

PYRAMID

Issue 3/16 February '10

HISTORICAL EXPLORATION

AN AGE OF SAILS

by Kelly Pedersen

THE VIKINGS IN THE ATLANTIC

by Graeme Davis

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

by Andy Vetromile

MINDING YOUR MANNERS

by Alan Leddon

LANGUAGES, CULTURE, AND

THE COMMON TONGUE

by Demi Benson

CITY OF THE CAESARS

by J. Edward Tremlett

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Article Colors

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)

Dark Blue: GURPS Features

Purple: Other Features

IN THIS ISSUE

Gather the crew and scrape the barnacles off the hull; this issue of *Pyramid* is ready to set course for the open seas!

Our first destination is *Pele-1*, an alternate timeline for the *GURPS Infinite Worlds* setting, in *An Age of Sails*. Discover a world in which Asia made contact with the New World before the Europe – and learn about a mystery that spans four worlds.

Discover the rumors surrounding the land of Patagonia and its fabulous lost *City of the Caesars*. Learn the background on the city's "creation" and the various (unsuccessful) attempts to find it. This generic article contains a treasure trove of ideas on what the City could be, possible tie-ins to other odd phenomena in the area, and ideas for contemporary campaigns.

Each contact with a new civilization means a new culture. *Minding Your Manners* offers insight into the perils of personal interactions plus numerous suggestions on how to represent the alienness of exotic locations.

With new civilizations often come new foreign phrases to frustrate frontier fortune-hunters. *Languages, Culture, and the Common Tongue* presents new optional *GURPS* rules for languages and cultural familiarity.

When exploring, being first often matters most – and it's possible the Vikings were the first Europeans to cross the second-largest ocean. Graeme Davis, author of *GURPS Vikings* and *GURPS Middle Ages 1*, provides an overview of some of the lands these hearty travelers explored in *The Vikings in the Atlantic*. It includes numerous adventures seeds suitable for those with and without Viking blood.

Perhaps the most famous locale explorers might seek in the New World, the *Fountain of Youth* describes the rewards and pitfalls of putting one or more magical water sources in a historical campaign.

This issue's *Random Thought Table* discusses the distinctive and exciting features of exploration campaigns. What will you do today?

Your explorers already have character sheets, but what about the campaign? Keep track of your journeys with the *Expedition Log*, blank forms waiting for you to put quill to ink.

As always, *Odds and Ends* offers a few bits we can't cram into the cabin, including some laughs with *Murphy's Rules*.

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FROM THE EDITOR

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

This issue we tried to keep the amount of “weirdness” under a tighter rein than normal. While magic makes just about any setting more fun – especially depending on how broadly you define “magic” – the fact is that straight-up historical (or historical-style) exploration is incredibly interesting all by itself.

Oh, sure, there are some hints of alien strangeness located on Pele-1 (pp. 4-11), but for the most part, that’s a deep background aspect of the setting that the GM can explore or ignore as desired. Otherwise, it’s a good example of a historic-style exploration campaign, ready to be used as-is or mined for ideas for other adventures.

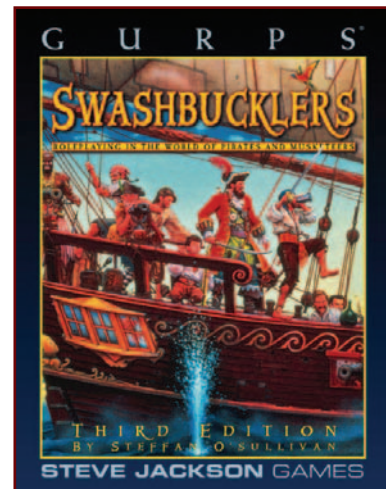
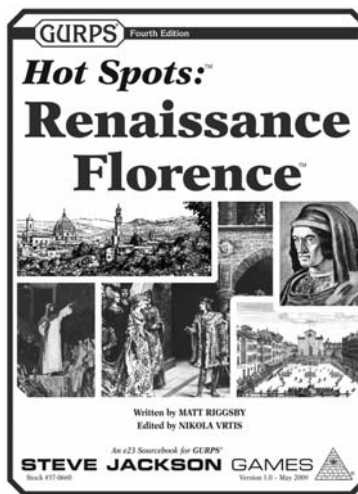
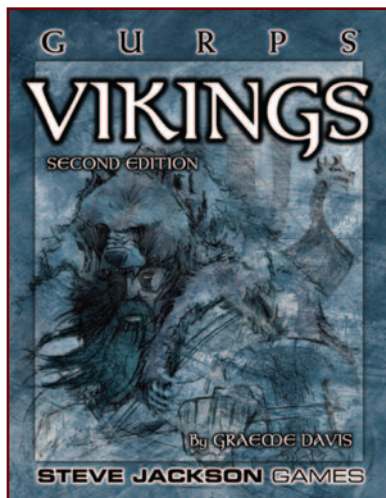
Similarly, there’s nothing inherently mystical about Vikings (pp. 27-31), social taboos (pp. 17-19), or languages (pp. 24-26) – although any of them can be infused with arcane significance. (Scientists have proven that Viking articles with references to Ragnarok are 87% cooler than those without.)

Of course, an occasional ounce of oddities are always welcome in most games, so for fans of the fantastic, we direct you to the Fountain of Youth (pp. 32-36) and the City of the Caesars (pp. 13-16) – both preternatural hot spots.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

As mentioned above, this is the first pre-modern-themed issue of *Pyramid* that has really emphasized “historical” aspects; we’d love to know what worked and what didn’t. If you’re on the second year of your three-hour tour and want to get a message to us, feel free to tuck it into a bottle and send it to pyramid@sjgames.com, or post it for the world to see at forums.sjgames.com.

If you’d like to hone your journal-writing skills and supplement your noble’s patronage, our Writer’s Guidelines are at sjgames.com/pyramid/writing.html and the wish list is at sjgames.com/pyramid/wishlist.html.



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AN AGE OF SAILS

BY KELLY PEDERSEN

In every era of human history, the brave and the bold (and the foolish and the mad) have searched for new lands. Whether to find new worlds to inhabit or conquer, new riches to purchase or plunder, or simply for the joy and glory of being the first to set foot on a patch of uncharted ground, humans have pushed back the horizon. The Age of Discovery in Homeline's history was perhaps the high point of European exploration, however. From 1419, when Henry the Navigator of Portugal financed the first journeys exploring the African coast, to the mid-1600s, when the Dutch, Spanish, and English explored the majority of the Pacific Ocean, Europe's horizons expanded continually. European nations gained access to vast new territories in the New World and established direct routes to the rich civilizations of the Middle East, India, and Asia.

On Pele-1, the Infinity Patrol has found an Age of Exploration not limited to Europe. The great civilizations of China and India have gotten into the game, sending out traders

and explorers of their own. Now, the three great cultures are clashing in Africa, the New World, and Central Asia, as each struggles to gain the most land and territory it can. Meanwhile, the Patrol is monitoring the situation carefully, trying to prevent the worst excesses of colonialism and watching for their eternal rival, Centrum, to attempt to raise one or the other of the competing cultures above the others as its puppet for world conquest. And both sides of the timewar are trying to investigate a mystery older than civilization . . .

INFINITE WORLDS

Although Pele-1 is designed as a new timeline for the *GURPS Infinite Worlds* setting, this alternate world can be used just fine as a location for adventure all by itself. Since Homeline tries not to make itself known to the natives anyway, the GM can remove them entirely without disrupting the world's flavor.

PELE-1

A world with a far larger Hawaiian island chain has spread Polynesian sailing technology and daring to Chinese and then Indian mariners, allowing those cultures to travel farther and faster. Meanwhile, the Mongol conquest of the Song Dynasty in China forced a diaspora of skilled administrators and traders. Now, the new Wanyou Dynasty in China seeks to reunify the far-flung Chinese settlements, clashing with India over the Silk Road cities in Central Asia, and with Europe. Meanwhile, European explorers compete with Chinese colonists in the New World, and Indian merchants in Africa.

A WORLD BORN IN FIRE . . .

Technically speaking, Pele-1's divergence point occurred approximately five million years ago, when the magma plume under the Pacific Ocean that forms the volcanoes of the Hawaiian chain underwent a drastic increase in activity compared to Homeline. Eruptions became far more frequent and spread over a wider range of the sea floor. Instead of the set

of close islands created in Homeline, the result in Pele-1 was a single huge island, extending almost 500 miles west-northwest from the location of the Homeline island of Hawaii. The magma plume apparently returned to its Homeline levels around 200,000 years ago.

The first major effect on human history, of course, happened much later. When Polynesian voyagers from Tahiti and the Marquesas arrived at the Hawaiian island in about 500 A.D., they found a tropical paradise even more lush than Homeline's Hawaii. The far larger land area allowed for a more diverse ecosystem, and more land for agriculture. The Polynesians came in droves, planted their crops, built their villages, erected their temples, and carved their boats. The "Great Island," as it became known in Polynesian, soon became a center of Pacific culture. The larger landmass could support a much larger population, and Hawaiian raiding and trading parties soon fanned out across the Pacific, searching for wealth and slaves for their lords back home.

*For inspiration on weird areas the explorers could discover on Pele-1, check out *GURPS Places of Mystery*. Of course, what that book describes as "ruins" are much more likely to be in use!*

A local warlord united the Great Island in 750 A.D.; soon thereafter he sent out Hawaiian warriors and merchants in even greater numbers. Within the next century, most of the Polynesian archipelagos were united, at least in name, within a single empire. Polynesian influence pushed west, into Micronesia, and from there, the Polynesian shipbuilding and navigation technologies began to spread north toward Japan and west to the Philippines. By 950, the coastal cultures of East Asia were at least somewhat aware of a seafaring culture that spread though the Pacific Ocean.

... AND RULED BY WATER

The Japanese were the first major Asian civilization to become seriously aware of the Polynesians' potential. Japan was in the middle of its classical Heian period, when foreign influences were being eagerly investigated and accepted. There was a minor fashion trend in the Imperial court for Polynesian-style feathered robes, and some Polynesian influences entered the poetry of the era. The most important exchange of ideas, though, focused on the Polynesians' true area of expertise: sailing. The islanders' tales of sea voyages stretching over thousands of miles, out of sight of land for weeks at a time, inspired a great deal of enthusiasm for the whole concept of nautical adventure. Japan also emulated Polynesian shipbuilding technology, introducing outriggers for stability and the Pacific "crab claw" lateen sail for additional maneuverability. Hawaiian navigators were in high demand as well, some being paid exorbitant sums to move to Japan permanently.

This new passion for the sea in the Japanese was felt in mainland Asia. Korea – newly unified under the Goryeo dynasty – saw increased trade with Japan, and found that Japanese warlords were often interested in acquiring territory on the mainland. China was too far, and far too powerful, for this sort of aggressive behavior to be practical, but Japanese traders and pilgrims came to China in droves, spreading the stories of the great voyages of the Polynesians on the open seas.

Meanwhile, China – under the Song dynasty – had contact of its own with the Polynesians. Hawaiian navigators had sailed west from Micronesia to the Philippines and from there to Taiwan and southern mainland China. The Polynesians had much less of cultural impact on China than on Japan; China was too large, and the majority of the population too removed from the sea, for tales of daring oceanic adventure to have much meaning. Nonetheless, China felt the Polynesian influence. As in Japan, they adopted Polynesian shipbuilding techniques for the construction of small boats, and Polynesian navigators gained a reputation for excellence that led to the formation of a permanent population. As a result of these nautical innovations, Song Dynasty China on Pele-1 had an even greater trade network with Southeast Asia than in Homeline history, a fact that would become very important over the next three centuries.

ESCAPING THE HORDE

Despite the strengthening of trade provoked by Polynesian influence, Chinese history progressed in much the same manner as Homeline for two centuries. The Song Dynasty came to

Pele-1, 1550

Current Affairs

The three great cultures of Europe, China, and India are battling to colonize the rest of the world. Europe and India are conflicting in Africa, Europe and China in the New World, and China and India in Central Asia.

Divergence Point

5 million years B.C.; larger Pacific magma plume creates much larger Hawaii.

Major Civilizations

Western (multipolar), Chinese (empire with rivals), Indian (multipolar).

Great Powers

Spanish Empire (Dictatorship, CR 4), England (Dictatorship, CR 4), France (Dictatorship, CR 4), Wanyou Dynasty (Dictatorship, CR 5); Raja of Delhi (Dictatorship, CR 4), Sena Dynasty (Dictatorship, CR 3), Deccan Confederation (Caste, CR 3), Hawaii (Dictatorship, CR 4), Lu Daoyu (Oligarchy, CR 3)

Worldline Data

TL: 4	Quantum: 6
Mana Level: Low mana (normal mana in alien ruins)	Infinity Class: R9
	Centrum Zone: Yellow

power in 960 and ruled all of China until 1127. Although the Jurchen conquered the northern parts of the nation after that year, the Song continued to rule the southern half.

Before and after their move southward, the Song Dynasty marked one of the heights of Chinese innovation and development, encouraged by imperial favor and the civil service. The Song period was also the height of meritocratic government in China. The system of civil-service exams had existed before, but they were made more rigorous and competitive under the Song, and administrators continued to be judged on their performance even after they had successfully taken the exams. The Song cultivated bureaucrats that were competent, eager to advance by improving their districts, and actively competing for new innovations to do so.

No dynasty lasts forever, though, and the beginning of the end for the Song was in 1211, when the Mongols invaded northern China. By 1279, the Mongols crushed the last Song resistance; and China was entirely under the Mongol yoke. However, it was during the conquest of the southern Song that Pele-1 started to diverge notably from Homeline history. As the Mongol invasion encroached further, many in the Song heartland fled if able. The finely trained bureaucrats of the Song Dynasty made their way south, to China's great port cities.

In Hawaii, giving small gifts out of thanks and thoughtfulness is important; locals like to be creative in repaying gifts.

In Homeline, most of them ended their flight there, to be overwhelmed as the Mongols took the cities one by one; in Pele-1, the refugees had a further step to take to safety. The expanded trade network of the Song had created Chinese trading ports all over Southeast Asia. The tide of emigrant administrators and other persons of importance flowed out to these colonies, swelling their populations and wealth. This movement climaxed in 1279, when the boy-emperor Bing was spirited out of China, rather than committing suicide along with many of his high-ranking courtiers as in Homeline's history. The emperor, in fact, eventually made his way to Hawaii itself, where he and his descendants maintained their claim to be the ruler-in-exile of China.

Nevertheless, despite the survival and diaspora of so many Chinese administrators and nobles, the Mongols now ruled China, and this state would persist for the next century before they were overthrown. To the west, an empire in India was fragmenting and leaving a model for later rulers to emulate and strive toward.

*The greatest joy a man can
know is to conquer his enemies
and drive them before him.*

– Genghis Khan

THE TIGER'S CUBS

In the meantime, other lands were also seeing their own upheavals.

In Homeline history, the Pala Empire of India was reasonably successful. It was a Buddhist nation, founded in the modern state of Bengal in 750 A.D. It reached its height in the early seventh century, where it ruled a significant section of the Indian subcontinent. The Pala Empire declined steadily from that peak, but it lasted until 1120.

In Pele-1, the course of Indian history ran somewhat differently. The Pala Empire reached a height in the seventh century, but that was not its highest point. On this timeline, the Pala Empire revived in the 11th century, as increased trade from the east poured wealth into their coffers. The Pala monarchs went into an expansionist phase, marching west and south once again. This new phase of conquest proved even more successful than their first; by 1050, the Neo-Pala Empire encompassed the entire subcontinent and pushed both northwestward into Afghanistan, and eastward into the Southeast Asian peninsula.

The Neo-Pala Empire was a strong state; it left its mark over the entire Indian subcontinent, building up infrastructure and agriculture and promoting tolerance between Buddhists and Hindu. However, all empires fall, and the

Palas were no exception. Though they tried, they were unable to fully unify the states they conquered while also dealing with the danger of Islamic invasion from the northwest. By the middle of the 12th century, the cracks were beginning to show. Over the next century, the Neo-Pala Empire began to shake itself apart; peripheral territories revolted and went their own ways, followed in later years by core regions. By 1240, the last of the Pala emperors died with no clear heir, and the Neo-Pala Empire officially met its end.

However, the empire did not die without a legacy. Across India, rulers now had a vision before them of a unified nation. Every conqueror with ambitions believed that he could be the next Emperor of India, carrying on the legacy of the Palas. By 1300, a new balance in India was emerging. Three major groups had mopped up the minor states and now formed a rough balance of power. In the northwest, the Raja of Delhi commanded a strong military state, dedicated to defending the Hindu Kush from invasion from the west. In the northeast, centered on Bengal, the Sena dynasty ruled. Their state focused on agriculture, with India's most productive farmland within their control. To the south, the Deccan Confederation formed from a union of smaller states wanting to avoid absorption. It focused on trade, with Deccan merchants going both east to Southeast Asia for spices, and sailing west to Africa and the Middle East.

This three-way tie has persisted in India for two and a half centuries, until the current day. While the Mongols overran China, the Indians consolidated their hold; they made especially successful inroads into the islands of Southeast Asia and the northern end of Burma, where they explored new trade routes to southern China. The Mongol invasions, so devastating to the Chinese, proved a boon to the Indians. The Muslim empires to the west were broken beneath the hooves of the Mongol horde, while the Mongols themselves avoided taking their armies over the formidable mountain ramparts of the Hindu Kush. However, the Mongol empire would not last forever, and in the wake of its fall, China was once again on the rise.

GATHERING THE SCATTERED FLOCK

The Mongol Yuan Dynasty lasted for fewer years in Pele-1 than in Homeline. The exiled Song nobility had never forgotten their homeland, funneling money and covert aid back to rebels against the Mongols. The Yuan state degenerated in the first half of the 14th century, with bandits, famines, and floods running unchecked. By 1330, the indigenous Chinese population rose in revolt of their Mongol overlords.

Though the Song exiles continued to aid the rebellion, particularly in the south, in the end it was Han Shantong, a northern general, who succeeded in overthrowing the Yuan and uniting enough of China to proclaim himself the new emperor. The Mongols suffered their final defeat in Chinese territory in 1343, and Shantong was proclaimed emperor the same year.

For something a bit farther afield, GURPS Locations: Tower of Octavius has a complete tower that can be plundered for inspiration and cartography. (Of course, to keep it nonmagical, you can mentally replace "wizard" with "crazy guy" or "cult" while reading that volume . . .)

Han Shantong was a leader of the Buddhist White Lotus Society, a messianic sect, and he integrated many of its beliefs into the new structure of empire. He named his dynasty the *Wanyou*, or “Universal,” as a promise to spread the message of his faith to all who would listen.

The Wanyou Dynasty began pursuing an expansionist policy of conquest and religious proselytization. Their first targets were to the north and the south: the Mongols, China’s erstwhile overlords; and the states of Southeast Asia, by now thoroughly Sinified by the exiles of Song. Their crusade in the north met swift success; the Chinese had learned Mongol tactics and strategy well and used it against the fragmenting Mongol Empire. The northern campaign was not easy, but the Chinese forces advanced every year, spreading their brand of civilization and religion with them.

The southern campaign did not go quite so well. Though the Chinese exiles had despised the Yuan Dynasty and worked to overthrow them at every turn, this new replacement struck many of them as little better. The Wanyou emperors represented almost the antithesis of the Song. Their style was strongly religious, with an apocalyptic fervor that worried the more secular exiles. The Wanyou considered matters such as trade and innovation to be bothersome necessities at best, and dangerous worldly distractions from religious matters at worst. Likewise, the civil-service exams were neglected or abandoned entirely. An administrator’s chief virtue was his theological purity, not his ability to do sums or organize a bureaucracy. While the administration thus created was perhaps less corrupt than the Song, it was also far less efficient. The exiles – who survived through trade and by acting as competent administrators for the states they found themselves in – looked on the new China with something close to horror. They swiftly realized that their fate would easily be as bad under the Wanyou as under the Mongols, and they resisted any attempts by the new dynasty to bring them back under the rule of mainland China.

Next the Wanyou targeted the Japanese, who – as on Homeline – had not been conquered by the Mongols. In 1468, the Chinese began a campaign south through Korea. By 1485 the Wanyou began preparing for an amphibious assault on Japan. China’s forces landed on Kyushu in 1490, after a pitched naval battle. Chinese forces marched north, but they met heavy resistance. It took until 1500 to secure Kyushu, and the Japanese seemed to be prepared to fight equally strongly for every foot of land on their other three islands. The Japanese navy blockaded every likely crossing point, and launched constant raids on the Chinese supply lines. The Chinese generals decided to dig in and thoroughly pacify their initial conquests before continuing.

NEW FRONTIER, NEW FIGHT

Far to the east, a new discovery was made that would change the map of the world and alter the priorities of everyone.

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. Unfortunately for his place in history in Pele-1, his discovery had been preceded by about 10 years, by a Chinese captain out of Tiangang (Homeline Manila). Even before Captain Yang Qiang-Feng made landfall at

The Voyage Into Adulthood

During the rise of the Hawaiian culture, a tradition developed that would later have great impact on Pele-1. Like many cultures, the Polynesians maintained a practice of manhood ordeals, difficult tasks that a boy must successfully perform to be considered a man. On Hawaii, the ritual took the form of the Manhood Voyage. In its original form, a boy had to set sail alone before becoming a man, leaving sight of land for at least a night and a day.

The tradition changed slightly over the years. Rather than undertake the voyage before becoming a man, a boy was allowed to swear an oath as part of his manhood ritual to perform some great voyage. This let young men gain the prestige of a particularly long voyage, without killing off too many boys who had never made any serious sailing trips alone. The young man had a grace period to learn the ways of sailing before setting out.

After Hawaii was united into a single kingdom, the Manhood Voyage became an instrument of empire. Young men were allowed to go out in groups, rather than alone, and a high-status vow for an ambitious warband was to conquer an island. The Voyage also served as a form of social mobility. If a boy swore an oath appropriate to a particular profession, his elders in the profession were honor-bound both to give him adequate training to complete his quest and to accept him into their fraternity if he returned with enough glory.

The tradition of the Manhood Voyage even spread (in somewhat lesser form) to other cultures the Hawaiians encountered. In particular, the Japanese, Maori, and the Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest embraced it. Although it wasn’t mandatory to become an adult, it became fashionable in these cultures for young men to undertake some impressive quest soon after achieving adulthood. Thus, it is possible to run into small bands of boys with big ambitions throughout the Pacific Rim – and sometimes even farther.

Such a band could be an ideal adventuring party: propelled by a deliberate quest for the new and unusual, lacking a certain degree of common sense possessed by the older and wiser, and sometimes overwilling to solve problems through violence. In fact, a typical group of heroes may end up *mistaken* for such a group!

Homeline’s Cape Mendocino, scattered reports circulated of particularly venturesome young men on their Manhood Voyages (see *The Voyage Into Adulthood*, above) finding huge islands to the east; however, Captain Yang was the first to make a good navigational record and return with most of his crew intact, so he gets the credit on Pele-1.

*For affordable mini ships useful in seafaring campaigns, check out the **Pirates of the Spanish Main** constructible strategy game (formerly by Topps/Wizkids). Packs can usually be found for a few dollars each.*

Other Peles

Infinity has discovered three other worlds where increased volcanism in the Pacific has created a much larger Hawaii. At first, the Patrol chalked up the odd phenomena as “just one of those things,” a quirk of the timelines. However, closer inspection of Pele-2 and Pele-3 suggest that something stranger is going on. As far as anyone can tell, Pele-1, Pele-2, and Pele-3 are not merely timelines with a common feature, they are almost perfect *echoes* of each other, displaced in history. Pele-2 is 200 years further along in its history than Pele-1, and Pele-3 is 450 years displaced. Otherwise, according to their history books, the timelines align perfectly with one exception.

On **Pele-2** (Q6, current year 1750), the increased trade and competition of a world with three colonizing cultures rather than one has pushed the tech level ahead of Homeline’s at that time, and Pele-2 is in the early stages of TL6. The new technology, particularly that of transportation, is spurring exploration into the darkest corners of the world. Driving the urge to explore is the recent discoveries of mysterious ruins in various inaccessible areas of the globe – beneath the waves, under ice caps and glaciers, and at the peaks of high mountains. The ruins seem to contain the secrets of new sciences and devices, and everyone is scrambling to be there first with the most.

Pele-3 (Q6, current year 2000) shows the result of the exploration that Pele-2 is just starting. Secrets in the ruins, now decisively proved to be of extraterrestrial origin, have spurred the science of this timeline even further. The world is TL9, with superscience engines and force screens that

allow them to travel the Solar System. Humans have journeyed to and established bases on all the inner planets. They are now exploring the dark reaches of the outer Solar System, where even larger remnants of the star-faring creatures exist.

What really concerns the Patrol about the first three Pele worlds, however, is not their similarities, but what makes them different. Careful scientific dating of the ruins on the three timelines suggests that the arrival of the creatures was *not* at the same time on all three. Or, more accurately, that the arrival *was* at the same time – as viewed from Homeline. The strange buildings first arrived almost exactly 200,000 years before the local present on each timeline. Furthermore, the ruins in the three timelines are not identical, despite being in the same locations. Instead, they seem almost complementary, when viewed from the perspective of world jumpers. A location that appears devoted entirely to industrial activity in one world is paired with a residential area in another. The implications of this have the Patrol sweating. Not only have they run into clear evidence of alien life with high technology, it’s very likely that the aliens had parachronics.

This, of course, is why **Pele-4** may be the most nerve-wracking timeline of all four. Pele-4 is on Quantum 4, local year 200,000 B.C. The volcanic activity around Hawaii has just about died out, and the world is pristine, with only scattered bands of primitive humans wandering the landscape. Patrolmen stationed here are watching the sky *very* carefully . . .

Captain Yang did not return empty-handed to his home port, either. On his journey south down the new coastline in search of the trade winds to take him home, he encountered the Aztec empire, with its gold, blood, and many unhappy subjects. Word spread through Southeast Asia, Polynesia, and north to China and Japan that something larger and richer than islands lay beyond the western horizon. Others began making the journey; those who returned alive brought back more tales of wealth and territory to be had. Of course, not everyone survived; it took almost two and a half decades of trial and error before the safest, most reliable routes to sail eastward and to return to the west were worked out. However, the opportunities were far too great to ignore. Private explorers found themselves replaced by ones sponsored by the various nations of the Pacific Rim.

The leaders in this race to conquer the New World have been Hawaii and Lu Daoyu (Homeline Philippines). By 1530, both had significant presences in the New World. Both nations had been thoroughly Sinified by the Song exiles who had arrived two and half centuries before. On Hawaii, the royal family had intermarried with the descendants of the last Song Emperor, and now the King claimed both the crown of Hawaii and to be the

legitimate ruler of all of China. Hawaii established its presence in the New World to the north, with its capital in Wuwan (San Francisco), and territory stretching southward into the former Aztec Empire. Lu Daoyu, meanwhile, established itself further to the south, with its major port at Po Mao (Acapulco).

While the Chinese had been establishing their presence on the west coast of the Americas, the Europeans had been arriving more or less on schedule in the east. European history matched fairly closely to Homeline until the discovery of the New World, when things began to go off the rails. Unlike in Homeline’s history, the Spanish did not encounter an entrenched Aztec Empire in Central America, with wealth concentrated in one place and an easily controlled central authority. In Pele-1, the exchange of disease between the Old World and the New had been in full swing for almost 30 years when the Spanish ventured onto the mainland in 1512. The Aztec Empire had fallen before plagues, revolts of its subject peoples, and Chinese treasure hunters and conquerors. The Spanish were able to pick up the pieces on the east coast of the Caribbean Sea, overcoming several small Aztec successor states, but no huge treasures were forthcoming, and the Spanish soon realized that men from Cathay already had a firm grip on the west coast.

More on the Aztec Empire can be found in GURPS Aztecs, including information about surrounding cultures and populations that are especially noteworthy for a campaign revolving around exploration.

No Spaniard has made a serious claim to the whole Pacific Ocean on Pele-1. For the past 40 years, the Spanish have only built up their strength slowly on the mainland of Central America, preferring to focus on the islands. Meanwhile, the Chinese have been more proactive in enlarging their empires, but they are hampered by the greater distances separating their home from the New World, and by increasing native resistance (often encouraged by the Spaniards, who donate arms and sometimes mercenaries, to stir up trouble). In addition, the technology of the Old World – horses, ships, metallurgy, guns – are spreading out across the New World.

OUTWORLD OPERATIONS

Of the four Pele timelines (see *Other Peles*, p. 8), Pele-1 is the lowest priority for the Patrol. It is low-technology, so there aren't useful designs to steal. Infinity is here mainly to thwart Centrum, and to protect Homeline resources. Homeline's biggest interest in this timeline is research. Besides the usual historical enquires (epidemiologists studying virgin-field epidemics in the Americas, economists investigating the effects of increased trade on pre-modern societies, and so forth), Paralabs has an interest in Pele-1, specifically the mysterious ruins to be found there. Paralabs often funds expeditions to the various known ruin locations, hoping to perform proper archeological examinations before local treasure hunters discover them and disturb the sites too much. In particular, there are several known ruin locations on Pele-2 and Pele-3 that were essentially destroyed by overeager investigators when they were first discovered on those timelines, and Paralabs wants to get teams into their Pele-1 equivalents before the same happens here.

In addition to research, of course, Homeline has the usual set of commercial interests. Tourism is permitted, and there is a steady trickle of curious and thrill-seekers. Southeast Asia and India are particularly popular destinations for the sybaritic, where a good store of local currency will buy a very luxurious lifestyle. Meanwhile, the more historically curious tend to gravitate to the New World, particularly Central America, and exasperated Patrolmen are forever pulling naïve groups of tourists out of whatever local problems they have

made worse by their arrival. White Star Trading runs its usual low-tech trading systems, shipping spices, luxury textiles, precious metals, and so forth about the timeline, taking the best luxury items for sale back on Homeline.

Exasperated Patrolmen are forever pulling tourists out of local problems they made worse by their arrival.

Centrum actually has even less interest in Pele-1 than Homeline does, although the Patrol isn't aware of this. Centrum's disinterest stems from several sources. First of all, Pele-1 is simply too limited technologically to be very interesting. Any attempt to make it a Zone Green world would either involve an expensive uplift program, or leave the world a technological backwater; neither prospect is very attractive. Second, Centrum's usual policies are hampered here by several factors. The language gap is erecting its usual barriers; this world has two major powers who don't speak English at all. Also, none of the major power centers are particularly amenable to their standard tricks. Centrum can't unite Europe easily into a world-conquering force; it's too fragmented. China is the most united nation on the planet, but the religious fanaticism of the Wanyou unsettles the strictly rational Centrum. Currently, Centrum is focusing its efforts on India and Southeast Asia, hoping to create something usable there, but the agents on the ground aren't receiving much support. The biggest reason that Centrum doesn't try too hard on Pele-1, however, is that their research suggests they *can't*; examinations of the parachronic equations describing all the Pele timelines suggest a high level of "historical inertia." Changes to the timeline that would cause it to diverge from the history of Pele-2 or Pele-3 tend to be reset. Centrum has about given up on the timeline as a result, and a posting to it is basically an informal punishment detail in the Interworld service.

ADVENTURE LOCATIONS AND SEEDS

Each continent on Pele-1 has its own exciting features to lure explorers, merchants – and visitors from Homeline.

THE BROWN AND PLEASANT LAND

Chinese sailors have known about the existence of Pele-1's Australia for at least a century. Until recently, however, they

have mostly ignored it, since the northern coast is dry and inhospitable. Now, however, the merchant-princes of Lu Daoyu are looking for a new route to the New World, hoping to avoid the fleets of Hawaii. As a result, sailors are ranging further south, seeking steady western winds. Explorers are investigating Australia for harbors that would make suitable bases. Adventurers can be part of the discovery of the more habitable portions of the island continent's south coast, and the creation of the first non-Aborigine settlements there.

In Hawaii, it's bad luck to remove black sand from the beaches – it could anger the goddess Pele.

Settlers must contend with harsh weather, the hostility of the natives, and Australia's dangerous flora and fauna. Besides building anchorages for the sea trade, it is only a matter of time before someone investigates the interior, realizes the immense quantity of valuable minerals that Australia possesses, and sets off a gold rush.

Of course, Homeliners already know about the mineral wealth of Australia, and it is their primary reason for going to Pele-1's version of the continent. Homeline can establish mines deep in the Outback with little fear of being spotted by curious natives. Of course, not all mining operations from Homeline are legitimate. The Patrol must deal with a constant stream of illegal prospectors trying to strike it rich by showing up at the known location of a large deposit and simply digging in. Tracking such a criminal can be a difficult exercise in survival, since it usually requires long treks through the harsh Outback desert.

Hawaiians believe that the volcano at Kilauea is inhabited by a family of fire gods presided over by the goddess Pele who governs the activities of lava flows.

– Martha Beckwith,
Hawaiian Mythology

THE DARK CONTINENT

Africa on Pele-1 is undergoing a rather accelerated colonizing process. On Homeline, European influence was mostly limited to the coasts until the 18th century. On Pele-1, however, the European advance was stopped at the Cape of Good Hope, where they encountered Indian traders already established. Meanwhile, Indians – particularly the merchants of the Deccan Confederacy – have been exploring East Africa for over a century now, and they are well aware of the economic potential of areas such as Ethiopia. The Europeans are now establishing more long-term settlements on the West African coast, in an attempt to compete with the Indians.

Unfortunately, neither the Europeans nor the Indians have reduced Africa's thriving slave trade. Indeed, slaves are one of the main economic products of the African colonies, with the Indians shipping them to the thriving Arab slave markets of the Middle East, and the Portuguese and Spanish shipping slaves west to work the great plantations now springing up in the Caribbean and South America. Expeditions into the interior of Africa from the coastal colonies go in search of slaves, gold, spices, and now gemstones, as the extent of the diamond fields in South Africa becomes clear.

As in Australia, Homeline agents will usually be engaged in either establishing or defending resource-extraction projects, such as mining diamonds or harvesting rare plants from the jungle interior. The Africa of Pele-1 is also something of a tourist destination, with many westerners eager to see an Africa "unspoiled by outsiders." Adventurers can be tapped to lead safaris or jungle expeditions, or rescue parties of tourists when said ventures inevitably go wrong. Finally, the deep interior jungle of Central Africa has a few ruin sites that Patrol members may be sent to investigate.

THE CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD

Central Asia is currently one of the hot spots of Pele-1. The great trading cities of the Silk Road have been centers of wealth and culture in an otherwise-barren landscape, but now they are hotbeds of intrigue and potential warfronts as well. The forces of the Wanyou Dynasty have been pushing west for almost a century, since the fall of the Mongol Empire. Meanwhile, the Raja of Delhi is expanding north and west past the Hindu Kush, trying to tap into the lucrative trade that its Indian neighbors are enjoying, and attempting to secure its borders against more incursions from Muslim crusaders. The result is a clash in the ancient cities of Central Asia, as the religiously motivated Wanyou seek to convert everyone in sight (and incidentally tie up the trade for themselves), while the forces of the Raja look to leave the roads free for their own merchants, and perhaps divert some of the trade from the west toward them while avoiding religious fanatics.

Although outright war has not yet broken out, it seems only a matter of time. Agents from both sides can be found throughout the Silk Road cities, assessing defenses, taking stock of resources, and sounding out the population's feelings on everyone involved. Anyone who can offer useful intelligence on any of the involved parties can command their price from everyone else, and a deadly cloak-and-dagger game is being played out in the ancient streets, bazaars, and caravanserais.

Infinity agents can find action in Central Asia quite easily. Infinity has its own intelligence-gathering operations, since the inevitable outbreak of war will necessitate changing a lot of operations; Infinity wants to know how, when, and for how long the war will be. Besides engaging in the Great Game, local agents must also help shepherd White Star traders through the growing turmoil, and retrieve the occasional incautious Homeline tourist captured by bandits or lost in the desert. Centrum activity is also high in this area. The Patrol hasn't gotten a perfect picture of just what Centrum is up to yet, but they suspect that the Interworld Service will try to tilt the balance of the battle in the Wanyou's favor. Of course, Centrum agents are actually looking to boost the *Indian* forces, which can lead to some comedy-of-errors situations where both sides try to thwart the other without realizing that they're not really competing in this circumstance.

For more information about Homeline, the Infinity Patrol, Centrum, and related organizations – as well as other worlds where the countries of Asia have had a particularly significant influence, such as on Attila and Shikaku-Mon – see GURPS Infinite Worlds.

NEW WORLDS TO CONQUER

The Americas, particularly Central America, are currently the place on Pele-1 where the ambitious can go furthest. The old empires of the Native Americans have mostly collapsed. The Aztec Empire has splintered into a dozen squabbling city-states, dominated by the Spanish and Chinese along the coasts, and mostly independent in the interior. Mercenaries are always in demand, as are those skilled in Old World crafts such as metallurgy, gunsmithing, and agriculture; local nobles can often pay in gold and silver. Both European and Chinese expeditions up and down the coasts are revealing more lands to expand into as well. The Chinese of Lu Daoyu have just encountered the remnants of the Inca Empire in South America, fragmented by disease and civil war. Meanwhile, the French and English are eyeing the lands to the north of the Caribbean, looking to establish their own presence in the New World. A bold explorer can make a name and a fortune in the Americas, and many who chafe under the restrictive aristocracy of their homelands are beginning to think that the interior of the new continents would be the place to go to escape tyranny.

To Homeline, the Americas represent the biggest tourist destination on Pele-1. The “Conquest of the New World” looms large in the consciousness of both the societies descended from it and the European nations that participated. Travelers from wealthy Western nations visit Pele-1’s Americas to discover what it looked like before the arrival of Columbus, to see the conquest taking place, or to justify their own opinions on the ethics of the colonizing of two giant continents. All this leads to a constant stream of tourists flowing into Pele-1’s North and South America, and a concurrent headache for the Patrol. Most of the local societies are not particularly tolerant of ignorant outsiders showing up and asking pesky questions, and the natives can express their displeasure in extremely unpleasant ways at times. More than one tourist party has had to be rescued from being the star attractions in a blood sacrifice. The Patrol must also guard Homeline’s commercial interests in Central America, as dealers in antiquities and art objects try to get to the good stuff before the Europeans or Chinese melt it down for its gold value. And, of course, researchers always need looking after, since they never quite seem to recognize the danger of sticking around for a few more pictures of the temples while the natives sharpen the sacrificial knives.

HEART OF DARKNESS

The last major adventure opportunity on Pele-1 for Homeliners is, of course, the ruins. The ruins of the Pele

timelines are far from human settlement – buried in deep jungle, on the peaks of high mountains, beneath crushing ice, or below the waves. Thus, very few of them have been even noted on Pele-1. However, Homeline has an interest in the ruins, and it is often easier to investigate them on Pele-1 (away from prying local eyes), rather than on Pele-2 or Pele-3 (see *Other Peles*, p. 8). However, the ruins are not easy to get to, even for masters of parachronic technology; the ruins apparently emit some form of energy that disrupt parachronics. It is extremely difficult to use a conveyor or projector to enter any of the Pele timelines within 500 miles of a ruin. When the ruin is far from any human habitation – as the ones in Antarctica or deep in the Pacific Ocean are – Homeline finds it easy to reach them; inserting a research team in an aircraft or other high-tech vehicle that can cross the intervening distance is easy. However, when the ruins are on inhabited continents, such as those deep in the African jungle or situated in the Andes, Infinity cannot risk having locals see the arrival of the research team. As a result, groups going to ruins on any of the inhabited lands of Pele-1 must do it the old-fashioned way – on foot.

Such missions are usually provisioned and staffed entirely from Homeline; recruiting native porters can make it difficult to use any of the high-tech amenities of modern explorers, and even grad students have some limits on the conditions they’re willing to put up with. Nonetheless, exploring parties must often deal with the native inhabitants of the lands they are passing through, so all gear is designed to be easily disguised as low-tech equipment to casual observation. Once at the ruin site, researchers try to conduct their investigations as quickly as possible, as the ruins tend to be unsettling, and have an uncanny tendency toward bad luck on the part of intruders. Of course, Centrum is also interested in the ruins and employs similar methods to investigate them on Pele-1, which provides another reason to not spend too much time in any given location. From time to time, Homeline and Centrum expeditions have overlapped, and the results have ranged from tense to explosive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Pedersen lives and works in Saskatoon, Canada, where he continues to search for a job that will both pay for gaming books and allow him enough free time to participate in gaming sessions. He feels that writing for *Pyramid* is a good step toward fulfilling both of these goals. He enjoys a wide range of game systems and styles, but he remains committed to annoying his friends by pointing out, “You know, we could do this with **GURPS**.” In his free time, he bothers his cat.

As time passed they became a part of the innumerable multitude of au-makuas, or ghost-gods, of the Pit of Pele, worshiped especially by those whose lives were filled with burning anger against their fellow-men.

– W.D. Westervelt, *Hawaiian Legends of Volcanoes*

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CITY OF THE CAESARS

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Not as well-known as El Dorado or Cibola, the legendary “City of the Caesars” – to call it by one of its many names – was a fantastically rich city, supposedly located within the amazingly diverse landscape of Patagonia.

The South American city was purported to be well-kept, advanced, and brimming with mineral riches. It was also said to be notoriously hard to find – wrapping itself up in a fog to confound would-be discoverers, or even able to change its location at will. Conquistadors, missionaries, and other (less reputable) sorts launched numerous expeditions, but the legendary city of gold and diamond was never found.

Was the City of the Caesars just a myth spread by locals to get conquistadors out of their village? Or was there something more to the tale? Does it sit there still, patiently awaiting discovery? Should the world be worried?

The City of the Caesars is a lesser-known exploration-age enigma. A GM could use it in a campaign set in that era, with explorers, missionaries, or pirates seeking its treasures. Its legend could also be used in a modern-day occult or conspiracy game, or a two-fisted tale of pulp, archaeological adventure.

THE CREATION OF A LEGEND

The story of the City of the Caesars is a historical mish-mash, a game of “telephone” played over decades by several different participants, whose final product was a blend of all their hopes, ideas, and outright lies, stirred together with the cultural chauvinism and romanticism of the time.

Patagonia was unseen by Western eyes until 1520, when Magellan rounded the strait that would one day bear his name. His crew witnessed the shoreline fires of its inhabitants. For reasons still historically unclear, he called them Patagonians. According to Magellan, they were twice the height of Magellan’s crew and convinced that the European explorers came from the sky. Magellan’s tales of their hardness and height later proved exaggerated but enflamed the imaginations of others, lending an unearthly dimension to a land already full of exotic strangeness.

The Spanish ordered a few attempts to explore and take the strait, but these met with sorry failure. Later, in 1526, Sebastian Cabot’s expedition to China took a meandering (and mutinous)

turn when he landed in Brazil and decided to investigate the Rio de la Plata instead, hoping to find the fabled treasure of the Incan king. During the trip, one of his captains – Francisco Cesar – came back with tales of a fantastically rich land filled with gold, silver, and jewels. However, all subsequent searches turned up none of the riches that Cabot hoped to find.

Ultimately, Cabot went home with only knowledge of the region (which at least may have earned him a pardon for his gross mishandling of Spain’s ships and money). Still, his tales of Incan wealth were so compelling that people began to imagine it was real and started referring to it as “Caesar’s.” The metropolis was also referred to as the City of the Patagonia, the Wandering City, Trapalanda, Lin Lin, and Elelin. Its genesis was variously ascribed to: Incan *mitimaes* (migrants) who built new cities in the south after 1535; shipwrecked Spanish sailors who founded settlements and interbred with the natives; and Spanish natives who had survived native attacks in that area, and built great cities on the backs of their conquests.

Given free rein to mutate with constant retellings, the City of the Caesars soon became a vast metropolis, built between a mountain of diamond and a mountain of gold. The population supposedly enjoyed a rich and luxurious lifestyle, living in houses decorated with gold and precious gems, and growing potatoes as large as watermelons.

Over time, the story became even more fantastic. The city’s founders were now said to be the Patagonian “Giants,” ghosts, or possibly even the Templars – who hid the Holy Grail within it. They also said the city could move itself from place to place or hide within a thick mist that cleared only for the worthy, thus explaining why no one had yet been able to locate it.

FAILED FINDINGS

Once the city’s legend reached full steam, a number of expeditions were formed to try and catch up to it. Deigo de Rojas explored large portions of the region in 1543, and Jeronimo de Alderete and Francisco de Villagra tackled the problem from two different directions in 1551. None of the three explorers found any concrete evidence of the city, though de Rojas did find some chickens of European descent and, eventually, a poisoned arrow in his neck.

If you’re looking to run a GURPS Infinite Worlds campaign where magical cities and fountains are more at home, consider using the alternate framework presented in GURPS Infinite Worlds: Collegio Januari.

The streams of lava and volcanic sand which we saw at the foot of the volcano of Osorno are even today considered by some of the neighboring inhabitants as roads which were built by the Caesars, and the thundering noise made by the rush of avalanches – Byron’s “thunderbolts of ice and snow” – down the sides of Tronador are regarded by them as the reports of their artillery.

– J.A. Zahm, *Through South America’s Southland*

Decades later – and well after crushing the Incan power in 1573 – the Spanish tried again to hold the strait against pirates. The famous explorer (and Inquisition-accused mystic) Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa took 3,000 men in a fleet of 12 ships to fortify the area in 1581. However, after mutiny took more than half his complement, the colony he established was doomed to failure. The sorry remnants of “Port Famine” put a capstone on Spain’s control of the strait, at least for the time, and for some years thereafter it was dominated by pirates.

In addition to engaging in their “profession,” the pirates searched the coasts and interiors of Patagonia for the City of the Caesars. They, too, had become convinced that the massive city of legend lay somewhere within the area, in one of its mountain valleys or up one of its rivers. Their booty-fueled travels contributed much to the geographical knowledge of the territory, but they found no great and hidden city – just other pirates, eager to steal their ill-gotten loot.

The next big attempt to locate the city – as well as convert natives – was undertaken by Jesuit missionary Father Nicolas Mascardi. In 1669, the priest and his native guides created a small settlement near lake Nahuel Huapi, in northern Patagonia, and used it as a base for conversion, as well as mounting expeditions in search of the fabled metropolis. The explorations ended badly: Father Mascardi was killed by hostiles in 1673, and his body was left to rot in the jungle for two years until the Spanish could recover it.

Sporadic explorations in search of the City of the Caesars would continue for most of the next century, resulting in better understanding of Patagonia’s geography, but making little progress in discovering the fabled city. From 1779 to 1793, Father Francisco Menendez planned and executed several trips to the region, eventually finding the remnants of Father Mascardi’s settlement by the lake. Perhaps shocked into sense by a solid reminder of what gold fever could lead to, Menendez was among the first to admit that maybe there had been no City of the Caesars after all.

After that, the story began to fade into gentle obscurity, resting alongside such delusions as Cibola and El Dorado, and giving way to more modern quests for cities such as Great Paititi. Still, there are those who wonder if maybe the legend

of the city’s ability to hide itself, or even move, was what confounded those expeditions.

Perhaps the great city lurks just out of sight, waiting for a worthy explorer to set foot inside and enjoy the material and intellectual wealth it has to offer.

WHAT IT COULD BE

Does the City of the Caesars exist? In spite of the numerous failures to officially find it, records exist of Spaniards and native Patagonians who swear that they saw it and even set foot within it. While their testimony could be attributed to lying, tall-tale telling, or wishful thinking, some of them were possibly telling the truth. Perhaps the metropolis only unveils itself to the worthy, or at least to those who aren’t actively looking for it.

The most mundane explanation – other than its having been a tall tale that went too far – is that it’s the last stronghold of the once-mighty Incan empire: a massive vault intended to warehouse their riches, culture, and technology in the face of some horrifying event. Maybe they ordered it built long ago, hoping they’d never need it. Maybe they came *from* it, somehow, and built their empire going north (rather than south, as is generally believed). It might have been buried, or else blended into its surroundings so well that one could stand right before it and never see it.

However, the reigning description of the city – and its fantastic attributes – lends itself to more outlandish explanations. It could be a wonder of ancient engineering, a piece of alien technology, or a manifestation of good old-fashioned magic. Perhaps there is a mystical or scientific purpose for the mountains of gold and silver, other than purely over-the-top aesthetic concerns or a sign of its immense mineral wealth.

There’s also the possibility that the mountains of gold and diamond *are* the city. Perhaps the city is a massive, bisected cone, with a huge “diamond” window on one side and “gold” shade on the other. This could indicate that it is an ancient arcology – one sealed long ago, and then expertly hidden to avoid external meddling with its carefully balanced ecology. Maybe its camouflaging has been done to aid in its long-term mission.

For a historical example of a city that might well have sponsored explorers to go out and do great things, GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence presents that city in all its glory. Any of the noteworthy families might financially back heroes – or hire explorers to thwart the PCs’ efforts!

Or maybe it isn't camouflaged at all! Perhaps the city has been built with advanced geometrical principles, allowing for movement in and out of the three dimensions humans normally experience. Maybe the city can vanish into higher planes of existence, and appears only to dedicated seekers whom the city's inhabitants consider worthy of entry. Maybe it moves through space as well – possibly even time itself.

Maybe the city is a vehicle. Did its builders seek to escape not only persecution, but also the planet? Or is it a product of von Daniken's "ancient astronauts" – one that crashed here long ago, or was abandoned when its inhabitants landed on Earth and settled it, creating other fantastic, legendary cities as they migrated north? Is the city just visiting the Earth on an irregular basis, or could it be here all the time, parked and cloaked somewhere within the wondrous landscape of Patagonia?

It is also unknown who controls the city. Is it populated by aliens or humanity – or by some exotic interbreeding of the two races? Is it filled with the remnants of the Incan culture – those fortunate ones who escaped the Spanish conquest of their homes? If so, did they build the city, or merely find it? If they built the city, in all its advanced glory, then why didn't they put up more of a fight against the conquistadors?

Perhaps some of the Knights Templar escaped their persecutors, fled to the New World, and established the city. If so, the entire metropolis could be infused with their mysterious magic, and therefore hidden from uninitiated eyes. It might contain the Holy Grail or other treasures the legendary order may have held. It may even share its builders' curse.

Another legend has it that the city is full of ghosts. If so, what sort of spirits haunt the place, and why? Perhaps they are threadbare wraiths that walk its long-deserted streets and hallways in endless approximations of what their life was once like. Maybe they are angry apparitions who seek revenge against those who shut them in there and left them to die. They might be ascended beings seeking to present wisdom and knowledge to the worthy, and keep the greedy and domination-minded at bay. Or they could be high-tech holographic interfaces, awaiting the instructions that will take the city back to its home beyond the stars.

The City of the Caesars can be anything, built by anyone, for any purpose. It exists, it can only be hoped its eventual discovery will bring good into the world, rather than ill.

MAPS AND LEGENDS

In addition to the riddle of the City of the Caesars itself, other legends and anomalies abound throughout the region. There is a possibility that the mystery could be connected with them, or else somehow complimentary to them.

For example, were there actually giants in Patagonia? Magellan's "footprints" were explained away, as were sightings of too-tall natives. But did they actually find traces of a tall race of humanoids who called that difficult land their home, and if so, was the City of the Caesars their capitol? It would explain why their city is so hard to find, as giants often find it difficult to live among ordinary men. Is the city the last redoubt of the

Biblical giants of old – the Nephilim? Why did they think Magellan and his sailors came from the sky?

Although the mysterious Nazca lines, up in Peru, lie quite some distance away, and their true nature was not "discovered" until 1926, one of the speculated uses of the vast designs was to act as landing directions for ancient astronauts. Did some of the lines direct spacecraft, such as the city, to landing spots in Patagonia? If so, what other ships might be lurking in the area, or be on their way?

Explorers can learn of numerous legends and anomalies in South America.

Then there's Antarctica, not too terribly far away. Is the City of the Caesars some outcropping of the ancient civilization some have supposed once lived there, long before the ice came? Is the city a fantastic remnant of its once-great culture, or a piece of a much larger city, moving through space by way of the advanced science of that lost kingdom? Did Caesars' current inhabitants find the abandoned city and make it their own, or are they the descendents of the Antarcticans? Perhaps the Incans and/or the Patagonians have some Antarctic blood in their heritage.

The city isn't the only feature of the landscape that has a habit of vanishing. Not far from the Falklands are three islands – the Auroras – that have been sighted, and then vanished, several times since their discovery in 1762. Are they here when the city is not, and vice versa? Does their presence act as a kind of "counterweight" to the city? Or are they a minor effect caused by the same disturbances that resulted in the city disappearing?

Of course, the most infamous "vanishing island" of all – R'lyeh – lies off the coast of Chile, some distance south of Easter Island. Is there some dark connection between it and the City of the Caesars? Might the projection of the city's existence be a kind of lure, set into place by some hideous creature of the Mythos, hoping to attract humans toward some horrible, metropolis-sized trap? If so, who's responsible? What truly awaits those who discover it?

CITY OF ADVENTURES

The numerous possibilities of the City of the Caesars, coupled with the vast amount of explorations, piracy, and naval engagements that took place around that area, present a wide range of options for the GM who wants to run a historical adventure. The most obvious is to have a group of gold-hungry conquistadors enter Patagonia in search of the city's treasure, encountering a number of hostile natives and rival explorers as they penetrate the strange and varied landscape. Other possibilities exist, too.

Getting messages back to one's sponsors is often important in exploratory campaigns. Check out the Wizard's Letter from Pyramid #3/1: Tools of the Trade – Wizards and Code Words from Pyramid #3/5: Horror & Spies for two approaches on how to deal with this problem. The two might even be combined!

Pirates of Patagonia

The heroes are a group of pirates who have chosen to investigate the claims of a fantastic city, somewhere inland. They have been given what is supposed to be a map to the location (or *one* of the locations – the city apparently moves) and a warning that the city will not give up its secrets so easily. They plan to take their ship upriver for as long as they can, then continue on foot when that's no longer possible. Along the way, they'll run afoul of other pirates, natives, missionaries, and the Spanish, possibly intent on the same quest. Will they succeed in finding the lost City of the Caesars? Or will they vanish into the landscape, as so many others have done?

The Good Work

Missionaries from Spain have come to the New World to set up churches and Christianize the natives. Included among them are some who would do more than simply banish superstitions, but actively destroy those who profess them. A branch of the Spanish Inquisition is in Patagonia, seeking the truth of this heathen-sounding City of the Caesars – and ready to destroy it if necessary. They will have to find the truth of it by “questioning” those Spaniards, foreigners, and natives who claim to have seen it, and then mount an expedition into the wilds to find the fabled mountains of diamond and gold. Will they uncover the truth behind the legend? Will that truth set them free?

Caesar's Necropolis

The city is not what it once was. Long ago, it was a bustling metropolis, filled with glory and gold, knowledge and luxury. Then came the settlers from the Old World, and with them their terrible diseases – plagues the city's people had no defenses for. In a moment of curiosity, they let some of the newcomers inside, so that they might examine them. In that moment, the city was doomed. Now only ghosts live here, between the precious mountains . . . and they are very, very angry.

The PCs could be raiding parties of wraiths, out to wreak havoc on the mortals who spread their diseases about this land. Or perhaps they are missionaries who might enter the city, learn of its demise, and put its furious souls to rest.

The Inside Out

The city of Elelin has come to the end of its usefulness. It is decaying around its alien-human inhabitants. Even now the metropolis is floating in and out of dimensional cohesion for longer periods each time, and the next disappearance may be its last. The advanced civilization of hybrids – progenitors of the Incan people – has been aware of this problem for some time. However, there is still one last mission before the city can be abandoned: information retrieval.

The many subtle techno-artifacts their wayward people carried when they left the city must be gathered and brought back, lest greedy humans get hold of them and unlock their secrets. Thus the heroes must disguise themselves as men and wander through the dying and ravaged remnants of the Incan empire to retrieve pieces of their past from the greedy, the curious, and the dangerous. Can they maintain their masquerade among these belligerent ape-children – with their guns and religion – while digging up burial chambers and forgotten temples? Or will they have to show mankind the power of the true Children of the Sun?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid*, has been the editor of *The Wraith Project*, and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.



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MINDING YOUR MANNERS

BY ALAN LEDDON

Every culture has specific rules of conduct, as do most organizations. These rules may be practical, such as knowing which side of the road to drive on, or how to hand a knife or pair of scissors to someone. They may be an acknowledgement of position or status; as two examples, Japanese bow lower to their social superiors than to equals, while American parents can address their children as “honey” or “sweetie,” but it is rude and disrespectful for the children to address their parents the same way. Rules of conduct cover how to act when meeting strangers, when courting, and when working. Behavior that is acceptable in one situation may be inappropriate in another – imagine a suited, balding accountant shouting “Sir! Yes Sir!” to his supervisor at a Fortune 500 company!

Heroes in historical and fantasy games are unlikely to know all of the customs of those they meet in distant lands – even if they take the time to research the lands that they are visiting. Variations on normal conduct may apply to certain castes or professions; for example, in *Celtic Mythology*, Ward Rutherford notes that bards could request any payment they wished, and kings were honor bound to pay it. There could be different rules or customs that apply only to relatives or only to madmen. In modern and future games, adventurers with the Internet or similar tools at their disposal may be better prepared – if they think to use this resource, and if the needed information is available online.

The GM can add a whole new dimension to a game by emphasizing what is polite from the perspective of the NPCs who inhabit the lands the heroes explore. Incorporating the potential for misunderstanding merely requires the GM to present situations where the taboo might be violated. Without understanding local customs and manners, it is easy to give unintentional offense. The GM can select any number of behaviors that will offend the character’s hosts: boasting, openly displaying weapons (or concealing them), refusing hospitality, failing to use titles, and many other actions can potentially offend the natives. Did the explorer bow to the idol? Did he use the Holy Well (or the drinking water well) as a cuspidor?

The GM should also have an idea about what responses to offenses are likely. A culture that views its men as warriors may require duels to expiate an insult, while a medieval

English noble may have a low-status explorer whipped. Some societies may require a fine or a period of servitude.

By the same token, a little effort can go a long way. When meeting natives in a far-off land, it’s usually better to seem interested in the language and manners than to appear to be crass and boorish. Exerting effort to communicate in the language at even the Broken level and learning how to address their leaders (and putting a point in an appropriate Savoir-Faire specialty) goes a long way toward fostering good will and helping to ensure appropriate respect is returned. It is often not necessary to know the precise form of respect that the host expects – an elder of most tribes (Native American, Celtic, Australian Aborigine, Martian, Elven) will recognize the good intentions behind an explorer’s use of “Honored Elder” or “Honored Grandfather” when addressed as such.

This article is *not* intended to be a comprehensive survey of the etiquette of various real-world cultures. Rather, real-world (and fictional) examples are used to illustrate points. What follows is advice on how to breathe life into the exotic cultures that heroes will explore, and how to present explorers with potentially dangerous and embarrassing social situations during their adventures. The GM decides which customs or attitudes are prevalent in a particular culture and how great an offense is represented by the wrong action.

*The problem with communication is
the illusion that it has been accomplished.*

– George Bernard Shaw

THE BODY

It should go without saying that there are many actions involving the body that may offend a foreigner (or an alien). For example, in the United States, it is mildly offensive to refuse to shake hands with a stranger; conversely, some other cultures consider handshaking to be excessively intimate.

Even if the heroes are in conflict with another culture, knowing their cultural taboos is still important. After all, if you do something incredibly offensive to a society you’re at war with (such as desecrating their holy texts or slaughtering their sacred animals for food), that could provide the catalyst needed to cause them to fight more fiercely.

Personal space is very important. Modern Westerners like to have just over two feet between themselves and others in casual conversation, while people in other cultures tend to stand closer. As a consequence of different comfort zones, a native who likes to stand close might see the Westerner as being standoffish, while the Westerner could see that same native as intrusive or overly familiar. The GM may set comfort zones as he likes for the cultures encountered by the intrepid explorers of his world, then permit the misunderstandings to flow. An explorer who stands too close to locals who like more space could find himself bitten, pushed away, or even entered into an arranged marriage with the person he stood near; one who stands too far away might have natives perpetually advancing on him, or he might discover that locals will no longer talk to him.

Ideas of the body also apply to the remains of those who have died. Various cultures have their own ways of handling corpses, and exotic cultures that explorers come across should be no different. For example, many rabbis hold that an autopsy or other disfigurement of a body makes the dead body impure and thus forbid any alteration of a body; however, other rabbis feel that use of a body for important medical research does not defile the body.

Thus, a country may forbid defilement of a dead body. If the heroes encounter a deceased body belonging to that culture and the adventurers perform an autopsy to determine the cause of death (without consulting with anyone), this can lead to offended dignitaries, legally prosecuted PCs, and considerable other mayhem.

The GM may decide his exotic culture forbids infidels from observing the dead, requires everyone “in the area” to partake of the deceased to help him reach the afterlife, or other ideas. Regardless, it is almost certain that insults to the dead will not be taken lightly . . . unless “insulting” the deceased is necessary to keep evil spirits from interfering with his journey to the afterlife!

ELDERLY ADULTS

In the United States and some other countries, the elderly occupy a lower social position than other adults. Those who are mildly “different,” often as a result of aging or dementia, are locked away out of public view, often in facilities. In public, the youth they encounter are sometimes disrespectful, impatient, or contemptuous. If youthful PCs act similarly to the aged in the campaign, the GM can exploit this tendency when they explore exotic foreign lands.

In many cultures, such as those of Japan and China, ancestors are venerated, and the elderly are treated with great respect. Others defer to the eldest; at mealtimes, the eldest is served first. In an unfamiliar culture, perhaps the eldest control the money, make all the important decisions (such as how long to imprison impudent foreigners), regulate trade, even control the military and police – perhaps to deal with those rude foreigners. Heroes who’ve traveled for months to open trade routes, cement military alliances, or arrange politically expedient marriages can go

home in disgrace after a single rude comment – or spend several sessions trying to atone for such a *faux pas*.

Even if the elderly do not possess all of the power in a land, they may certainly have supporters. It would be potentially mortifying if the “old hag” the adventurers insulted and pushed out of the way turned out to be the mother/aunt/sister of the Guildmaster they had traveled 3,000 miles to meet. Even worse, what if she is instead the mother of the head of the Thieves’ Guild . . . or the Assassins’ Guild?

REAL ESTATE

Many cultures have an idea of property ownership. In the United States, for example, it is acceptable to walk on a sidewalk, driveway, stairs, or porch leading up to a door, even if you are a stranger to the family who lives in the house. Conversely, it is inappropriate, and possibly illegal, to enter a house uninvited (unlike on television, where an open door is an often an invitation).

Further back in history, there is the commonly known example of the crime of “hunting in the King’s woods” – a form of trespassing against the rights of the throne. In China, peasants were denied access to the Forbidden City. Explorers can reasonably expect some reaction to trespassing, ranging from a polite request to act properly – say, an elderly homeowner asking the explorer to go to a different door – to legal sanctions . . . or worse. (In the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode “Justice,” one character faces the death penalty for accidentally stepping on flowers!)

Explorers in unfamiliar cultures may repeatedly – yet unknowingly – violate the property rights of locals . . . who will likely be forgiving only the first time, if at all. To utilize this taboo, devise a number of potential offenses for cultures ahead of time. Perhaps it is a crime or sin for foreigners (or infidels) to enter certain areas; for example, the holy city of Mecca is off limits to non-Muslims. Or perhaps you must obtain permission before entering certain areas; in some American nursing homes, nurses and other staff can be terminated for entering a resident’s room uninvited.

SMALL TALK

“Hi! How are you?”

“I’m fine, and you?”

“Oh, good, good. Lovely weather we are having, ayuh?”

“Yeah, lovely weather.”

“Small talk” is important in many social circumstances. Some use such chit-chat to show that they are interested in, and care about, the other person (even if they aren’t). Many find small talk to be comforting and genteel, while others consider it to be a waste of their precious time. The GM may decide that small talk follows a ritualized form, that it is altogether absent in his cultures, that locals do not feel safe doing business until after a few minutes of chatting, or that attempting to engage a native in small talk is the only rude thing in the entire culture.

A parchment of pictographs showing basic concepts could prove invaluable when a language isn’t shared (see pp. 24-26). Of course, some illustrations – such as a picture of someone eating food – might be considered rude or even taboo, leading to the awkwardness described in this article.

TABLE MANNERS

Table manners are another potential source of offense to people in exotic lands. Some desert cultures consider it offensive to touch food with the left hand (which is used for cleaning oneself to conserve water). It may be offensive to a host to eat before the host or after, to “clean your plate” or wipe it with bread (suggesting the host did not provide enough food), or to refuse food or offer to return it. . . famously seen in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*: “You are humiliating them and embarrassing me. Now eat it!” In America, it is rude to belch after a meal or slurp your food; in Japan, these actions are considered to be compliments to the cook.

Explorers may wonder whether to add salt, pepper, sauces, and other condiments before tasting food (risking the suggestion that the hostess could not possibly have cooked the food well) or after (risking the suggestion that the food is not prepared to the taster’s liking). Like many matters of etiquette, this is definitely a case where a wise adventurer watches the actions of those he is visiting; locals can be expected to know what is polite at the table.

Even the commonest dirk has due respect paid to it. Any insult to it is tantamount to personal affront. Woe to him who carelessly steps over a weapon lying on the floor!

– Inazo Nitobe,
Bushido, the Soul of Japan

WEAPON ETIQUETTE

In cultures where weapons are common, generally numerous rules and laws exist regarding them. Cultures restrict who may own weapons, what kinds of weapons may be owned, and what weapons may be used for. Other rules may also be enforced; where the majority of participants carry weapons during events in the Society for Creative Anachronism, only those who have earned an “Award of Arms” are permitted to sport their weapons within 10 feet of the King and Queen, or within 10 feet of the throne. As another example, the American branch of Nippon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai makes a seven-page document available that details the care and etiquette of Japanese swords – available online at nbthk-ab.org/Etiquette.htm.

Carefully consider the role of weapons in foreign cultures. Are weapons generally reserved to authority figures: police and military, or nobles? Is every adult required to own a weapon? The GM can extrapolate etiquette from the answers to those questions. If every male citizen must carry a firearm at all times, perhaps it is very polite – or very rude! – to ask specific questions about the weapon (“How long have you had it? Has your pistol ever spilled the blood of a foreigner?”). If weapons are reserved to certain castes or professions, perhaps required forms of address must be used with those who carry weapons: “Officer” is an obvious choice.

Should an explorer show excessive rudeness toward a native’s weapon, it’s quite possible the native will use the weapon on the boor! This could be out of simple rage, because the native believes that the weapon requires a taste of blood to cool its own anger, or – of course – any other motivation that the GM desires.

Shields may also have rules of etiquette, especially if they are a primary means of displaying heraldic devices. Thus it may be considered very rude to lay another’s shield face down. Other rules of etiquette might relate to the fact that the shield protects the life of its owner.

ADVENTURE POSSIBILITIES

To enhance the gaming potential of exploring distant lands, the GM need only pay attention to the local ideas of proper behavior and etiquette. Having natives concerned with courtesy adds realism and life, and makes foreign lands feel truly exotic. These suggestions can help a GM incorporate these ideas into a campaign.

Army Men: While traveling in a foreign land, explorers find themselves accompanying a large army formation. They may be hired as personal aides or as porters, made prisoners, or simply going the same way. In conversation, they learn that the general is a stickler for perfect manners at all times. This is shortly before the general invites them to dinner . . .

Diplomatic Process: The heroes’ liege arranges to host a foreign ambassador late next year. For many reasons, the visit must be perfect. The heroes are sent to the ambassador’s distant and mysterious homeland, where they are to learn the ambassador’s native recipes, dance steps, and table etiquette, then return in time to teach this material to the liege’s servants.

His Highness: The adventurers are summoned by their liege and paid to take a message, gift, or tribute to the son of a foreign king. The liege’s chatelaine teaches them some basic rules of etiquette in the foreign court – but the heroes arrive and find that following those rules leads to people becoming angry and walking away. Worse, the prince refuses to grant an audience after hearing tales of the oafs’ behavior. Can the explorers resolve the diplomatic intrigues here *and* back home?

Professional Duelist: Soon after arriving in a new land, one of the adventurers has a minor encounter with someone; perhaps he touches a married woman’s hand, or is berated by an elderly woman for wearing his ugly shoes. The next day, a well-dressed, armed young man comes to the hero’s lodging, reminds him of the incident, and challenges him to a duel. Passersby clearly recognize the duelist and inform the PC that at least his death will be quick as well as painful. The hero may refuse (possibly against his Code of Honor), risk death, or learn how to apologize properly for whatever offense was given.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Leddon lives in Madison, Wisconsin with his wife, daughter, and several other creatures. Alan can often be found on Tuesday nights playing (or GMing) at a local game store, and he hopes to someday win enough money in the lottery to hire and maintain a full time GM. Recently, he measured his bookshelves; he found 10 shelf-feet of history books, nine shelf-feet of books on religion, one shelf-foot of books on parenting, and 12 shelf-feet of rulebooks for roleplaying games. He now knows what his priorities are.

EXPEDITION LOG

On some level, explorations are built around the idea of recordkeeping. The explorers are there to make discoveries, but if they return home without having written anything down, the sponsoring government is probably going to have them pilloried. Of course, that's assuming they make it home at all; a significant miscalculation on the amount of food they have could doom an expedition before it makes it home – or even to its destination.

Here, then, is a record sheet designed to help would-be explorers keep track of the essentials of their trip: Who they are, where they've been, and how much food and water they have.

USING THE LOG

Once you've printed your Expedition Log (see below), you can start using it!

Pages 22-23

These pages work together. Portions that might not be self-explanatory are explained here.

Expedition Information: The *Scheduled End* is either the date the expedition is expected to end, or the mandate (such as "six months"). The *Actual End* should provide the information in a similar format.

Notable Members and Roles: Here you can list the named individuals of the party, plus what function they are serving – such as "Thomas Fisher (Captain)." The *Total Number* space lets you account for the total size of the party, including those who don't get named.

Map: The hex paper on p. 22 is designed to include locations of interest in a map; there is room for information on those locations both in the boxes to the left and right of the graph paper, and in the *Additional Details* section on the next page. Number noteworthy hexes and put the corresponding numbers in both the corner box of their info section as well as the "Map #" section on the p. 23 sheet.

Food Information: *Location* is where the party's carried food is (beyond, perhaps, individual meals some in the party might tote), such as "Pack Mule" or "On the Ship." If there are multiple iterations of some locations, you can mark that as well: "Pack Mule (x3)" – this assumes each location carries the same load. *Amount* is how many person-days of food that source has: "10 days," for example. If you're marking multiple iterations in a box, you can note that: "10 days per."

Water Information: This functions identically to *Food*, above.

Unless you note otherwise, neither *Food* nor *Water* takes into account what the explorers can get from the land or sea as they travel.

Page 21

This page works alone for making notes or maps, or in conjunction with the *Map* section of pp. 22-23, using the hex portion on p. 22 to represent a subset of either of the two blank hex maps on this sheet.

Besides close-ups, the larger hexes can also be useful for tactical maps or diagrams, such as detailing how the explorers stand in relation to each other.

PRINTING THE LOG

Depending on your printing capabilities, there are a lot of possibilities for printing this log.

Pages 22-23

These are the "meat" of the Expedition Log. They're designed to work together, either printed on the same page (front and back) or as side-by-side sheets.

Alternatively, if you're able to print on double-size paper (11" x 17" or A3, depending on where in the world you are), you can print them both on the *same side* of a sheet of paper; set up your printer to do two-up (in Adobe Reader, use the "Multiple Sheets Per Page" feature), and print them both on the same large sheet. (You can also print them out two-up on a single side of a sheet of 8.5" x 11" or A4 paper, but you'll have to write small if you do.)

Page 21

Depending on how you set up the other two pages, how you use this sheet is up to you.

As explained above, the hex grids are designed to work well with the map section on p. 21. You can print individual sheets as needed (single- or double-sided), print it on the back of a character sheet, etc.

As a tip: Adobe Reader will let you print out two of the same page if you put the same page twice in the "Pages:" box. This can be useful if you're doing multiple pages on a sheet or duplex printing. Thus, if you wanted to print two copies of the hex paper on the back of the sheet that contains pp. 22-23 (see above), put "22, 22" (no quotes) in the box under "Pages:" and print two pages per sheet.

Name of Expedition: _____	
Purpose: _____	
Sponsor(s): Expedition Information	
Start Date: _____	Scheduled End: _____ Actual End: _____
Notable Members and Roles (Total Number of Expedition Members: _____)	
Notable Members and Roles	

Map Notes: _____	
Food Location	Food Information
Amount	_____
Notes	_____
Water Location	Water Information
Amount	_____
Notes	_____

Name of Expedition: _____

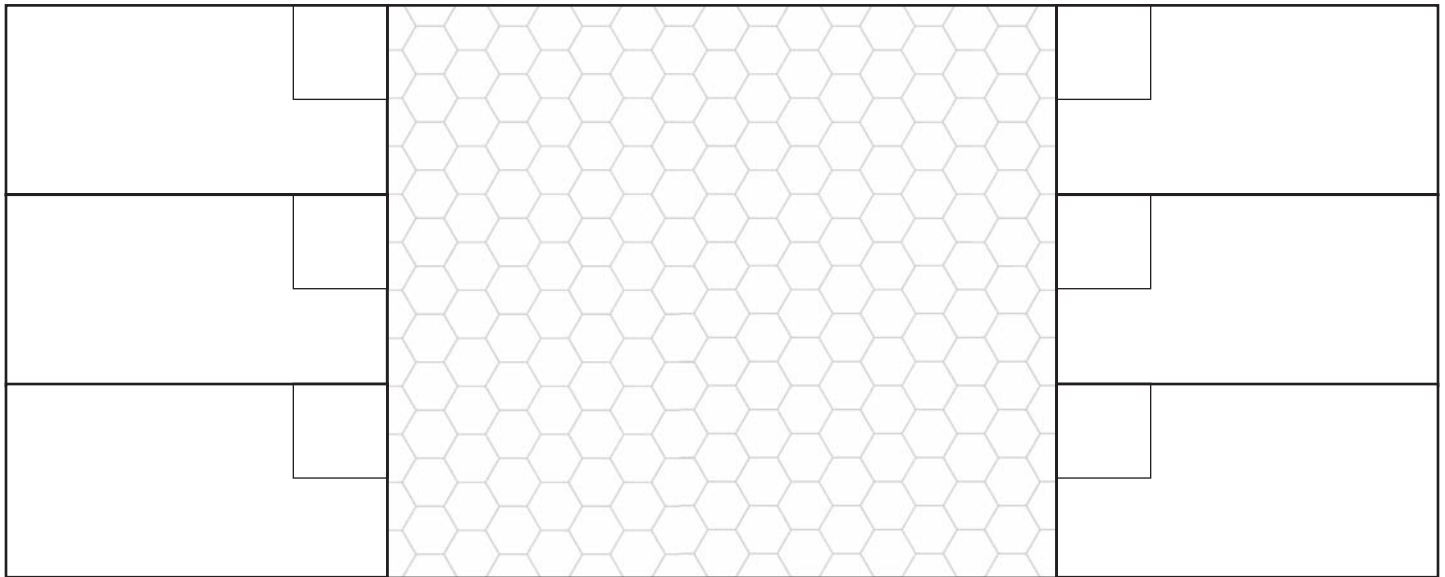
Purpose: _____

Sponsor(s): _____

Start Date: _____ **Scheduled End:** _____ **Actual End:** _____

Notable Members and Roles (Total Number of Expedition Members: _____)

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



Map Notes:

Food					
Location	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Amount	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Notes					
Water					
Location	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Amount	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Notes					

Notes on Expedition

Notes on Expedition Members

<i>Map #</i>	<i>Day/Date</i>	<i>Place Visited</i>	<i>Notes</i>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Additional Details:

Notes on Food Supply

Notes on Water Supply

LANGUAGES, CULTURE, AND THE COMMON TONGUE

BY DEMI BENSON

"Well, Iansa, what did he want?"

"Er . . . Brother Preston, I think I might not have understood correctly."

The priest stopped tying their packs together, "Give it a try, boy. Best way to learn a language is by jumping in up to your head. What do you think he said?"

Iansa cast his gaze to the ground and fidgeted nervously, "I know the caravan master thinks I'm thick. But when he said those things, I had wicked thoughts not worthy of being a priest of the Light."

"Oh? What terrible curses could he have said?"

*"He motioned that I'm too young to be let away from my mother's apron-strings, and he's going to beat my head and kick my backside until that little palm tree over there grows as big as the ones over there." After an increasingly nervous pause, "He didn't actually **say** that, but he said it with his hands, like the Jazaret Mystics."*

There was a long pause as the elder priest's eye crinkled in amusement. Stifling a smile, Brother Preston finally responded, "Could it be, Iansa, that instead of a personal attack on you, he wanted us to tie our packs into a bundle so the drovers could put them in the wagon, and we should quickly get into place so we can leave?"

The young acolyte's eyes opened wide in confusion, and he squeaked out a humbled, "Oh."

It is a luxury to be understood.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

A major challenge in real-world exploration is encountering languages and cultures unknown to the adventurers. Being able to converse is vitally important to seeking information, buying supplies or even asking, "What's that called?"

These optional additions to the **GURPS** language rules can add further possibilities to games that involve the interaction of many foreign cultures.

LANGUAGES

In the ancient world, many regions had their own languages and culture, often differing only slightly from those of their neighbors. The farther one traveled, the greater the differences, with sharp discontinuities where the local language family changed (from Iranian to Indo-Aryan to Tibetan while traveling from Persia to Burma, from Romance to Germanic going from Iberia to Scandinavia, or from Bantu to Khoi-San traveling southward from central Africa). Languages within the same family will – to some degree – be mutually comprehensible to native speakers, although this might mean only a dozen base words are in common.

Language Defaults

Very close languages (Swedish and Norwegian) default to each other at Accented. Native speakers can converse in their respective languages and be understood almost perfectly. One point of comprehension penalty can be offset by modest exposure as a familiarity, but learning to speak fluently and without accent in a defaulted language still costs 1 point. A very thick accent or strong regional dialect also falls into this category.

For campaigns where languages are going to play an important part, research (or invent, in the case of fictitious ones) some phrases or ideas that are easy to communicate in that language but difficult to convey otherwise.

Closely related languages (French and Italian) default to each other at Accented – Native-level French would let someone understand Native-level Italian as if the speaker were Accented, and vice versa. It takes 1 point to learn a defaulted spoken language from Accented to Native.

Distantly related languages (English and Danish) default to each other at Broken or worse! Communication is at the penalties listed on p. B24. If the Native and default languages are closely enough related (Spanish and Latin), Native-level speech can be had for 2 points to buy it up from Broken.

Very distantly related languages (Russian and Greek) are effectively unrelated. However, the GM *may* allow someone with Language Talent to speak the defaulted language at Broken – but with all communication penalties *doubled* – after two weeks of exposure to the language (or 50 hours dedicated to studying it).

Unrelated languages have no default.

The GM may allow Language Talent (p. B65) to grant benefits beyond simply reducing the cost of languages. If so, it reduces any communication penalty due to poor comprehension by 1 – the speaker adjusts his mode of communication to help the listener better understand. If two languages are “very closely” related (above), Language Talent allows the new one to be learned without any character points, once enough time has been spent absorbing the difficulties. In addition, it grants the character Broken spoken (but not written) comprehension of a language after only 100 hours of immersion (see p. B294).

Comprehension at Broken can be helped by speaking slowly and clearly, using appropriate gestures, simplifying your own language’s irregularities, and checking the other person’s understanding. A successful Gesture roll by the speaker improves the listener’s comprehension, reducing his penalties by 1; however, the added gesticulating and miming makes conversation take at least twice as long, and isn’t subtle.

New Perk: Linguist†*

You are familiar with all closely related languages in the same language family. You must specialize by a narrowly defined language family (such as Romance, West Germanic, or Semitic), must already have Native-level comprehension of a language in that family, and must have Language Talent. For languages that default at Broken or worse, this perk improves comprehension rolls (both social skills and IQ) by 1, as long as all the other requirements of this perk are met.

CULTURE

Cultural differences can hamper communication as well (p. B23). In the modern world, distinct cultures are very broad and based on zones of religion and conquest (East Asian, Muslim, Western, etc.). This holds true even for historic empires

(such as the Incan Empire, Mongol Khanate, Roman Empire, or Imperial China). In remote areas away from dominant kingdoms and empires, Cultural Familiarities are based on the lifestyle of the inhabitants (such as Hunter-Gatherers, Nomad Herders, Coastal Farmers, or City-State Farmers). These lifestyle Cultural Familiarities are based on commonalities in social hierarchies and organizations – hunter-gatherer bands are more like each other than like city-states supported by farming or like tribes of nomadic herders.

However, lifestyle Cultural Familiarities are necessarily more general than those based on specific regions and won’t include specific local customs and taboos; instead of completely negating the -3 penalty, cultural skills (p. B23) have a -1 penalty (doubled for alien species), which can be eliminated for specific regions with enough familiarity. Cultural Adaptability (p. B46) eliminates this entirely.

TRADE PIDGINS

Where there is trade between regions of differing languages, a trade pidgin may develop. Such a commerce language arises from the need to transact business where both groups have no language commonality. It starts from merchants each gesticulating and yelling in their own mother tongue, then both sides picking up a few words and phrases from the other’s language, and eventually becomes a mixed language blended from all its component parts. If a pidgin is taught to children as their mother tongue, it becomes a creole language.

In regions with substantial cross-cultural trade, the local pidgin or creole may become the *de facto* regional language. If so, it will have a good default to its primary linguistic component (the superstrate language), and modest to poor defaults to the minor components (substrate languages).

THE COMMON TONGUE

Fantasy stories and RPGs have introduced the concept of a “Common Tongue” – a high-level language spoken by nearly everyone. This is a conceit of the genre to let gamers ignore linguistic issues in favor of moving the story along.

Realistic Common

Circumstances exist where such a common tongue would be plausible. As examples: The former subject lands after the decline of a mighty empire may keep the conqueror’s language alive as a *lingua franca* (Latin after the Roman Empire, Spanish in South America after the age of conquistadors, French and English after the modern colonial period, or Russian after the Soviet Union); powerful centers of culture or long-distance trade will spread their language among their trading partners (Italian and Sabir from medieval Italy, Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age, Persian several times throughout history, English in the modern era). Many fantasy settings have a rich history replete with several such periods of conquest and far-reaching culture and trade.

*As a minor example, French has many hard-to-translate phrases, such as *l’esprit de l’escalier* – literally “the spirit of the staircase,” but meaning “a comeback you think of too late.” Including a few of these in interactions (especially if not defined) can remind gamers that literally understanding a language may not be enough.*

Lingua Franca

Sabir, the original *lingua franca* (“language of the Franks,” where “Franks” referred to any European), was a mixed language used for centuries around the Mediterranean for diplomacy and trade. It was primarily Italian (the superstrate) with Arabic, French, Greek, and Persian (the substrates). The term now refers to any language used to communicate between people who do not speak each other’s primary language.

Cinematic Common

As a cinematic alternative, Common Tongue may be a trade pidgin instead of a full language. In this case, Common will be based on a dominant regional language (which may even be a *lingua franca* on its own) and reliant on a broad set of culturally appropriate gestures as a crude sign language. Assume that each such language has a simpler, spoken-only, Common version, which is one step easier to learn than a full language – that is, 1 point for Accented, 2 points for Native. (Learning it at Broken requires only 100 hours of study, or about four weeks of immersion.) Because it is a trade pidgin, Common is only suited to discussing trade and general information – about the complexity of “I look for ship go up river. Me and five people and horses.” Any other subjects are treated as one comprehension step worse (trying to seduce someone with poetry in your Accented Common would be treated as Broken, with doubled penalties as usual for artistic language skills), and margins of success are halved. Cultural Familiarity penalties *always* apply – when playing fast and loose with a language it’s easy to accidentally make a rude gesture or violate a taboo!

You may study a region’s normal language *and* its Common version simultaneously, as if both were a single trait. If you know a sign language or another form of Common at Native, or Gesture at IQ+2 or better, you can pick up related forms of Common quickly; as long as the two base languages are at least “distantly related” (p. 25), *halve* the time needed to learn a new Common at Broken comprehension. This does not reduce the time needed to learn it at Accented or Native; only basic concepts are this easy to pick up on.

Assuming the GM is using the expanded rules for Language Talent (p. 25), it greatly speeds up the process as well. You can learn Broken Common in only 50 hours (halved to 25 if you know a complementary language, as per above), Accented Common in only 100 hours, and Native Common in 200 hours (or by spending 1 point).

EXAMPLES

Here are two worked examples utilizing these optional language rules. Both assume spoken languages only, and a cinematic take on Common.

Regions

In Razool, they speak Razooli. In nearby Namsool, they speak Namsooli, but Razooli and Namsooli are so close as to be no more than thick accents for Native-level speakers of either language. Kimruchan is somewhat far to the east of

Razool, and they speak a related language and have a similar culture. Speakers of Razooli and Kimruchanese would default to one level less. Despite Hypsilos being geographically close to Razool, Razooli and Hypsilaia are distantly related and have different cultures, so they default to two levels less. Razooli and Valdauspraake (Nord Valdau is very far to the north) have no default since they are very distantly related and have no common culture. Razooli Common is identical to Namsooli and Kimruchanese Common, but barely comprehensible to Hypsilaia Common, and not at all comprehensible to Valdauspraake Common.

Characters

Brother Preston is a priest of the Light. He has crossed continents spreading its blessings, and his current peregrinations have brought him to the region of the famed Razooli Trade Guilds. Brother Preston has Language Talent and speaks many languages, including Hypsilaia and Hypsilaia Common at Accented (learned from Hypsilaian sailors when he traveled across the Ring Sea) and the Silent Speech of the Jazaret Mystics at Native (a priestly Sign Language from a region visited by the Razooli Trade Guilds). As an avid traveler, he’s learned Gesture to expert level.

Brother Preston travels to Razool with a Kimruchanese caravan, picking up some (Broken) Kimruchanese on the way. This doesn’t help when talking to the Razooli, though, and Hypsilaia Common is just culturally different enough to cause confusion – he needs to learn Razooli Common. As he has Language Talent and Silent Speech at Native (which is distantly related to the gestures used locally), he can learn Common Razooli with 25 hours of immersion. After a week of interacting with the locals (and a few polite misunderstandings!), he can speak it at Broken. Two months of constant immersion later, he has learned the equivalent of 1 point in both spoken Razooli (Accented) and Razooli Common (Native), and can blend in with the foreign merchants. After *another* two months, he sounds like he was born and raised there (Razooli at Native).

Brother Preston’s acolyte, Iansa, is not cut out to be a missionary; he doesn’t have Language Talent and speaks only Antronach, his native tongue. He never got the hang of Silent Speech and only knows a few Hypsilaian vulgarities (no comprehension). It takes him nearly four weeks to speak Razooli Common at Broken. By the time his master is preaching on the street corner like a native (four months), Iansa can only pass around the collection plate and answer cursory questions – with the same 2 points’ worth of immersion, he only speaks Razooli at Accented, which means doubled penalties for Public Speaking and religious discussions. Although Iansa has no problem dealing with the city’s merchants (since the same study time taught him Razooli Common at Native), he should still study up before he writes poetry for the innkeeper’s daughter.

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THE VIKINGS IN THE ATLANTIC

BY GRAEME DAVIS

GURPS Vikings (for *GURPS Third Edition*) covers the history of Viking exploration in the Atlantic and elsewhere. This article offers a series of adventure seeds set in the lands they

discovered. Some are strictly historical, but others range from the start of Ragnarok to the European colonization of the Americas 500 years after the end of the Viking Age.

ICELAND

Some scholars believe Iceland is the Thule mentioned by the Greek merchant and explorer Pytheas in the fourth century B.C. Literary sources suggest that Irish hermits settled there earlier, but no supporting archaeological evidence has yet been found.

Instead of appointing a king according to Scandinavian custom, the Icelanders established an *Althing* – or general assembly – in 930. Here laws were passed and disputes were heard, although it was up to the individual and his family to enforce judgment. This made blood-feuds commonplace, and together with the arrival of exiles and political refugees from other Viking lands, it likely gave Iceland something of a wild frontier feel.

ICELAND ADVENTURE SEEDS

Adventures set in Iceland can focus on a number of themes. Iceland could have been something like the Old West, with exiled berserkers in place of gunslingers and bandits and native *alfar* in place of Apaches. Scandinavian kings may try to annex the island to their own kingdoms, and voyagers may return from the west and south with fantastic tales of new land.

Blood Feud

The heroes arrive in Iceland and claim hospitality from the Ragnarsson clan, who are friends of relatives of one or more PCs or linked to them by honor debt.

Over food and drink, the adventurers learn that the Ragnarssons are feuding with the neighboring Sigtrigssons. A boundary dispute boiled over a few months ago when a group of Sigtrigssons ambushed young Hrolf Ragnarsson, who escaped, leaving two attackers dead. The Althing supported the Sigtrigssons, but Ragnarsson patriarch Halfdan refuses to pay

wergild for the two dead men on the grounds that Hrolf was acting in self-defense.

That night, the Ragnarsson farm is attacked. The Sigtrigssons fear that the heroes have been recruited for an attack and decide to strike first.

For an action adventure, the Sigtrigssons may hire exiled berserkers like Old West hired guns, leading to a climactic battle. Alternatively, they may hire a deadly professional duelist and suggest that the matter be settled one-on-one. Perhaps they plan to kidnap or kill young Hrolf, exacting payment in blood.

For a more thoughtful adventure, the adventurers must help the Ragnarssons mount an appeal at the next Althing. Any PC with legal and oratory skills becomes the target of sabotage attempts. The investigators must track down witnesses to the original fight; some were bribed or intimidated into silence and others are dead, possibly murdered to prevent them testifying. This tale could likely culminate with the party trying to sway the Althing to reverse its original judgment.

Muspellsheim

Iceland is one of the most volcanically active places on Earth, and in this fantasy adventure, one of the volcanoes is linked to the fire-giant realm of Muspellsheim.

It is foretold that during the end times of Ragnarok, the fire giants will destroy the bridge Bifrost between Midgard (the world of men) and Asgard (the world of the Aesir). Surt, the king of the fire giants, is massing his forces beneath Iceland.

The adventure begins with volcanic eruptions. Farms are destroyed by lava or buried under feet of ash. Fire giants (and other fire-based creatures, at the GM's discretion) attack, destroying ships and blocking fjords with rocks and lava so no warning can get out to the rest of the world.

If the heroes hear about a clan-wide blood feud taking place in areas they must travel through, dare they get involved – or do they just try to keep their heads down?

If the heroes try to escape and carry the news to the rest of the world, they must find an intact boat or build one themselves, keeping it hidden until they can escape. The fire giants have the coast encircled, and the PCs must fight giants and disable warning beacons. Fire-giant ships pursue the heroes as they escape; new volcanic islands also burst from the

waves, showering the adventurers with scalding steam and red-hot rocks.

Should the adventurers stay and fight, they can dungeon-bash their way to a showdown with Surt. Mythology dictates that they can't kill him, but they can force him to retreat, seal the gateway to Muspellsheim, and postpone the end of the universe.

A women's boat passed from my side of the bay to the other; the people in the boat exhorted each other, as usual, as they approached the icebergs, not to speak, and did not suffer the oars to make any noise; but a young lad wantonly struck with a piece of wood on the skin stretched over the boat. The sound was propagated in a few moments to the top of a rotten iceberg; the latter fell down, and all the people in the boat, seven in number, were drowned.

– Hans Egedé Saabye, *Greenland: Being Extracts From a Journal Kept in That Country in the Years 1770 to 1778*

GREENLAND

Gunnbjorn Ulfsson sighted the region in the early 10th century after he was blown off course between Norway and Iceland. Settlement began in the 980s, and the name Greenland is attributed to Erik the Red – according to both the *Islendingabok* (The Book of the Icelanders) and his own saga, “He named the land Greenland, saying that people would be eager to go there if it had a good name.”

The Greenland colony consisted of the Eastern Settlement, on the western side of Greenland's southern tip; the Western Settlement (further north and west); and the small Middle Settlement between the two. Remains of about 600 farms have been found, leading to population estimates of 2,000-10,000 people for the entire colony. Recent research supports a figure toward the lower end of that range.

Greenland enjoyed a milder climate in Viking times than today. The fjords around the settlements supported birch woods, with grass and willow brush on the hills. Even so, the colony depended on the Viking homelands for wood and iron, exporting walrus ivory, sealskin ropes, and hides in return. The farms raised sheep and goats; those in milder areas also raised cattle.

Relations between the Viking settlers and their Inuit neighbors were chilly. After Christianity took hold in the colony, the priests forbade the Scandinavians to have anything to do with the pagan *skraelings* (see *GURPS Vikings* for more information). Jared Diamond, the author of *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, contends that this prevented the settlers from learning vital survival skills that helped the Inuit survive the gradually worsening climate. The Western settlement was abandoned around 1350, and

although no firm date has been established, the Eastern Settlement probably collapsed around a century later.

GREENLAND ADVENTURE SEEDS

Greenland was at the end of the Viking world, and adventures here should convey a sense of that remoteness. Like a science-fiction mining colony, the Greenland colony must be self-sufficient and news – and justice – may take months or years to arrive from home.

Trollborn

In 1926, archaeologists found a strange partial skeleton at Gardar in the Eastern Settlement. Dated to the 12th century and named *homo gardarensis*, the remains were compared to Heidelberg Man and the Neanderthals. The find was later explained as a case of acromegaly – a pituitary disorder leading to excess production of human growth hormone. Cryptozoologists and conspiracy theorists still debate the status of Gardar Man.

In a historical adventure, someone with acromegaly might suffer discrimination or persecution. In Christian times, any deformity might be seen as proof of dealings with the devil. If the heroes befriend this strange individual – whose size and strength would be useful to a band of adventurers – they have to deal with everything from pranks to murder attempts.

With any of the adventure seeds presented in this article, the heroes could be outsiders stumbling across Vikings as they undertake their own adventures.

In a fantasy adventure, Gardar Man might be half-troll, or his father could be a local Bigfoot-type creature; they appear under a variety of names across North America, and an outlying population in Greenland is not unlikely. The hero Kiviug, for example, encountered various giants and monsters in Inuit legend.

The half-troll could be a pure monster, fostered by his father's family and raised to hate humans. He could be a *tupilaq* – a Frankenstein-like monster created by an evil shaman to spread terror or exact revenge. To add a fantasy twist to the historical seed above, GMs with a penchant for morality tales might borrow from *Beauty and the Beast*, with the monster turning into a handsome and powerful Viking prince once his curse is lifted by a show of kindness.

VINLAND

Bjarni Herjolfson sighted new land after being blown off-course between Iceland and Greenland in the late 10th century. Leif “the Lucky” Erikson – the son of Erik the Red – set out to find this new land around 992. (*GURPS Who's Who 1* has a description of Leif with statistics for *GURPS Third Edition*.)

Leif passed a land of rock and glaciers that he called Helluland (“Land of Stone Slabs” – possibly Baffin Island) and a forested land he called Markland (“Wooded Land” – possibly Labrador). He wintered further south in a milder land that seems to match the northern Newfoundland archaeological site of L'Anse aux Meadows (where a Viking farm dated to around 1000 was excavated in the 1960s).

Adam of Bremen, writing in the 11th century, tells that the Vikings found wild grapes, prompting Leif to the country Vinland – Land of Wine. A 20th-century theory claims that the name is based on the Old Norse word *vin* (“pasture”) and refers to the grassy landscape.

Vinland was never formally colonized, but expeditions did bring back timber, grapes, and hides. A viable colony might have been established given greater numbers of settlers and livestock, but relations with the *skraelings* were fragile and the settlers were far from home.

Although no other sites have been found like L'Anse aux Meadows, alleged Viking objects have turned up along the Atlantic coast. A late 11th-century Norwegian silver penny found at a Native American settlement site in Maine in 1957 is regarded as the only reliably Viking artifact found outside L'Anse aux Meadows. It may have been traded south from Newfoundland and does not necessarily prove that the Vikings reached New England. Runestones of alleged Viking origin have been found from Maine to Minnesota, though their authenticity is debated.

VINLAND ADVENTURE SEEDS

The nature of adventures in Vinland will depend upon whether the colony struggled (as in historical fact) or prospered.

Climate Change

In a fantasy setting, the climate shift that contributed to the collapse of the Greenland colony could have a supernatural cause.

While the fire giants are building a power base beneath Iceland (see pp. 27-28), the frost giants of Jotunheim are massing in northern Greenland. The *Poetic Edda* foretells that they will go to the field of Vigridr after Bifrost has fallen, and join Jormungand, Fenrir, Loki, and the forces of Hel against the armies of Asgard. The PCs must discover the frost giants' plan and prevent them from marching.

This adventure could follow the fire-giant adventure in Iceland to create a high-powered Ragnarok campaign.

If the Vinland colony had succeeded, history could have been very different. Later English and French colonists would encounter Vikings or hybrid Viking-Native American cultures, and Spanish *conquistadores* might even find that the Vikings had reached El Dorado before them! There was a whole continent to explore, and the Vikings would not hesitate to do so.

The New World

Historically, the Vinland colony never got off the ground. This campaign challenges the heroes to found a lasting colony.

Like the 17th-century colonists, the Vinland settlers must learn to live off the land. It is not practical to carry a year's worth of supplies across the Atlantic, so trade with the locals – for knowledge as well as for goods – is vital. The colonists are surrounded by superior numbers of natives, making friendly relations even more important. Unless they undertake a dangerous winter voyage, they will arrive too late to sow a crop for the year; regardless, their seed could well be ruined by damp on the way.

Impressed by the Vikings' iron tools, the natives do everything they can to obtain more, by trade if possible and by theft and raiding if they are denied. It takes time to locate suitable iron deposits and set up a forge, so the settlers are soon unable to satisfy the demand for iron. The natives might also decide to hunt the settlers' livestock, being unfamiliar with the concept of owning animals. Without the firearms of later colonists, the Norsemen have only a slight technological edge over the Native Americans and must tread carefully to avoid conflict. Cultural differences make for challenging negotiations.

The colonists also risk being dragged into local power politics. Powhatan tried to persuade the Jamestown colonists to live among his people, working iron in exchange for food and protection; a local leader has the same idea about the Vikings and will use force if diplomacy fails.

A smallpox epidemic in 1618-1619 almost wiped out the Algonquian population of the Eastern Seaboard, and the disease was known in Europe from at least the fifth century.

Although sometimes whimsical, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables is an excellent resource to generate (mundane) items of plunder that are noteworthy and interesting.

Smallpox transmitted by Viking colonists will seem like a supernatural attack to natives with no resistance to European diseases. Likewise, Native Americans were lactose intolerant; as a result, they attacked Viking settlers on at least one occasion when traded milk made them sick.

These and other troubles provide many challenges for players who enjoy social interaction, negotiation, and problem-solving.

The explorer who came next and who did the most was Thorfinn Karlsefne of Iceland. While he was visiting at Brattahlid he married Gudrid, the widow of Thorstein, and she – together with others – talked to him so much about the new lands that he resolved upon settling them. In the spring of 1007 he set out from Greenland with three ships heavily laden and came to Vinland and wakened the sleeping camp to new life.

– Otilie A. Liljencrantz,
The Vinland Champions

Cahokia

The influence of the Cahokian (or Mississippian) culture spread as far as Georgia and Oklahoma. The Cahokians lived in cities dominated by huge earthen mounds and surrounded by farms. Between 1000 and 1200, the Cahokian culture was booming, and their cities were both prosperous and populous. They would make very tempting targets for Viking raiders,

especially as the Mississippi and Tennessee river valleys provided easy access for Viking ships.

In addition to outright raids, Cahokian adventures could include rescuing captives before they are executed or sacrificed. Cahokian priests have been depicted holding severed heads, but it is not known whether their rites were as bloody as those of the Aztecs. For a more thoughtful adventure, a *Romeo and Juliet* romance between a Viking chief and a Cahokian princess could cause cultural and diplomatic problems.

The Cahokian culture had collapsed by the time Hernando de Soto arrived in the area in the 1560s, but if Vikings had stepped into the power vacuum (or strengthened the Cahokians by intermarriage and iron-working) the implications could be far-reaching. A powerful Cahokian-Viking city would be a troubling discovery for French or Spanish explorers charting the Mississippi, and even more of a problem for later Americans pursuing Manifest Destiny.

The Kingdom of Saguenay

Early French colonists in North America encountered the Algonquin legend of a kingdom to the north peopled by blond people rich in gold and furs. No trace of them was found, but if Viking colonists had survived in Newfoundland or elsewhere, the course of North American colonization would have been very different.

Historically, New Sweden was a small and short-lived fur-trading operation on the lower reaches of the Delaware, while France and later England colonized the probable location of Vinland. If Scandinavians were discovered already living in North America, Sweden – the major power in northern Europe in the 17th century – would immediately lay claim to the eastern seaboard of modern Canada, leading to wars against France and England both there and in Europe. Knowing this, French and English explorers who encountered the Kingdom of Saguenay must keep it secret – and wipe it out if possible – or risk losing the territory for their country. Naturally, the Scandinavians would fight back, possibly recruiting allies from among neighboring Native American tribes. If they decided to reject Swedish rule as well as those of France and England, the American War of Independence would be a different – and much earlier – affair.

THE ISLES

Three island groups made up a series of stepping-stones between Scandinavia, Iceland, and Scotland. Harald Finehair annexed Orkney and Shetland about 875 to deal with exiled opponents who were raiding the Norwegian coast from the islands. Both groups remained in Norwegian hands until 1468 and 1469 respectively.

The Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland were conquered by Norway at about the same time, as was part of the Scottish mainland. The mainland territories came back under Scottish rule in 1095, and the Hebrides in 1266. In the ninth century, opponents of Harald Finehair settled

in the Faeroe Islands (about halfway between Scotland and Iceland).

Shetland, Orkney, and the Hebrides are dotted with prehistoric ruins including barrows and stone circles, which were mysterious and intriguing to the Vikings. They dug for hidden treasure in barrows, and tales like *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* tell of outraged *haugbui*, or mound-dwellers (a term synonymous with Tolkien's Anglo-Saxon-based *barrow-wight*) fighting to defend their property.

Legends tell of other, more mysterious islands in the Atlantic, some with magical properties.

Read GURPS Atlantis for more information on another famous lost isle (mentioned by name on p. 31).

ISLAND ADVENTURE SEEDS

Adventures focusing on these island groups can be grounded in reality or steeped in the fantastic, depending on the needs of the campaign.

Finehair's Fist

In this adventure seed mixing action and politics, King Harald Finehair of Norway has tired of political opponents using the isles as a base for raids against his kingdom. He has raised an army and is preparing an island-hopping campaign that will crush resistance once and for all.

Some of the island *jarls* are already under his influence, and others are fearful of what will happen if they resist. The heroes must pick a side.

Resistance involves recruiting neutral *jarls* and fighting Finehair's army in battle or through commando raids. The PCs must watch out for false friends, bribed or threatened by Finehair into trapping and turning over resistance leaders. GMs can draw inspiration from later English campaigns in Scotland and from movies like *Braveheart*.

Adventurers on the Norwegian side may find themselves hunting rebels across the rugged landscape, avoiding traps and ambushes set for the Norwegian army. Once the king is in the isles, rebel forces plan an attack on Norway itself, to rally support there and leave Harald a king without a kingdom.

The Little People

Prehistoric stone circles and burial mounds prove that the Vikings are not the first settlers in the isles. The original natives were a small, dark people related to the Picts, with outstanding stealth and fieldcraft skills and powerful shamans on their side.

This fantasy adventure starts with attacks on Norse farms and sightings of strange, threatening creatures such as lake and sea monsters. The Norse settlers soon find themselves embroiled in a guerilla war against the Little People and their allies.

The attacks will not stop until the Vikings are driven from the islands completely. The natives may agree to negotiations, but they talk in riddles and often use meetings as an excuse to play humiliating – and sometimes deadly – pranks on their foes.

The GM can find more inspiration in the chapters on the Sidhe and their magic in *GURPS Celtic Myth*. Other creatures from island folklore can appear as allies of the Picts if the GM wishes. *GURPS Faerie* includes descriptions and *Third Edition* statistics for fachans, nuckelavees, redcaps, baobhan sith, and cailleach bheur as well as the pechs who form the basis for the Little People in this adventure seed.

Tír na nÓg

The mythical land of Tír na nÓg is a remote faerie land, which – like the Isla de Muerta in Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* – can only be reached by someone who has already been there. Like other faerie lands, time passes differently in Tír na nÓg, and mortals who leave find themselves aging rapidly – or even crumbling to dust – if they set foot on their home shores again.

Several Irish explorers set out in search of Tír na nÓg, including Saint Brendan – who may have reached North

America five centuries before Lief Erikson. When the Vikings established themselves in Ireland, they would certainly have heard tales of it, and a voyage in search of it would be fraught with adventure.

Tír na nÓg itself might be a surviving fragment of Atlantis or a true faerie realm. Records of voyages there would spur further exploration, possibly sparking conflict between the fae or Atlantean natives and waves of colonists – thus ending the land's idyllic peace. The strange nature of time there creates unique challenges for mortals wishing to return, for they can never set foot off their ships when they reach mortal lands.

The Aspidochelone

This gargantuan sea creature, whose Latin name means “serpent-turtle,” has been encountered by explorers from Classical times to the Middle Ages. It is so huge that, when it basks on the surface of the ocean, its vast back is often mistaken for an island. Many tales tell of voyagers landing on the supposed island only to find themselves in danger as the creature submerges – often after they light a fire.

Although it is not an adventure in itself, the aspidochelone can make an interesting encounter for Vikings and others in the mid-Atlantic. Until the creature sinks, they may even think they have discovered a remnant of lost Atlantis. The creature has also been known to surface beneath a ship and, apparently oblivious, carry it on its back for a considerable distance . . . leaving the voyagers off course and possibly lost.

The Sargasso Sea

Right up until the 19th century, the Sargasso Sea in the mid-Atlantic was regarded as a mysterious place. At roughly 700 miles wide and 2,000 miles long, it is larger than the British Isles and Iceland, and a combination of wind and current has led to tales of sailing ships being trapped among the rafts of floating weed.

Later explorers – from Columbus to 20th-century survey vessels – could encounter a strange Viking culture in the Sargasso Sea, living on floating platforms made from becalmed ships and the debris brought there by the currents. Instead of farming, they might live on fish and other marine life – although they could even have descendants of their original livestock corralled on wooden islands, fed on the plentiful Sargassum weed. Their oared longships enable them to move around the sea and prey on passing ships, accounting for various unexplained disappearances in the area.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graeme Davis is the author of *GURPS Vikings*, *GURPS Middle Ages 1*, and *GURPS Faerie*. After spending far too much time playing roleplaying games at college in the early 1980s, he worked for Games Workshop developing *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, and has been freelance – with various jobs in the video games industry – ever since.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

BY ANDY VETROMILE

Juan Ponce de León was said to have come to the New World in search of the mythical Fountain of Youth. While modern scholars have long since debunked the notion that this was why the famed explorer made his long journey, the quest for a legendary source of waters with miraculous restorative properties dates back at least as far as Alexander the Great. Stories of the Odinsaker (a Norse land where no one ever ages), the Garden of Eden, the Holy Grail, and Tír na nÓg mean similar versions of these fables are scattered all throughout history. Dropping something into a game that essentially cheats death isn't a task to be done lightly, so what follows are some possibilities for including it in a campaign. This article assumes the period is the Age of Discovery (roughly the 15th to 17th centuries) and the location is Florida, the Caribbean, or environs, but these tales emanate from around the globe – switching the material into a modern, fantasy, or even space-based setting is effortless.

WHAT FORM DOES IT TAKE?

The mythology of youth-giving waters is not always a fountain. The shape it takes alters how adventures involving it play out. A simple font not only enjoys a sort of allegorical poetry, it's easily defended by local clans or the explorers who stake a claim to it. Such a resource is even easier to protect if someone builds a fort or temple around or over it.

Larger bodies of water aren't contained by one structure, so protecting the secret or maintaining possession is an issue of either not letting anyone else know about it, or ruling the lands surrounding it. A pond might still be something a single garrison could look after, but depending on how the body is fed, it might be a finite resource, especially with 200 determined seekers pouring it into barrels for return to Spain. A stream could be brief enough that a small fort or town surrounds it, but such waterways can go for miles; they sometimes flow into subterranean caves and out again as though stitched across the landscape. Anyone who desires a monopoly has to explore the terrain for miles around to ensure the claim.

An actual river, even if it was small as such things go, would be almost impossible to partition in any meaningful way without a massive effort and many men. Several interests could

position themselves along its path, though everyone is at the mercy of whoever is farthest upstream. Once the river is discovered, everyone will move to find (and secure) the headwaters. If that party can fight off its rivals, the group may establish a town or stronghold to maintain the position, and may even attempt to dam the waters. They can do this to regulate the output, doling it out to others as they choose or denying it to outsiders entirely.

The headwaters aren't limited in form, either. Some bodies of water arise from rainwater in the hills and mountains, while others are melted snow or glaciers (turning longevity into an even more precious, seasonal phenomenon). Marshlands are another familiar source; these can be uncomfortable and remote locations, difficult to navigate – but no one ever said eternal youth was bought easily. However disgusting or inhospitable, intruders won't stay away for the sake of a few mosquito bites.

Still greater bodies of water could work magic on travelers, but that changes the campaign on a far greater scale. Explorers attempting circumnavigation could return from far-flung extremes to tell of an entire ocean with medicinal properties, in which case all of humanity could potentially live forever. The waters might not be safe for consumption, but perhaps traversing them or being in their proximity keeps people young. This is not to say wars won't be fought across the ocean; scarcity isn't the only thing that promotes petty greed . . .

WHAT EFFECTS DOES IT HAVE?

Although referred to as the Fountain of Youth, history and legend are full of stories about the therapeutic effects of certain waters. Even "eternal youth" doesn't completely convey all the details about how such a fountain works, so the GM has a lot of leeway as to what this strange artifact does.

Youth

If it truly is meant as a source of youth, the GM should set boundaries. This doesn't just make it gameable without letting it run away with the campaign; it makes it a more interesting lynchpin for adventure ideas.

If you know that the Fountain of Youth will be playing an important part in a campaign, it might be useful to have the players generate characters at different stages of their lives.

For example, does it halt the aging process where it is, or reverse it to some degree? If the former, how often must one partake to remain unchanged? If the latter, how powerful are the effects? If a 25-year-old sailor imbibes a mug of enchanted water, how young does it make him? Shaving off one year per cup might be a good benchmark – at the very least, it means someone drinking from the fountain once per year would remain ever young. If it cuts one’s age in half, it’s not just good for resuscitating the aged . . . it becomes a peril! Drink too many times and you may have to start life over completely – and who wants to take their chances as an infant being cared for in a jungle during a sailing expedition to the New World?

Is it a temporary condition, or is it permanent? If the elixir reduces one’s age for a few hours, it’s a good magic item with built-in controls: Older warriors could take a drink and be young and vigorous for the course of a battle – experience married to vitality – or seasoned spies could alter their appearance by regressing a bit. If the Fountain of Youth is a literal reversal of time, the GM may need to stick to careful bookkeeping (or adjudication); in that case, the gaming group adjusts the stats on the heroes, resetting them to capabilities they held earlier in their career. A lasting effect requires a one-time reset (assuming only one drink from the fountain), but that’s a pretty good deal for the explorer. It also changes the adventuring landscape more profoundly as untold numbers of people can now reclaim their youth in a meaningful way.

*Ay! but beyond the Wood of Ancients
there is the labyrinth; and in the middle of
the labyrinth there is a fountain, trickling
and sparkling in waves of molten
diamond.*

– Ponce de Leon,
The Fountain of Youth (1891)

Immortality

Some legends hold that restorative waters imbue someone with immortality – now they will never die. This is not necessarily the same as a fountain of youth. Someone gaining immortality may remain at their current age but never get any older. The vigor of youth remains out of reach, but time is no longer an issue if someone wants to study martial arts, spell-casting, history, strategy and tactics, and so on. If a little learning is a dangerous thing, imagine if that education is concentrated in one capable individual, and need never stop.

The immortality may be a one-time change in a person’s body, or the GM can rein it in by requiring regular doses of the mystic water (at which point the definitions of “immortality” and “eternal youth” meet). It should also be noted that such a draught probably only prevents someone from succumbing to old age or infirmity; drinkers can still be

killed through violence and do not possess any kind of invulnerability.

Health

It is said some sought the fountain to cure their ills, and many of the myths surrounding it are steeped in metaphors for love and eroticism. (Put another way, hunters of the font wanted a cure for impotence.) It could be a panacea, healing its supplicants of all maladies, or the GM can place specific limits on what it does for the sake of game balance. For example, it might cure diseases like cancer or tuberculosis, or it may “only” fix infirmities such as arthritis . . . or even missing limbs.

Other Effects

The GM isn’t limited to the tales surrounding the Fountain. Depending on the era and the genre, the waters might offer a character some form of superpower (Charles I’s *Conquistadores Poderosos de la Lucha*, perhaps?). However, considering their immediate foes are technologically limited tribesmen who didn’t fare terribly well against explorers *without* supernatural abilities, it’s a storyline with narrow appeal – at least until opposing military powers show up to contest the claim. It could also provide weaponry (say, Lethe-like water that depletes the memories of one’s foes when they’re showered with phials of the stuff). A drink from the fountain might simply enhance a person’s inherent talents: Soldiers become brawnier or more agile, while the explorers find their sight and/or other senses rival those of animals.

Suppose multiple fountains dot the landscape, each with a different effect. If several nations establish control over these, they may eye one another jealously and attack to gain control, or they may be more diplomatic about it. There could be trades:

“Spain will offer 10 barrels of youth-granting elixir in exchange for the same number of barrels of rejuvenating water from England.”

“Fie, Rodriguez! You know our spring’s output is nowhere near the equal of your own!”

“Ah, but youth is far more precious a commodity than the healing of gout, Señor Cole.”

In a setting with several fountains, the heroes could be tradesmen, arbitrators, bodyguards, or even thieves in a large market-based metropolis that arises around the many springs of the region.

WHAT MAKES THE WATER SPECIAL?

Explorers are pragmatic types – not the sort to look a gift horse in the mouth. However, if any scientifically curious folks come along on an expedition, they might be lead to wonder: What makes this water so useful? The GM can decree that a fountain able to makes its users ever youthful is simply a plot device, but it layers on the intrigue to give it some back story the heroes can investigate.

Generating heroes at different stages of their lives is a useful technique regardless; it’s similar to the “career path” method of character generation found in other classic RPGs.

There is a fountain of youth: It is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age.

– Sophia Loren

If the gods look kindly upon the local clans, they may have decided there's something about their society worth preserving. Blessing the flow is their way of looking after their most favored servants. This also means a nonbeliever who drinks of the water is taking his life – or his soul – into his hands, as he may be struck down as an unworthy outsider. Alternatively, those who bathe there might be chosen as a new breed of representatives for the religion, ready to return to the Old World and proselytize in the name of their found god.

Native populations sometimes have a more liberal view of worship, favoring the idea that otherworldly influence is more pervasive and less personalized. In this case, any number of spirits could occupy the fountain and offer their rewards to any who avail themselves. The entity responsible could be an innocent form of water nymph, a vicious ghost who demands periodic blood sacrifices to keep up the magical waters, or something in between.

The fountain could be a symbol that keeps up a theme for the campaign. Imagine a priest accompanying the expedition who finds he can bless the waters with his European brand of belief – something he could never do back home. Thematically, this land is a blank slate upon which these newcomers may work their will . . . so they had better be responsible about it. Just as eternal youth is a game-changer, so, too, might the explorers irresponsibly call up troubles of their own devising that make the New World more burden than blessing.

Magic could be the culprit, though this could alter a campaign even more so than just newfound youth. Did the explorers know about mana back home? If so, the Fountain of Youth might be an expression of magic with which they were previously unfamiliar. If magic was a hitherto unknown quantity, their world now explodes with possibilities. Maybe they came here hoping to find a reputed well or new magical source, but they arrived with no real set notion of what to expect from the water. Is the water the only magical thing about the setting, or is it one of many instances of artifacts and enchantment to be found in the new lands? And how does the font help the spell caster? It could represent a whole new college or aspect of magery, but it might also require the wizard to stand knee-deep in a fishpond to make any use of it.

The GM could also choose to make this a pseudo-scientific phenomenon, stating the effects are just the result of a peculiar combination of minerals and plant life found along the banks of a stream. Water further upstream doesn't have such

abilities, and downstream, the benefits are diluted and replaced in part or whole with Montezuma's Revenge. More spectacular would be a meteorite that landed in this body of water, changing it only so long as the rock remains. Eternal youth may therefore be accompanied by alien parasites, or be the result of nanites stranded on this chunk when it broke free from some extraterrestrial mining operation centuries ago. Remove the meteorite, and the waters lose their properties; put it somewhere else and the effects may be transferred or completely altered.

WHO WANTS IT?

In a word, everybody.

Unless steps are taken to hush the whole thing up, word will leak out and soon everyone wants the fountain. The nation, government, or family that financed the expedition claims sole rights, the church proclaims it a miracle fit only for the faithful (which in no way includes the natives who have been sitting on it for the last millennium, though they'll still be afforded the opportunity to show their faith through enslavement), and enemy nations seek a way to secure that resource or find one of their own. The possibility of war isn't just high, it's likely; even if a treaty is struck for fair distribution of the water among royal bloodlines, it won't stop accusations, smuggling, black markets, and worse.

Peasant uprisings would likely increase; they just want enough water to heal family members when they sicken, or when the plague sweeps through the region. The royals aren't going to agree to that, but the seeds for change would be sown. The serfs and any displaced tribesmen aren't going away, and they create more tension on both sides of the ocean. It's one thing to see one's leaders with all the best things in life, but a treasure like eternal life might send the common folks over the brink, leading to revolutions far earlier than occurred in real history.

If the game world contains other aspects of the supernatural, the GM can allow reprisals from unusual quarters. For example, vampires may like their status as the only long-lived beings and attempt to do away with anyone seeking the secrets to eternal life. The Fountain of Youth might actually *be* the source of vampirism or other magical abilities, which gives several fantastic species a vested interest in keeping humans on the outside looking in (and preferably not even that).

The "Fountain of Youth" could also be nothing more than the "Fountain of Delusions." Most minor effects of the Fountain of Youth could be merely wishful thinking.

If the wellspring is the source for multiple enchanted creatures in the world, they may already hold some ancient pact among themselves regarding the secret of the fountain. Humans breach this united front at their peril.

HOW DOES IT CHANGE THINGS?

Unless it's relegated to part of a secret history, discovering the Fountain of Youth changes how the campaign unfolds. These are but a few ways in which the Age of Discovery might shift to accommodate such a fantastic treasure.

Since the benefit of the elixir is going to be funneled to the royal family first and foremost, the leadership of nations – particularly that of the finding country – is less likely to change. Excepting accidents or assassinations, the current rulers may remain in power for decades, even longer. The GM can keep up player interest by concentrating on vibrant characterizations for his ruling NPCs. On the one hand are the hidebound nobles who extend their hold over their lands and people at any cost, keeping a steady flow of life-giving water coming. On the other hand might be a more enlightened leader who views an expanded lifespan as an opportunity to nurture public works and civic improvements for his followers through many years. Heroes can be tasked with securing water for their leaders (if they like them), smuggling it to their rebel friends (if they don't), or increasing the search area around the fountain for additional wonders.

If average citizens gain access to the water's powers, effects can vary widely. Artisans could produce a greater body of work. Clergy might see a cathedral, usually a decades-long project, through to the finish. Farmers may have some chance to amass agricultural knowledge and improve their methods, which is important since the population is going to explode in just a few generations. Of course, if there's enough water to have a noteworthy effect on the citizens at large, it probably means the secret is not only out, its use is widespread and not contained to one nation.

Eternal youth won't have as profound an effect on the army unless it's cheap and common (dead soldiers are replaced by young dead soldiers). If it is readily available, members of the army will be exceptionally fit for a much larger window, manned by baby-faced teenagers with skills beyond their "years"; if its use is restricted, it would be limited to leadership, able to share generations worth of warfare-based knowledge longer.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS?

Disadvantages or restrictions on the use of the water aren't just a good idea for game balance, it makes the stuff more interesting and "realistic."

For starters, is it potable? Everyone's idea of the Fountain of Youth probably entails a gentle flow of sparkling blue fresh water, but anything found springing from the ground in a

Florida swamp is of questionable cleanliness. It may have sulfur in it, or be infested with parasites. That's not to say the stuff doesn't work, but it's possible anyone using it only receives its benefits if they can survive a bout of indigestion, diarrhea, or worse.

The water may not retain its special properties forever. If it has an "expiration date," speed is of the essence when bringing it to the thirsty royals back home. If it cannot survive even the fastest return journey, those who want to enjoy its effects have to make periodic trips to the New World to tank up, or they need to move their court permanently to another part of the planet. If it has a really brief shelf life – perhaps it must be drunk from the fountain itself – the location becomes even more important and closely guarded.

Even if the water works after removal from the fountain, storage may still be a hurdle to overcome. It might require special methods of collection and stockpiling. Maybe it's considered a blessing, one that must be overseen by a priest . . . and if it requires the participation of a local holy man, forcing one to assist just adds insult to injury for the natives. Perhaps it can only be kept in barrels made from the wood of native trees, or the water needs something else precious to hold it – such as a fancy golden ewer or another magical artifact. Transportation might demand an entire fleet for protection and backup, so valuable and tenuous is the cargo and its containers.

This assumes, of course, that it can be transported at all. What if the water only works on locals, or those who have spent a certain amount of time in the environment (such as the explorers who uncovered it)? Once again the area would see an influx of VIPs from faraway lands, come to partake of the miracle. The water's magic may only work on native soil, or within a certain number of miles of the source itself.

*Our remedies oft in
ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven.
– Helena, All's Well
That Ends Well*

Is the spring endless, or does it only produce a certain amount of water each day/week/year? It may be a luxury tribes only afford to their chieftains, shamans, and extremely sick or valuable family members. Once others get hold of the secret, there may not be enough to go around (not that plentiful supplies means the locals would get their fair share), and storage of any excess is a bigger issue. If a pond of this elixir is drained, does the next rainfall refill and "recharge" it or has the magic been extracted along with it?

The right mix of suggestive hallucinogens in the water combined with explorers' desires could be enough for a completely "realistic" Fountain of Youth. Nations would still probably go to war for waters they think can heal them.

Several wrinkles may have been added to the fountain to confound trespassers, and the GM can make use of these to ensure getting eternal youth is no walk in the Everglades. If there are magics protecting the site, a magic word may be required to access the water. Failing to speak the proper phrase before using the fountain has effects ranging from an outright attack on the person to a simple failure for the well to perform as expected. Incomplete incantations could limit its effects, and a priest or other man of faith (from the explorers' team or a tribe's shaman) may be needed to say prayers over the water. Perhaps a puzzle must be solved – one that gives some clue as to this relic's true purpose. Finally, it could be that those with selfish ends are like beacons to the fountain, and it refuses to allow itself to be exploited. Only those who are noble or pure of heart and spirit receive any benefit from the water – which may make them targets for the hostilities of jealous tribesmen, or turn them into guinea pigs when the royal family tries to think of a way around this boundary.

Finally, is its use an exact science? Could too much or too little be dangerous? Overexposure could turn a middle-aged man into a babbling infant, and too little might affect only part of a person – creating a young-but-senile general, for example. Is it addictive? Even if someone doesn't need more of it to keep young, he may *believe* he does, which renders him ever more unstable as time passes and he seeks to keep the fountain's bounty for himself, away from those thieves he arrived with. Once ingested, the body can become acclimated to this "helping hand" – going off the water might return a person's characteristics to something more appropriate for his years, aging the person quickly or even accelerating the process.

*Amrit is in the Waters; in the
Waters there is healing balm. Be
swift, ye Gods, to give them praise.*

*Within the Waters – Soma thus
hath told me – dwell all balms that
heal, and Agni, he who blesseth all.
The Waters hold all medicines.*

*– Rig Veda, Book 1,
Hymn 23, Verses 19-20*

WHO GUARDS IT?

Once unleashed upon an unsuspecting world, someone has to play watchdog for the fountain. The who is as important as the how.

It has to be someone the new owners trust. Not only do they want someone who won't talk, they need someone who won't be tempted to either drink from their precious supply or stage a coup to take control of the waters. Initially, it has to be the

team that found it, but once they report back they'll be replaced by the most trusted and elite members the country can muster. The campaign may center around protecting the fountain as one of these highly skilled individuals; retaking the fountain as native warriors; attacking the first explorers as soldiers of the next rival nation to arrive; or playing self-serving mercenaries who hope to score water or monetary gain.

Eternal youth lets long-term plans come to fruition, so the fountain could give rise to the Illuminati or some other enduring secret society. It's a chicken-and-egg situation: Did a cabal form to protect the secret of the fountain, or did the extended lifespan offered by the fountain allow for the creation of a secret society? (In the latter case, the group should have some other, long-standing goals – otherwise they're a group that protects eternal youth just so they're around long enough to continue to protect it.) Regardless of the explanation, such a setup explains how and why there's a shadow conspiracy that lasts through so many ages with such consistency of purpose.

It could be that magic forces protect the fountain – anyone who wants to live forever has to find the spring and then circumvent the sigils and enchantments that vex intruders. The GM must ask himself who cast these spells and why. Why create such an artifact and then keep everyone away? Is this a test, to see who's worthy enough to reach the water? Does the mage responsible also slumber here eternally, awaiting his unwitting apprentices? Is the arrival of outsiders this far from home a signal to begin the next phase in a mystic sentry's assignment? Or does the magic merely keep thieves from stealing the water? That would suggest someone or something has yet to come and (re)claim their elixir – though that being may have long since died and the font now waits endlessly for no one.

Alternatively, elemental spirits may guard this place, holding others at bay lest they drain the world of what little wondrous mana remains. Beasts may do their bidding, with crocodiles, bears, and more heeding an instinctive call to preserve the status quo – or, if there's no mystic conspiracy, maybe the animals merely sense the value of the pool and guard it fiercely for their own sake. The waters could be an earthly embodiment of elemental forces, and those who drink from these waters are in fact stealing the limited life essence from the mother of the water nymphs. If the spring forms a bridge between this world and the land of the fey, the doorway may weaken with each use, threatening a war with the sidhe.

THE WEIGHT OF WATER

While the Fountain of Youth serves as an interesting magic item, its function in the campaign can be even deeper. Like most such relics from history, it's an allegory for other things: the pioneering spirit, enlightenment, the thrill of discovery itself. Its pursuit as an asset can be pivotal in a chase for power; its use, an exercise in wisdom or forbearance. Managing it properly makes the Age of Exploration more exciting; failure to manage it makes a game more interesting still.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Vetromile is a freelance writer and editor with an insatiable taste for games. He's been reviewing them for over 10 years and still can't wait for the next release. He has also contributed to *Pyramid* and edited several **GURPS** books.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

YOU CAN'T EXPLORE NEW WORLDS WITHOUT PROPER PERMITS

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Whether you're sticking to strictly realistic historical settings or allowing for more "fantastic" elements, exploratory campaigns allow for a bunch of fun possibilities. Or, as I like to think of them, "permissions." These permissions let you approach an exploration campaign differently than many other adventure frameworks. Let's get right to the big bold sub-heads, shall we?

PERMISSION TO BE FIRST

In an exploration campaign, you are encouraged to be the first ones to visit pretty much everywhere you go . . . at least, the first ones from your country (or sponsors). Diplomacy, raiding, pirating, empire-building – all of those rely on walking previously tread paths. Even the traditional dungeon crawl – evocative of images of adventurers prying open long-forgotten tombs – usually relies on having a network of locals and legends to guide the heroes to the front gate:

"Oh, yeah . . . the Temple of the Element in Derume? Sure! We get treasure-seekers asking about that all the time. Everyone who visits there dies. Anyway, we had full-color guidebooks printed up; they should help you get there. Six silver, please."

Exploratory campaigns, meanwhile, are built around the premise of boldly going where no one has gone before – and that's an idea that can get you to the stars.

This "permission" can be mixed up a bit by having multiple groups vying for the same goals. If Her Majesty has given charters to explore the Edged Coast to a half-dozen explorers, then any of them might be trying to get where the heroes are going

at the same time. This can be an excellent way to add urgency if the adventurers start dragging their feet: If they hear reports that an opposing team is trying to reach the top of Mount Edrive by week's end, then that can get them to push themselves to be faster . . . which is also important.

PERMISSION TO BE FAST

"Well, the Spring of Eternal Fitness has been pulverized by a piqued pack of pachyderms, two nations are now at total war with each other, and the jungle is still ablaze. Our work here is done. Onward!"

Another fun aspect of exploratory campaigns is that the heroes have a ready-made excuse to vamoose when their current exploits get too complicated or unfun. In theory, if heroes are trying to keep the Orb of Orelse from falling into sinister hands, they need to see that mission through to the end. However, if the heroes' duty is to try to explore as much as possible within limited confines (say, the time frame of the charter, or the amount of food they have), then they can't dawdle too long at any one spot.

This "permission" is easy to utilize if the group is playing in an episodic campaign; you just assume the heroes wander off after the last interesting "fade to black" scene. In more continuous sagas, the impetus to move on will probably need to come from the heroes, perhaps in the form of the terms or charter they are operating under. (If the heroes of an Age of Sail campaign find their cell phone ringing, and it's the king telling them to get moving, things have gone off the rails.)

If the heroes prove noteworthy (for good or ill), their names might enter the language of a culture they visit!

Maintaining an open mind is essential when exploring the unknown, but allowing one's brains to fall out in the process is inadvisable.

– Dean Radin

Fortunately, these conflicts can serve as interesting narrative devices themselves. If the good guys are drawn between the need to find the source of the Umpteen River before hurricane season starts and their desire to make sure the tribal relations they inadvertently mucked up are repaired, that's some plate-spinning drama right there.

But, for the most part, invoking this "permission" means that you get to show up at new and exotic locales, get involved in some tales of derring-do, make some notes in their journals, and move on to the next adventure. And, even better, you can find acclaim even if your journal notes are *wildly wrong*; in fact, that might be the best thing that happens to you.

PERMISSION TO BE WRONG

According to preliminary investigations, my kitchen contains a race of four-armed giants, able to crush a car with their enormous two-pronged clubs. Should our expedition – or perhaps a future one – find time later, this unusual species may warrant further investigation.

Sure, you know that I'm probably joking, but can you say that with absolute certainty? How thoroughly have you investigated my kitchen?

Here's a mind blower: In an exploratory campaign, the heroes have incredible leeway to be *totally* wrong, and can still lauded as heroes. Those weren't centaurs but guys on horseback? Those mermaids were actually manatees? That "island" you found is actually the 1,700-mile coastline of a gargantuan landmass? Whoops!

Depending on the campaign (and game system), I'd be tempted to impose penalties to the fame or reputation of explorers for being wrong – but I'd give them *greater* bonuses for being interesting. In other words, like in the real world, an interesting story is often worth considerably more than the truth. If you return from your tour of the Everglades and report (accurately) that it's nothing but mosquitoes, swamps, mosquitoes, angry lizards, mosquitoes, and dead blood-drained calm lizards, no one's going to remember your name in a thousand years. But if you claim to have found the Fountain of Youth (pp. 32-36), or heard from some guy who said he'd seen the Fountain of Youth – well, that's going to get you noticed.

PERMISSION TO BE FREE BUT CONTROLLED

One aspect that many gaming groups struggle with is how much or little their heroes abide by either their free will or their mandates and duties. For example, in a realistic space-faring campaign where the heroes are members of a planetary federation, many captains may feel they need to vet important decisions past their superiors . . . especially if faster-than-light communication makes this relatively easy.

In historical exploration campaigns, however, the heroes often have special powers; they may represent the authority of the government that sent them, perhaps even with the ability to make treaties, start wars, mete out justice, and so on. Conversely, they can be constrained by as many rules as the *gamers* feel comfortable with; if the players want their powers and responsibilities spelled out, then the GM can work with them to devise "prime directive"-type understandings that everyone agrees to. In fact, it's even possible to emulate the "contact our superiors" aspect; for example, if one of the PCs is also a prince (or other high-ranking noble), then *he* might be the final word on thorny issues . . . but only if the other PCs directly consult him in that role. (And if the gaming group likes the challenge of an open-ended mandate – "Go with the blessing of the crown, and if you mess up too much I'll disavow all knowledge of you" – then that's fine, too.)

As a result of this "permission," an exploration campaign is much more easily tailored to the exact comfort levels of the group.

PERMISSION TO END

Finally, exploration campaigns usually have set ending dates – even if they're broad ones. Governments that send out adventurers don't usually like to give them mandates that are of the form, "Keep exploring until you die." (How will those wonderful journals make it back home?) This finite time frame can give the campaign a focus; knowing that the heroes are on a five-year mission – after which the campaign will end – gives them an incentive to try to cram as much in as they can. Goals are much more acute when they can't be put off indefinitely.

Finite campaign structures also mean that the players can approach the campaign as something of a simulation. If the players will be playing a number of campaigns in the same era, each with a set time length – say, one year – then they can compare careers across campaigns. (For inspiration, see the classic computer game *Sid Meier's Pirates!* for an electronic iteration of this idea.)

Of course, "permission" to end can mean that some plots or mysteries simply don't get resolved but are left hanging forever, tantalizing, like a one-sentence, concluding paragraph that ends with a question mark – right?

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over nine years; during that time he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son Sam!, who is a little force of nature entirely worthy of his exclamation mark.

ODDS AND ENDS

FOLLOWING THE FOOTSTEPS OF GIANTS

One interesting aspect of exploration campaigns – especially those that are more-or-less historical – is that it enables the heroes to pursue previously explored areas, checking for more information or verifying more outlandish claims. Who wouldn't find it exciting to be given copies of Magellan's journals and tasked with determining if his reports of giant "Patagonians" (p. 13) were true?

An entire campaign can be built around retracing the exploits of a famous explorer (real or fictitious). Such a campaign needn't feel like it's merely "rehashing" previous discoveries. Any number of complications could beset such adventurers. They could:

- realize the explorer deliberately left out information from his trip, to protect something Man Was Not Meant to Discover. If faced with the same choice, what will the heroes do?
- learn the explorer *made up* everything he claimed to encounter after a certain date. The heroes might then need to figure out where he really was during that time, and what he was doing.
- discover the situation the explorer described has changed since he reported on it.
- reveal the explorer blatantly lied at every turn in order to embellish his record and career. (This could prove problematic if he is beloved, powerful, and/or paranoid of the secret being revealed.)

In short, even if the players have been part of multiple exploration games, they could have a totally new experience by going over old material. For campaigns that run long enough with different groups of heroes, it might be possible to build a campaign around retracing the steps of an earlier PC group!



MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



Signs the Journal You're Retracing May Not Be Accurate

- The directions for how to reach a point of interest begin, "You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out . . ."
- Back-to-back daily entries read, "Parrot assures us next island contains our goal" and "Crew enjoyed rare meat with meal."
- Points of interest are named Figment, Madeupia, and Athtavernland.

- One day's note says, "Found evidence of a human encampment, since departed. One of their number left a glove behind, of a style the same size and style as one I lost. I shall borrow it until I find him."
- A confused report reads, "No sign of the tiny people I saw with my telescope earlier; natives claim to be confused."
- It ends with, ". . . and then I died."

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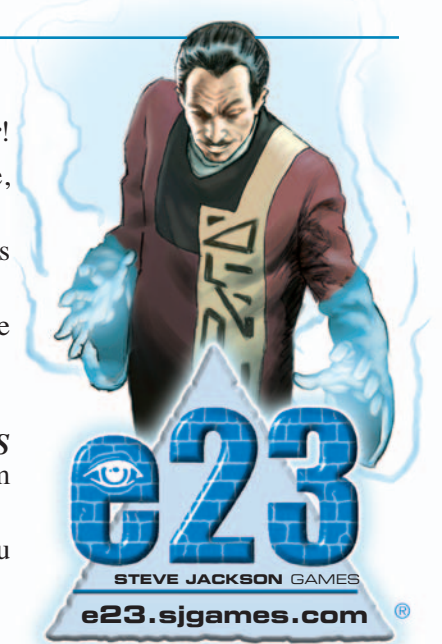
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