, and those low-technology whale hunts can be incorporated into all sorts of historical and fantasy games.

As for science fiction, the void of space tends to make it a hostile environment for any type of hunting, but it can't be ruled out; the creators of the anime *Hakugei: Legend of the Moby Dick* certainly didn't.

Reading List

Books

Chase, Owen. *The Loss of a Ship Essex, Sunk By a Whale.* As mentioned in the plot hooks, this true story shows the deadliness of whales and is a great story of what happens to people put in extreme survival conditions. The History Channel occasionally runs a program about these events, too.

Druett, Joan. *Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea, 1820-1920.* Whaling may have been men's work, historically, but that didn't exclude women from having their place on whaling ships, and it shouldn't necessarily exclude female characters from your game.

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale.* Being a classic (and in the public domain), there are many versions of this book. If you can, pick up the Norton Critical Edition and get a whole bunch of background information on the novel itself and whaling.

Melville, Herman. *Typee.* As mentioned in the plot hooks, this book mostly deals with a native South Seas population. Pick up the New Riverside Edition to see Melville editorializing about corrupt missionaries and other subjects that were left out of the first printing. This book was the most popular of Melville's works published during his own lifetime, as it is a brief, exotic, and exciting book.

Websites

The New Bedford Whaling Museum: http://www.whalingmuseum.org. The New Bedford Whaling Museum is a great museum for anyone at all interested in whaling, and its website is also very well done. Check out the online exhibits, including one on how whaling helped open Japan to the west, and the "Research Library" section for an overview of American Whaling and several extensive bibliographies.

The Wreck of the Whaleship Essex at H2G2: http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/classic/A671492. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (real-life version) has an informative article on the wreck of the whaleship Essex.

The History of the Makah Whale Hunt: http://alamut.com/subj/the_other/misc/makahWhaling.html. For those of you who are interested in some of the oldest (and newest) whale hunts.

Pirate Werewolves and Vampire Ninjas

for *GURPS*

by Michael Kreuter

Pirate Werewolves

Around a large group of small islands there is always much trade . . . and wherever there is much trade, there are pirates. For a certain group of islands, which we shall call the Land of Isles, there was one particularly nasty ship of pirates. At least, it was noticeable that there were ships that never reached their destination, and others that had been found derelict with the entire crew killed. Everyone assumed two things. First, because of similar clues among the victim ships, the attacks were the work of the same pirates. Second, there was (thankfully) but one ship due to the relative infrequency of the attacks. Or, indeed, at *most* one ship, since some people debate the veracity of these legends in the first place.

But people love to tell tales of terrible, bloodthirsty and bestial pirates, and nothing is going to stop the tale of the Cursed Ship Greywolf and her brutal skipper Captain Lupus Fangtooth. Exactly where this story comes from is almost unknown, since no real reports of anyone surviving an attack of what are apparently pirate werewolves has ever been validated. Yet there are still those who claim, when the air is still during a full moon, and you listen closely, you can hear the wolves howling on the ocean.

Perhaps some parts of the story are put together from fact. There was a ship called *Greywolf* captained by a man named Lupus, though he didn't have the surname "Fangtooth." He was an eccentric fellow, and would never answer questions as to his line of work with a straight answer. For years he raised a pair of fine hounds that looked like wolves more than dogs, feeding them rabbits and other small game found on the islands. Possibly his greatest oddity was that (according to rumors) he worshiped a primal and bestial wolf-god who demanded blood sacrifice of animals under every full moon. He never harmed anyone in towns, so no matter what he did with his religious life, he was tolerated. One day, however, he drummed up a crew for what he called a freelance mercantile venture, and they disappeared, never to be seen again. Some make the connection between tales of werewolf pirates and this man's obvious obsession with the canines to form the story that he was a werewolf and he turned his crew into one, so that they would be able to take on any threat and rob, loot, and plunder what they pleased. Most people openly deny this is true, yet even the Imperial Navy carries silver-tipped weapons. After all, there are many islands and they could be hiding in a cove of any one of them.

Pirate Werewolf Template   *100 points*

Advantages: Alternate Form (Werewolf)† [25], Regeneration (Fast) [50], Unkillable 1 [50]. 30 points chosen from Ambidexterity [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Daredevil [15], Luck [15 or 30], Mariner [10/level], Rapier Wit [5], Slippery [2/level], Alcohol Tolerance [1], No Hangover [1]

Disadvantages: Secret (Werewolf) (Possible Death) [-30], Vulnerability (Silver, x3) [-30]. -25 points chosen from Alcoholism [-15], Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5], Greed* [-15], Impulsiveness* [-15], Laziness [-10], Lecherousness* [-15], Overconfidence* [-5], Social Stigma (Criminal Record) [-5]

Skills: 30 points chosen from Boating/TL (DX/A), Brawling (DX/E), Broadsword (DX/A), Carousing (HT/E), Crossbow (DX/E), Fast-Talk (IQ/A), Fishing (Per/E), Freight Handling/TL (IQ/A), Gambling (IQ/A), Knife (DX/E), Knot-Tying (DX/E), Leadership (IQ/A), Meteorology/TL (IQ/A), Navigation/TL (Sea)(IQ/A), Seamanship/TL (IQ/E), Shiphandling/TL (IQ/H), Shortsword (DX/A), Smallsword (DX/A), Smuggling (IQ/A), Strategy (Naval) (IQ/H),

Streetwise (IQ/A), Survival (Salt-Water Sea) (Per/A), Swimming (HT/E)

* Modified for self-control roll

† Wolf Form Racial Template   *11 points*

Attributes: ST +5 [50], DX +2 [40], IQ -4 [-80], HT +2 [20], Perception +6 [30]

Advantages: Claws [3], Discriminatory Smell [15], Extra Legs (4-legged) [5], Night Vision 1 [1], Teeth (Sharp Teeth) [1]

Perks: Fur [1]

Disadvantages: Berserk* [-10], Bestial [-10], Bloodlust* [-10], Cannot Speak [-15], No Fine Manipulators [-30]

* Modified for self-control roll

Improving the Pirate Werewolf

The pirate werewolf template given above is the basest and weakest of all the werewolves on the ship *Greywolf.* Others are more powerful, right up to Captain Lupus Fangtooth himself. All of them start with this template, however.

Improving the pirate werewolf can be done in many ways, typically those involving making them more durable. Adding Damage Resistance and extra Hit Points, especially in wolf form, are common aspects of werewolves. Some wolves may have higher levels of Night Vision as well. Acute smell is also appropriate; Lupus in particular has a very high level of it. Animal Empathy limited to wolves and dogs is only one point, but it can make a good addition. Having wolves as Allies or Mind Control limited to wolves may also be appropriate. The pirates tend to be luckier than the ninjas, and buying the highest level of Luck or even Super Luck is not out of the question. Improving the pirate's wide range of skills is also always beneficial. Werewolves who have learned to control themselves better may buy off Berserk, Bestial and Bloodlust, though note that they will never be able to buy off Cannot Speak or No Fine Manipulators.

Ninja Vampires

It is said that on one of the islands of the Land of Isles, there is a secret ninja training school. Sure, this arrangement raises the question of "What are ninjas doing here, anyway?" as well as the more obvious "How secret could it be if we're hearing about it?" At the very least, no one knows where it is, or at least no one will admit to it. No one would *care,* either, except that these ninjas are supposedly often used as assassins and spies. No one has ever seen any of these ninjas, but of course those who believe in them say that this merely proves how good they are.

These ninjas are apparently almost as bad as the pirate werewolves. A long time ago, one of their teachers, Ginjiro, sought eternal life and made a pact with a demon. Whether the result was desirable or not is not known, since the teacher has not been found for questioning, but rumors persist that the creature is an undead abomination that can only be described as a vampire. According to the lore, he dreaded holy objects, could not go out in the sun for long periods of time, and was only killable by driving a stake through his heart.

The worst part would be how he treated his students after that. Those that were disobedient he would inflict with his terrible curse and force them to become his willing slaves. They would then go out and curse others, in a grand pyramid scheme with Ginjiro at the top. Those students that pleased him he would curse and then free from his control. They would be free to create their own network of vampires as long as they remained loyal to him. The school of vampire assassins became very powerful, and they gained much wealth due to the abundance of amoral employers.

Ninja Vampire Template   *100 points*

Attributes: ST +2 [20]

Advantages: Dominance [20], Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving) [25], Trained By A Master [30], Unkillable 2 (Achilles' Heel: Wood) [50], Vampiric Bite (1HP/sec) [30]. 60 points chosen from Charisma [5/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Danger Sense [15], Fit/Very Fit [5 or 15], Flexibility [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Silence [5/level], Slippery [2/level], Unfazeable [15]

Disadvantages: Dread (Holy Items, Larger Radius) [-14], Secret (Vampire; Possible Death) [-30], Supernatural Features (No Body Heat*, No Reflection, Pallor*) [-16], Uncontrollable Appetite [-15], Unhealing (Except when immersed in blood) [-20], Weakness (Sunlight)(1d/minute) [-60]. -10 points chosen from Code of Honor (Ninja's) [-5], Honesty† [-10], Truthfulness† [-5], Vow (Chastity, Non-Alcoholic or similar) [-10]

Skills: 30 points chosen from Axe/Mace (DX/A), Blind Fighting (Per/VH), Broadsword (DX/A), Cloak (DX/A), Detect Lies (Per/H), Diplomacy (IQ/H), Judo (DX/H), Karate (DX/H), Knife (DX/E), Kusari (DX/H), Meditation (Will/H), Rapier (DX/A), Saber (DX/A), Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (IQ/E), Shield (Buckler) (DX/E), Shortsword (DX/A), Slieght of Hand (DX/H), Smallsword (DX/A), Stealth (DX/A)

* Except after feeding
† Modified for self-control roll

Improving the Ninja Vampire

Like the pirate werewolf template above, this only represents one of the lowliest ninja vampires. More powerful vampires have the ability of Flight, forms of Mind Control, and are even stronger and faster than those presented here. Higher-up vampires have Allies in the form of their dominated brethren, or those that have been freed but are still loyal to their masters. Control over wolves, rats, bats and other creatures of the night can be added as Allies or Mind Control with appropriate modifiers. Some vampires even have alternate forms themselves, usually of wolves, bats, or a fine mist. Vampires are also able to buy off some levels of their weakness to sunlight, but never completely.

The Blood Feud

The werewolves and vampires were at first as aware of each other as the general populace was, meaning they had only heard of the other group in legend and rumor. Nevertheless, they took these rumors possibly more seriously than normal people, because they realize that such things actually do exist. As they weren't in the same business, and the ninja assassins hardly ever carried valuables via boat, they mostly didn't worry about each other.

However, one dark and cloudy night Greywolf approached a merchant vessel with the intent to raid it. Upon boarding the ship, they found the captain dead. Captain Fangtooth used his incredible sense of smell to sniff out where the killer hid, and confronted him. It turned out to be a ninja, who introduced himself as Ginjiro and explained that another merchant had hired him to kill a rival and promised him the ship full of goods as payment. Lupus was angry, but wise enough to hold his tongue. He told the vampire that he wanted no trouble and left.

The next day, he once again used his legendary sense of smell to track the vampire across the ocean. Despite the fact that there was very little for scent to be left on, his sense was powerful enough to track through the air. This led to the crew of Greywolf discovering the secret ninja school. The captain took half his crew to the dojo and challenged Ginjiro to an honorable duel over the goods of the merchant ship.

All the students of the school and the men that had come with Lupus circled around the two to watch the fight. Given the rules of "no wood, no silver" the fight lasted a long time. This was long enough that the other men from the ship had time to sneak into the building and steal their most valuable treasures.

After Lupus was sure that enough time had passed that his men would have had enough time to do their raid, he began to lose, and then forfeited. Ginjiro bowed to him and Lupus said he could keep the goods. The entire crew ran back to the ship and shoved off before the ninjas could notice that anything was missing.

They did notice soon enough, though the pirates were long-gone by then. Ever since that time, the vampires and werewolves have been fighting, tracking each other down, stealing their treasure and killing one another. Neither gets the upper hand for long, so they seem locked in an eternal struggle.

Adventure Hooks

Although the premise of werewolf pirates fighting vampire ninjas is an inherently silly concept, they have been presented in an entirely serious tone. This can be the case for your campaign, but it need not be. They can presented as lightly and humorously as you wish, playing up the fact that vampires, ninjas, werewolves, and pirates all come from extremely different places, and that the Land of Isles could never really exist. Alternatively, they can be played rather seriously. For the latter option, it is suggested to consult White Wolf's *World of Darkness* series of roleplaying games, or their *GURPS* conversions.

If the players want an entire campaign revolving around the fight between pirate werewolves and ninja vampires, you can easily give it to them. They can be on either side of the fight that they wish, though the GM is cautioned that running a PVP campaign, while tempting, can be difficult. Should it be chosen that they play as one or the other, it is suggested that the characters be worth about 200 points, making it a rather high-level campaign. This will give the players the chance to customize their vampire or werewolf even further than the templates allow. The suggestions for improving the characters will come in handy if this choice is made.

They also fit well enough into many fantasy games, especially fantastic versions of age of sail games. (The recent *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies are a good resource for inspiration on the fantasy age of sail genre, including multiple crews of inhuman pirates.) How exactly the characters come across this fight may vary. Perhaps they are on a ship that is raided by Greywolf and they join the side of the vampires to get revenge, or possibly they join the werewolves because someone they cared for was assassinated by the ninjas. Maybe one side hires them as spies or errand-runners because the characters are not vampires or werewolves and won't have the troubles of hiding secrets. For an even more dangerous option, they could be caught in the middle with both sides after them, either for perceived slights or because both sides think the characters belong to the other.

Three Rocks, Let's Roll

The roadmap: minor aside that starts talking about a game but doesn't, then an abrupt transition to talking about games but the column doesn't go where you might think it will, and then we tie it back into the beginning. Ready? Great.

There's a description of a game on artist Scott McCloud's site called "5-Card Nancy." It's a game where you photocopy panels from Ernie Bushmiller's classic *Nancy* comic strip, and use those panels as "cards" to try to come up with a logical, satisfying game. On the page, McCloud discusses Bushmiller's Platonic minimalism, and offers a paraphrase of Art Spiegelman's words of wisdom on the subject: "[A] drawing of three rocks in a background scene was Ernie's way of showing us there were some rocks in the background. It was always three. Why? Because two rocks wouldn't be 'some rocks.' Two rocks would be a pair of rocks. And four rocks was unacceptable because four rocks would indicate 'some rocks' *but it would be one rock more than was necessary to convey the idea of 'some rocks.'*"

I've always loved that idea.

End minor aside.

I've been a fan of portable video-game systems for decades now, probably beginning with my beloved Mattel Electronic Football with the LED screen that I played under bedsheets when I was a wee lad in the very-early '80s. It was my senior year of high school when I bought my first portable video-game system -- and, boy, did I end up thinking the Atari Lynx was a wise choice over the Game Boy in the long run -- and I've owned many portable gaming devices since then.

Anyway, as a gamer who's usually worked something approaching a 70-hour week for the past 15 years, I squeeze in my gaming when I can, and portable gaming devices let me do that in a way I can't usually that's a lot less possible with more-fulfilling but more-cumbersome gaming options.

One video game I've been playing a bit in recent weeks has been **Lego Indiana Jones.** (I secretly want the new **Lego Batman** game that was just released, but I swore not to buy another game until I finish the one I'm playing.) **Lego Indiana Jones** is a fun enough game, and it pushes my *Indiana Jones* buttons well enough. And it has something going for it that *seems* like it should be a plus: Almost everything is destroyable (yea!), which causes items to explode into a shower of Lego (yea!) that, in turn, sometimes reveals hidden items or other useful tidbits (yea!). The problem is that there are literally hundreds of such items on each level, and trying to maximize the score and find everything requires one to destroy *everything* . . . frequently with controls that are (at least on a portable system) less than precise.

In other words, frequently in my spare minutes of entertainment, I find myself playing this game where I'm in the middle of the level, I've unlocked the exit to the next room, I've dispatched all the enemies, and I'm unwilling to leave the room because I'm systematically destroying every box, rock, bush, and tree trying to avoid missing some minor reward.

To me, this is not fun.

In some RPG campaigns, players are forced to have their characters behave like my Lego-rock-destroying archeologist, methodically exhausting every possibility to ensure some minor form of success. Interrogating a suspect? You need to ask the *exact* right questions for all the clues to be revealed. Shopping at a bazaar? You need to stop at every booth to make sure you find the interesting items. Looking for secret doors or traps? You need to state that you're searching for them *every time,* or else end up in the bottom of a pit. (Many original **Dungeons & Dragons** adventures would have secret doors or traps where -- in otherwise incredibly terse adventures -- it was described exactly what needed to be done in order to discover or open these doors or traps, which leads me to think the writers assumed that players would be expected to describe exactly what was required in order to open them . . . including all the false starts that would entail: "I put the 10-foot pole into the mouth of the first gargoyle. I lever the pole up; anything? Okay; I lever the pole down; anything? Right. I push the pole away from me; anything? I pull it toward me; anything? Okay; I take the 10-foot pole out, and put it into the mouth of the second gargoyle . . .")

In my mind, the *Nancy* three-rock paradigm is one that can be applied to many RPGs in many situations, which is this: By doing something three times, you have indicated that you have done that task *all* the times you need to. By coming up with three examples of something you have have provided *all* the examples necessary.

For example,let's say the bad guy has an endless supply of mooks, and you are able to defeat three of them one-on-one without major difficulty. This indicates that you are able to handle *all* mooks supplied by the baddie (in a one-on-one situation). Or let's say the heroes are interrogating a henchman for what he knows, and they manage to ask the right questions and make the required rolls such that they receive three pieces of previously unknown information. In that case, let's assume the PCs learn *all* the information he has. (If there's an interrogatee with lots of information, it might be possible to break the clues down into categories; for example, learning three Easy items means learning all his Easy items, while learning three Moderate bits means all the Moderate bits are revealed.)

As another example, if the heroes are preparing to establish base camp for the night and they come up with three interesting things they're doing to secure the area -- say, sleeping in shifts, tying ropes and bells around the perimeter, and keeping supplies tied in a tree and out of the reach of predators -- then they've done *all* things required to secure the camp.

And, yes, once I've destroyed three random objects on a ***Lego Indiana Jones*** level, I feel I shouldn't need to destroy any more.

If using the "three rocks" rule, many of the times reaching the "three = all" threshold doesn't mean the hero has done their tasks exemplarily; rather, it means that a skill roll determines how successful those efforts were. Thus, in our "establish base camp" example, the player would roll something like Survival after coming up with three examples. But "three rocks" keeps the game from playing itself, encouraging players to actually *roleplay* and think about what their doing, rather than having the game go on autopilot:

Player: We establish base camp.
GM: Make a Survival roll.
Player: 8.
GM: Okay. In the night, you're attacked. Make a combat roll.
Player: 12.
GM: All right; he's dead. In the morning, you look for food. Make a Scavenging roll.

And "three rocks" also keeps players from having to fret or plan every iota of their heroes' actions, like some "Plans A through Z-prime" *Shadowrun* nightmare, without fear that the GM will spring some nastiness on them ("You said you were tying up the provisions in a tree, but you didn't indicate you were testing to make sure the tree could support the weight! Hah!!").

RPGs frequently have a tension between having dice resolve all situations and requiring the players to take unsure actions they assume their characters would know a lot better. But with "three rocks," it might be possible to find a compromise; even if a player doesn't know everything his hero would do in that situation, if he know three things he'd do, then that's close enough for me . . . and *Nancy* creator Ernie Bushmiller.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Pick

Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries

Published by [Days of Wonder](#)

Designed by Alan R. Moon

Illustrated by Julien Delval

Full-color boxed set with 20"-by-31"-inch mounted board, 46 Destination cards, 110 Train cards, 1 Globetrotter Bonus card, 135 train cars, 3 wooden scoring markers, & 4-Page rule booklet; $50

STOP.

Stop whatever you are doing. Especially if you are a fan of the *[Ticket to Ride](#)* family of games. Stop and make your way to your nearest games emporium. Once there, purchase a copy of *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries,* because by all accounts, this newest member of the multi-award-winning card-drawing, route-claiming train-themed series is a limited edition with just the one print run. Otherwise, kindly read on.

Originally available only in Scandinavia, *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* -- like its immediate predecessor, *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* -- is designed for two to three players. Yet where *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* was merely an expansion -- consisting of a new board and new Destination Tickets, all packaged into a flat, album sized box -- *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* is a full game. So inside the box can be found not only a new board, new Destination Tickets, and new rules, but also the game's own deck of Train cards, three sets of train pieces, three wooden scoring markers, and the new Globetrotter card.

The aim and play of *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* is relatively unchanged from other *Ticket to Ride* titles. The players take it in turns to draw colored Train tickets, either face up or from the deck, attempting to get enough to match the color of various routes on the board. When he has enough, a player can claim a route on his turn, marking it with his trains and discarding the Train cards. Each route connects two cities, and by connecting one or more routes a player can complete the full route marked on one of the Destination Tickets he received at game start -- for example, "København to Narvik" or "Oslo to Honningsvåg" in *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries.* Points are scored for each route claimed, the longer the route and the greater the number of points. More points are awarded for completing Destination Tickets by game's end, but lost for failing to complete them.

Thus it is in *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries.* Just like in *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland,* this version plays relatively quickly, with a game lasting no longer than an hour. As with *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland,* the only concession to the two-player game is that only one person can claim a double route. Unlike *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland,* this new game adds very little in terms of rules or features, so there are no new Destination Tickets that take the travelers beyond the borders of Scandinavia. So what then, is different with *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries?*

First is its theme -- Scandinavia or the Nordic Countries. This shows strongly in the game's graphical design, from the snowbound train and waving Laplander (complete with reindeer) on the front of the box to the little Viking longship and little mermaid illustrations on the board via the Train cards that each depict a snow-covered car. Although the feel of *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* is not as "chocolate box" as *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland,* it is very Christmassy.

Second is the board is the board itself, laid out vertically rather than horizontally as other *Ticket to Ride* titles. This

reflects the geography of the region, the board being dominated by Finland, Norway, and Sweden, which together run the height of the board. At the bottom edge of the board sits the northern tip of Denmark; while to the East lies Tallinn, the capital of Estonia; and to the North (just across the Russian border) is Murmansk, the largest city north of the Artic Circle. The Artic Circle is also marked on the board, not just with a line across the board, but also with the region above the line being marked with dark mauve wash to reflect the Midnight Sky.

Given the geography of the region, it is no surprise that it is dominated by long vertical routes with relatively few horizontal routes, most of which can be found in the South. Several tunnels can be in the South West, crossing Norway, while ferry routes run the length of the Norwegian coast and crisscross the Baltic Sea, connecting the various countries by short sea routes.

The tunnels work just as they do in *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* and *Ticket to Ride: Europe.* A player puts down the Train cards needed to claim the tunnel route and turn over the top three cards from the Train card deck. For each card drawn that matches the color of the route, the player must use an additional Train card of this color to claim the route. If this is not possible, the route remains unclaimed and he receives his cards back.

Similarly, the ferries work just as they do in *Ticket to Ride: Europe.* Each ferry route is marked with one or more locomotive symbols. For each of these a player must put down a down a locomotive card as well as the normal cards needed to claim the route. Alternatively, three cards of a single color can be substituted for each locomotive card.

With its rules for tunnels and ferries, *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* feels very much like a two to three player variant of *Ticket to Ride: Europe.* It has one major difference though, in the form of one exceptional route. Routes in *Ticket to Ride* are never longer then six spares long, but in *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries,* the Murmansk to Lieksa (in Finland) route is not six spaces long, but nine! Six space routes are worth six points, but this Murmansk to Lieksa route is worth 27! It is a grey route, so cards of any color can be used to claim the route. As with ferries, cards of another color can be substituted to claim one or more spaces along the route, but four cards instead of three. So a player could use eight red cards and four black cards to claim the route instead of the full nine red.

Lastly, there is no bonus for the Longest Continuous Route as in other *Ticket to Ride* titles. Instead, the Globetrotter card is given out to the player who has completed the greatest number of Destination Tickets. Just as with the Longest Continuous Route card, this award is worth 10 points.

Obviously, *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* draws strong comparisons with *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland.* Both have fewer Destination Tickets and each player begins the game with fewer Train pieces -- 40 as opposed to usual 45; and both are tight games with either two or three players with an emphasis placed upon the locomotive card. Where the Swiss set game reserves them for use in the tunnels, the Nordic variant demands their use for both ferries and tunnels. With only 14 available in the Train deck, we found ourselves playing through the deck several times in our search for them and acquiring thick handfuls of cards in the process.

Yet one area where the two games differ is in the distribution of Destination Tickets. In *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland,* many of the Destination Tickets duplicate parts of other routes, so it is possible to draw several more and score with already completed routes. In *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries,* this is less of an occurrence despite the number of Destination Tickets that originate in the four main capitals -- Helsinki, København, Oslo, and Stockholm.

There can be no doubt that fans of the *Ticket to Ride* series will want a copy of *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries.* It offers them a more balanced two to three player variant that is as tight as *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland,* but which is not as complex, lacking the high number of tunnels running from Switzerland to Italy through the Alps. It is a pity that this variant comes as a complete game rather than as an expansion as did *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland,* but doing it in such a fashion would detract from its theme . . . and anyway, the reviewer's girlfriend liked the new purple playing pieces. (This is a Goth thing.)

For players new to the series, *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* offers a better game than the original -- better in terms of balance, in terms of complexity, and in terms of competitive play. It is actually a pity that *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* is going to be a limited release, because the series really needs to have really good version for small groups as much as it does for larger groups. It also offers another path into the series: *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* and on

to *Ticket to Ride: Switzerland* versus *Ticket to Ride* and then on to *Ticket to Ride: Europe* or *Ticket to Ride: Märklin.* Offering much more in the way of competition and a challenge, *Ticket to Ride: Nordic Countries* is the best introduction the series to date.

--Matthew Pook

The Cape Squad

by James L. Cambias

In any world where costumed superheroes and villains have existed for more than a few years, police departments will develop special squads to handle the unique law-enforcement challenges they represent. The official name of the unit varies from city to city -- Metahuman Crimes Unit, Superhuman Affairs Division, Superpowered Situations Team -- but the nickname is universal: they're the "Cape Squad."

Not every city has a Cape Squad, any more than every police department has a SWAT team or a gang crimes unit. A rough guideline is that a department has about as many officers assigned to superpowered matters as there are superheroes in its jurisdiction. So if Austin's sole superpowered defender is Illuminator, the Austin Police Department probably has only a single detective handling supercrimes full-time. Meanwhile, New York can boast dozens of heroes so naturally the NYPD has a whole division with detectives, specially-trained officers, and a captain in charge, all doing nothing but coping with superpowered criminals.

Assume an even mix of uniformed police and detectives. A small squad (under six officers) is commanded by a sergeant, up to 20 gets a lieutenant, and the biggest Cape Squads are commanded by a captain.

Certain jurisdictions may have an unusually large or small Cape Squad. High-profile towns like Washington D.C., Hollywood, or Las Vegas might well have an extra-large unit as those places are magnets for supercrooks. Conversely, a city with an especially powerful and well-beloved resident superhero might not need a Cape Squad at all simply because the guy in spandex does such a good job.

Resources

In most campaigns the Cape Squad is limited to mundane weapons and equipment. That does mean they can call on some pretty serious firepower: M-16 rifles, tear gas, possibly some light antitank weapons, and maybe one or two heavy armor-piercing rifles like the Barret .50-caliber to deal with armored opponents.

Prisoners are restrained with extra-heavy cables and padlocks when handcuffs aren't enough. Cities with lots of metahuman activity may have one or two specially-reinforced holding cells for superpowered suspects.

Note that such real-world equipment is woefully inadequate to stop or hold superbeings who can turn into vapor, or control minds, or who can melt through steel. The

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Cape Squad Adventure Hooks

The Theme Crook: A costumed supervillain has been committing "theme" crimes around the city -- crimes based on days of the week, or the Periodic Table of elements, or the batting lineup of the 1962 Boston Red Sox. There's a superhero in town who thinks he's the world's greatest investigator, but this time the Police Commissioner wants his department to break the case first. The detectives of the Cape Squad can apply real-world investigative techniques to the nonsensical villainy of a Silver Age comics bad guy.

Hero Gone Bad: One of the city's longtime superhero protectors has started committing crimes. The Cape Squad has the job of bringing him in -- and of figuring out what's going on. While the uniformed officers try to subdue and arrest someone who can throw a supertanker into orbit, the detectives have to work out why he went bad. If this is a case of mind control or an impersonator, who's the real villain?

A Death in the Family: One member of a superteam based in the city has been murdered. Who did it? An old enemy out for revenge? A fellow team member? The Cape Squad must conduct their investigation while multiple superheroes are also trying to solve the crime -- and one of them just may be the killer.

Cape Squad Dirty: Superhero PCs discover that the city's Cape Squad has a corruption problem. Officers have been taking bribes from a supervillain mastermind, who is using them to eliminate rivals and crack down on pesky do-gooders. Can the heroes root out the corruption without making enemies in the police department?

Cape Squad is keenly aware of that, and is constantly on the lookout for heavier firepower and more effective ways to restrain or hold superhumans. Officers may carry personal "backup" weapons like Magnum pistols, or maintain a stash of "found" military gear. If any technology exists to suppress superpowers in the campaign, police Cape Squads will be the earliest adopters . . . even if the technology doesn't really work.

The most potent asset available to the Cape Squad is simply a disk drive. They collect and keep information on all local supers -- heroes and villains alike. They have crime-scene reports from the aftermath of superpowered battles. They have videos and eyewitness descriptions of supers in action. They can and do trade information with other law enforcement agencies all over the world. This means that they can made a good estimate of what a given super can do, recognize the effects of any known super's powers, and adjust their tactics and response to suit the threat level.

Another extremely valuable resource for the Cape Squad is the evidence locker. Alien weapons, ray guns, power-armor suits, doomsday machines, and all manner of bizarre superpowered gadgets wind up in the Cape Squad's custody. Some of the items are eventually taken for study by "top men" from vague government agencies with classified return addresses in Nevada. A few items eventually get returned to their owners. But a surprising amount of stuff just sits on the metal shelves. In an emergency, the Squad can grab something and hope it works. See *GURPS Warehouse 23* for ideas.

Operations

The Cape Squad is part of the regular city police force. As such, officers have the usual police powers, no more and no less. They need a warrant or a clear public-safety need to enter private property. They can only use reasonable force to apprehend suspects -- though the definition of "reasonable" force when dealing with superbeings is a perennial problem.

The Cape Squad's work breaks down into policing and investigation. Policing is pretty straightforward: a supercrook or other paranormal being causes trouble, the Cape Squad responds -- often backed up by the city's SWAT team or a bunch of regular uniformed officers. The chief question is always "is it immune to bullets?" The Cape Squad's database of known supers can be invaluable in situations like that.

Investigation is considerably more complex. Officially, the Cape Squad concentrates on cases involving supervillains or superheroes. In practice, that means they get anything that's out of the ordinary, since abnormal events tend to indicate super involvement. (And indeed, in the world of the comic books, it's true.) This means the Cape Squad can wind up investigating all kinds of strange cases -- some with supers, some with other weirdness, some that are just unusual crimes by normal humans, and even a few "Scooby Doo" cases where the anomaly is a fraud.

The Cape Squad has terrible relations with the local District Attorney's office. For every straightforward superpowered bank robber they catch, there's always half a dozen cases where the law has to stretch in uncomfortable ways to cover the crime. How *do* you prosecute a case of

"conspiracy to reverse time" or "attempted mind control?" To make matters worse, super crimes are almost always high-profile cases with lots of media attention. It's no wonder the assistant D.A.s tend to hide in the bathroom when a Cape Squad officer shows up.

Relations With Supers

As the lead officers on superhuman crime incidents, the Cape Squad wind up interacting with the local superheroes more than most officers. Their relationship with superheroes tends to be friendly but wary -- after all, most superheroes *are* illegal vigilantes, but the officers also know they might need a little spandex help once in a while.

Much depends on the actual methods and personalities of the local superheroes. An upstanding, law-abiding paragon gets much better reaction from the cops than a grim, violent avenger. Surprisingly, the Cape Squad cops are more sympathetic than anyone else toward "misunderstood" heroes, especially mutants or weird creatures who suffer persecution. Cape Squad cops have the files: They know who has done what and don't easily succumb to hysteria.

If superheroes are illegal or strictly controlled in the city, the Cape Squad's job gets a lot harder. Suddenly instead of just hunting superpowered criminals, they also have the thankless job of busting superheroes. If the heroes have a clean rap sheet, officers may well decide this is low-priority work and concentrate on more immediate threats. But a hero who has actually tangled with the cops and earned a bad reputation can shoot to the top of the list.

Regardless of their relationship with local supers, the Cape Squad certainly do their best to establish a positive I.D. on superpowered villains and heroes alike. Any hero without a secret identity is absolutely known to the local Cape Squad. Whether they share that information with other agencies depends on the hero's attitude and actions. Heroes and villains with secret identities will certainly be investigated, though how much effort the Squad puts into the investigation varies. The cops will work overtime to learn the name of a mass-murdering supervillain or a bloodthirsty vigilante, while a basically ethical costumed hero just gets a file to which tips and clues are added as they come in.

Using the Cape Squad

The Cape Squad is a good way to mix the gritty realism of station-house cop dramas with the four-color world of superhero comics. There are several ways to use them in a campaign.

As adversaries, the Cape Squad puts a human face (or faces) on that standby of superhero campaign disadvantages "hunted by the police." Depending on the tone the GM wants in the campaign, the Cape Squad hunting a PC can be anything from bumbling buffoons to honorable professionals to obsessed rogue cops. There's always room for drama if one or more members of the Squad have a personal connection to the heroes: a family tie, a debt of honor, or an old grudge, for instance. A small Cape Squad (the average for most cities) is a -10 point Enemy, while a large metropolitan police force's squad would be worth -20.

As allies, the Cape Squad can be the frail humans desperately outgunned by the supervillains, or they can be the competent, well-armed cavalry arriving in time to save the day. Actually, they are likely to be both. A team of detectives or even a squad of uniformed cops won't be able to stop most superpowered threats at first encounter. But give them time to go back to the station, armor up, empty the weapons locker, and dig through files on the bad guys' powers and weaknesses, and they can become a pretty potent force. Usually the Squad won't be more than a Contact Group for most heroes. If one player character is a *member* of the Cape Squad in his or her secret identity, then the unit

In the pre-Miranda decades, the cops won't hesitate to get rough with supervillain lackeys, especially if innocent lives are in danger.

Cyberpunk Cape Squad

For superheroes in a near-future high-tech setting, the police are a potentially serious *enemy!* Advanced crime-scene investigation technology and universal computer networks make it very hard to maintain a secret identity, and high-tech weapons go a long way toward evening the playing field between human cops and supers. Throw in the possibility of cyberware and biological modification and there may not be much difference between the cops and the superheroes -- except that the cops are probably corrupt and under the thumb of Sinister Corporations.

might qualify as an Ally Group.

Finally, the Cape Squad makes an excellent campaign setting for player characters. A variety of power levels are possible: 100-point rookies assigned to a brand-new Cape Squad, struggling with their own inexperience as they try to protect the city from superpowered bad guys; 200-point professionals in an established department; or 250-point elite normals who can sometimes give the costumed metahumans a run for their money. To amp up the soap opera possibilities, consider making one member of the squad a superhero (or reformed villain) in disguise, always faced with the dilemma of using his powers.

For a particularly gonzo take, combine the Cape Squad with the Company from **GURPS Black Ops** -- the Squad isn't just made of competent cops; they're cinematic supercops armed with the latest in high-tech firepower. Step aside, costumed posers: the *professionals* have arrived!

Bibliography

- *Powers,* by Brian Bendis and Michael Oeming (Image, later Icon Comics). Homicide detectives in a four-color world, one of whom is an ex-superhero himself.
- *The Savage Dragon,* by Erik Larsen (Image Comics). A superhuman joins the Chicago Police Department.
- *Top 10,* by Alan Moore, Gene Ha, and Zander Cannon (America's Best Comics). Superpowered police fight crime in a city of superhumans.

Lair of the Drama Queen

by Matt B Carter

Roleplaying games are not fiction. They can, however, share many elements in common with fiction, particularly for those who are inclined toward a more dramatic style of gameplay. This essay aims to explore how some of the rules of creative writing can be applied to games in order to invoke drama, lending your campaign the excitement of a movie, a novel, or a TV series.

The Core Element

What is the one essential element of drama? One thing common to all dramatic events, in life as in fiction, is that they involve conflict of some kind. Drama is a measure of the emotional weight -- the impact -- that these conflicts carry. That impact depends upon the meaning in human terms: the potential risk, the potential gains, and the way it changes characters and affects the world. The most dramatic of conflicts are those that relate directly and emotionally to the characters, sharing as many points of connection as possible to make them inextricably linked. The most powerful stories are those in which the characters are a believable part of the world, in which their actions carry risk and consequence, and in which everything affects everything else in a meaningful, plausible, often surprising way.

Plot Is Character

In fiction, the reader is often most compelled by the active protagonists: those who seize the initiative and take the course of events into their own hands, making decisions and acting rather than reacting. This makes the story more compelling because the characters are involved with the plot, motivated and realistic, and hopefully sympathetic enough as a result that the reader can identify with them. In RPGs, the structure of a game often lends itself to less proactive roles for the protagonists -- at least until the players begin to occupy their characters and have gathered enough momentum to make their way without prompting.

Many games are more likely to start with the adventurers being fed their mission by an authority figure, with active plot development on the players' part only arriving once they have established their niche. On the other hand, just as many games, and just as many players, are inclined toward proactive heroes. In most cases these are players who have thought carefully about their PCs' motives and personalities to make them original and interesting, but it is important not to dismiss the more archetypal characters. Drama merely requires conflict that is relevant to the characters; it need not be unique or even particularly original. Actually playing the role of a character, as opposed to watching it on screen, undercuts any sense of cliché through the sheer joy of playing to the archetype. Even a cookie-cutter dwarf can still be involved with the dramatic plot in a worthwhile fashion. Besides, as discussed later, characters painted in broad strokes often hint at a deeper nature as they grow.

The perception among many roleplayers is that it is the GM's job to be the driving force behind the campaign. This unfortunately undermines proactive roleplaying in a lot of groups. This is by no means a bad thing if those groups are content with that style of play; after all, it takes creativity and confidence to play a dynamic character with clear goals, and some people just don't have the energy. Luckily, those players will probably not miss the potential extra roleplaying elements that they are missing out on. Either they will be happy to let the more dramatically inclined players take the lead while they continue to react to the plot, or the example of others will prompt them to experiment.

The difficulty arises when none of the players feels capable of becoming proactive, meaning the only dramatic tension comes from whatever the GM provides. This is hardly a disaster, but not ideal, partly because it places the entire weight of propelling the game squarely upon the GM's shoulders, and also because the most powerful conflict in fiction comes from the protagonists. That is why they are the protagonists in the first place, not mere secondary characters.

Paint in Broad Strokes

Trying to make every character a complex tapestry of loves, hates, desires, and flaws can look clumsy or self-indulgent if it is not done with care. Building convincing characters is easier if you begin by casting your net quite wide over their personalities; try starting with just an idea of how they talk and act, and the basics of what they want and don't want, then let the character breathe for a while as a fairly simple one-dimensional organism. The players' imaginations will assume that there is more to him than they've seen so far and will allow ideas to form, letting you build the character based on your instincts while you portray him and the way the PCs treat him.

One way to do this is through subtle contradictions. For example, if the PCs act as though they're frightened of the guard captain, this gives you something to play on -- perhaps he turns up just as they're talking about him, making them paranoid, and then does something to convince them he's not so bad after all (but still scary). The guard captain now has the beginnings of an empathic relationship with the PCs, nuanced by the fact that he still unnerves them. One dimension -- a guard captain who makes the heroes nervous -- has become two dimensions. Essentially, now he's a character, so we can care about him. Adding a third dimension is the next logical step, and chances are it will emerge naturally in play when inspiration hits.

Cliché Versus Archetype

Of course, starting out too broadly can just lead to unconvincing stereotypes. Pirates with eye patches and parrots are not likely to be taken seriously. In fact, trying to add drama onto a stereotypical character can just come across as comedic. It can work, but it's an uphill struggle, so try to avoid stereotypes if you can. Again, this applies less to things like superhero games and adventure pulp, where stereotypes are more easily accepted -- if not actually expected -- and can be pulled off to a greater degree. Still, it can be risky if the game has not been clearly established as pastiche. The only reliable way to pull it off is entirely without subtlety, and even this is tricky.

All of this advice applies in particular to villains. While it may be tempting to make your villain a literal embodiment of evil with no other motives, and you may well be able to pull it off admirably, it is usually far more effective to make a villain appear human, with genuine personal motivations and at least some sense of ethics. The most powerful villains are the ones we to whom we can relate, because their villainy becomes plausible and frightening in the context of ourselves. Even more nuanced is the character who is neither antagonist nor ally to the heroes, but plays either role depending on the circumstances and guided by his own consistent yet evolving motives.

Conflict Reveals Character

It is generally true that you can tell a lot more about a character during a time of crisis than when everything is calm and there is no danger. Risk, and potential consequence, force a character to test himself in various ways -- physical, mental, and spiritual -- thus revealing his attributes. This plays into the idea of "show, don't tell," on which more detail later. Reacting to conflict, or becoming proactive and creating or controlling conflict, demonstrates non-verbally the way the character is -- or at least, the way he acts, which may even tell you more.

Make It Meaningful

Ideally, any conflict should involve an element of risk, and that risk should be something that resonates emotionally with the characters involved. An ideological conflict in which the player character risks losing face has meaning for him whether he wins or loses, and the result either way will be an emotional one that adds drama and tension to the conflict. Naturally, the more the hero stands to win or lose, the greater the scale of the drama.

No matter the size of the stakes, however, it is harder to empathize with risks that are indirectly related to the character. For example, while the necromancer's plague will cause unspeakable suffering for thousands if it is allowed to spread, it carries far more threat -- and therefore dramatic weight -- if the heroes' loved ones are trapped inside the

endangered city. Stakes should be personal if at all possible.

Be careful, though, not to overload characters with pathos by putting their personal lives in harm's way every five minutes. Unless this is supported strongly by the setting, or by the established plot and characters, it can start to get repetitive. To avoid letting the game seem like a soap opera, try making sure that the campaign supports such things by establishing reasons in the genre or the setting for constant threats on things that the heroes care about. In a superhero campaign, for example, the genre conventions allow for almost limitless exploitation of the "girlfriend in peril" archetype. In other worlds it helps to establish that this is a theme, perhaps by emphasizing how dangerous the setting is, and to provide consistently plausible reasons. If a character's brother is constantly being kidnapped by villains then it will lose its dramatic effect very quickly and become a chore, but if he gets himself into trouble for logical reasons -- such as confronting the villain alone to avenge the loss of his fiancée (love being, if not the most dramatic of motives, is surely the most poetic) -- then it will be far more compelling. The death of his fiancée at the villain's hands is in itself a meaningful loss that leads to further conflict when he confronts the villain.

Both events are entirely plausible and, ideally, have emotional weight for the heroes. In the case of the second, the fact that it was set up by the first will give it extra narrative power because the players will see it as something that they could have avoided. They may even have been dreading it the whole time, building tension as their anticipation grew. This is not quite foreshadowing, unless there was a hint from the brother that it was going to happen, but it will not be a surprise. Instead, it can have the same dramatic punch as losing everything in a poker game on the last card, or hearing a scream and the line going dead. For full effect, have it happen at the worst possible moment, such as when the PCs are powerless to prevent it.

Also remember that "bigger" does not necessarily mean "more dramatic." What is personally meaningful to one character may be irrelevant to another, and vice versa. A PC's dog dying could easily stand a better chance of drawing a tear than the death of an entire nation. Also try to vary the type of emotion used as a motive, depending on the character. Heroic deeds and "good guy" quests do not have a monopoly on pathos; an assassin might be highly motivated to achieve his hundredth successful hit so that, when a rival appears on the scene, the ensuing conflict is just as gripping as if he had to do one last job to pay for his grandmother's operation. It's all about how the GM sells it. It is vital to understand the motives of the characters, and the players' motives in creating and playing those characters, to work out what sort of risks constitute "meaningful" for each of them.

Infighting

Conflict between PCs is a touchy subject. A great many gamers frown upon it, and with good reason: roleplaying in general is usually about heroes working together to achieve the same goals, and if the PCs start fighting among themselves then it can interfere with that. Infighting can also quickly turn into one-upmanship, which is even more undesirable. If approached with maturity, however, the idea of heroes falling out or coming into conflict -- or even changing sides or outright betraying each other -- can lead to some truly amazing drama. In fact, if a player has some kind of dark secret or hidden agenda, this is practically an invitation to engineer a climactic confrontation at some point.

Increase the Pressure

Of course, the ability to raise the stakes at the right moment is invaluable. Adding to the level of threat, or complicating the heroes' ability to achieve their goal and win the conflict, can dramatically increase the tension if it is done with the right kind of care and pacing; if it is not, however, it can seem contrived or unfair to the players. The trick is to keep the level of difficulty at the "sweet spot," where the players know they can reasonably succeed but also know they stand a chance at failure, and keep the danger close at their heels. Who can reach the exit faster: the hero, or the crocodile chasing him? If the scene is to be dramatic, that lizard should stand a chance at catching his dinner. The closer the hero gets to the exit, the closer the crocodile gets to him. This can be taken as a metaphor for many types of conflict, in that the protagonists should need to stay dynamic and ahead of the game, or at least be constantly pushing to maintain their position, in order to create that edge-of-your-seat tension.

Naturally, this needs to be offset with quiet moments -- interludes, down time, happy reunions, background exposition, cut-scenes describing calmer locales, and so on -- in order to contrast the tension. If the story is constantly moving at a breakneck pace, the tension has nowhere to build to and will eventually lose its power. Conflict should ebb and flow -- preferably not with too much regularity, but in a series of peaks and troughs -- so as to remain unpredictable yet still allow for foreshadowing.

Skip to the Good Parts

Immersion is all well and good, and vital to the art of drama, but that does not necessarily mean playing out every single scene and describing it in minute detail. This is useful during the intentionally slower-paced moments, if you have the knack for colorful description, but as a rule it is more dramatically powerful to skip to the parts that serve a purpose: either to develop the plot, to develop one or more characters, or preferably both. If a PC wishes to fly to a neighboring country to talk to an old contact, skip as much of the journey as possible (unless something is going to happen along the way) and go straight into the conversation: have the contact greet the hero, then describe the location as they talk. A good rule of thumb is to think of the game as a TV series, and imagine how you'd edit the scenes. This makes dramatic pacing much easier. If you keep a particular movie (or comic book, director, and so on) in mind while you're running the game, you can more easily adjust the pacing for various genres. This is especially easy and effective with franchise-based games. We all know how *Star Wars* should feel.

Remember, this can also be applied to the very first scene. Try starting the adventure as late into the plot as possible, skipping whatever is not absolutely essential, then hit the ground running. "The zombies are under the control of the evil warlord and will be here by nightfall" is more dramatic than "the evil warlord is looking for the Staff of Ra in order to raise an army of undead" -- unless the PCs have the Staff of Ra and are surrounded.

Make Everything Human

If the PCs have no personal stakes in the conflict, another way to apply meaning is to evoke sympathy through the portrayal of other characters. This involves crafting believable personalities and dialogue for the NPCs. Just as strong plots are driven by strong characters, so are strong characters driven by engaging motives and character traits. Of course, this is by no means easy, and depends largely upon the GM's own level of comfort and acting ability.

Show, Don't Tell

The obvious adage is that actions speak louder than words, and to an extent it is true. As human beings, although we do not necessarily judge people by their actions any more than by their words, it is certainly no small factor in our perceptions of others. The amount of communication expressed through body language alone is easily underestimated, and we tend to be remembered by our deeds rather than our words after we are gone (except for those of us whose words dramatically outweigh our deeds). In fiction, the phrase "show, don't tell" is an invaluable mantra about characterization, and it applies just as much in a gaming context.

Avoid Overuse of Monologues

While a good dramatic speech can be fantastic in the hands of a good actor, it is also very easy to overdo the monologues in a dramatic campaign. Dying speeches, and villains revealing their plots, are particularly thorny subjects and can easily make a scene seem satirical. Once this happens it can be very easy to lose all sense of drama. Injecting humor into the moment, or otherwise directing attention away from the drama by subverting the convention, can rein in the excess. Doing so can also throw the actual dramatic element into sharper relief.

Other kinds of dramatic speeches can also be tricky to pull off. Long exposition must be handled with care. Less is often more with exposition, as spelling everything out can seem clumsy and arbitrary. Instead try throwing hints and references out there, letting the players' imaginations work on the rest. If you do use long speeches, try to underplay

them slightly rather than emoting for all you're worth, lest you sound like an amateur production of *Hamlet*. This will also help to undercut the clichés. On the other hand, if your campaign's back story really is interesting, or your villain's plot original, you can often get away with hamming it up a little more.

No Man Is An Island

The essential driving force of conflict is the relationship between its participants. A character with no past, no interaction with his surroundings or community, and no relationship with the world at large, cannot easily be strongly motivated or involved in emotionally resonant conflict. Characters must affect their environment and be affected by it. "Environment" in this case includes other characters, including the PCs. When the heroes save the farmers from marauding bandits, the surviving bandits might get together and put out prices on the heroes' heads. Letting the miller's son get killed when he tags along on an adventure could incur the wrath of the miller himself, who plots vengeance over the long term by sabotaging the heroes' lives and driving them out of the village. The PCs have clearly affected the world and are suffering for something that they did or did not do . . . and, of course, they can also be rewarded for past actions and inactions. Players are also more likely to feel attachment to NPCs whom they have interacted for a long time, making them a meaningful risk, as discussed earlier.

Creating relationships between characters before the game even starts can be invaluable and is something that a lot of players overlook. Countless are the PCs who start the game with no living relatives, no friends, and maybe a contact or two who sells guns. Try encouraging each player to come up with at least the name of one significant acquaintance -- a roommate, or a sister who is at college, or just his father's first name -- and something unique about their relationship that can be inserted into the character's background. This can be as simple as "used to go hunting with his father"" or "thinks his roommate is secretly gay," and can be used as plot inspiration. Once a hero has an NPC of his own devising involved in the plot or a subplot, both plot and NPC will start to give each other more importance.

When the character has interacted with others for long enough he will gain a reputation, or at least people will begin to form opinions of him. A good way to illustrate characters is by demonstrating these opinions -- have the NPCs talk about him, noting his behavior and personality and what they think about him. This illuminates not only the character being talked about, but the character doing the talking. The observer is a vital part of the observation itself, so everybody a character knows well will have a different opinion of him. Talking to each other, or about each other, is a great way to cement relationships and develop characters. This is to be encouraged -- especially between PCs.

People Change

Remember, a fight does not have to end with both parties hating each other, and even if it does they can reconcile later. Friends fall out and become bitter enemies. Enemies realize they are not so different, or run out of reasons to fight. People admit they were wrong. They lose their fears, gain new confidence, lose their nerve, and change their habits. People in general are constantly growing and changing. Or, at least, they should be. Remember to also apply this to NPCs in games. Simply promoting the town constable to sheriff while the PCs were away can add a layer of depth to his character -- especially if one of the other townsfolk tells them the heroic tale behind his promotion, which the new sheriff is too modest to brag about himself. Was he always this brave?

Seeing characters develop around them also helps the players believe that they are in an actual living, breathing world. Just as letting the heroes' actions dictate the course of the game draws them further into it, watching how the NPCs change over time hints that there is a larger world and hidden depths behind the veneer of the game. Double points for tying the two ideas together and letting the PCs see how their actions changed the NPCs, for better or for worse.

The Nurse of Wisdom

Love, hate, fear, affection, loyalty, trust . . . there are lots of emotions that come up fairly often in campaigns. But there's one emotion that's a relative rarity in most campaigns I've been in.

But I'll let the suspense build on that for a few paragraphs.

Last millennium when I went to college, I started getting into comics and graphic novels again. Having completed my Alan Moore indoctrination, one of the "independent" graphic novels I tried out was Frank Miller's and Dave Gibbons' *Give Me Liberty*. *[SPOILER ALERT!]* In this story, someone unexpectedly becomes the President of the United States owing to freak circumstances. He turns out to be a good leader and a good person and generally likable character. But by the next issue (of the four-issue miniseries), he's become an unstable alcoholic who makes some decidedly unwise decisions. *[END SPOILER ALERT]*

The emotion I felt is one I've felt quite often in the real world, especially in my years of following the American political process. In a way, it's inevitable: A candidate you liked turns out not to be what you expect. Or a politician you're hopeful will be different turns out to be just like everyone else.

And the emotion, of course, is disappointment.

In many childhood households -- my own included -- one of the worst things one could hear parents say was, "I'm not mad . . . just disappointed." (This is also, as an aside, a great statement/response for many suitable campaigns involving crazed scientists: "You're *mad!*" "No; I'm just disappointed.") Disappointment is such a challenging emotion: It challenges the disappointed to reassess their opinions about the object of disappointment, and it challenges them to react to the person differently.

But this different reaction isn't necessarily something that can be attacked, purged, discredited, or defended against . . . which is why it's a rare emotion to appear in RPGs. Most gaming groups paint in broad strokes. Master villains cackle maniacally. Heroes die heroically. When the mascot betrays the super-hero team, dons a powered suit of armor, and attacks Buckingham Palace, the first emotion to spring to mind is not "disappointment."

Sure, it's a complex emotion that doesn't allow such simple "energy-blast the problem!" solutions . . . but it can still be worked into adventures. For example, let's go with the "team mascot betrays the heroes" motif. We know that donning a powered suit of armor is too extreme for disappointment, but what if we toned down the betrayal? What if he, instead, was selling mementos belonging to the team? Or giving exclusive interviews to tabloids without the team's knowledge or permission? Does it make a difference in either case if he was doing so to pay for his ailing grandmother's surgery? What if he merely *said* he was doing so to pay for the surgery, but some investigation reveals he doesn't have any living grandparents?

What if he's feeling ignored by the team, and joins another team that's willing to make him a full-fledged member instead of an honorary one?

What if he just disappears for weeks at a time, unexpectedly, without explanation?

And so on.

Depending on the group, any of these actions might provoke disappointment, or weaker or stronger emotions. If the GM and the adventure can trigger that "disappointment" sweet spot in the heroes, it places the PCs in a challenging position. Do they kick the mascot off the team? Do they merely make him promise not to commit the infraction again? Do they ever trust him again . . . and to what extent?

What other ways can GMs work disappointment into campaigns? Perhaps instead of someone associated with the team, what about one of the ancillary characters of a PC? Again, getting the "disappointment" reflex caused by a loved

one or associate can cause many interesting subplots. Maybe the incorruptible police commissioner isn't quite as incorruptible as the heroes thought. Maybe the brilliant military strategist they admire doesn't have any plans for a conflict's resolution once the battle ends. Maybe the benevolent monarch they view as an ally needs to make a strange-bedfellow alliance with one of the heroes' enemies.

Of course, there's always the possibility that the actions of the heroes can make someone *else* disappointed. Again, disappointment isn't the sort of emotion where its trigger causes one to don a costume and do battle against the heroes (unless you're from the Nile Empire), but it can cause new sets of complications. Instead of a girlfriend being merely the target of kidnapping and threats, the hero might need to overcome the disappointment of a previous slight . . . perhaps even needing to win her back, or pick up the pieces of a failed relationship altogether. (Many relationship subplots become very different when they hinge on an estranged relationship: "I've saved you, Lois!" "Thank you, as always. Please . . . put me down.")

Disappointment isn't something you want to spring on the players every day, of course, or it loses all impact. But it's one of those emotions that we all encounter in a dozen different ways in reality; in many ways, our reaction to disappointment defines us, and -- in an RPG -- can open up new avenues for character development.

And unlike the real world, in many RPGs it's entirely possible to deal with the drudgery of disappointment by picking up a sword or a blaster and smiting some deserving foe. Such escapism from stark realism is *seldom* disappointing.

--Steven Marsh

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Notre Dame

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Designed by Stefan Feld

Full-color boxed set with five game board District sections; three Notre Dame Tiles (triangle, square, pentagon); five rat markers (black wooden cubes); 15 person cards (nine ABC cards, six generically-backed cards); one bell ringer (first player marker); 25 gold coins; 84 prestige tokens (denominations 1, 3, 5, 10); eight-page rulebook & separate double-sided supplement page; 45 action cards; 70 influence markers (wooden cubes); five trusted friend pawns; five wooden carriages; 20 message tokens; $44.95

Notre Dame is a game of politics in which each player takes control of a powerful family in Paris, and thus is in charge of a district of the city. Comparable to classics such as *Puerto Rico,* the balance of expanding influence, traveling messengers, and donations to the church is a race to gain influence while hordes of rats try to lower everyone's property values. The game lasts nine turns, although much can be done in these turns. The goal of *Notre Dame* is to gather more victory points (VP, or "prestige") than everyone else while trying to avoid overruns of the plague. As an intermediate goal, players seek to deploy all of their Influence Cubes to the board to reap the most benefits.

The physical components are of a decent size, the board components are made of a strong cardboard, the standard Eurogame cubes are distinguishable from the board components, and the cards are themselves distinct. The box's molded plastic trays can hold all components adequately. The package even includes several resealable bags to store components (although this reviewer separated all components related to each of the five player colors to speed setup: Action cards, cubes, message tokens, and a plague marker).

Notre Dame provides several "Notre Dame" cathedral center pieces to accommodate various numbers of players (e.g. a triangle for three, a pentagon for five). Each player receives a burrough (district) to attach to Notre Dame cathedral, his personal colored deck of action cards, four cubes to start the mobile Carriage and Trusted Friend pawns from the center market of his board, and some gold. All the rest of the pieces are placed next to the board. The ABC Person deck is carefully shuffled with the As randomly on top, Bs below, and so on. The Brown Person deck is completely shuffled and placed next to it.

The turn starts with the ABC deck's top Person card being revealed, and the top two Brown Person cards revealed. Each player takes the top three cards from his Action deck, and chooses two to pass to the next player. Likewise, he chooses one of the pair of cards passed to him, and passes it on similarly. Then, the players each execute one card in turn, in two cycles, leaving each with a card unused. At this point, the color of the cards does not matter -- a player can only directly affect his own district.

Eight of the cards allow a player to invest a single cube in a resource of his district or in Notre Dame cathedral itself. Some of these resources have an additional effect. For example, the second cube invested in the Bank allows the player to take two gold, the third cube, three, and so on. Of special note is the Notre Dame card, where a player must invest a cube and one to three gold coins. The latter reap exponentially more VP now, while the number of cubes will represent shares in VP at the end of the next trio of rounds. The use of the last Action card sends a "Trusted Friend" pawn to any district that a player wishes, where it acts as if he had just placed an Influence cube.

After each of the nine turns, players may hire a single Person card at the cost of a gold coin, gaining the reward (which can include moving his cubes, gaining VP, gold, removing rats, and so on). The last part of each round is to calculate how the plague hits each district. On the bottom of the three Person cards that are flipped over are zero to three pictures of rats. They represent the amount that each person's plague counter would advance at the end of that turn. Fortunately, there are several ways to cause the plague marker to retreat. Foremost is investing in the Hospital, in which each investment removes a rat, and will reduce the severity of the plague at the end of the round. Investing in the Park, the Tavern, the Carriage, and even some People cards can slow it as well. Should a player's plague counter exceed 9, then the player loses VP as well as a cube from his district. As there are three Person cards exposed each round, the severity can range from zero to nine rats from one turn to the next. If the Hospital has been invested in, the counter may even go down, should the number of cubes in it exceed the number of rats.

After every three Rounds (e.g., after each trio of ABC cards are flipped), the Influence Cubes on the cathedral are scored, and the brown Person cards and each player's deck are reshuffled. The cubes on Notre Dame award VP to their owners and are returned to the general supply, where they must be purchased again before being deployed anywhere. At the end of the ninth round, the game ends, and the player who accumulated the most VP wins. A player's nine Action cards are all used after three rounds, giving the player the guarantee of being able to use at least one card that he wishes in each of the three A-B-C phases.

The economics in *Notre Dame* are a delicate balance of tactics. The only direct competition is for sharing one of the cathedral's bonus and for the finite bonus items captured by investing in the carriage. This is to capture minor rewards, on the order of four times the number of players. Gold is not as useful as it seems; for basic operations, players need only keep one gold per turn to hire a Person (e.g., the starting 3 gold plus 6 more), and any extra gold -- typically 3 per turn -- should be planned to donate to Notre Dame, assuming that a player can obtain a Notre Dame Action card. Buying cubes from the "general supply" for one's own use is critical. It is deploying these cubes to the board that is a key strategy in *Notre Dame.* Should a player not have any cubes in his hand (whether or not the general supply is empty), he may still take the Action, but the cube must be moved from another of his districts on the board.

Notre Dame is a solid mercantile game with few holes. The rulebook is logical and straight-forward, and the quick-reference sheet is necessary to playing the game. The ABC cards only appear once each game, so players will have little chance to memorize them all. It is a game of average difficulty to learn and master, which will keep players wondering if they could do better next time; at 75 minutes or so a game, it's likely the players will try to do better again and again.

--Eric Funk
Special thanks to The Webbs and Jameson Hogan for wearing long pants.

Pyramid Review

MAID The Roleplaying Game

Written by Ryo Kamiya & Team Maid with Ewen Cluney & Diamond Sutra

Translated by Ewen Cluney with Diamond Sutra

Illustrated by Luis Guaragna & Stan!

Cover Illustrated by IWAKO

Illustrated by IWAKO, Tsurubi Nanten , Chizuru Kyoujo , Satoshi Muranishi , Babayan , Hamochan , Paul, & BON

212-page b&w softcover with color inserts; $26

All right, let's get it out of the way. This game is bloody weird. You roleplay Maids serving the household of their Master, attempting to follow his instructions to the best of their abilities and so gain his favor. If your rival maids lose or gain less favor than you do, then so much the better. This, as I said, is bloody weird.

The game in question is *MAID The Roleplaying Game,* the very first Japanese RPG to be translated for the English speaking market. It comes from Otaku culture's maid fetish, seen in both their special maid cafes and in Manga titles like *Emma* and *They Are My Noble Masters.* Since it comes out of Otaku culture, the Japanese also think that the whole maid thing is weird. So it really must be so . . .

A Western audience will find *MAID The Roleplaying Game* weird because they are being asked to roleplay a fantasy version of the maid. In other words, they are *not* members of the housekeeping staff at a hotel. For the primarily male hobby, the cross gender (and possibly transgender) roleplaying required here will be an uncomfortable area to get into, essentially because the role of the fantasy maid is fraught with sexual connotation. Much like its inspiration, *MAID The Roleplaying Game* is more innocent than its subject matter suggests, but in truth the game definitely skirts such connotations -- and in some places slides under the hemline -- so anyone uncomfortable with such issues should avoid this game. Thankfully the game does not come with Live Action rules and even suggests that having your own costume is creepy.

Oddness aside, *MAID The Roleplaying Game* is about the master-servant relationship, and not necessarily one in which the Maid is wholly subservient. It *is* a humorous game, meant to be played with an element of slapstick, a combination of *My Life With Master* and *Kobolds Ate My Baby!*, or (as the book suggests) *Teenagers From Outer Space.* Just as in the first two of those games, the GM is not only the referee, but also roleplays the Master, invariably a teenage boy or young man. The action will take place within the Master's mansion with the maids following his instructions to the best of their abilities, hampering their fellow Maids, and having to contend with whatever random events that they can throw at each other.

The game starts with maid creation, a table-based process. 2d6/3 is rolled for six attributes -- Athletics, Affection, Skill, Cunning, Luck, and Will -- to get a rating between one and four. Dice are rolled for Maid Type (options including Sexy and the innocent Lolita), which modifies the attributes; for the color of a Maid's uniform (including

transparent!); and a Maid's special qualities, such as "Glasses," "Overactive Imagination," "Actually a Guy," or "Neokomimi" (Catgirl). Half of these qualities require rolling on a second table. Other tables provide a Maid with her roots, an involuntary action when she suffers a Stress Explosion, and a Maid Power associated with her highest attribute, such as "Weapon From Nowhere" for Athletics or "teleport" for Luck. Favor and Stress are the two secondary stats derived from Affection and Will.

The core mechanic in *MAID The Roleplaying Game* is simple. A single six-sided die is rolled and the result multiplied by the appropriate attribute. If the result (anything between 0 and 30, depending upon attribute and roll) beats the target or an opposed roll, the Maid succeeds. Opposed rolls are used in combat as well, with the type of attack determining the attribute employed, the result being a Maid's Attack Power. The most notable penalty levied for any roll is that imposed for each item of her uniform that a Maid is not wearing!

Whatever the nature of the attack, damage is taken in the form of Stress. The exact amount is the Attack Power divided by the target's defending attribute, which feels awkward as a mechanic. Suffer too much Stress and a Stress Explosion is triggered, which forces a Maid to steal, cry, sleep, or binge, depending upon what the Maid rolled for her Stress Explosion during her creation. Alternatively, a Maid can accept the orders of the opponent who caused the Stress Explosion. Either way, this period lasts a minute -- in real time -- for each point of Stress taken, resetting it to zero. Alternatively, a Maid can spend Favor to reduce Stress.

Favor is the game's currency. Besides reducing Stress, it is spent to raise an attribute, improve a die roll or an attribute for an action, or to buy a random event. Such an event can be freely described by the purchasing player . . . or, of course, there is a set of genre-specific tables. Possible results include discovering a doorway to a fantasy world, the Master running away, or a sudden ninja attack! Why random events? Their use is designed to add spice to the game, to move it along, just because. The trick is not to overload the game with them.

Favor is gained by achieving objectives, such as attending to the Master (1d6), encouraging a nice atmosphere for the Master (2d6), completing a major task set by the Master (2d6 or 3d6), saving the Master's life (3d6 to 4d6), or even getting physical with the Master (2d6 to 4d6) once and multiple times (+1d6) . . . Of course Favor can be lost as well as gained, and if a Maid loses all of her Favor, she will be dismissed or she can sacrifice an attribute point for more Favor.

When it was originally published in Japan in 2004, the *Meido RPG* was just 50 or so pages long. Two further supplements followed -- *Koi Suru Meido* (*Maids in Love*) and *Yume Miru Meido* (*Dreaming Maids*) -- and both of these have been included in the English translation along with the core game. All together, they add options galore for both the Master (GM) and his Maids alike. These include new roles in the form of the Butler, the Head Maid, and Apprentice Maids; rules for creating both the Master and his Mansion; and rules for costumes, items, and the seduction and comforting of both Maids and the Master.

The rules for Mansion creation along with numerous additional Event tables allow a *MAID* game to be set across time and space, including Old Edo, a post-apocalyptic future, the Old West, and an archetypal Fantasy setting. The rules for Seduction enable Maids to gain romantic influence over another Maid or even the Master. The seduced cannot win in any combat with her seducer, so must follow her orders, but she can be given extra Favor by her seducer. The relationship set up by a seduction must be cultivated or Stress will be suffered, but if cultivated, Stress can be reduced. Ultimately, a neglected romantic relationship will trigger a Stress Explosion, which will also cause a Tragedy -- rolled on another table -- such as an attempted suicide or a scandal.

A game can be played as a simple race to gain Favor, or as an actual scenario, of which there are 11 in the book, which see the Maids celebrating a young Master's birthday; setting up a new mansion for a new Master; and helping the Master with his latest fad, a treasure hunt! The best of the scenarios, though, has the Maids escorting a candidate through a dungeon to the 10th level where he will be confirmed as the new Demon King and their new Master. Each Maid is an expert in an aspect of dungeon maintenance and administration, and together the Maids must not only deal with bored monsters, but persuade their potential new Master that his destiny really is as the new Demon King. Overall, these scenarios are nicely inventive and showcase what can be done with *MAID The Roleplaying Game.*

Also included in the pages of *MAID The Roleplaying Game* are several of what it terms "Replay." These are

transcripts of actual play, a phenomenon that is particular to the roleplaying hobby in Japan. Usually samples of play can be helpful, but with several of these being over 10 pages long, here they are just too long. I suspect that the appeal of the "Replay" for the Western audience has been lost in translation.

Physically, the layout of ***MAID The Roleplaying Game*** is useable rather than exciting. Primarily due to preponderance of tables, the layout style does feel dated. The artwork employs various Manga styles, and is reasonable enough, even if some pieces are used twice. Unsurprisingly, the book needs another edit and an index. A back cover blurb would be nice too. The contents also needs organizing, perhaps the setting and Master and Mansion creation rules could have been made more of an intrinsic feature much in the way that the Master creation rules are in ***My Life With Master.***

Advice for the GM is slight, focusing primarily on trying to explain what the game is to a Western audience. As befitting a humorous game, the actual advice boils down to keep the game light and keep it moving. If I have any real issue with the writing, it is the unnecessary use of bad language in the designer's notes.

Of course, ***MAID The Roleplaying Game*** draws upon one particular Manga sub-genre, Shojo, which is written for a female audience. This is not to say that a game cannot draw from Shonen Manga (Shojo's male counterpart) -- one scenario in the book even includes giant robots -- but ***MAID The Roleplaying Game*** is just a bit too earnest in its attempts to sell itself to male Western audience. It is as if it is trying to say, "Yes, this is weird, but it's okay, you can play this. It's Japanese." Really though, is this any more weird than playing a baby-stealing Kobold or a slave in the Old South or a faerie or a couple out on their first date? Well yes and no, because the simple truth is that the humor and the cross gender play of ***MAID The Roleplaying Game*** will lie outside of many a gamer's comfort zone.

If, though, you have no problem with the humor or the cross-gender play of ***MAID The Roleplaying Game,*** then there is plenty within its pages to keep everyone busy. Although it could have better organized, there is no denying that this game is very, *very* complete, far more so than would be expected for any other humor RPG. Even when the scenarios have been exhausted the setting tables add further possibilities for play, and make game set up very quick and easy. Quite possibly the oddest game released at Gen Con 2008, ***MAID The Roleplaying Game*** is good pick up game that might just be a lot of fun. If you let your hair down.

--Matthew Pook

Latent Malignancy

Six Horrifying Set Pieces for Your Horror Game

by Douglas Hamilton

In every RPG campaign there comes a time when the GM wants to scare the pants off of their players. This is where the horror game comes in, when the players put aside their itchy trigger fingers to investigate that creepy seaside town where people have been disappearing. These can be great fun, but how can one ensure that the players will be suitably soiling themselves with terror? Well, as we all know, the pulsing center of the horror game lies in the atmosphere. When the players approach the time-battered mausoleum, with the pale moonlight pouring down and the nightingale's song piercing their ears, the GM wants the hair to stand up on the back of their necks when they realize that the doorway is slightly open.

Of course, the location of the adventure is key to atmosphere, but let's say you want something new and different. Many groups have explored the abandoned church graveyard or gone a little too far into the local dark scary forest, so what's next? Here are six sites loaded with forgotten lore and buried sequence, to help get those creative juices flowing. Each site lists three categories. First there is "Function," which gives a short description of how and why these things fit well into the horror campaign. Second is "Plot," which lists a couple of adventure ideas for using these locales as the central area. Finally there is the appropriately named "Scary Bits," which is just of list of (semi-)location specific events which will work well at setting your players on edge. These could be hallucinations caused by fear, or they could be actual details the GM works into the story.

These set pieces are of a generally ambiguous place and time, so they should be easy to fit into most campaigns with a little work.

The Courthouse

The cracked stone path led unerringly to the courthouse. The monolithic edifice gazed down, uncompromising, absolute. Moss on the lifeless walls clung not to the stone but to the obscuring darkness just behind it. The pale light of the moon wrapped around the building, like the tendrils of some hidden monstrosity. The stained and sullied marble of the rough-hewn columns enforced the air of baleful judgment, which hovered like a suffocating mist.

Function

A courthouse can be an excellent place to include in a horror game. It inspires solemn fear and unemotional law in the same way as a church can. In fact, in can be even better than a church in that it can transcend any boundaries of religion, holding power over an entire town. A courthouse can also be chock full of violent history and emotion; after all, here is where people fight tirelessly to condemn or free others. There is a long history of physical violence in courts, from enraged brawls to mafia assassinations. Courthouses also have the vitally important aspect of an imposing look. They have been historically built of heavy stone, giving it the solemn appearance of a tomb. In addition, the columns and tower help emphasize the strength of the building. If those aren't enough reasons, then, darn it, if it's good enough for Ghostbusters it's good enough for you!

Plots

A powerful psychic/magical being subtly controls the judges and juries through its connection to the courthouse, intent on condemned the village using its legal system. Suddenly no one is found innocent anymore, and sentencing becomes more gruesome and violent as examples are made of criminals. This works well in backwater towns where the judge might be the highest authority.

When a killer is found innocent, the relatives of the victims gather in the courthouse for a ritual in order to summon something to bring justice. The only problem is that the summoned creature has a very skewed view of justice. For an extra twist, the original killer might come to the players, claiming to be innocent and asking for protection.

Scary Bits

- The heroes see apparitions of a silently watching jury.
- The sound of a banging gavel echoes from an empty courtroom.
- Ghostly voices of crying victims reverberate in the halls.
- Rattling chains of the convicted clatter at the periphery.
- Flags move indoors without wind.
- Symbols on flags transform into ritual symbols.
- Heavy courtroom doors open and slam shut.
- The stenographer typewriter moves and types on its own.
- The Bible rapidly flips its pages.

Giant Tree

According to the locals, the ancient tree has stood for as long as anyone can remember. Looking at its prodigious size, it's easy to believe. The tree itself is truly a monstrosity. The bark is cracked and split all over the trunk, like scars of some ancient war. The heavy roots have grown wildly, unhindered by rocks and stone, pushing even into the street. The branches cast a terrible shadow across the green, and no matter where the sun sits it seems like the dark tendrils reach every part of the town.

Function

A giant tree situated in the center of a town can be great at representing the uncontrollable power of nature against mankind. It can reflect the powerlessness of man against primal forces beyond their understanding. The presence of a grand old tree is also very fitting to horror: the twisting veins of the trunk and the tentacles of the branches and roots almost make a tree appear to be an alien life form. In terms of the adventure, a tree can provide a real, almost menacing living thing to center an adventure around. The tree can be a meeting point for an evil sect, or the thing itself can be a nexus of evil.

Plot

The tree has stood in the center of the small town since its inception, but the townspeople don't know that the odd carvings in its bark defines the tree as the last shrine to a pagan god. The entity has awakened and is attempting -- through murder and magical prowess -- to gain worship once again. The heroes must try to stop it from gaining power and discover a way to destroy the tree and its taint.

Long ago, a tribe of werewolves decided that the tree represents the center of their ancient territory. They have lived subtly in the town for generations until a local governing force decides to cut down the tree for the sake of expansion. As is to be expected, the tribe reacts violently, killing the workers assigned to the task, as well as the workers' families. The players need to find a way to identify and banish these werewolves.

Scary Bits

- Roots and branches twist and warp.
- Hideous faces appear along the bark of the trunk.
- The flowers and grass around the tree wither and die.
- Unearthly moans emerge from the tree whenever the wind blows.
- A skeletal hand reaches out from a hole in the tree.

- Ghostly branches envelope the adventurers.
- The tree cracks open from the trunk and bright red light pours blindingly out.
- Without warning, birds fall dead from the branches.

Library

What once could have been an opulent library of learned men has since been despoiled. Books have been ripped from every shelf while tables and chairs are strewn aggressively across the room. Despite the chaos which the room itself embodies, the air stands motionless. Dust hangs heavy and stagnant in the air, stifling any life left in the great hall. The thick air and the smell of rotting paper creates in you a sense of nausea. Reluctantly, you push forward; someone has to find out what caused this, and ensure that it never happens again.

Function

While it may seem obvious, libraries primarily work as an ideal place in which to store arcane knowledge. One possibility is that this knowledge is either the target for something horrifying or it has gained some malignant sentience itself. However, this is definitely not the only option. Libraries can also exemplify many of the ravages of age. They can be thick with dust, the wood of the shelves and chairs can be rotted and warped, and the building staffed by a woman older and colder than the stone with which it was built. Libraries are also good places to destroy, whether by cataclysmic forces toppling shelves and throwing books, or, sometimes more terrifyingly, by fire (a la *The Name of the Rose*). If those aren't enough reasons, then, darn it, if it's good enough for Ghostbusters it's good enough for you! (Huh . . . déjà vu.)

Plot

A man, brutally wounded, runs from the town library into the street, babbling about being tormented by Satan, before quickly perishing from his wounds. The trail of blood leads to a section in the back of the library about occultism and devil worship. The truth is that the owner of the library has gone sadistically insane and has a secret passage in the back of the library which leads to his personal torture chamber where he maims and kills his victims while wearing a devil mask.

A new shipment of books arrive at the local library infested with flesh-eating beetles. The librarian is killed immediately; when the heroes discover the creatures, it is revealed that these beetles cannot survive in sunlight. The investigators need to find a way to contain this threat before night comes and the beetles escape into the city. Then the source of the shipment needs to be found.

Scary Bits

- Titles spell out evil messages.
- The head of a stone bust transforms into a skull.
- Every page of a book is covered completely with blood.
- Shifting figures move between the shelves.
- Light bulbs burst or torches sputter and go out.
- White light pours in from a window at night.
- Organization cabinets open and close rapidly.
- Pages on open books flip rapidly.
- A chandelier starts to swing and creak.
- Curtains open and close erratically.

Island

The island is no more than a single great crag piercing the omnipresent ocean. It progresses upwards unevenly from

where you landed, in great steep steps of feldspar, rich in the red oxide of copper. Strangely, though the briny sea beats ruthlessly on it from all sides, there is little evidence of erosion or any build up of coral upon the rocks. Looking up towards the harshly blazing sun, you can just make out the tip of the rock sharpened to a delicate spike piercing the sky.

Function

Islands have always been the place for fiction writers to hide things, whether it be treasure, lost civilizations, or something more sinister. Islands can contain the last monolith of an ancient god, the lair of some hideous beast, or perhaps the bones of a demonic culture. There are three places to focus on exploring on an island. There is the surface, which can serve as the foundation for ancient buildings or markers. There are the shadowy caves, which lead winding down to unknown places, e.g. *Journey to the Center of the Earth.* Finally there is the water, which is an excellent element of horror. It can hide so much from the world, and humanity loses much of the control it has over the Earth when they are forced underwater.

Plot

The water level at the local harbor is starting to rise, at first slowly and then faster and faster as time goes on. As the locals begin to get worried about their houses and the farmers about their crops, the local sailors notice a new star in the sky which isn't moving. The heroes must follow the star to the distant island to find whatever creature or item is doing this, to prevent the world from drowning. Maybe the flood is just the preparation for something still to come.

The investigators are shipwrecked on the island; they explore and find small caches of human bones hidden around the place. In the very center of the island they find a pit, deep with rotting corpses. Nothing has been stolen from the bodies. After the players find this, they notice a gigantic stone saucer floating on the water towards them. Once it reaches the shore, demoniacally mutated beings arise from the sea and carry corpses to the pit before leaving again.

Scary Bits

- Ghostly shapes of animals or people move in the trees.
- Large rocks shift or fall.
- Shrieks coming from the depths of caves.
- Rocks appear to be human bones.
- Blood leaks from the stone walls.
- Devilish laughter echoes in the rustling leaves.
- The heroes experience hallucinations of the earth swallowing someone up.
- Ghostly fire covers the island.
- The ocean turns to blood.

Statue Garden

Beyond the baroque intricacies of the ironclad gate lies the statue garden. Upon the indistinct ground an accumulation of stagnant, rotting flora lies prostrate, longing for any shred of light. A host of misshapen statues stand impassive, risen up from the earth and enshrouded in shadow. Any remaining shreds of humanity in their shape has been lost, malformed lepers standing as scarecrows to the night.

Function

Statue gardens are inherently creepy, with stone creatures staring blankly out of emotionless eyes. A statue garden is not unlike a cemetery, with the silent stone arrange cryptically in patterns, and that's one of the reasons why the location works. Statues also suggest a kind of solemn and ancient power, like the courthouse. Statue gardens are also often found in areas of high wealth and social class and can be an opportunity for the PCs to explore horror in the

upper classes, instead of focusing on backwoods villages all the time. It's probably best that GMs *not* use the classic "statues coming to life and attack" plot; players tend to expect it whenever statues become principle aspects of a game.

Plot

A newly placed angel statue in the church's garden bleeds out of its eyes on Christmas Day. It is declared a miracle. The investigators, skeptics as they tend to be, set out to find the real cause. After getting access to the statue, they find out that there is a corpse sealed inside of the stone . . . and they note this is the case for many of the other statues as well. The murderer is the church pastor's wife who is being hidden by the pastor in order to keep face.

A cadaver is found impaled on the tip of an obelisk. More deaths follow, and after each the ground surrounding the obelisk becomes more sodden with blood. The obelisk is possessed by an evil poltergeist that is killing in order to use the blood to open a portal to another world in order to unite his spirit with his body.

Scary Bits

- Statues move and stare at the heroes.
- Silhouettes of the statues in the moonlight seem to bend and twist.
- Statues make "appropriate" sounds (lions roar, people scream, and so on); more can be extrapolated from what kind of statues are in the garden.
- Vines crawl up the statues.
- The sound of scraping stone seems omnipresent.
- Plants rustle without wind.

Harbor

As you set foot on the warped planks of the Easthill Harbor, the boards creek with strain. The wood, prematurely aged by tides of ocean water, has begun to deform and weaken perilously. Sullen boats along the dock drift erratically, submissive to the unfathomable whims of the opaque sea below. Pale light gleams harshly on the silent water, conjuring ghoulish shapes in the fog.

Function

The harbor has been a superb place for horror, most notably known from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. But that story only scratches the surface of the potential of a sinister harbor. A harbor, whether old or new, is essentially an attempt to control and utilize the untamed seas. And what better theme for horror is there than man's attempt to classify and control the unknown, an unknown filled with ancient gods and undead beasts! Much like the island, a harbor also involves the water, which can be an excellent plot device (see above). A harbor creates great atmosphere: the salty sea air, the eerie rocking of the boats, the aging wood beneath the heroes' feet, the way the lighthouse silently pierces through the fog -- any of these can be excellent topics to the make sure the PCs feel outside of their comfort zones. Finally, the harbor can represent a very uncertain escape for the heroes. It provides a getaway that can be hard to follow but it is largely dependent on the movement of the sea and the wind and can be quite slow and precarious.

Plot

In a nowhere town, corpses start to appear in the water of the harbor, too rotten to identify. Eventually a more recent body arrives whom one of the villagers identifies as a sailor from that town who had drowned at sea. At first the villagers rejoice that God has given them a chance to give their dead a proper burial. However the real cause of the bodies' return is that a local necromancer living near the harbor has obtained an item of great power which attracts the dead . . . and eventually animates them.

Harbor men notice an increasing level of a greasy skin on top of the water near the dock. As it increases, the plant life

and sea creatures around it begin to suffocate and whither away. Fishermen begin to get worried about their catches and immediately start a witch hunt to find the culprit in town. The real cause is the approach of a horde of undead sea creatures which exude the ooze in preparation for a meal, eating the remains when the ooze does its job.

Scary Bits

- Seagulls resting on the pier all suddenly awaken and fly towards the PCs, cawing with fear.
- Ghostly ships hover off in the distance.
- One of the beams supporting the pier breaks suddenly, throwing an unlucky investigator into the water.
- The heroes hear thrashing movement in the water with no cause.
- The lighthouse light suddenly goes out, throwing the area into darkness.
- The investigators think they see a man hung from a ship's mast.
- The names written on the side of the ships move to form malicious warnings.
- The moon is an unsettling red hue that night.
- A large wave leaves blood on the pier, but it is washed away on the next wave.

Pyramid Review

DM Campaign Record

Published by [Goodman Games](#)

Developed by Harley Stroh

Based on Campaign Tracker by Joseph Goodman

Art, graphics, and layout by William O'Connor & Peter Bradley

16-page b&w softcover; $4.99

Hot on the heels of each and every new game or edition is a fairly predictable roll of complementary products. The GM's screen is one such inevitability, and the various documents for tracking characters and events in a game are another. Goodman Games is an early adopter of the newest *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition* license, and their most recent release is from this latter set.

The *DM Campaign Record* is meant to help the referee keep things straight in his game. It starts simply enough, with a place for the campaign's name, its participants, and the books allowed. This might be a better resource for the players than the guy in charge, of course, but without perforation it's clear the creators don't expect that page to be removed, photocopied, and distributed to the game group.

It gets more specific as it goes. There's a place to list the major kingdoms, their various rulers, and the answers to day-to-day questions. Who kowtows to which gods, what are the calendars and currencies called, and who gets the day off? Then it's a sharp drop to what the players really want to know: Where does my hero work, worship, and drink?

Plots, Legends, & Villains is a neat idea, with columns for Heroic, Paragon, and Epic levels. Here the GM is supposed to put down these entities and come up with some sort of plan or surprising development for the team at each of the mentioned levels of experience. Trouble is, even a single sentence is asking the purchaser to put one helluva lotta information into some pretty small columns; it's like asking someone to enumerate their favorite movies and the reasons for their inclusion in the same space usually reserved for a grocery list.

One can fit three big NPCs into this volume and several smaller ones (sans their combat statistics) next to that. The heroes get marginally more space than the faces in the crowd, so the GM needn't keep asking the players for their heroes' Armor Class or Fortitude. An even darker element: There is as much space given over to ongoing modifiers and a list of character deaths as there is to the characters who may suffer same. Someone has a fairly cynical view of the party's chances.

It's good to have a page for the geography, but it's for a picture of the world painted with broad strokes. Above it the GM can list significant terrain features, but the tiny hexes in the blank map space won't allow much detail. A nice two-page spread accommodates the bulk of the action, so who did what to whom and when can be recounted for the benefit of posterity (and XP arguments). And then there's the full page left open for house rules -- apparently the party's odds aren't the only thing being questioned.

There isn't a whole lot in the way of art, nor need there be. The interior actually includes a bit of text: some welcome instruction to make sure the GM knows what a section can be used for. It's not baffling without it, but they made sure their helpful advice was worth the fin that was paid for it. The cover is nicely "wow," and the only thing that sort of

spoils it is the banner across the bottom where the GM can write in the name of his campaign. It's not clear what the producers thought the buyer would use to make lasting marks on the slick cover, but it won't be a pencil, or a ball-point pen, or a permanent marker, or a crayon, or . . .

The book excels by offering some things most other record books don't. There's a blank encounter table so the GM can tailored one to his world, and they even remind readers to include page references so details can be recovered quickly. A timeline of the world's events up to now lets the referee lay out a history (so long as he doesn't mind that only six notable things have happened since time immemorial). The inside covers round it out with nice random generators that call NPCs and tavern names into being with a few flicks of one's dice-hand; these tables make up for the full page they covered with a pickpocket table. There are some good adventure seeds to be had pulling something out of another's purse at random, but mostly this is a space-devourer.

The failing, if it can be called that, is that the **DM Campaign Record** is a jack of all trades but a master of none. Photocopies will be necessary if the game goes on for any real length of time. So many good ideas, so few with space enough devoted to their proper execution. Not only has the timeline a mere six spaces, each is like a compressed postage stamp. In some places this is merely a page-constraints issue, but in others it's the layout that cripples the feature; make as many copies as needed, but they may still be duplicates of a too-small font size. Buyers should find the price tag justifiably tempting, but should weigh that against the utility of individual elements.

--Andy Vetromile

Style and Substance

GURPS Thaumatology Designer's Notes

by Phil Masters

Three times that stately, violet-robed figure gestured with lifted arms, and three times the living flame deepened and paled. Then Jarisme's voice soared in a high, triumphant cry and she whirled with spread arms, facing the company. In one caught breath, all voices ceased. Silence fell upon them like a blow. Jarisme was no longer priestess, but goddess, as she fronted them in that dead stillness with exultant face and blazing eyes.
- C.L. Moore, "Jirel Meets Magic"

The idea behind ***GURPS Thaumatology*** is pretty simple; the execution turned out to be . . . well, a 272-page, rules-dense book's worth. ***GURPS** Third Edition* accumulated a number of different magic systems and variant rules for magic over the years; when the Fourth Edition appeared, people naturally wanted to carry them over. The baseline "spells as skills" mechanic, as defined in full in ***GURPS Magic,*** works more than well enough for many games, but fantasy magic is idiosyncratic and infinitely varied by its imagined nature, and it helps to have a really big toolkit when working on this stuff. A Big Book of Variant Magic seemed in order.

I would build that dome in air, That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

So I got the job. But doing this properly meant more than just working a bit of Fourth Edition jargon into such classic pieces of design as S. John Ross's "Unlimited Mana" mechanic (now renamed "Threshold-Limited" magic) or C.J. Carella and Stephen Kenson's ritual systems (now slightly expanded as "Path/Book" magic) . . . important though this was, given the fan base for both those creations. This had to be as complete as possible a guide to making magic work right for any given setting and conception, which meant reviewing pretty well the entire pre-existing ***GURPS*** product line for systems and ideas, and then generalizing them. Many of the specific cases survive in ***Thaumatology,*** though, because they make really cool worked examples or because they're too rich and interesting to lose -- which means that, say, Ken and Jo Walton's restructuring of the spell college system for ***Celtic Myth,*** and Ken Hite's catalog of Hermetic/Decanic modifiers, now have a new home. Like I said, 272 pages.

But magic, as everyone knows, has a price.

I did come to wonder about this project, actually. During the time I was working on it, I suffered two brief but interesting medical problems -- I'm claiming it cost me part of one eye and a day's memories -- and other people involved also had some incidents. We should probably be selling this book as *Extreme Roleplaying: Read It At Your Own Risk.* Less acausally, the playtest was, well, a substantial business, though a useful one; several parts of the book are definitely much the better for it.

And there were enjoyable moments, too. Finding appropriate pullquotes was an excuse to dig around some slightly obscure texts, not to mention a couple of my favorite comics and webcomics. Most of them made it into the finished book, I'm happy to say, though the C.L. Moore quote above and the closing lines of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" were squeezed out.

And all who heard should see them there, And all should cry, Beware! Beware! His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

And there were the examples and vignettes. The opportunity to kick back and write a paragraph or two of (okay, rather pulp-ish) fiction can be a pleasant break from intensive rules tweaking. However, with a project like this, I do try and make sure that the fiction illustrates and relates to the accompanying game material -- or, to put it another way, I like to think that the game mechanics can be used to create and play interesting characters, like the ones who I try to put in

the fluff text. A couple of examples have made their way into the e23 product -- **GURPS Thaumatology: The Age of Gold,** which is being published as a companion to the main book -- but just for the interest, here's another:

Montmorency de Rouen

Montmorency sees himself as tragic proof of the adage about a little learning being a dangerous thing. He is by nature (he would say) a quiet, harmless scholar, who would like nothing better than to huddle in some quiet garret on the Left Bank in Paris, burrowing through the library of the University and teaching a little natural philosophy to earn an honest crust. Unfortunately, his fate was instead to become entangled in a desperate secret war.

The fact is, however, that Montmorency is at least partly a victim of his own restless intellect, and to a lesser extent of his conscience. Born to a modest urban family in Rouen in 1474, he demonstrated a keen mind and earned a place at the University. While studying there, he developed an academic interest in certain rather arcane or even occult topics, and started digging through various bookshops and obscure areas of the library in search of hidden lore. On one occasion, however, he realized that someone else was evidently looking for the same manuscripts, and perhaps foolishly, he ignored warnings to leave that subject alone. As a result, he was kidnapped from his lodgings and dragged off for some very rough interrogation.

His captors came to understand that he really didn't know what he was involved in. They also learned he knew almost as much as them about certain supposedly secret topics . . . a fact which could have proven very dangerous for Montmorency. Fortunately, however, he was rescued in the nick of time by a band of swashbuckling swordsmen and mercenaries lead by a woman known as Ludovine L'Ange Dentelé (the Jagged Angel). Even more fortuitously, he was actually able to assist his rescuers with advice when his captors counterattacked, somehow sensing when magic was used against them and even suggesting effective countermeasures. The latter knowledge came from his studies, but the awareness surprised everyone; it seems that the stress and pain he'd suffered as a prisoner may have unlocked a latent gift. Among other things, this sense caused him to notice a tarnished silver amulet which was lying unremarked amongst a heap of small items which his captors had acquired for some reason; thinking that it was special without knowing why, Montmorency quietly picked it up as he passed.

Ludovine and her band decided that this half-crazy, battered scholar should be introduced to their employers, a mysterious group who call themselves the Order of the Rosy Cross, or "Rosicrucians" (not a term which is widely known in the world at large at this date). They in turn perceived that he had a magical gift, and recruited him to their cause, partly with the temptation of arcane lore which few but themselves could teach, and partly by telling him that his captors wouldn't now forget him or leave him alone, and suggesting that he'd be better protected among a band of skilled and knowledgeable warriors than he would be alone. He's not now sure if this was such a good offer, though; he finds that he's expected to go out on missions with those warriors, so whether or not their opponents are still after him, he certainly gets caught up in their fights -- and it turns out that their chief opponents are secretly minions of Rodrigo Borgia - alias Pope Alexander VI. The Rosicrucians, it seems, are locked in a secret war with the Borgias and other factions for control of the powers of the supernatural, and claim that the very future of the world is at stake. The trouble is, they are probably correct -- and in that case, Montmorency feels that he cannot desert them. Furthermore, the aching torture scars on his limbs often remind him that he owes a debt of vengeance.

However, Montmorency doesn't always let his situation worry him. He *has* learned a deal about magic in this new life, and when he's in a confident mood, he wields it with some enthusiasm. The trouble is, magic has a tendency to bite back, and fear of such hard reminders tends to throw Montmorency into a black and nervous state of mind. Worse, he has severe difficulty explaining the capabilities and limitations of his magic to his allies, who thus have come to regard him as an unreliable miracle-worker. He can understand why, but he's not sure how best to stay alive in a war which he didn't even know was happening until he became a battle-scarred casualty.

The Magical Context

Montmorency is active in a version of late 15th/early 16th century Europe in which magic works, but is very rare; specifically, characters in this setting use Threshold-Limited spell magic, with a standard recovery rate of 5 and

threshold of 20. (Montmorency's threshold is raised to 32 by his amulet.) The effective local mana level is normal, with few or no variations, but possession of any magical training at all (knowledge of any spells or Thaumatology skill) requires a 10-point Unusual Background. Montmorency initially started to unlock his own potential as a mage by experiments and study of a text which he found deep in the libraries of the University of Paris, and the stress of torture somehow completed the process, but much of his training comes from hints and partial texts given him by the Rosicrucians -- and he's smart enough to worry about this, as it may well leave him subject to manipulation and control in ways that he can't anticipate. The fact is, though, that worthwhile magical training in this setting really requires study of some kind of "style" or "tradition," and all such systems have peculiarities, gaps, and assumptions; the Rosicrucians aren't by any means the worst in this. They've certainly pushed Montmorency to learn a certain amount of "combat magic," in which he finds some cold comfort. Because of this training, he tends to use very mystical, poetic jargon when discussing magic, which sounds quite weird even by the standards of Renaissance Hermeticism.

Montmorency's effectiveness as a practical wizard also depends heavily on the amulet which he acquired while being rescued, which he has found allows him to use rather more magic than many mages in the setting, but which also represents a vulnerability. (It seems amazingly robust, maybe even indestructible, although it appears to be made out of ordinary silver; he has to wear it next to his skin.) He's managed to keep the fact secret so far (except from the Rosicrucians, who regard such things as toys and beneath their dignity), but he's still subject to the envy of other scholars of the occult; a few suspect that his power may be *stealable* in some way, and might yet make some move to see what they can get from him.

Montmorency de Rouen   *200 points*

A sallow, sharp-featured scholar, clean shaven and usually plainly dressed, prone to very visible mood swings.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Shortsword).
5'7"; 135 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 4 [0].
CF: Western (Native) [0].
Languages: French (Native) [0]; Arabic (None/Semi-Literate) [1]; Classical Greek (Broken/Native) [4]; Hebrew (None/Semi-Literate) [1]; Italian (Broken) [2]; Latin (Accented/Native) [5].

Advantages: Increased Threshold 3 (Gadget: Can Be Stolen: Can only be taken by stealth or trickery, -20%; Unique, -25%) [9]; Magery 0 [5]; Magery +2 (Gadget: Can Be Stolen: Can only be taken by stealth or trickery, -20%; Unique, -25%) [11]; Patrons (The Order of the Rosy Cross; 12 or less; Special Abilities: magical powers in largely nonmagical world, know many secrets; Minimal Intervention) [30]; Serendipity 1 [15]; Status +1 (Scholar) [5]; Unusual Background (Magical Training) [10]. *Perks:* Magical School Familiarity (See below; Rosicrucian Training). [1]

Disadvantages: Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Curious (15) [-2]; Duty (Service to the Rosicrucian Conspiracy; 12 or less) [-10]; Easy to Read [-10]; Enemy (Occult Borgia Minions; medium-sized group, some formidable or super-human; 6 or less) [-15]; Missing Digit (Missing Finger on left hand) [-2]; Post-Combat Shakes (15) [-2]; Sense of Duty (Those who've helped him in the past) [-5].

Quirks: Broad-Minded; Fears capture by the Borgias slightly more than death; Heavy scars on limbs (Easily identified when these are exposed, may attract all sorts of comment if noticed); Suffers from Overconfidence (12) whenever he has no more than a point or two on his Power Tally; Very nervous about magical Calamities. [-5]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Paris) (E) IQ [1]-14; Brawling (E) DX [1]-11; Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy) (H) IQ-1

[2]-13; History (Classical Roman) (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Linguistics (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Literature (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Philosophy (Classical) (H) IQ-1 [2]-13; Physician/TL4 (Human) (H) IQ-1 [2]-13; Public Speaking (Debate) (E) IQ [1]-14; Research/TL4 (A) IQ+1 [4]-15; Riding (Equines) (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-14; Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Thaumatology (VH) IQ-1 [1]-13*; Theology (Christian) (H) IQ-2 [1]-12.

Spells: Create Air-14 [1]; Create Fire-14 [1]; Daze-14 [1]; Detect Magic-14 [1]; Divination (Pyromancy)-14 [1]; Dream Sending-14 [1]; Dream Viewing-14 [1]; Earth to Air-14 [1]; Earth to Stone-14 [1]; Earth Vision-14 [1]; Extinguish Fire-14 [1]; Fireproof-14 [1]; Foolishness-14 [1]; History-14 [1]; Ignite Fire-14 [1]; Illusion Shell-14 [1]; Missile Shield-14 [1]; Mystic Mist-14 [1]; Phantom Flame-14 [1]; Purify Air-14 [1]; Purify Water-14 [1]; Seek Earth-14 [1]; Seek Water-14 [1]; Seeker-14 [1]; Sense Danger-14 [1]; Sense Foes-14 [1]; Shape Air-14 [1]; Shape Earth-14 [1]; Shape Fire-14 [1]; Shield-14 [1]; Simple Illusion-14 [1]; Sleep-14 [1]; Trace-14 [1]. (All spells include +2 for Magery.)

• Includes +2 for Magery.

Weave a circle round him thrice, And close your eyes with holy dread, For he on honey-dew hath fed, And drunk the milk of Paradise.

It should also be noted that *Thaumatology* isn't just about resurrecting old, Third Edition stuff; it also provides an excuse to examine many game mechanisms which have arrived or been expanded with Fourth Edition, applying them to conceptions of magic. There's a whole chapter finding new, magical uses for the "powers" idea which underlies *GURPS Powers,* for example, and a lot of examination of enhancements and limitations as applied to character advantages such as Magery. But not every new idea appeared in time for me to adapt it (which is probably just as well, given how much the book grew in the writing as it was). One such very recent possibility -- not one I thought of first, I admit -- is to apply some of the "Style" rules from *GURPS Martial Arts* to magic.

At heart, a *Martial Arts*-type "style" is mostly a bundle of skills, some mandatory, some optional, which are taught to stylists, along with some advantages, perks, and disadvantages which they often acquire. In this respect, the application of the idea to magic is obvious and straightforward. A magical style may be associated with a college, academic lineage, theological tradition, etc., and can consist of a set of spells, rituals, alchemical formulas, or whatever, known to the style's adepts. Careful choice of ingredients can give the style a very distinctive flavor, whether this means Fire College spells for a school of combative battle wizards, Path of Nature rituals for an order of pacifist priests who serve farming communities, or symbols of Knowledge and Pure Magic for highly academic scholar-mages who work a lot from first principles. Indeed, *Thaumatology* already covers some such ideas, with discussions of Priestly Spell Lists, Books of thematically linked rituals, and so on -- but introducing explicit magical styles takes things a bit further.

One thing to note here is that styles are only worth having if they give stylists an advantage of some kind over non-stylists. If non-stylists can freely learn anything that's taught in any style, but styles come with built-in restrictions, players won't generally want to look at them; any who do, for roleplaying or aesthetic reasons, will effectively be penalized, which is hardly fair. In *Martial Arts,* the main reason to study a style is that non-stylists may be restricted from buying up combat techniques, while study of a style gives a good (possibly required) excuse to take Trained by a Master or Weapon Master, and to learn various cinematic abilities for which those advantages are prerequisites. In addition, the Style Familiarity perk attached to each style gives small but worthwhile advantages. Magical styles need to offer as much.

But in, say, the standard spell-as-skill magic system, characters who can learn spells can generally learn any spell in *GURPS Magic.* Similarly, *Thaumatology* implicitly assumes that any ritual magician will have access to all or most of the rituals known in their setting, any alchemist can attempt any formula, and so on, unless the GM explicitly rules otherwise. In such cases, finding something for styles to offer is tricky. The obvious answer is to make specific lists of the spells (or spell *colleges* -- or rituals, or symbols, or whatever) known to each school, and to prohibit non-stylists from learning many or all of the magical options known in the setting. This can certainly generate a very "school-based" magical environment; however, the GM should watch out for problems with, say, spells that require

prerequisites from other colleges, or overly severe restrictions on magic due to the fact that nobody with training in only a single school can actually do more than a few things, and nobody can become a really impressive wizard without a lot of cross-training (which schools may even prohibit). It may be better to make much of the magic system available to everyone, but make some high-powered effects -- devastating area attack spells, symbols for supernatural beings, crucial Hidden Lore skills, or whatever -- the "inner secrets" of certain secretive schools. This in turn brings up another point about magical schools; the GM will have to decide how they see each other, how their internal politics work, and so on -- and most especially, how easy or hard it is to join one, and then how hard joining the first school makes it to join a second, or a third . . .

Also, magical schools may also have their own etiquette and complex internal rules, much like many martial arts schools (and with similar benefits in terms of discipline, prevention of accidents while learning to use deadly force, and so on). To reflect this, GMs may borrow the idea of Savoir-Faire (Dojo), or introduce a new specialty of that skill, "Savoir-Faire (Magical College)." Note that possession of the School Familiarity perk (below) for a school means that a character never suffers cultural familiarity penalties when using this skill within the school.

And finally, it's also worth borrowing one small but flavorful additional detail from the *Martial Arts* style rules: the Style Familiarity perk. In fact, the esteemed line editor, Sean Punch, has already tackled this in *GURPS Power-Ups 2,* creating the Magical School Familiarity perk. Now let's take this a little further, applying it to the more general concept of magic provided by *Thaumatology.*

New Perk: Magical School Familiarity†

You have studied with a particular master, academy, or guild that teaches a specific style of magic: a limited set of spells, alchemical formulas, ritual paths, books, or whatever. Paying a point for familiarity with such a school gives these benefits:

• You understand the arcane principles that undergird the school's magic, and you know at least the outlines of most of its teachings. You may have *at least* +1 to skills such as Occultism or Thaumatology, at the GM's option, when using them to identify or analyze magic performed by someone else using the school's teachings. The smaller the school's set of standard teachings, the larger the bonus you should receive, and for very standard procedures, recognition may often be automatic.

• You understand the arcane principles that empower the school's magic, or at least you are fully conversant with its flaws and foibles. Hence, you can always use standard countermeasures or defensive measures against that magic, and you don't suffer any sort of familiarity penalty, even if you don't know how to use the ritual, elixir, etc., that you are trying to defeat. Where appropriate, you can always use measures such as Counterspell or Ward spells at full effect against any of the school's magics, even if you don't know the actual spell or whatever you're trying to defeat.

(It's up to the GM to decide whether you can *always* counter a spell or whatever that the school teaches, even if it's being used by someone with a completely different training background. That depends whether the thing only has one possible form, or whether the versions taught by different schools are substantially different.)

• Because you have a solid grounding in the school's magic, you can generally extend your abilities with it without having to seek further teaching or even reference material. For example, where the school has a set of spells, rituals, or techniques which the GM defines as central to its teachings, you can acquire or improve them by spending earned points in play, wherever you find yourself at the time.

• You're acquainted with the school's culture. When dealing with another wizard who has the same perk, neither of you suffers -3 for lack of Cultural Familiarity when making Savoir-Faire rolls, Teaching rolls to pass along the school's ideas, or similar.

• You probably have the equivalent of a 1-point Claim to Hospitality (p. B41) with an academy, guild, or archmage. This mostly means that you have somewhere to stay while studying.

Note that this perk should be restricted this to settings with a fair number of different magical schools or styles active; if everyone uses the same style, Style Familiarity becomes a dirt cheap multi- purpose skill bonus with extra benefits.

The Witch Murders

A Modern Occult Adventure For *GURPS*

by James L. Cambias

Salem, Massachusetts, is famous as the scene of 17th-century witch trials. But now the town is in an uproar. Since early September, Salem has been the scene of five murders attributed to the "Witch Killer." The police suspect a serial killer, the local Wiccan community blames Christian persecution, and a vigilante group blames "occult crime."

This adventure uses the standard *GURPS Magic* spells with certain assumptions. Earth is a Low Mana zone, and the magical modifiers from *GURPS Cabal* work as described. The police and most of the population believe magic is nothing but trickery and superstition.

Involving the Heroes

There are several ways for a group of PCs to get involved in the Salem witch murders investigation.

Law Enforcement: Law enforcement agents are the easiest to insert into the story: They are invited by the Salem police department. Initially, both the pro-witch (ORDO) and the anti-witch (SMACC) factions assume the heroes are on *their* side, and are quite cooperative -- but once they see that the PCs are not taking their side, they become more hostile and confrontational.

Journalists: A juicy multiple murder involving claims of witchcraft and persecution -- in Salem, no less! -- is catnip for the media. Reporters get a polite but arm's-length reception from the cops. Negus Robertson is full of professional courtesy. The rival vigilante groups scramble for media attention.

Busybodies: Characters *without* any official standing have a tougher time. The police are fed up with amateurs. ORDO and SMACC react favorably to sympathetic strangers, but both are suspicious of "police spies." ORDO may recruit outside investigators to overcome "police bigotry."

The Murders

There are five killings attributed to the Witch Killer. For each murder, the facts are broken up into what the public knows, what the police know, other information, and the truth. Dates are given for 2008.

The First Sacrifice

Public Information: Sandra Farinelli was murdered on Saturday, September 6 in a quarry south of Salem on Swampscott Road. She was 17 years old, a high-school Goth girl. Her body was found the next day by a police officer responding to an anonymous tip. Death was caused by a single stab to the heart.

Police: Sandra's stab wounds were inflicted by a very unusual blade (an obsidian knife, in fact, though they haven't determined that). The scene was carefully cleaned up. There were no sign of any sexual assault or other injuries to the victim, no drugs or alcohol in her system.

Other: Sandra's mother, Gloria Farinelli, is convinced that all that witchcraft stuff is nonsense, and suspects a "sex

maniac" did it. Sandra's friends know that she was interested in the occult, and was a regular at Books of Thoth (her friends also hang out at the store, and Tasha King will soon learn about anyone asking questions).

The Truth: Sandra was sacrificed to provide extra magical power for a spell Tasha King was performing. Tasha killed her on a Saturday, in a quarry, using a flint knife, in order to cast the spell Earth to Stone on a ceramic cat figurine. Tasha hoped to transform it into gold, but only got a gold-silver alloy. The statue is still for sale in her shop, valued at $20,000. Sandra came willingly; she was interested in learning about magic and Tasha promised to show her the real thing.

The Second Sacrifice

Public Information: Anne Ireland, a 16-year-old athlete, was waylaid as she was jogging through the woods near the Peabody Reservoir on September 22. She was killed by a single stab to the heart. Her body was found amid "occult paraphenalia" by a pair of joggers who heard a cry of pain.

Police: Ireland's wound matches Farinelli's. Again, there's no sign of a struggle, or drugs, or any restraint -- apparently she lay down on the ground and let someone stab her. The killer got away without leaving footprints or the murder weapon, but did leave behind a number of occult items: black candles placed in a pentagon around the body, quartz crystals and crow feathers scattered over her, and a small cypress-wood figure of the Egyptian god Geb was placed on her abdomen.

Other: Her parents, Tom and Martina, run the Lobster Pot restaurant and have no idea who could have done it. Anne was a champion field-hockey player and runner, and had taken self-defense classes.

The Truth: Tasha used a Loyalty spell to get Anne to come and be murdered. It was the day of the fall equinox, under an oak tree, using an obsidian knife. This time the Earth to Stone spell turned a small marble statue into gold, which Tasha sold to a gold dealer in Boston for $75,000 on September 26.

The Red Herring

Public Information: Cindy Cole, a 19-year-old T-shirt vendor, was killed in an alley in downtown Salem, just off Derby Street on October 25 at approximately 2 a.m. She was last seen an hour earlier, leaving the Black Cat pub a block away, where she had been drinking. She was struck on the head with a brick and died about an hour later.

Police: Miss Cole's body showed signs of a fight, with torn clothing, bruises, and scrapes. She was legally drunk. The crime scene indicates two male assailants wearing athletic shoes. No fingerprints or DNA recovered.

Other: Cindy's grandmother Josephine (her parents both live out of state) is convinced witches killed her. Her friends are very unhelpful since most of them have been in trouble with the police before (-4 on Reaction roll to law enforcement, -2 to anyone else). Investigators who get a particularly good reaction roll (16+) can learn that she used to be pretty wild, but was trying to straighten up -- "no more getting stoned, no more hookups with guys."

The Truth: There was no occult connection -- Cindy was out drinking, met a couple of guys from her old high school (Dwayne Jermyn and Henry Spoletano) and started flirting with them. Things started to get out of hand, and when Cindy tried to leave, the boys got rough. When she screamed, Henry panicked and hit her with a brick. Both Henry and Dwayne were sufficiently drunk that neither one actually remembers who killed Cindy.

The Third Sacrifice

Public Information: Roanna Eagleburg, a 23-year-old Boston University student, was found floating in Salem harbor on November 1. She was stabbed in the heart.

Police: The police can't tell if Eagleburg was killed with the same weapon as Farinelli and Ireland, because the killer did a thorough job of messing up the wound post-mortem. Otherwise, no sign of a struggle, no drugs or alcohol. Time

of death was approximately midnight on Halloween.

Other: Roanna's parents, Louis and Sarah, live in Brookline, Massachusetts, and are afraid their daughter may be the victim of a hate crime because she was a lesbian. Roanna lived in a dorm at Boston University, but had no roommate. She was studying Communications, but had an interest in occult matters. In the trash can in her room is a copy of the Boston *Phoenix* with part of one page of classifieds torn out. If the investigators track down an intact copy of the paper they find the missing piece is from the Personals and includes one ad which reads "TRICK OR TREAT? SWF seeks SWF for Halloween in Salem. Must love books, cats, Celtic music." There's a phone number which is the Books of Thoth bookshop in Salem. (If confronted with this, Tasha King simply insists that nobody ever responded to the ad.)

The Truth: Roanna answered the ad, and took the commuter train up to Salem on Halloween. Tasha took her home, cast Loyalty on her, then did the sacrifice in the basement of her shop before dumping the body in the harbor. Her death powered another Earth to Stone spell, producing a solid gold Mayan calendar wheel which Tasha sold on ebay November 6 for $80,000.

The Coverup

Public Information: Isaiah Schweitzer, age 27, was found stabbed in his Proctor Street apartment in Salem on November 8. Mr. Schweitzer was a graduate student at Boston University, and worked as a Salem tour guide.

Police: The murder weapon was one of the victim's kitchen knives -- it was found at the scene, carefully washed. He was stabbed in the back four times and died of blood loss. He had a lot of books about magic and the occult, and was carrying a mezuzah in his pocket. No sign of forced entry, but his computer was missing.

Other: Schweitzer's family live in Houston and know he was interested in magic and the occult from his teens. The family is Jewish, but not observant, and his parents would be surprised to hear that Isaiah was carrying a mezuzah. He was getting a Master's degree in anthropology from Boston University. Isaiah did have a study carrel in the university library, and among the books stored there is a notebook with the dates of the Witch Killer attacks and notes on their occult meaning. Farinelli's death has "Saturn's day, Virgo -- decan Ieropael rules Earth magic." Ireland's says "Equinox! Also Virgo, and under an OAK tree! Ieropael again?" Cole's death has "?? DOESN'T FIT! Wrong day, wrong sign." Eagleburg's says "Samhain! Ieropael's power max!"

The Truth: Isaiah figured out the pattern of the killings and realized the Witch Killer was doing some kind of magical working. Unfortunately he mentioned it to Tasha King, asking her to pass it along to the rest of ORDO. She came to his apartment and tried to cast Permanent Forgetfulness on him, but his mezuzah protected him. So Tasha finally just stabbed him when his back was turned.

The Vigilantes

Two community groups have formed in response the Witch Killer attacks. Unfortunately, they seem more interested in blaming each other for the crimes and accusing the police of covering up the truth than they are in actually helping protect the town.

ORDO

The Old Religion Defense Organization was founded by Dehianna Lundberg. She runs the Moon Woman Teahouse and is a very vocal and proud Wiccan. Lundberg is convinced the killings are the work of a "Christianist fanatic." She thinks Salem's Wiccan community needs to "take it to the streets" and is spoiling for a fight. One reason Dehianna is so combative is that she's being egged on by Tasha King, an ORDO member who also happens to be the Witch Killer.

ORDO has about eight serious members, local Wiccans genuinely alarmed by the murders. They patrol the streets in pairs wearing black T-shirts with a blue pentagram stencil on the front and "ORDO" on the back. So far they've prevented two purse-snatchings and a burglary -- and gotten into a brawl with a trio of Mormon missionaries. ORDO

vigilantes are average individuals armed with cell phones and pepper-spray cans.

Dehianna Lundberg has ST and DX at 11, and Comfortable wealth from her successful business. She is Attractive, but has the Odious Personal Habit "Confrontational." She has Dancing, Judo, Occult, and Theology (Wiccan) at 12, but her Cooking skill is 14. Other ORDO members have similar stats, without the wealth and cooking ability. Lundberg is 34 years old, currently single, and has a large pentagram tattoo on her shaved scalp.

SMACC

Salem Mobilized Against Cult Crime came into being at the same time as ORDO. Its founder, Frank Duncan, thinks the killings are the work of a "witch cult." Duncan runs the Salem Witch Terror Dungeon, a small-time "educational" haunted house and wax museum. He has a grudge against the local Wiccans after some complaints that the Terror Dungeon "perpetuates negative stereotypes." Right now SMACC consists of Duncan, Jacob Caldwell, Josephine Cole, and Henry Spoletano. Mr. Caldwell is a local history buff whose chief purpose in life is to tell people that the witch trials actually occurred in the village of Danvers, and that Salem's maritime history is much more important. Mrs. Cole is Cindy's grandmother. Henry, of course, is Cindy's killer.

SMACC doesn't have enough members to do regular patrols. Instead, Frank sends out a blizzard of press releases and emails, and turns up with the whole crew and anyone he can round up at demonstrations and public events. They insist that the reluctance of the police to accuse anyone of the murders means there's a coverup -- which implies the whole Salem police force, if not the entire town government, is secretly infiltrated by witch cultists.

Only Frank Duncan actually owns a weapon: He has a permit for a .38-caliber revolver, which he keeps on him. Henry is a habitual brawler.

The Press

Negus Robertson is the reporter for the *Salem News* who is following the Witch Killer story. He knows all public and police information. Robertson is on fairly good terms with the police, and won't publish information they want to keep a lid on -- but if he thinks some out-of-towners are going to get a scoop, he'll go ahead.

Robertson knows most of the people involved in SMACC and ORDO, and privately dismisses both groups as crackpots. Unlike the police, he is willing to consider occult motives; he doesn't believe in magic, but he can imagine a crazed killer might.

Robertson has IQ 12, Area Knowledge (Essex county) and Research skill at 14, and Detect Lies at 12. His other abilities are normal for a middle-aged African-American man with a desk job.

The Police

Sergeant Phillip DeSoto is the detective in charge of the Witch Killer case. He is entirely skeptical -- he isn't even convinced the killings are the work of the same person. DeSoto's personal theory is that the murders are drug-related. He suspects Schweitzer and Eagleburg may have been dealing to the Salem high school kids. DeSoto has little patience for either vigilante group, but is a little sympathetic toward ORDO -- anything which gets citizens involved in reporting crime is a good thing . . . except for that business with the Mormons.

If the heroes are law enforcement, DeSoto is helpful and shares information -- but insists on being there for the bust. He's not going to let someone else hog all the glory. He is polite and noncommittal with reporters, polite and completely unhelpful to busybodies.

Sergeant DeSoto has IQ 12, DX 11, Combat Reflexes, Law Enforcement Powers, Honesty, and Post-Combat Shakes. His Area Knowledge for Salem is 14, and he has Forensics, Holdout, Intimidation, Law, Research, and Streetwise all at 12. He carries a 9mm automatic and has Guns (pistol)-13. He is 38 years old and is married with three kids.

Other Busybodies

If the situation isn't complicated enough, the GM can throw in some rival investigators poking around Salem.

The rash of killings has attracted the notice of the [Serial Murder Resource Center](#). The Center has dispatched Adam Wayne Hessler to look into the matter. Hessler's goal is to find the killer before the authorities, and help him or her get away clean. Note that the SMRC does not have any working occult knowledge, but if they form an alliance with Tasha King, the organization suddenly gets a lot more dangerous.

Murders with genuine occult significance will of course attract the attention of the Cabal. The Draco Viridis Lodge of Boston sends a Novice, Carlton Kirby, to look into the matter and make contact with this promising new mage. Like Hessler, Kirby's goal is to find and protect the killer.

Both Hessler and Kirby are likely to realize that Cindy Cole's death doesn't fit the pattern, and will work to find her killer and pin all the deaths on him. The ideal method would be to kill Dwayne or Henry, make it look like suicide, and write a confession to leave with the body.

Research

Following up Isaiah's notes requires a university-caliber library -- like the one his study carrel is in the middle of. A successful Research roll reveals that Ieropael is the decan governing earth-magic, including transmutation of metals. Ieropael is part of the Zodiacal house of Virgo, and is associated with the planet Saturn. It is also connected with the ancient festival of Samhain, known today as Halloween.

Checking on Salem High school yearbooks will show that Cindy Cole was a classmate of Henry Spoletano. One of the "candid" shots in the yearbook shows Cindy, Henry, and Dwayne Jermyn sitting together on the hood of Dwayne's old Mustang.

Henry and Dwayne

Henry Spoletano and Dwayne Jermyn killed Cindy Cole in a drunken three-way fight they can barely remember. Henry struck the fatal blow but doesn't know it. The two young men have managed to keep quiet about it, but their crime is gnawing at them. Henry has joined SMACC and is trying to cover up the crime by loudly blaming the "witch cult." Dwayne drinks himself unconscious every day.

If questioned, either one will crack on a successful skill roll by the interrogator -- and promptly blame the other for killing Cindy. This is good enough for Sergeant DeSoto, who can easily get them on aggravated assault.

However, Henry is just violent enough to try to silence Dwayne if he thinks he might spill the beans. He'll try to beat Dwayne to death in his apartment, then make a run for Canada in Dwayne's car. In the ensuing uproar, Tasha King will try to plant the obsidian knife near Henry's home (he lives with his stepfather) and thereby pin all the Witch Killer murders on him.

Henry and Dwayne both have ST 12, all other stats 10. Henry has Bad Temper, Dwayne is Alcoholic.

The Killer

The Witch Killer is Tasha King, owner of an occult bookstore called Books of Thoth. She is a practicing witch (though not a Wiccan -- she's a lapsed Methodist). She was using the victims as sacrifices to aid in transmutation spells, turning stone figurines into gold. Tasha needs the money because there is a rare book auction coming up in Providence on December 9, featuring a book by Johannes Faust which contains rituals for summoning powerful demons.

Tasha King   *205 points*

Caucasian woman, age 42. Height 5' 2", weight 130 lbs. Hair dyed black on the left and white on the right.

ST 10, DX 12 [40], IQ 13 [60], HT 12 [20]
Dmg. 1d+1/1d. BL 20 lbs. HP 10. Will 16 [15]. Per 13. FP 16 [12].
Basic Speed 6. Basic Move 6.

Advantages: High Pain Threshold [10], Magery 2 [25]. Disadvantages: Addiction (Ecstasy spell) [-10], Bad Sight (mitigator: contact lenses) [-10], Callous [-5], Secret (killer) [-20]. Quirks: Always tells *literal* truth, Distinctive Feature (black and white hair), Technically a virgin, Uncongenial [-4]. Languages: Egyptian: Spoken (None)/Written (Accented) [2], German: Accented [4], Latin: Spoken (Broken)/Written (Accented) [3].

Skills: Archaeology (IQ-2)-11 [1], Computer Operation/TL8 (IQ)-12 [1], Detect Lies (Per-1)-12 [2], Guns/TL8 (pistol) (DX)-12 [1], Knife (DX)-12 [1], Literature (IQ-1)-12 [2], Occultism (IQ+1)-14 [4], Research/TL8 (IQ)-13 [2], Stealth (DX)-12 [2], Thaumatology (IQ+1)-14 [4]*.

*Includes bonus for Magery.

Spells: Bravery-13 [1], Earth to Stone-15 [4], Ecstasy-15 [8], Emotion Control-15 [4], Fear-15 [4], Flesh to Stone-15 [4], Foolishness-15 [4], Forgetfulness-13 [1], Loyalty-15 [4], Permanent Forgetfulness -14 [4], Seek Earth-13 [1], Sense Emotion-13 [1], Sense Foes-13 [1], Shape Earth-14 [2].

Gear: Tasha owns a Glock 9mm automatic pistol (see p. 278 of the Basic Set), an obsidian dagger (see p. 275 of the Basic Set), and a notebook describing all the spells she knows. She has three Powerstones: a 5-point Earth college Powerstone in the form of a large sapphire pendant, which can only recharge when touching the earth; a 4-point Mind Control college stone in the form of a ruby set in an iron brooch; and a 3-point all-purpose Powerstone in the form of an amber pendant, which must be exposed to the light of the Sun to recharge. She carries cigarettes laced with garlic and powdered wolf brain to get a +1 skill bonus on Mind Control spells.

Books of Thoth

Books of Thoth is a small shop in old Salem, specializing in used and rare books. The building has three stories plus a basement.

Tasha King lives on the top floor, in a four-room apartment accessible by an outside staircase on the back of the building. A search of the apartment will turn up her obsidian knife (hidden in the toilet tank) and her spell book. She keeps her Glock pistol in a lockbox under her bed unless she's carrying it.

On her bedside table is the catalog for Valecroft & Sons, the auction house in Providence. The catalog describes an upcoming sale on December 9, offering volumes from the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. Most are German works on metallurgy and mining from the 15th century. One page has the corner folded down: "Handwritten volume, German, circa 1500, attributed to Johannes Sabellicus Faust. Quarto, 64 pages, hand-bound, Fine condition. Text contains descriptions of magical rituals and names of demons, with 8 hand-colored illustrations. Starting bid $100,000." There is a fine amber gem hanging up in the bathroom window to catch the sunlight -- it is actually her all-purpose Powerstone.

The second floor is part of the shop, and can be reached by the rear outside stairs and by an interior staircase from the ground floor. It is devoted to science fiction, mystery, and romance paperbacks. The stock is sparse, with whole shelves empty. Tasha has been selling off her stock to raise more cash.

The ground floor is the main part of the shop. Tasha keeps the rare books and nonfiction there. As on the second floor, the stock seems surprisingly sparse, and there are signs up advertising a 50% off sale. During the day, Tasha King

mans the cash register, and half a dozen local kids, including members of ORDO, hang out in the shop smoking clove cigarettes and trying to sound knowledgeable about magic.

The glass case next to the cash register holds the few really valuable books Tasha hasn't sold yet, and a cat sculpture made of electrum. A successful Perception roll allows one to notice that the electrum statue is absolutely identical to the ceramic cat bookends Tasha uses throughout the store. In the drawer below the cash register are Tasha's ledger and account books. They show that she's been systematically piling up cash for several months, selling off her inventory, taking out loans, and ignoring bills. An Accounting or Administration skill roll can reveal that Tasha has piled up more than $300,000 in available funds.

The basement is accessible through a staircase from the ground floor, and via a padlocked walkout in the rear. During the day the stairs are marked "STAFF ONLY." The basement is Tasha's magical workroom, and there is a very old magical pentagram carved in the floor, 1 yard across, created by a witch with skill 16. Tasha has a cabinet of magical supplies, with candles in various colors, herbs, and neatly-labeled vials of animal blood. There is a strong smell of bleach in the room, from the clean-up after Roanna Eagleburg's murder. Tasha's Earth College powerstone is hidden under a loose paving stone beneath the worktable. Isaiah Schweitzer's personal computer is in the cabinet under a box of candles. Its hard drive contains his more detailed notes on the occult significance of the three murders, and how Cole's death doesn't fit the pattern.

Endgame

Tasha is quite clever and utterly amoral. If she feels threatened by investigators, she will use ORDO (and anonymous tips to SMACC) to interfere, identifying PCs as the killers, anti-Wiccan bigots, secret witch-cultists, or all three.

For increased chaos, she will use magic to coerce ORDO members to make threatening phone calls, then erase all memory of having done so, so that the victims seem to be making unfounded accusations. The goal is to get the PCs into a physical fight with Lundberg and the vigilantes, which would almost certainly destroy the investigators' credibility with the police. If that isn't enough, King will also try to get individuals alone and use Permanent Forgetfulness on them to erase any suspicions.

Evidence of magic isn't worth anything in court. The heroes need to connect her directly with the crimes. She does have Isaiah Schweitzer's computer. The obsidian knife hidden in her bathroom is identifiably the murder weapon for two of the killings. Of course, evidence aquired illegally won't hold up, but if Sergeant DeSoto really suspects Tasha he can bring the full weight of modern criminalistics against her -- even a single hair from the Ireland murder site would be enough to put Tasha at the scene.

Tasha is absolutely fixed on getting the Faust volume at the auction. Even if she is accused of the murders, she will do her best to stay free on bail until the case comes to trial, and will encourage her lawyers to drag out the case until after the auction. Once she can command powerful demons, no jail will hold her and the heroes have a much bigger problem.

Winning Means Never Having to Say, "I'm Sorry!"

During GenCon, I actually got to do a bit of roleplaying, thanks to my friend Matthew Gandy (who's working on an anime RPG of his own; hopefully he won't mind me linking to his blog). The game -- "Jedi in the Vineyard" -- takes the popular indy RPG sensation **Dogs in the Vineyard** and transplants the ideas and mechanics to . . . well, that would be telling.

Just kidding. No, it was set in the *Star Wars* universe, during the time of *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith.* We two players took the roles of Jedi during that period, trying to get to the bottom of whatever is going wrong with the Jedi Council and/or the Emperor. We had a fun time; I was very rusty gaming-wise, having not sat down at an RPG table since the birth of our youngling two years ago. But the bigger problem (for me) stemmed from the difficulties of trying to untangle the story . . . a story we came into knowing completely well how it turns out. In my mind, *Episode III* is utterly incomprehensible from a "what the heck do we do?!" standpoint. I swear, I've watched movies about Vietnam that were less morally ambiguous than *Episode III.*

It was really frustrating both as a watcher of the original movie and as a player in that universe: "I know I don't want this Emperor guy to get what he wants, but does that mean I oppose the Jedi in the war? Am I siding with the anti-government separatists?" It seems that, in these Clone Wars, there are two factions: evil robots and creepy morally ambiguous clones of someone I know turns out to be a bad guy. Can I just let my Jedi retire to a mountain top and meditate instead? (Or even a swamp planet . . . Yoda has the right idea.) Frankly, even if Palpatine were hit by a truck after the opening text-scroll of *Episode III,* I still don't know what our characters could have done to make the galaxy a decent livable place, how to untangle all the problems, or who I'd side with. While that might make compelling storytelling for some, having no one I fully identify with or any feasible course of action is a tough sell for me.

Or, rather, it's a hard sell in a *Star Wars* game, my perceptions of which were painted by watching the original Trilogy in the theaters. The original *Star Wars* stands out as one of the *least* morally ambiguous movies of the 1970s. Someone (quite possibly Harlan Ellison) postulated that only *Star Wars* could make a "war" movie seem good, right, and fun again; in the years after the less-than-optimal Vietnam Conflict, the notion of having a military-focussed movie with clearly defined Good Guys and Bad Guys seemed downright ludicrous.

(I note, for the record, that I have no problem with morally ambiguous or problematic situations -- I likes me some **World of Darkness** -- but it's just not what I envision in my mind when I think of *Star Wars.*)

(I also note, for the record, that I haven't seen any of the prequel Trilogy since I saw them in the theater. So perhaps *Episode III* is a lot more clear-cut than my memory serves. But, even so, it's certainly not as clear-cut as "rebel good guys against amazingly oppressive government that blows up planets.")

Anyway, one thing I took away from that -- which I've danced around a bit -- is that there are some situations where there is no "right" solution; no amount of cleverness or fighting or brilliant plans will forestall the inevitable. This has certainly been driven home lately, as the world economy stands on the ledge of a metaphorical building while the cosmos shouts, "Jump! Jump!" The world's leaders are trying to do what they can to prevent the worst, and they might succeed. But they may not . . . and they may not succeed because nothing can be done. Heck, at present, we all know of one big universal unwinnable conflict whose icy grip brings our lifelong dreams to an end. (For you Chicago baseball fans, I'm talking about death. Although, curiously, death is one of the first things to fall in many campaigns, whether its sci-fi cloning, fantasy resurrection, or comic-book "I thought you were dead!"-isms.)

Now, whether or not such hopeless unwinnable outcomes should be incorporated into RPGs is open for debate. I note that if the GM has determined ahead of time there is nothing the heroes can do to resolve the situation, then that can be frustrating for the players . . . especially if the players learn that the situation *is* unwinnable. See, in most games, the GM controls the horizontal and the vertical, and if he wants to make it so the heroes are utterly incapable of leaving their rooms in the morning, he can do so. ("As you try to leave the tavern, you learn the door is stuck! The chimney? It's being plugged from above. The cellar door? Err . . . the room below is stacked to the floorboards with rats. And the rats are on fire.")

Personally, when I GM, I tend to think of a situation as being probably hopeless, and I mentally plot out the most likely actions and the less-than-satisfactory outcomes. ("Mentally," of course, because I never write anything down.) But if the players come up with something brilliant that I think would work, or if they surprise me with their resourcefulness or determination, then they can win even "unwinnable" situations.

I suspect this was the tack taken by Matthew when he GMed our "Jedi in the Vineyard" game. And, sadly, we weren't up to the task of saving the universe.

Of course, it's also possible that we didn't pick the best things to do because, in the "real" *Star Wars* universe, there was nothing that could be done . . . except wait, and hope things get better in a future time, a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Murder of Crows (for [Call of Cthulhu](#))

Published by [Super Genius Games](#)

Written by Stan!

Illustrated by Luis Guaragna & Stan!

Cartography by Stan!

32-Page Full Color Saddlestitched Book; $12

34-Page Full Color 5.1 Mb PDF; $7.99

From just the one -- Pagan Publishing -- the number of licensees for Chaosium's *[Call of Cthulhu](#)* has spawned into a squamous clutch, aiming to publish both new scenarios and supplements for the game and new variants of the game using alternative rules systems. Pelgrane Publishing's excellent *[Trail of Cthulhu](#)* is an example of the latter that we have already seen and now a *Murder of Crows* is our first example of the former. Published by Otherworld Creations through its Super Genius Games imprint, this scenario is the first of a series set on the fringes of Lovecraft Country.

A tale of isolation and horror, *Murder of Crows* takes place in the fictional town of Bethlehem, New Hampshire (as opposed to the real town of [Bethlehem, New Hampshire](#)), forest bound and desperate to find a means to survive in the face of its failing logging industry. The town's leading figure, Prescot Walker, is sure that he has hit upon such a means: tourism. In the last few years, Walker has directed the town to prepare itself as an autumnal retreat for visitors, specifically wealthy dilettantes and socialites, and from these few weeks Bethlehem has made enough money to survive the rest of the year.

This year has been different though. The deep woods surrounding the town have had visitors of their own: crows. Literally a "murder of crows," coming right up to the town's edge to watch Bethlehem and her inhabitants, and harassing and pecking at anyone who stepped under the canopy to enjoy its ruddy colors. Such incidents, together with the townsfolk's distrust of the tourist visitors were enough to drive the outsiders out *and* get this "Murder of Crows" a write-up in the press.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Word from the fleeing dilettantes and the news articles are the hooks for any investigator to become involved in this scenario. Alternatively, the scenario suggests that the investigators could be ornithologists or naturalists with a professional interest in the unnatural avian behavior; socialites or journalist coming late to the town and the story; or former natives of Bethlehem returning to solve the mystery. The investigators need not be experienced in terms of the Mythos, or in terms of classic investigative skills such as Library Use. Indeed, outdoorsman and interpersonal skills will be probably of more use.

When the investigators arrive in Bethlehem, they discover that the crows have not gone away since the tourists have left. Initially the birds will remain in the woods, but as the new interlopers tackle the recalcitrant townspeople, the feathered creatures will move closer, watching, gathering, and perhaps even flying dangerously close... Sometimes they even appear when an investigator is not looking, and will disappear just as oddly. If anyone ventures into the woods, they will be subject to a murderous assault of deadly pecks and scratches. As the investigation moves closer

towards its final realization, crows are not the only threatening fauna that the interlopers will face: spiders, frogs, and the like will hop and scuttle towards them and around them. Eventually, in an act of extreme intelligence, the vermin will spell out message or two intended directly for the investigators. First a warning or two, but later an invitation . . .

Murder of Crows is divided into three acts, but this is not really the case. The acts are more a means of organizing the scenario's content, because it only really has two parts. Act one covers the investigators' activities in Bethlehem, while act two details the response made by the "villain" of the piece. Acts one and two run simultaneously, with the strength of the response growing until the investigators are literally invited to act three and onto the denouement with the aforementioned "villain."

[END SPOILER ALERT]

In terms of production, *Murder of Crows* lacks polish. It desperately needs a good edit and a good proofread, and the handouts fail to impress. If a handout is meant to be a newspaper article, why not make it look like one? And if the investigators are expected to look into the history of Bethlehem, why not provide a handout to give this information rather than expecting the Keeper to relay it parrot fashion? As to the town map, why not present it with North at the top of the page, instead of at the bottom? Also, considering that the investigators are bound to go there, why not include a map of the villain's home? In addition, none of the scenario's NPCs are given a physical description, leaving the Keeper more unnecessary work. That said, the inclusion of two or three quotes for each NPC that a Keeper can bring into play is a nice touch, although no advice is given to this end.

Four pre-generated investigators are provided: two physical and two academic characters. The quartet feels rough around the edges, and why both academic characters possess a Cthulhu Mythos skill of 10% is never explained. The inclusion of this skill is superfluous anyway, given the very minor involvement of the Mythos in *Murder of Crows,* which has the side effect of making the scenario very easy to run with the horror RPG of your choice. It's also easy to set the scenario in the 1890s of *Cthulhu by Gaslight* or in the here and now of today. That said, the next scenario in the series, *The Doom from Below,* promises greater Mythos involvement.

Where *Murder of Crows* has the potential to shine is in presenting an unnerving and slowly encroaching menace. After all, if it was good enough for Daphne du Maurier and Alfred Hitchcock, why not a scenario for *Call of Cthulhu?* It is not, though, a scenario to run for the player who suffers from arachnophobia, or indeed either batrachophobia, insectophobia, ornithophobia, or scoleciphobia. (Or maybe that would just add to the scare factor?) Anyway, the use of the various creatures in *Murder of Crows* is an effective device, one that a Keeper should enjoy applying. The scenario is short, though, perhaps providing at most one or two good sessions of play -- and definitely one if the players send their investigators to one location in the town too early. One bonus for long-time Keepers is that *Murder of Crows* represents much wanted support for the Lovecraft Country setting, one that can be thematically linked to the scenario, "The Madman," from the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook.

With the shelves at your local gaming store starved of releases for *Call of Cthulhu,* anything new for the game will be welcomed by its adherents. Thus it will be so with *Murder of Crows,* which -- despite its physical shortcomings -- will be welcomed all the more for lying on the fringes of Lovecraft Country.

--Matthew Pook

Franklin

by Nicholas Dowbiggin

On a parallel Earth, the capital of a vast empire sits on the West Coast, founded by exiled American revolutionaries for whom liberty was a lost cause. In the times after their city flourished and grew, refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.

The Birth of a Republic

1776 A.D.: The Viceroyalty of New Spain establishes Fort San Francisco and the Dolores Mission, with the intent of converting the native Yelamu Indians.
1778 A.D.: George Washington's Continental Army deserts him at Valley Forge during the long and grueling winter.
1780 A.D.: The Kingdom of Spain intercedes on the behalf of the French in the American Revolution, entering a colonial war in North America with the British.
1781 A.D.: The British army finally puts down the waning revolt among their 13 Crown Colonies of British America with the help of the Tories and the passive neutrality of the Moderates, a party of former Patriots and other Americans who had predicted the downfall of the revolutionaries during the past three years. The Founding Fathers of the attempted insurrection flee the colonies into the Indian Reserve beyond the Appalachians, followed by the remnants of the Continental Army and known Patriot families who are exiled upon their refusal to swear a loyalty oath the Crown.
1783 A.D.: As part of a treaty with the British to exchange territories captured in their colonial war, Spain agrees not to allow any assistance or sanctuary to the American exiles in their colonies of Florida or the Spanish-governed French colonial territory of Louisiana, stretching across the middle of North America. After two years of beleaguered settlement building among hostile natives, with their pleas for sanctuary refused by the Spanish, the Patriots set forth West to find a new homeland.
1789 A.D.: After eight years trekking through the uncolonized wildernesses of Louisiana and the upper reaches of Spanish Mexico -- trading and negotiating with natives and New Spain ranchers alike -- the exiled Patriots reach the abandoned mission at San Francisco, which had previously fallen to a pox that spread among the priests and Yelamu natives and provoked the recall of the Spanish soldiers stationed. They establish the city and Republic of Franklin there, named after the Founding Father Benjamin Franklin. Franklin had returned from France with funds and supplies to join them in their exodus rather than cowardly abandon the American cause, and had died of dysentery during the last year of the journey. It was largely from his precepts that John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington founded Franklin.
1800 A.D.: Spain returns Louisiana to the hands of the France, allowing the still-developing Franklin settlement to use the treaties it had forged with the natives and trappers of Illinois County to arrange for a supply route from New Orleans to their fledgling city-state.
1821 A.D.: The Mexicans win their independence from Spain. With the use of the ideas from Franklin delegates, the democratic faction wins over those wishing to establish their own empire; thus the Mexican Republic is formed.
1841 A.D.: The Pacific Fur Company loses its control of the Oregon territory after the death of its owner. A provisional government establishes itself, aided by the Republic of Franklin and the growing disinterest of Britain in its American holdings.
1846 A.D.: Along with the rest of California, Los Angeles -- sometimes rival and sometimes ally of Franklin -- secedes from Mexico. The resulting war is negotiated to a truce by Franklin, acting as a neutral party and bosom friend of the Mexican Republic. Under this treaty California is established as an autonomous zone, and those Louisianan and British-American settlers in Texas and other Mexican territories are encouraged to immigrate there.
1850 A.D.: Having long lived by a derivative of the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention of Franklin results in California and Oregon voting themselves in as states of the Republic.

Franklin, Then and Now

Since the foundation of the unified republic, the city-state turned capital has lived on in the same manner it had survived during that colonial period: through strength of ideas rather than arms. The city survived a civil war that wracked the American continent and two great world wars after that by using religion, trade, scientific achievements, political manipulation, espionage, and imperialism . . . but never direct, brute force.

From its columned streets the words that incited slaves to rebel and free-staters to fight were uttered, but never did a single soldier or rifle leave the city walls headed for the fray. In its Senate halls echoed the words that condemned the imperial powers as a whole and damned their conflict, while boats surreptitiously left its docks laden heavy with food and treasure to fund the survival of their old friend, France. And during the Second World War, while under the brutal occupation of Imperial Japanese forces, inventions such as radar-jammers and man-portable V-rockets still managed to be constructed in the basement of the Symposium in secret and smuggled out to the Allied democracies. During the ensuing Cold War between East and West, the city retreated into isolation and the Republic fell into decline and backwards thinking, protected by the most sophisticated missile defense system in the world and kept in self-reliant automation by nuclear power.

The discoveries made by the Viking Probe in 1975 sparked the imaginations of a new generation of citizens and propelled the vision and glory of the capital toward the conquest of Mars and the New Millennium.

All Roads Lead To . . .

Franklin has been many things throughout its history: last refuge of political exiles, frontier settlement, Republic capital, seat of an interstellar empire. The very stones of its streets seem to invoke human achievements far more ancient than the city itself, giving the feeling of being outside the rest of the world; it's a sentiment that characterizes Franklin as a place and a people. Regardless of the period it's being visited in, this self-proclaimed center of the world has a purposefully timeless quality about it. Unless visited in its uncertain infancy when all its "grandeur" amounted to a wooden palisade surrounding an abandoned church, the capital of the Republic and later throne of the Empire of Free Worlds will provide travelers with enough stories for a lifetime. The city has long existed as a sort of Puritan Rome, giving public display to all the civic glory but none of the grandiose hedonism (which hides in its catacombs, aqueducts, back-streets, and behind the graffiti-riddled walls of its private estates). Using stones hauled from the Sierra Nevada range, the city was built piece by piece, assembling a living tribute to all the wonders they attribute to the Masons: Rome, the Pyramids, and the temples of Jerusalem.

In the late 20th to early 21st century, the population of the city of Franklin is approximately eight million people in a sprawling metropolitan complex consisting of the entire Bay Area, living in varying degrees of population density. The Old City, by the Golden Gate, retains its original walls, though the once defensive gates are now always open to the rest of the expanded city. Even though the other quarters have tried to maintain the white column architectural design of this oldest portion, the realities of dense urban population and modification required by modern advances have prevented all of them from being as stately and dignified as the center of both the federal and city government.

Entering the city from any of the cardinal directions, one will pass under a grand arch with the seal of the city, the phrase *Deo Favente Perennis* ("Enduring by the Favor of God") emblazoned around the symbol of the all-seeing Eye of Providence. This portion of the city is dedicated to administration of the Republic/Empire and of the city itself, not to habitation or commerce. As such, the Franklin Metropolitan Police Department, a massive organization in themselves, has no authority here; law enforcement instead falls to the Praetorian Guard of the federal district of Old Franklin. Also unique to this portion of the city are the many hills, which forced city-planners of the past to design it in plateau-like tiers (reminiscent of those of the ancient Incans), and later supported with entrenched geological stabilizing equipment designed by the geniuses at the Symposium Institute of Science.

The Old City is home to the Capital Building, which houses the Senate on the lower level and the office of the Consul (chief executive of the federal government) on the the upper. The Old City also features the Hall of Centurions, where the military administration is centered; the Curia, highest court in the land; and also the office of the Tribune, the elected leader of the city of Franklin outside of the Federal District. Most proudly, the Old City also features the truly massive Forum, where citizen committees throughout the land can meet and discuss matters. The Forum also hosts a more private section where the Council of Tribes speaks for the individual provinces of the Republic/Empire convenes.

Less prestigious but no less important are the other federal administration centers located in the Old City, such as the Hall of Government, where the censors and quaestors work; and buildings of local government, such as that of the Public Curator, who handles zoning and planning for the city.

In *GURPS* terms the city of Franklin, from the beginning of the 20th century onward, is approximately half a TL above the rest of its world. This is mostly due to the unrestricted experiments of scientists from all over the world who flock to the Symposium Institute of Science (which is perhaps the most significant memorial to Benjamin Franklin in a city named after him). This means that Franklin tends toward the more advanced limits of its world's TL, or -- when the TL's limits are already being explored by other nations -- the lower end of the next level. If anyone in their world has a chance at identifying *Infinite Worlds* Parachronics or other out of place phenomena, it would be them.

When the settlement stopped merely being an encampment and was formally founded, the city charter took effect. In the haste and seclusion of their circumstances, their plan of government was heavily inspired by the Roman Republic, which was more of the democratic ideal to the Founding Fathers than the Greek city-states or the form of the commonwealth. Because of the independent fervor and the general radicalization of revolutionaries exiled for political reasons, the charter also contained an interpretation of the Declaration of Independence that was, in essence, their version of the Bill of Rights. All men being created equal and other principles ceased being mere ideals to live up to and were instead clearly stated points of law, ending slavery and overt institutional racism and classism. It would not be long until this interpretation would widen even further, including women's suffrage and other progressive changes.

The founding principles of their society were not merely practical or moral; there were also touches that still exist today for reasons mostly emotional by way of politics. Most obvious is the curious dominance of Latin, not English, as the spoken language in Franklin, though the Republic has always allowed the dominant language of the people of a province to be the official one of that region. While not a written law throughout most of the city's history, the use of Latin -- not only in public signs and notices within the city-limits but also in the exterior signs of private establishments -- is a tradition that peer pressure keeps alive and strong. However, because so many people pass through Franklin (to the point where around one million of its residents at any time are assumed to be temporary) most shops have their interior menus and display boards in English, Spanish, or even Russian, depending on what quarter of the city they're in. (Interestingly, scholars hypothesize that the teaching of Latin in the city's schools from a young age, and the general high quality of education stressed by the Franklin Board of Knowledge, is one of the reasons many people from throughout the Republic come to the city to start families.) Of course, traditional Latin or no, many languages are spoken in Franklin, even before it became part of an interstellar empire. Its people encompass the descendants of the exiled patriots: hispanics, caucasians, African-Americans, and Native Americans descended from the populace of the early Republic, and the city has grown because of families started by political exiles, radicals, free thinkers, artists, and scientists seeking freedom from heavy research restrictions over the decades. And as the Republic and its fame grew, so came to be the state of so many travelers moving through, bringing an even greater diversity of language to the stone paved streets at any given time.

Franklin, Right or Wrong

Since its earliest rise to power, Franklin has been the headquarters of three major political parties: the Plebians, founded by John Adams and Thomas Jefferson; the Patriarchs, founded in the legacy of George Washington after his death; and the disillusioned Equestrians born out of the strife between the two. At any given time all three of these parties occupy high-ranking positions in the city and federal government, making infighting a way of life. Less scrupulous officials are always looking for new agents to use against their rivals, and even the most saintly politician makes the news of foreigners and other strange visitors to the city their business, in hopes of gaining an edge in the rat race. The presence of foreign agents, time travelers, dimension hoppers, or unknown alien races would immediately become another element to this dangerous and sometimes deadly game.

The criminal underworld in Franklin is literally that, running gambling halls and brothels out of the catacombs and aqueducts beneath the streets in what amounts to an open secret known but not acknowledged by even the most upstanding citizens. These enterprises are dominated by the Collegia, a class of organization that can include organized crime, labor unions, and private corporations. Each organization has their own legitimate fronts on the surface world,

to varying degrees, from legitimate groups and businesses that participate in the illegal vice trade on the side to murderous gangs who make it their primary focus. Because of the nature of the underworld in the city, regular law and order cannot enter there, even in a limited intrusion. A murder or other unsolved mystery that occurs down in the underground can leave both the Metropolitan Police and the Collegia in an odd position . . . a position from which they might find it easier to just hire a third party, especially one that's composed of outsiders and presumably less likely to be extorted by conflicting interests.

Other adventure possibilities for those seeking to turn a profit range from the mundane to the absurd. Because the currency of the Republic is much like the U.S. dollar save for the image of the wild turkey instead of the bald eagle, it could be of great interest to collectors of legal tender from alternate Americas. More grandiosely, the capital city would be a natural target because of the Treasury, a pyramid shaped building in the Old Franklin district. This building was originally constructed as a treasure trove for the mother lode gold discovered by accident when stone was being mined to build the Old City. However, a heist under the nose of the Praetorian Guard would require either developing dangerous contacts among the Collegia, risking open combat in the streets, forging even more dangerous contacts among Treasury officials or other politicians able to pull relevant strings, or using abilities/technology foreign to the Republic. The final option would risk allowing the Symposium to theorize the origins and mechanisms of the strange occurrence and thus risk the criminals' cover . . . and, with it, knowledge of their world falling into unfriendly hands.

While the nation it leads is home to many faiths and religious tolerance is part of its charter, the predominant faith of the ancestral residents of Franklin is Deism, in many forms. Headquartered in the city, the Church of The Clockmaker is a Deist sect which believes God created the natural order of the universe and would never allow it to be violated with supernatural influence. The latter belief separates the Church of the Clockmaker from the philosophy of most of the Founding Fathers and their inheritors. Because of their fervent belief in the wholeness of the universe as defined by science, their organization could be a major opponent to time or dimensional travelers and perhaps even seek to suppress such "demons" and knowledge of their existence through violence.

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Ice Flow

Published by [Ludorum Games](#)

Designed by Dean Conrad & John Streets

Illustrated by Rich Aidley

24 Blue Acrylic Ice Floe Tiles, Cloth bag, 12 Explorer Pieces in 4 Colors, 15 Red Rope Pieces, 15 Brown Fish Pieces, 5 White Polar Bear Pieces, 2 Diomede Island Cards, 14 Ice Flow Cards, 4 Player Guide Cards, 4 Rucksack Cards, 12 by 18.5-Inch Full Color Board, & Four-Page Full Color Rules Leaflet; $49.95

Games Expo is my local games convention here in Birmingham. In just two years it has acquired a good reputation, the organizers working very hard to cater to not just a wide spectrum of gamers, but also a family audience. This year I decided to get involved, and did so by being a judge for the convention's own awards. My speciality was RPGs, but since the convention places an emphasis on board games, I also took note of those nominated for the Games Expo award. The winner was *Ice Flow*, the second game from Ludorum Games, a publisher whose first game, *Fagin's Gang,* just happened to win the same award at Games Expo '07.

Ice Flow is a light, euro-style board game with a strong race theme and a minor ecological theme, with both puzzle and resource management aspects. Designed for two to four players, aged 11 plus, a game can be completed in roughly an hour for the younger players. For them, it can be played as a simple race game, but for older or more experienced players *Ice Flow* has a nasty "take that" mechanic that will quickly cure you of any love you had for the polar bear.

The game's theme is simple. Each player tries to be the first to get a team of three explorers from Alaska to Siberia across the Bering Strait, on foot, all while leaping from ice floe to ice floe, swimming between ice floes, dodging polar bears, and riding ice floes that will probably end up drifting off in the wrong direction. Its slight and probably unintentional ecological theme extends as far as leaving the players to wonder if such a race is even possible given the effects of climate change.

When you open up the box for the first time, what catches your eye are the 24 acrylic tiles. This description fails to do them justice though. Each is a rich blue transparent hexagon, 1.5 inches wide from side to side. Two or three sides of each hexagon are not smooth, but roughly cut representing the ice ridges of the pack ice. These ice floe tiles are wonderfully tactile and while another game publisher might have just used cardboard pieces, the use of these acrylic tiles neatly adds several degrees of quality to *Ice Flow.*

The game's other components are of an equal quality, including the explorer meeples (which you really can imagine are wearing fur parkas), the fish, and the polar bears, all in wood. The cards rely on symbols -- of fish, polar bears, and rope -- to get their message across, reflecting the game's multi-lingual audience.

The game's board depicts the Bering Strait, the coasts of both Alaska and Siberia, and the Diomede Islands in between. The Bering Strait is just six hexes wide, each column of hexes representing a sea current that runs north or south through the strait. These currents carry the ice floes through the Straits at varying speed and an explorer might be able to ride the ice floe up and down the strait to his advantage, or if a rival player has his way, then not . . .

At the start of the game each player receives his three explorer meeples, which are distributed between the American

starting camps, and one fish and one rope, which are placed on the player's rucksack card. The players take turns placing 12 ice floe tiles on the board. These are seeded with fish, polar bears, and rope as indicated on the Ice Floe Cards. Each player also receives a Player Guide Card, which again uses symbols rather than text to explain a player's possible actions per turn. They are perhaps too cramped and initially will need referring to the rules for a full explanation.

On his turn, a player must do two things -- an Ice Floe action and an Explorer action -- which can be done in either order. For an Ice Floe action, a player can add another ice floe to the board from its southern or northern edge and seed it with fish, polar bears, and rope as indicated on a newly drawn ice floe card; move an ice floe along the current it sits on (one, two, or three hexes, depending upon the current's speed); or rotate an ice floe by 60 degrees. The last two actions cannot be done to an ice floe occupied by a rival explorer, unless the acting player also has an explorer on it. If a Diomede Island card is drawn when a new ice floe is added to the board, the resources that would have been placed on the ice floe are instead placed on the island.

An Explorer action can be any one of several options, each involving either a combination of movement and items, or just items. There is no limit to how far an explorer can move in his phase, except for the terrain and the resources he needs to cross that terrain. He can cross from one hex or ice floe to another with ease as long as the edges between them are smooth. If they are rough, then for each rough edge an explorer needs a rope to climb them. This rope is left behind as the explorer moves onto the new floe or Diomede Island if he makes it to the middle of the straits where he can cross from American to Russian territory. It is possible to swim across a single hex of open sea, but a fish is required to do so. As long as a player has the resources, he can keep an explorer moving. If there is rope or fish on the hex that the explorer stops on, then he can pick one of these up and add them to the team's rucksack to be used by everyone in the team.

There are also other uses for the rope and fish. An explorer can spend a turn using a rope to fish, which uses up the rope, but gains the team two new fish. He can not only expend a fish to distract and bypass a polar bear, he can also come to a stop on the ice floe occupied by the polar bear and use the fish to drive the predator off. The polar bear then moves off in a direction chosen by the player, either onto another ice flow or out of the Bering Strait, but not onto land in Alaska or Siberia. If the polar bear moved in this way stops on an ice floe occupied by another explorer, then he must immediately vacate his current location, even if it means using rope or fish to get to adjacent ice floes. If any explorer lacks the means to escape the suddenly bear infested ice floe, he is in serious trouble. Fortunately, the explorer can be airlifted back to Alaska before the polar bear eats him! As the rules state, in big bold letters, "Nobody dies in *Ice Flow.*" It is entirely possible, though, that a polar bear can be bounced from ice floe to ice floe as the players engage in polar bear pinball between rival explorers.

Play thus switches between resource gathering and actual movement. Time has to be spent gathering fish and rope, though each team's rucksack only has the room for three items, and the availability of resources will vary throughout the game. Players will find themselves introducing new ice floes to the Bering Straits just to get access to more rope and fish.

The first player to get his team of three explorers to Siberia wins the game, which at its core is a simple race game. Yet it adds thematically fitting complications: the shifting playing surface of moving pack ice, the threat of roving polar bears, and of course, rival teams. Beyond balancing these complications, a player can still use his Ice Floe action to his best advantage, whether that is to add a new ice floe and new resources or to move an ice floe to his best advantage. This might be to line up an explorer's movement or to impede a rival's possible movement, and lining up an ice floe just right has the same satisfaction as slotting a piece into the right place in a jigsaw puzzle. Of course, when a rival moves an ice floe to your detriment, it is equally as frustrating.

It is hard to identify any real issues with *Ice Flow.* That the rules leaflet is a little too fussy and cluttered is a minor issue. More of a problem might be that the game can give a player too many decisions to think about, but that can be over come with a friendly nudge or two. Nevertheless, being able to change the play space through the shifting ice floes, along with being able to attack other players with the polar bears, are features that will hold the interest of the dedicated gamer. They make *Ice Flow* more than just a simple race game but not so complicated so as to confuse either the casual or the younger player. Great components (the ice floe pieces, in particular), an easy theme, game play

that can be as light or not as needed, and simple fun, *Ice Flow* delivers all of these.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Rocketville

Published by [Avalon Hill/Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Richard Garfield

Full-color boxed set with 5 Popularity Markers and 100 Campaign Promises in five player colors, game board, Campaign Rocket Token, 21 Robot Cards, 20 Endorsement Cards, 6 Undecided Tokens, 64 Campaign Promise Cards, four-page 8"×8" rulebook; $35

Rocketville is a bidding game set in a large space city. All players tour together with the Campaign Rocket until it has toured every district, and the player with the most popularity at the end is elected mayor (which is presumably a good thing). The first aspect of *Rocketville* to grab the eye is the use of a 1950s future look (not unlike the film *Robots*). The colors are generally soft and do not detract from game play. The score and rocket tokens are pleasing to the eye. The board is a six-by-six playing field surrounded by a white victory track over a starfield. In the playing area are six contiguous districts in four colors (each of six squares). The iconographic bonuses depicted on each square indicate slightly different attributes to be possessed, including Zone (such as "Residential," "Rich," and so on), drawing a Robot Card, drawing a Robot card, drawing a Campaign Promise card, or +/-1 Popularity. The Campaign Promise deck holds two kinds of cards: white (10-39), which can be played equally in any region; and color cards, which are better than white (40-48) in their home region, but poorer elsewhere (1-9).

Setup is fast, assuming all components are kept separate: each deck is shuffled, and players take their color pieces and a Campaign Planning card. The players' Popularity Markers start at "5," and all players are dealt four Campaign Promise cards and a Robot card. A single Endorser card is flipped over, not yet belonging to any player. One player is chosen to go first, and he moves the Campaign Rocket onto any space on the board. Each round of play begins with a bid for popularity on the territory where the rocket sits; players place a card face-down, and all are revealed simultaneously. The highest value card (from 0 to 48) wins. A single winner places his token (Campaign Button) on the square and gains any additional bonuses or penalties for winning (as marked on the square). A tie forfeits the zone as "undecided," and a neutral marker wins the square. Players who chose to play Campaign Planning cards (0) get them back, and draw another Campaign Promise card. If only one player chose a Campaign Planning card, then he gains possession of the Endorser card, for better or worse. Two examples include: "Add 2 to the value of each of your Campaign Promises," and "When you mark a space, gain 1 Popularity." Victory comes after all territories have been visited. Bonuses to Popularity are awarded for majorities in specific neighborhoods (of six territories). A player's Robot cards can grant extra awards of Popularity, based on the cards that player has remaining in his hands.

Rocketville revolves around playing Campaign Promise cards, and balancing the need to replace those cards by instead playing Campaign Planning cards. Thus, a player may only bid every other turn, on average. Winning players must move the Campaign Rocket carefully, as a trapped Rocket with no adjacent squares to escape to will cost a player popularity (although not necessarily that player's). Campaign Planning must also be done carefully, as finishing last in certain zones can carry penalties. The Endorser and starting Robot cards are optional, but add a lot of variety to the game, making each experience slightly different. Cute sayings such as "No new giant robot disasters" add charm to the game, and the rules are fairly clean and well illustrated. The game play example is in an appropriate place, but an example of scoring, or moving all the scoring rules onto the same page, would help. Also, due to the similar names, it can be easy to confuse Campaign Promise and Campaign Planning cards in explaining the rules.

With a pedigree of large companies behind it, *Rocketville* provides a space-themed game of winning popularity, which boils down to a game of War with color-matching. For such a bidding game, it succeeds at what it is trying to do using robots, and as such *Rocketville* displays a strong showing in the polls.

--Eric Funk
Special thanks to Jameson Hogan for his vote.

When It Comes to Complexity, Some Like "Complex," Some Like "Itty"

When you think about it, games actually have two levels of complexity to contend with, neither of which has much to do with the complexity of the game itself.

Namely: "How complex a game are you able to enjoy?" and "How complex a game are you able to find players for?"

It's a concern that doesn't come up with a lot of types of entertainment; if I enjoy reading James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* no one else's input really matters. If I want to see *Eraserhead,* then at worst my inability to find others to watch it with means that I'll be eating the gargantuan bowl of popcorn alone . . . a feat of which I am easily capable.

But games are an oddity in that the desires of the entire group need to be taken into account. Although some players are game for anything, most have desires (which should be expressed) and aversions (which need to be mitigated or taken into account). The curious thing is that both desires and aversions are seldom boolean "yes or no" expressions.

Aside the first: One of the odd things I've had a hard time communicating with others -- especially my wife, who tries to be accommodating to a fault -- is that there is often an odd calculus regarding my desires and aversions. For example, I'm not a huge fan of overly random games (such as *Zilch* or *Yahtzee*), but I know my wife and her family enjoy them. In fact, as best I can determine, they like such games more than I *dislike* them . . . which is reason enough for me to go along with the group. (It's the same mental computations that she employs when she permits green peppers to touch her food, with the conditions they either be large enough to pick out and toss on my plate, or small enough to be invisibly incorporated by the rest of the dish.)

Unfortunately, in some situations where I try to do such calculations, I run into the problem that my expressing a lack of preference (to, say, *Yahtzee*) is taken as putting the kibosh on the whole idea. (Part of the problem, of course, is that there is no scientific unit of pleasure; I can't say "Well, *Yahtzee* only gives me three or for centihappys, but I know it gives you at least a couple decahappys, so I think we come out ahead going with that.") I suspect many people would be willing to go along with a game that may not be their first choice if they know that the group would be willing to do the same when the time came.

Aside the second: There's another curious tendency that I've run into, which is mistaking "I have enjoyed something" for "I want nothing but that thing." For example, let's say I enjoyed an intense psychological scene in an RPG, and let the GM know. The next session I note that there are more psychological scenes, at the expense of other stuff I enjoy. And the session after that, the balance is again skewed for my character so that I'm only getting the thing I said I enjoyed one time.

In this case, communication has failed. And, in much the same way as there's a difference between "I like cake" and "I want to eat nothing but cake from now on," so too can there be a gulf between what you enjoy and how much you enjoy it. It's easy to be miserable if you get too much of what you want. (In the hypothetical of the psychological scene, perhaps I might have forestalled things by saying, "I really enjoyed that scene with the crazed farmer, but I can only handle about one of those kind of scenes a month." Presto! Preference stated, along with an upper threshold.)

Unfortunately, game complexity -- especially when it comes to strategy or competitive games -- often doesn't respond well to the notion of "I'll go along with it." Partly this is because a lack of enjoyment of game complexity often stems from a lack of desire (or ability) to digest a thick rule set. But, perhaps more importantly, complex strategy games often require players to play to a certain baseline of ability. If you have a complex game with six players where only three or four are playing "right," it can have dire consequences for everyone else's enjoyment. (This is unlike RPGs, where a player can more easily fade into the background if he doesn't wish to be as involved with a type of gameplay he doesn't enjoy.)

I've seen neophyte tabletop gamers brought into sessions of **Battletech,** with predictably disastrous results. I would

want to make sure that everyone who shows up at a **Star Fleet Battles** knows what they're in for. Sure, someone who arrives at a **Fluxx** game when he doesn't enjoy that kind of madcap fun is likely to have as little enjoyment as the complexity-hating gamer who arrives at a **Star Fleet Battles** game, but the **Fluxx** player at least has a good shot at being able to play correctly as he grits his teeth through the proceedings, unlike the **Star Fleet Battles** newbie.

So when it comes to complexity, perhaps a better strategy is to pursue a different line of questioning. Rather than asking, "How complex a game do you enjoy?" or even "Would you like to play this really complex game called **Star Fleet Battles?**" someone might instead ask, "What's the most complex game you've ever played?" and "How much did you enjoy that?" (Perhaps good followups would be, "How well did you do at that game?" and/or "How much did the rest of the gaming group like that game?")

As ever with gaming, a few minutes of communication beforehand can save an evening of unenjoyment. Fortunately, it's not that difficult at all to figure out everyone's complexity comfort level.

--Steven Marsh

Toys of Weirdness

by Steven Marsh

At their core, toys are tools. And just like all other tools, the evolution and expression of toys have enabled humanity to learn, adapt, and advance. But sometimes children's diversions go askew or otherwise deviate from their creators' intentions. Here, then, are three examples of oddities that can be found in the toy isle of Warehouse 23.

The Smart eBrains Learning System

"Look at the equation on the chalkboard! What was Dr. Armageddon planning?!"
"Wait; this is calculus! I know this! [muttering] 'Derivative of added terms shouldn't give you cause to squirm. Multiply the first term's exponent by the variable's adjacent component. Then subtract one from the power number-'"
"Hey! you're one of those Smart eBrains kids?!"
"Shhh! I'm thinking!"

Technology and education have converged for centuries, if not longer. So it's not surprising that, during the microchip age, many new products sought to combine new electronic marvels with educational -- and marketing -- possibilities. Fake laptops with LCD screens, talking dolls that spout off endless counting and alphabet drills, and entire playscapes that plug into televisions like video games were but a few of the possibilities as the world entered the new millennium.

For a time, one of the biggest names on the block was the Smart eBrains Learning System, an educational conglomerate that encompassed one of the largest -- and most ambitious -- "edutainment" efforts ever. What made the Smart eBrains (pronounced "smarty brains") system unique is that, while its competitors tended to limit themselves to preschool, elementary, and perhaps middle-school education, Smart eBrains prided itself on coming up with electronic learning tools for almost *any* subject, including those up to the first year of college. Biology, first-year calculus, geology, home economics, industrial arts, driving, English, world history, and more had educational options available for purchase.

Unlike many other options on the market, the Smart eBrains system seemed to *work,* too, consistently and measurably. Those who played with the toys (or the video-game systems, or barcode flash cards, etc.) discovered they were learning more, faster than their peers.

Unfortunately, there were three drawbacks to the Smart eBrains system, one that helped elevate the company, one that caused people to question the system, and a third that led to the company's downfall. First, almost all Smart eBrains Learning System possibilities were expensive -- in some cases, two to three times (or more) than comparable systems from other companies. The extra profits enabled the company to expand its options greatly beyond the original offerings, including college-level courses. (For a time, there was concern in the media about the effects of these educational advancement opportunities would create for society, and the "Smart eBrains schism" became the catch-phrase for those who could afford the best learning techniques versus those who couldn't.)

The second drawback of the Smart eBrains system was that it relied heavily on mnemonics and memorization, using catchy little jingles and rhymes to convey almost any information, plus odd shorthand techniques and gestures to figure things out. (One example jingle from the elementary mathematics education system was, "If you need to times by 10, / drop the finger you're timsing, then / look left, look right / and now you have your answer.") The upshot of this is that, for all but the most gifted children, those who use this system are obvious by their constant recitation of weird rhymes and odd jingles and their usage of curious gestures.

But the third, most devastating, drawback of the Smart eBrains system was that its techniques were educational dead ends. Using the Smart eBrains system could enable one to make great advances and even learn enough to graduate college, but the shortcuts and techniques belied an actual understanding of the underlying material. As such, those who "graduated" from advanced-level Smart eBrains courses found themselves conversant in the material they learned, but

woefully unprepared for advancing their education. In essence, if a student had a desire to advance their knowledge level, they needed to *"un-learn"* everything they'd acquired via the Smart eBrains system and start from scratch.

Obviously, this third limitation proved disastrous to the company, as the wealthy social-climbers who had hoped to use the advances gained from the Smart eBrains Learning System to propel their children to academic excellence find themselves needing to undo the "damage" caused by the programs. The parent company, Smart eBrains Inc., was sued out of existence, and today their products are little more than a memory.

However, many people still fondly remember the Smart eBrains system, and there has been a brisk business in used systems, toys, and equipment from the company in the years since they closed their doors. Most of these hunters are not driven by nostalgia, but by simple pragmatism: Sure, the Smart eBrains system may be unable to elevate one's knowledge beyond a certain level, but if that level is all a person needs, then who cares?

Campaign Uses

The Smart eBrains Learning System is another quasi-realistic Warehouse 23 option to introduce into a campaign. At its core, it provides the possibility for advanced education, but with two caveats: It becomes obvious to those who know what to look for that you're using it, and to advance a skill beyond the level provided by the Smart eBrains system requires the person to "unlearn" that knowledge.

In game terms, the Smart eBrains system can allow for a point-cost break on basic skills. The skills that can be learned are areas of knowledge that might be taught via educational toys and games. Although Smart eBrains expanded their offerings a great deal over their competitors', they still only taught what was commercially viable. Thus there are geometry and world history modules, but there aren't any devoted to jujitsu or weapon design.

The point savings probably depends on the system, but as a general rule skills learned through the Smart eBrains system cost half as much as the regular skill (rounded up). The maximum amount the skill can be raised to, again, depends on the system, but usually corresponds to "average" or "slightly above average." For example, a good threshold for *World of Darkness* would be two dots in a skill is the maximum for advance using this system. In *GURPS* a limit of the 4-skill-point level before the savings would be appropriate (Attribute+2 for Easy skills, Attribute+1 for Average skills, Attribute for Hard skills, and Attribute-1 for Very Hard skills); thus someone who wanted to raise an Average skill to Attribute +1 can do so, spending 1 (i.e. 1 divided by 2, rounding up) for (Attribute-1), 1 (2 divided by 2) for (Attribute), and 2 (4 divided by 2) for (Attribute+1), for a total of 4 points spent.

The most serious downside to using the Smart eBrains system is that, to raise the skill beyond the maximum level, the skill-holder needs to *unbuy* the skill, then *rebuy* it. For example, if the *GURPS* hero wanted to raise the sample skill above to Attribute+2, he would need to spend 4 points to *reduce* the skill back to default, then spend 15 points to raise it back to Attribute+2, for a total of 19 points. Thus while the Smart eBrains Learning System might be a tempting shortcut for those looking to maximize their skills, adventurers would be wise to limit their expenditure only to skills that they will never wish to expand beyond a basic comprehension.

The more trivial downside is that anyone witnessing someone who uses a Smart eBrains skill who also possesses that skill can roll against that skill to determine if he recognizes the Smart eBrains system as the source of the skill. This isn't dangerous or useful in and of itself, but knowing that an opponent used Smart eBrains also conveys the knowledge that the opponent can't possibly be that knowledgeable in the skill in question. (With a good enough result when analyzing the skill, the person acting against the Smart eBrains person might even know of holes in his learning that can be exploited!)

Adventure Ideas

- The heroes are called in to settle a dispute. An ally of the adventurers has acquired the rights of the Smart eBrains Learning System and wants to use it to elevate the educational level of a third- world country. Another patron of the PCs disagrees, believing that using such a "short cut" will cause more problems for the country than it will solve in the long run, since to advance beyond the basic-level education provided by the system will

require effort and time to undo the old way of learning.
- At the end of another adventure, the heroes acquire a cache of still- in-packaging Smart eBrains Learning System devices. Although worth a great deal on their own, the devices might also provide a temptation for heroes looking to advance their own skills.
- An evil mastermind hopes to take the techniques underlying the Smart eBrains system and co-opt them for a more sinister purpose (such as training mooks the basics of urban warfare and/or terrorism). Can the heroes stop him in time . . . and if they do, can they keep the new learning tools from getting stolen by the larger market?

Alternates

The Smart eBrains system can be used in practically any campaign or genre where there is formalized learning. It's easy to envision a magic-college setting, for example, where there's a system that allows one to cram the basics of a school of magic without understanding the underlying theories enough to progress beyond that point. (Obviously the "Smart eBrains" knowledge name would need to be changed to something else for settings where a lowercase prefix letter doesn't connote "high tech.")

Again, adding magic or other technology to the Smart eBrains system allows for all kinds of mischief. Consider that the richest and most powerful elite purchased the Smart eBrains system at its height; who knows what kind of memes or hidden programming could have been placed within the minds of those who used the tools? (Or worse?)

The Safekeepsake Doll

Most of us don't know when, exactly, our childhood was lost.
But Wendy does. Wendy lost her childhood in a doll's back on her 12th birthday . . . 40 years ago. She hadn't fully realized what she'd lost at the time, nor at the time of her first daughter's 12th birthday. But as her second, youngest daughter blew out the candles of the cake, Wendy had a plan. A plan, and one more gift for her youngest.

Dolls are one of the oldest toys known to humanity, so it's no surprise that that's all manner of examples of odd dolls cluttering the infinite halls of Warehouse 23. One of the more unusual examples, of which dozens are still unaccounted for in the wild, is the Safekeepsake Doll.

The Safekeepsake Doll was created during the Victorian era in England, where its name was originally "Starlight Princess Safe-Keep Keepsake Doll" and sold by the Paris-London Trading Company. These dolls were described as "indestructible," which is more or less true. The dolls are predominantly made of a material with properties similar to Tyvek, so they are very durable and resist rips and tears, but they can be cut, mussed, and stretched.

What made the dolls interesting at the time was the fact that each doll had a secret compartment located on the doll's back, behind her dress. This compartment would supposedly only open for the doll's owner. At the time this was accomplished through the use of a combination lock, with the dolls requiring four dials to be turned to the correct numbers. The combination was included with the packaging of the doll.

For many owners of the Starlight Princess Safe-Keep Keepsake Doll, the doll worked as intended, and many girls had hours of fun hiding things in the fist-sized compartment the doll provided. But some girls, predictably, lost or forgot the combination. Most children who lost the combination either didn't have anything of worth inside, or simply didn't care enough about the lost functionality.

But a few of those who lost access to keepsake items wanted inside more than *anything*. And, if a child wanted inside her doll badly enough, she found herself able to access the doll's compartment the next morning . . . for one day. For the whole day, she was able to access the doll as much or as often as she wanted. In fact, the doll seemed more accepting than ever before, with a seemingly limitless storage capacity. But access to the compartment lasted for one day only. Once the child fell asleep and awoke again, she discovered she could not access the compartment. In fact, there was no proof the compartment ever existed! Regardless of what was placed therein, the doll weighed the same as it did when new and empty. All attempts at accessing the contents were doomed to failure, including cutting open the

doll.

Of course, discovery of this fact relied on the child awakening again. Because, if the doll ended the day with less weight in her compartment than when it began, the doll's owner would never awaken.

Given how common child mortality was even up through the Victorian era, the link between the dolls and the deaths was never discovered.

The Safekeepsake Dolls, as they came to be known by aficionados, had another unusual property . . . one that would take over a decade to discover. The original Starlight Princess Star-Keep Keepsake Dolls were designed as heirloom-quality dolls, intended to be handed down from generation to generation. For the mundane versions of these dolls, they worked as advertised, and children who remembered their dolls' combinations could pass them on accordingly. However, for the dolls who opened "one last time" for sufficiently willful children, there was another opportunity to access the contents of the Safekeepsake Dolls. If those children grew up and became mothers of daughters themselves, their daughters gained the ability to open the doll on the same age-day as the mother. For example, if the mother wished to be able to access the doll's compartment 12 days after her eighth birthday, then her daughters can all access the hidden storage area on their 2,934th day after birth (whichever day that falls on).

Of course, unless one knows about the Safekeepsake Dolls' special properties -- which a number of groups apparently do -- it is difficult to stumble across the generational aspect of accessing the hidden compartment. But it's not impossible; after all, if a girl inherits such a doll from her mother or grandmother, and she plays with it constantly, then she'll discover the compartment naturally. (Or, as naturally as possible for such a doll . . . once it seemingly transforms into the gateway for an extradimensional space, it loses many other aspects of its former life, such as the combination lock or any sign of a compartment.)

Dangerously, the hidden compartment so discovered by a descendant retains the same properties as when it was originally discovered: If the doll's new owner does not put at least as much weight into the doll as was taken out, then the doll's owner passes away the next morning.

The extradimensional space accessible within the doll is much larger than the original model's fist-sized compartment; in fact, it seems virtually limitless, and anything that can fit in about a six-inch-diameter hole can be placed inside the doll. Time does not seem to pass in this extradimensional space, and there are reports of small pets being recovered decades later, shaky but alive (and seemingly sane).

It is unknown what happens if the doll is destroyed once its otherworldy gate is opened, but it's suspected the doll -- and its gate (and contents) -- are not completely removed from the world. One theory is that the doll appears elsewhere, perhaps in a thrift store or antique shop, waiting to be discovered by a new owner (for whom the gate will open the first time she wills it). The other theory is that the contents of the gate are transferred to another Safekeepsake Doll, awaiting discovery in the future.

Campaign Uses

The Safekeepsake Doll is, perhaps, the ultimate small-item storage device. It acts as a portable version of the [Big Score Bank], but with creepier implications and greater danger for the doll's owner. For a female PC with a daughter of her own, it serves as a great "blast from the past" plot device: "You remember playing with this doll as a child, and you swear, for one day, you could open it up and put things inside. You thought you did, too, but you're not sure. You were right about the same age as your daughter is now, as best you can recall."

The Doll can also serve as a prison, of sorts. For example, if the heroes acquired a gem that contained a sinister demon intent on escape, they might try to persuade the owner of a "mundane" version of the doll to be willful enough to force the doll to open its extradimensional space. While not a foolproof means of keeping something away from the human plane, it certainly buys the investigators some time.

Adventure Ideas

- The key to the Felsom-Kloraden Library was lost over a century ago; it was last seen as one of the two beloved playthings of Sarah Felsom, daughter of the Lady Felsom. The other beloved plaything was a doll . . . a doll currently in the hands of Felsom's great-great-granddaughter. Can either the family or the doll provide any clue as to how to proceed?
- At the beginning of the adventure, the heroes discover part of the secret of the doll and manage to get an item of import from the extradimensional space. However, as their adventure progresses, the investigators learn of the consequences of the doll being left empty to the doll's current owner. Can they resolve their adventure and return to the doll before sundown?

Alternates

As designed, the Safekeepsake Doll was tied to the Victorian Age because that's about the earliest a doll can be imagined in human history that would still be played with today. The initial creation of the doll can be pushed forward -- for example, having been designed in the 1950s -- but part of the doll's appeal is the notion that generations of children might have hidden unusual objects therein. Thus the sooner the doll is created, the more opportunities (and history) it has to get into mischief before its path crosses with the heroes'.

Pushing the doll further back is also problematic, although as a one-off creation it's possible to envision a doll being passed down from generation to generation from about the Elizabethan Era (or perhaps earlier).

Moving the doll to other settings -- such as a sci-fi locale -- is possible, but difficult. It assumes a certain amount of "magic," and although it can be hand-waved away with a suitable amount of technobabble, the justification of why the doll behaves this way is more problematic, compared to the usual hand-waving that comes with "Victorian-era vaguely creepy dolls entrusted with willful little girls": "So why does the doll access the DNA patterns of the XX chromosome to open a hyper dimensional space?!"

Queue Be Square IV (and Queue Be Square V)

*"Oh, **wow!** A Queue Be Square III! You know I used to be able to solve one of these in under eight minutes."*
"Uh-huh. And what about the IV?"
"Oh, the IV? Heh. Yeah, I used to solve that one between the commercial breaks of Party of Five."
"Rii-iight."

Created at the tail end of the mechanical-puzzle craze in the 1980s, the Queue Be Square IV is the fourth iteration of the Queue Be Square (pronounced "cubey-square") puzzle line. Like the rest of the line, the original Queue Be Square was a cube, similar in size to the three- by-three-by-three cube puzzles, but only consisting of one "unit" per side, which was either black or white. Marketed with the tag line, "The Simpler, Trickier Cube," the manipulation of the original Queue Be Square was such that surface of the cube was a single tile, similar to age-old sliding tile puzzles; however, tiles could slide into position perpendicular to its original position, "turning the corner" on the cube; as such, there was no manipulation of the cube itself so much as a manipulation of the tiles on the surface. Of course, forcing one tile to turn the corner pushes all the other tiles out of the way. The challenge of the original Queue Be Square was to align the tiles so that all three tiles of the same color touched each other, for both colors. (In other words, if using a standard six-sided die as a reference, the white tiles would need to end up on the 1-2-3 positions while the black ones have to end up on the 4-5-6 sides.)

There were two tricks with the original Queue Be Square; first, its solution required determining which way was "up"; the positioning of the cube locks out certain movement possibilities, and the tiles simply refuse to move in that fashion. Second, there is a less- obvious move that is possible with the puzzle: By grasping at the corners, you can pivot the entire center puzzle around itself. (Again, using a die as a model, you can rotate 1-2-3 around itself, which would change their relative position according to 4-5-6.) This move became known as "turning the corner" among Queue aficionados.

The upshot of these two tricks was that the original Queue Be Square was notoriously difficult to *scramble;* simply

sticking with the obvious moves of rotating the center tiles around itself resulted in the same puzzle, and only by discovering (or being told) the "trick" was it possible to actually scramble it so that you could work on *solving* it. For a time, "scrambling the Queue" became a catch phrase for any problem that requires a nonintuitive step to make progress, but that still requires work once it's been done. One late- night comedian joked, "President Reagan managed to scramble the Queue last week, by getting both sides of the Middle East crisis to talk to each other through interpreters. [beat] Now the interpreters hate each other."

The success of the Queue Be Square spawned the Queue Be Square II, which kept the same tile-manipulation aspect of the original, but expanded the cube itself to a two-by-two-by-two design. Tiles on the cube's surface could move "around the corner," as before, but they would also nudge one other tile on a side when they moved. The halves of the cube could also be rotated around each other, similarly to more popular cube puzzles. The goal was the same: to match three adjacent corners with the black tiles and the other three with the white.

This puzzle was much easier to scramble (although still challenging to determine which way was "up"). While "turning the corner" was still possible, it was no longer required to scramble or unscramble the Queue. Fans of the original puzzle were largely disappointed with the Queue Be Square II, although it was more of a puzzle and less of a "trick."

After that was the Queue Be Square III, which followed the same design as the Queue Be Square II, only with a three-by-three-by-three design. This version was a puzzle similar to the second model, but with a "trick" like the first: Some moves are only possible if all six center tiles are pressed in at the same time; this is very difficult to do without having someone else to help you, so when people finally figured out this move, the puzzle's tagline of "Ask Your Friends" made sense. It's theorized, but currently unproven, that the center-press moves are required to solve the puzzle.

At present, the most famous model of the Queue Be Square puzzle line is the fourth: the Queue Be Square IV. By appearances, this version is the same as its predecessors, with a four-by-four-by-four design. However, there is one curious feature about the Queue Be Square IV that has kept it in the public consciousness more than a decade after its introduction: It has *never* been solved.

All indications are that the Queue Be Square IV *should* be solvable. It doesn't seem outwardly different from the previous incarnations. More importantly, mathematical analysis has indicated that there should be a strategy that can be utilized to figure out the puzzle (although the proof doesn't state what that solution should be). However, over 10 years of attempts by some of the world's smartest players -- working on the actual puzzle or mathematical models of it -- have not been able to bring a puzzle from a scrambled state to a fixed one.

As such, all Queue Be Square IV puzzles in the world are in one of three states:

- Unscrambled from their original "out of the box" state
- Scrambled in some fashion, and seemingly unsolvable
- Disassembled and reassembled.

The mechanics of the Queue Be Square IV are such that those that are disassembled and reassembled almost never survive the reassembly process; reassembling one without any marks, scuffs, or dings is an incredibly difficult prospect, and less than a handful of people worldwide can do it reliably. In addition, beginning with the Queue Be Square III, each cube has been individually numbered, so it's possible to trace the lineage of one and confirm that the same model was used beginning and end.

The inventor of the Queue Be Square line, Quincy Phenn, said that he knew he was unable to solve the IV, but this did not surprise him: "I just discovered a neat locking mechanism that I realized I can use in puzzles; I haven't been able to solve II or III, either, but I figured someone would be able to."

In a curious postscript, five years ago, the Queue Be Square V was released, which follows the same pattern but is a five-by-five-by-five pattern. At present, mathematicians have *not* been able to prove that the V is solvable. So, of course, at least two people have been able to do so more than once, with one person recording the entire 17.5-hour process it took him on one attempt. (The intricate locking mechanism of the larger cube makes it easier to disassemble than the IV, so it's possible that those who claim to solve it have merely engaged in chicanery of some sort.)

Campaign Uses

The default assumption is that the Queue Be Square IV puzzle has no actual "powers" or other unusual abilities, outside of its stubborn refusal to be solved despite all evidence to the contrary. Even so, it still has a number of uses.

First, the Queue Be Square IV can serve the role of "unsolvable puzzle" in any campaign. If incorporated into the campaign background, it can have the same appeal to geekdom as something like the [Riemann hypothesis](#), but in a form that can be more easily related to: "I had a Queue Be Square IV when I was a kid!"

Similarly, the solution of the Queue Be Square IV can serve as a "sign of intelligence" (or trickery) in a way that's easily relatable to a gaming audience: "Everyone claims this mixed-up cube can't be solved; it's just been solved. Interesting!"

From a more practical or useful point of view, the Queue Be Square IV can be used in situations where it becomes necessary to determine if something has been tampered with. For example, a briefcase might have an internal mechanism that's hooked up to a IV, so that if the briefcase is opened it will start the initial move on the cube (which cannot be undone). If a recipient knows of the use of an untampered cube and the cube's number, he will be able to tell (with reasonable certainty) that the briefcase has not been tampered with.

There isn't quite as much immediately applicable about the Queue Be Square V, but it can serve, in some ways, as a "lesser" version of the IV. For example, a PC who wants to prove (or demonstrate) his intelligence might solve a Square V. Or a mathematical genius hero might provide the actual proof for how the V is solvable. (Or mystery-hunter investigators might prove how those who *claim* to have solved the Square V were faking it!)

As a final in-game use, the existence of "quemematicians" -- those mathematicians who devote considerable time and resources to understanding how the Queue Be Square series works -- can serve as an interesting character quirk or gathering opportunity. This toy is also useful symbolically; IVs are popular gifts to present to math geeks and college grads, often with notes like, "Achieve the impossible!" Gold-plated or more elaborate versions can even be worth quite a bit by themselves.

Adventure Ideas

- The heroes are invited to Queue-Con, a formal semi-academic convention for Queue Be Square enthusiasts. One of the highlights is a demonstration for the solution of the IV. The person who claims to be able to do this turns up dead at the con, the solved cube missing from his possessions. Who's behind it? (And why wasn't Quincy Phenn's special guest appearance at the convention more publicized?)
- The heroes, famous crime investigators, stumble across the work of a serial killer, whose victims are each found in an "impossible" murder with a solved Queue Be Square puzzle. The adventurers are able to figure out the first three crimes (where the original puzzle, the II, and the III were found), but the discovery of a truly impossible crime with a Queue Be Square IV in the room serves as a taunt: You cannot solve me. Can the heroes prove the killer wrong? (This adventure seed is also a natural way to introduce the Queue Be Square, including the central mystery about its unsolvability, without having that aspect of it be a central part of the story.)

Alternates

The Queue Be Square can easily exist in alternate time periods. Futuristic campaigns can accept it with no difficulty (although if it retains its purely mechanical form, then it may be derided or praised as "retro"). It can appear in its exact forms in any era with precision machining and perhaps plastics. This means it might be found any time from WWII on, as well as any setting with more advanced techniques (such as a Steampunk world), although in eras before mass production, they are probably quite expensive.

Introducing magic or other supernatural influences allows for all sorts of interesting possibilities. For example, the Queue Be Square IV is most often found in the homes of puzzle-solvers, mathematicians, and other scientific

intellectuals. Imagine what can be done if the IV is actually an antenna, syphon, or other means of accessing, controlling, or draining the best and brightest of the world . . .

Likewise the entire Queue Be Square line involves a lot of manipulation and handling; what if the entire series of puzzles is some sort of cataloging device, reading information from its players? If the cubes are so popular that almost every household in the nation has one, the implications can be quite sinister.

GURPS with a Twist

A "Higher is Better" Variant Rules System for the Fourth Edition

by Bob Portnell

I've always found it faintly distracting that *GURPS* damage rolls are higher-is-better, reaction rolls are higher-is-better . . . but action rolls are lower-is-better. I wondered what it would take to make the *GURPS* action roll work on a higher-is-better method. It turns out the changes are few and simple. This variation won't be for everyone, of course, but hopefully the exploration is interesting and potentially well worth it.

The Essential Principles

Let's start with the First Principle: *The Key to **GURPS** is not the die rolls, it's the modifier system.* Positive modifiers are good, more positive is better, negative modifiers are worse, more negative is even worser, and zero is the balance point. The difficulty of a given action is expressed, for better or worse, by the accumulated modifiers. There's no change there -- that's how *GURPS* has always been.

The Second Principle is our Touchstone: *We don't change the chances.* The probabilities of assorted actions under these rules will be the same as under the standard *GURPS* rules. We're not re-writing the system, just transposing it into a different key.

Principles Applied: The Functions

Those principles lead us to three functions we use to retune the entire system, so that -- in all cases -- rolling higher is better. In mathematics, a function is a tool for changing one thing into another by an established series of operations -- we'll do much the same here with *GURPS* rules.

The first function is called Reflection. If a die roll is described as "roll *n* or less," change it to "roll *(21-n)* or more." There's no sorcery there; that's just how 3d6 probabilities work. Feel free to work out the tables for yourself, or find them on the web, if you need proof.

Still speaking of probabilities, the second function touches the character sheet most. It's called Zero Norm: If you reference a skill level *s*, or an effective skill *s*, this will be revised to *(s-10)*. If you reference an attribute *a* in relation to an action, this will be revised to *(a-10)*. We need to get everything that relates to an action roll to be approachable in terms of a balance point at zero, per the First Principle.

The last function is called It All Adds Up: Modifiers are applied to the roll of the dice. Skill levels and attribute levels (in actions) are treated as modifiers, not as target numbers.

And that's it. Those three functions let us make *GURPS* uniformly higher-is-better. How? Let's work a few cases, starting with character creation.

The Character Changes

First, let's apply Zero Norm to create a new value. I'll call it attribute modifier, or attmod for short. It's just the attribute value less 10: ST-10, or DX-10, etc. For convenience we can refer to these as STmod, DXmod, etc. An adventurer with ST 13 has a STmod of +3. His puny friend with ST 8 has a STmod of -2.

We use the regular attribute value for determining effects: bare-hand damage, basic speed, lift and carry, fatigue, hit

points, and so on. We use the attmod for action rolls: skills, senses, saving throws, and so forth.

A few specifics: Will and Perception are both based on IQmod. Basic Speed is unchanged. Dodge is (Basic Speed - 5), drop all fractions. Dodge is involved in action rolls, so we have to get it to a zero balance. It's important to remember that in in this variant, negative values simply mean "weaker than average."

For advantages and disadvantages, we'll use a lot of Reflection. Apply Reflection to any occurrence, frequency, or similar rolls. For example, a Reputation where the character is "Sometimes" recognized would be recognized on a roll of 11 or more. The basic self-control roll (from *GURPS Lite*) is not 12- anymore, it's 9+. And so on.

For skills, the only change is to use the attmod instead of the attribute in level assignments and in default calculations. (Thus if a skill defaults to IQ-5, then it instead defaults to IQmod-5.) That automatically gives us Zero Norm compliance! For a character with DX 12 (DXmod +2), Knife 3 costs 2 points . . . or maybe Knife 2 for 1 point . . . or maybe just leave it at default of Knife –2. Again, a negative skill is only a weak thing, not a bad thing.

The Core Mechanic Changes

What does our higher-is-better action roll look like? Start with skill value or attmod. Add all the other appropriate modifiers (as usual) to get the effective skill. Roll 3d6 and add that to get the result. Let's do a basic example. The character has Guns/TL (Pistol) 2. There is a -2 penalty for poor light. The effective skill is 2 + (-2) = 0. The roll is 12. The result is 0 + 12 = 12.

How do you know if you succeeded or failed? Since all difficulty factors have been assessed as modifiers, the surprising consequence is the *Rule Of 11:* If the result of your action is 11 or better, you succeed. If it's 10 or less, you failed.

What are the automatic results? A die roll of 18 or 17 always succeeds; a die roll of 4 or 3 always fails. (This is a simple application of Reflection.)

If effective skill is -8 or less, no roll is possible (except for defense rolls). This is a straight-up Zero Norm change; just as there's no way in standard *GURPS* to roll 3d6 under an effective skill of 2 or less, there's no way in this variant to combine the best possible roll (18) and an effective skill of –8 or less to get to 11 and success.

The degree of success is the amount you beat the target by, and the degree of failure is the amount you missed by, just as always. Since the target is almost always 11, you could express this in a single statement as (result - 11).

Critical success occurs on a roll of 18 or 17, or on a *result* of 21 or more if your effective skill is 5 or more. Lucky 21! Critical failure occurs on a roll of 3; on a roll of 4 if effective skill is 5 or less (otherwise a roll of 4 is a normal failure); or on any *result* 10 less than the target number. In most cases, a result of 1 or less is a critical failure. Leveraging the functions lets us express the same effects with somewhat simpler language.

How about contests? Regular contests are unchanged: both roll. If one succeeds and one fails, the victor is obvious. Otherwise the challenge goes on. Quick Contests are much easier now: Both roll, and the higher result wins. If the results tie, the winner is the one with the higher die roll. If that's a tie, repeat or resolve some other way. (A tied Quick Contest could be resolved by comparing effective skills instead. I prefer the dice, letting the victory go to the skill underdog, but I can see the merits of either solution. Just be consistent in your game.)

Here's one wrinkle: Having the *Rule of 11* might spoil things for the game master who wishes to keep a bit of mystery about the difficulty of a given task. If there are modifiers the player can't know, this probably falls into the penumbra of "not knowing the true outcome with certainty," and it's better for the GM to roll on the player's behalf. (The alternative involves the GM applying "invisible modifiers" and then having to explain why that result of 14 is actually a failure: inelegant.)

Combat Implications

Attack rolls, like most everything else, have a target number of 11. All defense rolls have a target number of 13. Base "skill" for defense rolls is your Dodge for dodging or 1/2 the relevant skill (round *up*) for blocking and parrying, plus any shield defense bonuses or other defense modifiers. If it seems peculiar that attack results must be 11+ but defense results are 13+, I refer you to the Touchstone. Defenses have always been harder in *GURPS* -- it's just easier to see now. The Rule of 20 for defaults from attributes becomes a Rule of 10. And so on.

Suppose you're using the optional rule for Quick Contests in combat. The only wrinkle to our new rule is that defense rolls have a higher target number, so in a Quick Contest the defender's result must beat the attacker's by 2 or more. It's still much easier than back-constructing margins of victory under the standard rules.

The Dai Is Recast

Finally, here are bits of a familiar character, pointing out the changes needed to work within this variant. All the rest of his character sheet would be unchanged.

Dai Blackthorn
(concept by Hite; original stats by Hogue and Punch)

ST 8, **STmod** -2; **DX** 15, **DXmod** +5; **IQ** 12, **IQmod** +2; **HT** 12, **HTmod** +2
   Will 2; Per 5
   Dodge 7; Parry (Shortsword) 8.

Disadvantages

   Duty (To ISWAT; 6 or more; Extremely Hazardous)

Skills

   Acrobatics 5
   Body Sense 6
   Climbing 8
   Escape 6
   Fast-Draw (Knife) 5
   Fast-Talk 2
   Filch 4
   Guns/TL8 (Pistol) 5
   Holdout 2
   Knife 7
   Lockpicking/TL8 5
   Observation 5
   Pickpocket 5
   Shortsword 5
   Stealth 6
   Streetwise 2
   Thrown Weapon (Knife) 7
   Urban Survival 4

Wrapping Up and Up

By getting skill values balanced around zero, it's a little easier to see at a glance which are the best and which are not -

- most brains can rank single digits more readily than double digits. And, as usual for **GURPS**, most of the working math is done during character creation and stays out of the way during play. The *Rule of 11* implies a handy short-cut for actions -- if your effective skill is 8+, success is assured (barring the automatic failure roll of 3). (And if the effective skill is -8 or less, success is impossible. Viva la symmetry!)

On the other hand, this twist on the rules doesn't save you from the long lists and applications of modifiers. Those still have to be tallied up (but with a zero balance on the skills, they may not go quite as high and so might be easier to handle in the head for some). The change of defense skill calculations from round down to round up will have a modest impact for character optimizers; with defense rolls being more difficult anyway, I don't mind reducing the point costs in the name of conserving the Touchstone probabilities. And I haven't explicitly touched all the rules that might be affected by the changes, but the crafty GM has the Principles and Functions to see him through any conversions-on-the-fly.

A *Pyramid* Poll in late 2003 revealed a strong preference among *Pyramid* poll answerers for game systems where higher die rolls are the better outcomes. As it happens, it's easy to make **GURPS** action rules fit that bill without changing the number of dice, or the structure of the character sheet. All it takes are three simple functions and a willingness to experiment. See if you find them as much fun playing them as I found in writing them.

Command Performances

"He's not so much a hero as a really effective administrator."
    Crow T. Robot, *Mystery Science Theater 3000: Revenge of the Creature*

As I mentioned a few months ago, I saw *The Dark Knight* in the theaters (well, at a drive-in, at any rate). This made it a bumper year for "Movies I've Seen at the Theater," at a grand total of three.

I'm trying to avoid too many spoilers here, but one interesting thing about *The Dark Knight* is that the hero is, in some instances, more remarkable in his ability to get other people to do his bidding than he is on his own. This harkens back to the era of the mid-to-late 1990s version of Batman, when the hero was as much a general of a larger army of costumed do-gooders as he was a butt-kicker in his own right.

Although original *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* and I often agree about as often as a two-headed calf is born, one aspect I did enjoy was the notion that most characters of a sufficiently high level started getting followers, minions, etc. In that game, I think it's mostly assumed that these supplemental characters were going to come along with you on adventures (and, like hirelings, die because they're not as strong as you). But that's not necessarily the case; an aspect incorporated into the original *Vampire: The Masquerade* -- which has since found its way into most other *World of Darkness* games -- is the cultivation and use of background characters. These are areas over which you have influence and sway, presumably in the form of human pawns you've dominated, controlled, or keep supplied with jelly donuts. Thus if you want to (say) try to keep the police from investigating a blood-drained dead body found outside your home (a frighteningly common occurrence in many *Vampire* games) you can decide against going down to the police station in person and instead call up your pal in the homicide department to sort out the matter.

Outsourcing tasks is a fact of life in this world. Just the other day my stepdad called me up to help him with his latest computer issue (I ended up convincing him that installing a wireless router would be cheaper and more useful for his laptop than installing a new phone jack). My wife's family -- a group approximately the size of Belgium -- is constantly swapping tips, news, information, and favors among themselves. And I've availed myself of the collective knowledge of the *Pyramid* chatroom countless times. So what if you wanted to build a campaign around the notion that the PCs -- while having capabilities themselves -- spend a great deal of their time commanding and managing others? Many seemingly tired genres look fresh again with such an approach:

A **Supers** game look like the Batman stories discussed, with the hero sending other heroes and allies out to deal with problems.

A **Space** campaign might resemble the end of the original *Star Wars,* with the PCs acting as generals over other soldiers or spacefarers. Or it may look like *Stargate SG-1,* with the heroes having access to other squads of similarly skilled characters to help carry out complex missions.

An **Action** campaign might resemble *Ocean's Eleven* thru *Thirteen,* with the players taking the roles of one of three or four main protagonists, with the other characters divided up three or four apiece among those players as allies.

A **Fantasy** setting might resemble the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* setting *Birthright* (a setting I enjoyed too much to have only mentioned once before), with the heroes playing the part of nobles sending armies out to war.

A **Horror** campaign might resemble the postscript series envisioned by the end of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* with the heroes in charge of other, weaker warriors against the darkness. Or it might resemble an *X-Files*-like setting, with the heroes having access to much more manpower within the bureau.

An *In Nomine* campaign seems custom-made for this type of idea, with angelic and demonic PCs having dozens of human (and more than human) allies on Earth waiting to take orders. (In fact, there are many adventure possibilities where it's *dangerous* for direct Celestial involvement, because of the disruption of the Symphony that causes.)

And so on.

There are some pitfalls and possibilities for these type of campaigns, a few of which we'll revisit in a future installment. For the time being, though, envision the type of adventure possibilities for your current campaign if the heroes suddenly had access to other, less-powerful (or less-versatile) characters. Ideally, each player (and/or PC) would have control over a different group of these minions, or there would be some sort of division of command responsibility among them, so that one player isn't saddled the need to control all these resources (with the resultant hogging of the spotlight that entails).

I've been toying with the idea of a standard dungeon-crawl fantasy campaign for some time. But to turn it on its ear a bit, what if the heroes each were in charge of 10 underlings of some sort? The adventurers heed the call to action in investigating a dungeon to stop the evil necromancer from assaulting a nearby village. Standard stuff, but with the new system, the heroes realize they may want to have some of their underlings guarding the village, and others patrolling the countryside. Deep within the dungeon, the PCs find themselves in the thick of a fight, when an enchanted carrier pigeon arrives with a message from one of their underlings: "Under attack! Help!" Can the heroes resolve their current battle? Will it aid the village's cause more to soldier on and try to put an end to the evil at its source, or to "retreat" and investigate the disturbance at the village?

The old can feel fresh with the addition of a few new folks to order around.

--Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Hot War: A Game of Friends, Enemies, Secrets, & Consequences in the Aftermath

Published by [Contested Ground Studios](#)

Written by Malcolm Craig

Cover by Paul Bourne

Illustrated by Paul Bourne

204-page b&w digest-sized softcover; $28
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Winter 1963 and the war is over. The Cuban Missile Crisis unleashed both a nuclear exchange and Other Weapons. Disgorged from Soviet landing craft, Bayonet Troops viciously stabbed all in their path; maniacal ever-chattering Creeps attacked all indiscriminately; the giant spider-like Runners assaulted enemy lines; and Servitors -- alien black masses -- crushed all before them. The United Kingdom responded as best it could, but it was forced to drop nuclear bombs to stop not just the Soviet Other Weapons, but rumor says, its own.

London is now rubble, its reduced population placed under martial law and desperate for both work and food. The government, dominated by the military's rival arms, does the best it can, operating from the old Cabinet War Rooms (one of many underground facilities that the military, the populace, and the monsters have moved into). But when that fails, out wheels the aged Winston Churchill as a symbol of Blitz spirit. The now-armed police force maintains martial law in the face of the radical Citizens Defence Army, the influx of refugees, and Sir Oswald Mosley's increasingly popular Union Movement. Meanwhile the British Experimental Rocket Bureau tries to investigate Soviet Other Weapons while covering up its own involvement in Other Weaponry.

Operating through this mess is the Special Situation Group, or SSG, tasked with the investigation and containment of Soviet monstrosities and counter-espionage activities. Its membership is drawn from the military and the police, the sciences and the civil service, plus tradesmen, taxi drivers, and sewer and Underground workers, these last three for their knowledge of London above and below ground. SSG membership increases the ration allowance, but exposes you to dangers human and inhuman, and factionalism, numerous powers and organizations wanting to control the SSG.

Hot War: A Game of Friends, Enemies, Secrets, & Consequences in the Aftermath presents a post-apocalypse of a very grim and British character. Thematically, if not actually, it is a sequel of sorts to the author's earlier *[Cold City RPG,](#)* a game of monster hunting and trust in post-World-War-II Berlin. It is the same technology pioneered by the Nazis and hunted for in *Cold War* that has been unleashed by the world powers in *Hot War.*

Hot War is not just influenced by *Cold War,* but by the *Cold City Companion,* which details several new rules and ideas. These show up primarily in the mechanics that add further detail to a character and his relationships, and in the questions asked prior to play to help establish the game nature and tone that the participants want to play.

The first question is, will the game be Open or Closed? A Closed game is traditional in nature, the GM retaining control and the players being unaware of everyone's Hidden Agendas. The reverse is true in an Open Game, with the

players being expected to participate in creating the story. Game tone and feel takes its cue from British science Fiction, whether "Quality BBC Drama" (*Edge of Darkness, Quatermass and the Pit*); "Post Apocalypse" (*28 Days Later*); "British Catastrophe" (*The Day Of The Triffids*); or "Dark Horror" (*Threads*). Deciding what a campaign is about and who is involved continues the collaborative process. For example, someone has been attacking Frogtown's European refugees and the SSG must if the attacks are human or inhuman in origin. The players suggest that a Union Movement agitator, a Frogtown black marketer, and one of their character's relatives is involved. Each player must suggest a scene that he wants during the campaign, with the proviso that it must be described as a black and white photo. For example, a brilliantly lit desk covered in identity papers and passports, along with scalpels, tweezers, glue, and rubber stamps. Lying on this is a pair of spectacles, one lens smashed and bloody. The GM is expected to work these and further suggestions into the game.

To create a character, five points are divided between three attributes -- Action, Influence, and Insight -- and five traits are defined. Three traits must be positive, ("Tunnel Rat") and two negative ("the war made everyone equal"). Each character has two Hidden Agendas, one factional, related to a character's real masters (for example "Report government activities in the London Underground to the Citizen's Defence Army"), the other personal ("Ensure that the white man doesn't keep me down in this new world"). Each Agenda is rated three, five, or nine, indicating how many times it comes into a story before it must be concluded. The lower this number the more immediately important it is to a character, the more powerful its effect upon a Conflict, and the fewer times it can be used.

Each character begins the game with at least four relationships, either positive or negative. Rated between one and four, these must be with a fellow SSG member, a fellow faction member, an antagonist, and one personal in nature. Eight points are divided between these, with three or more points being assigned to negative relationships. The last part of the creation process involves playing through an experience scene for the character, establishing part of his background, his relationship with the SSG, and something about the war. Winning or losing this scene gives the character a new positive or negative trait. This experience scene, like Closed/Open game and game tone rules, comes from the author's work on *Cold City Companion,* but it also lets everyone try out the Conflict mechanics.

Hot War is played as a series of scenes, each of which will involve a Conflict, but all of which must be concise, and any Conflict must be meaningful. For example, a Conflict could be between the SSG team who disagree over what to do about evidence of a planned attack by the Citizen Defence Army on a Union Movement cell that has been fermenting tension in Frogtown. The Conflict itself is decided by rolling two opposing dice pools of 10-sided dice. Each pool is based on appropriate attributes with further dice added for Hidden Agendas, traits, relationships, and other external factors, the aim being to roll more dice higher than your opponent. Each higher die is counted as a success and translates as Consequences for all involved.

Possible Consequences include changing a trait between positive and negative, gaining a new trait or relationship (either positive or negative); increasing or decreasing a trait, relationship, or attribute; and locking or unlocking a trait. A locked trait enables a character to use it without fear of it being affected by Consequences, but that also means that it cannot be improved. Consequences can also be spent to reduce an attribute or a relationship to zero. Although a Conflict winner decides the nature of any Consequences and how they are applied, everyone can make suggestions. The nature of the Consequences has to stem from the nature of the conflict.

If an attribute is reduced to zero, the character has suffered a serious injury, either physical if the Action attribute was used, mental for Influence, or Insight. He has also reached a Crisis Point, which has the potential to end his role temporarily or permanently. If the latter, a new character is needed, although the player can narrate an epilogue scene for the character. If the former, his character recovers and returns to play with a reduced attribute and had a positive trait replaced with a negative one.

What *Hot War's* rules emphasize is that the characters are living in times both dangerous and desperate, and are expected not just to risk themselves, but also put what is important to them, represented by both the agendas and the relationships. This sounds more complex than it is, but the author takes the time to explain and discuss the rules throughout, supporting them with numerous examples using the same characters. These examples highlight the author's preference for playing *Hot War* as an Open Game and the fact that *Hot War* is not exactly a storytelling game. Rather, it is a shared storytelling game, with both the GM and the players being expected to contribute, not just in terms of

roleplaying, but also with suggestions and ideas to improve the story. The downside of this and the pre-game discussion is that scenarios are created and run as the game goes along, making it difficult to write adventures for the game. In addition, game pace is partly set by each Hidden Agenda, their each having a limited number of uses before it has to be resolved.

In terms of support, *Hot War* describes the factions present in London; various locations in the capital, most of those underground, and beyond; plus various NPCs and monsters. No scenario is included, but four sample outlines are given, each exploring a different game tone. The mediography is excellent, covering films, books, television, RPGs, and computer games, as well as a list of useful websites.

Physically, *Hot War* is a decent looking book, with Paul Bourne's computer-rendered illustrations capturing the feel of ruined London nicely. Particularly good are the numerous posters, diaries, memoranda, and documents which echo London Spirit during the Blitz and impart so well the delicious desperation of this post-apocalypse England. The rules are not only clearly written, but well served by the excellent examples.

It could be argued that *Hot War* fails to detail either enough Other Weaponry or the twisted science behind it. There is some validity to such a suggestion, but the truth is, they are the reason for the "Hot War," not its focus. *Hot War* is about the war's survivors and what they must do in a world of inhuman horror where society is barely hanging on, all too ready to slide into dictatorship or merely crumble. Another issue is that this game is very grim and might not be enjoyable to play. Lastly it is very English, and while I have no problem with that, given both my nationality and my familiarity with much given in the mediography, others might have difficulty in visualizing a devastated London of the 1960s. For me, I can already imagine drinking the last of the real tea out of cracked bone china as the dresser threatens to topple.

If *Hot War* is not a true sequel to *Cold War,* then it is an evolution both in terms of rules and setting. If this shows in its greater complexity, it is only slightly so, and only to encourage everyone's participation in both telling and playing a *Hot War* story. Alongside the clearly written rules, the setting is superbly invoked; if you like either your science fiction or your horror to be with an English sensibility, then you will like *Hot War.* Imagine if you will that John Wyndham had collaborated with HP Lovecraft on a novel, and Nigel Kneale did the screenplay for the BBC. That would be *Hot War: A Game of Friends, Enemies, Secrets, & Consequences in the Aftermath.*

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

The Massive vs. the Masses: Gamorzilla the Giant Monster vs. the Army

Published by [World Domination LLC](#)

Designed by Jake Alley

Two full-color plastic boards, one metal Gamorzilla figurine, 44 plastic army pawns, six plastic airplane pawns, 60 cards (30 Gamorzilla & 30 army), stickers, basic rules, two unique rules, two reference sheets; boxed set, two players, five to 20 minutes playing time; $60

The ground trembles as it approaches, and it is awesome to behold: a $60 price tag on *The Massive vs. the Masses: Gamorzilla the Giant Monster vs. the Army,* a game of giant monster battles from World Domination LLC. Is it worth what comes in the unremarkable box?

The object of the game is to eliminate the other player's units.

Two sides duke it out for Tokyo, one trying to protect the citizens and the other making a meal of it. "The Massive" is an enormous creature called Gamorzilla, sort of a cross between Gamera and Godzilla; "the Masses" comprises the military and civilian units fighting (and running) for their lives. Each gets his own board (the sea and Tokyo respectively, showing the beach and the buildings and city infrastructure), and these fit together facing each other. Both sides start with their own deck and a hand of cards.

On his turn, the army player draws a card, plays a card, and moves and attacks with each of his units. Gamorzilla does the same, except a) he has just one (freakin' tough) unit to move and b) his attacks are dictated by his available cards. Cards for the humans may electrify the train tracks or force the monster to retreat to the sea; for their radioactive enemy, the cards may let the monster sweep away people with his tail or jump onto a tank. Reference sheets show the range, hit points, and damage values of various units and forms of attack, and that sums up the basics. A single set of rules forms the backbone of the game and each faction gets its own set to refine the action.

Gamorzilla wants to eliminate all the flailing civilian pieces, while the military tries to bring the armored lizard down. New pawns may spawn at important locations (the airstrip, the barracks, even tasty tourists), assuming the monster hasn't crushed them. Few army units withstand attacks, so it's not a question of whether they'll be lost but how best to use them to harass and kill their attacker. Some human innovations, like the giant robot, work better if the lab still exists and the scientist pawn isn't dead. Even then, Gamorzilla can regenerate his wounds with the right cards, so the give-and-take continues until someone/thing is dead.

The production values on this game are almost through the roof. The "almost" part is because the rules and reference sheets are just pieces of paper, though it makes them easy to photocopy. That's especially important for the Gamorzilla player because he's got 100 HP and no way to track them unless one uses a very small marker or has a duplicate to mark up. The pawns are nifty circles on a little stand (the buyer has to apply the supplied stickers himself); the boards aren't just thick, they're *hard*; each rubble counter is mounted and cut to fit; and the jewel in the crown is the metal Gamorzilla miniature -- a great sculpt using professional materials. The board is easy to read (white letters on a dark background), but hard to appreciate (too much of it ends up a dark blur). Again, that box isn't anything to write home about, but while the artwork on the cards -- tiny paintings -- borders on the childish, it's giggle-inducing stuff. Yes, *Atomic Flame Flight* looks goofy as all get-out, but it's so wonderfully true to the genre. (Come to think of it, it looks like something drawn by a boy who had recently befriended a giant monster.)

And that's where this game truly excels. It knows its source material, and knows it well, and everything in it

contributes to the theme. Participants see favored tropes from film play out on the board, and they do so in a balanced way (it's geared to keep things from ending early, but the possibility exists). It isn't easy to take down the beast, nor is it a simple thing to wipe out all the civilians getting underfoot. And it's also not easy to understand all the rules. Oh, it's a playable game, but it's the sort that forces many questions with no immediate answers, and demands FAQs and perhaps errata pages (both are already in motion at the website). For example, there are no graphics to designate the shape of the area-effect attacks without resort to the home page. The *Weak Point* cards are a clever addition; they come with a unit's deck, but they're shuffled into the enemy's deck to give *him* ammunition.

This is the first in a promised series of "M vs. M" sets, each with its own motif. Upcoming are a Vernian hero's fight against mole men deep underground, and a survivalist's war with hordes of the undead. In each case the sets can be mixed and matched, pitting, say, Gamorzilla and the zombies in mortal combat (there's one Toho Studios hasn't tackled yet, but you just know it's coming). The "break points" on the hex maps (along hex edges) allow them to be placed end to end and side by side, so big and little forces can be recombined however the group fancies. Given the increases announced by other companies, the price for *The Massive vs. the Masses* isn't exactly outrageous. With its quality components and thoughtful interpretation of the genre, it is both a promising start and a pleasant way to spend half an hour.

--Andy Vetromile

The Wellsprings of Creation

A Pyramid Fantasy Campaign

by Matt Riggsby

In most worlds, the gods unleash the powers of creation and then stop, letting their creation run its course. Here, they never quite finished. Consequently, the world is a place of constant new wonders and new horrors. Power is easy to come by, and life can spring up spontaneously wherever the four elements combine. There are always new places to explore, even when they contain bits of the old places they've replaced.

This article presents in brief a fantasy campaign framework for *GURPS,* with a particularly strong slant toward *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* campaigns. In doing so, it brings together many previous fantasy locations and characters previously presented in *Pyramid.* Now the Oracle at Na'arak may send you to find the Kung-Fu Crucible, and you can discover the relationship between Uxuloth and the Bleeding Earth.

World Without History?

No one knows how old the world is (or, at least, has a convincing argument on that point). It's not that the world has no history. Indeed, it is littered with countless relics and other traces of prior civilizations. But between frantic cycles of growth and destruction and the occasional application of forces which warp the fabric of reality itself, what it lacks in most places is continuity. However, it's clear that whatever forces created the world are still hard at work. Part of the world's abundance can be found in the spontaneous generation of new life. In areas of wilderness, away from observation, it is clear that new creatures come into being, arising out of the elements. Whether this is a consequence of ongoing acts of creation by the gods or a more "natural" magically-enhanced process, it is nevertheless the case that no region can long remain unpopulated. After a span of a few years, an area depopulated by a catastrophe or simply naturally lightly populated (such as a desert or dry steppe) will start to see new individuals or even entire tribes. The deserts of Enota and jungles of Rabilus are, therefore, a constant problem for coastal civilizations, since they can be counted on to provide a barbarian invasion every few generations.

Most new beings are of clearly defined orders: newly created humans, for example, are indistinguishable from those created by the usual means. The frequency with which entities are created is inversely proportionate to an as-yet unquantified combination of size, natural lifespan, and intelligence. Orcs and the smaller orders of goblins appear most often, followed by humans, and next trolls and centaurs. New dwarves appear least frequently, and always in deep caves. There is speculation that dragons and elves are only born naturally and never spontaneously generated; the jury is still out on various breeds of faerie, who may leak through from a spirit world or be born from special blossoms as well as being born by conventional means.

The world is full of towns -- even reasonably large cities with the hinterland that implies -- which are quite stable, but larger societies tend to go through a recognized cycle. First, there is the struggle for growth. It may begin with the wise king of a small kingdom, a strong tribe, a benevolent action by a mystic entity, or something else which allows that society to start establishing its authority over a larger area.

The expanding society absorbs its neighbors, drives out monsters in the wilderness, and establishes more secure lines of communication. With the expansion, there comes greater wealth, security, and some measure of social change. Often, there is considerable investment in magic, since mundane means are inadequate to protect the growing society from external threats and ensure internal stability. Though some societies rely on black magic and dark gods, most eschew diabolism in favor of more practical, morally neutral magic to achieve its golden age.

But with its profusion of energies, the world is chaotic. It's difficult to build and maintain a society when a dragon can suddenly appear to lay waste to the countryside, orcish hordes can advance unexpectedly from the desert, or

archmages can accidentally turn cities to stone. Large societies inevitably collapse in a catastrophe: earthquake, holocaust (rains of fire are a well-documented, if rare, meteorological phenomenon), plague, large-scale magical disaster, or simply the appearance of a surprisingly large barbarian or monstrous horde. On rare occasions, two adjacent large societies may go to war and destroy each other in a barrage of mystical attacks.

Of course, these aren't everyday events. Kingdoms of moderate size, even empires, can exist for generations without world-shattering events. However, there's a marked tendency for larger states and organizations to suffer utter economic, demographic, and social collapse after a few centuries. There seems to be a choice between taking up a lot of space and lasting a long time. Longer-lived societies are more conservative. They control magic, distrust innovation, and persecute groups bent on radical change. The elves surround themselves with magic, but use very slow magical processes more than the quick, flashy spells of humans and other short-lived creatures (they *can* use such magic and do so if they must; they just use other procedures in their everyday lives). Dwarves likewise use magic, but typically in a supporting role. They may use divination to find new ores, magic crystals to light their caves, and fire spells to light their furnaces, but their primary interest is in crafting superior tools.

Everyday Life and Landscape

The world, then, presents a patchwork of civilization and wilderness. Areas are civilized to the extent that they can defend themselves against the monsters which inhabit the surrounding area. However, there is strong pressure to expand into those areas. Beyond the traditional reasons of a society extending its reach to attain more wealth and power, every wilderness is a virtual treasure trove of the lost relics of countless previous societies. Who knows what lost wonders this tomb or that ruined castle holds, once those pesky basilisks are cleared out?

But despite instability over long distances and the long term, small societies are extremely viable. Effective fertility rituals are widely used, sometimes enhanced by magical plows and mystically enhanced seed grain, ensuring that in most places, most of the time, most people get plenty to eat. For similar reasons, clothing is affordable, housing is plentiful, and medicine is reliable.

With their lack of industry, well-settled regions more or less resemble any other pre-industrial landscape, on the surface. Most land is occupied by small villages and farmland. These regions are punctuated by a few towns or cities of appropriate size, which are centers of trade, government, and craft-scale manufacturing. The rural hinterland is also frequently home to small fortifications housing military professionals. These may be anything from feudal noblemen to garrisons of standing armies to a "national" police force, whose job is to protect from external threats (wandering monsters from the nearby wilderness) as much as to maintain law and order. On the edge of civilization, professional foresters and hunters need to be much tougher than their Earthly counterparts.

Even the wilderness can have its own safe spots. A less well-protected area of civilization or a spot between civilized areas may have trade routes along which caravans or even individual travelers may pass. Such routes often have fortified inns at intervals, providing protection from the usual threats of the trail. And, of course, particularly powerful individuals and strongly motivated small groups may establish their own strongholds in the wilderness, far from the interference of unfriendly governments. After all, though a few ogres in the neighborhood may frighten off peasants and other everyday people, a reclusive wizard or fanatical cult can defend themselves against such threats.

Regions

The world has three continents and a number of smaller islands. The continents are separated by the Narrow Sea between Rabilus and Enota and the Turning Water between those continents and Semaria.

Click for larger map

Enota

Once past the wall of frozen mountains along the northern coast, the north of Enota is mostly tundra with regions of scattered forest, though forests become much denser a bit to the south. Cold Amadan is one of the few centers of civilization in this region.

A large part of the center of Enota is still recovering from the collapse of a large empire. The capital city, Carazani, was destroyed in a mystical disaster, and the immediate vicinity is still a wasteland, though a highly magical one. The area north of the Vissar Gulf and Gulf of Falan has reverted to widely scattered strongholds and their associated settlements surrounded by hostile wilderness, save for the western edge of the region, which still supports a few cities. Some trade also still travels up and down the Thesseter River, and a number of elven strongholds, such as Tanir Aesayya, are firmly established.

Farther south, between the Vissar Gulf and the Astlan Mountains, Carazani's former empire has devolved into a number of successor states and independent cities, including Amadan Of The Sea to the far west. The most notable exception is the heavily forested region between the Gulf of Fallan and the Terrend's Curtain range, which has long been the chief territory of the elves and was never part of the Carazini empire. Dwarves have become increasingly active in the Astlan range itself.

The southwestern coast of the Narrow Sea is occupied by what is currently the largest political unit in the world, the Tsio Shu Pan empire. The region is densely populated and highly advanced, but politically volatile. The dragon-god-emperor died some decades ago, but his close circle of advisors hold that he is too august to replace until a nigh-messianic heir from a long-lost bloodline is found. The central government is paralyzed by internal squabbling, so the governance of individual cities and provinces falls to local governors, whose abilities and competence vary wildly. The empire is a mageocracy, with government officials required to pass examinations of magical talent and learning in order to advance in the civil service. It is rumored that the high mountains to the south of the empire conceal a [community](#) of the world's greatest martial artists.

Beyond the mountains lie the Devouring Lands, a vast desert punctuated by huge, rocky outcroppings. This area is a source of new orcish threats and worse every few generations, keeping Tsio Shu Pan governors on the border wary, particularly since none have been forthcoming over the past few decades. To their south are the Qaram Emirates, a collection of culturally unified but politically fragmented principalities, sharing a love of horses (Qarami horses, raised in large numbers on the dry, grassy plains, are said to be the best in the world), date wine, unbelievably elaborate poetry, and raiding.

The southern tip of the continent is occupied by mountain, jungle, and a number of small kingdom, but most ominously it is also home to the [Mmorn Commune](#). The Mmorn haven't spread very far north yet, but they present a terrifying threat to the rest of the continent, if not the world. The islands to the southwest of the continent are generally far more tropical than their longitude would suggest. It is said that many islands there are unusually magical, being either blessed or [cursed](#).

Rabilus

Rabilus north of the Sleeping Hills is one of the less active areas of the world at the moment. Dominated by forests and swift, cold rivers and lakes, most intelligent life is concentrated on the coasts, usually in freeholds and villages like those of the [Nemorae](#) in the Emlyndaer region. The inland area is largely uninhabited, save by a few remote settlements such as the region around [Caerceol](#).

South of the hills, as the dense woods of the north give way to plains and light scattered woods, the broad center of the continent is home to numerous city-states and kingdoms of moderate size, such as the Three Kingdoms (and [Bonamy](#) off their coast) and the small [Empire](#) of the [East](#). The center of the continent, though, is the vast Khefric Desert from which tribes of orcs and centaurs periodically erupt.

A large part of the southeast coast, once a thriving human civilization, is shrouded in never-ending night and is ruled by a collection of vampire-ruled nations known collectively as the [Bleeding Earth](#)[1]. The area of darkness has been expanding for over a century, though its rate of growth has decelerated over the years. The terrain west of the Bleeding Earth nations is largely jungle and swamp. The inhabitants are largely uncivilized, save for the area around Hot [Amadan](#).

The southern tip of the continent the domain of a number of city-states. There is no political unity among the constantly feuding states, but they have become relatively prosperous through trade with one another, and the philosophy of [Aiden the Prophet](#) has sparked the growth of what might become a shared regional philosophy. The city of [Refuge](#) has become the primary port linking Rabilus and Semaria.

Semaria

Between the Half-Blind Straits, which are half-blocked by Champre's Storm (a permanent, stationary hurricane) and the wide berth mariners give to the growing darkness of the Bleeding Earth region, contact between Semaria and the rest of the world is more difficult than one might hope. Still, there are good reasons to make the effort. The northern mountains are home to a number of dwarf colonies which make themselves a bit easier to deal with than their cousins on Rabilus.

More importantly, though, Semaria holds fairly reliable magical aid. The Labyrinth of Oukoss, in the high central desert plain, is a well-known pilgrimage site, and the city of Na'arak is on the southeastern coast. Cities like Kunruk form important links in cross-country trade and pilgrimage routes.

The islands to Semaria's east are occupied by a variety of tribes and small towns. The area is known for rare, if generally unfamiliar, spices, sea monsters, and daring sailors from groups such as the Nahal[2].

Inconstant Geography

Several significant parts of the world move on a regular basis. Even ignoring occasional appearances and disappearances of faerie villages and lost island civilizations, there are several places which are always in motion. Consequently, they're not on the map, and the GM may place them as necessary. The light-avoiding Dawnless City, the constantly relocating Goblin Market can appear quite literally anywhere (or, at least, anywhere on solid ground), and visiting them is likely to be a matter of luck and dogged pursuit. The flying city of Aulos can likewise appear anywhere, but it moves at a more sedate pace and is a center for trade as well, so while it might be difficult to reach from time to time (for example, when it passes over oceans), it won't be difficult to find. Finally, there is the great beast on which Saroo is built. Saroo, like Aulos, moves fairly slowly and in a more-or-less predictable path, so it can be found if need be, but may take some time in pursuit.

Lost Civilizations

Go anywhere in the world and dig down, and you'll find some remnant of an earlier civilization, if only in the form of a broken bit of pottery or a fragment of worked stone. Underground complexes and ruined strongholds from scores of civilizations are rife, but here are a few of the better-known ones:

Carazani Empire: Covering most of the middle of Enota, the Carazani produced high-quality steel arms and armor with surprisingly austere designs. Carazani architecture was very symmetrical; large complexes were almost always composed of mirror image halves.

Chanter Alliance: An association of technologically primitive tribesmen in the north of Enota, the Chanters combined strong spirit magic with a surprising number of orichalcum weapons (typically axes and short swords), a number of which are still in use today.

Kuhud: One of the few large dwarven empires, Kuhud outposts can be found in every significantly hilly area in Rabilus. Kuhud was known for well-decorated and high-quality metalwork; no Kuhud weapon is less than Fine quality. In Kuhud settlements, adjacent chambers are of evenly diminishing size. If more room was needed, the largest chamber would be enlarged first, then smaller chambers immediately adjacent, and so on.

Lightbringers: The Lightbringers were a religious movement rather than a political unit, a combination of divinely supported clerics and lay martial orders. They were brought down by internal dissent, but they have left ruined temples, usually built according to local styles, and holy relics, decorated with their symbol of a rayed circle, across the world.

Realm of M'tube-Keff: Occupying large parts of the southern half of Enota and nearby islands, M'tube-Keff was a largely mundane empire whose warriors were often armed with meteoric iron. M'tube-Keff builders constructed large brick ziggurats and dug rooms out of them.

Shansin Mandarinate: Tsio Shu Pan grew from a successor state to this oligarchic empire. The mandarinate mobilized vast bodies of labor to support ritual magic, leading to the mass creation of elaborately enchanted items. Most of their palatial architecture, constructed from condensed moonbeams and stabilized seafoam, has not survived.

Xuchlazek Diabolism: One of the greater disasters to overtake Semaria was Xuchlazek, a realm ruled by demons, with armies and bureaucracies filled with demon-possessed humans. Their bone-decorated relics can be immensely powerful, but are often cursed.

!Zaaak'kee: Though rare now, it appears that the Coleopterans, at one time, had a vast underground empire stretching through the world. At least, that's the conclusion some have drawn by noting similarities in the size, shape, and construction of vast numbers of underground complexes and the modern tunnels of Coleopterans. Many have been reused in later years by monsters, independent-minded cultists, and others in search of a good hideout, but many undiscovered ones, often filled with gold and silver, remain.

Races

All Dungeon Fantasy races are available (and [more monstrous versions](#) of the monster races besides), though many won't be encountered in large numbers. This section describes general tendencies and social trends, but there will be numerous exceptions in play. Any race, for example, might be found in particularly cosmopolitan areas.

Humanity: Humans are, at the moment, the most numerous intelligent creatures. They balance numbers with an ability to reason and organize, allowing them to hold off sometimes more numerous orcs and other monstrous hordes. However, their ranks are proving to be a source for growing numbers of undead, and their unchecked ingenuity often results in political, economic, or magical catastrophe.

Elves: Immune to age but not misadventure, elves are among the most conservative of races. Elven communities tend to keep in touch with one another, but generally prefer local government. Wood Elves are the predominant type, but all others and more can be found. For example, Wood Elves inhabit [Tanir Aesayya](#) and most large elf colonies in Rabilus, while a mix of High Elves and Mountain Elves rule [Caerceol](#), and winged elves can be found through the Teltikki mountains. Shadow Elves are known to visit the Bleeding Earth nations; elves, apparently, offer little real nourishment to vampires, so they can do so in relative safety. There is speculation that the profusion of elven types is a consequence of each newly created batch of elves being a completely new and different type. Others believe that all types of elves were created along with the world and, unlike other races, none have been separately created since then save by normal reproduction, while still others suspect that new types of elves were deliberately engineered, though without agreement on who the engineers may be.

Dwarves: Dwarves, for the most part, keep themselves in highly organized, highly conservative societies, though a visible minority (particularly junior family members who see no chance for improvement in rigid dwarven social systems) leave their home caverns to seek their fortune in the wider world. Like the elves, they don't cast lots of typical spells, but they are perfectly happy to use magic in support of their mundane craft work. For example, they may use enchanted tools and magical aids (enchanted fire-lighters, fire-resistance spells, etc) to create top-quality but unenchanted gear. They are also at the cutting edge of technical development, often verging on TL5.

Other Civilized Races: Gnomes and Halflings mostly live on the fringes of other races's territory, contributing to those civilizations in some small way and benefiting from their protection. They are typically found around human or dwarven societies (halflings, for example, often provide dwarves with surface-grown produce), but sometimes shelter under elven protection as well. The various kinds of Faerie Folk are similarly associated with elven territories, though a great many individuals and even some small communities live in uncontrolled wilderness as well. Coleopterans have their own independent settlements, rarely larger than a small town, which are often in conflict with dwarven interests.

Orcs, Goblin-Kin, and Ogres: The most numerous creatures behind humans (and sometimes not even that), these often inherently dangerous and destructive races are confined when possible to the desert wastes at the center of each continent, but they often spread out to occupy wildernesses between civilized areas. More than tribal organization is extremely rare, and larger hordes are usually held together only as long as a charismatic leader survives.

Other Uncivilized Races: The remaining races are found in miniscule numbers, and usually in wildernesses and wastelands, with a few exceptions. Corpse-Eaters, by necessity, live on the fringes of other races' civilizations and are increasingly found in the Bleeding Earth nations, where they eagerly pursue positions as servants of the regions ruling class. Dark Ones are usually solitary and ill-suited to close contact with anyone, but they may form loose associations which communicate letter or magic.

Dragons: Dragons exist in varieties which make even the elves look uniform, from tiny beasts which could sit on a man's shoulder to vast firedrakes which are rumored to sleep underneath mountain ranges. And from animalistic brutes to some of the wisest, canniest creatures in the world (just about any dragon from *GURPS Dragons* may be encountered). They are generally solitary, living in remote areas and communicating with one another rarely and even then mostly by magic rather than face to face. Beyond demanding tribute and the occasional virgin, they rarely interfere in the activities of "lesser" mortals, though some dragons were involve in the Shansin Mandarinate.

Undead: The undead have their own turmoil to deal with. There are three major players: Uxuloth, Mmorn Commune, and the Bleeding Earth nations. Uxuloth's isolationist approach makes it the most moderate of the undead nations. It isn't likely to become an active ally for the living, but some hope that factions in the city can be persuaded to share information. The Bleeding Earth nations are shrouded in constant darkness, giving their vampire rulers complete freedom of action within their own realm. However, the larger the area grows, the harder it is to extend it further, massively slowing their advance. The Mmorn commune's growth threatens to accelerate, since every person killed means that much more power. However, cracks are appearing among the commune's higher ranks. The commune and the Bleeding Earth nations have also started to see one another as future enemies. Both require live humans to fuel their growth, and they may soon find themselves in competition for the same victims.

Religion

It is clear that gods exist and intervene in worldly affairs. Lots of gods. Gods of good, evil, and cosmic madness. Gods of love, war, and craft. Gods of animals, weather, fertility, and fire. Gods of men, orcs, and dwarves. Demon princes and other immensely powerful spirits, as well as forces of nature and ancestors, are worshiped as gods by some, though theologians will question whether they qualify as gods on technical grounds.

All of these religions have a few things in common. One is that worship and obedience to codes of behavior in return for supernatural power is a common bargain. The other is that worship is generally local. Most religions have most of their followers within a few hundred miles of one another. Even significant religious movements such as the Aedenic movement rarely expand beyond regional importance, and the few which do, like the Lightbringers, collapse quickly.

The more visible religions are more or less benevolent, supporting fertility rites, charity for the poor, and temples for healing. Most would like to be in politics, but, save for a few theocracies in west-central Enota, have no more than moderate influence in even local affairs.

Magic

Most of the world is Normal Mana, with frequent city-sized pockets of High Mana. Areas of Very High Mana and aspected mana tend to be small, often no larger than a building of moderate size, but a handful of aspected mana areas are quite large. Infamous battlefields and graveyards, for example, may be death-aspected, and several ancient forests are plant-aspected. Low Mana areas are rare and No Mana areas are all but unknown; No Mana areas "heal" over the course of a few decades, slowly returning to the ambient mana level.

Magery is a talent which just about anyone can develop. Some are born with it and others are not, but almost anyone can be trained in it. Anything beyond Magery 3, though, is rare verging on mythical, even for PCs.

Technology

The world is predominantly TL3 with many scattered areas of TL4. A large part of the reason is that societies rarely have the time and resources to develop any farther before something happens and they fall apart again. They may leave behind some of their knowledge, but neighboring societies are often caught up in the latest collapse and are in no position to build on it.

Gunpowder is technically possible (indeed, the dwarves have invented it several times), but it's not terribly popular. Fire spells set off gunpowder easily, it attracts fire elementals, and certain intelligent monsters *hate* it.

Languages

Despite almost total social fragmentation, there is surprising unanimity in languages. Essentially, there are nigh-universal racial languages. Most humans, for example, speak dialects of the same common tongue, dwarves all speak dwarven, orcs all speak orcish, and so on. Newly created intelligent creatures speak nigh-identical versions of their racial language, varying only in technical terms for things which don't exist in their environment (for example, a new steppe-dweller wouldn't have a word for "ocean"). There is some fragmentation, of course; loan words enter local dialects depending on how close relations are between races, and languages naturally diverge as societies develop. Therefore, most languages have regional dialects, but most dialects can be understood by the speakers of other dialects at a level or two of fluency lower. For example, someone from Amadan, completely fluent in that dialect, is effectively Accented in the Saroo dialect.

Campaigns

The Wellsprings of Creation is suitable for typical fantasy adventures. Searching through lost caverns, killing things, and taking their stuff is, if not a recognized profession, then at least a well-known practice by risk takers in search of wealth and glory. The dark side of treasure hunting, of course, is that unearthed wonders may carry curses or hidden instabilities which doomed the long-lost civilization which created them. Dungeon delvers can be anything from peasant children searching through a nearby but long-forgotten cave for hidden signs of the everyday lives of distant ancestors to heavily armed expeditions methodically clearing massive cave complexes of orcs and relieving them of any wealth they may have had, one room at a time.

Empire building is also a more than viable possibility. Adventurers who can clear an area of monsters and keep it clear can usually find peasants and craftsmen willing to join them. Rulers of small territories will want to expand them, and neighbors of other civilized areas will want to absorb them, whether by conquest or diplomacy.

However, there are a number of possible campaign themes suitable specifically for this world:

Steam!: Even if technological development presents problems in the long run, there's no reason for PCs not to pursue it for its immediate advantages. The physics of the world permit technological advancement; the question is whether or not craftsmen and their backers can pursue it and make a bundle off of it before the inevitable collapse, which may after all be generations in the future.

Secrets of the Universe: A great many questions about the fundamental nature of the world are unanswered. Though they may appear philosophical on the surface, the answers may have deeper practical implications. Just where do elves come from? And how about dragons? Are there really that many gods, or are they aspects of a higher divine reality? What is the source of magic? Can the answers be found in [the Bottomless Pit](#)?

Death to the Dead: The undead have always been present (Uxuloth, notably, is several centuries old). However, between the Mmorn Commune and the Bleeding Earth nations, their numbers are growing explosively. If present trends continue, the undead may be able to extend their sway over the entire world. Unless the living stop them. PCs can undertake a number of roles: raising armies to fight the growing threat head-to-head, going on daring espionage missions in undead-controlled regions to increase internal tensions and rescue as many of the living as possible, performing counter-espionage where the undead are trying to extend their influence (The Dawnless City is a natural target for undead infiltration, and Amadan is threatened as well), doing diplomacy to assemble an alliance of the living

(and, perhaps, trying to recruit the aid of Uxuloth or long-exiled demon princes, who hold even greater powers of darkness), and researching the very nature of the Mmorn Commune to dissolve it and the shadow over the Bleeding Earth to restore the sun.

Make The Magic Go Away: An abundance of magic, divine power, and nigh-supernatural achievement through enormous skill and talent has long been the world's blessing and its curse. However, that may be coming to an end. The magic isn't going away; quite the opposite, in fact, and that's the problem. The natural order is twisting on itself. The dead are rising from their graves more often, earthquakes are increasing across the world, ancient forests are expanding overnight, and even the Toll in Amadan is growing more frequent. There are those who would say that the world would be better without magic at all.

* * *

[1] The "death of the sun" is greatly exaggerated. The regions in question are covered by unending night, not the whole world, and the gods are currently of local, not global importance. However, if the area of darkness extends, neighboring regions will face the same problems.

[2] Here, of course, the Nahal are just another sub-race of humanity. Their history can be ignored, but the society can be used as-is.

The Mind of a Mentor

by Steven Marsh

"The Mind of a Mentor" is a player-character subplot suitable for any campaign where the unusual is possible. As written, it's primarily designed for a fantasy campaign, but the techniques and central mystery are such that it should transfer easily to other genres or times; simply substitute references to "magic" to something suitable to the setting.

The Windup

This subplot works best if the player has created a background for his hero that involves a character serving as a mentor. Ideally, the player has some attachment to the adviser and intends for the NPC to make appearances in the future. The subplot's even better if the mentor is someone who wouldn't be involved with the rest of the party. For example, a PC apprentice might have a wizardly instructor who teaches spells while the other heroes don't possess any magical abilities or interests.

The Pitch

Design a series of adventures so that exciting things happen at the beginning of each adventure. If the player protests that he wants to see his mentor ("Wait! I was hoping to learn Ring of Fire . . ."), the GM has the player make a "mentor availability" roll (either one dictated by the game system or decided on by the GM). If the player succeeds at the roll, the GM explains that the PC remembers interacting with his mentor; then play out the scene with the mentor, as a flashback and with as much detail as needed. Once the flashback ends, the adventure begins, as normal. (If the availability roll determines that the mentor wasn't available, then the GM informs the player of this fact.)

In future adventures, try the same technique, with the player needing to resort to "flashback" sequences to meet with his mentor.

If the player informs the GM at the end of the adventure that he intends to meet with his mentor between adventures, the GM should "forget" to let him do so until he is reminded. The GM should then say something like, "Ah, yes! You remembered that you wanted to meet with your teacher, and he had a number of interesting things to tell you." (This works especially well if the GM normally refers to downtime material in the past tense, and "real" current adventure material in the present tense: "After the last adventure, you healed your wounds and researched that old map you found" versus "You meet an old man in the bar . . .")

Ideally, the advisor should be such that the heroes are discouraged from visiting him during an adventure: Maybe his tower is at the top of a mountain on the outskirts of town, or the mentor is so busy that he makes it clear that appointments are necessary to see him.

The Swing

Eventually, there should a scenario serious enough that the heroes are tempted to talk with the mentor regardless of any visitation restrictions. They try to do so, and find him unavailable. Should this not dissuade the group from locating the NPC, they discover that he's *very* unavailable. His tower at the top of the mountain seems like it hasn't been used in months, if not longer. Friends and associates don't remember seeing him recently . . . if they remember him at *all*.

If the adventurers don't discover this fact -- instead, the investigators don't press for more information when it's suggested that he merely seems to be hard to get a hold of -- then they can continue on as normal. The hero can continue having "flashback" encounters with his mentor before other adventures, but never during the actual adventure.

The Blow

Why doesn't anyone know more about the mentor? The reality is that the NPC doesn't exist in the conventional sense.

How and why the mentor doesn't exist are up to the GM, but possibilities include:

- The mentor is entirely a construct of the hero's imagination. This explains why he can remember visiting him, but he can't encounter him directly or bring other PCs to meet him. The adviser doesn't exist, and he never existed. (This is an especially appropriate possibility when the mentor serves to "unlock" information that the hero might theoretically be able to release on his own, like many powers and abilities in the *World of Darkness* setting.)
- The mentor did exist, but something happened so that he no longer does. (Perhaps a magical experiment merged the essence of the mentor with the hero, or perhaps the mentor had his memory wiped and implanted within the consciousness of the PC.) When the hero "remembers" encountering his mentor, he is actually tapping those portions of his consciousness in which the NPC resides.
- The mentor *does still* exist, but is somehow out of alignment with the time stream; the NPC continuously exists "20 minutes ago" (or some other span of time). The hero can correctly "remember" meeting with the teacher, but the NPC doesn't exist in the "now" to interact with.

The Aftermath

Once the player realizes that his hero can't physically be in the presence of his mentor, he'll probably try to figure out what's going on. The adviser might know his own unusual nature, or he might be in the dark. Unraveling the secret of the mentor's lack of conventional existence may well be an adventure or two itself.

During the period when the player (and character) understand the nature of the problem, it's entirely possible for him to "force" meetings with his mentor by "remembering" them. The first time the player figures this out and takes an active role in utilizing his counselor should make for a memorable game session; it could even be something he stumbles across accidentally. Here is one example.

GM: You have left the Castle of Despair and are trying to learn more about the coming of the Banewrath.
Player: I try to visit with my mentor to learn more about the great catastrophe.
GM [rolling]: You discover he's not available, and he hasn't been around in some time.
Player: Again?! Wait a minute . . . Has my mentor ever talked about the Banewrath to me before?
GM: Hmm. Yes, you *do* recall a conversation with him at one point.
Player: When was that?
GM: About an hour ago.
Player: What the-?!

There are a few ways this subplot can resolve:

Business as Usual: The hero comes to accept the unusual nature of his mentor, and utilizes the NPC in a slightly different fashion than most mentors. Although it's a fairly unusual way to live, it doesn't really affect the game to require the player to alternate from "I visit my mentor" to "I try to remember if I've visited my mentor recently." In fact, it might even be beneficial: After all, when the PC is in the middle of a dungeon outside a door with odd-looking sigils, it's difficult to say, "I go visit my mentor". However, the person *can* say, "I try to recall if I've ever talked to my mentor about this." (This works only if the adviser is somehow a part of the PC's mind). This option functions best if mentors are required to have a roll that determines availability; in this case, that roll is more to figure out if the hero can access his mentor via whatever method the two are connected, rather than a true availability roll.

All Good Things: The hero attempts to sever ties to his mentor (especially in the case where the mentor is a completely fictitious construct). At its most tragic, this can be another version of the departure of imaginary friends; in fact, this option works very well for children PCs and their "mentors." At its most epic, the mentor might have other

ideas about how and when his involvement with the hero ends; he might even turn against the adventurer and attempt to protect his own existence:

GM: You awaken after another blackout with a day's worth of stubble on your face and wearing different clothes.
Player: Do I remember what happened?
GM: That depends; how badly are you trying to remember?

Here After the Hereafter: The hero tries to "rescue" his mentor from his unusual state. This should be a difficult prospect, and it can involve all manner of unusual adventures. It will also change the campaign, potentially. If successful, the mentor will become someone the rest of the party can meet . . . and, if there are consequences for failure, then being *unsuccessful* might mean the mentor is never available again.

Choosing to Live in the Past: As a final option -- especially suited for mentors who are out of phase with the timeline -- the group might discover a way for the hero to meet with his friend . . . but *only* by also going out of phase. In this case, the hero will need to decide between joining his mentor and abandoning his adventurous allies, leaving his mentor to the unusual mental limbo he currently exists, or even severing ties with him altogether.

In all cases where the hero is forced to give up the mentor (or considerably reduce him in ability than was expected), the PC should be given back the points for that mentor to spend on new character aspects . . . perhaps even a new mentor. After all, this challenging subplot is foisted onto the player without his knowing what he's getting into, so it's not fair that his hero should be weakened in power as a result.

Pyramid Review

The Primal State (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by **Chaosium, Inc.**

Written by Jeff Moeller

138-Page Perfectbound Black & White Book; $22

The Primal State is a mini-campaign for ***Call of Cthulhu*** available as part of Chaosium's Miskatonic University Library Association series of monographs. Subtitled *A Campaign for Classic-Era Call of Cthulhu, Ideally Set in Vermont 1925-1930,* this is a campaign with a specific setting in mind and an associated and overarching theme that makes it very difficult to transfer to other times and places. Yet three of its four scenarios could be extracted from the campaign's framework and be run with relative ease in the 1890s of *Cthulhu by Gaslight* or in the here and now of *Cthulhu Now.* Doing so though would mean losing both the aforementioned theme and the strong sense of place that together form the underlying strength of *The Primal State.*

The campaign's theme is drawn directly from H.P. Lovecraft's own observations of the effects of mechanization and modernization upon the New England state of Vermont. In "Vermont -- A First Impression," Lovecraft described these effects as ugly, tawdry, and commonplace, bemoaning the loss of the region's "pristine and ancestral beauty." Conversely, it is this very modernization and mechanization also has the effect of enabling greater and easier access to the primarily rural and forested Green Mountain State, but its more insidious effects will become apparent over the course of the campaign.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The structure consists of a single scenario, "The Sap Keeps Running," divided into four parts that take place over the course of the second half of the 1920s. Each time the investigators drive into Vermont, they make what becomes a regular stop at the roadside house of Claire Jeplin. Miss Jeplin is nice old lady who makes her living by making and selling maple syrup and maple sugar candy; she is not only genuinely friendly, but also helpful when it comes to questions about Vermont folklore. It is intended that Miss Jeplin be someone that the investigators come to care about over the course of the campaign, but this being a horror campaign, and a *Call of Cthulhu* campaign, she is (of course) doomed. Her fate is not that of some unsubtle bloody mess, but more a steady deterioration that echoes the Sanity loss incurred in investigating the Mythos. Of course, Miss Jeplin is old, and she could just be suffering from encroaching senility.

In between the four parts of "The Sap Keeps Running" *The Primal State* inserts three other scenarios, all set in Vermont. The first of these is "Invitation to the Dance," which is set in the town of Bennington where a churchyard has been beset by incidents of gravestones swapping places. The police have put this down to schoolboy pranks, but such an odd occurrence should arouse the interest of the investigators. This is a longer version of a scenario that previously appeared in issue #5 of the British fanzine, *The Whisperer,* and promises some truly unsettling and memorable encounters with a "vivophiliac" -- quite literally the opposite of a necrophiliac -- for players and investigators alike. The scenario itself does have a strong sexual aspect, one that the players could be uncomfortable with. Certainly, given the conservative mores of the time, these "witch riding" encounters should prove particularly shocking to the investigators. Although this aspect is handled in a mature fashion, it is difficult to run the scenario without it and there is no advice for the Keeper on how to do so. Of the three scenarios, this is the only one to include notes on running it for the modern day.

The second scenario takes place in Burlington and concerns the monster of legend in its nearby lake. In "The Beast of

Lake Champlain" the latest in a series of drowning victims, a local councilman's wife, forces the authorities to act. Her body was pulled from the water minus several limbs, a state that suggests that her death was no accident. Either she was murdered by persons unknown or she was dragged into the water by the infamous beast. Legends of a creature in the lake, known as "Champ," have been rife for centuries, but this is only one of several possible culprits suggested by the scenario. Other options include a coven of cultists making regular sacrifices, a colonial-ear witch turned serpent, and a crazed serial killer. Whichever option the Keeper decides to use, the scenario should ideally end in a climax set along the wooded shores of the lake, the investigators racing to save the next victim.

The third scenario, "Home, Sweet Home" ends with the investigators trapped in the Vermont foothills near the all-but-abandoned town of Glastenbury. It begins with their being hired by the University of Vermont's archaeology department, which has lost touch with a small dig team lead by Professor Daniel Abernathy. The professor has a particular interest in the activities of pre-Columbian visitors and explorers in North America, especially those from Scandinavia. If the investigators follow this line of inquiry, they may find themselves visiting Iceland or Denmark, but eventually they will find themselves going out to the dig site itself. Or of course, they could just cut to the chase and go straight to the dig site, which is where the fun really starts . . . well, at least fun for the Keeper, because this scenario differs radically in terms of tone and mood. Once at the dig site the investigators fall under a curse that prevents them from leaving, and once stuck there it drives them eventually into starvation and insanity. Worse still, the curse applies to the dead, and the investigators will be plagued by several zombies of various species. If they are to survive and return to civilization, the investigators will have to lift the curse, but if the players cannot work out how, "Home, Sweet Home" could well become an endurance test for investigators and players alike, eventually resulting in frustrated players. The author suggests that the zombies in this scenario be played for comedic rather than deadly effect as otherwise this could be a very deadly scenario. This will not actually hamper a player continuing to play his investigator, and part of any comedy will come from that. Nevertheless, this scenario is not as direct or as traditional as the previous three and -- as well written as it is -- suffers for that fact.

The campaign comes to a climax in the fourth and final part of "The Sap Keeps Running." Where previous parts of this interspersed scenario have been simple encounters, perhaps even appearing as mere period color to the players, they lay the groundwork for this last part, their significance becoming apparent after a ghostly encounter on the road. Investigating further will lead to puzzling inconsistencies and a very nasty encounter in the woods. Going armed for bear will probably be a good idea, but how likely is that? Even if the investigators do manage to deal with those responsible for Claire Jeplin's death, they will make one last attempt to deal with the investigators from beyond the grave which should give them nightmares about driving on country roads at night.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Of course, **The Primal State** suffers from the same problem found in many **Call of Cthulhu** scenarios: how to get the investigators involved. The author includes several plot seeds for the Keeper to develop, while scenarios such as "The Madman" from the **Call of Cthulhu** rulebook and the recently published [*Murder of Crows*](#) could also be used to bring the investigators into the Green Mountain state and the campaign. It also suffers from the perennial problem that besets all of Chaosium's monographs, namely a lack of editing. Actually, this is not as much of an issue as it has been with other monographs, but the book does need the touch of a professional editor, if only to give it polish and help present the wealth of information that the author provides for the Keeper. This information is mainly devoted to the Green Mountain State and its history and folklore, all designed to support the scenarios, all of which it does admirably, along with a plethora of period maps and photographs.

If **The Primal State** has a weakness, it is its chronological length; it takes place over five years, which can be difficult to work into a campaign. The adventures could be played straight through, but what the series really demands is that the Keeper and his players play through this in between other scenarios, returning to its pages as and when it is fitting. The deadly nature of a **Call of Cthulhu** campaign could actually remove those investigators from the group that over the course of **The Primal State** have come to befriend Claire Jeplin, weakening the campaign's theme and design. The Keeper may want to be prudent in his choice of scenarios to run alongside **The Primal State** if his investigators are to fully comprehend its theme.

Being set in Vermont means that **The Primal State** is not quite set in Lovecraft Country, but it is certainly close

enough to be run as an extension of any campaign set there. Any Keeper wanting to run will discover that the campaign is well supported with a wealth of detail that help bring its period, its location, its theme, and Vermont folklore to live. Further, each of the scenarios is good in its own right and the campaign structure allows the Keeper to run other scenarios with ease. The surprise is that this campaign has not been developed into a full supplement for *Call of Cthulhu* (as has the recently released *Mysteries of Morocco*), because *The Primal State* is one of the best Miskatonic University Library Association monographs released to date.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Humans!!!

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Designed by Kerry Breitenstein, Todd A. Beitenstein, & Jonathan Beitenstein

Art by Dave Aikins & Kurt Miller

Full-color boxed set with six character cards, 60 zombies in six colors and styles, 60 human figurines, 40 event cards, 40 wound cards, 30 capture cards, 27 no barricade chits, 45 dice tokens, two six-sided dice, 20 town tiles, & rules; $34.99

two to six players, one-hour playing time;

Cast aside any misconceptions the title might suggest: Naming the game *Humans!!!* doesn't mean the living fare any better in Twilight Creations, Inc.'s latest horror opus. In fact, here the players portray the zombies and (literally) go to town devouring the people.

The object of the game is to achieve one's victory point total first.

A thematic sequel to ***Zombies!!!***, a little role-reversal puts everyone in the flesh-eaters' ragged shoes. Each player receives a set of 10 distinct zombies and a character card to represent the lives they had before becoming infected. The doctor, for example, has a scalpel that offers a bonus in combat, and the musician has drumsticks that let him redraw unfavorable wound cards. (Clearly not all the metaphors are on solid ground.)

The monsters start in the Town Square with one zombie figure apiece. Tiles showing the town are laid down each turn, and terrified human miniatures appear here. The streets get bigger and the people run farther as they try to outdistance their sallow-skinned pursuers. Zombies get a movement allowance, but it may be divided among several units. If a zombie pawn can catch up to a person he rolls a six-sided die to capture the human, but unlike the original game there's a second step: drawing capture cards.

Capture cards include Escape, Eat, and Infected. Any Escape card means the human gets away and another player moves the miniature with a die roll. If the cards are all Eat and Infected, the "majority" card takes effect (the player chooses if there's a tie). A consumed human is removed from the board and the Eat card goes in front of the diner. Each such card is worth one point. If the result is infection, the human pawn is replaced with another of that player's zombies -- he's on his way to overrunning the city with his breed of flesh-eater, and his new zombie friend is also worth a point. (If multiple Escapes are drawn one of them is removed from the game, making it harder as the game goes on for people to elude the hordes of undead.)

Players get event cards as well, and these alter the game's flow. Zombies may hit an ice patch (they "move" faster), or they may dump additional human targets onto the board. If one player wants to make life more interesting for another, he can play a weapon card during the rival's capture attempt -- his prey has the means to defend himself. Now it's the human's turn to roll for an attack, and better weapons make success more likely. A successful attack draws wound cards, and these show body parts like arms or the torso. If there are multiples of a card -- say, two leg cards -- one of those is placed before the wounded player. If there's a tie, the player chooses which one to keep. Regardless, if the card kept is the second such wound -- the second leg injury, maybe -- the zombie thus attacked is killed. And for head

shots, no need to wait for a duplicate card there. It's all over for that corpse.

Certain "named" tiles come into play with people and some counters for zombie use. A player has to roll to beat a structure's barricade number if his dinner is indoors, but once inside a building he places a marker to indicate humans are no longer safe within. The currency for this game is the "do-over" dice token, which lets the user reroll any result he dislikes. These are marked with six-sider dice-pip designs; it's a clever added mechanic, though the rules say vaguely that these have no effect in the "basic game" (there's no advanced game mentioned here).

Players count the points for each human killed or infected, and when the combination reaches that character's goal (the more capable the zombie the higher the points needed), he wins the game.

The illustrations on the cards are done by longtime Twilight Creations artist Dave Aikins, though these are a bit brighter and more colorful than previous iterations. The sculpting on the human figures is neat, giving them just the right panicked look and a great fleeing stance, and having multiple zombie miniatures and not simply different colors raises the game. Kurt Miller's town tiles are also much clearer and easier to read.

Play runs a good deal quicker than it does in *Zombies!!!*, and these mechanics are far more pleasing than the routine dice rolling and token trading; there's not really much more to it, but it is engaging. Humans are harder to come by but points come from two sources, and watching the diseased spread across town is a kick in the pants.

The game is in real need of clarifications, and while the website promises a wealth of new options and errata, it would be nice to have that information at one's fingertips. Fully half the rules discuss combining the two games so players have a choice between the undead or the shotgun-wielding humans, and an awful lot of questions arise for a booklet that tells us to go on-line for a full(er) version. Other oversights (like variously calling them capture and infection cards, clearly artifacts from multiple iterations along the development path) give the game an unpolished feel, though as long as one isn't looking the rules up it's all smooth sailing.

Not content to simply rerelease the first game with a few serial numbers filed off, *Humans!!!* is an improvement on the original while still being compatible and with a feel all its own. Adding the games together seems balanced (killing the player zombies gives the human players three trophies instead of one, but the player zombies move faster than the "NPC" undead), so whatever one's poison the theme works and is another feather in the corpse-obsessed Twilight cap.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Where The Deep Ones Are

Published by **Atlas Games**

Written by Ken Hite

Illustrated by Andy Hopp

10"×8" full-color 32-page hardcover; $19.99

Come the closing hours of October 31st, are your children chained up in bed after a hard Halloween's trek from door to door in search of another handful of sweet treats to fill their pumpkin-shaped buckets and their gaping tooth-filled mouths with ever-more sugary delights? Do they clamor for a bedtime story, something fittingly ghoulish and ghostly that will give them the scares they so crave on this dark night? If they don't, and if they aren't, what kind of offspring are you raising?

Once done, might I suggest that you retire to your own bed, taking with you your own story book to enjoy, whether alone or in the company of a loved one? Perhaps the very first children's book by Ken Hite, a writer best known for mining the esoteric in gaming and quite possibly the last man you would think to become a children's author. Yet if I tell you that his first children's book is "a MINI MYTHOS book," then your qualms should be calmed. Further, if I tell you that the title of this book is *Where The Deep Ones Are,* then they should be fully allayed.

For as the title alludes, this is a parody, a retelling of one classic story through the vehicle of another. With *Where The Deep Ones Are,* Hite takes what he regards as one of H.P. Lovecraft's near-perfect works (as described in his recent *TOUR de LOVECRAFT*), "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," and retells it through that classic children's tale *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. Both classics entail a journey of discovery. In the latter, young Max is sent to bed without any supper for "making mischief"; from his room sails into his imagination to the lands of the Wild Things are where he can have a proper "rumpus," but once homesick he is able to return to find a hot supper waiting. In "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," an unnamed narrator describes being stranded in a strange New England fishing port and of discovering the strange fish-frog men that like to come ashore and mingle, before finally revealing that he has the blood of this mingling in his veins, and like his cousin, will transform eventually into something batrachian.

In *Where The Deep Ones Are,* young Bobby -- a nod to Robert Olmstead, whom Lovecraft revealed as the narrator of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" -- is sent to bed for wanting too much fish; once there and still wearing his frog-like costume, he is able to sail down river to dread Innsmouth in search of his favorite food. There he discovers not just the town's secrets, but who he is and what he really wants -- and it is definitely more than fish! Despite its dream-like quality, for Bobby this is not a journey of the imagination, but one of horrible understanding and acceptance. In this, *Where The Deep Ones Are* is definitely more Lovecraft & Hite than Sendak, and, despite using a classic of children's literature as a vehicle in its retelling, the tale very much demands a knowledge and understanding of Lovecraft's own story to be fully appreciated.

Hite cannot keep to as few words as Sendak ("The Shadow Over Innsmouth" is longer and more complex), but he can parody the style, managing to convey Lovecraft's complexities in surprisingly few words, though doubtless the Mythos neophyte will himself wanting more. The parody is vibrantly supported by Andy Hopp, whose illustrations echo those of Sendak and Max's journey, except with more frogs and fish. His marvelous rendering of Innsmouth's Deep Ones lumber, lurch, and leer out of the page at you, all goggle-eyed and ready for their own rumpus. Were someone to turn these Deep Ones into something unwholesomely plush, I would not be surprised.

Previous Mythos-themed titles aimed at a younger market, such as *Baby's First Mythos* or *Mother Hydra's Mythos Rhymes,* worked in verse form and so seemed to lose much in the rendering. With *Where The Deep Ones Are,* the author is at least hinting at, if not the "Cosmic Horror" of Lovecraft's story, then the inevitability of the narrator's fishy fate; the longer form of a prose story is better able to impart that and the wonder of it. Hite has already hinted at one future MINI MYTHOS title: a retelling of *At the Mountains of Madness* through *The Polar Express.* The concept lends itself to many more. I for one would love to see *The Cat in the Hat* retold through "The Rats in the Walls."

As you close the pages upon your copy of *Where the Deep Ones Are*, ponder this. If not a book for children -- for surely it is for those of us old enough to appreciate both classics -- could its purpose be something else? Could it be a warning upon the dangers of eating fish, or perhaps a primer on the heritage of all those with a certain name? A certain name that can only be Marsh? Tell me reader, have you seen our esteemed editor spread his fingers of late, or blink? Ever . . .?

--Matthew Pook

?

by Greg Hyland

Murphy's Rules

?

The Three-Step Path

In a mystery story, something is unknown.
In a thriller story, something is unknown, and it can kill you.
In a horror story, something is unknown, and it can eat you.

In my mind, one of the problems with trying to run a horror campaign is that it's hard to do; like the half-a-dead-cat rattling around the box that Schrödinger gave me, the act of gaming affect the game. In other words, the mere act of participating in a horror campaign can cause those who are participating to behave differently; it can be almost impossible to have players who are participating in a horror campaign *not* behave like they're participating in a horror campaign. If you're in a ***Call of Cthulhu*** adventure, it can quickly become SOP to collect every scrap of information, lock every door, and question everyone who's behaving suspiciously to within an inch of their lives.

Conversely, *not* telling players that they're potentially in a horror campaign is a recipe for disaster; after all, many players simply don't like horror, as I've [discussed before](#).

Perhaps this is one of the reasons I enjoy playing in and running ***World of Darkness*** campaigns so much. In almost every campaign from those settings I've been in, there's a horrific undercurrent, but most of the time it quickly becomes a non-horror campaign. For example, many ***Vampire*** campaigns quickly turn into the day-to-day political machinations of various factions; political intrigue can be interesting and engaging, but it's not particularly scary. Likewise most ***Werewolf*** adventures revolve around attacking spirit-infested people and places; this may lead to some icky things, but encountering a [six-foot-tall cockroach](#) is a lot less scary when you're a nine-foot-tall furry killing machine. *But* the mere fact that you're in a ***World of Darkness*** campaign gives the GM permission to spring a horror story on you at any time. After all, when you're playing an undead monster who drinks the blood of the living to maintain a cursed unliving condition, you don't have much room to complain when other horrific elements are introduced.

The interesting thing about these "surprise" horror stories (which the heroes agreed to beforehand by virtue of agreeing to play in a ***World of Darkness*** campaign) is that they tend to follow the progression at the top of the article. Namely, the heroes begin with an adventure where something is unknown, and they assume it's a mystery. Then they realize the unknown thing poses a threat to them, and it becomes a thriller. And finally they realize that threat can actually cause them some sort of harm or setback that exists outside the normal "rules" they're used to, and the stakes are a lot higher than originally believed. And *that's* horror.

What makes the ***World of Darkness*** work, then, is the idea that, because the players agreed to the initial horrific conditions of the premise of the setting itself, it's perfectly permissible to "surprise" them with horror at any time. ***Earthdawn*** exists as another good template for a setting where it's entirely possible to play it horror-free -- in this case, epic fantasy -- but the players almost certainly understand that you can spring other ickiness on them if and when you're so inclined. And, as a final example, if players who agree to show up to an ***In Nomine*** don't realize that there's the possibility for diabolic horror . . . well, they probably didn't read the back cover copy very well.

Expanding further, this idea can be incorporated into other campaign types as well. For example, let's say you want to run a darker supers campaign. You tell the players that their PCs will all have powers which are tapped via the same source: Namely, death-row inmates who volunteer to have their life essences drained (killing them) in return for significant monetary compensation for their families. These life essences need to be replenished about once a year, or more often if their powers are used extensively. The heroes, you explain, will have a two-fold darker edge; first, they'll know that their powers were derived from the death of another human, and to maintain those abilities they will need to keep enabling others' deaths. (The PCs also have the option of draining others they encounter of *their* essences to power themselves.) As a secondary wrinkle, you explain that occasionally the heroes will receive demands, requests, or inquiries from these inmates whose souls are fueling the heroes' powers. The PCs are generally able to control these impulses and keep them in check, but it weighs on their hearts.

If the players sign on for such a premise, then they understand that this is a horrific world and setting -- one where

souls can be eaten and heroes can be tempted by the internal chittering of criminal minds -- even if most adventures *won't* be horrific. The campaign can be played as a standard super-heroic campaign most of the time, but the possibility exists for the heroes to encounter something that follows the mystery-thriller-horror pathway.

If you and your players like the idea of occasional horror but don't want to play in a horror campaign, consider having them sign up for a setting where unsettling elements form the undercurrent of the campaign. That way, horror can remain where it is most effective: lurking in the shadows.

--Steven Marsh

The Munemoro Rewrite

Birthing the Future, Today

by Alice Turow

"This is awful; do you see what you're doing to the world?!"
*"Your question is intriguing. Let us now rephrase it: Do **you** see what I'm doing to the world?"*

Once a generation -- or perhaps less often -- an intellect comes along with the power to change the world. Such is the case with Dr. Yoshida Munemoro, the brilliant geneticist who can alter humanity.

"The Munemoro Rewrite" is a moral dilemma for modern-day campaigns. It is designed to have the scope and power of a globe-spanning horror campaign, but a realism and immediacy that might be more tangible for players than shadowy tentacled monsters lurking on the periphery of perception.The Munemoro Rewrite

Dr. Munemoro has created a process for would-be parents that enables them to conceive the best possible child from their genetic material. Although he refers to this process as "Dr. Munemoro's Genetic Counseling Process #19," the press has dubbed it "the Munemoro Rewrite," a name that has stuck. (No one but Munemoro knows what the first 18 processes are.)

According to the scientist himself, the Munemoro Rewrite culls out all less-than-optimal gametes from fertile parents. If two patients who have had the procedure conceive a child together, the result is a superchild: an offspring who performs at the absolute peak of physical and mental human ability. (Press attempts at dubbing such children "munemorians" have so far been unsuccessful.) The process is suboptimal when performed on one parent; although the resultant kids are significantly above average, they are not the "quantum leap" beyond their peers like the Munemoro superchildren are.

The Munemoro Rewrite process is not patented, because Dr. Munemoro believes that his techniques, knowledge, and understanding are so much more advanced than the rest of humanity, his efforts cannot possibly be duplicated within the window granted by patents. He is correct in these beliefs; it will be at least 30 to 40 years before science progresses to Munemoro's genius . . . and that assumes superchildren scientists attempting to duplicate his efforts.

Although not known, the Munemoro Rewrite process is unable to be duplicated because it uses several different techniques to achieve its results. For women, the procedure involves chemical and radioactive treatments, which kill suboptimal eggs and enriches the few ones left to survive the remaining child-bearing years of the patient. For men, the process is similar, and also relies on (somewhat primitive) nanotechnology that eliminates suboptimal gametes and bolsters promising ones; this extra step is required because male gametes are continuously generated, and thus a one-shot treatment would be ineffective. These nanites are keyed to the genetic code of the man; they thus cannot be transferred to anyone else accidentally or intentionally.

The Future Children

Children who result from two parents who have undergone the Munemoro Rewrite are maximized versions of humanity in every way. (In game terms, assume that all such offspring *begin* at the peak of human ability for the game system's core attributes or ability scores, and they can potentially advance beyond that. For example, in **GURPS** and the **d20 System,** all attributes would begin at 20; in the **D6 System,** all attributes would start at 5D; in the **World of Darkness,** all attributes would start at 4 or 5 pips; and so on.) In addition, the future offspring of superchildren are themselves superchildren automatically, without the need for treatment; in fact, were they to receive the Munemoro Rewrite, it would provide no additional benefit. These superchildren almost always possess other great physical and mental gifts, including high pain thresholds, photographic memories, absolute direction senses, unerring internal

calculators, and so on. Although these abilities are all at least somewhat realistic -- no one has flight, telekinesis, or other obviously supernatural powers -- they also push the boundary of what is considered possible by humans. For example, an exceptionally perceptive person might enjoy something closely akin to a "danger sense," without there being anything preternatural about the ability.

These superchildren are somewhat detached from the rest of humanity, in the way that the exceptionally gifted sometimes are. However, there is nothing else "wrong," sinister, or otherwise bad about them (at least, as envisioned by the basic version of this scenario; see below for more possibilities).

Intentions as Paving Stones

The campaign conflict that arises from Munemoro's process comes directly from the means by which he has gone about making that procedure available: Only those capable of paying his exorbitant fee can even consider the measure. The cost is such that only the upper 0.5% of the world's population can remotely afford it, and all but the richest of those would find it financially devastating to do so.

As such, the world is quickly filtering into three categories:

- the ultra-rich, capable of affording the process with enough reserves to maintain their positions of wealth and power at the upper echelons of society;
- the super-rich, who bring themselves down to the realms of the merely rich by enduring the procedure; and
- everyone else.

Of course, not all those who are ultra-rich choose to pursue the process; many of them are already past their child-rearing years. However, if they can't get the procedure themselves, they have provided for their children to undergo the process. The super-rich have a harder time affording the measures for their own children -- especially if they have more than two -- and the media has dubbed them a somewhat commonly known acronym: FRANCS (Formerly Rich, And Now Choosing Superchildren).

The upshot of this incredible barrier to undergoing the Munemoro Rewrite is that the world is rapidly dividing (or will be soon) into two classes: the superchildren and everyone else. These superchildren are so much superior to their unelevated peers that it seems inevitable they will become the ruling class. And, since the beneficiaries of the procedure pass on their abilities to their offspring, once the cost is paid, it does not need to be repaid for that bloodline. Furthermore, once the superchildren become entrenched in positions of power in the world, the flow of wealth to the world's richest should escalate even further.

Of course, at least one person should emerge as incredibly powerful in this new world: Dr. Yoshida Munemoro is on track to become one of the 20 wealthiest people in the world within two years. His further ascent up that list is virtually assured unless an outside force disrupts his operation.

For this adventure to work, the heroes will need to learn and comprehend the direction the world will rapidly take if Munemoro is left to his own endeavors. If they don't make the connection themselves, they might be told by a mentor, allied agency, or even a villain who puts aside his quarrel to point out the danger to the heroes. Alternatively, as the superchildren become more apparent in society, the PCs might learn about the path the world is taking via the news. (Of course, by the time the mainstream media has enough fodder to develop talking-point opinions, it might be too late to alter the course of humanity.)

The Rewritten World

The world's governments will probably not act against the procedure . . . at least, not with any unified force. There will always be a part of the world willing to host the doctor's procedures. (In a worse case scenario, Dr. Munemoro possesses the resources to move his operations entirely to international waters, out of the reach of government authorities.) In general, the world powers will be deeply concerned with the rise of the superchildren, but they will be

more concerned at the prospect of *other* countries being unwilling (or unable) to halt the elevation of their elite. As such, governmental powers might make token efforts to curtail Dr. Munemoro, but it's unlikely they will pursue any serious effort to stop him without truly heroic efforts by outside forces (read: the PCs). Of course, if the presence of superchildren begins to reap benefits for the countries in which they reside, all bets will be off.

Using the Munemoro Rewrite in a Campaign

In the broad sense, the Munemoro Rewrite is designed to provide a pivot point in history, encapsulated in a way that the heroes (and players) can understand and attempt to influence if they are so inclined. The eugenic future it points to is similar to that postulated by much speculative fiction. At best, it might become an amazingly segregated, sterile world akin to that seen in *Gattaca* (amplified considerably); at worst, it might point toward a future of super-soldier warfare, akin to *Star Trek's* [Eugenics Wars](#) or the [Nietzscheans](#) from *Andromeda.*

In this case, the pivot is entirely focussed on one person; without Dr. Yoshida Munemoro, the process cannot continue, as he personally performs the complex procedure on every participant. (Of course, anyone he has already performed the treatment on may continue to reap the benefits.) Presuming the heroes understand the implications of what Munemoro is doing, and agree that something should be done, they are denied the respite provided in most stories of this sort: As conceived, Dr. Munemoro is not a mustache-twirling, handwringing sinister mastermind, nor are those transformed secretly tainted with alien presences or foul ichor. If they were, of course, the heroes could simply toss grenades at the situation and feel righteous.

For morally ambivalent player characters, the notion of trying to incapacitate or kill Dr. Munemoro may pose no ethical concerns for them. In this case, the geneticist might serve as merely a target for their latest action-packed black ops. (Of course, they would be trying to kill one of the wealthiest people in the world, complete with the resources and defenses that would entail.) But for heroes with more rigid codes of honor, this might prove to be difficult: How do you stop someone who isn't actively doing anything evil per se, yet whose actions will have an evil result in the future?

Besides killing or incapacitating the doctor, there are a few other ways the Munemoro situation might possibly resolve. First, it's conceivable that the knowledge he holds can be stolen, reverse engineered, independently developed, or otherwise distributed more freely. This won't solve the situation of the rise of superchildren, but it might make things more egalitarian. (It could also result in larger numbers of these elevated humans coming into the world, escalating the situation.) Independent development will probably be very difficult without considerable outside heroic actions involving the theft of knowledge or materials; as conceived, Munemoro simply knows and understands more than the rest of humanity. (In *GURPS* terms, he probably exists at least one to two tech levels above everyone else, at least as far as his knowledge and understanding of eugenics, reproductive nanotechnology, and genetics is concerned.)

As another potential solution, the heroes might try to get government involvement. If (say) having the Munemoro Rewrite is globally criminalized, enabling governments to seize assets or perhaps even sterilize the "criminals,"

The Enigmatic Munemoro

As written in this adventure, Dr. Munemoro is almost entirely devoid of a personality, with his ultimate goals and motivations enigmatic. This is intentional. In some ways, it doesn't matter; his actions are what matter to the campaign, not his desires and goals. For much the same reasons that the timeline can remain the same if Thomas Edison is an egomaniacal mastermind or a kindly inventor, so too can Dr. Munemoro assume whatever personality traits that would be useful for the GM. Unless the PCs possess incredible influence or power of their own, they might not be able to get close enough to understand the "real" Munemoro. (How much does the average person generally know, for example, about anyone on the list of the world's richest people?)

For the adventure to be at its most challenging, however, there are a few suggestions.

As mentioned elsewhere, Dr. Munemoro is not in any way evil, or even necessarily amoral. He has developed a technique that has long eluded scientists, and he believes (correctly) that the world will pay for his process. He rationalizes that since the process is so mind-bogglingly expensive (which it is) that it is out of reach for all but the wealthiest people on Earth as it

then few would undertake the procedure. This would require significant political maneuvering on the heroes' parts, and it would necessitate considerable dedication and follow-through to ensure that the desired results were achieved. This could also be the catalyst that pushes Munemoro to a more sinister role in the campaign. Taking a political tack could form a good (if creepy) "origin story" for a newly created black ops campaign.

For long-running campaigns (or campaigns that are intended to be long-running), the Munemoro Rewrite can serve as a foreboder to larger developments. For example, many cyberpunk adventures could incorporate this plot into a prequel miniseries, giving the heroes a chance to forestall (or proving to the players' satisfaction how difficult it is to do something).

Alternate Rewrites

The core idea of the Munemoro Rewrite is a realistic horror concept that can be applied to many different realistic campaigns and situations. Here are some further suggestions for translating the idea to other genres or settings.

Fantasy

The Rewrite can be transplanted almost directly to many fantasy settings. Because many vaguely medieval settings are already sharply divided into haves and have-nots, it may not be particularly horrific. However, if the fantasy society has as much potential upward mobility and middle-class comforts as an average *Dungeons & Dragons* setting, the effects of the creation of a race of superbeings could be truly depressing. The pathos would take on even uglier tones if the process is limited to only one race; a different quasi-apocalyptic setting arises from contemplating the elevation of elves, humans, or goblins above all other races.

Supers

The Munemoro Rewrite already creates "superchildren," so it's a small stretch to consider that this process might create *actual* super-powered individuals. Imagine a typical supers world where *everyone* with superpowers is also a multimillionaire many times over.

Psionics

In addition to the possibility that the Rewrite can awaken psionic abilities (similar to the Supers idea), a campaign world with psionic abilities provides an ideal way of amplifying the conflict: Mind-reading talents would prove that Munemoro is not evil nor are his creations. Precognitive powers can allow the mentalist to visit a possible future where the Rewrite is allowed to have its full impact. Empathic abilities would show the general detachment of the superchildren from humanity.

Horror

As an obvious development for this idea, any number of supernatural aspects can be overlaid onto the Rewrite. However, almost all of them weaken the central dilemma: If the process becomes in any way tainted outside of a

is, why not simply ensure that a considerable profit is built in for him?

Nor is Dr. Munemoro particularly *good.* He could, for example, work with governments to try to work to bring humanity to a new level as a group, rather than creating by design a gulf between the haves and the have-nots. But this doesn't interest him; like many people with a unique talent people are willing to pay for, he sees nothing wrong with trying to earn as much money as possible from his abilities.

The doctor is not stupid, either. He will take considerable precautions and devote a significant portion of his wealth to keeping himself alive and well.

It should also be noted that the blank slate of Dr. Munemoro can be replaced with anyone who already exists in the campaign. For example, if there is already a well-known supergenius in the game world, he can easily become the inventor of the "Munemoro Rewrite." In this case, the GM should make sure that the existing character's actions are similarly devoid of malice (especially if the Munemoro role is given to a reformed supervillain). To be most effective, the heroes can't have the easy option of going in with guns blazing and feeling morally justified in that action.

general sense of unease about the future, then more drastic measures to end the problem become justified.

In one interesting twist -- especially in a setting where the PCs have access to psionic abilities -- the rise of the superchildren allows the world under their indifferent control to thwart some *greater* threat. Maybe the existence of Munemoro-altered individuals provides the protection the world needs to thwart some ancient old ones destined to invade in the future. In other words, what if the bleak, dystopian future predicted by the Rewrite is a *best* case scenario?

In Nomine

An obvious development would be to have Dr. Munemoro be an agent of Vapula. However, this should probably be avoided, as it gives angelic PCs an easy out: demonic involvement = guns blazing. Far more interesting is if the doctor has managed to figure out these secrets on his own as a normal human. This might place those on the side of Heaven in an awkward position: Is it ever justified to attempt to commit the evil of killing a normal human, if doing so prevents an exponentially greater evil?

Of course, many ways exist in which *In Nomine* PCs can attempt to resolve the situation without killing. In these cases, angelic involvement to attempt to peacefully resolve the Munemoro Rewrite situation would almost certainly invite demonic intervention to thwart those actions and protect Munemoro. Regardless, both sides would have powerful incentives to attempt to sway him to their worldview.

Science Fiction

Although the technology and scientific understanding in most science fiction is so far beyond that of the modern day, the Munemoro Rewrite could still serve as the catalyst for an interstellar ban on human genetic modification. Some of the superchildren might even escape to the stars to form their own colony (like the end of *Star Trek*'s Eugenics Wars) -- and return someday to take revenge on those who shunned them.

Alternatively, in a space-faring campaign, the adventuring group could come across a planet where Dr. Munemoro has just made his procedure available to the public; in this case, the Munemoro Rewrite only affect those of the alien species. Assuming the PCs have an inkling of what could happen, how much right do they have to interfere with another planet's development, especially if the superchildren could someday take to the stars?

Alternate Earths

For those who feel the basic unpowered prospect of the Munemoro Rewrite is too nebulous to be affecting, one good possibility is to allow the heroes to travel to another world where the Munemoro Rewrite has already had a generation or two to unfold. Once they witness firsthand the dystopian "future" (in whatever form the GM presents), they might return to their own world and learn about a gentleman named Dr. Yoshida Munemoro who has big -- and expensive -- plans for the world . . .

The Children of Khenti-Amentiu

A Lurking Archaeological Threat for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*

by J. Edward Tremlett

May 23, 1932:

Dear God, what have I done?

I write these last words while hiding for my life. I only barely escaped the wretched, horrid things we unearthed when we forced open the Necropolis. I fear they will find me soon. The creatures are slow, but there are too many of them. Far too many.

What a fool I was to come to this place! I longed to prove those fools at the Society wrong. Indeed I have, but at what cost? I have discovered something so horrible, so **AWFUL** . . .

I now know the true, long-hidden reason the Egyptians buried their dead in the manner that they did. It was not to prepare them for their afterlife. **IT WAS TO PROTECT THE LIVING FROM THE DEAD!**

Dear God, they're coming closer. Merciful God forgive me. I have unleashed hell upon the world.

One of the great mysteries of the ancient Egyptians is how they came to bury their dead in the manner they did. The true explanation did not survive through the ages, as much of the time before the Dynasties was lost in time and translation.

But the evidence abided, buried deep in the Western desert. Miles from the earliest of known tombs, in an unknown necropolis, an ancient evil was locked away for an eternity. The shambling, swarm-ridden children of a long-forgotten god slept in the darkness -- their dark hunger denied respite for thousands of years. And they waited for the day that someone would release them into the world, so that they could once again feast.

That time is *now* . . .

This article for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* presents a new kind of zombie: the insect-infested "children" of an ancient, mostly forgotten god. It presents information on their history and imprisonment, their stats and appearance, and ideas for using them. It also details their unique form of "Spreading the Love," and presents tips on using their god, Khenti-Amentiu, in play.

The Horror of the Western Sands

Long ago, in pre-Dynastic Egypt (before 3100 BC), one of the gods of the dead was a insect-headed entity named Khenti-Amentiu -- "Foremost of the Westerners." In later times, he would be seen as a companion to Osiris and Anubis, but the early Egyptians knew him for what he truly was: an evil monster who raised the dead from their resting places, setting them against the living.

Great precautions were taken against these mass incursions of the undead, including the creation of burial charms to ward off evil, and burying the departed with their possessions to remind them of who they once were. But the god's magic seemed too powerful for such paltry defenses, and every year, at the start of what became known as "the Time of Hunger," entire villages would be wiped from the map by shambling hordes of undead.

In the generation before the unification of Egypt, a wise and powerful magician discovered the enemy god's secret: the dead were not brought back to life by spells, but by a strange kind of insect. These tiny, bone-white beetles swarmed from the deserts when the season was right, infecting the bodies of the sand-dried dead. Thus were the dead made extensions of the will of Khenti-Amentiu.

Empowered by this dark knowledge, the magician formulated a dire plan. He forced a hundred workers and a score of soldiers into the Western deserts, a great distance away from the burial place that would become Abydos. Out there, lost in the sands, was a necropolis older than time, built by nameless ancients whose civilization had long since vanished. And there, over the course of a year, he had his workers change and refit the necropolis to his needs.

Once the workers completed their task, the magician waited for the first night of the time of hunger. Then he ordered the soldiers to slay all the workers, placing their bodies deep within the central structure. That night, by the light of the full moon, he created a lure so powerful that every one of the dark god's newly-awakened insects was drawn to the necropolis. Swarm after swarm buzzed and clicked its way to the central structure, where fresh bodies awaited them.

As soon as the magician was satisfied that every last of the bone-white beetles remained locked inside -- and, by extension, the power of their god -- he instructed all his soldiers to seal the door. Once it was closed he worked a final spell, forcing the souls of the warriors into the door, so that no servant of Khenti-Amentiu could open it. And, victorious, the magician left the nameless necropolis behind him, along with any evidence of the terrible things he did there.

The magician went on to become the chief priest of the first Pharaoh of a united Egypt, some years later. Through suppression and propaganda, the true tales of what had happened were warped and changed, so that within a few generations no one remembered the tales of the walking dead. The now-impotent Khenti-Amentiu was transformed -- changed into a jackal-headed, benevolent, lesser deity -- and the elaborate burials of the dead became less about fear of their rising, and more of making their souls ready for an eternal afterlife.

Meanwhile, the nameless necropolis was swallowed by the sands, as the magician had intended -- its ghastly secret hopefully preserved for all time to come.

From Out of the Ages

Despite the best efforts of the nameless magician, and his followers, bits and pieces of evidence survived.

There was a cult dedicated to the true nature of Khenti-Amentiu that managed to last until the 4th Dynasty, well after the time that the god was officially "changed." The heretics were found and executed. They were buried alive in coffins that bore no name and left at the bottom of a deep pit at Abydos, along with the broken shards of their god's old, insect-headed statues.

One of the high priests scrawled the true nature of their beloved god on the lid of his coffin with his fingernails. He also bemoaned his deity's imprisonment, somewhere out in the western deserts, but he had no idea where that prison might have been. The cursed pit has yet to be discovered, but with every square inch of Abydos being dug up to uncover the past, it's only a matter of time before it's found.

There was also the so-called Buttersworth Papyri. Professor Buttersworth, a disgruntled member of the Society for the Exploration of Egypt, found a cache of papyri written in the ancient picture language that predated hieroglyphics. When translated, they revealed markers leading to a necropolis in the western deserts that the Ancient Egyptians knew of, but had no idea who it belonged to.

Flush with excitement, he hastily organized a secret expedition, intent on having all the glory to himself. He did take the precaution of leaving copies of the scrolls and their translation with a friend, so that if he didn't come back a rescue could be mounted. But when he failed to return, his "friend" -- who thought Buttersworth mad -- threw out the translation, keeping the scrolls for their value.

In time, the Egyptian Government took the cache from the late friend's estate sale. Its contents now sit amongst a massive backlog of untranslated papyri at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, seemingly unremarkable. But if someone were to translate the papyri, as Professor Buttersworth did, they'd be told not only of how the necropolis was discovered ages ago by Horus, while feeling the wrath of his uncle Seth, but directions on how to get there from Abydos.

Destinations Unknown and Evil

Getting to the necropolis requires a 100-mile trek through the punishing western deserts. The party must follow the stars at night, and look for certain, creepy landmarks during the day. They will be at the mercy of the sun, thirst, and certain Bedouin tribes that are known to snipe at those entering their tribal territory.

The necropolis sits in a depression ringed by strange, corpse-like spires of rock. Its only visible structure is a squat trapezoid seemingly carved from living rock; it is 50 feet long and wide, with a slight slope on the sides making the roof 40 feet wide on the front and back. A large, sealed slab of rock serves as a door, and appears to be the only entrance.

The entire structure is covered with the picture-writing that pre-dated hieroglyphics. Those who succeed in a Very Difficult Science (Archaeology) roll can tell that the carvings were added on at a later date. The carvings on the back and sides of the structure seem to be a series of incantations designed to lure something in, and keep it there.

The inscriptions on the door tell the story of the fight against Khenti-Amentiu, and how a great spell was worked here to trap his evil power in this city of the dead. It doesn't mention the insects by name, merely using "the evil force" to describe what animated the god's dead soldiers. It ends with a plea to leave this place, lest the evil be let loose once more.

If the party opens the door, they are greeted by a five-by-five tunnel that slopes down at 45 degrees, extending halfway into the trapezoid before leveling out. It goes straight forward for 50 more feet, then widens out into a trapezoidal room the same dimensions as the visible structure, up above. Several open rooms lead away to other, smaller trapezoidal rooms, and initial exploration reveals that the place is a warren of empty chambers; rooms and passages lead to yet more rooms and passages, seemingly endless.

The place is carved from the living rock, with no writing or markings at all, except for uneven conglomerations of light-colored bricks half-sunk into the floor. There are no coffins, no caches of treasure, and no bodies. In fact, the only things down here are weird, scuttling bone-white beetles that slink into the shadows as soon as light is turned upon them.

If the Cast Members are the first to open the necropolis, the dead slip back into the far corners of the warrens and try to encircle them, thus cutting them off the sole exit. If they're second on the scene, there aren't as many dead on the inside, but there are some lying in wait outside, buried in the sand. They wait until the party splits up for entry into the necropolis, and then, when they know the ones inside are attacking, go after the ones who stayed behind.

The ward on the doorway is still potent, even when removed. There's nothing to stop the undead, or their insect swarms, from going outside once it's open, but once they're out they can't get back in. This can lead to a scary stand-

off, with the dead waiting silently outside the front for the party to die of thirst. And when they do, the insects still inside are waiting for fresh hosts . . .

The Children of Khenti-Amentiu

STR 2
DEX 1
CON 2
INT 1
PER 1
WIL 2

DPs: 26
EPs: n/a
Spd: 2
Essence: 9
Skills: Brawling 2
Attack: Bite Damage D4 x2 (4) Slashing
Weak Spot: Fire -5
Getting Around: Slow and Steady 0
Strength: Dead Joe Average 0
Senses: Like the Dead 0
Sustenance: Who Needs Food? +8
Intelligence: Tool Use 1 +3, Animal Cunning +2, Teamwork +4
Spreading the Love: Infestation -1
Special: Nest (level 1 included with Infestation)
Power: 16

The undead servants of Khenti-Amentiu are dried, desiccated corpses that are home to buzzing hives of bone-white beetles. They are practically dripping with the foul insects of their dark god, and anyone who attacks them in hand to hand combat will have to contend with being bitten by the things.

The zombies shamble slowly, but are not as stupid as they appear. They share a group mind in Khenti-Amentiu, gaining a sense of teamwork, as well as the ability to use simple tools and weapons. They are also quite adept at hiding, stalking prey, and digging themselves into the sand in order to attack passersby.

The creatures present another, greater threat: after all this time, the zombies are stuffed to the point of bursting with dormant eggs. Should those eggs be immersed in water -- like, say, an oasis, or the Nile -- they will hatch en masse, creating an additional swarm that will seek out the nearest corpse. If enough zombies engage in "hatching," the situation could turn from a minor disaster into a total zombie outbreak.

Luckily, their chief weakness is easy to arrange: fire. The beetles crave liquids, and leech what they can from the bodies they inhabit, leaving them incredibly dry. A good fire not only burns the body, but crisps the infestation as well. This kills the creature as well as its eggs, thus prohibiting the insects from raising another corpse.

Khenti-Amentiu

Spreading the Love: Infestation -1

This form of raising the undead involves something living (or possibly unliving) taking over a corpse and stirring it into action -- automatically conferring the Nest Special Feature in the process. The Infestation can consist of bugs, spiders, worms, and other forms of vermin, but it has to be some creature that could cause one regular damage, through bites, stings, poisons, etc.

In order to spread the love, the zombie must kill a victim, and then spend five consecutive turns in skin-to-skin contact with the fresh corpse. At this time a portion of the swarm that infests the zombie slides into the dead body, impregnating it with the foul forces that drive the infestation -- riddling its dead flesh with tunnels and breeding chambers. Within 24 hours of infestation, the zombie rises, now host to a small swarm of vermin and burning to kill, thus spreading its foul condition to others.

The best way to deal with a zombie with infestation is to burn it: The fire slowly destroys the corpse *and* the swarm within it, preventing it from spreading. However, if the zombie is destroyed by normal damage, the infestation quickly exits, doing one last bit of regular damage to its killer as it skitters away to find a new corpse.

Fortunately for the characters, Khenti-Amentiu isn't as powerful as the term "god" might suggest. Even in his heyday, when the ancient people feared his Time of Hunger, he still wasn't able to hold a candle to the more puissant deities of Ancient Egypt. The fact that names like Osiris, Isis, and Seth are still known the world over, while he remains something of an archaeological footnote, shows just how comparatively weak an entity he is.

While he is an immortal being, blessed with great powers, his relationship with the beetles runs both ways: His swarms are nothing without him, and he is nothing without them. That is why he's languished without power for the thousands of years that his insects have been sealed up in the necropolis. He *could* still talk through a perfect likeness of himself, such as one of his insect-headed statues, but they were all smashed to pieces during the 4th Dynasty, leaving him totally silent.

Once the seal of the nameless necropolis is broken, Khenti-Amentiu will have a measure of his strength back. He will then be able to do the following:

- See through the eyes of his insect swarms and, by extension, though the eyes of any corpse taken over by them. He can't focus on everything at once, of course, but he has enough presence of mind to skim through his legions and find what, or who, he's looking for in a matter of minutes.
- Direct the actions of any swarm he's paying particular attention to, though he can't focus on more than a handful at any given time -- especially if they're some distance apart.
- Form a "god body" out of a swarm, or several swarms, of his beetles. This buzzing, pulsing mockery of a form looks like his insect-headed statues, and allows him to speak in a deep, buzzing voice. It requires a Fear Test at -2 to look at a buzzing, insect-headed god made of bugs without fear when he's the size of a person; if he gets so large he looms over buildings the Fear Test is at -5.

Khenti-Amentiu can't do any blunt force damage when he manifests in this fashion, but he can engulf people in the swarm, doing one damage per turn as per the Nest Special Ability. The more swarms his body's made of, the longer it takes to get out of him, and the more damage is experienced. As with the swarms, gunfire and physical damage won't harm it, but explosives will scatter its insects, and fire (and possibly poison gas) will kill the swarms, causing it to break up. It won't damage Khenti-Amentiu, himself, though.

Khenti-Amentiu's chief weakness is that his swarm is still just a bunch of bugs. He can only be truly active at times of the year best suited for them to be out and about, which is why there was a "Time of Hunger," and not a constant threat. This is also why the nameless magician was able to trick the swarms into the necropolis in the first place, as the power of the magical lure was so great that the god could not order his insects to turn away.

When Khenti-Amentiu gets his full strength back, he may show extra abilities, but this is up to the Zombie Master. Giving the god psychic abilities and miracles might be called for, but might also be overkill. Being able to command armies of bug-ridden zombies, talk through statues, and not be killed may be more than enough for the Cast Members to handle.

Exploitations of Ancient Evil

The most obvious use for the Children of Khenti-Amentiu is to have some archaeologist unearth them, and have them shamble out of the deserts, towards the Nile. When they undead reach the water, their long-dormant eggs will hatch, and the resulting swarm will block out the Sun all over the river valley.

The exposed swarm cannot be effectively attacked by blunt force or firearms. Area weapons like fire and explosives (and possibly poison gas) do normal damage. If it takes 10 or more points of damage it will lose coherence and cease to be a threat.

Help From Beyond the Gulfs of Time

The nameless civilization that existed to the west of the Nile knew Khenti-Amentiu of old. He was considered one of their evil gods, too, and the true reason they built their necropoli the way they did. The bodies of the dead were pulverized, cremated and turned into light-colored bricks, which made for efficient burial, and no chance of being resurrected by a swarm of insects.

Hidden deep within the nameless necropolis -- ensconced behind sliding walls and deadly traps -- are magic items and weapons that will help destroy his undead. Survivors and Inspired may be able to figure out how they

The bugs will then stream into the cemeteries, raising hundreds of thousands of corpses within hours -- creating a true Deadworld.

The Cast Members can get by on trying to survive, but they may find the clues that hapless archaeologist left behind, and ultimately uncover the nameless necropolis. Once there, they may possibly find something to help them combat the threat, or at least gain the important understanding that it's the bugs, themselves, that drive the monsters. What they do with that knowledge is up to them.

work to use them, but the Ancients left no writing, inscriptions, or pictographs on their tombs or artifacts. It will have to be guesswork, inspiration, and trial and error that save the day.

Another possibility is to have the Cast Members be the ones who uncover the evil. Perhaps they follow some archaeologist out into the wastes with tales of ancient, unknown civilizations, only to find that the curse on the door isn't just to scare robbers. Maybe they follow the clues in the Buttersworth Papyri, or discover the evidence in the cursed pit. Or perhaps they stumble upon the necropolis while in the deserts searching for something else, or during a war, and their curiosity gets the better of them.

No matter what their reason for finding it, they have a chance to contain the threat before it gets worse and becomes a proper Deadworld. The number of undead at the site can be adjusted by saying that the nameless magician had 200, 500, or possibly even a thousand slaves working on the necropolis. Higher numbers should be used for Survivors or Inspired characters, or larger, well-armed groups of Norms.

Another option is the time-bomb. Maybe someone opened the tomb in the early 20th century, but the zombies don't attack until the early 21st. They take their time until Khenti-Amentiu is at full strength, yet again, and only then march towards the Nile. This scenario would make some things easier, as the cast members have access to modern day technology and weapons. But dealing with a fully-powered god is an ordeal against which helicopters, machine guns, and a GPS will not help.

Martial Arts Case Studies

More Gameable Myths

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

Previously, we presented five martial arts myths, and how to implement them in your games. The premise is simple: martial arts myths are persistent, but they can also be *useful.* You can take something not completely true try to make it so, to keep your martial artists on their toes.

So here is another fistful of martial arts myths to use in your campaigns! You've got two-fists now, perfect for square-jawed rollickin' action. Warning: these rules aren't extensively tested, nor are they all balanced! They're food for thought and might spice up your game . . .

#1: My Style Uses the Enemy's Strength Against Him

This myth, a favorite of throwing styles, has some basis in fact. You *can* use your opponent's momentum against him, with techniques like Trip. You can ignore your opponent's strength in situations simply by striking instead of grappling yourself into a Quick Contest of ST.

But what if you can actually make your opponent's strength a disadvantage? The bigger they are, the harder they strike, the less likely they are to hit you.

If this is true, soft styles (such as Aikido, Judo, Chin Na, etc. based on grappling more than power striking) have a special advantage. Any "soft" technique based on Wrestling or Judo -- including Arm Lock, Judo Throw, Sacrifice Throw, and Trip -- launched on the turn after an attack against the defender, can use either the ST of the defender, or of the attacker, whichever is *higher.* Include all damage bonuses or penalties for the attack launched, whether it's for a technique (Jump Kick, etc.), skill (Brawling at DX+2, Karate at DX+1, etc.), or maneuver (All-Out Attack, Defensive Attack).

Example: Kong throws a mighty All-Out Attack (Strong), using his ST 19. Unfortunately, his ST 7 opponent, Minnie, uses her Judo Parry to stop his attack. On her next turn, she elects to Judo Throw, and successfully attacks and throws Kong. Instead of her ST 7, she resolves the damage for ST 19, including the bonus damage for All-Out Attack (Strong) (+2) and Kong's Brawling at DX+2 (+1 per die). He suffers 2+2 damage!

#2: My Kung Fu Is the Best!

If you say it often enough, it becomes true. And nothing beats the smack talking of a kung fu movie . . . the mere act of claiming your style is superior, and providing the guts to back it up, is often enough to make it so!

This is a variation of Shout it Out. Simply purchase "My Kung Fu is the Best" as one of your "Shout it Out" styles.

When you declare your Kung Fu is the Best, you must roll a contest of your best Will-based martial arts skill (be it a combat, Art, or Sport skill) against the best Will-based martial arts skill of your enemy. If you have more than one enemy, the highest opposing score applies! You *cannot* use Luck or other odds-affecting advantages, skills, etc. on this. You have to trust your dice!

If you win the contest, your style is considered the Ultimate Style for that combat, giving you a +1 to all of your skill rolls, damage rolls, and defenses. Your opponents suffer a penalty of -1 to all of those rolls. If you tie, nothing happens. If you fail, your kung fu is weak . . . you suffer the penalties, and all opponents for that combat gain the

bonuses against you.

There is a grave danger to doing this too often. If you roll an 18 on your Will-based roll, you automatically fail . . . and you *lose* the Style Familiarity for My Kung Fu is the Best permanently! You can purchase it again, but GMs may require a quest. A Training Sequence is a good way to get this back.

#3: The True Master Will Only Use His Art for Defense!

Like Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon* and Mr. Miyagi, the true master knows the best way to fight is not to fight.

If this is true, any martial artist may take the Perk: Only use my art for defense. The stylist receives a -2 penalty to any skill roll to attack, in a fight that he started. However, in return, when fighting to defend himself, or fighting to protect Innocents (with a capital "I", not just anyone -- GM decides!), he receives a +1 to any active defense rolls. Additionally, any rolls to defend another -- such as a Sacrificial Dodge -- is done with no additional penalty!

#4: Martial Arts and the One True Way to Spiritual Enlightenment!

Martial arts can certainly give a practitioner inner peace and spiritual development. But in some worlds, they are the *only* way to do it. But it's not the butt-kicking that does it, it's the art.

If this is true, Combat Art skills provide a bonus to rolls for any Philosophy, Theology, and Meditation skills, along with some Expert skill rolls. The complete list should depend on the style and the GM's judgement. If you have a Combat Art skill at DX+1, you receive a +1 to these skills. At DX+2, you receive a +2. This doesn't stack; you can only use the bonus from the highest appropriate skill. GMs may widen or narrow the list of skills as appropriate to the style: Mathematical-flavored styles would provide a bonus to Mathematics, while styles with a religious bent would provide bonuses to Theology.

Conversely, those who lack a Combat Art skill at all *cannot* improve such skills past IQ! The only path for the soul is through the way of the fist . . .

#5: Martial Artists Can Fight Multiple Opponents With Ease

A common myth is that martial artists can take on whole gangs. In real life, many martial arts students ask variations of, "When do I learn to fight multiple foes?" The misconception is pretty understandable; of course all martial artists learn to dispose of lesser foes by the handful, it's in all the movies!

If this is true, martial artists (anyone with a Style Familiarity) can use Rapid Strike and Dual-Weapon Attack at a reduced penalty, if each attack is directed at a different foe. If Rapid Strikes or Dual-Weapon Attacks are used against a single foe, the normal penalties apply (-6/-6, -3/-3 if Trained By A Master, -4/-4 for Dual-Weapon Attack). If all attacks are spread out to hit one opponent per attack, the penalty is halved, round down! Additionally, penalties for multiple parries are halved if the attacks come from multiple attackers.

Calculate the penalties first, then halve those thrown against extra opponents. For example, Blackfist is fighting a whole street gang. Four opponents are within his reach. His is Trained By A Master, and chooses to make 4 attacks -- one against each of these fools. He throws out a kick, dragging his heel across all four opponent's faces. Four attacks is normally a -18 penalty for each attack, halves to -9 for Trained By A Master. But because he is attacking four opponent with his four attacks, they are halved again to -4. A few quick rolls later, and four of his foes are sprawled unconscious on the ground.

This can be combined with the usual Mook rules, to allow true martial artists to dispose of foes by the fistful. Remember the wisdom of The Sphinx from *Mystery Men:* "You must lash out with every limb, like the Octopus who plays the drums."

Now, take these myths out and fight!

* * *

*(Special Thanks to Onno Meyer and Douglas Cole for suggesting so many **fun** myths to work with!)*

Pyramid Review

Cthulhu Rising

Published by [Twilight Creations, Inc.](#)

Designed by Dr. Reiner Knizia

Art & layout by Juan Manuel Serrato, Phil Velikan, Kerry Breitenstein, & Todd A. Breitenstein

Full-color boxed set with mounted board, one score counter, 60 playing tiles (30 red & 30 blue), & rules; $19.99

If we're supposed to wait thousands of years for the stars to align, allowing Great Cthulhu and his minions to rise, why are there so many games about it? It seems like a weekly event at this point. Ah, well, it can be forgiven as long as the end of the world remains entertaining, which it is with *Cthulhu Rising.*

The object of the game is to be the first player to achieve 10 points.

Two players take part here, one in the role of Cthulhu and his various evil servants and the other as the hardy human investigators arrayed against them. The good guys get a set of 30 blue number tokens and the villains take an identical red selection. All the tiles are shuffled and placed facedown in front of their respective player, and both take a tile at random. They are labeled one through 10, and the lower number starts the game.

Action takes place on a foldout board. There are two five-by-five grids, also in red and blue for each player, and the tiles drawn to start are placed in the middle of their respective section. Running along the top of the playing area is a scoring track, numbered one through 10 in both directions. A counter sits on the zero in the middle. On his turn, a player draws another tile at random and places it anywhere he likes, on either grid. Play alternates until a row or column has been completed.

Whichever player has three or more tiles of his color in the finished line scores it. A pair (two of the same number, of either color) scores one point, and the values increase for three of a kind, four, and so on. If all the tiles are the same color, it scores extra points. On the other hand, if there is no score, i.e., if all five numbers are different, that line loses points for the player who claims it. The track at the top of the board plays out like a game of tug-of-war: When a player gains points, the score counter is pulled that many spaces along the track toward his side. If he loses point, or his opponent scores, it goes the other way. This continues until someone pulls the pawn to his 10 space or the entire board fills up. The player who does this, or has the high score, wins.

Twilight Creations doesn't seem to know the meaning of cheap because this is yet another game with high-quality components at a more-than-reasonable price. The number tiles aren't the thickest, but they're precut and stuffed into a baggie (the buyer doesn't even have to punch them out). The pawn is the same plastic gewgaw one finds in an average copy of *Sorry!,* and the map is both mounted and folded. The complaint here is the artwork . . . not that it's bad, just that it's too often lost behind other graphics. It fades into the background -- it *is* the background -- and so it just adds a little flavor. And for whatever reason, the six and nine tiles are all but impossible to distinguish between. They lean a little differently, but there's no line or dot to indicate the bottom (unless someone knows whether the Old One depicted thereon is right-side up -- if so, please step forward).

The graphics aren't the only part of this game to fade into the background. The product's metaphor -- that placing the

tiles represents plots, schemes, and countermoves by the warring factions -- is interesting, but ultimately irrelevant. It's more colorful in its description and in the players' minds than it is in execution. Setting that aside . . .

Another thing Twilight Creations excels at is these considerate two-player exercises. As a strategy game it's simple but endlessly intriguing. The Sudoku-like elements provide an opportunity to show off one's ability to think not just a move or two ahead, but on three or four axes at a time (a row and column could both score at once with a single placement). With many ways to score, two ways to end the game, and the chance to force someone into an unfavorable play, when the game ends is as unpredictable as how. Once players are used to the regular game, variant rules let the actual number totals on one's tiles determine who wins a row or column.

Cthulhu Rising may fumble the ball as far as matching the theme more intimately with the style of play, but as thought-provoking games go it's quick (about 20 minutes), replayable, and no one has to go insane.

--Andy Vetromile

Playing God

Minor Deities for *GURPS*

by Matt Riggsby

It is the beginning. The world is new and empty of mountains and seas and civilization. And you're about to change that.

This article presents guidelines for creating and playing minor gods in *GURPS,* or at least creatures so powerful that they may as well be deities. The focus of this article is relatively minor gods, like the gods of households, rivers, forests, or patron deities of individual cities, but it points the way to building gods with world-wide powers. The templates below require *GURPS Powers.*

Divine Powers

In addition to their narrative function as creators of the world and founders of the moral order, gods usually have a number of physical characteristics in common in many mythologies. Gods are immortal, or so close to immortal as makes no difference. (Norse gods, for example, can be killed, but since their deaths are inextricably connected to certain changes in the cosmic order which operate on a specific schedule, they're essentially unkillable for practical purposes.) They can be *hurt,* sometimes badly, but they can never be killed permanently. Note that while they don't *have* to eat or drink, they may do so, even to excess, for pleasure.

Gods also have a range of abilities in common. First, gods can raise up their followers and cast down their enemies with a flexible range of blessings and curses. Second, gods can take on many forms, appearing in any guise they desire. Third, should they choose to reveal their divine presence, mortals will quake in fear and awe.

All divine characters should have the deity metatrait below, though that's just the beginning. Even a very minor god should be built on 2,000 to 3,000 points, and more powerful ones could easily be built on tens of thousands. However, this article will concentrate on the lower end of the spectrum.

What Does God Need With a Starship?

A perennial question about deities is why they want to have anything to do with mere mortals. In particular, why do they want to be worshiped? They're immortal, they usually live in some sort of paradise, and there's nothing a mortal can do which a god can't do better. Since humans usually create gods in their own image, the anthropological and psychological answer is that humans think of gods has having the same needs (and the same vanities) as themselves. Humans want to be loved and respected, the gods are natural and moral forces in human guise, therefore the gods must want to be loved and respected, too.

An answer with more gaming potential, though essentially no theological support in any major religion, is that gods draw power from worship. As god characters acquire worshipers, the GM may allow them to purchase worshipers as Ally Groups. And as the Ally Groups add up, characters may buy new abilities with the limitation Granted By Worshipers (-40%). Points spent on worshiper-granted abilities should not exceed points spent on worshiper-allies.

Deity Metatrait   *1,335 points*

Advantages: Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Immunity to Mind Control [30]; Modular Abilities (+100, limited to Afflictions related to attributes, advantages, and disadvantages) [600]; Morph (Improvised Forms; Unlimited) [250]; Regeneration (Slow: 1HP/12Hr) [10]; Terror (Awe) (10) (Presence; Cosmic: automatically effects

mortals but does not effect other gods) [250]; Unaging [15]; Unkillable (3) [150]

Divine Lenses

In addition to the abilities common to all gods, individual gods have powers in a particular area. There are gods of states of mind, professions, natural phenomena, and so on. These lenses reflect some of those kinds of gods.

Elemental Lens   *900 points*

This lens is for gods whose domain is a specific substance: fire, stone, etc. A god with this lens can create about a ton of that substance per second. That's about 36 cubic feet of water, 12 cubic feet of stone, or four and a half cubic feet of iron, enough to fill an Olympic pool in a day and a half or a respectable hill in a month. Since gods have little use for commerce, particularly for mere raw materials, it's probably a good idea to ignore Creation Pools and the value of substances created, per *Powers* p. 93.

Advantages: Control (Common Substance; Collective) (15) [600]; Create (Medium Category) (15) [300].

Phenomena Lens   *300 points*

This lens is for gods controlling natural phenomena, such as earthquakes, smog, and rain. Depending on the specificity of his area of responsibility, such a god can control phenomena within one and a half to three miles, inflicting bonuses or penalties from +/-5 to +/-10.

Advantages: One of Control (Common; Natural Phenomenon) 15 [300] or Control (Occasional; Natural Phenomenon) 20 [300] or Control (Occasional; Natural Phenomenon) 30 [300]

Animal Lens   *328 points*

This lens is for the god of a particular kind of animal: bears, stags, etc. For these purposes, a swarm of insects or rodents should count as a single animal. All animals of a given type which are likely to appear in the campaign are fervently devoted to the deity, can hear its commands without fail no matter how far away they are, and will do whatever they can in response. In addition to his powers of control, the god can perform healing on his subjects.

Advantages: Ally (All animals of a single species) (25% of starting points) (Constantly; 9 or less; Group Size (5,001-10,000); Minion (+2)) [144]; Animal Control Talent (4) [20]; Healing (Single Animal Species) [23]; Mind Control (Independent; One Animal Species) [73]; Mindlink (1,000-9,999 individuals) [40]; Speak With Animals (Specialized: one species) [5]; Telecommunication (Telesend) (One Animal Species) [23]

Emotion/Craft Lens   *465 points*

This lens is for gods of an or emotional state or artistic craft: love, anger, music, painting, etc. The god's skills are so developed that he can use them to sway or even control the minds of others.

Advantages: Charisma (5) [25]; Voice [10]

Skills: Enthrallment (Captivate) Will/H - Will+20 [84]; Enthrallment (Persuade) Will/H - Will+20 [84]; Enthrallment (Suggest) Will/H - Will+20 [84]; Enthrallment (Sway Emotions) Will/H - Will+20 [84]; one skill appropriate to the god's domain such as Sex Appeal of a love god or Singing for a god of music, variable/A - Attribute+20 30 [80]

Perks: Skill Adaptation: the god's underlying domain skill acts as a prerequisite to Enthrallment skills.

Other Abilities

The gods *frequently,* though not invariably, have movement-related powers such as Flight and Warp, the maximum possible levels of social traits such as Status, Reputation, and Social Regard (though limited to mortals, for the most part), and other supernatural powers such as speaking with plants, enhanced senses, and so on. However, no power, however exotic, should be ruled out for a god, and limits on Talents and traits such as Charisma may not have a cap for divine characters. Cosmic enhancements may be used but are not necessary. Gods of war, for example, may be very strong, have imbuements, and be armed with powerful signature gear, but they do not necessarily automatically kill their opponents. However, cosmic enhancements are entirely appropriate for divine creations and afflictions, preventing them from being negated or destroyed by anyone but another god.

High attributes are certainly a possibility, particularly ST and HT. But while gods may come to know a great deal, they're rarely portrayed as being necessarily smarter than mortals. Therefore, IQ restrictions appropriate for mortals should be imposed on gods as well. They are immune to magical, psionic, and other artificial means of mind control, but they are definitely vulnerable to seduction, argument, and other purely psychological means of persuasion.

Divine Intervention

So what does an immensely powerful immortal do, anyway? As suggested above, gods tend to have fairly human motivations. Gods may also want companionship and amusement, seeking to surround themselves with like-minded humans (war gods with warriors, love gods with the infatuated, etc.). Gods are often portrayed as related to one another but none to friendly, leading to constant squabbles, marital infidelity, and long-running feuds between divine or semi-divine generations and other groups (for example, the Olympian gods against their Titan predecessors or Norse gods against the frost giants). Mortal worshipers may be caught up in all of this, working against rival gods by working against competing worshipers. And if more worshipers mean more power, deities will find themselves in direct competition for the devotion of mortals, putting a particular edge on the usual squabbles within pantheons.

One of the few things gods are unlikely to pursue is wealth for its own sake. Any god worthy of the name can come up with any number of ways of acquiring money and valuable goods. Deities capable of creating or controlling the elements can sell nigh-unlimited quantities of raw materials, gods of art, craft, and emotion can easily persuade others to give them tribute, and gods of time, space, and many natural forces can often simply take what they can get. Gods may desire luxuries (fine wine, attractive surroundings, etc.) but are likely to treat them as disposable. Wealth, therefore, should be ignored in a divine campaign, though divine characters may still buy signature gear and other unique pieces of equipment.

Another divine motivation is to be protective of their area of interest. "Gods of place," such as the patron gods of cities and towns, household gods, and divine ancestors of clans, are likely to stay close to home, aiding residents and defending their territory against outsiders. Gods of natural forces seem to keep themselves aloof, regarding offenses against their charges as insults against them. A god of horses wouldn't object to horses being ridden or even put down if they suffered broken limbs, but he might go after someone who treated horses cruelly. Gods of craft and emotional states, on the other hand, are likely to be directly, if somewhat invisibly, involved with humanity. Gods of war and anger will frequent battlefields, gods of love and friendship will be on hand wherever young lovers congregate, and so on. Deities may, therefore, come into conflict as a mortal who has one god's favor falls afoul of another.

Finally, an option available to gods as characters is to start with a blank slate. Fundamental acts of creation, such as inventing new life forms or establishing the rules of good and evil, are beyond the scope of this article, but gods can create new geography; control or strongly encourage the growth of plant, animal, and intelligent mortal populations; influence peoples; and inspire exceptional individuals. A divine campaign can start out with a handful of gods on a near-featureless plain and take place over millennia as they guide the growth of tribes and nations. Divine PCs can write not just the end of the story, but the beginning as well. So let there be light.

Pyramid Pick

The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen

Published by Magnum Opus Press

Designed by Baron Munchausen

Illustrated by Gustave Doré

128-Page Digest-Sized Hardback "Gentleman's Edition"; $19.95
128-Page Perfect-Bound Digest-Sized "Wives' and Servants' Edition"; $19.95
128-Page Digest-Sized 20.3 Mb PDF "Difference Engine no.3 Edition"; $10.95

Gentlemen, I bring excellent news. Not only has that inestimable raconteur and gentleman adventurer, Baron Munchausen returned[1], he has brought with him his very own game, ***The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen.*** Originally to have been published in 1798, it was only through the efforts of Mr. James Wallis, a descendent of the 18th-century publisher, that the game came to light. Now the original game of competitive story telling is once again available. This new edition not only includes everything that was in the 1998 text, but has been expanded with variations anew for gentlemen and all those of wit, and good and noble character, and of most ages. And let us not forget, also, the ladies.

That 1998 edition came as something called a "New Style" game, something clearly aimed at an audience of radicals. The 2008 edition though comes in a "Gentleman's Edition" and a "Wives' and Servants' Edition." The latter is a softback, but the former a delightful pocket-friendly hardback, now sadly out of print. Fortunately, the softback is available, as is an electronic edition, with all three still superbly illustrated by Mr Gustave Doré and still written in the Baron's own inimitable style.

In order to play ***The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen*** you will require several acquaintances of good, preferably noble, character; a pen and paper to take notes with; and at least five coins per player, although these coins can be easily replaced with tokens of any kind, even chocolate coins. It is also suggested that each gentleman arm himself with a rapier, have ready access to a supply of bread rolls, and in case he gets bored, have a pre-prepared plan for the invasion of Belgium. An ample spread of food and drink is an absolute must, and while the Baron might not approve, the drink need not be alcoholic.

All this in hand, everyone sits down to play. If of noble character and noble name, a player is ready to begin; if not then he requires, at least for the purposes of the game, a nom de plume, whether -- in order of precedence -- religious, noble, or military. Precedence ascertained, the gentleman, or lady, of the highest rank begins the game. To do so he turns to the player on his right and asks him politely to recount to the company assembled, one of his famous adventures, for example:

"My dear Baron, please delight us with how it was that you were able to protect the modesty of Venus from the eyes of Captain James Cook during her transit of 1789?"

The player may demur and pass, instead providing the company with a round of drinks, or he may take a sip of his current drink, clear his throat and launch into his tale. The telling should take no longer than five minutes, and the tale, which can involve a suitable companion (who should preferably have an amazing ability that will have helped his master decide the adventure) should resolve the tale to the company's satisfaction. Having told his tale, the player turns to the person on his right and asks him to being *his* tale.

Of course, not every tale will be told to everyone's satisfaction. Although no gentleman would dream of calling another a liar, he can challenge a flaw or inaccuracy in a tale. To do so, he says, for example:

"Surely my dear Baron, Venus' husband Vulcan could have protected his wife's modesty by asking his brother Neptune to divert Captain Cook's ship?"

The challenged player can accept the wager and work the challenge into his tale, or he can rebuff the wager with his own token and try to continue his tale. The tokens are won by whomever backs down.

If neither the challenger nor the challenged can agree, they can continue to challenge and counter-challenge each other in this fashion, all the while increasing the number of tokens at stake until one side demurs or runs out of tokens. At this point, it becomes a matter of honor and a duel ensues. This requires the use of the aforementioned rapiers; for those unskilled in the fine art of swordsmanship, the game also includes the infamous rules, "dueling for cowards." The winner of this duel, whether to first blood -- or the version for sissies -- wins not only the tokens being wagered, but also the loser's purse.

Once everyone has recounted an amazing adventure, the first player summarizes the tales heard so far, and everyone takes it in turn to vote for his favorite story, using all of his current tokens. The player who receives the most tokens wins the game and should buy another round of drinks. They have the privilege of beginning the next game.

The aim of ***The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen*** is of course to tell and to enjoy entertaining tales. To win, though, a player should challenge the stories of his rivals and have them accept these challenges, working the details into their stories. In doing so, a player loses his tokens, but increases the strength of the other players' votes at game's end. So far so good, for this was what comprised the 1998 edition of the good Baron's game. What then of this edition's extension and comparison?

These come in two or three variants, depending upon which point you have reached in the appendices. The first, "Es-Sindibad's Rules" is born of the Baron's journeys in Araby, and dispenses with both alcohol and making wagers with money. Although the nature of challenges have been simplified to asking for a greater explanation upon a particular point, or asking if the storyteller was not killed -- both questions that the challenged must answer -- the actual storytelling is more complex. This is because the other players determine the elements of his story prior to his telling. The story will concern one of his famous voyages to some distant part of the world before returning to Baghdad with gifts for his Excellency, the Sultan. The other players take it in turn to set out the voyage and its destination, what befell him there and how he recovered from this predicament to return home, bounty in hand. All those elements the player must make part of his tale, but if a player feels that the player has not done so, he may claim a coin from the teller. In this fashion, the voting power of each storyteller will change.

The second variant is entitled "My Uncle the Baron" and can best be described as a game of one-upmanship, perhaps by [Yorkshire merchants](#) or the [clueless](#). Here, in a more mannered version, the young players take it in turns to describe the exploits of their most adventurous relative, each more remarkable than the last. For example, young Master Giles might begin with, "My Uncle the Baron won the Epsom Derby while sitting on his horse backwards," which might be followed by "My Uncle the Baron won the Grand National while sitting backwards and blindfolded." Another player could challenge the teller if the story is not more extraordinary than the previous or if the new player fails to tell his story in enough time. The challenged can justify the delay in his tale, with both rebuff and challenge put to the vote. If the challenged loses this vote, he steps down from the game and play continues until there is one player and a winner.

A further variant expands from the second, playing in exactly the same fashion, except that one player may challenge the previous player to explain how his Uncle the Baron performed the amazing exploit so described. If he cannot, he leaves the game and his challenger continues. If he can, then the challenger is out of the game and a new round begins. Just as with the original game, numerous examples are provided for "Es-Sindibad's Rules," "My Uncle the Baron," and "My Shorter Uncle the Baron," for those bereft of either time or the imagination.

It is 10 years since the release of ***The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen*** and my, how times have

changed. Back then this "New Style" game was a curiosity that not everyone believed to fall into the category of RPG, despite it asking its players to roleplay a role, (in this case a noble and a gentleman) and tell a story while in that role. Yet that is the extent of the roleplay that the game demands because it actually asks something of the players that no real RPG actually does. Nor can it be said to be a "storytelling game" in the contemporary mode, such as in *Hot War* or *Prime Time Adventures,* wherein both the players and the GM work together to create one story within the boundaries set by the game's rules. Rather it is the act and art of telling stories that is the point of *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* and this makes it more of a party game, albeit one that contains some roleplay aspects, and most importantly, one that is very well mannered. For the discerning gamer *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* offers welcome relief from roleplaying's more mundane pursuits. A relief that calls for wit, imagination, and fabulism. Perfect then, until you are ready to invade Belgium.

[1] If you think this improbable, offer to buy the good Baron a drink and I am sure that he will recount how this is possible.

--Matthew Pook