

BEST OF

FENIX



VOLUME 2

HORROR AND MORAL DILEMMAS

Welcome to the second volume of **Best of Fenix**, centered around horror and moral dilemmas. We are proud to present *The Master of Horror* – Kenneth Hite – at his very best, as in the article *51 Mythos Dooks* or the horror storytelling game *Last Flight of KG 200*. Pete Nash introduces you to the *The Many Faces of Horror* and the grimdark scenario *The Tree of Life Eternal*. Åsa Roos will send chills down your spine with *More Than Zombies*, *Golem* and *Smiles of a Summer Night* (thus proving she is not only our lead reviewer, but an appreciated game designer and writer as well). Martin Brodén Rother-Schirren take a closer look at *The House that Jack Built* and *Lovecraftian Horror*.

However, no horror volume should be complete without an emphasis on moral dilemmas. What better way to do that than playing *Better Angels*, a complete card game by Christoffer Krämer where you struggle for control over peoples souls by the way you make them handle definings situations that arise.

We want to bring you plentiful excerpts of the Swedish gaming culture. Some prefer old school gaming, others co-op role-playing (such as Nils Hintze's *Celestial Storm – A Crusade for Fallen Gods*) and story telling games never goes out of style. What you will not find is any of the vast amount of material made for games available in Swedish only. Since this entire title is in English, we chose not to feature articles you could not set in the context they deserve. Still, if you ever stumble across a game made in Swedish to begin with, now translated to English – give it a shot! There are lots of good games that originate here – such as *Kult* and *Mutant Year Zero!* And we happen to know that even more will show up before long...

Anytime you as a reader believe the language in the articles are making sense and not mutilate the English language, it is thanks to Jessica Augustsson and Pete Nash. They helped us look through the translations (or make them to begin with). If you find any lingering errors or inconsistencies, we probably made some last minute revision. This book would not have been possible without all the people who crowdfunded us. Some articles were added as we reached new stretch goals, others we added as an extra bonus. We hope you will enjoy reading the final result.

A comic by Åke Rosenius, the man behind *Bernard the Barbarian*.



BEST OF FENIX WAS MADE POSSIBLE THANKS TO OUR CROWDFUNDERS

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ÅSKFÅGELN

Editor in Chief Tove Gillbring
Art Director Anders Gillbring
Lead Artist Lukas Thelin

Åskfågeln E-mail fenix@speltidningen.se
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WRITERS

Tove Gillbring, Åke Rosenius, Kenneth Hite, Åsa Roos, Martin Brodén Rother-Schirren, Pete Nash, Nils Hintze and Christoffer Krämer

ILLUSTRATION ARTISTS

Lukas Thelin, Åke Rosenius, Michael Gullbrandson, Ola Larsson, Magnus Fallgren and Reine Rosenberg



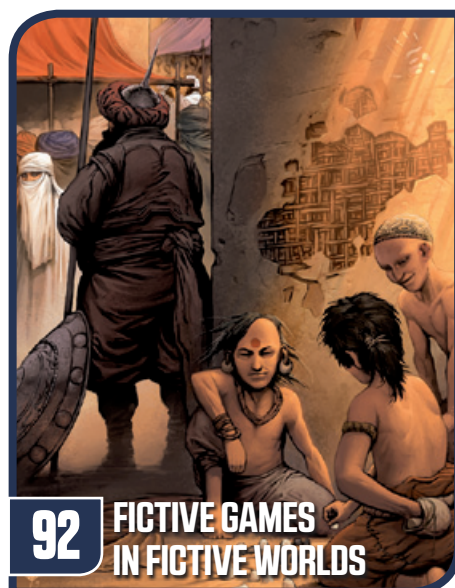
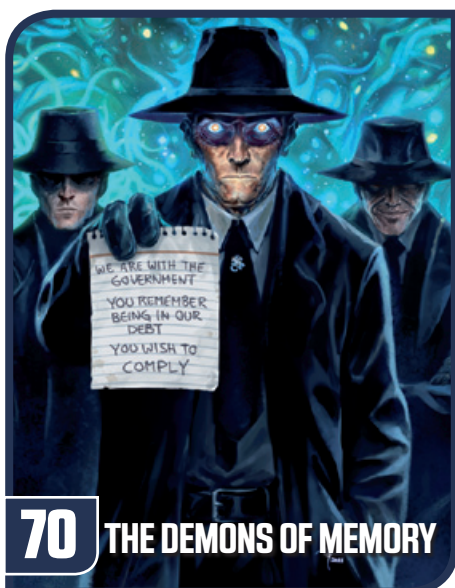
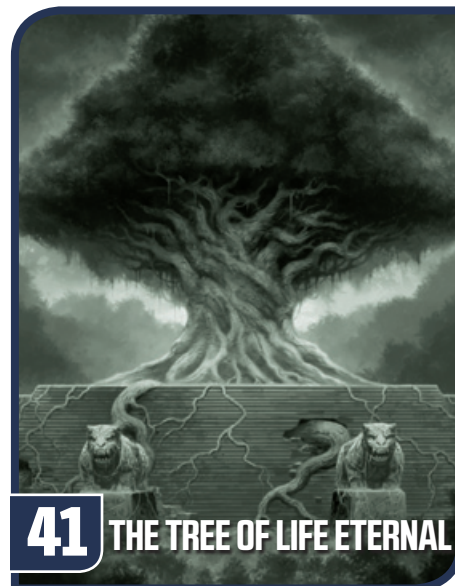
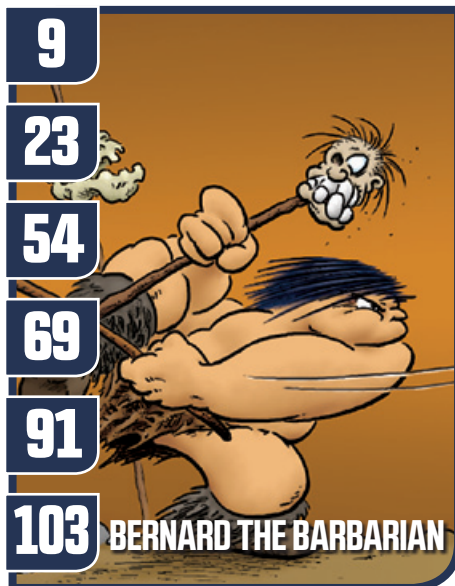
ABOUT THE COVER

The cover illustration on this issue is specially made by Lukas Thelin for *Fenix*, and more particularly for Åsa Roos' scenario *Smiles of a Summer Night*. Even though we would never be able to accomplish all the different gaming projects we publish without the help from talented freelance artists, Åskfågeln at its very core consists of Lukas Thelin, Tove and Anders Gillbring.

This cover is a personal favourite and one of our most appreciated illustrations ever, repeatedly demanded as a printed poster. We felt like it was a more than worthy artwork to put on the cover of *Best of Fenix volume 2*.

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TEXT **KENNETH HITE**

ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN**

IN THE DAY AFTER RAGNAROK

*“From the East there pours,
through poisoned vales
With swords and daggers,
the river named Fear.”*

– Völuspá, Stanza 36



When the Midgard Serpent fell to the Americans’ nuclear fire in July 1945, it was the Americans who took the brunt of its posthumous revenge: a cloud of deadly radioactive venom rained down on North America, and a mile-high tidal wave scoured the eastern seaboard clean. But Sweden did not escape. It would have been physically impossible; trillions of tons of dead snake smashed the British Isles and slammed into the European continent only 700 miles away. Earthquakes tore through Scandinavia, and the North Sea poured its own tsunami onto the low, sandy coasts. Denmark was nearly completely destroyed; Norway saw storm surges pour tens of miles up every fjord below Trondheim. Those nations sheltered Sweden from the worst of it: the tsunami that scoured Jutland clear merely flooded lower Malmö, although it smashed Göteborg with a glancing blow that still left hundreds of thousands dead or homeless. Earthquakes wounded Stockholm and the other eastern cities, but compared to the near-total demolition of Paris and Vienna, they remained inhabitable. Sweden’s survivors could shelter in their damaged buildings as the volatilized oceans came pouring down out of the upper atmosphere in torrential rain that became torrential hail and snow in August.

THE DAY AFTER RAGNAROK

This being the issue after the apocalypse issue, I decided to expand my post-apocalypse “submachine guns and sorcery” setting *The Day After Ragnarok* in these pages. For those who haven’t the faintest idea what I’m talking about, a short précis.

The Day After Ragnarok takes place in the 1948 of an alternate history in which the Nazis used magic to bring about Ragnarök, the mythical Norse apocalypse. Right on schedule, the globe-girdling Midgard Serpent rose up out of the Indian Ocean, heralding the end of the world. Then the Americans nuked it, flying a B-29 carrying the Trinity

Device into its eye. The Serpent fell to earth across Africa and Europe, killing hundreds of millions of people, and devastating eastern North America in a tsunami. The Serpent’s Fall shook the Narts – the Caucasian version of Norse jötunn, or frost giants – loose from their mountain glaciers and they joined forces with their fellow Caucasian god-hater Stalin. Radioactive Serpent fallout and resurgent Serpent cults breed or awaken other monsters around the world, sorcerers creep into the open.

The Serpent destroyed Britain and crippled America. The Germans died under the beast of

their own summoning, or got swallowed up by Stalin, but the Japanese forced an armistice in the Pacific as America’s military returned home to battle monsters. The British Empire relocated to Australia; it rebuilds while holding off Stalin wherever it can. Every advanced nation experiments with “ophi-tech,” using pieces of the Serpent in weird biotechnological dieselpunk devices and technologies. The old world is broken forever; Stalin and his foes maneuver to build a new one in its ruins.

And I haven’t even mentioned the man-apes.

For more details: <http://atomiccovermind.com/main/dar/>



POLITICS

Among the approximately 500,000 Swedes killed in the Serpentfall was King Gustav V, found dead in the ruins of a coach house on the palace grounds. Crowned in the miraculously intact Masthugget church in Göteborg, his elderly son became King Gustav VI Adolf amidst a freezing famine, desperate earthquake recovery, and the news that the Soviet Red Army was mopping up Germany, “liberating” Norway, and threatening Finland. The Communist press in Sweden was full of scandalous stories of the late King Gustav’s homosexuality, and the Communist parties were baying for new elections. When Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson died of a sudden heart attack, the national wartime emergency cabinet fell apart. The Soviets published extensive correspondence gathered in Berlin between Swedish politicians and Nazi officials; the Communist parties took over 40% of the vote in the dark winter of 1945. In partnership with the Farmers’ Party (angry at the seizure of crops by the government), the Communists formed the government with their Party Chairman Sven Linderot serving as Prime Minister. The new parliament repealed the Instrument of Government and forced Gustav VI Adolf to turn the Stockholm Palace over to the “workers’ revolutionary vanguard.” On January 1, 1946, it became the headquarters of the Swedish Communist Party (SKP).

Unwilling to add civil war to Sweden’s troubles, the king has secluded himself in

the private royal residence Drottningholm Palace with his books and his greenhouses: an avid botanist himself, he sponsors agronomists trying to find grains and fruits that can grow in Sweden’s now much-shorter summer. “Comrade G” does not discuss politics. Neither does his cousin, Count Folke Bernadotte, whose tireless work during and after Serpentfall as president of the Swedish Red Cross has made him hugely popular. Even the Communists hesitate to criticize the smooth-voiced aristocrat. No such restraint on either side applies to the Crown Prince Gustav Adolf, who proclaimed the repeal of the Instrument unconstitutional and with much of the military refused to swear allegiance to the “people’s government.” For their part, the government accused him of Nazi sympathies, producing more German documents that rival newspapers declared forged or authentic depending on their party line.

After seven months of escalating tension and street brawls, the Crown Prince decamped in November 1946 to the once-German island of Heligoland in the North Sea with a third of the Swedish Navy. Evacuated by the Nazis during the war, its fortifications, submarine pens, and tunnels mostly survived the tsunami: like the similarly flooded and drained Shetland Islands, the British Royal Navy had turned it into a radar station and forward base for its North Sea Fleet. Here he raised the Swedish flag, appointing himself Royal Governor of Heligoland. The resulting purge of the armed forces, along with a bill

collectivizing Sweden’s farms, led to the Linderot government’s fall and new elections in April 1947. Misled by optimistic reports from SKP officials, Linderot refused Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov’s suggestion that he cancel the election.

The result was a hung parliament. The Social Democrats (SAP) barely fell short of a plurality of seats, followed by the SKP and the Left Socialist Party (VSP). After two months of wrangling ended by Folke Bernadotte’s mediation, the three left parties formed a coalition headed by Gustav Möller, the new SAP chairman, with the Trotskyist Albin Ström of the VSP as Defense Minister and Linderot as Foreign Minister. The Farmers’ Party went into opposition, along with the Liberals and the National Organization of the Right (both of which suffered constant censorship and harassment during the preceding Linderot ministry). Against all odds, the governing triumvirate has lasted into 1948, mostly on a basis of postponing any votes that might fragment the coalition and lead to open street fighting. Even now, protests and strikes ripple through Sweden’s recovering industrial centers, and Stockholm’s Communist mayor (backed by the hundreds of new Communist police he has hired) keeps the capital calm only with curfews and restrictions on public gatherings. Thus, no new Instrument of Government has been drafted, the farms remain non-collective, and the reorganization of the military remains half-complete even as Möller and Ström desperately rearm.

SWEDISH SHORTLIST: TOP 5 PLACES TO FIND ADVENTURE

BOHUSLÄN: This coastal province was badly hit by the tsunami, and much of it has yet to be repopulated. Rumors of wights and wraiths abound, possibly describing gangs or clans of starving, cannibal survivors. In the middle of the wrack, a barbed-wire fence cuts off the Lysekil peninsula, enclosing the oldest runic symbols in Europe. Ahnenerbe scholars studied these petroglyphs in 1935 and somehow learned enough to eventually summon the Midgard Serpent; now a T-Kontoret team of Lund University scholars tries to recreate that research. Their failures and experiments do much to keep the surrounding devastation safe from prying eyes, but the population here have longstanding Communist sympathies.

CAFÉ STRINDBERG: Although this smoky, bohemian nightclub appeals to writers as well as artists, musicians, smugglers, fixers, spies, and gourmands, it is named not for the playwright but for its owner Erika Strindberg. Beautiful and enigmatic, Mlle. Strindberg spent the 1930s in New York working for the Comintern and hobnobbing with literati and jazzmen. In 1940, she returned to Sweden and opened her club on Österlånggatan in Stockholm’s

Old Town, which rapidly attracted foreigners with money and those interested in such folk. Now Café Strindberg is a crossroads, rendezvous, and hiring hall for every dubious character in Scandinavia, and every avant-garde artist or performer in the hemisphere.

GRASÖ: This tiny and remote island off the shore of Uppland province has a population of about 300 after the Serpentfall. Insular and standoffish, they make their living as fishermen and smugglers – and as Nazi assets in Sweden. Twenty miles offshore is an underwater Nazi base built into the bottom of the Gulf of Bothnia. The Germans stationed there (with experimental equipment to interdict and monitor Soviet naval traffic) met some Beings stirred up by the Serpent’s rise ... and changed. For example, they don’t have to use diving gear to swim underwater from Seepunkt Manta to the island.

HAPARANDA: Not all Swedes are happy to see their Finnish neighbors and relatives slaughtered by the Red Army. Haparanda, just across the river from the town of Tornio in the Karelo-Finnish SSR, is where

they send arms, volunteers, and supplies for that struggle; any combat vet can get a job here if he’s not picky about retirement benefits. Tornio, of course, holds a regiment of NKVD troops with all the most advanced detection gear and plenty of Bratukhin B-10 helicopters.

STORA SJÖFALLET: These spectacular waterfalls in Sweden’s far north have mostly been tamed by the Porjus Hydroelectric Station downstream. Porjus is the headquarters of Sweden’s top secret ophitech research and development program, overseen by Deputy Minister of Fuel Tore Waller. Waller is preternaturally gifted at detecting spies and other nosy strangers, perhaps a legacy of his time in the 1930s spent solving crimes. This brilliant (if prone to flights of Nietzschean vainglory) engineer drives his staff, picked from Sweden’s top industrial and scientific establishments, to constant inspiration and flights of genius: the prototypes developed here might be able to keep Sweden independent. One possible reason for this amazing progress: the falls are also Mimir’s Well, where Odin sank his eye and hung suspended in exchange for wisdom.



GEOPOLITICS

They rearm because Sweden must stand alone. Easily visible from Stockholm and points south, the Serpent's body lies humped and cloudy on the western horizon, a constant reminder that Britain has been destroyed and the world is changed. The Americans have pulled back to the Rockies; the center of the British Empire removed to Australia. Well-supplied with oil slant-drilled from the Serpent's carcass, the Royal Navy can keep station in the North Sea, but the Red Army commands all of Europe east of the Serpent Curtain.

Norway and Denmark are both People's Republics garrisoned by Soviet troops and guarded by barbed wire. Across the Baltic, Germany and Poland likewise host Soviet garrisons and proclaim socialist unity with Moscow. Stalin swallowed up the Baltic States and East Prussia during the war, and in the spring of 1946 the reinforced Red Army once more invaded Finland. Once more, fanatical Finnish defenses killed hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops, but Konev had millions more men to throw into the battle, total air superiority, and command of the sea. The Finns had no more sources of weapons or ammunition: the Linderot government refused even to condemn the Soviet invasion, much less aid its neighbor. Helsinki fell in May 1947 and the Soviets incorporated Finland into the USSR directly as the Karelo-Finnish SSR.

After the Crown Prince's defection, the Soviet Navy demanded and received basing rights at Karlskrona; the Soviet Air Force routinely overflies Swedish air space out of Oslo and Copenhagen. The Finnish Resistance ties down the Red Army for now, but even the Finns cannot hold out forever. Some time soon, Stalin will have fifty undistracted divisions on Sweden's eastern border. When that time comes, Sweden must seem not worth invading: cooperative in peace, deadly in war.

MINISTRIES OF FOG

Not everyone agrees. The SKP still officially calls for "the closest fraternal association with our Soviet brothers." Linderot's eager placation of Moscow is bad enough, but the new General Secretary of the SKP, Set Persson, is more Stalinist than Stalin. If Sweden ever becomes a "People's Republic," Persson will be its Premier: he actively conspires with the NKVD to advance Soviet interests and his own. The NKVD prioritizes the royalist underground as the ultimate class enemy, especially targeting the Swedish military for infiltration and subversion. Although the VSP controls the defense portfolio for now, plenty of Defense Ministry staff are willing to bet on the SKP returning to power, and to help

out the Soviets without the formality of an election. The SKP's deputy secretary, Hilding Hagberg, edits the Party paper *Ny Dag* and runs a network of such SKP assets within city and provincial governments, parliamentary and ministerial staffs, and the criminal police system. His already extensive files on everyone in Sweden (known ironically as "the Morgue") ballooned when the SKP ran the Justice Ministry under Linderot's government.

Meanwhile Tage Erlander, the SAP Education Minister, cooperates in secret with the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also known as MI6). In exchange for access to British ophi-tech research, he turns a blind eye to the "salmon run" the SIS keeps in Sweden: a network of safe houses for getting defectors out of the Soviet Union – or spies into the Red sphere. The local handler of the salmon run, Dr. Josef Zimmertür, is a Jewish psychiatrist and amateur criminologist in Stockholm; his police connections and highly placed patients make him an ideal coordinator. Soviet citizens can get visas for Sweden relatively easily, and running a small boat across the Baltic to or from the Finnish coast or Latvia is simple, if not quite safe. Running a larger boat past the Soviet patrols to the Shetland Islands is less simple, but flights on Swedish Intercontinental Airlines (SILA) and AB Aerotransport (ABA) leave Stockholm for Reykjavik weekly, weather permitting. ABA and Aeroflot fly to Moscow, Leningrad, Berlin, and Warsaw: forged passports and visas fill a seat or two on seemingly every flight.

Even more secret agendas stir the pot. Anton Nilson, a Communist labor organizer and convicted murderer, joined the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 but returned to Sweden disgusted by Stalin's dictatorial ways. He heads a covert "direct action wing" of the VSP, dedicated to erasing SKP (and thus Stalin's) influence over Swedish labor unions: his "Nilson Tendency" silences Stalinist organizers, dogs the heels of the NKVD in Sweden, and with members in every dockworkers' and sailors' union monitors Soviet Navy activity all across the Baltic. Nilson personally despises the reactionary British (his murder conviction was for bombing British strikebreakers in Malmö) and only works with SIS when he has no other choice.

Not all the Crown Prince's supporters in the military have been purged. An officers' network called "Friends of Björn" (after the Great Bear on the arms of the House of Bernadotte) monitors developments in Sweden and does what it can to lay the groundwork for a royalist coup d'état when "Comrade G" abdicates or dies. Whether or not the Crown Prince ever cooperated with the Nazis, the Friends of Björn are not so finicky: they harbor Wehrmacht and SS officers and Ahnenerbe

occult specialists in the ranks under false identities, and use members of the banned Socialist Party (which advocated for the Axis during the war) as cut-outs for dangerous missions. The Björners also work with the SIS, and with the "T-Office," a covert network of anti-Communists within the government and academia. The head of "T-Kontoret" (or just "T"), Thede Palm, is a specialist in ancient religion and the occult, teaching at Lund University. He is also the former head of Swedish foreign intelligence. "T" reaches into the Swedish military and bureaucracy, including the Security Police (Säpo), a kind of secret police inside the secret police. Palm's occult training gives him and his "T" agents something of an edge on the officially materialist Communists, though their frost-giant allies are another matter.

MYTHS AND MONSTERS

The frost giants known as Narts in the Caucasus Mountains, called bogatyrs in Russia, and remembered as jötunn in Norse myth do not restrict themselves to advising Stalin on primordial weather magic and arcane lore. They want their ancient kingdom back, to rebuild Utgard on the crest of Galdhøpiggen, to rule the North as they once did before the coming of the Aesir. But those gods – and then the newcomer God – sealed the land against their rule, with runestones and church steeples. Although Communist Norway gladly tears down churches in the high mountains at their command, the jötunn can for now only wander in Sweden, not rule it. For now.

For now, their servants the trolls spread across Sweden's bogs and forests, mountain scarps and quake-heaped rubble. They pull down runestones and smash isolated churches; they deface idols of Thor, Odin, and Christ alike. They kidnap humans for food and slavery and less wholesome purposes still. The sagas sometimes describe trolls as having human appearance; perhaps the trolls, too, are infiltrating Sweden for their horrific masters.

Other monsters have revived in the wake of Serpentfall. A cult in Östersund on the shores of the Storsjön in Jämtland worships Storsjöodjuret, a 20-foot long, humped lake serpent with a wolfish head. Children in Bromma tell of a short, dark-complected "friend" who invites their playmates to parties no one returns from; are these dwergar? Children gone feral and ghoulish in the quake ruins? Vampires? Krakens roil the North Sea and stir at the bottom of the Baltic. The giant snakes known as lindorms have returned to Småland, even as the volcanic flutes across the hills and forests belch forth new steam. Could dragons be next?

SWEDISH SCENARIO SPARKS

These adventure seeds assume investigators generally able to work within Swedish society, generally interested in poking Stalin in the eye but not averse to the main chance. Feel free to alter them for your own campaign.

- Former gentleman thief Filip Collin has returned to Sweden and to his old identity as Professor Pelotard, a scholar at Lund University. He works for T-Kontoret, and has been tasked to steal some fabulous occult item the heroes are also interested in: a Hand of Glory looted by Swedish troops from the sorcerous emperor Rudolf II's castle in Prague. Even if he bests the characters, if they impress him he may offer them a job with "T" – maybe one where they get to use the Hand.
- The skies of Sweden occasionally light up with arrow-shaped anomalies flying overhead at amazing speed. These "ghost rockets" seem to come from the south and fly to the north, but nobody knows just what they are. The Ministry of Fuel hires the heroes (especially if they have any mad scientists among them) to investigate Lake Kölmjärvi, where a ghost rocket crashed on July 19, 1946. Nazi UFO? Experimental British super-plane? Valkyrie? Who knows?
- The Wallenberg family of bankers, industrialists, diplomats, and politicians are the greatest defenders of capitalism left in Sweden. The Wallenbergs build railways, finance reconstruction projects, research ophi-tech in their corporate labs, and own the airline SILA. They jealously conspire against each other and against the patriarch Jacob Wallenberg for preferment in the family empire. A Wallenberg might hire the heroes to find a grandniece gone missing from a family retreat, or to get blackmail on a grasping uncle. Most of the Wallenbergs are anti-Soviet, so they might try to recruit the heroes into T or the "salmon run" or even the Friends of Björn – the Wallenbergs are an old naval family. Perhaps this was why the NKVD arrested Raoul Wallenberg (then working for the War Refugee Board to rescue Hungarian Jews) for espionage in Budapest in January 1945. For some groups, rescuing Raoul from the Lubyanka Prison in Moscow might be realistic; for most, their ties to the Wallenbergs will be less superhuman.
- Neils Orsen is a frail little man, almost a dwarf, with a big domed head and enormous pale-blue eyes like those of a Siamese cat. He spent much of the 1930s and early 1940s as a ghost-breaker for hire and a "psychic Sensitive." He left London for Stockholm on June 19, 1945, which would seem to confirm his psionic

gifts. He is the executive officer of the T-Kontoret, but most of his jobs for the heroes concern monster-hunting, ghost-breaking, and similar tasks. He would like to recruit a PC who has access to Hilding's "Morgue" (or who is running an asset with such access) if only to reassure himself that the Communists continue to neglect the occult front. He pays in psionic readings and predictions, which are never wrong.

- Here's one final possibility, which admittedly may appeal only to just the right game group. The heroes are approached somewhere outside Sweden (ideally in the South Pacific) by a sea captain named Efraim who is concerned about his daughter Pippi, alone in her home on Gotland. She's a good girl who can take care of herself – why, she gets her strength from dear old dad! – but a father worries. He has responsibilities here, but if they could go to Gotland and see if she's all right he'd be very grateful. (He might punctuate this by absent-mindedly squeezing coal into a diamond.) She'll be easy to find; she's friendly, adventurous, keeps a horse and a monkey, and has bright red hair in two pigtails. Characters trying to recruit the strongest girl in the world for their own schemes will get frustrated; heroes trying to help people out get the strongest girl in the world on their side.

TROLLS

Trolls are ugly, cruel beings created by the jötunn long ago as servants. They plagued the ancient Norse, who eventually drove them back into their dens and crevasses with the sound of iron church bells and the kiss of iron blades. After the Serpentfall, the jötunn have called them back to service; once more, no peat-covered bog or dark cave is safe to approach after dusk. So far, trolls have not taken up their habit of nesting under bridges, not least because most bridges in Sweden are iron.

Stats for *Day After Ragnarok* trolls in *Savage Worlds* terms appear below; it should be easy to adjust them to suit your campaign or rules set.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d8, Throwing d6

Pace: 8; Parry: 6; Toughness: 9 (1)

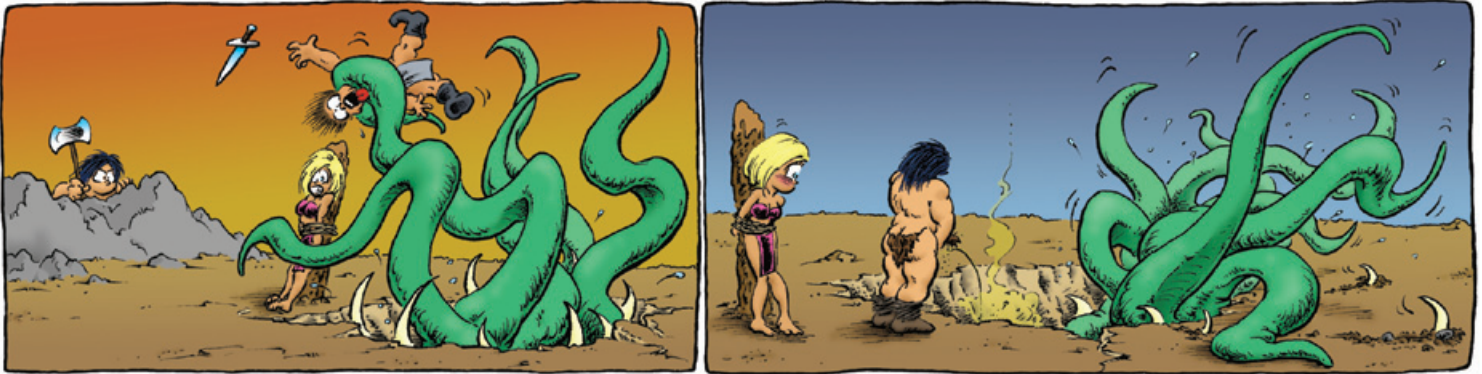
Gear: Club (Str+d6), stone spear (Str+d6; Parry +1; Reach 1 or throwing Range 6/12/24), stone knife (Str+d4)

Special Abilities

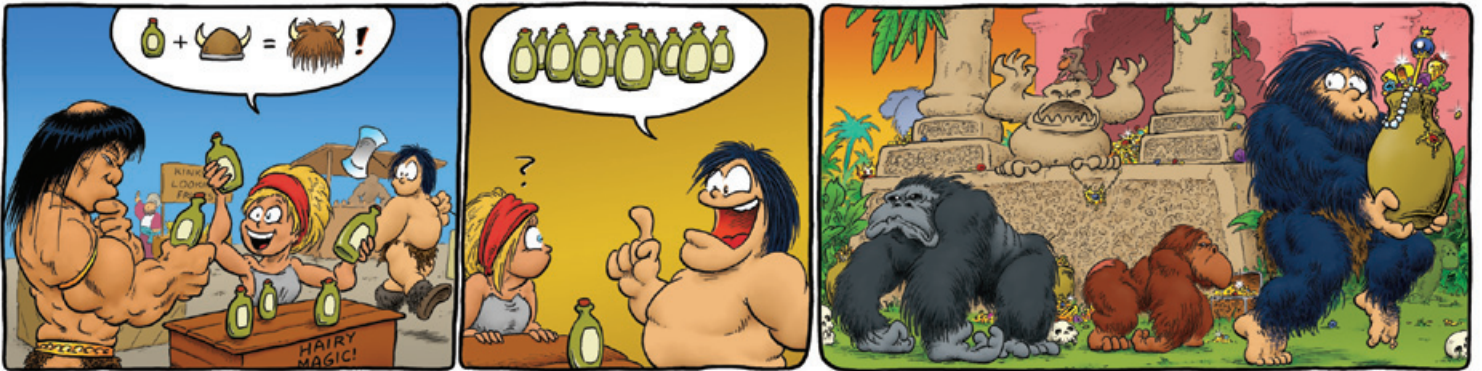
- **Troll-Wife (WC):** Some trolls are married, to wives far more formidable than they. Troll-wives have Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d10; and Knowledge (Arcana) d8, Knowledge (Poisons) d8, Persuasion d10, and Spellcasting d10. They can shapeshift from troll form to human form, and usually have other spells such as blind, disguise, or invisibility. A troll-wife is a Wild Card.
- **Armor +1:** Rubbery hide.
- **Bite:** Str+d4
- **Fast Regeneration:** Trolls make a Vigor roll every round to heal any damage they have sustained, even after "death." Success heals one wound (or removes Incapacitated status) and a raise heals an additional wound. This does not apply to wounds made by iron, lightning, or sunlight.
- **Immunity:** Immune to poison and disease.
- **Improved Sweep:** May attack all adjacent foes at no penalty.
- **Infravision:** Trolls halve bad lighting penalties against warm-blooded targets.
- **Size +1:** When unfolded to their full length, trolls are lanky creatures over 7' tall. However, they can crouch down to under 5' with no penalties for movement or action.
- **Weakness (Iron):** The touch of iron burns trolls; they cannot use it and must make a Spirit roll to shove it away or even to pick up a steel tool by the handle.
- **Weakness (Lightning):** Trolls suffer double damage from lightning or electricity-based attacks. Trolls fear lightning and must make a Spirit roll to go outside during a thunderstorm.
- **Weakness (Sunlight):** Direct sunlight turns trolls to stone; they take 2d10 damage per round until safe or fully petrified. Armor does not protect.



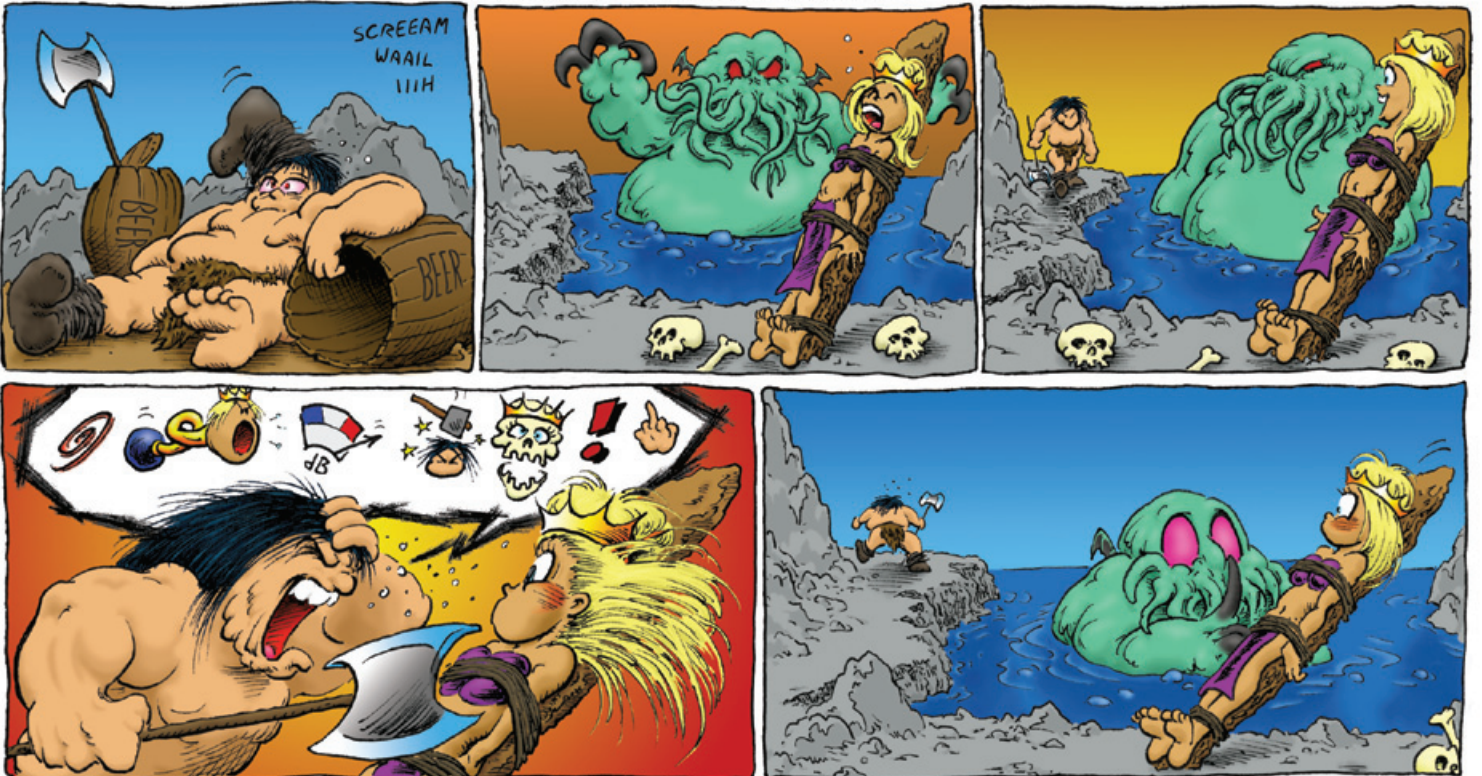
BERNARD THE BARBARIAN IN THE HOUR OF NEED



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN UNDERCOVER



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN SPEAKS UP



A HORROR ADVENTURE FOR ANY SYSTEM, WHICH TAKES PLACE IN THE PRESENT, DURING SUMMER

SMILES

OF A SUMMER NIGHT

TEXT **ÅSA ROOS**
ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN**

It is well past closing time at the Mediterranean Museum of Stockholm (or a similiar museum in a city of your choice).

In the semi-darkness of the warehouse is a row of wooden crates, some completely unpacked, others merely opened. The wood wool packing material has slowly expanded and overflowed the edges of the crates, pooling on the stone floor beside the crate lids. A thin, weak ray of sunlight still shines, falling on the stone face of the broadly smiling Egyptian god. The eyes are small and sunken, and in the low light of the warehouse, they almost give the appearance of movement. Tomorrow, it will take its place in the museum's upcoming summer exhibition. But that's tomorrow. Tonight, it is here in the museum's warehouse. Quiet, still, and at peace.

On a table nearby is a pink requisition slip and a certificate of authenticity issued in both Arabic and English. On the certificate of authenticity is a post-it note reading:

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"Please do not touch the metal ankh. VERY IMPORTANT!"





CAVEAT LECTOR!

Much of this adventure requires that you, the game's master, flesh out the details. This is more of a suggestion or idea than a fully fledged adventure, so read through and complete the text where you feel it is necessary. The Cop-tic is abused and likely grammatically incorrect, but that's the internet's fault.

I would also like to point out that no Egyptian statues were injured in the making of this adventure. I also do not personally know the staff of the Mediterranean Museum in Stockholm and do not actually believe they are quite as foolish as this adventure would suggest.

MOOD AND AMBIENCE

It is summer, and daylight lasts nearly round the clock. Despite this, the idea is that the players – while simultaneously experiencing the statue of Ammut's strange effects – will feel colder, feel that it is harder to keep warm, and have a sensation of cool sluggishness creeping over them, as death creeps over the dying.

SYNOPSIS

Smiles of a Summer Night is a scenario seed for a horror RPG of your choice, even though it is written with *Call of Cthulu* in mind. The adventure circles around an exhibition at the Mediterranean Museum of Stockholm where they have just received a shipment of Egyptian statues from the Ancient Kingdom period from 2650-2134 BC. One of the statues is believed to be an early incarnation of the god Ammut. Ammut is the monster who eats hearts from those who fail to pass through Anubis' Weighing of the Heart ceremony. The heart is placed in one of the scale's dishes and Maat, the feather of truth, is placed in the other. If the heart is lighter than Maat, the person may continue on to eternity, but if the heart is heavier, Anubis casts it to Ammut, who eats it, thereby destroying the person it belonged to forever.

The statue is, however, somewhat more sinister than that. The stone carving is an avatar of the creature who first gave the Egyptians the idea of Ammut. The statue is surrounded by protective spells and magical incantations, but a careless museum curator with the best of intentions, removes the most

important amulet of them all: an ankh made of a special metal alloy. Now the creature is once again on the hunt, slowly at first, but with an increasing hunger and intensity. The characters can either be unsuspecting museum visitors who come into contact with Ammut and then begin to slowly die from the inside out themselves, or they can investigate the series of deaths that are suddenly befalling the museum's visitors in the roles of police or even close relatives or friends to somebody who is being affected.

The only thing that can stop the statue is replacing the ankh, and during the adventure, the characters will receive help through dreams that provide them with an understanding of what is happening and what they must do. It is also important that once the characters understand that the ankh is the key, they figure out that the new curator has the ankh.

As if the curse weren't enough, during the adventure the statue will create two guardians who work to "help" those afflicted by the curse to continue on toward death.

I recommend that the characters themselves become affected by Ammut's hunger, since this creates further motivation for them to find a solution to the problem.

WHAT'S HAPPENED?

After having begged, prayed and attempted to barter, the Mediterranean Museum has received a pair of ancient statues for an exhibition with an Egyptian theme. The statues come with conditions, however. They may not be within reach of the public, no loose objects may be removed – not even for light preservation – and the exhibition can last for two months at the most.

A newly hired museum curator, Erik Bengtson, wants to put his best foot forward, however, and when he sees a small spot on the surface of the ankh, he removes it from the statue of Ammut in order to prevent further oxidation. In doing so, he becomes Ammut's first victim. As if in a fog, he departs the museum that night, forgetting to replace the ankh amulet on the statue. And to make things worse, he inadvertently takes the amulet home with him.

When the adventure begins, Erik is already half dead and is on sick leave from the museum. Ammut's guardians have also begun to follow him, which – along with his strange dreams – has made him paranoid and terrified to go outside his apartment. Erik's survival – at least until the characters have managed to talk to him – is vital. However, the guardians may well take the ankh from him if the characters manage to move too quickly through the story.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ADVENTURE

There are a number of different ways to introduce the characters to this adventure.

- The characters can be visitors who have been to see the statue and been selected as some of the statue's victims.
- The characters can have friends or acquaintances who have been afflicted by the statue.
- The characters can belong to medical or police staff who discover a commonality between the witness testimonies of those affected.

All introductions require a little hands-on action from the game master, however. In order for the characters to connect the mystery to the statue of Ammut, it is important that they all begin to dream about the mysterious statue, as well as begin to be followed by the two guardians Ammut has called forth.

THE CURSED

If the characters come into contact with Ammut's curse directly, there are a couple of ways to let them know this has happened. First establish that they are at the museum in Stockholm (*or a similar museum in a city of your choice*). The characters may be visiting, or perhaps they live in the city already. Regardless, it is good for the adventure and for the characters if they have some kind of list, such as: these are the museums we visited. In this way, they will have some way of figuring out which museums were visited, enabling them to return to the right place.

- Let critical information sneak up on the characters. For example, tell them that after a while of wandering through the city, they begin to feel cold and tired, despite the summer heat. A chilly lethargy comes over them and in spite of the sun's rays, they just can't get warm. Make it clear that something has happened – something unusual, something that feels a bit scary. It becomes even more apparent if there are a few among the group who are *not* affected by the curse.
- Read through the section "*Sacrificial Lamb*" and let the characters experience the moment when the curse hits them. It is a fairly obvious hint, but can provide the players with a wonderful sense of doom.

SACRIFICIAL LAMB

In the late afternoon, the summer light makes the old statues standing in long rows in display cases and along the walls look like they belong to another world, let alone another time. Most of them don't stand out in any way: Isis, Osiris, Horus and Anubis stand among portraits, hippopotamuses and cats, all with the same ancient patina. Off in a corner, however, is a statue of a pair of tall Egyptians. The statue is painted, and much of the colour remains. It depicts a man and a woman holding each other's hand, both running with one leg thrust forward. On their heads are the remains of wigs made of lamb's wool. A warm light surrounds them. Directly opposite them is a grotesque frog-like creature with a huge sneer plastered across its face.

Just as the characters pass the grotesque creature, part crocodile – part hippopotamus – part something else completely, a sudden draught sweeps through the museum. The group shivers and a deathly chill settles over them. They are chosen by Ammut; they will be devoured in his jaws, they will cease to exist.

EFFECTS OF THE CURSE

No matter who is affected by the curse, the process they go through will be the same. Those who are among the first to be afflicted will die much more slowly than those afflicted later on during the adventure. This is partially explained by the fact that the Ammut creature must first regain his strength before it can rampantly devour souls, and partly for reasons of game mechanics. Erik the curator must survive until the characters have spoken to him, and the characters must also stand a chance against Ammut in order for the adventure to be fun to play.

STAGES OF THE CURSE

1. The afflicted characters' skin gets chilled and clammy – it is difficult to get warm and the afflicted characters feel cold and their body temperatures sink. For the characters and Erik, this stage can last as long as the game master feels it is appropriate. Those who die from the curse will experience this state for a day or two, and this time diminishes gradually as Ammut devours more souls.
2. A kind of sluggishness takes hold in those who are afflicted. This presents as slower movements, slurred speech, and the skin becoming clammy and pale. A doctor or other medical expert can diagnose the state as hypothermia or anemia, but even these are not quite

right. The cursed still have normal blood test results, normal temperatures, and no other signs of illness. Yet now they're constantly freezing, and feel as if they're cold right to the bone. Many of those afflicted may get burn damage both internally and externally due to coming too close to heat sources in an attempt to get warm.

The victims also begin to realise they can understand and read fragments of ancient Egyptian.

3. The cold finally reaches the heart and the afflicted person is in a state of almost complete immobility. The sluggishness is now obvious. Movements take several minutes. Speech is nearly unintelligible and the skin is as pale as death. At this time, the body temperature finally begins to sink, the blood pressure drops and death is fast approaching. The cursed persons can now fully read and understand ancient Egyptian.
4. The cursed person dies. Any autopsy shows that the heart is completely shredded. If the ribcage was not intact, the medical examiner would likely attribute the damage to an animal attack.

For player characters, stages 2 and 3 function as a reduction or modification of their basic traits and skills. It is up to the game master as to how these new handicaps and language abilities will be managed, but remember that it is all meant to be rather scary to suddenly be unable to move as usual, and constantly feel cold.

THE DREAMS AND DREAM GUARDIANS

The dreams are not so much regular dreams as visions or apparitions. They consist of a man and a woman in ancient Egyptian style linen clothing with the classic Egyptian stark makeup and the voluminous wigs made of lamb's wool. If the players have been to the museum, they recognise the couple as the Egyptian statues that stood opposite the Ammut statue. Their warnings are at first in ancient Egyptian, but as the end of the adventure approaches, more and more player characters begin to understand the warnings, partly because Ammut's curse has this "positive" side in that the cursed player characters can understand ancient Egyptian, and partly to demonstrate more clearly to the players what they must do to destroy the statue of Ammut.

The visions always occur when the player character is alone and feels a bit exposed. Even the Guardians of Light, described next, can invoke terror.

THE FIRST VISIT – THE SHINING GUARDIANS

The first visit of the shining dream guardians should feel surrealistic and a bit frightening. The dream guardians radiate a warmth and a peace, however, that makes the player character experiencing the vision or dream feel less cold and anxious than he or she has in many days.

A tall man and a tall woman walk toward the player character. They are both dressed in Egyptian clothes and have enormous wigs on their heads. Their skin is shiny from oil and their linen garments are tightly wrapped around their bodies. The man addresses the player character, saying something incomprehensible in a choppy language the dreamer has never heard before.

The woman bends over the player character and places a hand on the dreamer's cheek. A heat as powerful as the sun flows through the body, and the character feels warm for the first time in quite a while.

The man speaks again, attempting to demonstrate his meaning with gestures and short words. He points at his chest, points at the dreamer's chest (when he touches the dreamer, the character once again feels the amazing warmth flowing through his or her body). Then, suddenly, the man lunges with his hand like a claw toward the dreamer's torso.

When neither speech nor charades seem to work as means of communication to reach through to the player character, the couple disappears into a cloud of golden shards.

THE SECOND VISIT – THE ANKH

The same man and woman appear again to the player characters. This time, the pair carefully awakens the player character from their slumber (which the game master can choose to let the character interpret as a dream) and again explains what the player must do to break the curse.

"Ammut!" says the woman. "Antotan sotm. Antotan Ammut ti pef-ankh. Ammut mo'she mih." (Ammut! You hear/listen/obey. You give Ammut his ankh. Ammut travels with demons.)

Portions of this may be understood by the player characters depending on how successful their skill rolls are.

The same warmth as before radiates from the guardians and this time, the character gains an actual advantage from having been visited by the pair, since the guardians restore the dreamer for approximately one hour. ►

THE THIRD VISIT – COMMUNICATION

The third and final visit from the dream guardians occurs soon after the characters confront Ammut and his personal guardians. Then their communication is crystal clear.

“Ammut,” says the woman. “You must listen! Return the ankh to Ammut. Ammut is a demon. He has his guardians and we cannot stop him. Place the ankh in Ammut’s hands before it is too late.”

The guardians can also inform the characters that they have been appointed to protect the world from the devastation of Ammut, but that they – like all other magic surrounding Ammut – have been weakened because the most important amulet has been removed from Ammut’s body. The guardians additionally give the character a weapon to use in the confrontation of Ammut. This weapon is a small bottle containing a liquid that completely removes the effect of the curse for one hour.

THE DREAMS OF AMMUT

The dreams Ammut sends out are not actually something Ammut himself controls. It is the creature’s enormous hunger that sucks the life energies from the players and makes them vulnerable to further attacks.

- The characters dream of falling. It is an infinite fall, a slow tumbling through the dark, and as they fall, they become colder and colder. They know somehow that something sinister awaits them at the bottom, something with a ravenous maw and a cruel and contemptuous sneer.
- The air surrounding the dreamer is dry and cold. The stone walls on every side seem to be closing in, and the closer they come, the more cold and helpless the character feels. The walls are covered with Egyptian hieroglyphs that spell death and destruction for anyone trapped in the room. A face of stone hovers above the dreamer, a derisive and hungry smile plastered across its face. It comes closer and closer.
- The dreamer feels sluggish and bitterly cold. An ankh floats in the air in front of the character and s/he know that this ankh will stave off the darkness and save them from the cold. But just as their fingers close around the metallic amulet, the evilly smiling jaws clamp down on the dreamer’s hand, sending out a chill so intense that the very air surrounding them begins to freeze, and every breath creates large puffs of steam.

THE DEVoured ONES

Those who died during the time the exhibition was on display at the museum all displayed the same symptoms. They complained of feeling not only cold but frozen, they tired easily, and then they inexplicably died after a sudden temperature and blood pressure drop (see the stages of the curse for more information).

The one thing the afflicted all have in common, of course, is that they’ve all been to the Mediterranean Museum of Stockholm while the Egyptian exhibition was ongoing. When the adventure begins, about ten deaths have occurred.

Those whose energies have been devoured are visible to others who have been afflicted by the curse. They stand gathered around the statue of Ammut like shadows, naked, with heads hanging low. Their chests have been torn open and their hearts are missing.

CONVERSATIONS WITH MUSEUM PERSONNEL

Annika Hellman can provide the following information about the exhibition and the Mediterranean Museum itself:

- The exhibition has been open for about two weeks, and there have been approximately 5.000 visitors.
- The statues and objects are on loan from the Egyptian museum of Cairo, the Egyptian museum of Berlin, as well as a few objects from the British Museum in London.
- The statue of Ammut is one of the oldest objects on display.
- The statue opposite Ammut are believed to be Panhsj and Beset, a pair of Egyptian magicians who were active during the Old Kingdom. The statues themselves are, however, from a more recent era than that.
- Erik Bengtson, one of the curators who worked with the statues of Ammut, Panhsj and Beset is out sick.

If the players are skilled at persuasion, or belong to some sort of governmental authority, Hellman can also reveal the following:

- Someone has removed an amulet from the statue of Ammut, but there are no papers on who might have done this.
- The last person to work with the statue of Ammut was Erik Bengtson.
- Erik Bengtson does not answer his telephone, email or text messages.

A VISIT TO ERIK

Erik Bengtson’s flat is in Rinkeby (a suburb), on the top floor of a five-storey building. The area is modern and newly renovated, but the main doors are reinforced steel requiring a 4-digit code to enter. If a character calls Erik’s entry phone, no one answers, but if they wait a few minutes, someone else will likely happen by to enter or exit the building, and they can enter the building at the same time.

The lift smells a bit stuffy, with an underlying scent of cleaning fluids and machine oil, which is rather unpleasant and makes one feel a bit nauseous. It comes to a reluctant halt on the fifth floor, and the doors open onto a corridor filled with the smell of incense and the odour of cooking exotic herbs and spices.

After the doorbell has been rung three times, Erik finally opens the door, and he looks terribly pale and sallow. He is wrapped in a blanket, several layers of thick sweaters, and at least two layers of trousers, as far as the character(s) can tell. The entire flat seems to emit a chill, as if there was an air conditioning unit inside that has been set to an extremely low temperature for a very long time.

The flat is clean and neat, and the only thing that might indicate any kind of disorder is the pile of bandages lying on the coffee table, plus the row of many coffee mugs on the kitchen countertop.

Following a bit of prodding, Erik explains:

- He still has the ankh in his flat.
- He is paranoid and has had the feeling that someone is following him.
- He has had dreams and visions of the Egyptian couple, and of Ammut as well.
- No matter how hard he tries, he is unable to get warm. He reveals a place on his arm where he burned it upon coming into contact with the stovetop burners. “But,” he says resignedly, “I felt nothing when I burned myself. Nothing.”
- He can give the players the ankh as long as they protect him from the two men who are following him.
- Erik can give the player characters the combination to the museum’s security alarm and a key card to open the door.

If you want to create a little bit of action at Erik’s place, you can have Ammut’s guardians break in and attempt to steal the ankh while the player character(s) and Erik are sitting and talking. Ammut’s guardians can be defeated by breaking their necks, or – like in tales of golems – erasing the words that give them life. The guardians each have a cartouche at the base of the neck, and removing or destroying the cartouche will turn them into the dust they were created from.

FOLLOWED

Throughout the adventure, the player characters will be followed by two white men of average height. It is difficult to describe them for the players because they blend in completely, looking like everyone and no one at the same time. Those who come into contact with them will be unable to explain what they look like. These are Ammut's guardians, sent to "help" Ammut's victims to cross over.

Let the players get a glimpse of the men, spotting them behind them from time to time, seeing them out of the corner of their eye, and noticing them outside on the street at night.

If you want, you can have the guardians steal the ankh from Erik before the players visit him. Even so, the guardians will continue to follow the afflicted characters, since Ammut needs at least thirty souls in order to break free of the stone prison that binds him.

If the guardians have taken the ankh, Erik should be dead and his flat should be completely ransacked and ruined.

SOLUTION

The final confrontation should take place at the Mediterranean Museum of Stockholm, and preferably at night or whenever it is empty of visitors. The museum has an alarm system that goes on when the last museum personnel leaves the building, but a visit to Erik can let the player characters find the code and the key card.

To defeat Ammut, they must place the ankh in Ammut's hands, which he tries to stop, with the help of his guardians and through visions that terrify the characters, resulting in loss of willpower and mental strength.

- Ammut causes hallucinations that can make the characters flee, or accidentally fall down the museum stairs.
- Ammut can freeze the characters even more, making them almost completely immobile, turning them into easy victims for his guardians.
- If Ammut does not have any guardians left, or if the player characters do not seem to take any damage from those remaining, he can make new guardians. Ammut can make one guardian every five minutes, with an upper limit of the number of players +2.

Panhsj and Beset can help the characters by sending them warmth and mobility, plus more of the liquid they gave the characters during their last dream/vision.

Ammut cannot move until he has consumed thirty souls, but the more he gets, the stronger he becomes.

FINALE

There are two ways in which the adventure can end. Either the player characters, with the help of Panhsj and Beset, defeat the devourer Ammut, or Ammut is once again set loose in the world, and this time on the streets of Stockholm.

What happens if Ammut is free to roam Stockholm is up to the game master. If Ammut is defeated, however, a couple of weeks after the exhibition has packed up and moved on, each player character will receive an anonymous letter of thanks, written in English and sent from Egypt. Each letter contains a tiny gold scarab. If the player characters decide to get some sort of assessment of the scarab (perhaps through one of Erik's contacts), they will learn that it is real gold, but more than that – the scarabs are all from the same necklace, probably a piece of funereal jewellery from about 1800BC. Their value is priceless.

GAME MASTER NPCs

Annika Hellman

Annika is a tall and graceful woman with close-set eyes and a generous mouth. She is completely professional, but the disappearance of the ankh and Erik's absence have made her suspicious and anxious. Annika is convinced Erik has the ankh.

Annika is also worried about the exhibition. She no longer likes to be in the exhibition hall, and feels there is something extremely unnerving about it. She is afraid of the statue of Ammut.

Erik Bengtson

When the players meet Erik, he is a pale, sunken young man who moves sluggishly. He is of average build, has blonde hair, and a few days' stubble on his cheeks and chin.

Erik is a new curator at the Mediterranean Museum and has only recently graduated from university. He wants to demonstrate his knowledge of metals, and when he sees the annealed ankh, he takes the opportunity to make it pristine. At the end of the day, he feels tired, cold and lethargic, and since he is not quite finished with the ankh, he takes it home with him.

Once home, he begins to have nightmares, both about a shining Egyptian couple and about a huge smile that wants to swallow him whole. He is constantly freezing, and has a couple of severe burns on his forearms after attempting to warm them on the stovetop. The ankh is in a small climate-controlled box on his desk.



THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

TEXT **MARTIN BRODÉN ROTHER-SCHIRREN**

ILLUSTRATION **MICHAEL GULLBRANDSON**



ORIGINAL PUBLICATION **FENIX 2/2005**
EXTENDED FOR THIS ANTHOLOGY

Several years ago I wrote a campaign setting incorporating Jack the Ripper with the Golden Dawn. I've since then had ample opportunities to test my material in various campaigns. When I was asked to translate my original article into English, it felt only natural to do some extensive rework. While there are many good sources on the Whitechapel murders and even more on Golden Dawn and other organizations mentioned, this article is not one of them. Truths are mixed with half-lies, exaggerations and myths in the name of a good roleplaying campaign.

Of course Jack the Ripper is not a fictional character per se. Unlike Dracula or the stories about Sherlock Holmes, the Whitechapel murders actually happened. A series of unsolved murders in Whitechapel in the autumn of 1888, possibly by the same killer, has fueled the minds and fantasies of many since.

Writers of Victorian Roleplaying Games seldom approach the Whitechapel murders. While Dracula and Sherlock Holmes show up all the time, Jack remains a shadow. Many mention the Ripper but are quick to point out that they don't give any solutions to the murder mystery; an understanding between fellow GMs that everyone has their own interpretation of the Ripper.

But what are the more extraordinary Ripper options for a horror/occult genre game master? This was the question that spawned my article the first time. I had my own Ripper candidate (I'll get to that later) that I wanted to promote, yet even more I wanted to lay a foundation where the Ripper murders were the starting point to a campaign after which anything could be added – be it vampires, superheroes, aliens, Nazi wizards, creatures from the deep, demons or whatever crumbled your cookie. This foundation is laid out more clearly this second time around.



LONDON BEFORE THE STORM

As the only country in the world to begin industrial revolution before the advent of railroads and one of the victors of the Napoleonic wars, the British Empire emerged as the leading nation of the 19th century. Large parts of the world are British colonies. Queen Victoria and her subjects have harvested unbelievable assets. The sun never sets on the British Empire.

London is the heart of this empire. In 1881 the capital has five million citizens. Truly a modern Babylon; a city that you are drawn into, that swallows you whole. Most of the citizens in this capital share little or no part of the empire's wealth. The living conditions for the lower classes, for instance those residing in the East End slums, are sometimes atrocious. With wealth comes status but also manners and informal privileges. It is a feudal society in all but name.

This is also the era of a new prudishness, often puritan morals, where the bare ankle of a young woman might be considered obscene. It is a time when homosexuality, at least out in the public, is forbidden – Oscar Wilde is imprisoned for his. Queen Victoria herself – a widow since 1861 and mother of nine – is always dressed in mourning black.

Occult societies abound. It is the sign of the times; God is present but has to compete with Nationalism. Faith and honor are not distributed to the same entity. There are those who look upon Christianity in a more liberal light, as one of several keys to a deeper understanding. There are even more people willing to follow these seekers, true or charlatan, into this new inner world.

OCCULT RENAISSANCE

Enter secret societies and magic cabals. Tastes may vary, but you probably have some magic system in mind already. This may be a whole RPG system like *Call of Cthulhu*/*Cthulhu by Gaslight* or *d20 Modern/d20 Past*; or it may be something that requires a little bit more work like *Authentic Thaumaturgy*, something from *Kult*, or maybe a rules set of your own creation. Pagan Publishing's *The Golden Dawn* has a nice little system.

Your next decision is to decide how frequent magic is. This can range from non-existing (where working magic is at best hinted at) to super natural (where players and magicians from different societies regularly square off in covert magic battles) but the middle way, where some key NPC:s perform magic when in a pressed situation, goes a long way for effect and plot development.

Masons

The Freemasons are primarily a gentlemen's club with secret handshakes and rituals, but with an occult background that the invited has a chance to delve into. Most masons don't. Masonry is primarily about connections and distribution of power; a secret sect with wealthy connections, if you will, but certainly Christian. British Masonry first comes to light in the early 18th century and becomes a way for the privileged to retain power in a world where power is beginning to be redistributed to the many; to create an elite alongside the formalized hereditary, political and religious social structures.

Masonry rests firmly on the Christian faith and a Christian mysticism. One would make a mistake focusing on the more macabre rituals; they are there for initiation only. A person entering the freemasons for, say, illumination would soon hit the roof and be disappointed. The inner core of masonry doesn't consist of the greatest scholars but the wealthiest men.

We will delve deeper into just one of masonry's "secrets": The legend of Hiram, the first Mason.

Hiram was the architect of the Temple of Jerusalem, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the Holy of Holies. He was murdered by three men by the names of Jubela, Jubelo and Jubelum and took secrets about the Temple structure with him to the grave.

The story of Hiram is used allegorically in the Freemasons. The society is not an organization several thousand years old, even though they would gladly have you believe that. It may well be true that the first modern Masons actually were stone masons; free of the oppression of a guild. But that is another story.

The Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society is founded by Helena Petrova Blavatsky and Henry Olcott in New York in 1875. Olcott is a lawyer and a colonel. Blavatsky is a medium, born of Russian nobility. Their society consists of all sorts of spiritualists, cabbalists, masons and others. Contrary to the Freemasons, the Theosophical movement accepts women into their ranks and the Christian influences are more minor. Instead, inspiration comes from the eastern spiritualistic traditions.

Blavatsky is the soul of this society; an enigmatic woman who likes to shroud herself in mystery. She flees her life in the Russian nobility at a young age to pursue a spiritual search. The search takes Blavatsky too many dark corners of the world. According to her own account she visits Tibet and comes into contact with the "Secret Masters" who resides in another world of higher existence. The wisdoms learned from the Masters are many years later built into the foundation of the Theosophical Society, mainly through Blavatsky's book *'Isis Unveiled'*.

Of course, Tibet is not only a country that is very hard to reach physically. It's also closed to all foreign citizens at this time.

In 1887, just a few years before her death, Blavatsky moves to London. She's ill and spends all of her time in her home, occasionally visited by fellow theosophists and other students of the occult; those she deems worthy. She begins work on her final Magnum Opus: The book that will be known as *'The Secret Doctrine'*.

The Golden Dawn

The Order of the Golden Dawn is founded in 1888, the same year as the Whitechapel murders, by three men: Doctor William Wynn Westcott, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and Doctor William Robert Woodman. According to the founders, there is a much older German order named "Die Goldene Verdammerung" that the Golden Dawn is a part of.

Westcott himself is an avid student of the occult. He is both a brilliant Mason and a Theosophist. Between 1879 and 1881 he takes a leave from his duties as a physician to study the occult full time. According to his own accord he receives a ciphered manuscript from the late Reverend Woodford, a fellow Mason. Having solved the cipher, Westcott finds that the manuscript describes the foundation of an order and the contact information to the German organization.

Like the Theosophical Society, the Golden Dawn accepts both men and women into their ranks. The order consists of two separate parts: the Outer Lodge and the Inner Lodge. Within each Lodge there are five grades for the Initiate to master. After taking all five grades within the Outer Lodge, the student is now admitted to the Inner Lodge. In the first grades of the Outer Lodge the student encounters basic occult training, but after some grades the occult teachings moves from occult 101 to Westcott's own maze of kabbalah, tarot and other occult practices.

The teachings of the Inner Lodge are primarily designed by Mathers, who is regarded

as an eccentric but a very charismatic person learned in the occult. While the teachings of the Outer Order are directed towards creating occult scholars, the Inner Lodge deals with magic. The Inner Lodge is ruled by the three "Secret Masters" that are not of this world.

The third founder, Woodman, is twenty years older than Westcott and Mathers. Woodman is an expert in Hebrew and the kabbalah. He contributes to the lore of both the Outer and the Inner Lodges. Of course, the official story is that all lore comes from the German order and the Secret Masters.

Other Societies

There are many esoteric societies during this time. Some are mere study groups in single fields of occult studies, whilst others deal with ranks and secrets and handshakes and the works. A few are open to all (within reason of social rank, of course) with open lectures. Others are not. Several are elite clubs. For most people, membership in one or more of these societies ends up being nothing more than a curious hobby. Then again, this is before the time of therapy, so any work on one's inner life probably does some good.

AUTUMN IN RED

The Murders in Whitechapel

While there is some discussion concerning which of the murders are committed by the same murderer, the orthodox view is five murders during four nights in the autumn of 1888.

During the last day of August 1888, twenty minutes to four in the morning, a worker on his way to work finds the remains of Mary Ann "Polly" Nichols, in Bucks Row, Whitechapel. Polly's throat has been cut after which her abdomen and genitals were severed. The cut to the throat is not clean; there is knife damage to Polly's teeth and tongue. Polly is a prostitute, a pattern later shared with all of the other victims.

A week after the first murder, on the 8th of September, Annie Chapman is found murdered in the alley of Hanbury Street. This murder is more brutal than the first. The abdomen has been cut open and parts of Annie's internal organs and genitals are missing. While the Polly murder makes the headlines, when Annie dies the newspapers are quick to point out the connection in brutality between the two murders.

The final day of September, the 30th, is instrumental for the Ripper mythology.

First, Elizabeth Stride is found mutilated in Dutfield's Yard. While there have been mutilations inflicted on Strides body, it doesn't show the same signs of carnage as the other victims. That same night the body of Catherine Eddowes is found in Mitre Square. Severely mutilated, parts of Eddowes abdomen have been removed. Her intestines are intertwined around her right upper arm and one of her earlobes is cut off.

The difference in disfigurement between the two bodies leads the police and the press to assume that the killer was interrupted in whatever post mortem rituals he were doing and had to start over again; the second time around he was undisturbed through the entire process. By now, the press is hysterical.

The final murder in the Ripper string of killings is the death of Mary Kelly, November 9th. Mary is killed in her own home; her body mutilated beyond recognition. The murderer has had ample time to thoroughly butcher Mary. The heart has been cut out and burnt on the stove. Mary's breasts lie beside her in a heap. It is hard to decide if the damage to the body has been applied methodically or through a rage.

And then, unfathomably, the murders stop. People are still killed in Whitechapel but the pattern for autumn 1888 is not seen again: A killer of prostitutes. Starts each murder with cutting the victims throat and then proceeds with mutilation of the body. In particular, the mutilation of the abdomen seems to serve some purpose. As time goes by, the murderer becomes more confident and the mutilations more brutal. The murderer may be a collector of trophies in the form of body parts and may have physiological expertise of some sort, but this is speculation.

Letters from Whitechapel

One cannot mention the Whitechapel murders without mentioning the letters written to the police during the autumn of 1888. While the murders themselves are sinister and gory, it is the letters from the alleged murderer that gives substance to the mythos of Jack the Ripper.

Of course, anyone can write a letter and send it to the police. You need to somehow prove that you are the one that you say you are. You might send a piece of the body, for example, or some kind of information not open to the public.

The reason that the myth of Jack the Ripper is able to flourish is that the police were totally unprepared for this, the first serial killer case ever reported. Nobody knows what information was available to the public or when, or what body parts belonged to which

bodies. One branch of the police force had no idea what the other part was doing!

Of the multitude of letters received, three are of particular interest. Two of these letters, "Dear Boss" and "Saucy Jack", are written in the same hand writing, one of these may displace information not known to the press at the time. A third letter, "From Hell", comes with a piece of an organ that may come from one of the victims. Added to our stew, it makes for a chilling story.

Dear Boss

This letter is received by the police September 27th, just a mere couple of days before the night of the two murders. It is the very first time that the name "Jack" is mentioned. What's in a name? Anything you want.

Saucy Jack

This letter is received by the police on October 1st, the day after the double murder. There may have been an opportunity for the writer of the letter to have heard about the murders from the very first morning papers.

Pieces of the Puzzle

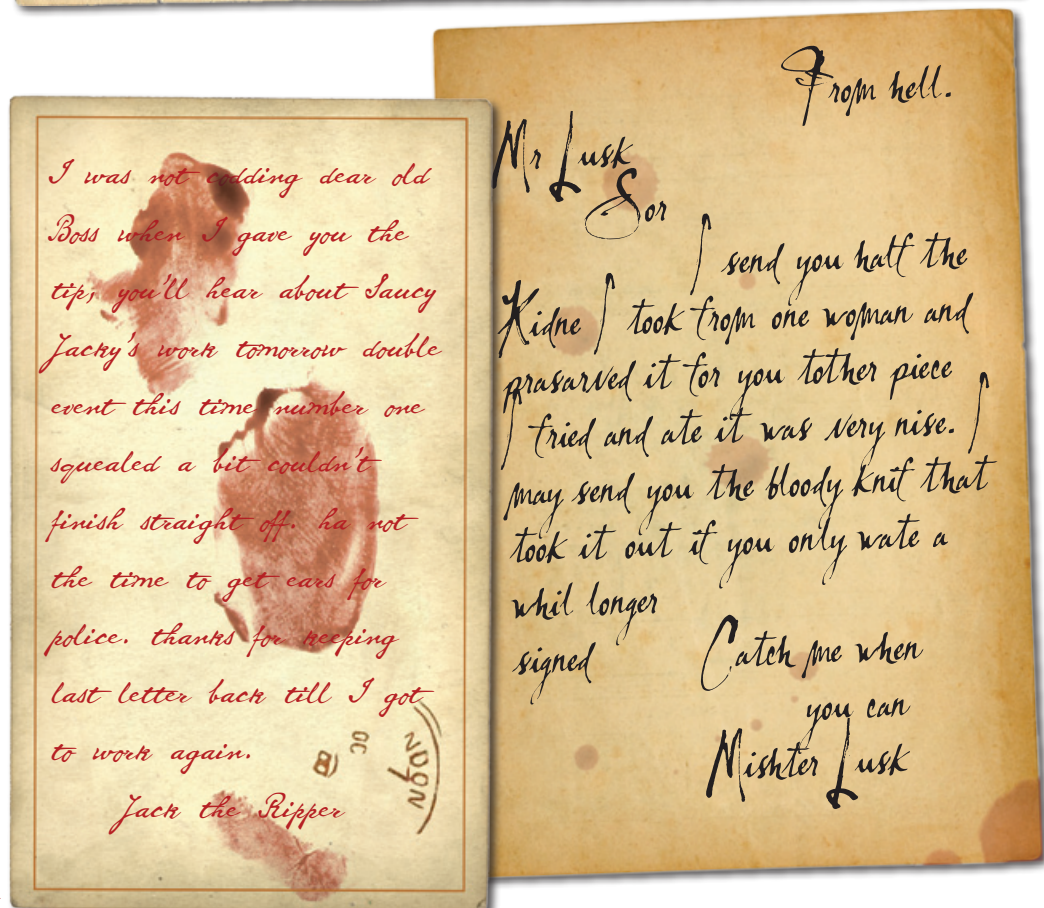
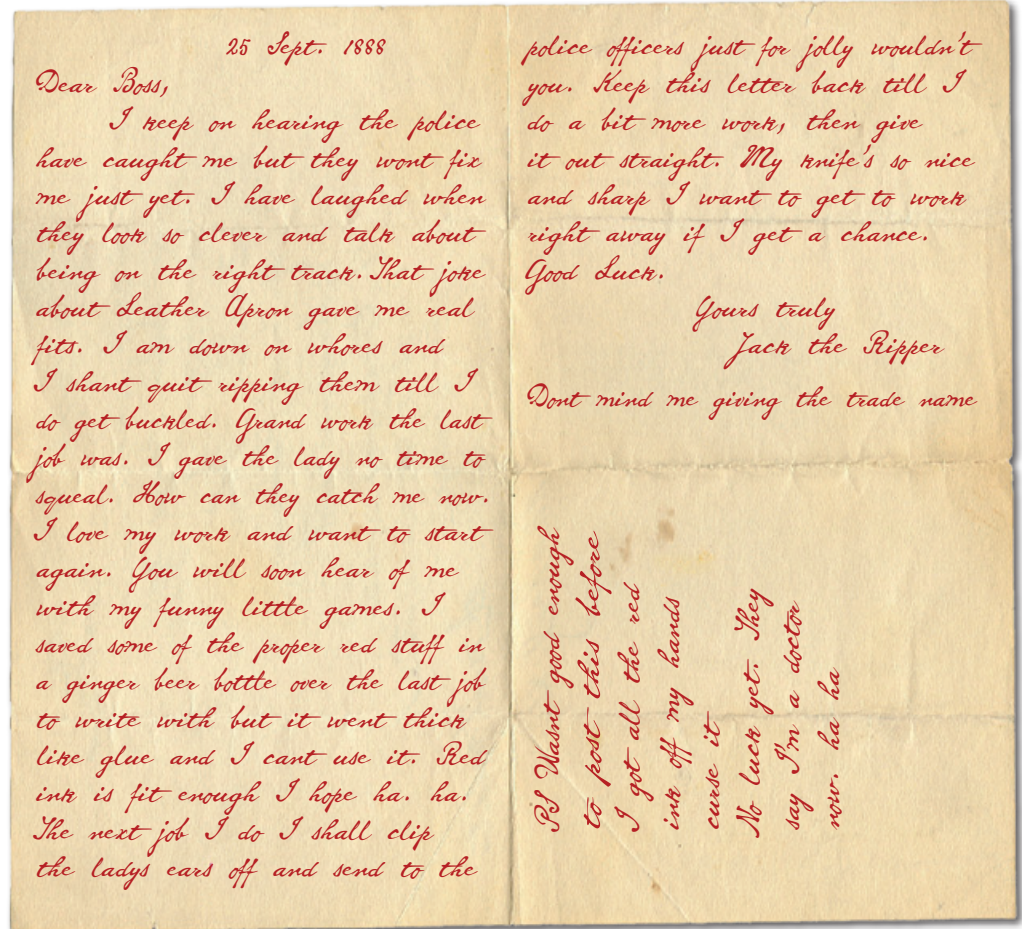
On the morning after the double event a bloody piece of cloth, probably from Eddowes apron, and some graffiti by a nearby wall on Goulston Street, a small step from Mitre Square is encountered. After having seen the writing, the police officer in charge orders the scribbling to be removed. Today, this kind of thinking from the officer in charge is downright alien, but at the time he probably was more focused on keeping order and avoiding riots against ethnic minorities than collecting evidence. The policeman that washed away the writing later remembered that is had the following text:

The Juwes are not the men That Will be Blamed for nothing

Leaving the obvious anti-Semitism aside, the Juwes are sometimes interpreted as Jubela, Jubelo and Jubelum, the three murderers of Hiram. It takes some faith to make this interpretation but let's do it.

From Hell

October 16th, between the double event and the last of the murders, George Lusk, the head of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee, receives an organ in a small glass jar together with a note.



ROYAL OCCULT CONSPIRACY

The victims of Jack the Ripper come from the lowest part of society. Prostitutes certainly represent the dark underbelly of Victorian society. They are also totally defenseless. By murdering whores the murderer points with his sharp knife toward the very parts of human nature that Victorian society eschews. But this is not enough. For the story of Jack the Ripper to really be a fable about the double nature of mankind the murderer must be someone from the upper class.

Of all these fables none are so rooted in modern ripper-ology as the *Royal Conspiracy*. This fable grows each time someone tells it but goes something like this:

Prince "Eddy", grandson of Queen Victoria and destined to one day wear the crown of British Empire, is mentally impaired. He wishes to live a secret life as an artist and shares an apartment with his friend Walter Sickart in Cleveland Street in the East End, under an alter ego. Scotland Yard knows of this and spies on the prince but doesn't interfere, instead reporting the prince's every move to the Queen.

Using his artist alter ego, the prince meets the young Annie Elizabeth Crook. The two become a couple. Then there is a secret wedding and because Annie is Irish the wedding is catholic. The Queen finally intervenes. Scotland Yard storms the apartment on Cleveland Street and interrupts the couple while making love. Eddy is returned to Buckingham Palace where he's more or less locked down. Annie is taken to the Bethlem Asylum.

Murders aplenty and a Baby

Enter Sir William Gull, a freemason and physician to the Queen. Gull is recovering from a stroke that has left half of his body impaired. He might also have had some occult experience, a sense of epiphany or ascension, during the time of the stroke. In short, he might be insane.

Gull takes it upon himself to clean up the entire mess. First he performs a lobotomy of Annie in Bethlem. Then he tracks down Annie's friends, the ones that were witnesses to the wedding, and finds them to be a circle of prostitutes. Gull ends up killing them all, one by one. At his disposal he has the resources of Scotland Yard and the Freemasons. He uses a coach to move and work undisturbed.

In variants of this fable, Prince Eddy himself is the Ripper, driven by hatred and syphilis. In another, Sickart is the killer, murdering as a response to an attempt at black mailing by Mary Kelly, who witnessed the events at Cleveland Street.

Sometimes there is a baby added to this story. Annie becomes pregnant and gives birth and the child is baptized during the secret wedding. The baby is theoretically the heir to all of Britain but of course this will never be allowed to happen. Somehow, the child is not present during the Scotland Yard raid but in the custody of one of the five prostitutes, Mary Kelly. Of course the killer doesn't know this but must order them all before he finds the baby, maybe disposed on the stove together with Mary's innards.

A baby that is the true heir of Britain is really just a variant of the *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* conspiracy, in which the baby is a continuation of Jesus blood line. The problem with these kinds of story lines is that unless blood magic is part of the setting, bloodlines are just cute bits of useless fact – it doesn't really matter if you are the heir to a king or a prophet unless you can cash in on it somehow.

As you notice, Mary Kelly gets the special treatment in more than one versions of the *Royal Conspiracy*. Having the somewhat dubious honor of being the ripper's final victim, some assume that her role is special. The circumstances around her murder also deviate somewhat from the others. For one, while the others were nearing their forties, Mary was still young. And why is she killed in her home while the others were murdered in the streets?

MY FAVORITE RIPPER

My favorite ripper candidate is Doctor Westcott. Not because it's plausible but because it's possible. As a doctor, a master occultist and founder of Golden Dawn, I can think of no better candidate for a juicy tale. Of course, to really make use of a master of the occult, we need some magic. It's time to define the Secret Masters to fit our tale.

Jack the Spirit

I'm now going to tell you how it might have happened.

Imagine Blavatsky in Tibet, travelling to the spirit world and making contact with spirits. Perhaps the Buddhist monks have told her that these spirits are benign, so she skips the protective magic circles that are otherwise standard in these circumstances. Now the spirits can tell Blavatsky anything, really, but it's best if the information given is exciting but complex. If Blavatsky's whole attention is kept, things might happen to Blavatsky's psyche without her knowledge.

While working as a medium or a writer, Blavatsky often let herself be possessed. It's

easy to imagine one of these spirits taking control of Blavatsky's body from time to time. One night, it might be many years after her trip to Tibet, the spirit writes a document in cipher. This cipher is used often in Hell and has been used in earlier times as common cipher between users of magic. The document describes the necessary ritual to reincarnate this spirit to the material world.

Enter Westcott. One day, while visiting Blavatsky in London, Westcott happens upon this document. It might be much later, maybe around Queen Victoria's fifty year celebration on the throne in June 1887. Recognizing its importance, he steals it. Blavatsky knows that Westcott is a prominent occultist. Maybe she has asked him to go through some of her papers in preparation for the finishing touches of *The Secret Doctrine*.

The Making of an Order

By august of 1887, Doctor Westcott has deciphered the document. In the process, Jack has connected with Westcott, entering his dreams and mind. A possession is close at hand.

The cipher is old but not ancient. Westcott has found the necessary keys in the British Museum, where he also has sat and worked. In the documents, Westcott finds the description of an order of two lodges, with five ranks within each. Westcott is instructed to fill in the details. He recruits Mathers and Woodman.

The story that Westcott tells Mathers and Woodman is this: Westcott has received the ciphered documents from Woodford. Following the leads in the document, Westcott has come into contact with a certain Frau Sprengel in Germany that represents Die Goldene Verdammerung. Sprengel has authorized Westcott to start an organization in London connected to this German order.

Or you can mix things up. Maybe there really is an ancient German order. When skeptics within Golden Dawn much later tried to track up Sprengel and Die Goldene Verdammerung there were no trace of them – maybe they went underground and covered their tracks for some reason. Or maybe Woodman has a larger part in the story. Who knows what he was up to before his death?

By March 1888 Westcott has finished all details for the Outer Lodge. At their first meeting the members of the Order number nine – incidentally the same amount as the number of Templars that moved into the Temple of Jerusalem almost a thousand years earlier.

The details of the Inner Lodge are still unfinished but Westcott hopes that this won't be an issue for some time.



Ritual Murders

One would assume the murders to be ritual in nature. If this ritual weren't sexual in nature but magical, the position of the murder scenes becomes important. Of course, any five dots can be made into a pentagram or equivalent.

Why these victims? Are they random or part of an attempt to clean up something? The royal conspiracy fails to explain how Gull, being incapacitated on one side of the body, would at all be capable to commit the crimes he is accused of. Gull may have asked his fellow mason Westcott for help.

How does this ritual work and what does it do? Anything that inspires you as a game master! The ritual could help the menacing spirit possess the child of Prince Eddie and Annie. As always, a really good Ripper story should not necessarily be plausible, but something mysterious and possible.

How does Westcott perform the murders? He needs a hideout in Whitechapel, but this

hideout doesn't have to be an apartment, it could be a cellar or an attic. If asked he needs an alibi, something that Westcott can surely produce if necessary. He needs a pathological mind which we will give him. Medical and occult knowledge is his already.

Also, for Jack our Secret Master, the advantages of stalking Whitechapel in the body of Westcott, as opposed to either Blavatsky or Gull, is that Westcott is able to move unhindered by a broken body.

The Murders and the Lodge

Of course, being possessed at night, possibly stalking for many more evenings than the night of the murder, takes its toll. No wonder that Westcott doesn't finish the material for the Inner Lodge in time for the first initiates to enter it.

Also, Mathers is no fool. Mathers is often seen as the bad guy in the aftermath of the Golden Dawn and it's for a reason. He's flamboyant, manipulative and dominating. Later

on he is known to threaten splinter group members with deadly magic from afar. With Woodman ill, Mathers and Westcott are the two persons left in the informal leadership of the order. Mathers surely would like to get ahead of Westcott.

Creating the Inner Order suits a double purpose for Mathers. He becomes the de facto power of the order but it's also a chance for him to shape the Inner Lodge to his liking.

Mathers and Westcott spend a lot of time at each other's homes, working with the order. Surely Mathers suspects something. Westcott is often sleepy. Westcott might be disorganized – maybe he wakes up with his clothes on with blood stains all over. Maybe Westcott offer Mathers some kidney pie the day after the double event...

Anyway, by late autumn, *The Secret Doctrine* comes out and Golden Dawn must take care not to lose momentum to the Theosophical Society. Maybe this is the reason why the murders stopped. Or maybe the Ripper succeeded in his ritual, whatever it was. ►



CLOSING THE CASE

The first time I wrote this article I made it in the form of an adventure with a fixed background story of what happened when. This time I chose not to do so. The campaign possibilities are rich and complex and any attempt to hammer out exactly what happened removes some part of the mystery that is part of the reason it is so intriguing in the first case. This way you can choose yourself what to use and what to avoid.

You could use this material as a backdrop to a *Bookhounds of London* campaign. The scenario in the rule book certainly complements the material herein although you must make adjustments here and there.

Or you can choose to enrich a *Golden Dawn* campaign with Ripper mythology. The events in this article occur years before Enochian chess, manors in Scotland, Crowley, Yeats, death magic, splinter groups, intrigue

and all the other niceties of Golden Dawn history.

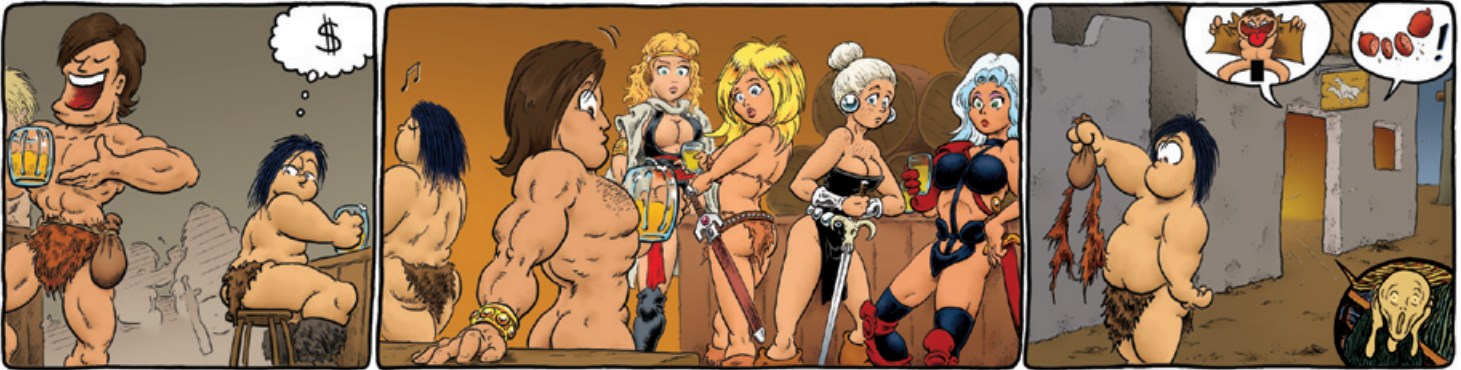
Or you can take any *Call of Cthulhu* scenario featuring a horrific cult-associated murderer and make it a Ripper incident.

Or you can just play the board game *Letters from Whitechapel* and imagine what happens outside the scope of the murder nights.

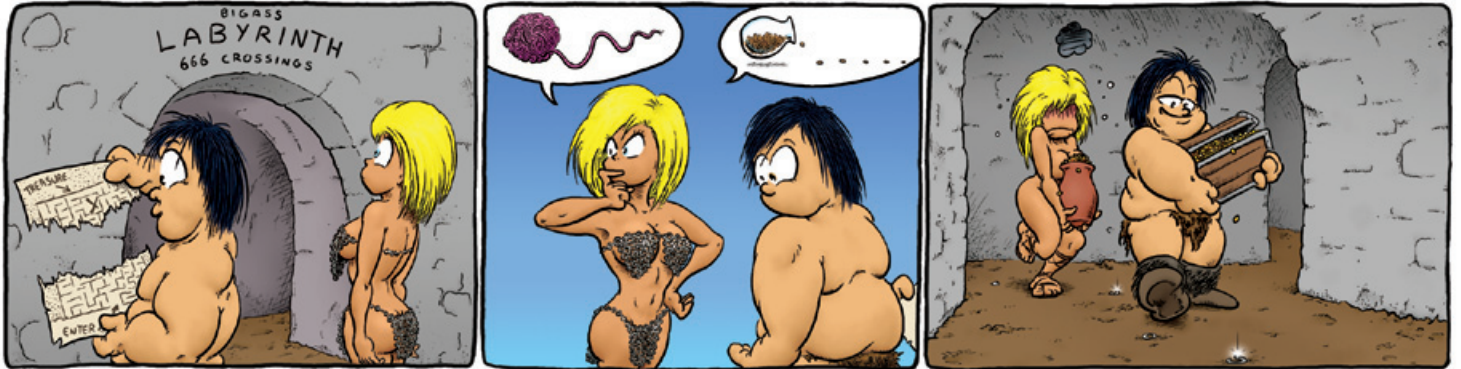
For reasons I cannot explain, I've always envisioned a Ripper campaign featuring all of the above, which somehow would culminate with the German invasion of Britain during World War II with the bastard grandchild of Queen Victoria in a leading role. I just never got around doing it. Maybe because while all parts may complement each other, if you put them all together they might not fit as neatly as you thought they were going to.

In conclusion, if you are going to craft any Ripper-related mystery; make it part believable, part implausible, part predictable and part unexpected.

BERNARD THE BARBARIAN - KING OF THIEVES



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN ON THE TRAIL



Story: Christoffer Krämer

BERNARD THE BARBARIAN IN HOLY MATRIMONY



LAST FLIGHT OF KG 200

A HORROR STORYTELLING GAME






TEXT **KENNETH HITE**
ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN**

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION **FENIX 2/2012**

"The thirty-thousand-foot level has been reached time after time with no discomfort beyond cold and asthma. What does this prove? A visitor might descend upon this planet a thousand times and never see a tiger. Yet tigers exist, and if he chanced to come down into a jungle he might be devoured. There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them."

– Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *"The Horror of the Heights"*

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

- Lots of six-sided dice, ideally in at least six different colors. If you're better than I am about keeping your dice sorted out, you can get away with fewer different colors. Here's one color scheme, but feel free to change it around; keep more dice handy for extra bonus dice.
- Red dice: **Blood**; three dice per player. 
- White dice: **Will**; three dice per player. 
- Gray dice: **Bomber**; three dice per player, plus four **Green** dice. 
- Black dice: **The Enigma**;  five dice per player.
- Blue dice: **The Sky**; five dice. 
- Index cards or small sheets of paper, or copies of the card forms in this article.
- Pencils or pens.

This horror storytelling game presents a desperate crew, flying out of the heart of darkness, into the heart of mystery. It might kill them all, or worse: reveal the truth they fly from. Somewhere in the night sky, Something is waiting. Waiting for the last flight of KG 200.

THE SETTING AIRFRAME

"I flew here and now belong to a special Kommando. Maybe this will be my last action. What it is about, I cannot tell you, we have been sworn again to secrecy. I can say only this to you; it will be the most dangerous action. My chances that I will return safely are extremely small."

– letter of Sergeant H.O. Hildebrandt, pilot in KG 200, written April 3, 1945

Kampfgeschwader 200 was a special unit of the Luftwaffe. Its pilots flew all sorts of aircraft on all sorts of missions, from long-range weather reconnaissance to suicide runs at Vistula River bridges. KG 200 captured and studied enemy aircraft – and flew them deep into Allied territory. They dropped off saboteurs and spies in the Ukraine and Iraq, and may have flown tungsten and uranium to Japan in a great circle over the North.

Other rumors are even stranger: that KG 200 flew foo fighters or flying saucers. That they sought Asgard or the Hollow Earth. That they flew the Spear of Destiny to Argentina, or Greys to the Moon.

The truth vanished with the Third Reich. The legends can still be seen, if you take the controls and look to the skies.



2012

THE RULES ENGINE

The Last Flight of KG 200 has no GM. Players take turn framing scenes. The scene framer establishes the conflict, decides what die pool covers it, describes events, and makes any other decisions necessary to set the stage for the scene. Players mutually interpret what specific rolls mean in story terms.

If the players wish, the player who has played most often can play the Kapitan, the officer in command of the plane – if not of the specific mission. Some groups may want the Kapitan, or even every member of the air crew, to be an NPC: instead, the players take the roles of the specialists or paratroopers or spies or other human cargo of the mission. Some groups may have a mix of characters: Luftwaffe, specialists, civilians, Gestapo – anyone who might be on a bomber heading far, far away from Germany in April of 1945 might be a character.

Character Creation

First, decide your character's name, and what he (or she) is doing on the bomber. If he is a Luftwaffe flier, you can pick a role – pilot, co-pilot, radioman, gunner, radar operator – or wait for something promising to come up during the game. If your character is non-Luftwaffe, you may want to decide ahead of time what exactly got him onto this flight, but you can stay the enigmatic passenger as long as the other players let you. Whenever you decide what you're doing on the plane, write it in the **RANK** and **BRANCH** line on the **CHARACTER FILE CARD**.

Leave the **SPECIALTY** blank for now; you'll determine it during play.

Every character in *The Last Flight of KG 200* has three **Blood dice** and three **Will dice**.

Blood Dice

Blood dice cover all physical actions: hitting people, firing machine guns, dodging shrapnel, torturing prisoners, piloting a plane, resisting poison – anything your body does is fair game for Blood dice. All characters have the same progression in Blood dice:

- At three Blood dice, you're **HEALTHY**.
- At two Blood dice, you're **WOUNDED**.
- At one Blood die, you're **CRIPPLED**.
- At zero Blood dice, you're **DEAD** and (at best) out of the game. (At worst, the **ENIGMA** now controls your lifeless husk.)

Put your three Blood dice on the right side of your **CHARACTER FILE CARD**.

Will Dice

Will dice cover mental and spiritual actions: navigating a plane, deciphering a code, activating a psionic death ray, operating an experimental invisibility field, casting a magic spell, bullying a subordinate, resisting hypnotic compulsions – anything your mind or spirit does is fair game for Will dice. Some actions might seem to straddle the line: is combat surgery, or playing the violin, more dependent on brains or hands? Whichever you decide for a given activity, stick with it for the rest of the game; other players have to use the same default you picked.

Every player writes their own Will “damage track” progression. Write down four stages depicting your character's likely descent into uselessness.

For example, one player might pick:

- 3 Will dice: **SANE**
- 2 Will dice: **TWITCHY**
- 1 Will die: **PARANOID**
- 0 Will dice: **HOMICIDAL**

Another might use this progression:

- 3 Will dice: **FINE**
- 2 Will dice: **SWEATY**
- 1 Will die: **COWARDLY**
- 0 Will dice: **FETAL**

It's up to you to roleplay your character based on their Will state, so pick descriptors you think you can chew some meaty scenes out of.

Secrets and Fears

Speaking of roleplaying, now's the time to dig deep into your character's black heart. You're flying a secret operation for Nazi Germany: you might be a “good German,” but you're not a *very* good German.

Every player character has a **DARKEST SECRET**, something horrible that they've done in the past:

- I bombed Coventry and enjoyed it
- I killed my girlfriend
- I served as a guard (or worse) in the camps
- I worship Nyarlathotep
- I ate human flesh on the Eastern Front
- I killed prisoners
- I let my wingman die and saved my own neck over Poland
- I strafed my own troops by accident

Try to avoid “light” **DARK SECRETS**. Plenty of things could get you killed in Nazi Germany, things you'd want to keep secret – but they aren't horrible. Don't pick something like “I worked to betray Hitler in 1943” or “I hide my Jewish ancestry.” Those can be your **FEARS**, if

you'd like: “The Gestapo will find out what I did” or “The SS will find out what I am.” Or you can go with some other standards:

- I'll be eaten by rats
- I'll die alone in the icy cold
- I'm going slowly mad
- I'll crack up under torture and betray Germany
- I'll be horribly maimed
- My insides will be full of insects crawling around
- I'll fail the Führer

Write your **DARKEST SECRET** and your **GREATEST FEAR** in first-person form on the **CHARACTER FILE CARD**.

Character File Card

Fill out a **CHARACTER FILE CARD** when you're done.

Bomber Creation

This is for all the players at once: Take a minute if you'd like, and figure out your bomber's name and type. If you're not big WWII aircraft nuts, just write in anything that sounds good for the name, and Junkers 290 for the type. In addition to most models in the Luftwaffe aerodrome, KG 200 also flew repainted and camouflaged Allied bombers: your bomber could be a Tu-2, B-17, or B-24 without any damage to historical accuracy. Because games about aerial monsters prize such things.

Put four Bomber dice on the left side of the card, in the **Critical Systems** area. Ideally, you should be able to differentiate these dice from the other Bomber dice: by size, color, numbers instead of dots, or whatever. This represents the systems or parts that keep the bomber physically up in the sky: fuel, engines, wings, etc. The specifics will vary during play: in one game, the bomber's electrical system might be critical; in another game, it goes out in a shower of sparks with no effect other than to add a **FLAW**.

Put all the rest of the Bomber dice on the right side of the card, on the **PAYLOAD** square. This represents all the stuff that can get damaged, used up, or otherwise handled during the adventure: e.g., the bomber's machine guns, its superstructure and chassis, and any cargo and NPCs aboard.

Don't worry too much about specific, historical performance issues of various aircraft: your bomber will be one of a kind. Its **FEATURES** and **FLAWS** will emerge during play, not based on what make of bomber you picked, although if any of the players are WWII aircraft nuts, they'll likely steer play toward those historical performance issues anyway. Good for them!

Bomber File Card

Fill out the BOMBER FILE CARD when you're done.

The Enigma

Finally, each player individually comes up with an ENIGMA – the horror in the skies that the bomber will encounter during the game. Don't tell the other players your ideas! Let them come up with their own horrors. Everyone submits their ENIGMA face down, and one of those will be the ENIGMA you're facing in the game.

For your ENIGMA, first decide what it is. What form does it take? What's its basic nature? Keep this as general as you'd like – a very specific ENIGMA can be harder to work into the game than a good, creepy, shadowy, vague one. Some sample ENIGMAS:

- A weird green cloud
- A portal to Hell
- Azathoth
- A vast bronze temple in the sky
- An immense tropospheric kraken
- A UFO mother ship
- A comet's tail

Next, decide what form its attacks or minions take. Again, vagueness is good but you can give some specifics:

- Zombies on the wing!
- Gremlins
- Hallucinatory seductions
- Really angry angels
- Foo fighters
- Vampirism
- Tendrils of cloud
- Protoplasmic tentacles

Finally, and most importantly, decide how the ENIGMA would get its hooks into your character. If your ENIGMA (your ENIGMA FILE CARD) is picked, you're going to wind up its hideous servant, so explain how your character would fall to its vile powers. You can involve your DARK SECRET or GREATEST FEAR, or you can just say "I get turned into a zombie by inhaling the weird gas." The first one might be more interesting to roleplay, but it's up to you!

Enigma File Card

Fill out the ENIGMA FILE CARD when you're done. Put all the ENIGMA cards face down, shuffle them, and select one randomly. Make sure nobody can tell whose ENIGMA was selected. Put the ENIGMA dice on the back of the selected ENIGMA card.

Character File Card

NAME: _____

RANK AND BRANCH: _____

SPECIALTY (UP TIP): _____

3 _____	WILL	3 HEALTHY	BLOOD
2 _____		2 WOUNDED	
1 _____	(DOWN TIP)	1 CRIPPLED	(DOWN TIP)
0 _____		0 DEAD	

BONUS DICE _____

DARKEST SECRET: _____

GREATEST FEAR: _____

Bomber File Card

NAME: _____ UNIT: KG 200

AIRCRAFT TYPE: _____

CRITICAL SYSTEMS	PAYLOAD (3 DICE/PLAYER)
4 _____	MACHINE GUNS, BOMBS, ETC.
3 _____	SUPERSTRUCTURE AND CHASSIS,
2 _____	SPECIAL CARGO, EXPERIMENTAL DEVICES,
1 _____	PASSENGERS, GOLD AND TREASURE, ETC

BONUS DICE _____

FEATURES _____

FLAWS _____

Enigma File Card

WHAT IS IT?

WHAT FORM DO ITS ATTACKS (OR MINIONS) TAKE?

HOW DOES MY CHARACTER FALL TO IT?



Dice Mechanics

Each party to a conflict builds their dice pool – which will depend on the specific conflict – and rolls those dice. Players usually base their pool on either their Blood dice or their Will dice, often with additional Bomber dice added. Usually, the scene framer decides whether players use Will, Blood, or their choice.

Compare the results: the high die wins the roll. If the high die ties, resolve the conflict based on the number of high dice, then by the second-highest die, then by the number of second-highest dice, and so forth. In case of a complete tie, the scene framer wins.

- So pool: 2 5 5 loses to pool: 1 1 6
- Pool: 1 2 2 3 4 4 loses to pool: 2 5
- Pool: 1 2 2 4 4 6 loses to pool: 1 1 3 4 6 6
- Pool: 1 2 2 4 6 6 loses to pool: 1 1 3 5 6 6

Remove all ones from the table. Those dice are lost forever. If any sixes are showing, the loser then returns all his sixes to his card; the winner returns an equal number of sixes to her card.

- Loser rolled: 1 2 2 4 4 6
- Winner rolled: 1 1 3 4 6 6

Both remove all ones, loser and winner both return one 6 to their card.

- Loser now shows: 2 2 4 4
- Winner now shows: 3 4 6

Winner and loser then rank their dice in order and compare them: winner's best to loser's best, winner's next best to loser's next best, and so on. For each die the winner has that's

higher than the loser's matching die, the loser loses that die. Once a winner's die ties or is less than the loser's matching die, the roll ends.

- Winner's 6 beats loser's 4;
- Winner's 4 ties loser's next 4. Roll ends.

If the loser has lost no dice (except ones), he loses one die unless the only die he could lose shows a 6.

Resolve multiple conflicts in reverse order: If Anna beats Bob who beat Claire, resolve Bob vs. Claire then Anna vs. Bob.

Tips

Under some circumstances, you may get to (or have to) tip a die. An “up tip” lets the player change a die to show one number higher: change a 4 to a 5 or a 2 to a 3. A “down tip” lets the player's opponent change a die to show one number lower: change a 5 to a 4 or a 2 to a 1.

Ones and sixes never tip.

If you are the first player in the game to use a specific piece of gear or a specific skill, it becomes your **SPECIALTY**, and you get one up tip whenever you do that. No other player can choose that specialty; write it on your **CHARACTER FILE CARD**. Only one player can have an up tip in any Player vs. Player conflict. The scene framer decides whose specialty dominates in such cases.

Any character whose **FEAR** or **SECRET** appears in the scene must take one down tip.

Characters with only one Will or one Blood die left must take one down tip in all conflicts,

regardless of which pool they rolled. Characters with only one Will and one Blood die left must take two down tips in all conflicts.

Bonus Dice

Some conflicts award you bonus dice. Put them in the **BONUS DICE** section of your **FILE CARD**; they're your “soak pool” or your “armor.” If you have a bonus die, you can always lose it instead of a die you rolled, even if you rolled a one. Put the “lost” die back on your **FILE CARD** – it's still out of the conflict – and lose a bonus die instead.

Frozen Dice

Some conflicts result in frozen dice. For the rest of the game, a frozen die stays on the number it rolled during that conflict. If it's used in another conflict, the player doesn't roll it: it automatically shows its frozen value. The only way to change a frozen die is to tip it; it stays frozen at its new, tipped value.

Scene Mechanics

The Last Flight of KG 200 is played in three acts, each of which is divided into scenes. A scene centers on a conflict. Players narrate the specifics of the scene based on the results of the dice rolls; the scene framer provides any other needed flavor and resolves any differences in the direction of drama, horror, and mystery.

Conflicts come in three basic versions: **PLAYER VS. PLAYER**, **PLAYER VS. SKY**, and **PLAYER**

vs. ENIGMA. The scene framer determines which pools players use (Blood or Will) if it's not obvious from the context. Players stabbing banshees with bayonets will use Blood, even if the airmen take howling damage from Will.

Player vs. Player

The framer pits her character against another character: a screaming match over the mission plan, an attempt to talk a coward into proper German obedience, a fistfight with an arrogant Gestapo political officer, etc. (If both other players agree, the framer can set up a conflict between two other characters.) Any player can join either side by paying the scene framer one die.

Lost dice (except ones) become bonus dice. The winning side is the side with the highest winner; all winning side allies split bonus dice evenly. Extra dice go to the framer, or (if the framer lost) to the high roller on the winning side. Winners can use bonus dice to replace dice bid to enter the scene.

Player vs. Sky

The framer pits the bomber against an outside, but non-supernatural, force: storms, enemy fighters, a sudden downdraft, heavy winds. Any player can join the framer for free. The player to the framer's right decides whether the SKY will roll three, four, or five Sky dice. The framer then rolls a die: this is how many total Bomber dice the players can add to their Will or Blood pools. The framer divides the Bomber dice among the participating players.

The bomber loses one Critical System die for each Bomber die that rolls a one. If the bomber loses all four Critical System dice, roll another PLAYER vs. SKY contest between two players (pilot and one other) and the Sky. The Sky rolls five dice. If the players win, they all survive the landing. If they lose, the bomber crashes, and the players die – unless someone can propose a really good miracle. If the story continues on the ground, Sky dice might still represent partisans, enemy soldiers, weather, or wild animals. Grounded players can salvage one Bomber die apiece from the wreck. Salvaged Bomber dice simply disappear if they roll a one.

Lost player dice are lost, or can be taken from the bomber's Payload. Lost Sky dice (except ones) are added to the bomber's Payload. Each winning player gets one bonus die (for three or four Sky dice) or two bonus dice (for five Sky dice). The framing player gets one extra bonus die, win or lose.

For every Bomber die that rolls a six, define some feature of the bomber that proves exceptional: a sonic cannon in the bomb bay, an amazing climb rate, a cargo of silver. In future scenes, referencing that FEATURE gets an

up tip on one Bomber die. For every Bomber die that rolls a one, define some flaw in the bomber: its wings ice up too easily, its tail is phasing out of reality, it's haunted. In future scenes, the framer must reference that FLAW and give one Bomber die a down tip.

Player vs. Enigma

The framer presents a threat or puzzle stemming from the Enigma. If a player uses her Will pool against the Enigma, she may freeze any dice (except ones) the Enigma rolls; the Enigma loses dice (except ones) from its unrolled stock. This represents learning something (ideally, a weakness) of the Enigma. The framer decides whether any player can join for free, or if they must pay a die to the framer to join: does the Enigma threaten the whole plane, or one player?

The number of dice the Enigma rolls depends on the Act: three dice in Act One, five dice in Act Two, seven dice in Act Three. The number of Bomber dice available likewise depends: the result of one die in Act One, the best of two dice in Act Two, and the best of three dice in Act Three.

The framer divides the Bomber dice among the participating players. The framer decides whether dice lost by the players come from Will, Blood, or from the Bomber. The framer decides whether ones on Bomber dice represent Critical Systems damage (gremlin tearing at the wing!) or just lost Payload (expended ammo, killed NPCs, short-circuited cloaking device). All players beaten by the Enigma lose dice simultaneously.

The Story

Unless everyone is just fizzy with ideas, or there are only two players, letting each player frame one scene in each act can produce a game that can lag or feel overly padded. Every group's rhythm is different, however: decide when to shift based on the feel of the story. You may find that your group needs to add more dice to the Enigma, or remove some, for the kind of game you want.

All players should respect the story: don't overtly contradict something another player said, don't change established details of the bomber or mission, don't negate emotional moments, don't defuse fights or panics. That said, feel free to introduce twisty details or surprises as needed: "You heard that from Bormann, did you? He's always hated you – why do you suppose he told you that?" Or "In the bomb bay, you find a strange, glowing cylinder labeled in Czech. Apparently this isn't only a weather mission." Or "I never react like that normally – it must be this horrible howling noise. What do you mean, you don't hear anything?"

Acts One and Two

The Kapitan's player begins and frames a scene: chooses a conflict and determines the pools involved. This scene may establish the bomber's mission – flying gold to Argentina, or uranium to Japan, or testing a time machine, or just checking the weather and praying for a hard freeze to delay the Soviet onslaught – or the framer may leave the mission to be defined later in play. Of course, the mission discussed in the first scene may be a cover for the real mission, revealed in a later scene.

If there is no Kapitan, then the players may bid to frame the scene: the first player to offer a die gets to frame the scene. He must lose that die in the scene conflict, no matter how the roll turns out. If no player bids, then the blondest player frames the first scene.

After the first scene, resolve scene framing in this order:

- The next player to bid.
- A player who wants to frame an Enigma scene.
- The player to the left of the last scene's framer.

No player may frame two scenes in a row. If only one player has not yet framed a scene, they frame the next scene.

Act One must have at least one PLAYER vs. ENIGMA scene. Act One must have at least two scenes.

Act Two must have at least three scenes, including at least one PLAYER vs. ENIGMA scene. If at all possible, the Enigma must affect or reference at least one player's Fear or Secret.

Act Three

Reveal the Enigma. The player who wrote that Enigma now frames a PLAYER vs. ENIGMA scene involving the Enigma's minions or extrusions attacking the bomber. During that scene, try to explain or work in as many details already revealed or established about the Enigma as you can: "Apparently, the comet's tail turns people into vampires!" "The gremlins must be the UFOs' pilots!"

The next player in the order above now frames a scene. This can be a PLAYER vs. ENIGMA scene or a PLAYER vs. PLAYER scene to reveal the Enigma player's perfidy or weakness: "You're behind this!"

Finally, the Enigma player frames another scene in which his character is turned by the Enigma. His character and the Enigma oppose all the other players in a climactic battle. Roll two sequential conflicts in this scene. End the story appropriately, in hot blood and icy terror thirty thousand feet above nowhere.

GOLEM

TEXT **ÅSA ROOS**
ILLUSTRATION **OLA LARSSON**

From the depths of a soulless body, a roar filled with anxiety and despair rises. The roar is so heartbreaking and tragic that the fear of this rebellious creature fades and is replaced by pity. Through darkened and foggy streets the heavy footfalls of a clay behemoth can be heard. This creature was made to protect, but it has broken free of it's bonds. Now, it's looking for a purpose.

The people it was made to protect are cowering behind closed doors, shivering with fear, as it slowly makes its way across the wet cobblestones. It's a safety and a threat. Who knows when it will break free and try to take what it doesn't have – a soul?

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C. LARSSON . 2008

The legend of the Golem originates in Jewish mythology. It's a creature made entirely from dead matter and then brought to life by its creator. Since God, according to the faith, is the only creature that can give rise to perfect, ensouled life, the golem is a creature lacking both a consciousness and a soul.

Only those with extensive knowledge of the Jewish scriptures, specifically the cabala, can create this type of life. To strive for this knowledge is to strive to reach godhood, and only a truly holy person can, according to myth, create a golem.

But a human being can never be God or be as God, and because of that, a golem can never be perfect. It is said that the biggest flaw of a golem is that it can't talk. If the golem should somehow possess that ability, the golem would also become self-aware, something that is seen as incredibly dangerous. A golem is a thing. A thing that hasn't got the same abilities and skills as a human being, and is therefore very unstable. To give a tool awareness is a very dangerous experiment, something that is noted in many different kinds of stories about the golem.

The most well-known golem myth is that of Rabbi Judah Loew. In the 16th century he created a golem to protect the Jewish ghetto in Prague. According to the legend, the Emperor decreed that all Jews should be driven out of the city or killed. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Loew built a golem from the clay of the river Vltava, and gave it life. The purpose of the golem was to protect the Jewish population of Prague. Shortly after its creation, the golem started to act up, murdering the non-Jewish population in the city. As the terror spread across Prague, the Emperor promised to stop the persecution of the Jews, as long as Rabbi Loew made sure that the golem was destroyed. Rabbi Loew agreed and turned the golem off by erasing the first letter in the word "aemaeth" – the truth of God – from its forehead. By removing the first letter, the words spelled "maeth" – death – and the golem stopped working. To make sure that the Emperor kept his word, the golem was placed in a casket in the attic of one of Prague's synagogues, where it is still resting, ready to be brought to life in a time of need.

Another very famous golem is the creature built by Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's book *Frankenstein*. The monster in Shelley's book is a warning – just because science allows us to create life, should we? And what consequences will that have on the life created? Victor Frankenstein is driven by the thirst for knowledge. His creatures are a combination of modern medicine and ancient alchemy, a marriage between the rational and the irrational, creating an unexpected

result for the young scientist. Frankenstein's purpose was to create a beautiful creature, but what rises, awakened to life, scares him so much that he rejects the creature. The creature in turn learns after many attempts at interaction with human beings that the only thing it can expect is hatred, disgust and fear in the face of its terrifying visage. The creature itself does not understand the frailty of life, but it learns. The abandonment and feeling of being on the outside is something many can identify with. So is the endless thirst for vengeance, that finally drives Victor Frankenstein to his death.

The most apparent use of golem in science fiction are robots, and one writer who excelled in giving voice to the fear of human-like machines was Isaac Asimov. Asimov used the three laws of robotics in his stories about robots – laws that have become more or less pervasive since then.

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

These laws are put out of order by Asimov himself a couple of times, allowing the robots to rebel. Asimov's stories are in large part about suspicion and fear. The people who populate his universe are scared of the constructed beings that populate it, something he himself talks about as a "Frankenstein complex" – the fear of artificial beings.

Another example of golem stories is the movie treatment of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick. *Blade Runner* is an excellent example of most of the themes that pop up time after another in the golem mythology. The fear of technology (Think about it. Why is it so important to hunt the escaped replicants? Their life is short.), arrogance in the name of science

and the contempt of that which is "less than" human. How come the contempt towards these "skin-jobs" is so strong? Is it because they, in their constructed humanity, are more than human? Better, stronger, more beautiful and therefore frightening?

There are also examples of golems used as entertainment. In the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Dr. Frank-N-Furter builds a man, Rocky, to use as a sex toy by the scientist himself. His plans are interrupted when a young couple gets a flat tire outside of his mansion. The innocent young lovers manage to mess up his plans and the creature turns against its slavery.

THEMES

There are a couple of themes that return again and again – the artificial human, the tool that rebels, the limitations of science. The most common theme is hubris. To create life is to equate oneself with God, raise oneself to the same level as the divine. Hubris is pride and arrogance. It is disregarding ethics and morals because one deems oneself above it. Hubris is a strong theme in most stories where a creator believes that the creature made can be controlled, only to find how disastrous that notion is.

Another theme is rebellion. A tool realizing its own value, or starting to question the rules it lives by. In the original story of the golem, the golem rebels by attacking the non-Jewish population of Prague. In *Frankenstein* it's the creature seeking revenge on its creator, and in the robot stories it's about how the robots circumvent the laws of robotics and by doing that, casting off the yoke humanity has placed on them.

The pursuit of humanity is also a strong theme. The creature in *Frankenstein* trying to find a home and a purpose in the dead flesh it has risen from and the humanity it used to belong to. For the replicants in *Blade Runner* it's about equality to humans. They know they're superior, but they're treated as slaves and their life span is considerably shortened. They're fighting for survival since they know they are superior, but the knowledge that they've been engineered make them feel subhuman. They can strive to become human, but they can never reach that goal. An excellent example of this struggle for humanity is Lt Cmdr Data from *Star Trek the Next Generation*. He is also aware of his superiority, but he doesn't see it as something positive, rather he sees it as an obstacle. His "brother" Lore is not only aware of his superiority, but he also despises humans. He views them as less perfect than himself. Lore's contempt motivates him to destroy any humans he comes into contact with.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF A GOLEM

Since the golem is such a broad myth with so many different possible interpretations, I thought I'd give some examples. In the myth there are a bunch of strengths and weaknesses that you can play around with when game mastering a campaign.

In a horror setting, the golem can represent the constant threat. Like the Terminator, a being that just won't give up until it is completely destroyed. An enemy that gets up time after time, exhausts the ones it is pursuing, until literally nothing is left of it. Depending on context, there are different ways to stop it. A "real" golem can only be destroyed by erasing the words on its forehead, and even then it can be tricky, if you're not the creator of the golem.

Another interpretation of the horror golem is the replacement of conscious life with automatons. Ira Levin wrote *The Stepford Wives*, a horrifying tale of the women in a small town being replaced by robotic copies of themselves. Previously self sufficient and career minded women are being turned into obedient housewives, waiting on their husbands. There's a creepy, apocalyptic feel to the book, paired with uncertainty and paranoia. Is this really how it is, or is there another explanation?

A modern take on the artificial human being could be to destroy or - why not - hack it and give it new instructions. In both these cases the trick is to get close enough to break through the outer defenses, and not even that may be enough. A self aware golem will not just give up, and its fear of death may be just as great as that of a human. A golem can never be certain it has a soul.

For the Frankensteinian creature, the qualms are existential. It's a treatment of something that once was alive and now has to handle not only a patchwork body but a new identity. How can you reason with a creature driven mad by sorrow, anxiety and an existential crisis? What drives such a creature? Are there any motives even comprehensible for a normal human being? How would it feel to kill such a creature? Is it possible to return it to humanity and raise it? Or is it too late the moment it wakes in the lab of its creator? What sins can be forgiven due to innocence? How much damage can a golem cause before it condemns itself and its kind to death?

ADVENTURE SEEDS

These are a few adventure seeds building on the mythology of the golem. You can use them as you see fit. All can be tweaked to all kinds of different game worlds.

There's also the option to let the players play golem characters. It may turn out to be

an interesting adventure, where the players discover that they're not what they think they are, but instead created with a purpose hidden from them. One example of such a golem is "Boomer" in *Battlestar Galactica*. Boomer doesn't know she's a cylon, but she suspects it, and reacts accordingly when she finds out. She's a cylon agent, and she has no control over her own actions. Letting the characters fight against such powerlessness is probably something that you should discuss within the group before using. Having the game master suddenly declaring that the player has no control over her actions is probably not going to be very popular.

The Missing Body Parts

The characters happen upon a village where the mistrust towards strangers is high. The reason being that the village has suffered from grave robbery for a long time. The graves have been emptied, not of valuables, but of bodies. If you want to ramp up the controversy, it's not the dead people missing body parts, but living. People are found close to death with their hands, kidneys, feet or eyes stolen by a thief, that according to the survivors is hard to identify.

The perpetrator can be a person out to create the perfect human being or just as Victor Frankenstein set out to cheat death. It may be a golem trying to replace the body parts it feels is the reason behind its outcast state.

The Smith

Inspired by Vulcan, the god who built his own automaton servants, a weapon smith has been stricken by the same desire. He's trying to create a child by creating a mechanic person, and in his loneliness a mechanical child is just as satisfying as a real one.

When the smith dies, his "children" go out into the world to discover it. Inspired by the smith's own contempt for humanity, and especially humans near the smith's dwelling, the children start dismantling the people they run into. Bodies are found, dismantled with mechanical precision, nerves exposed and organs placed with care next to the bodies, like objects at an exhibition. The golems themselves are unaware of their crimes. They can pull themselves apart and then together again, so why would it be impossible to pick apart a human being in the same way?

If you want to be slightly sadistic and confusing, let them succeed. They pick a human apart, and then put it together again. The result is a person with scars all over the body and strong memories of pain and death. Madness isn't impossible. Now the characters suddenly have to contend with more golems...

In Cover of Darkness

A golem has in its wanderings come across a beautiful human being that it is more and more attracted to. It's a love that borders on obsession, and the golem has started to neglect its other duties to be able to watch the human it has fallen in love with during the nights. The emotions are too strong for the newly awakened golem and when the person has suddenly found a partner (preferably someone from the group of characters playing), the jealousy is too much for the poor golem.

In a rage it will attack the characters and pursue him or her relentlessly until it itself has been destroyed or until the character is dead, alternately until the relationship is over.

The Protector

An area that the characters have to get into at any price, is guarded by a powerful golem. Its creator is long since dead. The area protected is wonderful and ancient. The characters may have to get into the place to find a cure for a disease or some other noble goal. One of the golems protecting the area is starting to become aware of its own self and its mission. When the characters arrive at the place it becomes interested, and doesn't act as the other unaware machines guarding the area. In some way it starts a conversation with the characters, and is vital to get the other golems to stand down.

When the characters want to leave, the golem won't let them go. This is the first contact it has had with humans since it became aware, and it wants to learn as much as it can from its visitors. The characters will have to find a way to extricate themselves from the golem's care. It has an army at its disposal and it has the power to stop them.

The Spy

An organization, a company or a court suddenly find that all they say and do seem to be known by their rival. Plans are upended and not even the inner circle are safe from the spying. It turns out that the rival has infiltrated the organization with a golem, an obedient artificial human being that doesn't know it's the puppet of the rival.

When he/she finds out and is confronted with overwhelming evidence, it is struck by the need for revenge and kills the rival that created it. This is of course a problem. The golem was a highly placed individual in the inner circle, and it has now killed of a rival. How is this reflected back on the company/organization/court? How does one prove that the golem is a golem? The characters must find evidence that the rival is the cause of his/her own death, or there will be a war.

51 MYTHOS DOOMS

TEXT **KENNETH HITE**
ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN**
& **MAGNUS FALLGREN**

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“The increasing thunder must have affected my dreams, for in the brief time I slept there came to me apocalyptic visions.”

– H.P. Lovecraft, “*The Lurking Fear*”

If Lovecraftian gaming offers anything, it is opportunities for apocalypse. The universe of the Cthulhu Mythos is so dangerous, so replete with opportunities for catastrophe, so hostile to the very concept of human existence, that it almost drives one to Derlethian heresy in an attempt to explain how we got this far. This can be exaggerated, of course. Most Mythos threats are long-dead (except for that one survivor ...), impossibly obscure (except for that one tome ...), or simply uninterested in mankind (except that one cult is trying to attract them ...), so the human race and indeed the planet Earth has a brief respite before Something awakens, emerges, or approaches. Perhaps as long as a century.

Since almost any Mythos entity might trigger the apocalypse, this column offers a choice of dooms, one for every entry in the *Trail of Cthulhu* core rulebook. Feel free to mix and match: Dagon’s rise might free

Ithaqua, the Yithian destruction of the time stream could awaken the Flying Polyps, or rival cults could summon Cthugha and Hastur simultaneously. Lots of room for multiple dooms, in other words. Use this column not just as a menu for destruction but as an ongoing inspiration for your ongoing Cthulhoid campaign, in whichever system you prefer. These dooms needn’t close off play, in other words: they can drive it.

Any of these dooms could be merely the plan of some cult, sorcerer, mad mathematician, or dream-worker encountered in your scenario. You don’t even have to necessarily introduce the monstrosity involved: a few thematic hints, a mysterious bas-relief, and an eerie dream or two can be enough. One eerie dream can become a whole series of nightmares, revealing the true extent of the horrific cataclysm looming over mankind. Are they visions of the hellish future, or perhaps

windows into alternate dimensions? Only the Keeper knows for sure. With time-travel and non-Euclidean gates in the campaign, the investigators can visit either one!

As a final possibility consider setting a one-shot or trilogy scenario in a Mythos-doomed future – or an alternate past! What if Cthulhu rose in 1925, or Wilbur Whateley’s twin escaped in 1928, or the Deep Ones of Innsmouth completed their shoggoth, or the Dark Haunter escaped from Federal Hill Church in 1935? Some of these dooms leave some humans alive: run an entire campaign in the ruins of human civilization, using *Cthulhu Apocalypse*, *CthulhuTech*, *Eclipse Phase*, or your own favorite dark Mythos horror system! Possibly some Yekubian cube or Yithian projector remains intact in a remote ruin – if only the investigators can recruit a cult, decipher the necessary tomes, and bring about the end of the end of the world ...



AZATHOTH

"Then, crushing what he chanced
to mould in play,
The idiot Chaos blew Earth's dust away."

– H.P. Lovecraft, *The Fungi From Yuggoth*

Azathoth already fell to Earth, at Tunguska in Siberia in 1908. Or rather, the impact of that event was Azathoth's attention, the bow wave of his immanence. Nuclear enlightenment, nuclear experiment, nuclear attack, and nuclear terror followed: the human race signing its name in the irresistible book of Azathoth. Then the ever-increasing disasters: Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Fukushima, Indian Point. Azathoth grew closer. The missiles detonate in their silos, the reactors explosively melt down, and all organic life inhales radioactive cesium, strontium, iodine, growing new life out of their cells' death. Their death howls, the air whistling out from boiled eyes and burnt throats, become flute music heralding the nuclear idiot Chaos.

BYAKHEE

These insectoid, necrotic creatures travel through deep interstellar space in great flocks, tens of millions of creatures folding space-time with membranous, metalloid wings. And now a flock descends on Earth. Their wings disrupt and wash out atmospheric signals: everything from radios to auroras goes wild and unpredictable. Their hideous visages drive cities mad; their insatiable appetites for dead flesh and dense metal tear the heart from industrial civilization and devour it as it rots. Mankind has a new apex predator – and it prefers carrion.

CHAUGNAR FAUGN

Chinese massacres of Tibetan protesters pour blood into the streets of Lhasa, built of stones where Chaugnar Faugn once drank deep. Chinese generals know only that they must spill more blood there; the dreams they awakened tell them to. Civil war grips China, a wave of blood-draining killers pours into India, nuclear exchange kills millions more. Other mountains demand other sacrifices, more blood for long-forgotten footprints of the Horror From the Hills: in the Pyrenees, the Ruwenzori and Atlas, the Pamirs and Urals and Sangre de Cristo and Andes. Any man you encounter might seek only to drain your blood onto a shard of rock he carries, to gain favor and surcease from the time-lost horror of Chaugnar Faugn.

COLOUR OUT OF SPACE

That forgotten, blasted patch of ground kept expanding, deep under the Arkham Reservoir. Now, it explodes out of the Reservoir, growing steadily and implacably by 13.14% each year. In 28 years, Worcester County erodes. In 40 years, all of Massachusetts disappears into gray, fibrous death. In 108 years, the whole surface of the world dies, and a new Colour congeals from the ionosphere.

GTHUGHA

Fires are easier to start, harder to extinguish. The oxygen content of the air is the same as ever; something about fire itself has changed. Badly maintained cars explode, cheap stoves destroy apartment blocks. Third World cities burn down just after their forests do, but the developed world buys itself time with inert gases, new alloys, steam turbines, atomic power: anything but burning fossil fuels. But when even a match-head can torch a room and the masses starve everywhere, it only takes a spark ...

GTHULHU

"The time would be easy to know,
for then mankind would have become
as the Great Old Ones; free and wild
and beyond good and evil, with laws
and morals thrown aside and all men
shouting and killing and revelling in joy.
Then the liberated Old Ones would
teach them new ways to shout and
kill and revel and enjoy themselves,
and all the earth would flame with a
holocaust of ecstasy and freedom."

– H.P. Lovecraft, *"The Call of Cthulhu"*

It began with those in power, killing enemies of the state, or their relatives, or anyone nearby. Then the rich and famous start hitting people with cars, throwing them out of buildings, infecting them with designer diseases. Neurologists spot accelerated limbic system activity in social spree killers, associated with brain areas evolved while mankind was aquatic. Crime burgeons, becomes a ratings winner, becomes a sport with endorsements, becomes mass spectacle and Olympic feature. Religious fanatics, ironically, hold off the "Cthulhu complex" slightly longer: their

own much-exercised temporal-lobe systems protect them. Of course, they launch their own crusades and jihads where they can: killing "Cthulhu" becomes a holy duty of all religions as memetic conflict turns physical. Riots become uprisings, vendettas become civil wars, cities become battlefields, nations become killing grounds, the world becomes as R'lyeh.

DAGON

Dagon returns to his ancient cult site in Philistia – now, the Gaza Strip. He crushes tanks, swats helicopters from the sky. His attack on Jerusalem triggers a nuclear response from Israel. Nine months later, every woman downwind of the explosion – for instance, the entire female population of Cairo – delivers a baby with gills and flippers. After this spawning manifests, Dagon emerges from the Persian Gulf and stalks toward Tehran ...

DAOLOTH

It is uploaded onto five global television networks, YouTube, 58 major media websites, and a third of all smart phones on New Year's Eve. A forty-second image of Daoloth, rendered in bright magenta and cyan by an anarchist mathematician, himself lynched on January 3. But that doesn't heal the two billion people blinded, and it doesn't cure the 175 million driven insane, and it doesn't prevent six hundred or so people from uploading their own visions of the Render of the Veils in the next forty days.

DARK YOUNG OF SHUB-NIGGURATH

Finally, a use for M. Night Shamalyan's film *The Happening*!

DEEP ONES

"No use balkin', fer they was millions of 'em daown thar. They'd rather not start risin' an' wipin' 'bout human-kind, but ef they was gave away an' forced to, they cud do a lot toward jest that."

– H.P. Lovecraft, *"The Shadow Over Innsmouth"*

- Step one: Get and read a copy of John Wyndham's novel *The Kraken Wakes* (published in the U.S. as *Out of the Deep*).
- Step two: apply what you have read.

DHOLES

A dreamer opened the Way from Pnath to the waking world, or a meteor from Yaddith fell to Earth. Is there a difference? The dholes crawl up through ancient graveyards, and burrow beneath volcanoes. Anywhere near century-old bones, or on a tectonic fault line, the ground ripples and roils like an apple full of tapeworms. Quakes blast cities to rubble; seas destroy coastlines; long-dormant craters blast magma like bursting blisters. High and remote desolation remains safe for now, as most of the dholes dig their way to the Earth's core, leaving only the weakest and most hateful ones behind to scavenge the surface.

DIMENSIONAL SHAMBLERS

A rogue archaeologist working for the dictator of Turkmenistan discovered the Rune. The dictator used it on all his enemies: unstoppable beings dragged them Away, never to be seen again. His enemies included some very angry terrorists. They dragged the Rune out of the dictator's cronies and used it on him. And then on their own enemies, who vanished from the Kremlin, and the White House, and many other no-longer secure locations. Leaving behind several very competent, or very wealthy, and very determined intelligence services. They found the Rune, too. It's getting easier to find.

ELDER THINGS

The Antarctic creatures had learned from the shoggoth revolt: every species they created thereafter would have an emergency shutoff subroutine, hard-coded into its genetics and controlled by the Earth's magnetic field. After two encounters with human expeditions in the 1930s, the Elder Things rearmed the subroutine they had built into proto-humanity. This year, they activate it. 99.9% of humans drop dead as their liver suddenly stops filtering toxins and turns their blood to sludge. The survivors, beneficiaries of fortunate genetic drift or fortunate positioning inside MRI machines, catch only pieces of the alien "reboot" signal and respond with OCD, self-mutilation, or frantic obsessive cleanliness: human reproduction stops almost completely.

FLYING POLYPS

"It was evident that the coming doom so desperately feared by the Great Race – the doom that was one day to send millions of keen minds across the chasm of time to strange bodies in the safer future – had to do with a final successful irruption of the elder beings."

– H.P. Lovecraft, *"The Shadow Out of Time"*

Nine flying polyps can generate a hurricane-force windstorm. There are hundreds of thousands of flying polyps buried beneath Australia. When they emerge, they blow the cities of man to splinters, raise waves hundreds of feet high, tear crops from the soil and cover the world in dust and salt. See John Barnes' novel *The Mother of Storms* for a description of their first strike.

FORMLESS SPAWN OF TSATHOGGUA

Black, viscous things swim deep beneath the earth. Accidentally fractal fracking pulls them out, through the shafts and pipelines, into the tankers and refineries. They expand, drinking deep of the hydrocarbons, reshaping them into new blood for their race. They achieve symbiosis, communication, control over petroleum: animating it, channeling eldritch power through it, bringing themselves into being wherever it flows or pools or sits in plastic. And then they strike.



GHATANOTHOA

John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* tells the first part of the story: all grasses and grains begin dying off. This is the first seal of Ghatanothoa's return. In fabled Mu, the priests of Shub-Niggurath opposed his rule; in his second reign, his gaze strikes at her foundations in fertility. The animals die next: worms petrifying under the soil, mammals slowly turning to leather, birds' bones ossifying. The land becomes stark and bleak, dried to a husk. Only under the sea does life survive, protected by dark water and perhaps by Deep One manipulation: humans in submarines ponder launching nuclear warheads against the new Mu.

GNOPH-KEH

Amid the frozen ruins of Commorion, the Things From the Snows set up a song. A hymn? A cry of loneliness? A ritual programmed into their blood and bones by long-vanished Eibon? Perhaps the latter: they re-open his Door to Saturn. A wormhole snakes out from Greenland to the surface of the ringed planet. The temperature plummets and Saturn's killing pressure blows freezing hydrogen all across the Arctic as gravity liquefies the Earth's northern crust. Mankind can only wait and watch as Saturn once more devours his children.

GOL-GOROTH

Global warming or volcanoes take the ice from his Antarctic island of Bal-Sagoth, and the Fisher From Outside rises once more. His servants gain fell magics, his priests convert multitudes where his power is strongest: lands laved by southern seas, in Argentina and Africa and Australia. He rules a dark and hungry theocracy, restoring human sacrifices in his ancestral temples in Mexico and Arabia, ruling everywhere south of the human population midpoint, 27° North Latitude. New cults rise in the north, in Hungary and Colorado and Siberia, waiting to restore Gol-Goroth to an Arctic throne and seal his rule over the earth.

GREAT RACE OF YITH

"Certain troublesome consequences [were] inherent in the general carrying forward of knowledge in large quantities. ... The few existing instances of clear transmission had caused, and would cause at known future times, great disasters."

—H.P. Lovecraft, *"The Shadow Out of Time"*

The sleeper Gita Nagy awakened early, and transcribed virtually the entire contents of the *Pnakotic Manuscripts* – in their clear, pristine original form – online before the Yithian agents could silence her. Religions fall, universities are dynamited, mobs storm ancient ruins demanding initiation, cults rise and slay. Then the disasters begin, triggered by nihilistic madmen: use as many of these other dooms as you wish.

HASTUR

Scenes from an apocalypse: *"The Scream"* by Munch. *"The Visage of War"* by Dali. *"The Garden of Earthly Delights"* by Bosch. *"Collective Suicide"* by Siqueiros. *"Europe After the Rain"* by Ernst.

HOUNDS OF TINDALOS

Archaean mites travel to the present, nestled in the Hounds' scales. They fall to the ground, drinking in the oceans of nitrogen in this far-future world. Methane billows from their blooms; in this brave new ecology, nothing holds them back. The atmosphere heats, the tropics boil, fires erupt where methane storms send lightning through oxygen.

HUNTING HORRORS

They beseeched Nyarlathotep to give them an aeon of darkness, and he granted it. Photons folded in new ways and the Sun ceased to shine. The Horrors emerged in the hot close eternal night, fearing nothing. Arc lamps or searchlights defend some cities for now, but the power will not stay on forever.

ITHAQUA

The glaciers are once more on the march: the caps of the Alps, the Andes, the Rockies, the Himalayas devour the valleys as the poles freeze solid. Stockholm, Chicago, Moscow die under the ice. Blizzards tear at Algeria and Florida; deserts become tundras; icebergs sail the Caribbean and the South China Sea. A remnant worships triumphant Ithaqua in the forests of the Congo and Borneo and Brazil, and prays the final snows stay away.

K'N-YANI

Something has happened to the K'n-Yani half-human steeds: a blight or pest kills them by the millions. With no food, no slaves, no workers, the half-astral cannibal race must expand out of their mounds or die, even if it means reawakening the inhabitants of lightless Koth and returning to the worship of feared Tulu. Fortunately, all that stands in their way is humanity.

LEMURIANS

"I dream of a day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind – of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium."

—H.P. Lovecraft, *"Dagon"*

Lemuria rises again in the Indian Ocean; Blavatsky's wheel reverses. The Lemurians sink North America and Northern Eurasia, drowning their mightiest foes before they can respond. The human root-race spends itself in wars, as the global climate collapses: everywhere, the Cyclopean beings raid and ravage, mindless and malignant.

LLOIGOR

Three epidemics rise exponentially: cancer, self-poisoning with cocaine and stimulants, and suicide. Madmen and visionaries and holy men say invisible monsters are driving us to those triple deaths, and propose counter-measures. Every so often, a mysterious explosion destroys a research station, or a power plant, or a church, and we hear less of such talk.

MASQUT

Their Nameless City destroyed by a flood, they prefigured the death of Irem. Now they reappear as ghosts and harbingers. Where they do, the city suffers its True Fate: Hiroshima and Berlin and Beijing evaporate in nuclear glory, London and Chicago and Moscow and Tokyo burn, Los Angeles and Tehran collapse in quakes, Mexico City and Naples die by volcano, New York and Baghdad topple into chaos, New Orleans and Houston and Miami and Shanghai drown.



MI-GO

"They will not hurt us if we let them alone, but no one can say what will happen if we get too curious about them. Of course a good army of men could wipe out their mining colony. That is what they are afraid of. But if that happened, more would come from outside – any number of them. They could easily conquer the earth, but have not tried so far because they have not needed to."

– H.P. Lovecraft, *"The Whisperer in Darkness"*

MORDIGIAN

The Great Ghoul has opened the Doors of Death wide, welcoming as many as he can to his domain before the final war begins. Every basement, cellar, subway tunnel, ditch, canyon, and well now leads to his domain. Those inside when the Doors opened became ghouls, returning to the streets and joining the horde of ghouls pouring out of cemeteries on jihad to convert the living trapped high in towers and on rooftops.

MORMO

The moon falls ever closer, looms ever larger, impossible tides smash coastal cities to jam, earthquakes pour poison gas into the sky, lunatics range through the streets, wolves hunt in parks and suburbs, owls attack children, poisoning cults run rampant. Mormo, the Thousand-Faced Moon, draws herself down to us.

NIGHTGAUNTS

They have stopped hearing Nodens, or he has turned his hoary countenance against us. We cannot know, for we can only speak to Nodens in sleep, and when we sleep the nightgaunts come for us in dreams and we die in hysterics. Only a few of us are left: a few mutants and experimental subjects with destroyed or artificially dormant sleep centers. We live in a world of corpses, blaring music, stimulants, and nonstop communication across all time zones, trying to keep ourselves awake and sane. None of us can rest, not for an instant. If we sleep, we die.

NODENS

Those who have seen and dreamed true beauty are made inviolate, invulnerable, invincible by

Nodens' touch. They may do as they wish, slay and hunt for His glory. Hope to dream, dream yourself to Ooth-Nargai before the hounds of Nodens, maddened by beauty, come for you.

NYARLATHOTEP

"Once we looked at the pavement and found the blocks loose and displaced by grass, with scarce a line of rusted metal to shew where the tramways had run. And again we saw a tram-car, lone, windowless, dilapidated, and almost on its side. When we gazed around the horizon, we could not find the third tower by the river, and noticed that the silhouette of the second tower was ragged at the top."

– H.P. Lovecraft, *"Nyarlathotep"*

Nobody sees what you see. You have your own senses, but nobody else's. You cannot communicate your vision; your words garble in strangers' ears. Perhaps you starve, if you eat dirt or poison. Perhaps you die if you walk into the ocean. It matters not. You are alone in a sea of billions of minds, each voyaging alone to the ultimate destination – the Crawling Chaos.

QUACHIL UTtaus

Cause no longer leads to effect. Genghis Khan ravages Asia again, coleopteran creatures rebuild Switzerland to their liking, dinosaurs roam Montana. Time is undone, and every escape leads around to the prison gate. Every escape except one, except nonexistence.

RAT-THINGS

The witch cult dwindles, leaving the immortal, sorcerous rat-things bored and malevolent. They breed with rats, raising up their own cult as they create pack intelligences and new rituals to inhuman gods. Rat-cults swarm cities, rat-kings commandeer human slaves, rat warlocks strike at human resistance from hidden angles and hyperspace. Humanity has a new rival species, more vicious than even we ever were.

SAND-DWELLERS

The Sahara expands to the Mediterranean. The Great Plains return to dust. The Caspian Sea evaporates. The sand-dwellers have found some Sigil to expand their wastes. They come with the sandstorms, and they never leave. Isolated desalination stations in the mid-▶



Atlantic, tankers full of fresh water in the Pacific, Antarctic stations built on submarine atomics melting the icecaps: they wait and watch and work to reverse the Sigil while the continents dry up, covered by shifting sand.

SERPENT FOLK

The Valusians seek to reclaim a nicely warming world. Their sages enhance a form of protothecosis, an algae that blinds of all mammals, and spread it on the winds. It's John Wyndham's *Day of the Triffids* with serpent-men instead of walking plants.

SERVITORS OF THE OUTER GODS

The flute music begins somewhere in Morocco. It hops to a ray album, then onto YouTube. Then people whistle it. Compulsively, those near them whistle it too. It shows up in commercials, in movies, in TV shows, spreading the tune everywhere. It shorts out dialogue and thought, ends human conversation and contact. Nothing but whistling and flutes, resounding over the globe, billions piping for the attention of a blind idiot god.

SHAN

I have no idea what you're talking about. The world is just as you knew it then, or perhaps more honest. The secret torturers now work in the open, to be sure. The drones watch all of us, not just those in other lands. The elect rule us openly, with pain-whips and clairvoyant agonies, not in hidden ways. The churches now proclaim their allegiance to blind Chaos, rather than cloaking it in pious mummery. The tiny scars in our leaders' skulls are but minor changes compared with these.

SHANTAKS

The shantaks appear and take anyone who wants to go, in congregations or alone. They cannot be killed or stopped. They appear when you hate your job, despair of your future, quarrel with your spouse, are wounded by your children. They take you away. Fewer and fewer people remain, organizations collapse with anyone able to withdraw at any time. The world gradually empties.

SHOGGOTH

Invulnerable, shape-shifting, protean beings that can grow to the size of subway trains, use magic, reproduce by fission, and lift battleships. Do I need to explain how they destroy civilization? Really?

SHUB-NIGGURATH

Vegetation, animals, fish, birds, worms, bacteria, viruses: if it can breed, it does. Cities become jungles, and jungles become cathedrals to the glory of the Black Goat of the Woods with a Trillion Young.

SONS OF YOG-SOTHOTH

"I shall go to those poles when the earth is cleared off, if I can't break through with the Dho-Hna formula when I commit it. They from the air told me at Sabbath that it will be years before I can clear off the earth, and I guess grandfather will be dead then..."

— H.P. Lovecraft, *"The Dunwich Horror"*

SPACE-EATERS

They set up a standing wave. That's what the cosmonauts think, trapped on the International Space Station. The alien wavelengths, if that's what they are, finally overloaded the Earth's harmonics, and turned global electromagnetism into a standing wave that simply disintegrated brain matter. Perhaps a few Stone Age tribes survive, if they had no iron deposits nearby to focus the magnetic fields. Perhaps a wooden ark made it into a silent stretch of the ocean. Perhaps.

STAR VAMPIRES

A brave band of investigators casts a spell to eradicate the star vampires forever. It doesn't quite succeed; instead, it locks them into symbiosis with compatible human minds. The cruel, the barbarous, the sadistic find themselves capable of flight, invisibility, and great speed, and monstrosity strong to boot. The only catch – they must drink human blood to survive for more than 24 hours. This can begin as 30 Days of Night, and end as *I Am Legend*.

TCHO-TCHO

A form of hemorrhagic fever virus, Nipah virus, emerged in Malaysia in 1999. It spreads by breath, moisture, or any physical contact. 60% of people who contract it become comatose, dying without mechanical life support. There is no cure, and no vaccine. See *Contagion* and then read *The Stand*.

TSATHOGGUA

It strikes Tsathoggua as amusing to end gravity, or to shift it. Like an infant with a new

toy, he rattles and shakes physical law in the core of the Earth, blasting cities into space, tearing continents loose from their moorings, and holding jungles aloft by sheerest whim.

XOTHIAN

"Soon from the sea a noxious birth began;
Forgotten lands with weedy spires of gold;
The ground was cleft, and mad auroras rolled
Down on the quaking citadels of man."

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Fungi From Yuggoth*

Y'GOLONAC

Tiring of his playthings, Y'Golonac utters base words re-wiring human connections between sex and death. His missionaries spread the word: "Tell her 'Glaaki vulthmm doel' and she'll do anything. Anything." Copulation becomes orgiastic violence as the meme expands – the celibate survive for now, hunted by feral rapists. See *"The Screwfly Solution"* by 'James Tiptree' for inspiration.

YIG

Snakes! They swarm everywhere, aggressive and deadly. Tiny kraits kill generals in their beds; great sea-snakes short out tankers of liquid natural gas and send them to fiery ruin in Djakarta or Los Angeles or London. Cobras and mambas and rattlers kill where they can, and madden survivors. A remnant of mankind retreats to sealed chambers for now, but unable to touch the snake-infested soil, they can choose only between swift poison and slow starvation.

YOG-SOTHOTH

"It will be ripe in a yeare's time to have
up ye Legions from Underneath, and
then there are no Boundes to what shal
be oures."

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*

Joseph Curwen, Simon Orne, and Edward Hutchinson may have died at the last, but they were not the end. Other worshipers of Yog-Sothoth can read Borellus, and apply industrial methods to those hand-crafted 18th century rituals. Corpses rise in armies from enormous cemeteries in India, France, Egypt, and China; their sorcerous reanimators prepare to smash the living and rule the world of the dead.

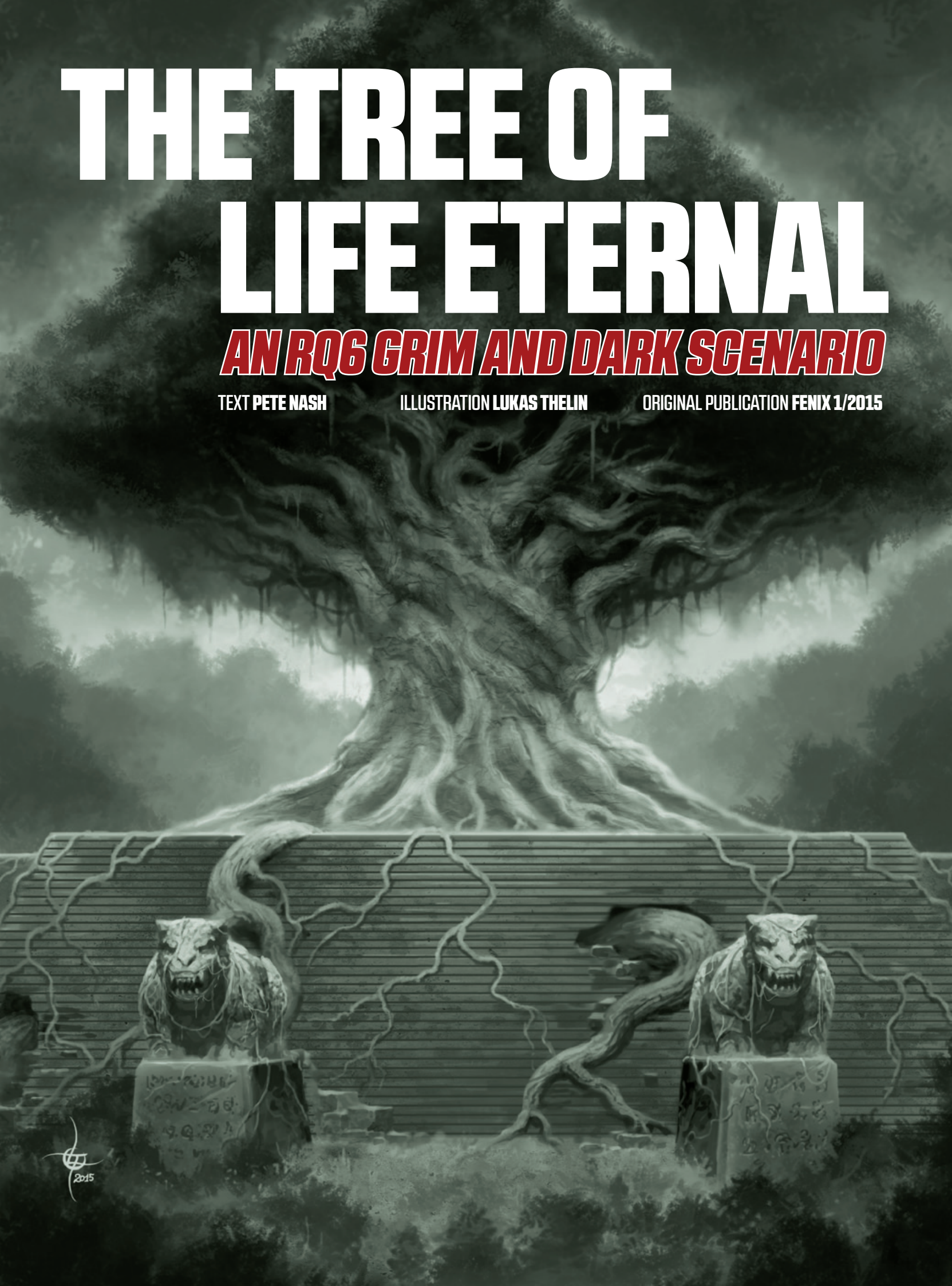
THE TREE OF LIFE ETERNAL

AN RQ6 GRIM AND DARK SCENARIO

TEXT PETE NASH

ILLUSTRATION LUKAS THELIN

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In the world of science fiction and fantasy writing, Grimdark has lately come to be used as a pejorative – a derogatory critique of style or themes, not admired by the reviewer. Yet stories embracing aspects of grim darkness have been central to human literature since the earliest tales ever written.

Of course as language evolves, terms and their meanings change also. For some people, Grimdark is the exaggeration of violence, overt description of morally unsavoury acts, inclusion of gritty aspects of everyday life, the loss of objective good and evil for shades of grey, and even the fact that a tale ends unhappily.

To those that hold such views I say, bah humbug! The very first story ever recorded, that of *Gilgamesh*, is the epitome of excessive violence, both murderous and sexual. He steals, is selfish, mourns the death of Enkidu, suffers utter darkness as he travels through the underworld and upon completing his quest, has success (and immortality) snatched away from him. Homer takes these themes even further in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, especially the gruesome combat scenes and tragic endings which befall almost all the Achaean heroes.

After four thousand years, not counting innumerable fairy tales and mythology, grim and dark fantasy tales emerged once again; amongst which the phantasmagorical stories of Lord Dunsany, R. E. Howard's Conan stories, and the fatalistic scribbles of Clark Ashton Smith are highlights. The grandfather of High Fantasy, Tolkien himself embraced such sentiments as selfishness, treachery, murder, bigotry, racism and the inevitable fall of civilisation before the tides of darkness. Even he incorporated torture into his stories, and although not described with relish there are few books grimmer than *The Silmarillion*.

Modern sentiment has turned its back on the enthrallment offered by the dark, tragic griminess of older adventure tales and pulps; replacing it with the fallacious concepts that good always conquers evil, heroes always survive and there are no negative consequences to acts of 'justified' slaughter. Nowhere is this more clear than in many Fantasy Role Playing Games, especially those written in the last few decades.

So in a direct rebuttal of the fluffy, fantasy of la-la land, allow me to introduce a *RuneQuest 6th Edition* scenario of pure grimdark heritage, where combat is brutal, morals are questionable and a quick nasty death lurks around every corner!

ONWARD TO ADVENTURE

The Tree of Life Eternal is a one-off scenario designed for a single 3-4 hour session of fast paced play. It was originally written for Eternal-Con in Germany, then rewritten for GenCon in the United States, as an introduction to both the *RuneQuest 6th Edition* rules and *Monster Island* – a deadly, old school sword & sorcery setting. Pregenerated characters are provided at the end for those for those not wishing to incorporate it in their own campaign.

No knowledge of *Monster Island* is required to run the scenario, as it is a self contained plot. The scenario is basically a treasure hunt, not for gold, but the secret of immortality. The characters have been thrown together out of necessity, rather than friendship or trust, since expeditions into the island are almost suicidal for lone adventurers. Its tone should be thought of as the tropical hell portrayed in *Agarrie the Wrath of God*, combined with the film noir striving of the treasure seekers in *The Maltese Falcon* and action adventure of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. For those who would like to run it as an actual 1930's noir, simply replace the archaic weapons with firearms instead.

Pacing is especially important. If needed, the characters should be hustled along towards the dramatic, and ultimately ghastly, ending without granting them respite to recover. Techniques such as using strange noises, the glimpse of light reflecting from gold, or the arrival of slow moving, yet threatening monsters can spur them into action so that they don't spend overly long debating what course of action to take. That's not to say the characters shouldn't interact amongst themselves at all, just keep them on track and if possible, a little unbalanced.

SYNOPSIS

Somewhere on Monster Island, isolated by a ring of impenetrable mountains, is a hidden valley. According to native savages only the greatest of heroes is permitted to find this wondrous place, and retire to the ruby palace of Xanzoga in peaceful bliss, surrounded by fabulous artworks of a long-fallen civilisation. Only a handful of more knowledgeable scholars know of a greater secret – that within this vale is the ancient Tree of Life Eternal, the fruits of which are rumoured to grant athanasia and the ability to regenerate any injury or illness, no matter how fatal.

The truth is far more sinister. Whilst the legendary valley is recounted to be a pleasure garden of heavenly delights, it is actually a nightmare of unchecked, choking jungle filled with carnivorous plants. The ruby palace exists, but has fallen into doleful ruin, the

once magnificent inhabitants reduced to mindless zombies infested with fungus-like growths. The sap of the strangely alien, gnarled Tree of Life does indeed grant immortality, but at the price of turning the drinker into an ageless botanical sentinel, a side effect of its malignant, demonic vitality.

It should be noted that none of the characters are expected to survive this dire expedition. It is when and how they die, which should be the climax of their enjoyment, whether from foolhardy greed, excessive bravery or backstabbing treachery. Unless fate is guiding them, nobody should emerge alive. A true, *GrimDark* experience!

INTRODUCTION

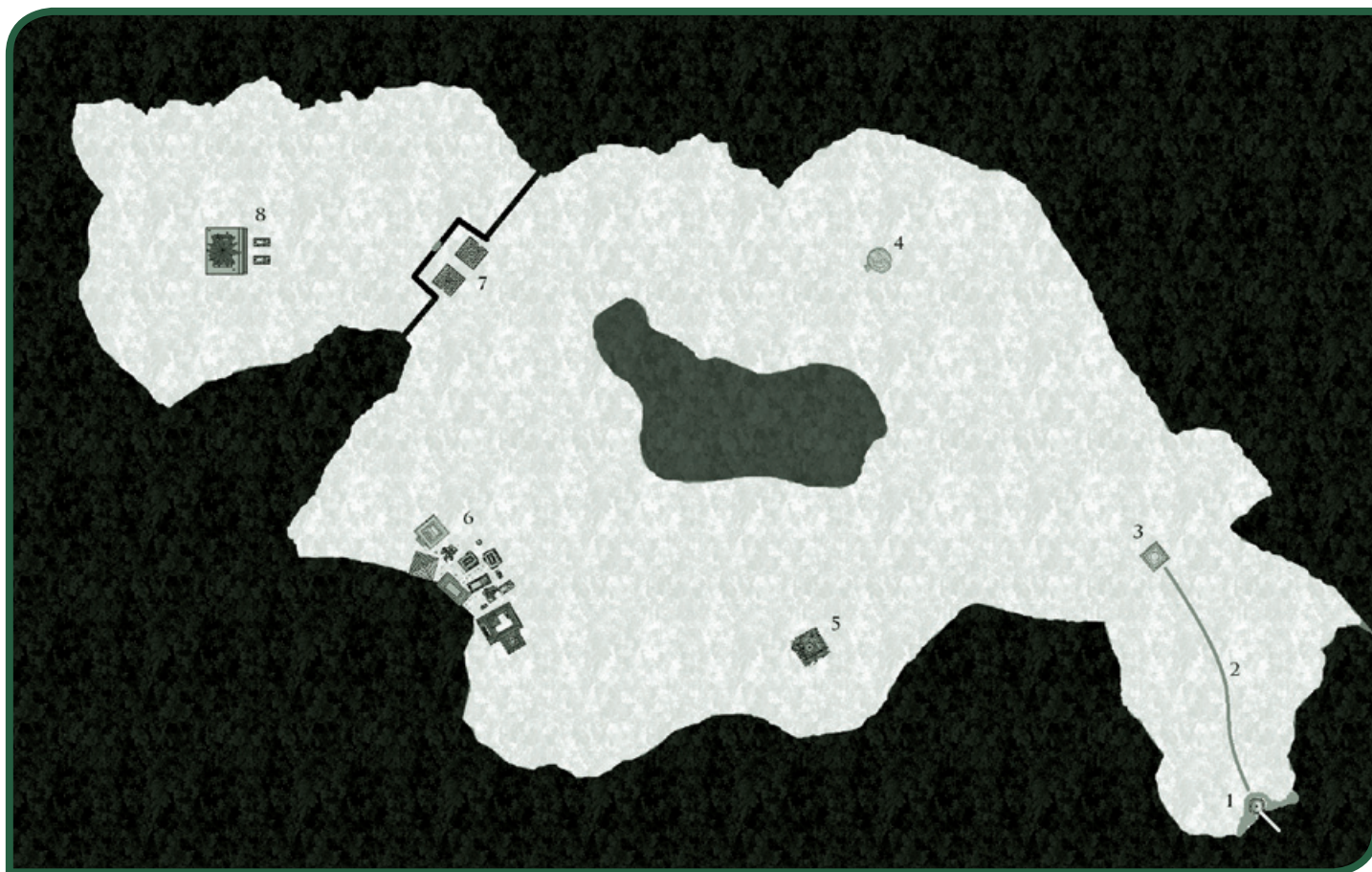
(to be read to the players)

Growing up you all heard fables about an island of mysterious wonder. For some it was a place of hidden treasures, secreted in its deep jungles by ancient emperors and buccaneers alike. Others learned it was filled with eerie ruins of a mighty civilisation, which ruled the entire world before its apocalyptic collapse unknown millennia ago. Above all were the tales of titanic monsters that roamed its steep volcanic slopes.

For many years you each sought out rumours or dug through musty scrolls to garner vague hints of where the island lay, undertaking journeys to backwater ports and surviving by quickness of blade or mastery of wickedness. Nonetheless you prevailed, finally falling in together as mistrustful partners and hiring a dilapidated trader to risk passage to the legendary place before hurricane season, on promises to pick up a cargo of strange artworks, exotic animal skins and nefarious drugs.

Arrival was more of a letdown than you could have imagined. The settlement was barely more than a fortified trading wharf, run by unscrupulous men who cheated the devolved natives and drunk themselves into oblivion to preserve their fading sanity. The atmosphere of the jungle was oppressive, a mysterious dread radiated from its green hell. Yet something hooked into your gut refused to let you remain cautiously behind the rickety palisade.

So you negotiated with the natives for escort into the interior. The last of your combined funds purchased bearers, so damnably inbred that their limbs were weirdly twisted and skin almost scaly, to guide you to the lost valley. Several days later the tattooed natives vanished into the night, and you were forced to rely on crude maps and fragments of forgotten knowledge to hack your way to its hidden entrance.



Alone and isolated, you finally beheld a monumental gateway cut into almost sheer mountainside. Climbing a dangerously narrow trail you arrived at a mighty pair of bronze doors tarnished with verdigris, trapezoid in shape, thirteen metres or more in height and five across. On either side a colossal stone sentinel of a serpent headed man, whilst before them upon a pyramidal dais, a huge, brown stained offering bowl.

Now in the wan light of your flaming torches and the crescent moon, you gaze upon the faded majesty of this final portal. Everything you have ever dreamed of lies beyond those mighty doors. Assuming your 'friends' can be trusted, you only need complete the ritual to unlock them and your desires will be realised now and ever more ...

ENTERING THE VALLEY

All those wishing to enter the hidden valley must pass via the mighty bronze portals, which guard a tunnel dug through the surrounding, sheer mountains. Using brute force to open the doors is beyond the physical strength of the party, however if the eroded hieroglyphs are translated by someone with the LANGUAGE (AN-

CIENT) skill they reveal a rite to ceremonially unlock them (see *Player Handout 1*).

Performing the 'Ritual of Opening' requires the spilling of human blood into the offering bowl as the light of dawn shines upon the bronze doors. The quantity of blood needed imposes an ongoing FATIGUE LEVEL of TIRED on the benefactor if performed by only a single donator, but in compensation will bless them with 1d3+3 extra LUCK POINTS for the adventure. If the blood sacrifice is shared, there is neither any Fatigue loss nor blessing.

Directly behind the bronze gates are a scattering of humanoid bones lying amid scraps of ancient rent armour and tarnished weapons of many historical periods. This macabre sight is a hint that the gates cannot be opened from within. After 12 hours they will seal shut again when the sun sets. Once closed the portal may only be opened when someone outside performs a new blood sacrifice, the sorcery specifically designed to prevent those within from ever escaping their voluntary exile or imprisonment. Assuming the characters translated the hieroglyphs correctly, knowledge of the ritual's short duration can be utilised by the GM to garner a sense of urgency amongst them.

1 – The Forbidding Monolith

At its far end, the tunnel emerges abruptly from the side of a colossal monolith, above a precipitous 10m drop into a flooded ravine. Cut off from the rest of the valley by the thundering cascades of water below, this natural spur of rock is heavily carved with forbidding faces. Only a narrow rope bridge, overgrown by verdant plants, provides passage across into the lush jungle beyond.

Anyone who bothers to check will notice that the woven lianas of the bridge are almost rotted through. Characters can make a CRAFT (ROPE) or *hard* ENGINEERING skill test to try and reinforce its structure, using ropes from their own kit. If successful, the characters need not make any further rolls to cross over.

Failing to repair the bridge means that the first person who crosses with a SIZ of 14 or greater, will cause one of the main supports to snap. They must pass an ACROBATICS or *hard* EVASION skill test or tumble over the side, ending up dangling by their hands. From there the character will need to be rescued unless they can make an *Easy* ATHLETICS check to clamber hand over hand to the other side. Fumbling either of these rolls means they

plummet into the watery depths (1d6 damage to a random Hit Location ignoring armour), where ironically they can easily swim to the side and scramble out, providing they pass a SWIM check.

Characters that remain at the tunnel mouth for an undue amount of time attract the attention of the *Succubus Ivy* (see *Appendix* at the end of this scenario) growing over the monolith's rocky face. This carnivorous plant will attempt to sneak its tendrils slowly into reach, permitting victims gathered on the ledge to attempt an unopposed PERCEPTION skill test to detect the movement. Those that succeed are not surprised and may defend against the hungry plant.

The fight is not intended to be fatal, merely to make the characters aware of the fact that plant life in the valley cannot be trusted. Thus the Game Master should act out the plant's lack of intellect and have it withdraw its tendrils after several have been severed. Any STR or CON lost during the fight return to the characters after several minutes rest. Of course, the animate plant may make the characters panic. If two or more decide to flee over the rope bridge, have it collapse and pitch them into the water as described earlier.

2 – Path of the Deathless

On the other side of the rope bridge the jungle is dense, save for an occasional clearing formed from the collapse of a gigantic tree. From the edge of the chasm almost sheer valley walls can be seen, carved into knife-edged ridges cut by thousands of small waterfalls. The only way onwards is an overgrown paved pathway, along the sides of which are intermittently placed strange yakshi – stone columns carved into the shape of women in serpentine poses, armed with exotic weaponry; whose long faded inscriptions once proclaimed the deeds of those who retired here to guard the Tree of Life Eternal.

Since most of the yakshi have long since toppled or been crushed under the roots of colossal trees, a successful NAVIGATION or *easy* TRACK skill test is required to follow the roadway, else become lost and have to roll on the *Random Plant Encounter table*. Assuming the characters survive any encounter with the carnivorous plant life, the valley is small enough that they eventually stumble onto one of the key locations. Roll on the *'Lost in the Jungle' table* to determine where they end up.

If the characters do not become lost, they can follow the path directly to the *Stele of the Ever Living*. However the lack of sounds from the jungle, plus the occasional jumbled pile of humanoid-ish bones should be described to start building tension.

Random Plant Encounter Table

Roll 1d6	Encounter
1	1d3 Botanical Zombies
2	Ivory Impaler
3	Kulamyu Pod
4	Succubus Ivy
5	Snapdragon
6	2d3 Botanical Zombies

Lost in the Jungle Table

Roll 1d10	Valley Location
1-2	Stele of the Ever Living
3-4	Temple of Bhazani
5-6	Treasure House of Heroes
7-8	Ruby Palace of Xanzoga
9-10	The Walled Garden

3 – Stele of the Ever Living

Once a verdant garden of landscaped terraces and flower beds, straggling jungle now surrounds a truncated ziggurat before which is a towering stele about 25m high. Although the obsidian monument is covered in strange unfathomable pictograms, principally the image of a great tree surrounded by badly worn figures of dancing warriors, it is the glassy-black pyramid behind which attracts interest. Several wizened corpses lie scattered over the steps to its summit, which is illuminated by a strange flickering light.

Atop the pyramid, partially shaded by the surrounding canopy, is a flickering pillar of purple-orange flame. Although it looks like fire, it is not hot. In fact it is an illusion covering a magical portal, connecting the pyramid to the four other portal locations in the valley. No skill or knowledge is required to operate the portals, but passing through costs a character 1 Magic Point. Destination is chosen by stepping into the flame in the precise direction of the required terminus (only possible if the destination is in direct sight or the character can succeed in a NAVIGATION skill test). If no direction is specified, then the sorcery spits them out in a random location (roll on the *'Lost in the Jungle' table* above).

Before any character can investigate the magical flame however, they must first bypass the strangely withered bodies. This can be achieved by either sneaking past with a successful STEALTH skill test, or by scaling up the rear or side of the pyramid with a *hard* ATHLETICS check. Failing to do so, or approaching to more closely investigate the bodies, causes the corpses to animate.

There are 1d3+3 Botanical Zombies, randomly armed, remnants of the mighty warriors who now serve the Tree of Eternal Life. Although ancient they are still somewhat self-aware, but have become insane from countless of years of unceasing life. Moaning

in pathetic supplication, they crowd towards the characters seeking release from their unnatural immortality.

Most of the zombies are shrunken husks, their skins encrusted with patches of fungus and twining tendrils. It is this parasitic growth which both keeps them alive and slowly regenerates any damage they suffer, even severed parts which crawl back together. They vary greatly in their weakness, as the older they become the more their flesh is converted to vegetable matter. Each century of life subtracts 1 point from their STR, CON, DEX, POW and CHA, whilst conversely adding half that value to their Armour Points. Once any Characteristic is reduced to zero the zombie finally collapses inanimate, though horribly still aware and alive.

Despite their ghastly appearance the zombies are not a direct threat. As well as being pathetically weak, their skills atrophied, they merely try to herd the characters into the dancing flame, in an attempt to send them deeper into the valley so that they might break the seal imprisoning the Tree of Life Eternal and deal with its final guardian. If the characters retaliate with violence, the zombies will try to subdue them with minimal force and carry them to the entrance of the Walled Garden.

4 – Temple of Bhazani

This 30m high, egg shaped temple stands above the jungle upon a small hill, in fact another pyramid so overgrown that no sign of its stones remain visible. From here can be seen the Treasure House (*location 5*), the Ruby Palace (*location 6*) and the ziggurats guarding the Walled Garden (*location 7*). Characters can arrive at the temple by either wandering lost through the jungle (See *Path of the Deathless*) or via the flame portals, one of which dances before the entrance to the sanctum.

The inside of the temple is a single open space with a stepped circular dais in its centre, which itself is illuminated by hole in the top of the dome. Around the walls are bas reliefs denoting a falcon headed, eight armed goddess battling demons of various horrific types. Characters that succeed in a LORE (MYTHOLOGY) or a *formidable* ART skill test recognise this as the almost forgotten deity Bhazani the Conferrer of Life, in her ferocious aspect.

Bhazani hasn't been openly worshipped for centuries, but closer examination of the exquisitely detailed walls will reveal that the carvings pictorially recount the mythic deeds performed by the goddess. Anyone who succeed in the earlier roll will note that the final panel does not fit her established legend, as it shows Bhazani decapitating an unknown

bull-headed demon of fecundity and burying its head under the roots of a young tree.

Atop the stepped dais stands a vertical bronze ring decorated with stylised flames, some two and a half metres high. Usually the cult statue would stand in the ring, but it appears someone or something long ago tore out the effigy, leaving a few scattered pieces of gold moulding littering the steps.

Nothing else of value remains in the temple, but if the characters remain too long within, 1d3 Botanical Zombies arrive out of the surrounding jungle to capture them. The zombies do not enter the temple, but might close off access to the flame portal if the party does not leave quickly.

5 – Treasure House of Heroes

The Treasure House of Heroes stands within a plaza built upon an elevated slope in the south of the valley. Its obsidian paving stones have been up heaved by small shrubs save for the area about the flame portal, but from here can be seen parts of the Temple of Bhazani (location 4), the Ruby Palace (location 6) and the Walled Garden ziggurats (location 7) that extend above the jungle canopy.

Once a square building topped by a magnificent dome, the treasure house has partially collapsed from either age or earth tremor. What little remains free from overgrowth shows that it was constructed from beautifully inscribed porphyry. The bronze bound hardwood doors are now twisted on their hinges, burst ajar by the shifted walls. Characters who try to glance in through the doors may attempt a PERCEPTION test. Success reveals the gleam of large amounts of gold. Hundreds of thousands of Pazoors worth of treasure lies about, untouched and unwanted, spilling from cracked, neck-high storage jars or thrown down from broken shelves.

Sadly for those driven by greed, the treasure is doubly protected against looting. Whilst the warped doors permit entrance to anyone who wishes to investigate inside, the walls and roof are precariously balanced, ready to fall at the slightest provocation. Anyone succeeding in an ENGINEERING skill test will realise the place is a total death trap – even a loud sneeze could bring the whole lot down.

Those that risk entry must make an *opposed test* of their STEALTH or ACROBATICS skill versus the building’s DEATHTRAP rating of 65%. Losing requires the character to escape the collapse by trying to beat the rolled Deathtrap result in an opposed test using EVADE. Failure to do so means they are buried alive, suffering 1d10 damage to three randomly rolled Hit Locations (which can be the same), with no armour applied. Assuming the character or characters survive, they get



BOTANICAL ZOMBIES

Characteristics		Action Points: 2		1d20		Hit Location		AP/HP	
STR: 3d6 – 1d10 (5)		Damage Modifier: -1d6		1-3		Right Leg		3/5	
CON: 3d6 – 1d10 (5)		Magic Points: 11		4-6		Left Leg		3/5	
SIZ: 2d6+6 (13)		Movement: 2 metres		7-9		Abdomen		3/6	
DEX: 3d6 – 1d10 (5)		Strike Rank Bonus: +10		10-12		Chest		3/7	
INS: 2d6+6 (13)		Armour: Bark-like Skin (1d5)		13-15		Right Arm		3/4	
POW: 3d6 – 1d10 (5)		Abilities: Flora, Immunity (Mental Control), Regeneration (1HP/Hour)		16-18		Left Arm		3/4	
CHA: 3d6 – 1d10 (5)		Magic: None		19-20		Head		3/5	
Weapons									
Combat Style: Fallen Hero 65%									
Weapons		Type	Size	Force	Reach	Damage	AP/HP	Athletics 40%, Brawn 40%, Endurance 60%, Evade 40%, Perception 50%, Unarmed 60%, Willpower 0%	
Club (Cuauhololli)		M		M		1d6-1d6	4/6	Bash, Stun Location	
Spear (Trishula)		M		L		1d8+1-1d6	4/8	Impale	
Shield (Chimalli)		L		S		1d3-1d6	4/12	Ranged Parry, Blocks 4 Loc	
2H Stone Mace (Gada)		H		M		1d12-1d6	6/15	Bash, Stun Location	
Great Sword (Maquahuilitl)		L		L		2d6+4-1d6	4/12	Bleed	

close enough to the doors to be dug free in a matter of minutes. The treasure though, remains entombed.

Characters who manage to creep within without bringing the roof down, see a literal heap of treasure, enough wealth to live like kings for the rest of their lives. The inside of the building however, is festooned with Xanthus Vines, their violet-blue flowers glowing phosphorescently from the walls, dome and amongst the treasure too. Only those who succeed in a **LORE (BOTANY)** skill test recognise their deadly mutagenic properties.

Simply grabbing for the nearest piece of loot will inadvertently bring the character in touch with a bloom. Forewarned or Suspicious characters need to succeed in a **LOCKPICKING** or **SLEIGHT** test to avoid touching the flowers. Contact smears nectar on a random Hit Location and requires an opposed test of **ENDURANCE** against the bloom's potency of 90%. Failing results in that body location slowly transforming into a new Xanthus Flower.

Entirely painless the transmutation is unnoticeable at first, but permanently reduces the Hit Points of the location by 1 per hour. The only 'cure' is amputation and once reduced to OHP it is completely converted. Game Masters are encouraged to make the Hit Location a limb, so as to preserve the character until the end of the scenario. In the meantime the treasure-mad character is free to carry off as much gold as they can carry.

6 – The Ruby Palace of Xanzoga

Majestic and abandoned the Ruby Palace stands at the south-western side of the valley, its masonry glowing with a deep, wine red colour. In spite of its name the Ruby Palace is constructed from red volcanic glass and as such has no inherent value. Yet it is a beautiful place, if somewhat alien of architecture.

Although some of its minarets and atriums still stand, the palace has been reduced to ruin by the roots of mighty trees. Characters who arrive by flame portal will find themselves upon the flat summit of the central edifice, from which can be seen the Temple of Bhazani (*location 4*), the Treasure House (*location 5*) and the Walled Garden (*location 7*). Apart from an adjacent annex little of interest remains, save for dozens of still active Botanical Zombies lying amidst the collapsed buildings.

Largely vegetation free, the upper floor of the annex contains the wizened body of a warrior-priest, still seated upon a throne – wearing the rotted fragments of a linen kilt, native jewellery and a magnificent headdress of transversely set, iridescent feathers which measures almost a metre and a half across. Regardless of its lich-like appearance and oddly serpent-like face the corpse is utterly

dead. On a low table before it are fragments of an ancient scroll, which seem to have been preserved by some lethal poison spilled from an overturned jade goblet beside it.

Translating the hieroglyphs on the scroll requires a **LANGUAGE (ANCIENT)** skill check. If successful, it tells of the fall of Xanzoga, hinting at the gradual corruption of the heroes who retired there to guard the Tree of Life Eternal. It also explains the reason for the apparent desecration of the Temple of Bhazani – which in reality was the last ditch attempt of the priest to ensure the soul within the tree was kept contained within the valley (see *Player Handout 2*).

Upon the wrists of the corpse are a pair of enchanted bracelets (emeralds set in silver bands) which provide protection from plant and zombie attacks, granting the wearer 8 Armour Points and stopping botanical poisons too. The glorious headdress confers no magical powers in of itself, but is the cult garb for highly ranked worshippers of Bhazani, warding them against her wrath unless they transgress her tenets.

7 – The Walled Garden

As one would expect from its name, entry into the Walled Garden is blocked by a titanic stone wall roughly 20 metres in height (7 metres thick at its base), which stretches about a kilometre from the north to the south of the valley. Due to design or earthquake the wall leans over slightly, so that scaling the overhanging surface is effectively impossible (although locating a suitably large tree and using a branch to reach its top is possible with an **ATHLETICS** skill check at *Formidable* difficulty, plus a roll on the *Random Plant Encounter table*). No plants grow upon the wall or from the hairline cracks between its irregularly shaped blocks.

The only opening in this impressive fortification lies about halfway along its length, opposite the separated halves of a tremendous stepped pyramid; the one referred to in the warrior-priest's scroll as the '*Ziggurats of Doom*'. Passage through the wall is blocked by a pair of bronze gates 8m wide, inscribed with a crudely scratched glyph near their base. The lower area seems to glow and shimmer with a faint radiance, but has nothing to do with the binding ward etched into the ancient metal. Rather it is due to their scalding temperature.

Important clues to this heat can be seen with a **PERCEPTION** skill check: a success revealing that the ground before the gates is cracked dry, vegetation-less earth with several blackened areas (where adventurers have been burned to oblivion); whilst a critical allows the viewer to discern that the air

itself is shimmering in a path back towards the summit of the northern ziggurat.

Atop both demi-ziggurats is a crystalline device which absorbs and re-focus sunlight at what they point at, incinerating their target. Whether designed to be used against trespassers attempting to gain entry into the garden, or to burn back the jungle is no longer clear. The apparatus upon the southern ziggurat has been long since destroyed, but the northern one is still functional and currently aimed towards the massive bronze gates in the wall – the reason why the gates are so hot. If cleaned of detritus which clogs its gears, the device can be turned to point elsewhere.

DECALESCENT DOORS OF DOOM

The final barrier facing explorers are the massive bronze doors, which are sealed with a huge bar, and a divine warding that not only prevents the supernatural entity bound within from escaping (a physical engraving of the Prison Gift – *Monster Island* page 153), but also prevents those suborned by its sap from finding the gateway. The power of the imprisoning magic only functions whilst the doors remain closed.

Although the ward has no effect on Player Characters, the heat ray beaming onto the doors will catch anyone blithely approaching them unawares. Even if the crystalline apparatus is redirected, it will take the doors many hours to cool down enough to touch safely; allowing the sun to descend towards sunset. Trying to push them open requires a combined STR of 60, although attempting it prematurely will sear impatient characters' hands, inflicting 1d6 Damage to each arm.

Aiming the crystal apparatus requires either the **MECHANISMS** skill or **ENGINEERING** at *hard* difficulty. Targets hit by the near invisible ray of heat it generates can attempt to evade as per normal combat. Those failing to escape the 3m diameter beam (or unwittingly blunder into its path) suffer 2d6 damage per Round to every Hit Location (*only* worn armour counts as protection) and will catch alight as per an Intensity 4 fire.

A hundred metres to the east of the pathway between the demi-pyramids is a raised plinth, atop which is the flame portal for this location. Its low elevation compared with the surrounding canopy means that no line of sight can be established back towards the other portals (see *Stele of the Ever Living*).

8 – The Tree of Life Eternal

Assuming the characters somehow clear the wall or open the titanic gates, nothing further prevents entry into the enclosure. If anything the jungle at this end of the valley is even more lush and verdant, with no space under the canopy at all – making travel a matter of hacking a literal tunnel through the riotous vegetation. Soon however the characters emerge between two mighty statues of reclining jaguars with a massive stepped platform at their rear.

On the pedestal of each vine-strangled jaguar are carved more hieroglyphs. A successful LANGUAGE (ANCIENT) skill check allows the reader to translate each one individually. The first reads “Here stands the Tree of Life Eternal, take freely of its milk and you shall be cured of all ills and see the suns of a thousand years”. Whilst the second reads “Yet take not its golden fruit of divine transcendence, for only a god may be a god”.

Behind them, the immense dais is occupied solely by a tree so gargantuan that its limbs almost span from side to side of the 100m wide platform. Monstrous roots have utterly destroyed the stonework at its centre, yet nothing else grows upon it. The species of the tree is unknown to the characters, but it is apparent that it must be the largest plant in the entire world.

At the edge of the dais before the characters is a shallow stone pool, empty save for a small spigot and a tiny puddle of sticky, white fluid. This is the sap of immortality which countless adventurers have died to gain, and only enough remains for a single quaff. Characters who wish to drink of the tree’s sap will probably fall out at this point, unless they have pieced together the clues concerning its curse.

Clever characters might realise that if the spigot comes from the tree itself, all they need do is approach the huge trunk and cut into the bark. The milky fluid will indeed grant them immortality, and even heal wounds to the point of regenerating maimed or missing limbs (at 1HP per hour as per the Botanical Zombies), albeit at great pain to the drinker. Conversely, anyone suffering from the effects of Xanthus nectar who drinks the sap will accelerate its progress to a rate of 1HP per minute, the transmutation continuing into the abdomen or head as applicable, and bringing an agonising end to the character.

Anyone searching for fruits on the other hand must succeed in a PERCEPTION test. Plenty of spoiled black fruit lay rotting on the ground, but only a single golden fruit remains on its branches. If more than one character is hunting for the fruit, make the roll a group opposed test with the victor spot-



BHAZANI

Characteristics

STR: 17
CON: 16
SIZ: 21
DEX: 21
INS: 16
POW: 20
CHA: 13

Action Points: 7 (4+3 Multi-limbed)
Damage Modifier: +1d4
Magic Points: 20
Movement: 6 metres
Strike Rank Bonus: +19
Armour: Dirt-smeared, gold-plated skin
Abilities: Dark Sight, Immortal (disappears in burst of flame on major wound), Intimidate, Multi-limbed
Magic: As per weapons

1d20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	4/8
4-6	Left Leg	4/8
7-8	Abdomen	4/9
9-10	Chest	4/10
11	Right Arm	4/7
12	Right Arm	4/7
13	Right Arm	4/7
14	Left Arm	4/7
15	Right Arm	4/7
16	Left Arm	4/7
17	Right Arm	4/7
18	Left Arm	4/7
19-20	Head	4/8

Weapons

Combat Style: Eight Arms of Death Style (Do or Die trait) 80%

Skills

Athletics 80%, Brawn 70%, Dance 90%, Endurance 90%, Evade 75%, Perception 75%, Stealth 60%, Willpower 90%



ting it first. Every character seeing it will feel an urge to consume the fruit entirely themselves, unless they succeed in a *formidable* WILLPOWER test to resist.

Plucking the sole fruit results in the appearance of a terrible sight, the living incarnation of Bhazani, bound here into her cult effigy as a last ditch attempt to prevent the soul of the demon buried under the Tree of Life Eternal from escaping. She glides out of the jungle and will slay all who stepped upon the dais, save for anyone wearing the ceremonial headdress of her cult – unless that was the one who plucked the fruit.

Fleeing results in merely delaying her assault by a few minutes, as she will infallibly track each person down before they can escape the valley. The only way to survive the wrath of the goddess requires the characters to coordinate their efforts and defeat her in combat. Whilst she is a divine being, her physical incarnation has been tied to the valley for centuries without worship and is now emaciated and weak. Even so, some character deaths are expected at this point.

Immediately eating the golden fruit is impossible as the fruit is the size of a small melon, with a thick rind requiring a knife and the best part of quarter of an hour to eat completely, so self preservation must take precedence.

BHAZANI

This horrific being has a skeletal body with the mangy head of a falcon, drooping breasts, long nails, a sunken belly, and tusks protruding from beside the beak. She wears a necklace of skulls. Upon her head is a headdress formed of piled, matted hair tied with snakes and bone ornaments, crested by a crescent moon. Her eyes are hollow sockets lit with dancing flames and her eight arms hold various objects (all weapons) – a Damaru (drum), trishula (trident), sword (scimitar), a snake (treat as a venomous whip), khatvanga (skull-mace), thunderbolt (as per the MIRACLE), a severed head (which screams) and skull-cup (kapala)

1. **Damaru** – When successfully beaten upon a victim, casts a Thunderclap miracle (1 MP)
2. **Trident** – As per Trisula (MI p178): dam 1d8+1, size M, reach L, Impale, Barbed
3. **Scimitar** – Dam 1d8, size M, reach M, Bleed
4. **Snake** – As per Ixcheltu (MI p178), but venomous: dam 1d4+2, size S, reach VL, Entangle, Flexible (1 MP)
5. **Khatvanga** – As per Patu (MI page 178): dam 1d8, size M, reach S, Bash, Stun Location
6. **Thunderbolt** – Can be thrown. Treat as a 3d6 Lightning miracle (1 MP), returns the following Round
7. **Severed head** – When waved at an opponent it screams, casting a Fear miracle (1 MP)
8. **Skull-cup** – This is filled with sticky blood. If successfully slopped at foe, they are blinded for 1d3 turns

FLEEING THE VALLEY

Assuming any of the characters emerge alive from the wrath of Bhazani, they can freely depart with the fruit – assuming of course that they can hold off the craving to consume it. Unfortunately any other surviving companions might contest its ownership – to the point of treacherously slaying their hitherto allies.

However, as they step down from the dais to leave the Walled Garden, the titanic Tree of Life Eternal shudders several times, then begins to tear its roots from the ground and ponderously pursue the characters. Its tortured creaks and groans somehow sounding like malicious laughter. Given its immense size and that it is possessed by the spirit of a demon, is should be immediately obvious that the Tree of Life, cannot be defeated in combat.

Despite its stature the Tree of Life Eternal has no difficulty keeping up, simply smashing its way through the jungle, whilst the characters are hindered by the vegetation. In addition, the demon can also summon the remaining Botanical Zombies scattered

across the valley to cut off their escape. The only chance they have is the heat projecting apparatus, at the Ziggurats of Doom.

If a character can successfully aim the heat ray for the three of the five successive Rounds it takes for the demon possessed tree to burst through the gates and reach the ziggurat, then it spontaneously combusts and is destroyed in a raging inferno. On its apparent death, all of the Botanical Zombies are finally freed from its mental domination and head towards the conflagration in order to destroy themselves, seeking final freedom from the curse of eternal life.

On the other hand, if the characters fail to ignite it or think of the idea of burning the tree, they must simply run for their lives and escape the hellish valley before sunset, else be forever trapped within.

A few rolls against ATHLETICS at incrementing penalty grades due to accumulated fatigue, should be enough to instil fear of fleeting time; with the Game Master assigning points according to the success levels rolled (Crit 3, Success 2, Failure 1 and Fumble 0). Except for the person holding the fruit, whoever performs worst ends up either being ambushed by overwhelming numbers of Botanical Zombies or is crushed to a pulp by the Tree of Life.

On the last stage back through the tunnel, safe from their pursuers, the remaining characters will hear the bronze gates beginning to close. A final sprint is required using the same mechanic as above to see who slips through before it slams shut in the face of the slowest survivors, no matter their pleas or curses. Whoever has the golden fruit may boost their Level of Success by one step due to the unnatural vitality it passes onto its holder. If everyone is joint equal in final place, an opposed test of UNARMED determines which of them pulled the others down to slip through at the last second.

AFTERMATH

Anyone who emerges from the valley alive should thank the gods, even if they leave with nothing but rags on their back. Few ever return from the valley alive. Those that foolishly drank the sap of the Tree of Life Eternal might at first rejoice in immortality, at least for the first century or so until the scabrous fungal growths begin to emerge from their orifices.

But he or she who might have escaped with the golden fruit and dared to consume its diabolical flesh will be forever accursed. They shall indeed be invested with the powers of a god when the reincarnating demon displaces their soul, swapping bodies so that the character's awareness and essence are forced into the still burning Tree of Eternal Life. Unfortunately for them, it takes hours to burn to death as a tree...

PLAYER HANDOUT 1**HIEROGLYPHS ON THE BRONZE PORTAL**

Tear off the relevant section (or fold over the page) according to the success level of the LANGUAGE (ANCIENT) skill check.

Full Translation (Critical)

Hark ye those who seek Xanzoga and life eternal
These gates bar passage to the sumptuous Ruby Palace
Only the mightiest of heroes may journey onwards
To take their place evermore freed from wound or death

To join their celestial ranks offer the water of life
Spill your strength in offering as the sky brightens
Beat thrice upon the portal to awaken the lords within
And the way will be opened until the sun sleeps

Partial Translation (Success)

Hear those who looking Xanzoga and eternal life
These gates seal passage abundant Ruby Palace
Only mightiest heroes can walk forward
Take place forever freed from the wound or death

Join the ranks of their heavenly provide water of life
Pour the power of offering as sky brightens
Beat three times in the wake of lords within the portal
And path be opened yet with sleeping sun

Fragmentary Translation (Failure)

Hark ye who seek eternal life Xanzoga
The gates to the bar verse sumptuous Ruby Palace
Only the mightiest heroes may visit them
Taking their place forever from the wound or death

Joining the number of those in heaven take the water of life
To drip your strength and giving the sky advances
Beat three times over the egress to resurrect the rulers
And way will be opened until evermore

Incoherent Translation (Fumble)

Return of eternal life and you want to Xanzoga
The gates of the sealed in view of the Palace Ruby
Only prisoners were to be discarded and may travel forward
To fight temptation of immortality

Join their ranks have been cursed or give blood
Better spill your strength now and in the light of the day
Beat out your brain over the entrance to treat your lust
And remain sealed until time end the sun

PLAYER HANDOUT 2**THE MAD WARRIOR PRIESTS WRITINGS**

...thus I watched my fellows slowly wither about me,
their skins mottling...

...have been the white milk of life, or was it the mould
that caused their slow degeneration, I suspected the....

...forsook the needless gift of life fearful of my own
inviolability...

...set the crystal lenses to cover the entrance to
the garden, in the hope that any passing through
the beams would be destroyed...

...frustration. The transformed needed the milk no
longer, sustained instead by the parasitic growths.
Yet at the dread one's direction they attacked me as
I camped upon the summit, overturning one of the
sorcerous devices...

...was now but one against many. Bereft of hope
I placed part of my soul into fashioning a seal and
decided to call upon...

...prayed before her idol, wearing my cult finery to
please her, beseeching her to guard against the spirit
of the demon escaping his imprisonment within...

...joy and horror the effigy burst asunder,
from it leaping magnificent and terrible the...

...Now before I too suffer damnation I will take
my own life to keep the guardian forever bound
here to complete the task my brother and I failed.
I hope the venom is strong enough...



Jo Broddi

A charming loafer turned professional card-sharp as needed, Jo has long sought adventure. His gambling addiction has often gotten him into trouble, causing him to flee to ever more uncivilised places to avoid his debts. In desperation Jo has latched onto Vivia Rutlich, conning her that he knows more about this supposed treasure laden island than anyone. Its all a bluff however and Jo is in danger of falling hard for the femme fatale.

STR 10, CON 16, SIZ 11, DEX 9, INT 13, POW 15, CHA 17.
2 Action Points, No Damage Modifier, 3 Luck Points,
+11 Strike Rank.

Skills

Athletics 80%, Boating 70%, Brawn 40%, Conceal 40%, Customs 60%, Deceit 40%, Endurance 70%, Evade 60%, First Aid 50%, Gambling 90%, Influence 50%, Insight 60%, Navigation 80%, Perception 90%, Seamanship 60%, Sleight 90%, Stealth 60%, Swim 80%, Unarmed 80%, Willpower 60%, Adventurer Combat Style (Machete, Hatchet, Spear; Cautious Fighter trait) 70%. Passions: Do anything for a bet 70%, Treasure hunter 50%



Vilmer Kook

Neurotic, yet unshakably loyal, Vilmer is Kasper Gutman's personal bodyguard, messenger boy and valet. Lean and coldly sneering, his temper however is very prickly, seeking insults and criticisms in any conversation directed towards him. Not the brightest spark on the block, Vilmer still possesses a ruthless cunning when it comes to protecting both himself and his boss.

STR 16, CON 10, SIZ 15, DEX 12, INT 10, POW 10, CHA 10.
2 Action Points, +1d4 Damage Modifier, 2 Luck Points,
+11 Strike Rank.

Skills

Athletics 60%, Boating 50%, Brawn 80%, Conceal 80%, Customs 40%, Deceit 50%, Endurance 80%, Engineering 70%, Evade 70%, First Aid 50%, Influence 40%, Insight 60%, Lore (Tactics) 60%, Perception 70%, Stealth 60%, Survival 90%, Swim 50%, Track 90%, Unarmed 90%, Willpower 50%, Bodyguard Combat Style (Scimitar, Target Shield; Batter Aside trait) 80%, Thug Combat Style (Club, Dagger, Chain; Knockout Blow trait) 70%. Passions: Loyal as a dog 70%, Hate everyone except Kasper 50%



Iddy Nars

An ex-gladiator who set himself up as a gangster, Iddy is driven by pure greed. He suspects the others are keeping some important secret from him, but all he cares about is the money, jewels and rumours of a falcon statue made of solid gold! Who gives a damn about history or esoteric knowledge? Just give him enough wealth to buy an entire city and Iddy will be a happy man. Of course, the fewer that survive this expedition, the larger his cut...

STR 11, CON 13, SIZ 16, DEX 10, INT 14, POW 10, CHA 12.
2 Action Points, +1d2 Damage Modifier, 2 Luck Points,
+12 Strike Rank.

Skills

Acrobatics 50%, Athletics 70%, Boating 60%, Brawn 80%, Commerce 80%, Conceal 40%, Courtesy 50%, Craft (Rope) 60%, Customs 80%, Deceit 50%, Endurance 90%, Evade 80%, First Aid 60%, Influence 70%, Insight 50%, Perception 60%, Stealth 50%, Street-wise 90%, Swim 60%, Unarmed 70%, Willpower 70%, Gladiator Combat Style (Short Sword, Peltast Shield, Trident, Net, Great Axe; Shield Splitter, Throw Weapon trait) 90%. Passions: Everyone is expendable 70%, Become insanely wealthy 50%



Kasper Gutman

A gentleman smuggler of impeccable tastes and excessive waistline, Kasper promotes himself as a man of good humour, a deal maker with an avid interest in art especially that of a rare, exotic nature. But this journey Kasper is not interested in mere trinkets, he has discovered that hidden somewhere on the island is the secret of immortality, and Gutman's health is failing from an incurable disease. He has sunk the last of his fortune into finding a cure and he is willing to sacrifice everyone, even his loyal bodyguard Vilmer, in order to seize it.

STR 9, CON 8, SIZ 17, DEX 8, INT 14, POW 13, CHA 15.
2 Action Points, +1d2 Damage Modifier, 3 Luck Points,
+11 Strike Rank.

Skills

Art 80%, Athletics 40%, Boating 40%, Brawn 50%, Commerce 80%, Conceal 50%, Courtesy 90%, Customs 60%, Deceit 80%, Endurance 60%, Evade 40%, First Aid 40%, Influence 90%, Insight 70%, Language (Ancient) 80%, Lockpicking 70%, Mechanisms 90%, Perception 60%, Stealth 60%, Streetwise 70%, Swim 50%, Unarmed 50%, Willpower 60%, Gentlemanly Defence Combat Style (Dagger, Hand Crossbow; Ranged Marksman trait) 70%. Passions: Search for a cure 70%, Art is sacrosanct 50%



Vivia Rutlich

A classic femme fatale: aristocratic and a seductive manipulator, Vivia has used her charms to survive in a world where she is little more than a possession to be owned. Born from a common family, she aspires to the highest echelons of society in order to crush those that corrupted her as a girl. Vivia has lately plied her wiles on Jo Broddi, a handsome man if a bad liar, in order to give herself a protector whilst she secretly searches for the Fountain of Youth, but anyone would do really. With its waters her looks would be preserved and if there is enough, sell tiny quantities of the priceless stuff... for the right price!

STR 8, CON 8, SIZ 9, DEX 12, INT 18, POW 14, CHA 13.
3 Action Points, -1d2 Damage Modifier, 3 Luck Points,
+15 Strike Rank.

Skills

Athletics 50%, Boating 40%, Brawn 40%, Conceal 40%, Customs 50%, Dance 80%, Deceit 90%, Endurance 50%, Evade 60%, First Aid 60%, Healing 60%, Influence 50%, Insight 70%, Language (Ancient) 70%, Lore (Myths and Legends) 80%, Perception 50%, Seduction 90%, Sleight 70%, Stealth 60%, Swim 50%, Unarmed 40%, Willpower 80%, Stab in the Back Combat Style (Dagger, Garrotte, Sap; Hidden Weapons trait) 60%. Passions: Hell has no fury as a woman scorned 70%, Betray those closest to you 50%



Yoel Kairo

Short and dapper, Yoel's appearance belies his trade as a professional hitman. Whilst his immaculate clothes and soft-spoken voice seem to make him harmless, there are few better with a knife. Yoel knows a good thing when he hears it, and after a previous victim exchanged knowledge of an island laden with an emperor's treasure for his life, the elegant assassin killed him anyway and has insinuated himself into the group, offering his unique skills to ensure nobody else would be joining them.

STR 13, CON 10, SIZ 8, DEX 15, INT 12, POW 12, CHA 13.
3 Action Points, No Damage Modifier, 2 Luck Points,
+14 Strike Rank.

Skills

Athletics 90%, Boating 40%, Brawn 60%, Conceal 50%, Customs 50%, Deceit 60%, Disguise 70%, Endurance 60%, Evade 80%, First Aid 50%, Influence 80%, Insight 60%, Lore (Poisons) 70%, Perception 80%, Sleight 70%, Stealth 90%, Streetwise 70%, Swim 60%, Unarmed 60%, Willpower 80%, Assassin Combat Style (Dagger, Thrown Dagger, Garrotte; Do or Die, Ranged Marksman trait) 90%. Passions: Suffer no provocation with impunity 70%, Trust Nobody 50%

Ivory Impaler

A nasty piece of flora and well feared by jungle travellers, the ivory impaler appears to be dead or dying tree stump, between five to eight metres tall, covered in vividly coloured trumpet-like flowers. These complex blooms are able to emit a range of sounds, with which it attracts its prey, from pain-filled moaning to almost familiar snatches of conversation in perfect mimicry of what the plant has heard before.
The extensive root system of the tree extends over ten metres from the trunk, the sharp tips rising up underground in vertical alignment. These provide two functions: the first is to detect the vibrations of approaching creatures, the second is that when a victim enters the area, all of the roots thrust violently upwards; transfixing anything above them on their three to four metre lengths. Using surprise they utilise the Impale and Bleed special effects.
After the initial trigger, the slick creamy white roots remain above the surface for

several hours, waiting for any impaled beast to die of blood loss, then gradually withdraw back into the ground.
The plant subsequently feeds off the decomposing carrion which gradually rots

into the soil, nourishing its subsidiary root complex. Rotting corpses have the additional benefit of drawing further scavengers, which if unaware of the danger, often also succumb to the Impaler.

IVORY IMPALER
Characteristics: STR: 2d6+9 (16), CON: 2d6+9 (16), SIZ: 4d6+48 (62), DEX: 2d6+12 (19), INS: 2d6+1 (8), POW: 2d6 (7), Action Points: 3, Damage Modifier: +1d4, Magic Points: 7, Movement: Immobile, Strike Rank Bonus: +14, Armour: Thick Bark, Abilities: Earth Sense, Flora, Magic: None, 1d20 Hit Location AP/HP, 1-8 Main Trunk 6/18, 9-10 Root 1 3/16, 11-12 Root 2 3/16, 13-14 Root 3 3/16, 15-16 Root 4 3/16, 17-18 Root 5 3/16, 19-20 Root 6 3/16, Weapons: Combat Style: Unwelcome Upthrust (Roots) 65%, Weapons Type Size Force Reach Damage AP/HP, Sharp Root C S-VL 2d6+1d4 As for Root, Skills: Athletics 0%, Brawn 80%, Conceal (Root) 66%, Endurance 82%, Evade 0%, Perception 55%, Willpower 0%

APPENDIX – DEADLY FLORA

These are the details of the deadly plants inhabiting the Valley of Xanzoga.

Snapdragon

Thorny bushes several metres in height with a solitary flower, a snapdragon has an amazing orchid-like bloom of yellow, orange and red covered with black decorative splotches. Despite its fragile appearance, the splendid appearance belies a very dangerous carnivorous plant which attracts prey with narcotic pollen that infuses the breather with an incredible sense of euphoria.
The pollen is progressively addictive, encouraging the addict to insert their head into the bloom to get a full dose. Since this is part of the pollination process the snapdragon does not attack every inserted appendage, but once the correct cross-fertilisation occurs it triggers a reproductive instinct in the plant, causing it to decapitate whatever creature next inserts its head. This then provides a sufficient source of protein in which to gestate the new generation of snapdragons.
Usually the decapitating bite of a snapdragon comes as a surprise attack, unless the pollen addict is aware of the plant's carnivorous tendencies, allowing the plant to GRIP and CHOOSE LOCATION by default. When fighting in coordinated self defence, the blooms also utilise ENTANGLE, FLURRY, TAKE WEAPON and

TRIP which they apply as maliciously as possible, either stealing weapons to render attackers harmless or pulling them down, then overwhelming them with multiple flurrying blows to rend the foe apart.
Snapdragon plants usually grow in collective groups of 1d6+6 flowers, which are all connected under the soil with an interla-

ced root system, in effect a single organism. Whilst immobile, the blooms support one another from attack, actively snapping at anything seeking to harm the group, or using whip-like tendrils to drag persistent foes into their reach.
The following statistics describe a single flower of the unified whole.

SNAPDRAGON
Characteristics: STR: 2d6+6 (13), CON: 2d6+6 (13), SIZ: 2d6+12 (19), DEX: 2d6+15 (22), INS: 2d6+1 (8), POW: 1d6 (4), Action Points: 3, Damage Modifier: +1d4, Magic Points: 4, Movement: Immobile, Strike Rank Bonus: +15, Armour: Entangling Briars, Abilities: Communal Mind, Earth Sense, Flora, Grappler, Magic: None, 1d20 Hit Location AP/HP, 1-10 Thorny Bush 4/9, 11-13 Left Tendril 4/7, 14-16 Right Tendril 4/7, 17-20 Snapping Bloom 4/7, Weapons: Combat Style: Vicious Viniculture (Bloom, Tendril) 75%, Weapons Type Size Force Reach Damage AP/HP, Bloom M L 1d6+1d4 As per Bloom, Tendril S VL 1d4+1d4 As per Tendril, Skills: Athletics 0%, Brawn 62%, Deceit 66%, Endurance 56%, Evade 0%, Perception 52%, Willpower 0%

Kulamyu Pod

Giant versions of the honeydew plant, except that the acidic digestive bowl is underground, part of its root system. Surrounding the tuber are long, fleshy leaves which spread out for approximately 2 metres in every direction; these have an uncanny ability to change their colouration and patterning to blend into the surrounding foliage. The orifice itself is disguised as a beautiful flower full of rich nectar, which gives off a wonderful jasmine-like scent. This attracts many types of prey which attempt to feed on the sweetness.

Touching the stamen of the false flower causes the leaves to coil rapidly, precipitating the victim into the now gaping maw of the plant if they fail to **Evade** the engulfing attack. Inside, the capacious bowl of the plant is half-filled with strong acid, which drenches whatever body parts become immersed. Roll 1d10+10 three times to see which locations end up in the acid.

Since the insides are slippery and most bipedal victims end up being immersed

head first, there is very little chance of escape unless they succeed in a *Contest of Strength* (see *RuneQuest* page 59) at an additional level of difficulty for their inverted position; or they have compatriots on hand to hack the

engulfing leaves away and drag the injured party out (excess damage carrying on to the trapped victim). Once the snare has been sprung, the plant can do little save hold onto the struggling victim.

KULAMYU POD

Characteristics

STR: 1d6+3 (7)
CON: 2d6+6 (13)
SIZ: 4d6+12 (26)
DEX: 2d6+12 (19)
INS: 2d6+1 (8)
POW: 1d6 (4)

Action Points: Not Applicable
Damage Modifier: +1d4
Magic Points: 4
Movement: Immobile
Strike Rank Bonus: +14
Armour: Waxy Skin
Abilities: Camouflaged, Engulfing (Victims up to plant's own SIZ), Flora, Trapper
Magic: None

1d20 Hit Location AP/HP
1-2 Digestive Bowl 2/10
3-5 Leaf 1 1/8
6-8 Leaf 2 1/8
9-11 Leaf 3 1/8
12-14 Leaf 4 1/8
15-17 Leaf 5 1/8
18-20 Leaf 6 1/8

Weapons

Combat Style: Sprung Leaves (Swallow) 62%

Weapons	Type	Size	Force	Reach	Damage	AP/HP
Swallow Whole	-	-	-	-	Strong Acid	Not Applicable

Skills

Athletics 0%, Brawn 73%, Conceal (Leaves) 63%, Endurance 66%, Evade 0%, Perception 52%, Willpower 0%

Succubus Ivy

An innocuous looking type of ground foliage which spreads across an area of tens of metres, succubus ivy is in actual fact a diabolical plant that drains the physical characteristics of creatures it entwines, in a similar manner to the sorcery spell *Tap*, adding the victim's vitality to its own.

Visually there is nothing apparently harmful about the plant when first spotted, although a faint whiff of corruption can be smelled if a *Hard* **PERCEPTION** roll is made; the scent being disguised by other rotting jungle scents. Otherwise the plant makes no immediate reaction when first trodden upon, waiting for victims to draw closer to its centre before springing its attack. At this point the tendrils of ivy coil up, snagging anything and everything within its central area. Tendrils cannot be parried, but must be evaded.

Creatures caught by this surprise attack suffer the *Entangle* special effect, plus *Trip Opponent*. The combination of both together usually spells doom for victims, unless they are big and strong enough to break free. On its following turns the ivy may spend an action Point to drain a single target of 1d8 points of both Strength and Constitution, unless the victim can resist the attack with an *opposed*

Endurance test. This draining continues until the characteristics are reduced to 0, at which point the creature is immobilised.

Instead of dying, the ivy inserts some of its tendrils into the victim, keeping them alive in a sort of symbiosis; the plant hydrating the victim, whilst they provide their stolen characteristics to the ivy. This has the ad-

ded effect of concealing the body beneath the foliage, although still living victims occasionally twitch. Eventually the creatures die of starvation (their characteristics then lost to the plant), and the emaciated corpses are drawn beneath the leaf mould, near the centre of the ivy patch, where they attract future predators and scavengers.

SUCCUBUS IVY

Characteristics

STR: 1d3 (2)
CON: 1d3 (2)
SIZ: 4d6+24 (38)
DEX: 2d6 (7)
INS: 2d6+1 (8)
POW: 1d6 (4)

Action Points: 2
Damage Modifier: +1d6
Magic Points: 4
Movement: Immobile
Strike Rank Bonus: +8
Armour: Woody Stems
Abilities: Characteristic Drain, Earth Sense, Flora, Trapper
Magic: None

1d20 Hit Location AP/HP
1-2 Tendril Cluster 1 1/8
3-4 Tendril Cluster 2 1/8
5-6 Tendril Cluster 3 1/8
7-8 Tendril Cluster 4 1/8
9-10 Tendril Cluster 5 1/8
11-12 Tendril Cluster 6 1/8
13-14 Tendril Cluster 7 1/8
15-16 Tendril Cluster 8 1/8
17-18 Tendril Cluster 9 1/8
19-20 Tendril Cluster 10 1/8

Weapons

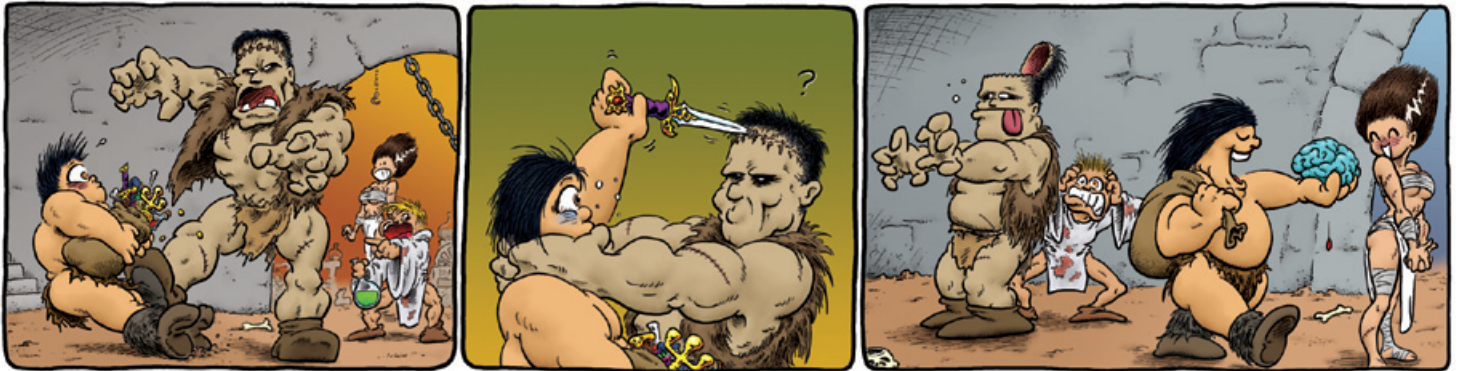
Combat Style: Entangling Foliage (Tendrils) 49%

Weapons	Type	Size	Force	Reach	Damage	AP/HP
Tendril	-	-	-	-	Drain 1d8	STR and CON As for Tendri

Skills

Athletics 0%, Brawn 70%, Conceal 54%, Endurance 44%, Evade 0%, Perception 52%, Stealth 0%, Willpower 0%

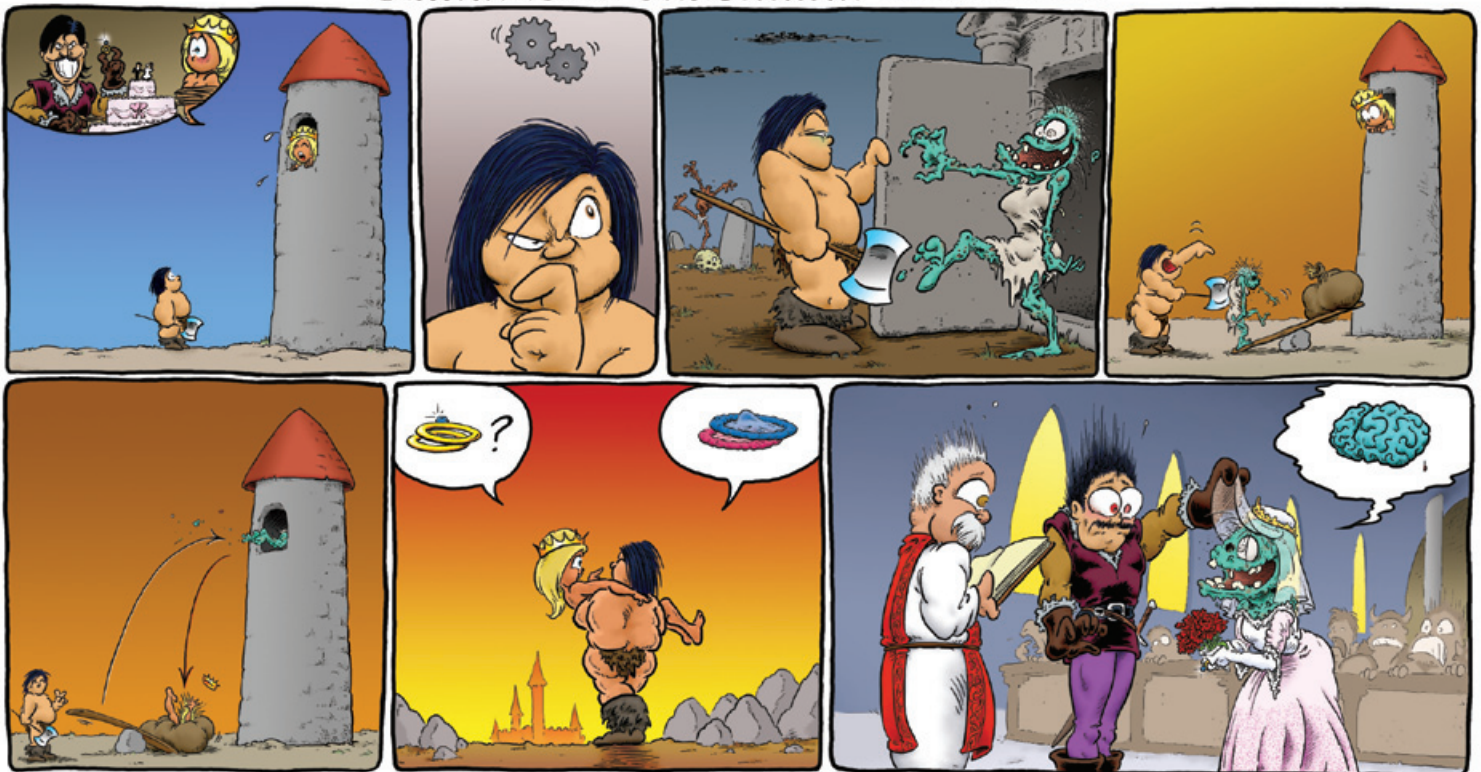
BERNARD THE BARBARIAN VS. FRANKENSTEIN



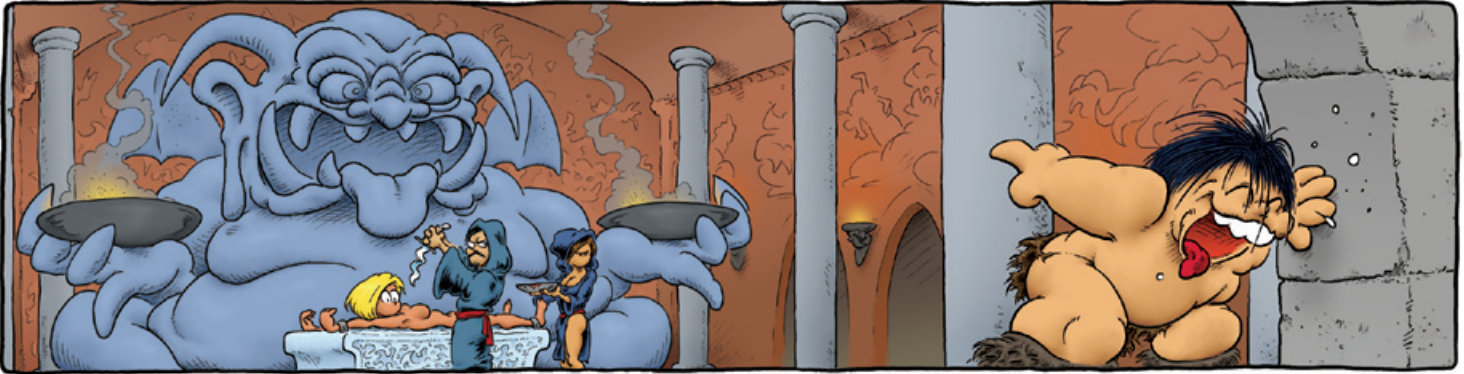
BERNARD THE BARBARIAN MUCKING AROUND



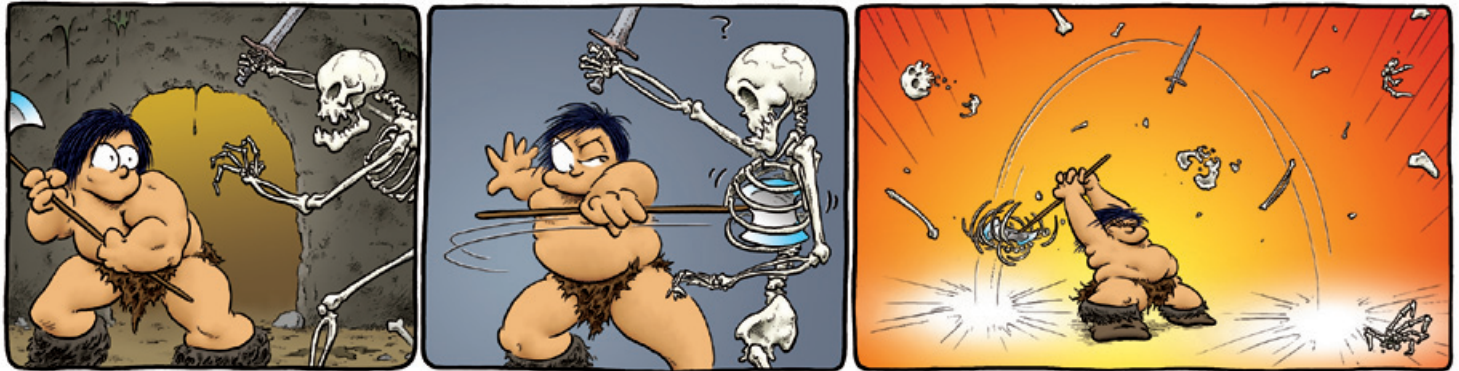
BERNARD THE BARBARIAN THE WEDDING PLANNER



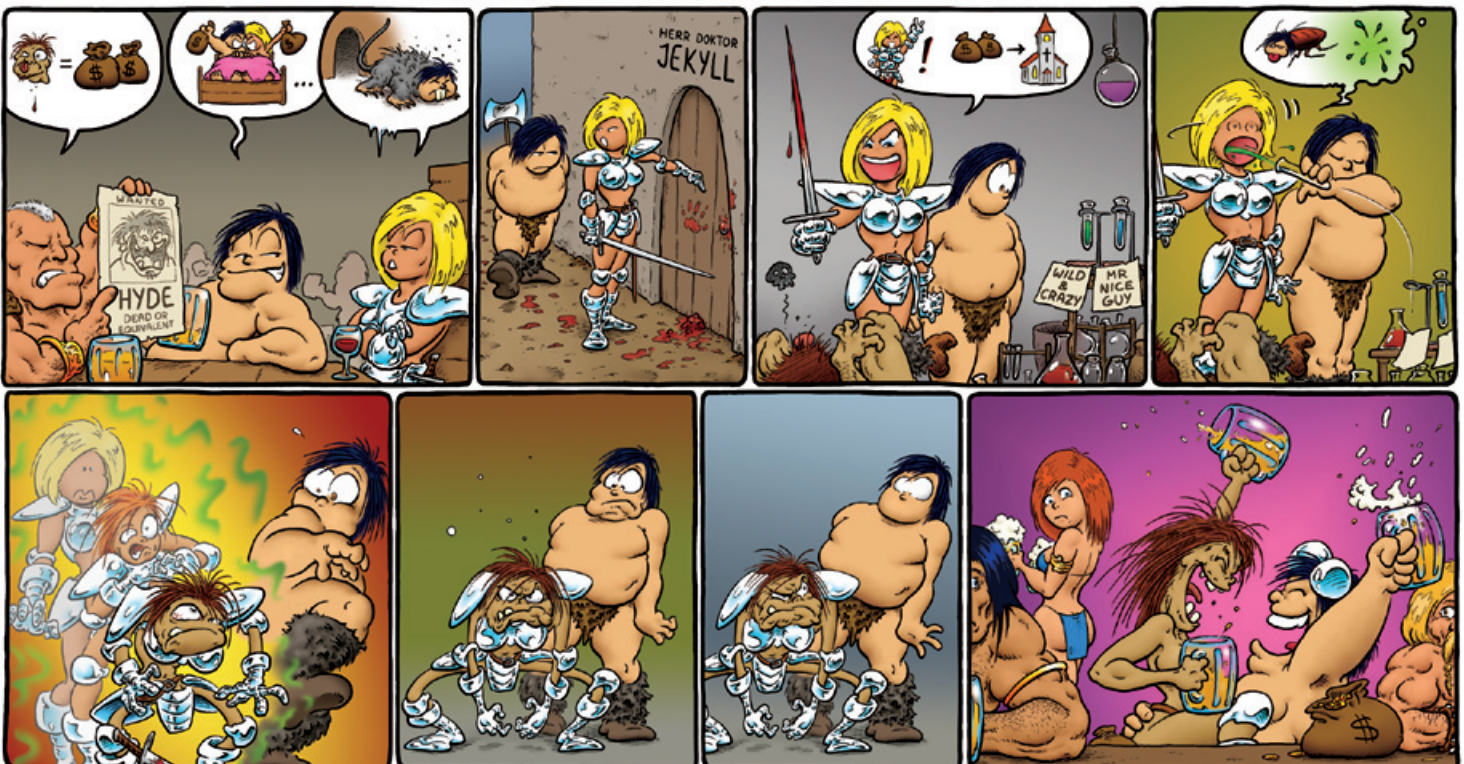
BERNARD THE BARBARIAN AND THE FACE OF EVIL



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN THROWING BONES



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN CORRUPTS



MORE THAN

ZOMBIES

THOUGHTS ON USING VODOO IN ROLE PLAY

TEXT **ÅSA ROOS**
ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN**

“M’sieu looks a bit pale. Why don’t you sit down. It can’t be good to stand there swaying like that. M’sieu?”

Frederick Wilson, recently come to New Orleans, was not feeling well. Not well at all. His head was spinning, and he felt cold and lethargic and could hardly keep himself upright. Sitting down seemed like a good idea.

The moment his behind hit the chair, the world disappeared around him. Frederick Wilson no longer existed.

Three weeks later, Frederick’s sister Andrea arrived in New Orleans. They had found her brother, or what was believed to be her brother. Andrea was reunited with him in a mental ward of the local hospital, but he was only a shadow of his former self. Stiff and wobbly, he walked toward her, barely more than a skeleton.

“Andrea. Andrea,” he whispered. “What are you doing here? Are you dead too?”

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Voodoo. A word that evokes the thrumming pulse of drums and the rhythmic pattering of feet, chicken's blood and Vevés painted with white chalk on dusty sidewalks. Voodoo is a living religion with more than 50 million practitioners worldwide. It gets its inspiration where it can find it, such as several elements from Catholicism. It is a very practical-oriented religion, which makes it quite useful from a role-playing perspective. Voodoo is made up of a number of different religions, with its primary roots in Africa. It came to Haiti in 1503, along with the slaves the Spanish imported to replace the original populace who had been reduced from 1.3 million to 60,000, a terrible development that took 11 years. The Spanish, as we all know, arrived in 1492. Fifty years later, the genocide was complete, and there were almost no Indians left on the island of Hispaniola.

In general, voodoo is characterised by defiance and hope. Defiance, because the slaves revolted against their masters and succeeded, all by the virtue of their religion. Hope, because voodoo looks to the present and what man can do to better his situation.

The thing that is the basis for all types of voodoo – and there are many – is that all beings have an innate life force known as *ashe* (pronounced ah-shay or ah-say). It is more than life; it is grace, blood, power, energy, and growth. Everything contains ashe: plants, people, animals, stones, gods, places, even sound. Ashe is the opposite of chaos and disorder, the highest power, that which cannot be identified. Those who practice voodoo use this ashe to achieve what they want – and what they want is not always a good thing.

There are many interpretations of what voodoo is. The Hollywood definition includes zombies, voodoo dolls, and spectacular possessions, but as it is practiced by its followers, voodoo – or vodou, vodun, vodoun, as it is sometimes spelled, to differentiate from Hollywood's misinterpretation – is a relatively small religion in that it is practiced within the personal sphere of improving one's own lot in life. Voodoo focuses primarily on the spirit world, which consists of both spirits of ancestors and spirits of nature. Some are good, while others are known to be tricksters, and still others are pure evil.

THE CLERGY AND THE GODS

Voodoo has priests and priestesses called *houngans* (male) and *mambos* (female). Women in particular have a strong position in voodoo. To become a houngan or a mambo, it is necessary to study the theory, usually for

many years. It is not possible in voodoo tradition to achieve understanding and spiritual power – i.e., that the Loa will hear you – if you have not first studied with someone. It is also very risky to simply call on the Loa without any prior training. A best-case scenario of an untrained person calling on the Loa is simply that the spirits do not answer, but in the worst case, that person may come to realise that he or she is being used by the spirits, rather than the other way around.

Each houngan and mambo is educated in their mentor's tradition. This means that there is a certain amount of recognition when an invocation is detected. In other words, those knowledgeable of religion with a specialty in voodoo would be able to say who had performed a spell or drawn a Vevé, or at least be able to point out what part of the country or even more specifically the city that particular person came from. Generally, it is all about specialised knowledge.

The *Loa*, *L'wa* or *L'wha* are the spirits that houngans and mambos ask for help in performing their spells. There are a great many Loa, which means providing an introduction to them all would be impossible in a short article like this. It also means that inventive game masters can more or less create their own Loa and their own traditions, without it necessarily being “wrong”.

The most prominent Loas within voodoo are shared among many traditions. They are known by many, even those who have never heard of voodoo, other than through the aspect of zombies and voodoo dolls.

Papa Legba is the Loa spirit who opens paths. If, for example, the houngan or mambo wanted to conduct a ceremony, whether the intent is to possess someone, or just to perform a small personal ritual, Papa Legba is nearly always the spirit to call on. He is the king of the crossroads; it is he who opens the doors between this dimension and the spirit world, which allows the Loa to cross through the barrier and help the priest with whatever he or she is asking. Typically, a successful calling of Papa Legba gives plus modifications to the calling of other spirits.

Erzulie is the goddess of love. She represents health, help, beauty, wealth, and love. It is Erzulie one calls on when one needs help making someone fall in love, or perhaps wishes to be rid of one's jealousy. But Erzulie also has a darker side. If you are looking for revenge or to create enemies, she can be very useful. Usually, though, hers is a light and good power. Rule mechanics-wise, Erzulie is a positive force when it comes to charisma and charm. A person who receives help from Erzulie can get plus modifications on everything to do with social interactions.

Damballa Wedo and *Aida Wedo* are voodoo's gods of creation. Damballa Wedo is associated with love, knowledge, wealth, and the art of healing, and is sometimes represented by the Catholic St. Patrick or Moses. Aida Wedo is Damballa's wife and she, together with Damballa Wede, possess the knowledge of life and death. They are an ancient power and are always there in the background. From a rules perspective, Damballa and Aida Wedo are fairly flexible. A player can get a plus for first aid, knowledge seeking, and similar, in order to show how Damballa and Aida Wede tangibly affect their lives.

The *Ghede* are the spirits of the forefathers. In voodoo, Ghede are the souls of the “forgotten dead”, those who did not receive a proper burial, those who have no one to mourn their passing, or those who died under difficult circumstance. The Ghede are many. *Ghede Nibo*, one of the first Ghede, gives these dead spirits a voice, and once they have a voice, they seldom shut up. Ghede always speak the truth. Though they are frequently crass, loud, rude and vulgar, they never lie, and many appreciate the advice they receive from the Ghede. Just as with the Loa, there are too many Ghede to describe here, but below are two of the most well-known Ghede.

Le Baron, Baron Samedi, or Le Bawon is an ancestor spirit who is often associated with the first man buried in a churchyard. Samedi is perhaps one of the better-known spirits in voodoo. He is the ruler of the dead, and is usually depicted with a top hat, black tuxedo, and dark sunglasses where one lens is sometimes missing. This is said to allow him to see between both worlds. His wife is *Maman Brigitte*, who is the first woman to be buried in the same churchyard. Brigitte is the one you call on when you are seeking justice, since she is believed to be an excellent judge.

The Ghede can be used as a source of knowledge. It is perhaps easier to go to the library, but speaking to a Ghede can provide players with information they might not be able to get in any other way.

BOKORS

It is not possible to talk about voodoo without mentioning *bokors*. It is said that bokors can “serve the Loa with both hands”, which means they can use their powers and knowledge for good, but also to harm and control – they can practice both light and dark magic.

Bokors can use the spirit *Kalfou*, who is associated with death, churchyards and cemeteries, and destructive magic. Bokors go to Kalfou when they wish to destroy, control by means of terror, or bend/break the rules.

Bokors choose to walk the pathless wilderness beyond the road. There are stories

of people who have chosen to go out into the night and the wasteland. Some of them never come back at all, and some return changed, in the way they act and speak, and their eyes tell of knowledge far beyond what man is meant to know. There is a connection between Kalfou and the Lovecraft-inspired *Lurker at the Threshold* by August Derleth. Kalfou is the master of the forbidden and unknown dimensions. He opens the path between our reality and the spirit world, so that humans can go where they were never intended to go.

Bokors are excellent antagonists in stories about voodoo. They can do all the things that hounsans and mambos don't want to do, they can control, damage, and strike fear into people. And they can create zombi. Use bokors in moderation. They are often very powerful practitioners of voodoo, and remember that they are not necessarily evil. It's just that they also have that option.

VEVÉS, GRIS-GRIS AND ZOMBI

Voodoo, as was mentioned before, is a practical religion. Practitioners work towards bettering their own lives and they use spells and incantations to do so. Some of these spells can be performed by the regular practitioners themselves, without the help of priests, but when it really counts, it is hounsans or mambos who must do it. If it's left-hand magic you need, however, you should go to a bokor.

You go to a hounsan or mambo to get luck, success, money or love. Love spells are the most common. There are potions, gris-gris pouches, and incense that can cause the most restrained person to throw caution to the wind and embark on a passionate love affair with the most unseemly partner.

Usually, a voodoo incantation consists of a hounsan or mambo preparing a small pouch for the person who will be affected by the spell. These small pouches are often called *gris-gris* and they can contain anything from herbs to stones or lucky coins. Often, they also contain some object that has a connection to the Loa or Ghede being asked for help and protection.

Sometimes, the hounsan or mambo can prepare herbs for a cleansing, healing bath that gives the bather protection from evil powers and bad influences. Such a bath usually contains herbs and are usually repeated a number of times, and the bather must undergo a small ritual.

Candle magic is also available. In such a case, the person seeking protection, riches or success can make a candle or purchase one that has been prepared or prayed over to give the "right" effect.

Vevés are used to conjure a spirit through painting them. In other words, it's a way to communicate with and call on the spirits. *Vevés* can be painted with sand or chalk, they can be sewn into a piece of fabric, and so on, depending on how permanent they need to be. *Vevés* are primarily a way to call on spirits, but they can also be used in gris-gris pouches as a connection to the Loa or Ghede who's help is being requested.

The common denominator for all the above methods is that the incantation requires some sort of personal item of the person the spell concerns. The priest, whether he or she is good or evil, must pray over the object and fill it with power. Having faith is also vital. Bokors, for example, rarely act without first notifying the victim of what may be about to occur. The *rumour* of the power of the spell is half its effect.

One of the most horrifying ways bokors use to control their enemies is creating *zombi*. The word *zombi* is akin to the Kikongo word *nzambi*, which means "spirit of a dead person," and it is the spirit bokors capture and imprison when they create a *zombi*.

When it comes to converting a human to *zombie*, it is necessary to perform a ritual in which a bokor prepares a *zombi* powder that is then thrown upon the subject intended to become a *zombi*. Making the powder is both dangerous and time consuming. The ingredients always include things such as burnt, crushed human bones, plants with irritating prickles, sharp thorns, or poisonous sap, and perhaps the most important of all, the puffer fish.

Because the powder is highly poisonous, even for the bokor who has made it, it is rarely used. But when it is used, it is extremely effective. Puffer fish contain a substance called tetrodotoxin, a powerful toxin which primarily affects breathing. Whoever comes in contact with the *zombi* poison becomes sick with a fever and nausea. Blood pressure and body temperature fall and finally, the person appears to be completely dead – and during this entire process, the victim is fully conscious.

The person is declared dead and is buried. A day later, the bokors or their assistants dig the person up. The *zombi* powder and the terrifying experience of being buried alive have had the intended effect: rendering the *zombi* into a state in which it is without a will of its own. During the ceremony, the bokor has captured the victim's soul in a *wanga*.

A *wanga* is a glass bottle or jar covered with red and black strips of fabric. It has small pieces of mirror fastened on the surface to deflect the negative energy. There are knives or scissors on the bottle to cut an enemy, and

the bottle contains a mixture of strong alcohol, herbs and bone fragments. The *wanga* is used to control the spirit trapped in the bottle. Destroying the bottle is said to break the bokor's control over the *zombi*.

There are, of course, means of protection against voodoo. Sprinkling red brick powder or salt along all the thresholds of one's home is one such method, or ensuring there is a protective *vevé* in the place a person spends a large part of their time – beneath the bed is a good place, for example. It is also possible to wear around one's neck a gris-gris pouch filled with purifying and protective herbs.

One more extreme way to protect oneself is by creating a *garde* or *gad*. A *gad* is made by first dousing one's left upper-arm in rum and then making a ceremonial cut in it. Afterward, herbs are rubbed into the wound and a strip of red cloth is tied around the cut. The person is then protected by a *Petwo* spirit, a powerful conjured spirit that protects the one it is connected to with the determination of an aggressive pitbull.

There is a plethora of incantations and protections in voodoo, just as there is a plethora of spirits and Loa that help those who pray to them.

Rule mechanics-wise, a voodoo incantation must always include among the ingredients a personal item, such as hair, fingernails or blood from the person who is the focus of the spell or curse. It is also necessary to pray to a Loa at some point during the incantation, in order for it to successfully get the desired effect. For *zombi* spells, the bokor's influence over their victim must be broken by destroying the *wanga*. Alternatively, if the setting is to be fully realistic, the person who has been subjected to the powder must be taken to the hospital to counteract the poison as quickly as possible.

CLAIRVIUS NARCISSE

Clairvius Narcisse was a Haitian man who died at about the age of 40 in 1962. He was buried and his family mourned his passing and said their farewells. Eighteen years later, his sister discovered him alive. He spent a good deal of time in the hospital, as he was very confused and had no memory of what had happened to him. Even the doctors were unable to find an explanation. Narcisse told of how, during the first two years following his "death" he was held as a slave to a bokor. Another prisoner woke from his stupor, killed the bokor who had enslaved them, and he and the remaining *zombis* were able to escape. Narcisse's case is documented in the controversial book *The Serpent and the Rainbow* by the anthropologist Wade Davis.



THE ORIGIN OF VODOO

Before the 1500s, records of voodoo show that it existed primarily in Africa, and that it was in its original state there, meaning it is most likely that before 1500, voodoo did not appear in any form in Europe or America.

Voodoo came to the island of Hispaniola along with the slaves. It is said that it is impossible to understand voodoo without first understanding its roots, and these roots are drenched in the blood of slaves.

The blood soaks the rich soil where the bodies of the Arawak and Taino Indians are buried. They, in turn, lost their lives in order to satiate the Spaniards' thirst for gold and wealth.

When the Spaniards discovered Mexico's silver mines, they lost interest in Hispaniola, and most of the island's inhabitants began to farm and raise cattle. Tortuga, an island near Hispaniola, was an infamous harbour for pirates and escaped slaves. In 1697, France took over the western portion of Hispaniola, and renamed it Saint-Domingue. It was not long before they realised just where the lucrative opportunities lay: the French slave trade, which quickly increased the African population on the island. The French used slaves to grow coffee, sisal, sugar and indigo – backbreaking work that meant that the average lifespan of the slaves was only about ten years. To maintain control over Saint-Domingue, the French used a number of terrifying methods. They whipped their slaves, branded them, tortured them using the rack, hung them from meat hooks placed under the ribs, cast-rated them, and burned them if they in any way attempted to retake any semblance of their humanity.

In this boiling pot of white supremacy and abused, battered Africans, slave revolts were common, and those slaves who were able, fled to the mountains of Haiti where they established their own colonies and their old traditions gained new life. Together with the surviving indian tribes who had fled their Spanish conquerors, these small societies created a mishmash religion with the Africans' tradition of spirits from Congo, Benin and Nigeria, as well as the indians' tradition of painting vevés with sand to call on their spirits. A little Catholicism was also mixed in, due to the fact that the French slave-owners had insisted they attend church each Sunday.

MACKANDAL

One of the most powerful and awe-inspiring slave revolts that took place during the French reign of terror, went on for seven years, from 1751 to 1758. The rebellion was led by a one-armed slave and houngan named *Mackandal*. He led the revolt that, when all was said and done, had claimed more than six thousand lives, and which made him a legend among the slaves. He was a cunning tactician and made good use of guerrilla warfare methods, but he was also a very skilled botanist, and many French plantation owners died in terrible agony, vomiting blood and screaming in pain after Mackandal had poisoned them. He was eventually burned at the stake, but even after his death, there were rumours that he had escaped the fire by turning himself into a fly.

Mackandal's rebellion inspired another houngan, Dutty Boukman, to lead a slave rebellion in 1791, in which two thousand Frenchmen died and more than a thousand plantations were burned. During the week this rebellion took place, Boukman was killed, but the Haitian war of independence had begun.

In 1804, the war ended and Jean-Jaques Dessalines ruled the island. He was of African descent, but ruled in the same manner as the French colonists before him – with fear tactics. Voodoo was banned, again, as Dessalines had seen for himself the kind of power religion had over people.

PAPA DOC

From the 1800s onwards, Haiti was led by a string of different people. The most interesting of these in the context of voodoo was François Duvalier, also known as *Papa Doc*. In September of 1957, Papa Doc was elected president of Haiti, and this was the last election on the island for the next 30 years. Initially, Duvalier's rule was very popular, but gradually, he became more paranoid and megalomaniacal. He instituted a militia called Tonton Macoute, which would protect the people from the overreach of the military. In the end, however, it was Tonton Macoute that was to blame for the worst crimes. Rape, murder, and extortion were rampant. Tonton Macoute kept Duvalier in power through terror. Duvalier himself professed openly to his belief in voodoo and seldom went anywhere without his top hat, dark glasses, and tuxedo, the symbols of Le Baron Samedi.

After Papa Doc's death in 1971, his son Jean-Claude (Baby-Doc) Duvalier, took over. However, he was not nearly as strong as his father, and was forced into exile in 1986. Tonton Macoute attempted to maintain power, but they too were soon cast out, sometimes extremely brutally.

VOODOO IN HISTORICAL SETTINGS

In historical contexts, voodoo is often painted with two faces. On the one hand, we see the “real” religion, a hodgepodge of Catholicism and spirit worship, and on the other, we see “tourist voodoo”. Some areas of New Orleans, for example, have become venues where white people can go and watch the spectacle of voodoo. It is a religion that is, on the surface, difficult to discern from Catholicism – practitioners adapted their behaviours according to their masters’ pleasure and displeasure, and disguised their religion as best they could.

Role playing campaigns that contain voodoo in historical settings are best placed on Saint-Domingue and Haiti, as well as the southern parts of North America from 1700 and onwards. My personal favourite is New Orleans in the 1700s, as the city itself offers so many colourful figures and events to incorporate in gameplay.

VOODOO IN THE PRESENT

Voodoo in contemporary campaigns are useful both as sources of good influence and dark terror. Cults that use voodoo as a tool for dominance still exist. As recently as 2010, international newspapers covered stories about victims of trafficking who were dominated by bokors to keep them under control. In some instances, police called in houngans in an attempt to reassure the recovered women that they were safe.

People who control their enemies with terror is a constant theme in history. Using voodoo as a method of extortion works well also. Medical science is probably of little help when it comes to a person who has been poisoned with zombi powder and has no will of his/her own, but is otherwise completely healthy.

VOODOO IN SCIENCE FICTION

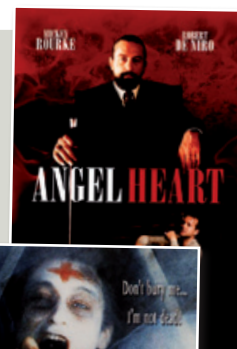
There are many ways to create zombies. Bokors in the future may make use of theta waves that affect the brain’s frequencies. Houngans and mambos jack into the net, or use dimension portals to speak with the Loa. The Loa may turn out to be friendly (and not so friendly) higher state energy beings that for some reason believe humanity is worth helping.

Or perhaps voodoo remains the same as it is today, and despite changes in science and technology, the religion could be used to add a touch of terror to, say, a space adventure.

INSPIRATION

VOODOO IN POPULAR CULTURE

- **Angel Heart** – 1987, directed by Alan Parker. Harry Angel, a private detective, becomes involved in a web of murder and voodoo. Still one of the great horror flicks.
- **The Serpent and the Rainbow** – 1988, directed by Wes Craven. Loosely “based” on Wade Davis’s book, and contains lots of Hollywood voodoo.
- **Skeleton Key** – 2005, directed by Iain Softley. A nurse at a plantation in New Orleans becomes involved in a number of atrocities. Also contains lots of Hollywood voodoo.
- **The Man in the Morgue** – TV series *Bones* takes on voodoo, and gives a glimpse of an interesting voodoo sect. Also fairly Hollywood-y.
- **Event Horizon** – 1997, directed by Paul W.S. Anderson. Not exactly voodoo, per se, but horror in space, which makes it interesting with regard to crossing genres.
- **The Marianne Lehmann Collection** – The world’s largest collection of vodou objects (more than 2000 pieces) tell the true story about the reality and history of vodou. The collection is now managed by the *Fondation pour la préservation, la valorisation et la production d’œuvres culturelles haïennes*, based in Pétion-Ville, Haiti. More than 300 pieces of this collection was on exhibition at the Canadian Museum of Civilization until February of 2014.



ADVENTURE SEEDS

Passion Noir

One person (a non-player character or player character) is suddenly stricken with lust for an individual of the same sex. This individual happens to hold a position in a conservative organisation bound by tradition, such as the Catholic church or a political party that frowns on same-sex relationships. It turns out that both people feel a surge of passion for one another, but after a hot night of sex, the passion has dissipated and both individuals go their separate ways vowing to never speak of this again. Until an envelope arrives containing photos of their rendezvous, demanding they pay or else the pictures will be made public, which would cause a terrible scandal.

Behind the sudden bout of passion is a voodoo priest intent on revenge, or perhaps it’s just a bored bokor who needs some quick cash. The characters can be involved in the adventure by having been one of those affected by the spell, or perhaps by

investigating what actually happened to them, and why they were so suddenly impassioned. Traces of the incident – which would likely consist of gris-gris pouches or vevés painted under their beds – lead back to a voodoo priest who has the ability and motivation to make life difficult for the player characters.

Revolt

Player characters either play white slave owners or slaves in the 1700s. A slave rebellion has begun and the characters must now choose sides. Among the slaves is a mambo who is more than willing to use her skills with poison and voodoo to free herself and her fellow slaves in order to seek a better life in the mountains of Haiti.

This type of adventure invites participants to examine the slaves’ situation in the 1700s by playing “the bad guys” who decide to ally themselves with the slaves, or alternately to try to put down the rebellion. Moral dilemmas, action and cruelty are probably ingredients in such an adventure.

LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR

*HUGE IN THE ROLE-PLAYING COMMUNITY
AND ALMOST UNKNOWN OUTSIDE OF IT*

TEXT **MARTIN BRODÉN ROTHER-SCHIRREN**

ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN
& OLA LARSSON**

H.P. Lovecraft has in later years been called the father of modern horror and referred to as the greatest horror writer of the 20th century. This is a big deal when we're talking about a century where authors like Clive Barker and Stephen King have reigned supreme over Hollywood's horror genre. The number of films based on Lovecraft's works is not vast in comparison, which is a sign that his "discovery" is perhaps fairly recent.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born in 1890 and died in 1937, just 47 years old. The fact that he lived in poverty conditions likely contributed to his early death. Perhaps he saw himself as a writer with that something special, and if so, perhaps he shared that image with some of his readers and writer friends, but few others. There was nothing in his life that indicated he would one day reach the level of popularity his writing holds today.

This article will demonstrate that Lovecraft's lack of celebrity during his life is not without justification, and that when we say today that we like Lovecraftian horror, we mean something other than that we like Lovecraft's writing.

But first, we will delve into one of Lovecraft's earlier works and take a closer look at some patterns.

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION **FENIX 4/2010**





THE TERRIBLE OLD MAN

In the short story “*The Terrible Old Man*” from 1920, Lovecraft writes for the first time about the little New England coastal town of Kingsport. A gang of criminals – Angelo Ricci, Joe Czanek, and Manuel Silva – plan to break into the house of the mysterious old man (known as The Terrible Old Man among the townsfolk), who lives in a house as old as he is, on Water Street, near the harbour. The men try to break in during the middle of the night, and they die inexplicably.

The story is definitely not one of Lovecraft’s best. It was written early on in his career and is almost too short to even be called a short story. (We might refer to it as “flash fiction” today.) Yet “*The Terrible Old Man*” serves well as an overall representation of the author’s style.

Note first the names Lovecraft gives the robbers – a mixture of Italian and Eastern European:

“[they] were not of Kingsport blood; they were of that new and heterogeneous alien stock which lies outside the charmed circle of New England life and traditions...”

These are opinions that are very close to Lovecraft’s own. He had a problem with immigration and people with mixed backgrounds, and found a genuine comfort in New England’s traditions and architecture.

Another distinct feature is that we, the readers, do not get to know everything. We have access to a few details and must then solve the mystery on our own. We learn that the old man is said to have once been a sea captain of East Indian clipper ships, and that he is older than anyone can remember. We know that he is somewhat peculiar and has been seen carrying on conversations with empty bottles in his house.

During the robbery, Czanek, who waits in the getaway vehicle, hears screams coming from the house. Against his better judgement, he

enters. We follow him until he gets to the door, where he sees not his companions, but the old man, who is revealed to have yellow eyes.

We then discover that three bodies were found the next morning, and that there was much gossip about this for a long time afterward. Nowhere in the story is it mentioned that anything supernatural has taken place. It is instead Lovecraft’s rich descriptions of the setting, with its moonbeams shining on the old man’s bizarre collection of stones in the garden, that lead us to believe that something outside the norms of this world has indeed happened.

A third feature of Lovecraft’s writing is his predilection for fictitious towns and villages. This is not unique with Lovecraft – fantasy writers are always creating new worlds – but it is nevertheless interesting, and will prove relevant in his future works. Though Kingsport is not as well known as Arkham, the fictive town located a few miles north of Kingsport, and the setting of many of Lovecraft’s stories.

The fourth reason to focus on “*The Terrible Old Man*” in this article is that the old man makes an appearance in a later story, “*The Strange High House in the Mist*”. The old man does not have a large part in the story, and his only real purpose is to inform the protagonist that the house on the cliff is even older than he himself is:

Even the Terrible Old Man who talks to leaden pendulums in bottles, buys groceries with centuried Spanish gold, and keeps stone idols in the yard of his antediluvian cottage in Water Street can only say these things were the same when his grandfather was a boy.
(from “*The Strange High House in the Mist*”)

It is a type of self-referential mention that Lovecraft makes to his own works – readers know that the old man is unnaturally old, and to have him say the house is even older gives extra poignancy to the story. Lovecraft’s intertextuality becomes a powerful tool, and it is just this type of connection that helps to create a universe. It doesn’t really matter that the old man behaves differently in the two stories. His role in the first story is as the antagonist (or the protagonist, if we view the robbers as the real “bad guys”) – old, yellow eyed, and mysterious. When we meet the old man again in the next story, he has no problem at all serving as an information source and happily tells all he knows. Perhaps the robbers in the first story should have chosen a different strategy when they confronted the old man. He was simultaneously a dangerous loner as well as a wise old man.

LOVECRAFTIANISM – CULT OF PERSONALITY

What characterises Lovecraftian terror? In Lovecraft’s world, we humans live in a bubble of safe ignorance. The world is more absurd than we could possibly imagine. Humanity is insignificant in the universe on a fundamental level – it is almost as if we are defined by our unimportance. Heroes are often, though not always, helplessly dropped into a situation that was doomed from the start. Obstacles are insurmountable, victories are short lived, and in the long run, there is no hope for humanity. The human psyche is too fragile to deal with the truth; those who glimpse it usually lose their minds. Aside from this, Lovecraft’s writing style is characterised by archaic expressions and the protagonists, who are typically isolated from society in general, are often academics or intellectuals.

According to Wikipedia, Lovecraftian horror focuses on the internal organs with their

moist and slimy membranes, as opposed to classic horror’s external organs with blood and skeletons. Like everything about Lovecraft, this claim should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt. He died long ago, and can do nothing about the mythical image that has grown up around him. He would likely have enjoyed the idea, but he can no longer comment on it.

Lovecraft had admirers, especially among other writers, and many of them corresponded with him via letter. One of these was August Derleth, who was also a horror writer. After Lovecraft’s death, Derleth and Donald Wandrei founded the publishing company Arkham House, which published Lovecraft’s stories, among other works. It was thanks to Derleth and Arkham House that Lovecraft’s work was preserved and found a new audience. Additionally, Derleth reworked several of Lovecraft’s unfinished works.

Derleth is a chapter unto himself, and his beliefs about a fight between good and evil do not mesh well with Lovecraft’s nihilism, but because Derleth’s work to preserve Lovecraft for posterity has been so vital for where we are today, we can perhaps also let Derleth’s Lovecraftian works exist as a part of Lovecraft’s legacy.

Derleth was not alone in writing in a Lovecraftian style. There were others who also wanted to explore Lovecraft’s manner of writing, such as the author Clark Ashton Smith, Robert Bloch (who later wrote *Psycho*) and Robert E. Howard (who also created *Conan*). Along with Arkham House, there came a new generation of writers who wanted to participate and contribute. Some of these wrote pure horror pastiches, while others contributed something more genuinely of their own creation to the genre. Lovecraftian horror is something far greater than one writer’s work. Lovecraft laid a foundation and had an initial vision, but there are now far more powerful forces in motion.

JUST HOW AWFUL IS AWFUL?

Role players and other gamers have always had a fondness for speculative fiction. The term is somewhat modern. Previously, bookstores and libraries often categorised both horror and fantasy under “science fiction”. But speculative fiction encompasses a broader field, including fiction where the creation of the world is a part of the fiction. Its breadth is what makes it so popular among gamers, as it includes everything from superheroes to epic narratives to Indiana Jones and much, much more.

Fantasy reaped tremendous success with the popularity of role-playing in the 70s, and it was only a matter of time before other

speculative fiction would be “RPG-ified”. This was, after all, during a time when there was NOT at least one RPG for every conceivable gaming concept.

Lovecraft began to really gain popularity in the 80s, at about the same time the RPG company Chaosium started using Lovecraft’s ideas when creating horror RPGs under the general *Basic Roleplaying RPG system*. Their first among these was “*Call of Cthulhu*”, which shone a spotlight on Lovecraft’s works, and without the game’s existence, Lovecraft would likely not be as well known as he currently is. Like Derleth, “*Call of Cthulhu*” brought Lovecraftian horror to a new audience through the medium of a role-playing game.

RPGs have different expectations than literature does. In literature, everything serves a purpose either for the story or as filler. In this way, literature is more connected to, say, film, which is also a static medium. In interactive media, however, it is vital that the world respond to the protagonists’ actions, which requires that the medium have greater flexibility.

On the other hand, RPGs and literature have a kinship that cannot be shared by film. With both traditional table RPGs and in books, one is expected to fill in the gaps with one’s own imagination. We have the voice of the author/game master in our heads, but the details are up to us to create based on our interpretations of the context. This idea of filling in the blanks with our own creative power really meshes well with Lovecraft’s style of narration.

This is not the only reason, however, that Lovecraftian horror functions so well in the RPG format. No matter how much imagination we can muster when playing RPGs, there are a few basic conditions that we want to have clarified. What cities are there? What people? What can I expect as a player in a story of this nature? How should we work together in order for everyone to have an enjoyable experience with these basic conditions? We don’t really need to know any of this before we begin to play, but having answers to these questions from the start will likely save the game master from going prematurely grey. This is one of the reasons it is important to create worlds for RPGs.

By having a coherent mythology with creatures and gods and fictive characters and locations within factual places in the world, Lovecraftian horror serves well as an RPG setting. It already has many of those basic conditions set, allowing the RPG writer to focus their creativity on filling in details, enriching the world, and answering questions that a horror novelist doesn’t have to: What’s behind the next bend?

THE MONSTER WHO DEVoured GENRES

And here is where something else begins to happen. Lovecraftian horror begins, like one of Lovecraft's gods, to swallow similar genres. It starts with vampires, werewolves, ghosts and other traditional Gothic horror creatures that are added when the game master wants to use "traditional horror" in the game.

Another clear example is Hastur. Lovecraft mentions this word in passing twice in the story *"The Whisperer in Darkness"* published in 1931. The first time it is mentioned, it is in a list with several other phenomena. The second time gives only a hint more information:

*There is a whole secret cult of evil men
(a man of your mystical erudition will
understand me when I link them with
Hastur and the Yellow Sign)...*
(from *"The Whisperer in Darkness"*)

This story is Lovecraft's homage to one of his role models, the writer Robert W. Chambers. Chambers wrote several stories with a supernatural feel. The short story collection *"The King in Yellow"* from 1895 was his debut book. Like Lovecraft, Chambers has a number of recurring concepts. The name Hastur, a mysterious yellow sign, and an equally mysterious figure called "The King in Yellow", that, aside from being the name of the figure and the story collection, is the name of a play that occurs in the stories that is said to make the reader insane. The stories in the collection have no other connection to one another aside from this one recurring idea.

When Lovecraft mentions Hastur, he is among good company. Chambers had borrowed the name Hastur from an earlier American writer, Ambrose Bierce. For Lovecraft's followers, both writers and game constructors, this is enough to incorporate the idea of Hastur, who is now an essential component in Lovecraft's legacy even though the concept was hatched long before Lovecraft began writing.

Another, more modern example of Lovecraftian horror swallowing similar horror genres is the boardgame *Arkham Horror* – a fantastic game where portals to other dimensions open in Arkham and a creature beyond time and space tries to break through to our world, and the players are heroes who must cooperate in order to save the world. The Lovecraftian horror element is in there as well, but it is now mixed up not only with traditional Gothic horror, but also with interdimensional and personal horror a la *Hellraiser* and the RPG *Kult*.



JAPANESE GHOSTS AND AMERICAN VAMPIRES

It is difficult to say what Lovecraftian horror is, now that it has encompassed so many other nearby genres. One thing is clear for me, however. Though I love to return to the author's original works, I do it most to refresh my memory of his writing and not really to feel scared. Some might feel I am critical of Lovecraftian horror, but that isn't the case. *Arkham Horror* is my favourite boardgame and *Call of Cthulhu* was long my favourite RPG. I absolutely love the fusion of concepts and ideas within the enclosure of Lovecraftian horror. And what will it become in the

future? Will the Japanese animated ghosts and the new trend of Hollywood vampires be incorporated as well? Remember, you read it here first!

Lovecraft is as known within the RPG movement as he is unknown outside of it. I suggest, however, that it was not his writing in and of itself that made this true, but rather our desire to create worlds, add on to them, and have access to a rich trove of ideas – these things made Lovecraft great. When we speak of Lovecraftian horror, we must be aware that it is something that we have all been involved in creating.

THE MANY FACES OF HORROR

TEXT PETE NASH ILLUSTRATION MAGNUS FALLGREN & LUKAS THELIN

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION FENIX 4/2013

"In the centre was Phobos (Fear) worked in adamant, unspeakable, staring backwards with eyes that glowed with fire. His mouth was full of teeth in a white row, fearful and daunting, and upon his grim brow hovered frightful Eris (Strife) who arrays the throng of men... Upon the shield Proioxis (Pursuit) and Palioxis (Flight) were wrought, and Homados (Tumult), and Phobos (Panic), and Androktasie (Slaughter)."

A description of the shield of Heracles, Hesiod

One of the most useful tools for a Game Master to entertain players is the application of fear. Despite being used as the descriptive word for its own genre of entertainment, *horror* (the god Phrike to the ancient Greeks) has many disparate forms, something realised by polytheistic civilisations that had separate deities for each nuance of the emotion. Technically horror is more than just the simplistic shock and revulsion which has spawned an entire generation of low budget movies. It also includes the slow realisation of impending doom, emotional consequences of a misjudged actions and understanding that we ourselves can be the worst sort of monster.

Although a Sword & Sorcery system at its heart, introducing horror into a *RuneQuest* campaign is easy, no matter what the genre or setting. There are three main methods of supporting horror tropes using the core rules, in addition to the usual skills a Game Master should develop in setting an atmosphere.

THE DREAD CAP OF HADES

One of the most potent items forged by Hephaestus, the dread cap wove shadows about its wearer to render them hidden. As a game mastering technique, using the unseen can plant the seeds of fear in even the bravest. An invisible monster for example is a frightening thing to face for characters in *RuneQuest*, since locating, let alone fighting such creatures is near impossible. Striking or defending against an invisible attacker should be treated the same as being Blinded.

To replicate such science-fiction and fantasy tropes, *RuneQuest* offers the theism miracle *Chameleon* and similarly named

Creature Ability *Camouflaged*; both of which are intentionally limited in scope so as to not make them unbeatable, although some creatures such as spirits are completely unobservable without the right skills or magic.

However there are many other ways to use the unseen to unsettle players. One example might be for characters to hear the screams of a brutal murder in an adjoining chamber, only to discover freshly mutilated bodies laying about a room with no observable exit other than that entered by. There need not be any invisible foe; merely a secret passageway or some unobvious means of transportation used to depart the scene, such as climbing a pre-prepared rope quickly pulled out of sight... or if a more magical method is required, teleportation or shape-shifting.

Of course unsettling events need not embrace or even threaten death. Simply hearing a cup fall to the floor with no clear explanation of why it toppled can be enough to set the atmosphere. Other examples include statues that seem to weep (caused by a drop of water which leaked through the floor above), an unrecognised howl (a strangely echoing gust of wind), hair standing up on end (entering a naturally cold place or static electrical build up), a building seemingly abandoned moments before (the occupants fled or in hiding), or a diary opened at the last page, its last entry unfinished mid-sentence, can be enough to plant doubt and wariness in the minds of players.

The art of utilising the unseen in this manner is to allow tension to build by never directly confronting the characters with the thing or natural explanation behind such apparently supernatural occurrences, until the very climax of the adventure.

THE SNAKE TRESSED MOTHER

Another type of horror which can be used to scare characters is the fear of powers against which they are helpless. The classical example of this is the head of Medusa, whose gaze "No one of mortal kind shall look upon and still draw breath". There are plenty of strange effects which cause a visceral dread in players.

Whilst instant death is rather passé, it does tend to induce caution. More feared however are exotic powers that trigger atavistic terror, such as growing older; becoming helplessly paralysed; slowly transmogrifying into slime or sand; turning into a mindless zombie servitor of some plant or insect, and so on.

Since these types of powers often tend to terminally remove a character from play, they must not be over-utilised. In addition it should be remembered that *RuneQuest* always offers a chance to resist terrible effects, usually in the form of an opposed roll of the ability's skill value versus an appropriate common character skill like Endurance, Evade or Willpower, although other more applicable skills could readily be substituted.

Worse still are those abhorrent abilities which don't kill characters but merely cripple them. For example, a creature which permanently drained skill points is terrifying to players, who would likely flee the next time they met such an encounter, rather than face erosion of their hard won expertise. A creature ability named *Consume Knowledge* could take the form of draining a character's highest skill by 1d6+4 points each time they were touched, appending it to the monster's own skill if theirs was lower!

Other versions of the same idea are fiends which irreversibly drain or consume *Characteristic Points*, *Magic Points* or *Hit Points*, unless reversed by extremely potent magic – assuming it was available. Such unwholesome effects are not just limited to creatures, but can be inflicted by disease, poison and even magic as exemplified by the list of conditions such as *Maiming* or *Sapping* on page 113 of the core rules; the *Diminish* and *Tap* spells on pages 241 and 254; and the creature ability *Characteristic Drain* on page 313 in *RuneQuest*.

THE PROPHECIES OF CASSANDRA

Third and perhaps closest to the core meaning of horror, is the discovery of unsettling knowledge which undermines the preconceptions (or possibly the delusions) of player characters. Traditionally in literature this is conveyed via uncovering a forbidden book, ancient tomb inscription or some drug-addled nightmares that hint at some immanent doom; whether it be a prophesy of cataclysm, the existence of mythical beings of antagonistic power or even that some aspect of reality has been warped to disguise the horror which lurks beneath. Unavoidable fate was the horror imposed on both Cassandra and Oedipus in Greek literature.

Yet this type of horror does not need to be gruesome per se. For instance, there is an awfulness to know that you are personally and directly responsible for some disaster. More mature players will perhaps understand the depths of tragedy losing an in-character wife or child due to the actions of their alter-ego. Again these consequences need not be supernatural in nature. They could easily be the result of an enemy who sought out a vicarious revenge on friends and relatives of their nemesis, or by the character's themselves carrying back a deadly disease to their own settlement.

Better still can be the revelation that a long standing ally or mentor of the player characters actually turns out to be a sickeningly depraved psychotic who has been performing evil acts under their very noses. Practices that induce a primitive gut response include cannibalism, child sacrifice, using people as incubators for other life forms, even performing experimental vivisections on living victims. In such cases it is as much the *performer* of the act, rather than revulsion associated with it which induces the horror.

On the other hand opening a bottle that imprisoned an ancient evil, which then rampages across the world causing genocide, brings its own psychological horror, especially if repeatedly warned against doing so. In this way the players' own curiosity, greed or belligerence can be used to set up a horrifyingly traumatic experience.

Some of the best slow-burning horror can be implemented by undermining the established world view of the characters. Discovering a flower whose sap transforms its picker into another flower of the same type can be chilling, but only briefly so unless further unsettling discoveries are made which erode the character's presumptions how science or reality work.

More revolutionary implementations of the same concept can be created by starting a campaign in an ostensibly 'normal' game world, then applying elements of the supernatural or otherworldly in incremental instalments. This is more the realm of works influenced by Lord Dunsany or H. P. Lovecraft whose protagonists begin to experience the truth that gods, demons or sorcery truly exist, and worse still, that these paranormal powers influence the world in terrible ways unnoticed by common folk.

Psychological horror needs no rules to back it up, but the *Cults and Brotherhoods* chapter of *RuneQuest* can be used to create the supplicants of such alien beings, or fendish abusers of corrupting powers. Player characters never need to discover the truth of what lies behind the





veil, it is not knowing which is the true horror of such knowledge! We conclude with the following creature loosely based upon the Erinyes, the divine punishers of dreadful crimes. Rather than adhering to their Classical nature, these horrifying monsters are designed to be inserted into any type of fantasy or science fiction campaign.

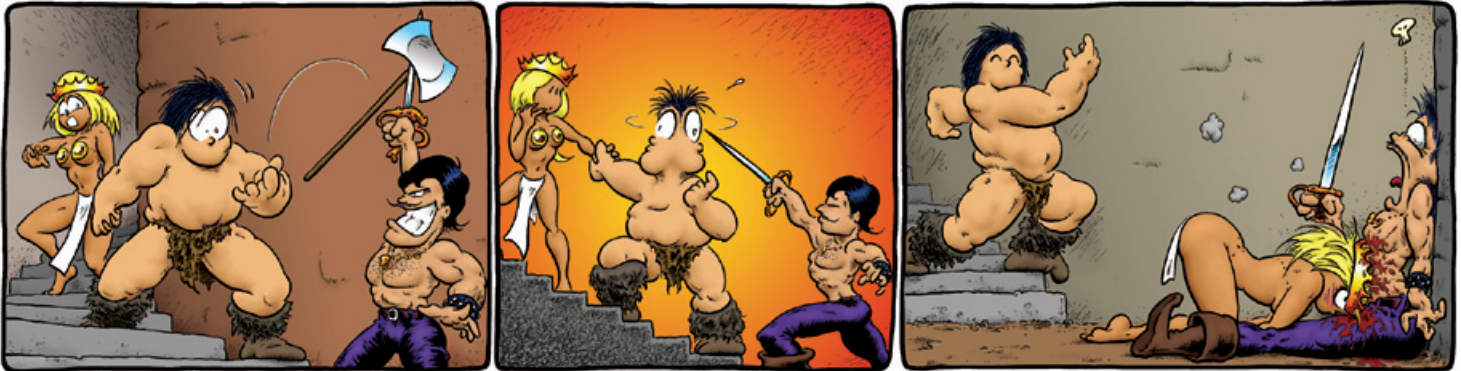
THE VENGEFUL ONES

Created long ago by an insane sorcerer or summoned from another dimension, Phrike are terrifying demons which, rather than mindlessly slay living creatures, feast off psychic emanations of fear and horror. To instil such emotions the Phrike undertake a reign of psychological persecution, so that its victims slowly descend into paranoia and madness prior to the demon revealing itself. Such enterprises begin with simple little acts of trickery, aided by the demon's natural ability to turn invisible. They pull at cloaks or topple nearby objects, startling their victim who must make an opposed Perception roll at Herculean penalty against the Phrike's Stealth to detect its presence. Once suitably disconcerted, the demon whispers into the ears of the victim, mimicking sounds and voices as if from a long dead enemy or crying child. This is normally enough to instil nightmares so that Fatigue levels begin to accumulate (1/day) from lack of rest. Finally the Phrike will manipulate the victim into suspecting they are responsible for horrific acts of treachery, betrayal or murder during their brief periods of exhausted sleep; by turning friends and allies against them. Their voice is heard from afar as if revealing a hard kept secret to another, or gloating just prior to attacking an associate from behind. Ultimately the Phrike will slay an innocent with the victim's weapon and return the bloody evidence to their own hand whilst unconscious. If this does not work, the demon will concoct ever more terrible crimes till the victim is driven to suicide from despair, at which point it visibly manifests to harvest the last dregs of horror. At first sight Phrike appear to be winged hags of ugly countenance, with large bronze-coloured wings, snakes wrapped around their limbs and holding sickle shaped swords. On closer investigation the serpents are revealed as tubular worms which writhe in place of actual hands and feet, with a single bony claw extending from their mass. The head is in fact a tri-partite orifice, which splits open to exhibit a mass of snake-like tentacles and eye stalks within, no mouth being needed due to the Phrike's psychic feeding. Those that observe the head splitting suffer the demon's Terrifying ability.

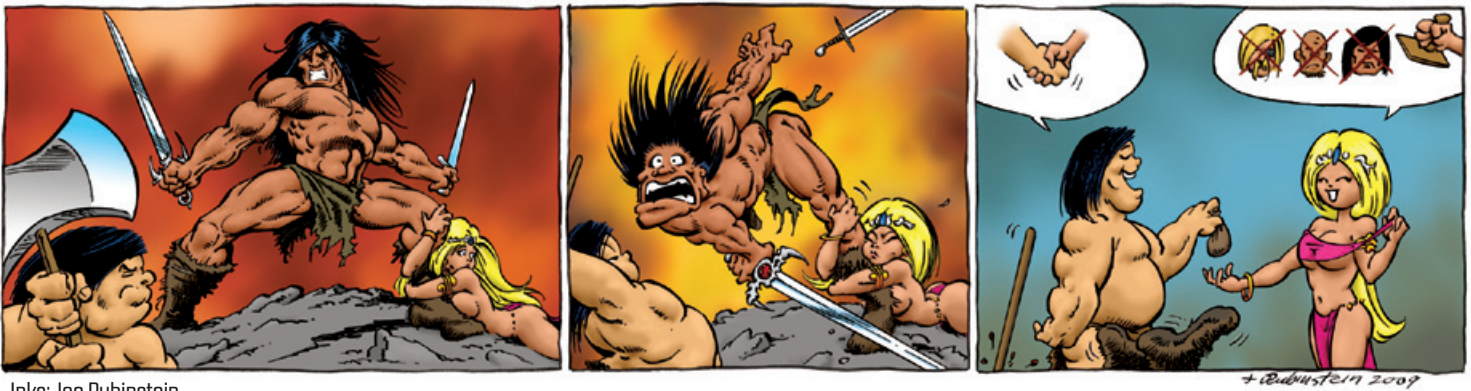
THE VENGEFUL ONES – THE STATS

Characteristics	Action Points: 2	1d20	Hit Location	AP/HP
STR: 2d6+9 (16)	Damage Modifier: +1d6	1-2	Right Leg	4/7
CON: 3d6 (11)	Magic Points: 7	3-4	Left Leg	4/7
SIZ: 2d6+15 (22)	Movement: 8 metres, 15 metres flying	5-8	Body	4/9
DEX: 2d6 (7)	Strike Rank: +11	9-10	Right Wing	4/8
INS: 2d6+7 (14)	Armour: Demonic Skin	11-12	Left Wing	4/8
POW: 2d6 (7)	Abilities: Adhering, Formidable Natural Weapons, Terrifying	13-15	Right Arm	4/6
	Magic: The Phrike can turn invisible at the cost of 1 Magic Point, long enough to play a trick or whisper into an ear	16-18	Left Arm	4/6
		19-20	Head	4/7
Weapons		Skills		
Combat Style: Hooked Horror (Claw) 73%		Athletics 43%, Brawn 58%, Endurance 66%, Evade 44%, Fly 53%, Mimicry 81%, Perception 61%, Stealth 71%, Willpower 64%		
Weapons	Type	Size	Force	Reach
Scything Claw		L	L	L
			Damage	AP/HP
			1d8+1d6	As for Arm

BERNARD THE BARBARIAN SERVING THE CROWN



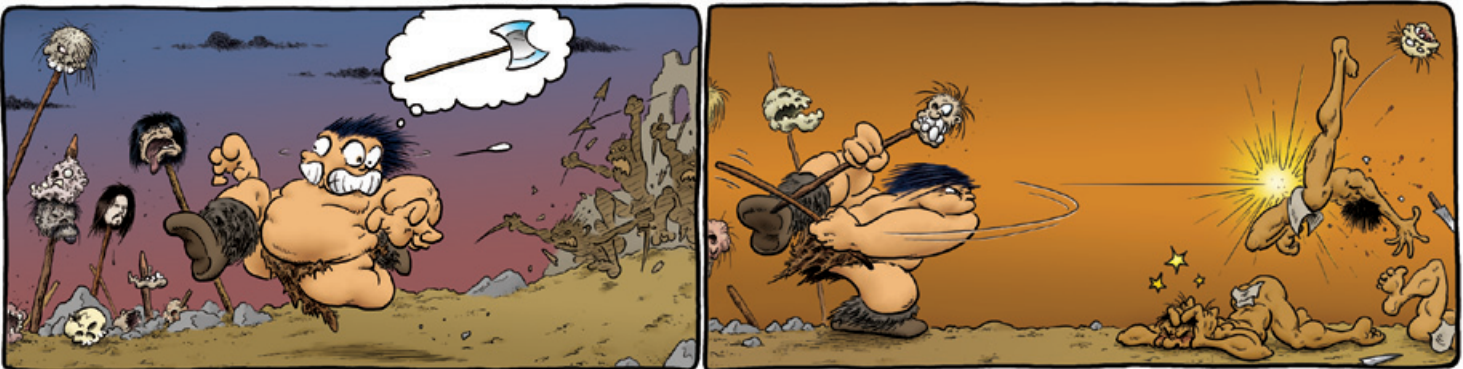
BERNARD THE BARBARIAN PACTING



Inks: Joe Rubinstein

+ Rubinstein 2009

BERNARD THE BARBARIAN GETS AHEAD



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN SWINGING THE FOOD CHAIN



THE DEMONS OF

MEMORY

And there are secret stories that remain hidden in the shadows of the mind; they are like living organisms, they grow roots, and tentacles, they become covered with excrescences and parasites, and with time are transformed into the matter of nightmares. To exorcise the demons of memory, it is sometimes necessary to tell them as a story.

—sabel Allende, *The Stories of Eva Luna*

TEXT **KENNETH HITE**
ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN**

Let me tell you a story. It's a story about a place where they keep demons. Demons who can do things to your memory. That's why it has to be just a story; if it were real, I couldn't remember it, and I surely couldn't tell you about it. Even as a story, I don't know if I remember all the details, or if what I think I remember is just a story that the Nefastis Institute told me. The Nefastis Institute – that's where they keep the demons.

You can't find the Nefastis Institute on any maps made in the last thirty years or so; the map-makers and surveyors forgot it was there. If you could get there, you might see more than a few wrecked cars burned in the ditches and towed into the woods: people who suddenly forget how to drive can spin out of control on the icy, gravelled roads, and crash. Nobody remembers to come look for the bodies, or for the cars. But not a lot of

people come there now, or at least not in their own cars. Busses with blacked-out windows, and even some tractor-trailers with the doors chained shut, they drive out of the city, over that one range of hills (or is it a tree-line? maybe it's a marsh) and down into the wide, desolate, and most of all forgotten moorland where the Institute buildings crouch.

The Institute was built early in the last century, or maybe in the one before that. It might have been a hospital once, or a sanitarium. Or maybe it was a prison, too. That's what it looks like, I think, gray and immense, carved stone and field stone piled and raised in battlemented towers over gargoyle-ridden slate roofs, hunched on the pale grass and gravel of the grounds, surrounded by tall, black trees that shroud it from curious eyes.

Or maybe I'm wrong. That seems almost too much like a story. Maybe the Nefastis

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WE ARE WITH THE
GOVERNMENT
YOU REMEMBER
BEING IN OUR
DEBT
YOU WISH TO
COMPLY

Institute is one of those anonymous polygons of blue glass and chrome steel on the highway by the airport, the ones you see piled up around the business hotels and corporate office parks, with a carefully trimmed lawn and nobody in sight for miles. Those vans and busses and tractor-trailers just drive into the parking garage, nameless corpuscles in the arteries of commerce. Looking at it, you can't quite tell how to get from the highway to the parking garage; it's like the off-ramp and the access road refuse to stick in your mind long enough to drive there. Then it slides by in your rear-view mirror, and you forget the building entirely, you forget its name, you forget it was ever there, because here's your exit now.

The tax office forgot it was there, too; nobody connected with the Nefastis Institute has paid taxes for decades. They still have passports, and drivers' licenses, and credit cards, and everything else they need in the outer world; they have bank accounts behind anonymous numbers that everybody remembers having checked but nobody remembers any details of. They need money, documents, some connections, maybe a phone line or an Internet address. Or maybe they just use that one Web-based anonymizer, you know the one I mean. It's right on the tip of my tongue. Damn, that is so frustrating. Anyway, that's how they talk to their clients; that's how they arrange for their supplies; that's how they still go among us to do their business. Usually, though not always, their business is murder. Sometimes it's theft, or obtaining secrets for blackmail and extortion. Sometimes, it's helping a tyrant escape justice, or a government destroy a dissident. It could involve covering up a crime, or destroying a reputation or a life, or silencing a witness or an investigator. It might just be propaganda or degradation or media manipulation. It's never something good. It uses demons to do it, remember?

Right, those demons. They are what the *Book of Kings* calls *ruach sheqer*, the "lying spirits," immaterial beings that exist only in our perceptions. Which is to say, only in our memories. You begin to see the problem. Dr. Margaret Nefastis (why am I so sure her name is Margaret? why am I so sure she is a doctor?) discovered the *ruach sheqer*, in her research on damaged brains, brains unable to remember or forget. Or perhaps she discovered the Names that summon them in a crumbling tome, bound in shagreen, a tome remembered only in very old catalogues and inventories; catalogues and inventories that not even the demons have remembered to destroy. Or she solved for them by mapping the information flow inside the most advanced forms of neural-net computers, computers

capable of melting themselves into new circuitries with the sheer mass and heat of their recall. She used those Names, those regimens, those rituals, those programs; she injected or summoned or built or solved the *ruach sheqer* into our world, and stored them in the minds of her operatives, her ovates, her orderlies. She trained her operatives to command the demons, and gave them sigils or surgeries that protected their own memories. Surely she did that, at least. She could not have been so careless as to forget such an elementary precaution.

How does a Nefastis operative use the demon on a subject? I'm not sure. Perhaps it depends on the complexity of the demonic task, or perhaps it depends on the strength of the operative. If conditions are perfect, or the rote easily comes to memory, the operative must merely look into the target's eyes, or manage things so that the target sees a specific talisman or rune (painted on his wall, slipped into his newspaper, posted on a Website he frequents, tattooed on a beautiful woman he covets). More complex programs likely require the target to listen to the operative speak, read mnemonically encoded text, or even listen to a song with forgetfulness embedded in the chords.

Complex combined projections of more than one demon require more than one operator, or perhaps remain the province of the most skilled and cruel of the orderlies, or even of Dr. Nefastis herself. But she does not leave the Institute often enough for such programs to be commonplace recourses. And she must leave the Institute for such occasions, just like any of her ovates. Surely, the operatives have to approach the target in person. Surely, the demons cannot suborn our memories over the phone, or through words on a monitor, or in a TV jingle, or between frames of a movie. Surely that can't happen. We'd notice that, at least. We'd surely remember something like that, wouldn't we?

The seven demons, at least as I remember them, are as follows.

KALUHA

Demon of Decaying Memory

Kaluha speeds the process of natural forgetfulness, and extends it to events or happenings or people one would not normally forget. When Kaluha wipes something from your mind, you don't even recall forgetting it; you don't interrogate the blank space in your mind unless someone forcibly points your attention to it. The operatives most often use Kaluha to erase recent memories: "Forget we were here." "Forget you heard anything." "Forget you saw this sigil."

KAZBIEL

Demon of Absent Mind

Kazbiel jogs memory out of its tracks momentarily, causing you to forget to do something, especially something you normally do routinely or subconsciously. Kazbiel can thus alter the very near past: "You forgot to take the safety off." "You forgot to call in your position." And the future: "You will forget to check your oxygen supply." "You will forget to load the gun." "You will leave your keys at the office." "You will forget to take your laptop out of the cab." Like those of Jaluha, the target doesn't remember Kazbiel's mental caress, although they may notice their lapse if someone else checks the gun or their keys before the crisis occurs. The Institute's operatives mostly use Kazbiel in quickly developing situations, or ones aided by their target's inattention and seeming carelessness.

PURAH

Demon of Blocked Mind

Purah pours out amnesia, and drowns memories you already have. You forget what you once knew better than the back of your hand; it's on the tip of your tongue but you just can't recall it. You know you can't remember what Purah has blocked, and it makes you nervous, frightened, and unready. Nefastis operatives can use Purah to silence witnesses ("You have forgotten what you were going to testify to.") or to destroy their lives ("You have forgotten your wife's existence." "You have forgotten everything until now.") or even kill them. ("You can't remember how to fly a plane." "You can't remember that mixing sleeping pills and alcohol will kill you.") Purah revels in such cruelties.

SUT

Demon of Misattribution

Sut leaves your memories intact, but changes their connections to your mind. Sut will tell you a lie, and make you remember hearing it from your lover, or from God. Sut will convince you that you read about the fire drill in the company newsletter, that your boss told you about the surprise inspection, that you heard about your husband's infidelity from his best friend, that you saw me on TV, that you got that bill from the government. Any operatives using Sut must be plausible enough to tell the lie, or subtle enough to plant the lie; selling the lie they can leave to the demon. If the operative can guide a conversation between two targets, he can switch their memories entirely, each believing the other's experience happened to him!

LIWET**Demon of Suggestion**

Liwet softens the mind to prepare it to receive new memories, but does not nurture them to greatness. Memories of decisions almost made are the easiest: “Remember, I have clearance.” “Remember, this is a toy gun.” “Remember, there’s no need to search the trunk.” Institute operatives use Liwet to open doors and lower defenses. More advanced operatives can plant new memories deeper in the target’s future, graft them higher up his decision tree: “Remember, you decided to kill your boss.” “Remember, you decided to leave your post an hour early tonight.” “Remember, you decided death was the only way out of your troubles.”

MASTEMA**Demon of Distortion**

Some believe that in the infernal realms Mastema is the lord over both Sut and Liwet, for his gift resembles a fusion of theirs. He distorts the target’s memories to match a story. Prepared operatives channeling Sut can convince targets they were abducted by UFOs, or abused by Satanists as children, or are being followed by government agents in black cars. Mastema can turn less dramatic narratives to his ends: “Remember how I saved your life.” “Remember the Masons are in on it.” “Remember your boss is planning to ruin your career.” “Remember an immigrant killed her, not me.” Targets fill in sketchy stories as best they can, but Mastema conquers best when the operatives prepare a more detailed story, showing it in snippets of video or enacting brief staged encounters before unleashing the demonic corruption in full. Suitably reinforced, Mastema’s narratives seem like bedrock truth to the target, who will deny under torture any confabulation or memory lapse.

ZACHRIEL**Demon of Persisting Memories**

Zachriel may be the cruelest of the demons known to Nefastis: his gift is the gift of remembrance. His subjects do not forget the tiniest detail of an experience, no matter how agonizing or shameful. One brush from Zachriel, and even the briefest torture can last an age, even the most momentary guilt overwhelm you utterly. Against targets with genuine trauma or disappointment in their past, Zachriel’s touch can kill by suicide or depressive self-neglect. The Nefastis Institute uses Zachriel’s power against those it wishes to erode, to frighten, to break. ▶

TOP 5 OTHER THINGS THE DEMONS MIGHT ALSO GRANT

While I (mostly) took these demons’ powers from Daniel L. Schachter’s popular psychology book *The Seven Sins of Memory*, demons traditionally have all kinds of excellent powers and abilities. Giving the Nefastis Institute orderlies access to a suite of powers makes them more dangerous and unpredictable villains.

Power Over the Seven Deadly Sins

Each demon can also instill one of the seven deadly sins in a target, either as a different power or as a penumbra of their main demonic domain. Jaluha governs Avarice (“Nothing is permanent, so nothing is enough”); Kazbiel imbues Sloth (“I can’t be bothered to remember to do that”); Purah invites Gluttony (“Forget you’ve already eaten”); Sut sparks Lust (“She told you that she wants you”); Liwet nurtures Envy (“Remember you wanted that”); Mastema instills Pride (“Remember your exalted station”); Zachriel compels Wrath (“I can’t forget how they wronged me”).

Power Over Finding Secrets

Among the powers most often ascribed to demons – and most useful for conspirators like the Nefastis Institute – are secret knowledges, or the ability to find things out. Jaluha knows where all secret treasure is hidden: buried gold and Swiss bank accounts. Kazbiel grants visions of absent places, both now and in the past. Purah removes the blocks on roads and gateways, both magical and material; his operatives can always find the true path to any destination. Sut reveals the secrets of the human heart: everyone’s hopes, fears, loves, and hates are open to him. Liwet knows which decisions lead to danger or death; he can find enemies open and covert. Mastema provides scientific insight, the secret knowledge of the natural world; likewise, Zachriel holds the key to magic, necromancy, and the occult arts.

Power Over the Elemental World

Demons dispose of raw power, as well as more subtle machinations. The seven demons of the Nefastis Institute might grant control of, command over, or at least immunity from: Water and Magnetism (Jaluha), Chance and Nuclear Forces (Kazbiel), Fire and Cold (Purah), Animals (Sut), Metals and Minerals and Gravity (Liwet), Plants (Mastema), and Air and Electricity (Zachriel).

Psionic Gifts

In a campaign where the “demons” are parapsychological constructs, or mental disciplines, mastering or controlling them might also encompass psychic abilities. Jaluha’s operatives can copy memories from the target to themselves, no matter how deep and ingrained. Kazbiel’s psychic bolt tells the brain “forget to restart.” Purah grants telekinesis; Sut telepathy; Liwet’s power of suggestion takes the full step forward into mind control. Mastema knows how the story ends; his carriers are precognitives. Zachriel shows the truth; his ovates see all clairvoyantly.

Mnemonic Disciplines

More narrowly yet, the seven demons might actually grant their users increased powers of memory and mentation, or the exercises and injections might cultivate them in the Institute’s operatives. Jaluha can change and delete digital memories as well; his operatives are computer hackers of the most cinematic and unrealistic sort. Kazbiel takes from others to give to his servitors: they maintain complete situational awareness and cannot be surprised. They may even practice a sort of *Equilibrium*-style gun fu, as might the agents using Purah for the lightning calculation of probability and mathematical variables (or the latter might stick to arranging *Final Destination*-style coincidental deaths). Operatives channel Sut to mimic voices, posture, and body language, convincing observers on a deep animal level that the operatives are really, obviously who they claim to be whether generic (“looks like a cop”) or specific (“my dead brother!”). Those who look on with the eyes of Liwet can master and perform any skill they see performed, at the level they witness it: Bruce Lee’s jeet kune do, Jacques Pepin’s cooking, Olympic diving or gymnastics. Mastema grants a whole new story to his hosts; they can replace their personality with a completely separate Other, willing to do anything and suffer anything to succeed. As might be expected, Zachriel grants eidetic memory of all text, imagery, or speech glimpsed or heard.

Entropy is a figure of speech, then, a metaphor. It connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow. The machine uses both. The Demon makes the metaphor not only verbally graceful, but objectively true.

– Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

As presented above, the Nefastis Institute makes a great low-fi, secret-war villain for a game of conspiracy, psychological horror, or espionage. It could be one arm of *The Esoterorists*, or a new sect for the *Dresden Files* RPG or *Unknown Armies*, or a strange mad-scientist project in some flavors of *Spycraft* or *Conspiracy X*. It may make sense to give the player characters some sort of immunity to demonic conditioning, whether thanks to specially blessed relics of St. Anthony (finder of lost things) or Mnemosyne (goddess of Memory), or special meditative disciplines, or lucky head injuries before the campaign started. If the players are cooperative, however, you can get a lot of depth by shifting their characters' memories around, getting them to work out fallbacks and routines for the PCs (taping all their interactions, hypnotic regression, buddy systems, autonomic reflex training) to thwart the Nefastis operatives, and really earning that win.

Nefastis agents become even more fearsome and powerful if they can affect people remotely, through phone calls or recordings, through prepped Web sites or planted text. Another huge expansion of the Institute's power occurs if the demonic powers work on digital minds, and computers fall vulnerable to the operatives. Remember, there are computer chips in almost everything now: Liwet might plant a kill-suggestion in a lawn mower engine, a Predator drone, or a jumbo jet. This might be the sort of escalation to introduce in midgame, as Dr. Nefastis makes another breakthrough, or offers up another seven dozen kidnapped child sacrifices.

You could, I suppose, run the Nefastis Institute as a player patron organization, possibly one subcontracted by their own government for deniable (literally!) actions around the world. The campaign might begin as a gritty black ops game, and slowly evolve into a grim struggle to defeat their own employers, or even turn the methods of the Institute against itself and against all

those who would employ it. If you make the "demons" more benign spirits or alien technology, or emergent properties of holographic programs, or just mental disciplines plus psychosurgery, you could possibly justify a mostly "good-guy" version of the Institute. Any of those variants of the demons could also apply to the villainous Nefastis group, of course – a Nefastis Institute that can use a holographic image projector (concealed in the red light at the tip of a laser pointer, say) to alter memories is perhaps even more dangerous than one in league with infernal, but independent, forces.

You can expand the problem if the demons are, indeed, independent, working their own agenda by manipulating Dr. Nefastis, the operatives of the Institute, and the Institute's clients. Do they want to build a world where demons dwell in every human mind? Are they trying to reach one specific memory, or erase all knowledge of God or science or justice? Do they want to breed, to open the way for their less subtle cousins Asmodeus or Beelzebub, or just to sabotage humanity? The Institute's top men may approach their player character enemies in the middle of the campaign to propose an alliance against their own weapons – but how can the players trust people whose memories may be conspiring against them already?

You can also move the basic campaign out from the conspiracy-horror genre. Cosmic horror is the next obvious step: the "demons" could be paramental constructs developed by the increasingly impatient Great Race of Yith (who we already know can manipulate human consciousness and impose amnesia), or aspects of Nyarlathotep playing some game of their own, or intellects transferred and distilled by the Mi-Go trying to open the way for Azathoth right through the human global consciousness. Or they might be agents of the Excrucians in *Nobilis*, of the Nephandi (or the Seers) in *Mage*, or of either side in *Kult*. Move into the far future or deep space:

the demons of memory and the Nefastis Institute fit in quite well with *Dark Heresy*, *Fading Suns*, or even (as weird Sith spinoffs) any *Star Wars RPG* (although the Jedi can probably resist such mind tricks).

Or take it in the other direction, into pure fantasy. You've already got demons and a remote, unreachable fortress: Nefastis could be a single Dark Lord, a pod of mind flayers, or a lich queen desperately seeking to keep her own memories intact long enough to complete one last dark ritual. Or the Nefastis Council might be a gathering of bards, or archmagi, or nymphs of the spring of Lethe. Saving throws might give partial resistance to Nefastis' more heroic targets: déjà vu, weird fixations, strange dreams, odd quirks of recognition or familiarity. You may already have memory magics in your game; Nefastis' first objective will be to get rid of all his rivals.

Set the Institute in any historical era: as a secretive cult of Thoth ensconced in the Fourth Pyramid (the one nobody remembers building), as the retinue of a noble rediscoverer of the Great Art of Memory intending to make himself overlord of Renaissance Italy, as a remote lamasery angry at British or Chinese imperialism, as a sanitarium in Texas or Lancashire new-built on the most modern lines and methods known to Victorian science, as a black project of Hitler's occult Hexenkommando, as a KGB-controlled program at the Leningrad Brain Institute ... or as all of them, building and controlling, reshaping the destinies and the beliefs of the whole world, and then vanishing into obscurity and somehow forgotten for decades. Until the player characters discover the evidence, and even deduce the techniques themselves. Why, if these calculations are correct, we could summon demons and get power over the memories of all our enemies! Imagine what we could accomplish! I can see it so clearly, in fact, that it's as though I remember doing it already.



CELESTIAL STORM

A CRUSADE FOR FALLEN GODS

TEXT NILS HINTZE

ILLUSTRATION REINE ROSENBERG

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION FENIX 1/2010



Celestial Storm is a fantasy game for 3-5 players, using a simple freeform role-playing system. The entire scenario should take between four to five evenings plus a few hours to do the characters. If desired, players may read the text up to the ***Running the Game***-section.

The world in which the story unfolds is partly inspired by Persian culture during the Muslim Caliphate's conquest of the Persian Empire. The Jahnashahs are inspired by Persian "medieval" culture while the Fraenks are a Christian medieval culture, resembling that of the historical Templars. Gaming groups may incorporate more elements from these cultures if they want.

Celestial Storm is a drama of galloping horses faster than the wind, duels with curved blades, dramatic poetry, cunning djinns and hopelessness.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SASSANID EMPIRE

In the middle of the vast Sassanidia empire stands Mount Ferdow, upon which a group of deities placed a huge spire of unbreakable glass - the *Tahangir* - connecting the gods with their chosen people, the *Jahnashahs* (kings of the world). The *Tahangir* gave the Jahnashahs eternal life and let them build an empire of harmony, wonder and happiness. Spared them from aging, violence and all forms of pain, the Jahnashahs lived eternal blissful lives.

The Sassanid Empire was built by the magical power of the *Tahangir*; cities, farms, fields and objects were sung out of the bedrock. Through their magical songs the Jahnashahs formed bonds with all plants and animals, and could shape their surroundings at will. Heralds of the gods, the Djinn, walked among the people and taught them to achieve perfection in whatever they were doing.

In the kingdom lived other peoples who came from cultures to the west. These fair-skinned people called themselves *Fraenks* and were subservient to the Jahnashahs, offering sacrifices to those they viewed as demi-gods. They did not share the gifts of the *Tahangir*, living ordinary, painful human lives. Resentful of this, some of the *Fraenks* began to see the Jahnashahs as arrogant slavers.

THE FALL

One night five years ago, dark clouds blew in from the coast and covered the sky over Sassanidia. For the first time Jahnashah children screamed with fear as lightning lanced down and huge fiery rocks dropped from the sky. One of these meteorites crushed Mount Ferdow, throwing the *Tahangir* far out over the plains. A sigh of death pulsated through Sassanidia as contact with the gods was broken. In that moment started the inevitable decay of their empire.

Meteorites continued to intermittently fall from the dark sky. The corn in the fields began to die, pests spread and everyone suffered terrible diseases. The djinns became maddened as if tormented animals, attacking former friends and vanishing into the wilderness. Most of the *Fraenks* abandoned their masters and returned west.

Hundreds of thousands of Jahnashahs died the first few weeks due to their unfamiliarity to physical labor, hunger and thirst.

The *matriarch* summoned representatives of all families to a council in the fortress of Parvaneh where the Sassanian empire was founded.

The council decided that the Jahnashahs would leave their blighted country and travel west to seek refuge with their friends the *Fraenks*, waiting for the return of the gods. The Matriarch decided that five hundred men and women would stay in Parvaneh, to reverse the diaspora when the gods returned. Some people also chose to stay in a couple of villages in the surroundings of Parvaneh, working the land they loved, hunting in the woods, waiting for a sign from heaven.

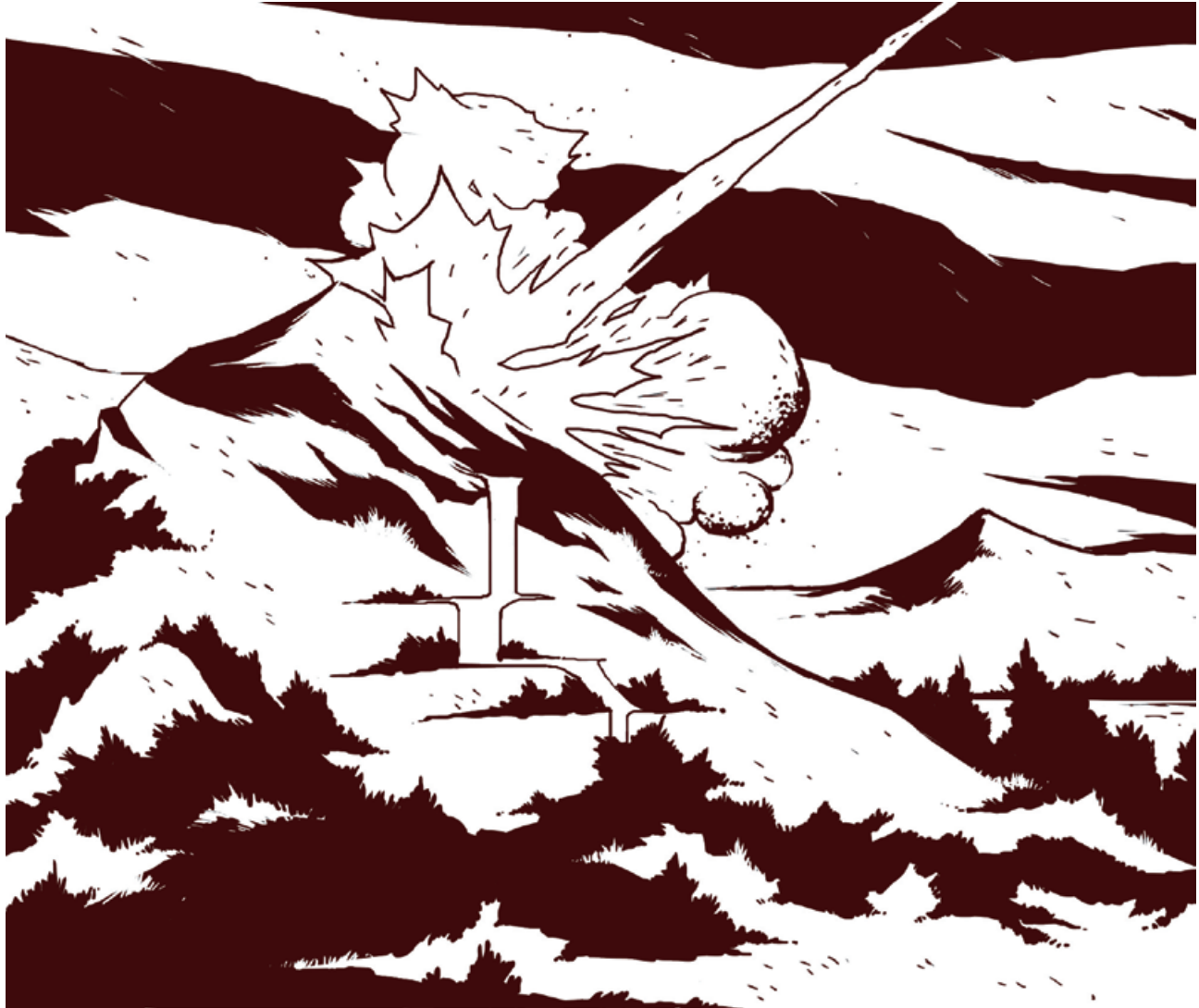
THE LONG ROAD WEST

Over a million Jahnashahs packed their most treasured possessions, beautiful glass sculptures, leaves created by magical singing, sparkling mirrors and soft leather sandals, then began to walk hundreds of miles west towards the *Fraenkish* kingdoms.

During the trek west more than half died, including their beloved Matriarch who was replaced by her seven-year daughter *Fereshteh*. The welcoming from the *Fraenks* was as cruel as unexpected for the Jahnashahs. Many of them were imprisoned as slaves and forced to worship the *Fraenkish* One God. A few managed to acquire an area where they tenuously held onto independence.

The new matriarch suffered fevers and her priests ruled the people in her name with an iron fist. To survive, they sold their people and possessions to *Fraenkish* merchants, purchasing mind-numbing drugs to dream of their past glories. Overwhelmed by lassitude and despair, the priesthood proclaimed that the Jahnashahs could do nothing but wait for death.





A DOVE OF HOPE

Five years have now passed and each day the Jahnashah priests burn incense and proclaim the world's end. The Fraenkish kings are at war with each other and neighboring cultures in order to spread their faith of the One God. Practice of the Jahnashah creeds must be done in secret. Through sorrow, disease and death the Jahnshahs have regained knowledge of mortal pain.

Now twelve years old, the matriarch Fereshteh calls for one *aswaran* (a mendicant knight or paladin) from each of the few remaining loyal families. A secret council meeting is held and Fereshteh tells them that she has been pressured by the priesthood who are trying to convince her to sacrifice herself in order to start the end of the world. But yesterday a pigeon arrived from Parvaneh, sent by the *akhond* (wise woman and magician) who was left in the fortress.

The message says that Sassanida is still ravaged by illness and insanity but that a dying hunter from the south claimed to have seen the Tahangir, the link to the gods, driven deep

into the ground. The Jahnashah who were left in Parvaneh still cling perilously to life, but their numbers are falling in the increasingly deadly land.

Fereshteh requests that the attending aswarans ride to Parvaneh, then put together an expedition to find the Tahangir and re-establish contact with the gods. The players will take the role of these noble aswarans sent eastwards, the last hope to save the Sassanidian Empire.

JAHNASHAH CULTURE

The Jahnashah people have always highly esteemed loyalty, dignified behavior and the survival of the family. Their culture has a strong sexual division between different fields of labor and expertise. Women have traditionally been involved in leadership and contact with gods and magic. Men's areas have been architecture, poetry, acting, animal management, expansion and mapping of the world.

Furthermore, each of the families has mastered mutually exclusive areas of expertise. A certain family, for example,





might speak with and train horses, becoming excellent riders. Another family may have mastered diplomacy or trade. One family produces tools and knows the secrets of smithing steel, whilst another arranges the ritual duels where honor is decided between challengers.

A duel to uphold a family's honor takes place in front of an audience through recitation of poetry, with swords or similar challenges.

Previously, the different families shared equal status but since the trek westward, things have changed. Some families have been completely enslaved by Fraenks while others made themselves powerful through trade and violence. Nowadays there are many bloody duels between representatives of different families to establish precedence.

The Jahnashahs have for millennia been masterful archers. As violence and conflict has again become a part of everyday life, more of the Jahnashahs learn to fight from the horseback with bow or curved blades. Of the thousands of horse-drawn chariots that were previously used when the kingdom expanded into hostile territory, only a few are still under Jahnashah control.

GODS

The Jahnashah worship many gods. **Azar** is the sun and a fire God that has now become a symbol of war within the entire culture. Jahnashah greet each other by showing an open palm and saying "azarana".

Perih is the moon god, a dark figure who hides the lover who dishonors marriage in a state of *Shayda* ("Love sickness"). Nowadays Perih is also a symbol of the underground struggle against the Fraenkish oppressors.

Banafshe is the God of plants. Each Jahnashah child who is born within marriage is tattooed with Banafshes violets on the neck for health and good development. This symbol has been banned by the Fraenks.

FOOD AND SMOKE

The Jahnashahs cultivate tea, olives, apricots, pomegranates, rice, onions and many herbs. The food is often spiced with saffron, lime and cinnamon. Tobacco and cannabis is smoked in hookahs.

FRAENKISH CULTURE

Fraenks are the collective culture of a hundred petty kingdoms, being united under the bishops of the *One God*. Some of these kingdoms are led by upstart warlords who formerly lived as servants in Sassanidia. Despite this, many Fraenks permit the Jahnashah to take a place in their society, as long as they acknowledge the One God and reject their previous idolatrous practices. The One God speaks through *Pope Gregory de Sylvain* in particular.

Fraenkish warriors call themselves knights and dress in white clothing, emblazoned with the red sun, symbolizing the One God's salvation. Knights wear heavy armor and fight with spear, broadsword and shield.

Fraenk society is a male-dominated, oppressing women, pagans and slaves. Their culture is flourishing, mighty cathedrals constructed and adorned with gold and precious stones.

THE JOURNEY BACK

The scenario begins with the player characters being sent back into the Sassanidian Empire to retrieve the Tahangir. They have ridden on horseback or travelled by horse-drawn chariots for several weeks and during that time gotten to know each other, starting tentative friendships. The roiling dark clouds that previously covered Sassanidia are replaced with a bleak grayness that occasionally lets through sunlight. However, soil and plants have been distorted. The shrubs that used to bear golden fruit now possess poisonous thorns that snag or wind around the ankles of travelers. Riding past many of the sacred places they consecrated during their childhood, the aswarans witness how spores cover the walls and have cracked the stones with decaying power. Animals have become aggressive, even livestock growing fangs and fighting among themselves.

Cobbled roads are overgrown and temples have been destroyed and looted by Fraenk robbers who venture into the area. Here and there the aswarans meet isolated farmers who say that the crops are now barely edible. After the sun sets strange creatures walk the night and people disappear. In some places, the earth has cracked open to reveal deep clefts and it is rumored that ferocious spirits live down there. Even the djinns have been transformed into wretched cannibalistic creatures that wreak havoc with their magical powers.

During the last part of their journey to Parvaneh the party hears rumors of a group of vagrants, beggars and entertainers who roam the devastation. Farmers whisper that they are deformed people with growths on the skin, strange body parts and display destructive powers that they supposedly receive from unions with the creatures of the underworld. This band of horrible jesters are said to be led by *Nima Massoud* – a man with long stilts instead of legs, a jester hat with bells and a tailed demon whip with which he steers his subjects. Of late his insane laughter has echoed through the hills.

PARVANEH

The aswarans arrive before the open gates of holy Parvaneh. From the highest roof flies the Sassanidian banner, however half of the fortified town has collapsed into a huge fissure in the ground, leaving only the inner wall and main keep intact. The characters are welcomed and offered a feast.

Parvaneh is built of white stone decorated with countless paintings and inset gemstones, formerly frescoes illustrating the world of the gods. Everywhere stand statues depicting gods or prominent Jahnashahs. The courtyard has a huge paved plaza, a large garden with fruit trees, roses and orchards. There are also a dozen buildings, stables and other outhouses.

Across the front of the fortress is engraved a script carved in enormous letters, said to be the agreement between men and gods when the Tahangir was placed on the Mount Ferdow. Two round towers point to the sky and the bastion's interior is filled with halls, meandering spiral staircases and walkways, numerous paintings, sculpted artworks and enormous crystals that were previously home for those djinns who watched over the citadel. The crystals are now empty, but illuminate chambers with their colored light. All windows are made of glass, doors wood, and walls of stone that has been fused together.





PROMINENT PEOPLE

The following individuals will be encountered by the player characters as they roam Sassanidia.

Dina is an ancient wise woman and *akhond* (magician) who once guided the former matriarch. Familiar with astrology she nurtured a close alliance with the gods. Shortly before the fall Dina succumbed to forbidden love in the state of *Shayda* (love sickness) and chose to stay in Parvaneh to escape the shame. She is reputed for her mystical spells, cruel curses and proud bearing. Her appearance is of an old woman wrapped in dark colored cloth of the God *Perih* and has his eye tattooed on her forehead. It was Dina who sent the pigeon which reached Fereshteh with rumors of the Tahangir.

Soheil was the woman left to rule Parvaneh as its matriarch, known for a gaze hard enough to make stone melt. She was one of few Jahnashahs who chose to feel pain even before the fall of the Tahangir. She also chose not to marry and has during her years had many fleeting friendships with both men and women. Soheil is a tall woman with short hair and tattoos all over her body. She constantly wears a bow on her back and it was once said that Soheil could hit even the stars with her arrows.

Manakai is the ranking military officer in Parvaneh who executes Soheils orders and protects the fortress and nearby villages. Gifted with a tactical ability that allowed him, even at a young age, to beat the matriarch in board games, Manakai was one of the few who advocated that instead of fleeing west the Jahnashahs should gather an army and invade the Fraenk

kingdoms. A man of the people, many of his warriors would have willingly followed him on this suicide mission. Manakai is a tall man with long black hair with wooden jewelry in his ears, around the neck and on his hands. A master with the sword and shield he was said to be able to recite the entire *Itemtish*-epic without pause for rest or drink.

Toscaj was not only known for his unusual marriage a djinni, but also for his ability to create food and drink, medicines, poisons and other drugs. Before the fall Toscaj he challenged conventions and struggled for Sassanidia to innovate and change. When the contact with the gods was broken his djinn-wife Firoz went crazy and disappeared. Toscaj advocated that the Gods had left Sassanidia forever and that the Jahnashahs should adhere to the worship of the One God of the Fraenks. As punishment he was left behind in Parvaneh to control the kitchen staff and servants. Toscaj is a bald man with long drooping mustaches and a hefty black beard. He frequently smokes tobacco, cannabis and speaks in long poetical sentences.

Clemens Saint-Omer has long been one of the Fraenks' strongest advocates for the eradication of the Jahnashahs. During the five years the exiles have lived in Fraenkish lands Clemens has made every effort to demonize, plunder and execute them. A devout yet fanatical priest, when Pope Gregory de Sylvain three months ago forbade Clemens from attacking Jahnashahs, he decided to gather a band of religious knights and ride into Sassanidia to purge their corruption. Growing up as a slave in Sassanidia he has a long red scar across his face inflicted during his former master's 'corrections'. He is short and squat, preferring to sit constantly on horseback, often with drawn sword. His eyes are full of fire.



CORE RULES

The following rules are used when one character wants to make something happen and another character (either a PC or NPC) has different intentions. This is known as a *conflict*. For instance, a character wishes to be let past a soldier, but the soldier believes that they are a traitor and wants to make them reveal themselves. The character lies and the soldier tries to see through their lie. They roll the dice to see which of them gets what they want, their *intent*.

INTENT

Intent can be anything – to kill an enemy, to get by unnoticed, to seduce someone, or even force somebody to shut up. Before hitting the dice both participants must say *what they are doing*, and *what their intent is*. Otherwise they may not roll. Once the intent has been declared, it stands. Whoever wins the conflict will tell what happens and how it happens. The loser should obviously role play the result.

In the beginning it is good to start with small intents (“*gain an appointment*”, “*make sure he does not run away*”) rather than large (“*demolish the fortress*”, “*get her to completely change opinion*”, “*slay the monster*”). It is part of the game master’s remit to ensure that a stated intent is both reasonable and within the ability of the declaring character.

WINNING INTENTIONS

Each participant rolls one or more D10s. The highest die of each participant is compared, and the one with highest number wins the conflict and gets the intent. If the highest number is the same you compare the second highest die and so on, until you have a winner. If player A rolls 10, 9, 3 and player B rolls 10, 7, 6, 4, then A wins. They both have 10 as highest, but A’s second highest roll is a 9 and B’s is only a 6.

You always roll at least one d10 in a conflict. Additional dice can be added via methods such as *Help Dice* and *Advantage* (will be explained later), but also from *Skills*, *Willpower Points* and *Status* as described under ‘*Player Characters*’.

CONFLICTS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Conflicts that have been rolled for and resolved cannot be overturned. The stymied character must instead try in another way: bribe, persuade or threaten, or wait until the situation has significantly changed. Of course the character can roleplay trying to resist the original resolution, but they are not successful. If an action takes an extensive period of time, for instance riding unnoticed through a land – you roll once and no more.

CONFLICTS WITHOUT OPPONENTS

Conflicts between NPCs are not rolled for – those are determined by the game master. If a situation occurs where the player has no opponent in the conflict and the game master doesn’t want to just hand wave it, you may instead roll the dice and count 7-10 as a success (knock down a door, jump over a ravine, find edible plants, and so on). You only need one successful die. It is often best to avoid these kinds of situations and just let the characters succeed with whatever they do. The most interesting conflicts are those between two people who desire different things.

SIMILAR RESULTS

If both sides of a conflict roll the exact same result, the game master should make something unexpected happen that changes the situation, so the conflict cannot be resolved for the time being. For example, the floor under the duelist crashes down, a messenger arrives, or monsters suddenly attack.

MORE THAN TWO INTENTS

In situations where there are more than two opposed sides, you may roll for each side’s intent and the highest result wins. For instance one player character desires to kill Dina, another wants to capture her without harm, and Dina herself wishes to escape. We now have three intents and must compare three different rolls.

INTENTION AND DAMAGE IN BATTLE

There is no damage system within the game, only consequences from intentions. Whoever wins the conflict gets to impose their stated intent. Injuries and death should be described as per fiction. If the opponent wins the sword fight and tells how she severed the hand of the loser – then the loser’s hand is off. This means that the players and the game master must be very clear when stating their intentions. Are you really trying to hurt the other participant, kill her, or just defeat her with a cunning disarm?

Try to avoid intentions with serious harm or outright death, at least in the beginning. The resulting consequences can be disastrous whether censured by non-player characters or alienating a fellow player when they are killed out of the game. The Game Master should make an example early on, staging fights with creatures or non-player characters which hold no lethal intentions in combat. More serious injuries should be saved for the big dramatic fights near the end of the scenario. Good fighting intentions you can use are: to capture, to beat down, to humiliate, to scare, to incapacitate or to inflict a superficial wound.

INTENTIONS AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

Social conflicts occur when someone wants to bribe, seduce, convince or lie. In these kinds of conflicts the stated intention must be plausible. You cannot convince someone to give you everything they own if the situation does not make it reasonable to believe that they would and you cannot bribe your arch enemy to shift loyalties by such an empty gesture as giving her an onion. The game master has final call of what is plausible – but the most important thing is that the group finds the intentions in social conflicts consistent, exciting and true to the storyline.

As with other conflicts, the result stands. If one character for instance tries to seduce another and wins, then their target is seduced – at least for now. If this doesn’t sound plausible to the players, it should have been said when discussing intentions and before rolling the dice!

Characters may walk away from social conflicts that they don’t want to enter, for instance they can just stop listening, but then they must also stop participating in that scene. You cannot say no to a social conflict about who may rally the mob, and then continue to talk to the mob. Stop talking, depart and leave the scene to the braver character.





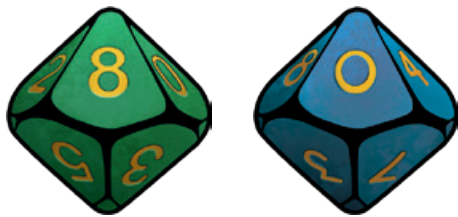
ADVANTAGE

If one participant in a conflict has a clear advantage, the game master may choose to give them an extra die to roll. An example of this might involve a heavily armored character mounted atop a horse facing a knife armed peasant on foot. Players can of course ask for an Advantage die, but only one side in a conflict may receive it.

HELP DICE

A participant engaged in a conflict may be aided by other characters, providing that they accept the consequences if their side loses. Helpers must describe what exactly they do to assist and if it seems helpful the GM may award an extra die to the character rolling for the conflict. Each aiding PC adds an extra die, whereas the combined aid from NPCs only ever adds a single die no matter their total number. But if one side of a conflict has ten helpers and one side has two – the side with ten helpers will probably also gain the *Advantage die*.

When rolling the *Help Dice* use ones of different colors, assigning them to each helping PC or group of NPCs. If it is the helper's die that wins the conflict, then they get to tell what happens, and how the intention comes to be.



PLAYER CHARACTERS

Players should know the adventure background before making characters. The game has no prewritten plot and the game master's primary role is to arbitrate conflicts. Thus it is the responsibility of the players to drive forwards the story, using their characters' respective goals. Part of the fun is to explore the social dynamics between the PCs and together, or perhaps against each other, forge a satisfactory climatic finale for the adventure.

To make things more interesting, prior to starting each player is permitted – within reason – to contribute their own creative ideas to shape the game world in the form of rumors, customs, traditions, creatures and even magic. However, the game master has final say on what should be incorporated and no suggestion should contradict those of another player, unless the GM decides it is actually a widely believed untruth.

FAMILY

Players start by naming the family of their aswaran characters. Decide what this family's particular skill is; that is to say, what they are good at. Also decide what kind of rituals the family is responsible for, its heraldic symbol, which gods they venerate in particular, and how time as refugees has affected the family. If the character enters a conflict where he or she does something that they can do better because of their family skill, then the player rolls an extra D10.

AN EXAMPLE

For example, a family named Urvaksha could be experts of oration and poetry. They are good at lyrical recitation, composing odes to celebrate deeds and are responsible for reading from the Gods texts during ceremonies. When the character who represents the family Urvaksha tries to win a conflict by eloquence, recitation or when conflict is about interpreting holy texts then the character rolls an extra D10.

STATUS

The time away from Sassanidia has meant that formerly friendly families are now vying for power. This affects the group of aswarans entering Parvaneh. The players should, before play starts, determine a hierarchy for their different families, each character inheriting their personal status from the family's standing. This can be done via random dice roll, mutual agreement or by presenting the most entertaining background which the GM then judges. This hierarchy may change during play as the aswarans strive with each other for glory and power. Whenever characters enter a social conflict, the individual with highest social status rolls one more die.

DUELING

Whenever sufficiently motivated, a player character may choose to challenge another player character to a duel of family honor. At least one other person must be present to witness the challenge. The duel is resolved as per an ordinary conflict.

It is the challenged PC who selects what format the duel will take, a fight with swords or by racing chariots for instance. Thus it is often risky to call someone out. However the challenging PC gets to choose the objective, for example if you duel with poetry whether the goal is to make the audience cheer by composing a witty haiku or to belittle the other with well-chosen insults. If it was a duel with swords the challenger might instead determine that the fight continues to the first drop of blood, serious injury or even death.

A character with lower status must sacrifice a *Willpower Point* to challenge characters of higher status to a duel. If the higher status PC wins the duel the looser will be placed at the bottom of the status hierarchy of the aswarans (if not already there). Conversely, if the PC of lower status wins the duel the characters exchange places in the status hierarchy.

INTEREST

Player characters also possess a narrower skill that is something that the aswaran personally excels at. This could be for example a weapon style, bribery, riding, cuisine, athletics, seduction, or similar. The character is famed for this mastery and should provide a back-story about how they learned this skill plus a heroic deed they performed using it, such as rescuing children from a burning house, stole a famous treasure, or outwitted a Fraenkish king. When the character is involved in a conflict involving something applicable to their chosen interest, then the player may roll an extra D10.

WILLPOWER

Willpower corresponds to the aswarans conviction and fierce will. All characters begin with one Willpower point, although more can be gained during play.





In normal use these can be sacrificed during a conflict to roll an extra D10 per point sacrificed. You may sacrifice any number of points both before and after the dices have been rolled. If you do it afterwards these dice will be added to the results already obtained. If you roll 8, 7, 1 then burn two Willpower Points rolling a 10 and 3, the new result becomes 10, 8, 7, 3, 1. This final result is compared to the opponent's performance. Each time a Willpower Point is used the player must describe how it manifests – the character grinds her teeth together, utters a howl of rage or something similar.

BELIEFS

Each player should write 3 Beliefs for their character. These are guidance for how the characters will act under stress and what choices they will make. Beliefs will directly influence how the story evolves, so it is important that players think through what would be fun or interesting to roleplay, and write beliefs about that. Depending on the group, game masters may request that players openly share each other's beliefs, perhaps helping each other to create them. It is a good thing if two characters' beliefs collide or hook into each other. This will create drama, tough decisions and conflict among the characters.

BELIEF STRUCTURE

Each Belief consists of two parts. The first part is called *Fact* and the second *Target*.

A **Fact** is an unshakable conviction of the character: *"the matriarch is not strong enough to nurture Sassanidia back to life"* or *"anyone who betrays me must die"* or *"those who cannot defend themselves are not worthy to call themselves Jahnashah"*. The Fact must not be vague or uncertain, but rather an undisputable view about the world or the character's situation.

The **Target** is the objective of the belief, something the character is driven to create, kill or change. This purpose should be something that the character can, if they wish, try to achieve when the game starts. *"I must make friends with Shahjan"*, *"I'll challenge and humiliate Manakai in a duel"* or *"I'll lead the other aswaran in a crusade to find the Tahangir"*.

When the Fact and Target are put together, you have the full Belief. *"The Matriarch is not strong enough to rule Sassanidia, I will become the new ruler by leading the other aswaran in a crusade to find the Tahangir"* or *"Parviz is a cowardly devil, I'll humiliate him in front of the others"* or *"The Fraenks are responsible for the doom of Sassanidia, I must kill Clemens Saint-Omer."*

BELIEFS AND PERSONALITIES

All Beliefs must mention, and somehow be connected to key personalities in this game – *Celestial Storm*.

- **The First Belief** should be tied to one or more of the non-player characters mentioned under *'Prominent People'*, or to the jester Nima Massoud.
- **The Second Belief** should be attached to any of the other player characters.
- **The Third Belief** should be linked to a person that the aswaran left behind in Sassanidia, and will probably be met in Parvaneh or in the

surrounding region. Although the player must make up who that person was and their original relationship with the character, the game master is free to warp both elements due to trials and tribulations they've suffered since the fall.

USING BELIEFS AND WILLPOWER POINTS

This scenario is played in *Scenes*, like in a movie. If a character is driven by a Belief in a scene – either in how they are roleplayed or by achieving a Target – then the game master may reward the player with a point of Willpower.

Only a single Willpower point can be awarded for each belief per scene. The characters must be in a new situation or place in order to be able to gain additional Willpower points for the same belief.

As long as players use their Beliefs to drive the story forward, such as going into conflicts, developing her character and making fun things happen; the game master should be generous giving out Willpower.

BELIEFS CHANGE

During the scenario things may happen which make a player want to change or replace a belief. For instance a character may be in love with Soheil, wanting to do everything to make her happy, but heartbreakingly Soheil demeans the character in front of everyone and marries one of the other PCs. In this circumstance the player should probably change his character's Belief about Soheil, and maybe even about the rival PC.

Usually this can be negotiated directly with the game master, but a more entertaining method could be to allow the other players in the group to decide what the scorned character's new Belief will be. Should the players present more than one option for a new belief – why not let them vote on it?

When a character reaches a crisis of faith big enough to change a belief, it often leads to new conflicts or less than honorable behavior. When balked even aswarans may turn to false causes and selfish intentions.

When a belief is changed the character gains a compensatory Willpower point, symbolizing the aswaran's newfound momentum. Players should be encouraged to evolve their beliefs during the game as the characters develop and new plotlines emerge.

WEAKNESS

The five years of suffering living far away from Sassanidia and its gods has put its mark on each of the characters. They all have a weakness like alcoholism, pettiness, arrogance, argumentative, vengefulness and so on.

Choose one weakness before play. Every time the characters weakness causes distress, conflict, makes the story evolve or simply entertains the group – reward the character with a point of Willpower.

NAME, APPEARANCE AND BACKGROUND

The character should now be named. On the internet you can easily find common Persian names. The player must also decide what the character looks like and compose something about how he or she has endured the exile in the Fraenk kingdoms.





RUNNING THE GAME



The scenario is designed to be a series of entertaining scenes. When a scene appears to have reached its peak or natural conclusion, the game master should cut it and do one of the following:

- Ask if any of the players wishes to start a particular scene.
Player: *"I want to find and confront Dina".*
The game master: *"You see her standing at the top of the city wall, she looks out over the ravaged landscape. What do you do?"*
- Self establish a scene.
"You're standing on the city wall when you notice someone sneaking up behind you. When you turn around Dina is standing there with a sinister smile on her lips. What do you do?"

PARTICIPANTS AND AUDIENCE

Players whose characters are not in a scene have the role of the audience, which means to curiously listen, booing the villains and cheering heroic or chivalrous acts. Sometimes the audience may get to decide what a person or a room looks like, and even be assigned a non-player character to play by the game master.

PACING

It's good to let the adventure get started at a slow pace. Do not be stressed out if the excitement and drama does not come at once, let players explore what engages them and roleplay until conflicts between the characters begin to occur. If players care about their character and have clear targets there will be drama sooner or later.

Take advantage of consequences caused by the players' actions. Let things happen as natural outcomes of their choices, and let their decisions backfire on them.

The world reacts to what the characters are doing.

Ignore everything that your players do not seem to be interested in.

The main task of the GM is to challenge and highlight the characters beliefs, which can sometimes mean letting the characters really shine.

ENDGAME

When the group eventually approaches the climax of the scenario, namely the recovery (or not) of the Tahangir, the GM is encouraged to engineer final events so that each player faces a dramatic final conflict for their character. It could be to uncover a secret sought by the character or something connected to one or more of their beliefs, but the choice of conflict should ultimately be an event of central importance, created over the course of previous gaming sessions.

Thus the endgame phase should try to tie together loose ends for the characters and answer questions that arose during the scenario, *"will I ever find love again?"* The last conflict can occur anywhere and at any time, yet is best suited to the presumed final showdown over the Tahangir. Be aware however that the original objective of the scenario might have twisted totally off course, so that they never find the Tahangir; ending up instead for example in a power struggle for Parvaneh or even killing one another in a religious purge!



GAME MASTER INFORMATION

The following section covers what occurred in Sassanidia during the five years since the fall, describes key characters that will be encountered, the main settlements where they might be found, and suggestions on what might happen during the game. Some of these elements need not come into play if the players do not uncover it during the game and can be ignored completely if it contradicts things the group invents at the beginning of the scenario. For the most part it is useful background material on which the actions of major NPCs are based.



THE SECRET BEHIND THE FALL

The Tahangir was indeed the divine object through which contact with the Sassanidian gods, or the powerful beings that called themselves gods, was established. Through the Tahangir they absorbed worship and life energy from the Jahnashahs.

Over millennia, the gods have been at war with insect-like celestial beings called Xants, who exist by taking over worlds and devouring them. It was the Xants who managed to break contact between the Jahnashahs and the gods, when invading the world.

The meteorites that rained down across the country were Xantian space ships, which dug themselves deep into the ground to begin building a colony underground.

The Xants are unaware of how the gods were in contact with Sassanidia and know not what the Tahangir is. It was only luck that their meteorites cast down the spire. If the Tahangir would again be erected towards the sky and given worship, the gods could reestablish contact with Sassanidia, forging anew their bond with the chosen and initiate war against the Xants.

For their part the Xants remain deep below Sassanidia, only occasionally sending up humanoid shaped insect servitors, flying chitinous monsters or poisonous spores, which distort the surface world in order to adapt it to Xantian living conditions. This is why the plants and the animals are changing. Below ground huge white worms dig subterranean passageways to travel in.



The writing found on carved on Parvaneh's fortress is indeed the agreement signed between the Gods and the Jahnashahs, perhaps the precise prayer needed to reactivate the Tahangir. As long as the fortress stands and remains occupied by an albeit shrinking garrison, the Xants cannot risk emerging above ground themselves and their servants dare not approach the fortress. Instead the Xants have negotiated from the shadows with the Jahnashah Nima Massoud and given him and his closest minions inexplicable powers so that he'll find a way to treacherously crush Parvaneh from within.

The Xant presence in Sassanidia has warped the native life, so that it is sickly, aggressive and parasitic. Animals are mutated into deformed monsters and crops have become toxic. In other words, the Game Master has scope to fill the Sassanidian wilderness with both sick animals and Xantian insectoid servants.

IMPORTANT GAME MASTER CHARACTERS

Each NPC is described by two *Skills* (marked in italics) which work just like the player character skills. They also have Willpower points which can be used in contests, to be recovered when the game master determines it reasonable – usually with each new gaming session or perhaps after a handful of scenes have passed.

Key NPCs should possess four to five willpower points, whilst those created as part of the player characters' beliefs have two or three. Faceless extras such as a soldier or villager are limited to one or no willpower points at all.

MANAKAI

Although technically not the matriarch, it is Manakai and his men who have, for several years, controlled Parvaneh with an iron fist. He once commanded three hundred warriors, as many horses and twenty heavy chariots, but their numbers have slowly withered. Manakai is convinced that only strength and asceticism can save the Jahnashahs and he has reluctantly taken it upon himself to harshly discipline his people, sometimes by whipping them as an example to others. Slowly the social equality between men and women has eroded, most womenfolk acting as servants and kept segregated from the garrison soldiers. Manakai plans to shortly marry Soheil, the current matriarch, to become the legitimate true ruler in the eyes of the people. Manakai is a *tactical genius* and expert at *manipulating*. Willpower Points 4.

MANAKAI WANTS TO

- get the aswarans to swear allegiance to him
- retain his power over Parvaneh
- use the aswarans as representatives of their families to validate the wedding with Soheil
- on his own terms find the Tahangir and save the nation
- force the residents of Parvaneh to remain steadfast in the face of combined adversities
- understand what or who is warping the wasteland and defeat it

SOHEIL

A bitter and brittle woman having lost two children to disease, she is still wearing Parvaneh's wreath of rule, but keeps silent and submissive in Manakais vicinity. Soheil loathes the idea of an enforced marriage and will do anything, including taking her own life to escape. She has recently embraced the Fraenks' One God and, with some other Jahnashahs, has set up a secret prayer room in a disused chamber in Parvaneh. Through her servants Soheil has come in contact with the religious zealot Clemens Saint-Omer who promised to return her to the throne if she helps him to take over the fortress. Soheil is aware of an underground passage into Parvaneh through the fissure that devoured the town outskirts, but she has yet to decide if she can trust Clemens. Soheil hates Dina because she chose not to support Soheil in power struggle against Manakai. Soheil is an *enslaved matriarch* and expert in *archery*. Willpower Points 3.

SOHEIL WANTS TO

- seek help to investigate if Clemens can be trusted
- kill Dina in retaliation for Dina not believing that she is a capable leader
- convert the aswarans to the faith of the One God
- lure or persuade the aswarans to overthrow Manakai
- seal the gates of Parvaneh and wait for salvation – she does not believe in rumors of the Tahangir

DINA

Dina drifts through the shadows of Parvaneh, the only woman who managed to retain her power. Every sunset she can be found praying from the walls, proclaiming divinations. Dina wants to overthrow Manakai and has many of the fortresses' residents on her side. She knows, however, that they need a strong leader to replace him and hopes that one of aswarans will take his place. Against Manakai's orders, it was Dina who sent the message concerning the Tahangir west and has also defied his ban by engaging in expeditions descending into the frightful crevasse in which the town collapsed. Down there in the dark, she found strange objects she has brought to the surface for study. Dina knows that Toscaj is hiding his beloved djinn Firoz in the fortress and plans to exploit this at the right time, forcing him to poison Manakai. Dina is a *powerful akhond* and expert on *foreseeing*. Willpower Points 5.

DINA WANTS TO

- enlist the help of aswarans to venture down into the underworld and explore its secrets
- make Toscaj murder Manakai with poison
- encourage one of aswarans to declare themselves ruler and topple Manakai
- find her brother Nima Massoud and with the help of the aswarans, break the Xant's spell over him
- destroy the people's faith in Soheil by revealing her as a follower of the One God.

TOSCAJ

Toscaj has become Manakai's personal servant and adviser, since he is the only one who grasps what is happening with the country's flora and fauna. He has managed to figure out what crops are still edible and how to capture the feral cattle. Toscaj





utterly abhors Manakai but is terrified of him discovering his darkest secret; that he is hiding his insane djinn lover in the abandoned dungeon. Several years ago, as madness snapped her mind, Firoz killed and ate several children in a murderous rampage. It was Nima Massoud who managed to capture her in the wilderness and returned Firoz to Toscaj, who is worried about the imprisoned djinn's barely constrained rage. Strained to breaking point, Toscaj yearns for a miracle to extract him from his guilty secrets and has asked Dina's aid to return his subtly changed beloved to clarity. Toscaj is an *apprehensive mystic* and expert on *drugs*. Willpower Points 2.

TOSCAJ WANTS TO

- get the aswarans to overthrow Manakai without he himself having to be involved
- discover something to break the Xant magic, so that his beloved djinn can return to sanity
- send the aswarans to slay Nima, whom he suspects of corrupting, even seducing his Firoz
- find some compromising information to hold over Dina so that she will not betray his secret
- locate a new source of narcotics which some villagers have imbibing, to escape his own sorrows

CLEMENT SAINT-OMER

On his campaign into Sassanidia, Clemens Saint-Omer has lost many of his knights to the horrors roaming the blighted land. He recently captured one of the remaining villages and is now lying low, recovering strength before attempting to seize the citadel of Parvaneh. From there he can launch a crusade to subdue the country, wiping away the diseases and monsters that Clemens believes Jahnashah magic evoked. He has realized that he cannot take the fortress by direct assault, thus has embarked on a secret collaboration with Soheil, hoping to deceive her into thinking he'll restore the matriarchy when Manakai is slain. Clemens is a *fanatic Fraenk priest* and expert on *swordsmanship*. Willpower Points 4.

CLEMENS SAINT-OMER WANTS TO

- deceive and exploit Soheil to capture Parvaneh and become the ruler of Sassanidia
- chase away or kill the aswarans if they cannot be corrupted to support him
- eradicate those Jahnashahs who will not convert to the One God, enslaving all others
- once Sassanidia is conquered, return at the head of an army and depose the Pope
- ceaselessly fight both Xant horrors and Jahnashahs in order to display he is the divine hand of the One God

NIMA MASSOUD

Nima was once a regular Jahnashah and is the younger brother of Dina. Corrupted by the Xants he has now become an insane magician of unknown power who leads a cult of bandits, jugglers and beggars. Part of the Xant sorcery enables him to 'improve' his subjects, physically warping and distorting them. He himself walks on two long stilts instead of legs, and waves a demonic looking barbed whip which is actually the twisted remnants of his right hand. Unhinged by the things

done to him he follows the orders of his masters, trying to find a way to win entry within Parvaneh, to either lure its people over to the Xants or cast strife among its leaders. Despite his servitude Nima has not told the Xants about the Tahangir and how it connected the gods with the Janashah. Overhearing the rumors that someone has seen it in the wilderness, he wants to find it first and turn against his masters. A dozen of his warped cultists are heading south to find Tahangiren. Nima is a *contaminated prophet* and expert on *illusionism*. Willpower Points 3.

NIMA MASOOD WANTS TO

- sew discord amongst the aswarans and Manakai so that the defenses of Parvaneh are weakened
- entice as many villagers as possible to the way of the Xants by use of his warping sorcery
- gain entry to the fortress, find the djinn he corrupted and unleash her destructive and powerful magic
- save Dina from all dangers (if he recognizes his sister)
- find the Tahangir and use its power for his own ends

RECENT HISTORY

Many things have happened in the years since the exodus from blighted Sassanidia. Little more than a hundred pure Jahnashah remain in Parvaneh and several hundred more, supported by a few remaining loyal servants, live in the three neighboring villages that supply the fortress. Most have been killed by monsters or the wild fauna and there is a widespread fear of the wilderness, especially when darkness has fallen. A few years ago a huge crack opened swallowing half of Parvaneh's suburbs, which vanished into the underworld. The fortress itself is however built upon solid bedrock, preventing the Xantian giant worms from undermining its foundations.

In the area around Parvaneh there are three villages, Zubin, Alborz and Khorshid. In each village live close to a hundred people, mostly Janashah, who struggle to survive via agriculture. Every few months the fortress sends demands to every village, taxing them food in return for protective patrols.

Zubin is the village closest to Parvaneh and the only one that has sworn allegiance to Manakai. They see him almost as a god and believe that he is the light that makes the wilderness monsters stay away from Parvaneh's vicinity. Some of the villagers secretly worship Nima Massoud and the Xants. Nima helps these cultists with food, information and hiding places; meeting at night in the ruins of a temple just outside the village.

Alborz is a village with many former nobles who distrust Manakai, retaining their oaths of allegiance to Soheil. On several occasions soldiers loyal to Manakai have ridden in on chariots to intimidate the villagers. Currently Alborz pays its taxes while waiting for help from the west.

Khorshid is the village located farthest from Parvaneh, which suffers frequent attacks by Xantian monsters. Its inhabitants built a rough stone wall around their village for defense, but about a month ago Clemens Saint-Omer and his knights appeared, forcing the village to swear allegiance to the One God, after several protestors were burned alive. The Fraenk now uses Khorshid as a base, his knights waiting for an opportunity to plunder Parvaneh. ►





THE TAHANGIR

A week before the characters arrive at Parvaneh, Manakai sent twenty of his best men to the south along with the brother of the dead hunter who claimed to have seen the Tahangir there. Manakai refuses to let anyone risk their lives by going south until his men return. Yet he does not know that Nima Massoud and some Xant servitors ambushed his soldiers, slaughtering them to a man.

THE GAME BEGINS!

The gates of Parvaneh are opened and the aswarans encounter the defenders of the fortress, battle clad warriors set at attention, with Manakai mounted upon a gleaming war chariot drawn by well-groomed horses. He welcomes them with open arms and next to him stands a sullen Soheil.

Manakai leads the aswarans to a feast in the main keep. On the way through the courtyard the characters see Jahnashah rotting with disease, children starving. The women are oppressed and forced to perform heavy manual work. In the middle of the courtyard stands a whipping post where people are restrained for flogging. The smell of dirt, blood and misery hangs heavily over all. Just before the aswarans go inside, they see Dina watching them from the wall, then disappearing into one of the two towers in which she keeps her white pigeons.

The commander is overjoyed to see brothers in arms from the west and pretends that it was he who asked Dina to send for them. Only men are allowed at the dinner table (except any female aswaran in the party) and Soheil silently serves Manakai wine. If anyone questions this Soheil smiles and pretends that she voluntarily took her current position. He says that the times require fighting men to be ready at a moment's notice. Despite shortages, the food is sumptuous with lots of meat, fruit and wine.

Isolated in deep within Sassanidia, Manakai wants to know everything about life in the west. He informs the characters that he has already sent men to find the Tahangir and does not want to place more expeditions at risk until they return. He says that the land to the south is much more dangerous than the areas the aswarans already traveled through.

Manakai offers them nice chambers within the fortress where the characters can lodge themselves. After dinner he takes them to a small smoking room, seeking their opinions about the future of Sassanidia. The commander desires them to swear allegiance to him and says that he expects their presence when he takes Soheil to be his wife.

After the conversation concludes the characters are free to drive the story forwards according to their beliefs and personal goals.

EVENTS

When action starts to stall and the story needs more energy, the GM can introduce some random event to spur the players. The events that follow provide inspiration for the game master; they can be threats, challenges or simply shocks. The best events should be closely tied to the characters beliefs so that players feel that they must react, or else something really bad will happen.

1. A villager gets whipped for stealing a piece of bread from one of the soldiers.
2. Dina implies through one of her evening prayers that Manakai is a false ruler. In retribution he imprisons her in the tower. Dina tries to get the aswarans to deliver a message to Toscaj – a threat to reveal the existence of Firoz, his djinn lover, unless Toscaj kills the commander.
3. Soheil tries to get the aswarans to swear personal allegiance to her as the rightful matriarch, if she succeeds, she will order them to worship the one God.
4. Dina tries to persuade the aswaran with the highest status to depose Manakai and become the new ruler of Parvaneh.
5. Nima Massoud asks for an audience with Manakai. He has with him a sword from one of Manakai's soldiers. Nima say they have found the fifty soldiers slaughtered and offers to guide a troop southwards, claiming to know safe routes. If he is assigned to a new expedition, he will let Xant servitors ambush the troop.
6. One of the fifty soldiers sent to find the Tahangir returns severely wounded with his tongue torn out. He is nursed by Toscaj. When one of the characters visits him he signs a jester hat in the air to show that it was Nima Massoud who assaulted them.
7. Nima Massoud summons the jinn Firoz who blasts her way out of her hidden prison and kills all she sees.
8. A character standing on the wall or near a window, sees far off in the distance one of the huge Xantian white worms erupt out of the ground and crush half the village of Zubin.
9. Clemens Saint-Omer and his knights ride back and forth outside Parvanehs walls. He sends one of his men as a messenger to challenge the ruler of the fortress to a duel with horse and sword. Manakai instead sends one of the characters as his advocate.
10. Soheil asks the characters to secretly go to the village Khorshid to show Clemens Saint-Omer the secret way into the fortress – with resulting disaster if they comply, as Clemens secretly plans to kill Soheil when he controls the fortress.
11. Dina wants the aswarans to go behind Manakai's back and accompany her to the underworld. Perhaps they will bring something bad back to the surface or discover the secret of the Xant presence?
12. A villager staggers up and says that Fraenks have taken Khorshid. Manakai sends the characters to scout and possibly save the village.
13. Manakai asks the characters to honor his wedding with Soheil. At the wedding feast he assigns one of the characters to watch Soheil, to prevent her from attempting to take her own life.
14. Toscaj tries to get one of the characters to take responsibility for the decision to kill Manakai with an undetectable poison, so that he dies peacefully in his sleep. If they do he will give them the vial but refuses to plant the substance himself.
15. Dina recognizes her brother Nima and begs the characters to capture him so that she can divine a method of breaking Nima free from the Xants influence.





CELESTIAL STORM

CHARACTER SHEET

NAME: _____

WEAKNESS: _____ INTEREST: _____

WILLPOWER POINTS: _____

BACKGROUND

FAMILY

(name, skill, rituals, heraldic symbol etc)

+1 WILLPOWER POINTS WHEN

- A Belief is clearly driving your character in one scene
- You try hard to reach one of your beliefs target in a scene
- Your Weakness puts you in problems/conflict
- Your weakness affects the story, making it more exciting and entertaining

BELIEF 1

LOOKS

HIERARCHY OF THE FAMILIES

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

BELIEF 2

BELIEF 3

WORDLIST

Sassanidia	The Kingdom of the Jahnashahs
Jahnashahs	'Kings of the World', people
The Tahangir	Spire on Mount Ferdows, link to the Gods
Fraenks	People in the west, servants of the Jahnashahs
Djinn	Divine servants of the gods
Aswaran	Paladin from one of the families
Akhond	Wise woman and magician
Parvaneh	The holy fortress in Sassanidia
Azar	Fire God
Perih	Moon God/ Symbol of Freedom
Banafshe	God of Plants
Shayda	Love-sickness
"Azarana"	Salutation

GM CHARACTERS

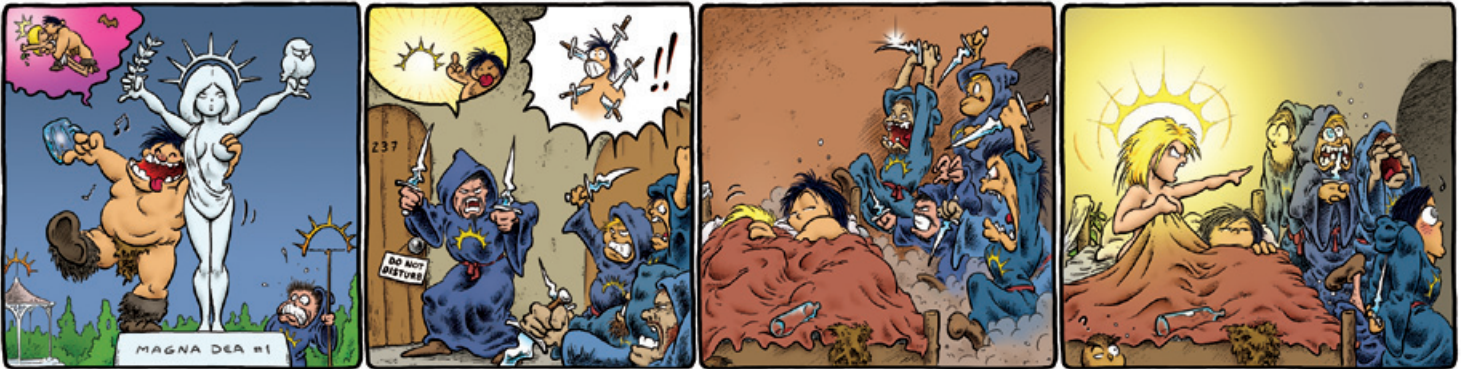
Dina
Akhond in Parvaneh
Soheil
The Matriarch of Parvaneh
Manakai
Commander of the soldiers in Parvaneh
Clemens Saint-Omer
Fanatic religious Fraenk
Toscaj
Master of Medicines, left in Parvaneh
Firoz
Toscaj's wife, a Djinn
Nima Massoud
Leader of crazy jugglers and beggars
Gregorius de Sylvain
Fraenkish Pope

CONFLICT

1. Between which characters?
At least one must be a player character.
2. What do you **do**, and what is your **intention**?
3. Roll 1D10
 - Advantage +1D10
 - Interest +1D10
 - Family +1D10
 - For each Willpower point spent +1D10
 - Help from GM-characters +1D10
 - Help from player character +1D10
 - Social Conflict against player character of lower status +1D10
4. Compare highest dice. Highest wins.
If equal compare second highest, and so on.
5. Winner tells how it played out.
6. Keep on roleplaying



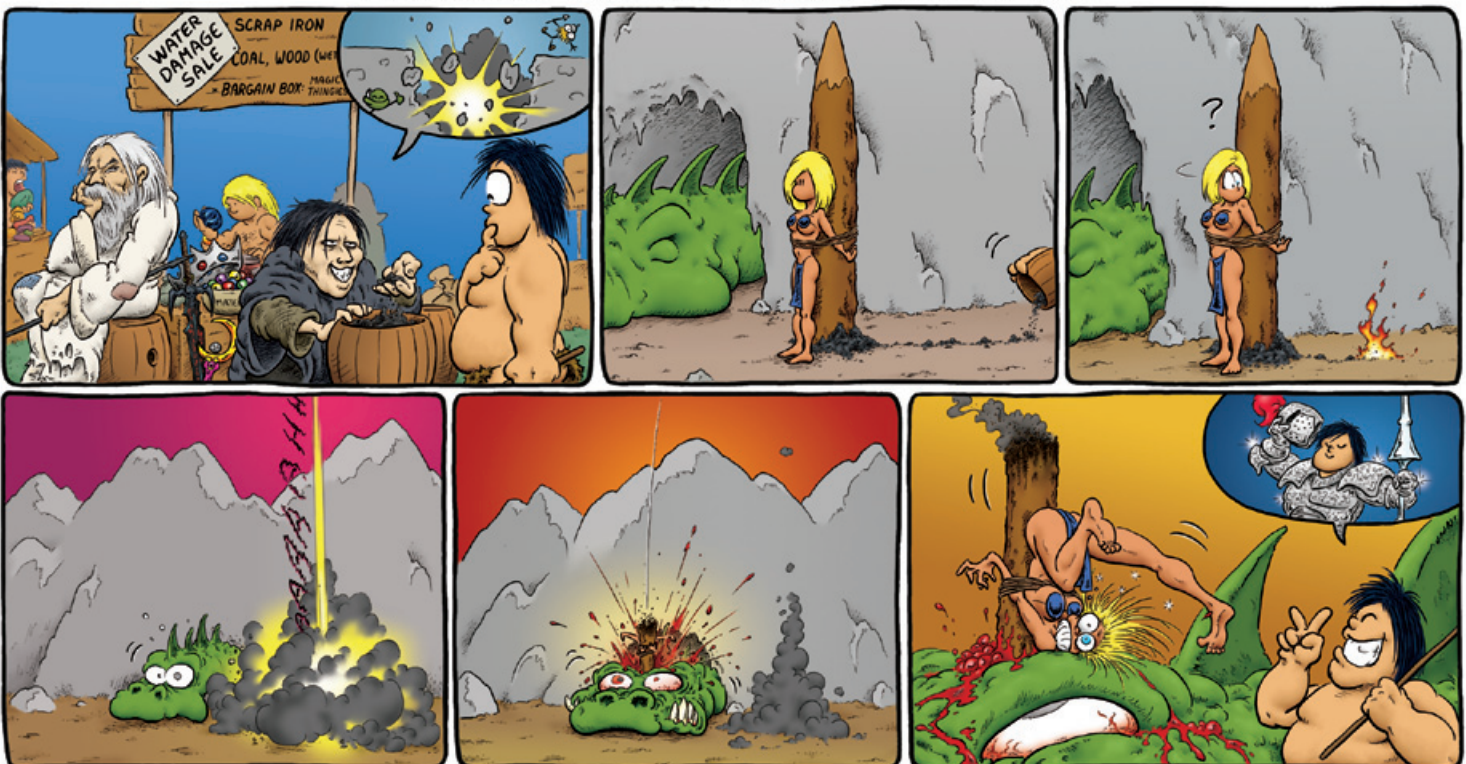
BERNARD THE BARBARIAN BLASPHEMES



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN SHAKES THE SNAKE



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN AND THE FIRE OF ORTHANC



FICTIVE GAMES

IN FICTIVE WORLDS

TEXT **CHRISTOFFER KRÄMER**
ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN**

GM: When entering the Dancing Bear Inn, the heat and the loud volume is striking. Every corner is occupied by people drinking, discussing and cheering. In front, by the bar, the innkeeper and his greasy wife are serving pitchers of beer as fast as they can, and by the *Skarabassa* tables, players and audience stand in double rows.

PLAYER 1: I make my way to one of the tables. Are they playing for stakes or just the honour?

GM: Clinking silver falcons lay on the felt tablecloth.

PLAYER 1: Then I'll wait for my chance, and when it comes, I'll be ready to bet half of the contents of my moneybag.

GM: After a while you get the chance and the croupier greets you with a nod.

PLAYER 1: I have 19 skillpoints in gambling, and also the modifier 4+ since I am especially good at *Skarabassa*.

GM: Roll the dice.

The Game Master and Player 1 roll the dice, adds and subtracts bonuses. Triumph!

GM: You win quite the number of falcons, almost twenty.

PLAYER 1: Wohoo!

GM: Lucky you.

The end.

Does this situation feel familiar? Despite being a hobby consisting of role players and people with a general interest in gaming, these boring and uninspired scenes surprisingly often describe fictive games inside the fictive role playing world.

This article is about why it is like this, and what can be done about it.

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION **FENIX 2/2007**

WHY DO WE PLAY FICTIVE GAMES IN OUR FICTIVE WORLDS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

It may be said that playing fictive games in fictive worlds is to introduce a meta level that complicates things for no good reason. But at the same time it is common, and if you think about it, both reasonable and human (elvish, dwarfish, or mutantly) to do so.

In the role playing world, the players and the game master are trying to simulate, as credible as possible, a fictive world, using the inner logic of it to make it as atmospheric as possible.

Playing games for fun is human, it happens in all times and cultures, and therefore it is natural for us as humans, to imagine that this happens in all worlds, times and multiverses.

Further, the game gives the ambitious game master the opportunity to communicate something about this world. In many cultures, games are more than games, and carries with them ideas and ideals regarding politics and esthetics which manifests in the game.

In the same way that *Monopoly* is the essence and the core of the American dream, *Go* reflects the buddhistic culture sphere.

Characters playing a specific fictive game in a role playing world could be a sign of them being a part of an ancient cultural tradition, and carriers of certain elevated cultural values.

The audience watched in awe as the old *Patsing*-master, with a slight tremble to his finger, tipped his jade tower over as a sign of his surrender. During the ongoing game, more and more people had gathered around the elevated stone table in the courtyard of the tea house. The rumors that a man as young as [insert optional character name here] had dared to challenge the wise Looang had spread fast. Now everyone was watching with great expectation to see how the old master would handle his defeat.

It was well known in the Tsirang-province that Looang was as good with his sword as he was at the *Patsing* table. Looang rose suddenly, with a speed defying his fragile exterior, and the audience quickly backed away. But instead of turning the tea house into an inferno of hardened steel, the old master took a deep bow as a sign of respect. [The players get goose-bumps, Hollywood buys the movie rights and so on.] ▶





In another situation, the same players can play another fictive game. This time the story is taboo, and crossing borders.

In the dim basement locals were watching, suspicious written all over their faces, as the well dressed nobleman descended like a shining angel into their opium filled gambling den. He had no given place down here among them, and his presence made them painfully aware of their lower standing. The tattoo-covered host of the gambling house stepped forward, bowing in a way that made the tattoo of golden kois seem to swim around on his naked back. He explained as respectfully as he could that the house only offered gambling with dice, that he was solely to blame for the fact that this had not been made clear at the entrance, and he apologized a thousandfold for having wasted the time of a member of the hadakka class in this unforgivable manner.

The nobleman accepted his apology with an inkling of a smile on his thin lips, made a quick bow, and produced a pair of ivory dice from his golden lofun-dress. This action was so shocking that the players talked about it for weeks after. *[Another scene for the film factory].*

Another good reason for having fictive games in your fictive worlds is that it provides another arena for the players to shine. Even if it is far from every role playing group that plays the kind of role playing games where experiencepoints and skillpoints define a character and their abilities, it is fairly common after all. When playing in this manner it is important to keep letting the players evolve in a way as unique and specialized as possible. Stimulating the brains reward centre, something the programmers behind the big mmorpg games are really good at, is equally important to regular role playing games.

If one, as game master, let's a player spend their points on developing a unique insight and ability to play a fictive game with some sort of importance to the game world, one has both fulfilled this players need to create a unique niche, and at the same time enabled game sequences or even whole adventures, revolving around this special talent.

Finally, fictive games gives the game master the opportunity to introduce an element of hazard that can be both useful and amusing in a campaign. The titilating feeling of placing a big bet, not knowing what will

happen can spice up any gaming moment, and it also gives the game master many opportunities to create subplots and scenarios.

The players may loose all they have gambling, but they can win fortunes and mysterious artefacts. Further, hazard always leads to conflict; accusations of cheating, bad losers, even worse winners, and of course: broad shouldered men with ill fitting suits accusing you of counting cards, wanting you to please come with them into the Nevada desert ...

THE DIFFICULTIES REGARDING GAMES IN FICTIVE WORLDS

Why then, does games in fictive worlds so often become the kind of boring dice excercises as in the introductory example? The answer is probably simply that it is a hard task. In the beginning of a campaign, the game master faces a main problem: he can let his new world be inhabited by people who by some cosmic chance happen to play *chess, go, backgammon, poker* and so on, or he can quickly design a number of immortal game classics that the people in his world stay devoted to playing for centuries to come. None of these options are very appealing. Filling a foreign world with the games of our world can easily destroy the illusion:

Captain Plosk from the first Pleiadic Space Commando beamed down to the recreation centre hoping to find amusement. Green slimeballs from the planet Xylafrog were sitting by the holosimulators enjoying pixelated fio-chasing, and loud pafnask from all parts of the galaxy gathered around the *Glonk*-tables to gamble away their hard earned mitharin disks. Plosk stepped up to his old nemesis Zloflock from Blaarn and slammed his fist at the table. You swindler, I challenge you to a round of *Ludo*!

Designing a number of functioning, exciting games from scratch is unfortunately not as easy as it seems. The process takes a long time, and immortal design classics do not grow on trees.

There are some basic requirements in order to design a game that all kinds of people will want to keep playing over and over again, regardless of the political or technical development.

- It must be easy to learn.
- It should be socially easy to play, just for entertainment and fun.
- It has to be complex enough to keep challenging the mind year after year.

When you have constructed a game like this – or preferably several games like this, since your world would feel flat having only one popular game – your players will be scattered to the wind, have moved out of town, gotten married, had children, and so on.

Luckily, compensation for this miscalculation awaits around the corner, in the shape of wealth as a professional games designer.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTES WHEN CREATING GAMES FOR FICTIVE WORLDS

So, how to go about in order to solve this Gordian knot? Strike like Alexander of course!

Just like anything else in the world of role playing, the important thing is not that it actually works, but rather it feels like it's working. Also, games you thought up tends to work perfectly well in your own mind. It is when you make a prototype and actually try to play it that all logical errors sees the light of day. Thus you design a fictive game that is never actually intended to be played, but feels completely realistic. Proceed from these framing of questions:

What's the name of the game?

The game should have a memorable, or telling name. It probably has different names in different cultures and classes. Presumably the name reflects the culture that invented the game, but the name may well have changed over time.

How does it look – from a physical standpoint?

Is it a board game or a card game or something completely different? What components make up the game (game boards, cards, tokens, etc)? What materials are they made from, how important is the esthetic presentation and so on?

What symbolizes the different components of the game, and what are their names?

Almost every game has underlying symbolic values or meanings. *Chess* is the simplest example. The game is a war simulation and the different pieces symbolize different powerful units on the battlefield. Other games can have other meanings, and be used to simulate something completely different.

What culture invented the game, and how does it show?

Is the game ancient or, historically, relatively new? Does it provide clues to what a foreign, maybe lost civilization may have looked like?

What kind of game is it?

There are different kinds of games. Is it a quickly played game of hazard focusing on betting and jackpots? Or is it an abstract fight of wills, rewarding intelligence and collected routine? Maybe the game is easy going and social, and is played solely to entertain?

How is the game played?

Even if the game is not actually intended to be played, you should still have a good idea of how to play it. How many players does the game have at most? How long does it take to play a round? Do the players cooperate or are they opponents? Do you take turns, or is the game based on quickness and dexterity? Can players be knocked out during the game? Does it contain any form of innate drama, with rising excitement? How do you win the game, and what signifies a really good player?

Is the game surrounded by any specific terminology or jargon?

Think about whether the game has originated slang expressions that may have influenced the rest of society. Does different moves or combinations have special names? Are the players called anything, or are such names reserved for the most dedicated?

Does the game have a history?

Is the game connected to a notable historical event? Are there players from the past, whose names all players still know today?

What reactions will a true master of the game face?

Does skill in the game render respect, or is it looked upon with suspicion? What possibilities are there to use one's expertise in the game?

Having introduced thought through, mood setting details in your campaign, the players will do the rest. Through questions and game sequences they will adapt the game and add to terminology and such. Then a game sequence will sound more like:

GM: The man in the cobalt blue uniform and the yellow turban nods invitingly to the chair in front of the *Kohann*-board.

PLAYER 1: I assess the opposition. Does he seem to know what he is doing? After the mishap in the harbour I cannot afford to lose any money.

GM: Hard to tell. He is an older military man from Mastrad, so there is reason to believe he has played for a good part of his life. At the same time, the board looks home made. The corner pagodas are made from nutshells, and the rope bridges are seashells on strings.

PLAYER 1: Okay, I sit down and put three silver talers on the Temple of the Holy Sun in the middle. Will he accept this challenge?

GM: He hesitates and looks at you, but eventually he puts down the same amount.

PLAYER 1: Does he want to play high or low rolls?

GM: He makes a gesture towards the board, you interpret this as him letting you choose.

PLAYER 1: Then I will play high rolls, and I start with a Maoann-opening. I levitate my Seanod to the first ledge.

GM: The man grins and when he moves his hand to move the first monk you see the ring he must have been hiding before. It is a cup ring from Bivari.

PLAYER 2: (*Grinning.*) Oh oh buddy. Grand slam!

PLAYER 1: Götterdämmerung! I immediately abandon my plan to win and move to play Bonettis defense. If I can last to the second incarnation he might offer me a tie.

GM: One can always wish...

FULLY PLAYABLE GAMES IN FICTIONAL WORLDS

Even if you decide to provide a game that the players are going to be able to play for real, you don't have to spend an infinite amount of time on game design. Set out to find the shortcuts! Find an existing board or card game in one of the many encyclopedias or webpages dedicated to this. Find a game that you like and believe your players are unfamiliar with. Then run this game through the filter of your game world using the framing of questions above. Come up with a new name, a new history and a new philosophy behind the game. Rename all the components and redesign ►

the game board to suit your campaign world. Then introduce the game through a specially written scenario or a colourful character.

If you want to create a fictive card game the excellent *Ultimate Book of Card Games* by Scott McNeely is recommended. It contains 350 card games, of which at least 200 are varieties you have never come across before. If you want to be more ambitious and create a board game of your own *A Gamut of Games* or any other book by Sid Sackson is recommended.

SCENARIO SEEDS

Being gamers, coming up with scenarios connecting to the joy of gaming, frustration when experiencing loss, and all the pressure created when the stakes are really high, is easy. I trigger my own imagination by using a few quick suggestions, divided into the groups: playing for money, playing for glory, and playing as the spice of life. All the suggestions are generic and work in all parts of the multiverse and in any fictive game.

Playing for money

An unexpected win

A gambler plays with high stakes and the opponent is eventually pressured into betting some sort of amulet, piece of jewellery or statuette. The bet raises the awareness of the local onlookers. When the player has won, it turns out that the item is not at all an ornamentation, but a known symbol for something completely different. It turns out the player has won an X. The game master fills in the blank with something spectacular and/or precious and/or incredibly complicated. The item could be a key to a run down amusement park, or maybe it is 30.000 cattle that immediately needs to be herded to far away slaughter, perhaps it is the man's symbol of marriage and the price is his wife.

Bigger than you ever think

A scenario based on the reverse. A player travelling in a foreign culture, bets, without really understanding it (due to the language barrier, or cultural differences in interpreting symbols and gestures) his honour, his freedom or even his name and title. The player is then forced to honour this bet and has to somehow get himself out of this mess.

The Sting

The Sting is a classical theme in games of hazard. It can be laid out in a number of ways. Either you let your players get cheated by skillful fraudsters, or maybe the players are

the fraudsters. All cheats have in common that the victims own greed lures them into the trap and renders them unable to see possible warning signs. If the purpose of the scenario is to cheat the players, you should not make it impossible for them to see through the cheat – the effect will be even bigger when they can look back and be annoyed that they missed all the obvious signs something was wrong. For example:

The players travel through a foreign environment and sense a light at the side of the path. On closer inspection, it turns out to be ignominious grave-robbers, or something similar. The players chase the bad guys away and then find an ancient tome that has been dropped. The tome turns out to be a player's guide to some locally played board game. According to the instructions, whoever plays using the advice in the guide, cannot lose. When the players reach the closest major community they will of course test the guide, and it turns out to be correct.

The players win every round. Spurred by their success they face ever more skillful opponents, and the guide delivers every time. Finally, the opportunity to play against a local rich man is given. A possible big win is enticing, they can bet all they got. Of course they are annihilated, and the purposely placed guide have rendered another victim among the greedy passers by. The poor community may flourish yet a while.

Playing for honour

The Champion's Challenges

A player has been endowed with an amazing talent for a particular game of skill. He seldom or never loses, but as he wins more prestigiously his reputation grows and the pressure increases. What happens when the player has to face:

- A man who has failed in everything, and whose last chance to impress the love of his life is to beat the player?
- A capricious and cruel ruler who has been surrounded by yes men, and therefore has won every game he entered thus far, thinking he is a true master player?
- A criminal organisation using threats against the player's loved ones wants to force him or her to give the victory away in an upcoming showdown?
- Death in the mood for playing a game ... ?

Playing for life

Luck, misunderstandings and/or a sting has led to one of the characters being perceived as amazingly good at a game of skill – which is the reason for the tricky situation the character is now in.

As a prisoner in an occupied city the character (and everyone else) becomes aware that the only way to stop the capricious war lord threatening to destroy the city, is to beat him in a battle of the brains in a game of X. The townspeople will not hesitate to make the character play against the war lord to save their city.

Trapped between the desperation of the townspeople and the weapons of the attacking army, a duel of the minds might be the best way out.

The sisters day and night

In the aftermath of a storm, the players find themselves in an inhospitable part of the world in a nomadic campsite ruled by an old toothless, beady eyed patriarch. The old man has two daughters, hidden in veils, and he would be more than happy to see one of the players make an honourable woman of one of his daughters, maybe because he is grateful for being rescued.

The patriarch describes one of the women as incredibly beautiful, and the other as an ogre. To decide which one of them will make a wife for any of the players, one has to face the man in a game of X. Of course the player forced to play loses, and suddenly he finds himself stuck with a fiancée.

All sorts of soap opera-esque, or shakespearian, entanglements later it (of course) is revealed that the veiled sister is far from an ogre. She is a beautiful, intelligent woman, who gladly joins the players adventures in the world.

Playing as the spice of life

We are all just pawns in the game of life

The players have found, or obtained, a board game. Gradually, as the scenario, or campaign moves forward, they realize that the rounds they play on it has an immediate impact on the world around them. Perhaps national or international politics will mimic the moves they make in the game or maybe the impact is bigger than that – maybe they are moving planets and stars. Who does the mighty board really belong to, what consequences will their games have, and most importantly, how can they use the situation to their advantage?

The artefact

The players have come across a very old, antique specimen of a known board game. What they don't know is that the board is the key to something much bigger. Perhaps a number of predestined moves will open a hidden compartment in the board, or maybe the board itself is the key to a portal somewhere.

Face cards

The players arrive to a sophisticated culture in some decadent dictatorship. Here it turns out that a card game, very familiar to the players, is being played. However, even the richest and mightiest seem to be pretty bad at the game. The players soon discover they can win both glory and fame playing the game. But they have not noticed that in this sophisticated culture, since way back, people have stopped caring about the actual outcome of a game. Instead it is all a subtle political game with advanced symbolism. The cards you play at a certain time, what cards you fold, and what cards are paired up, what cards you bet money on and which cards you cheat with – are all commentaries on the contemporary events around you, and are meant more for the audience than winning a game. Since the players are tripping around like elephants in a china shop in this culture, they are sending out signals they do not understand themselves. Their bold political gambits soon attract the rage of the ruler.

Trapped in the game of life

The players get their hands on a sophisticated board game with many types of pawns, many different parallel strategies that may lead to victory, and many philosophical levels. The particular version of the game they found turns out to be cursed (or endowed with hallucinogen properties) and during the first round the players discover they have been moved inside the game. The players are forced through a long *Alice in Wonderland*-esque passage to navigate the game from inside, and somehow master this complicated game. If they fail they are lost forever, but if they succeed they have gained a unique insight to the essence of the game that they can use to beat the most elevated master player.

The Enigmatic Game of Worlds

The biggest universal genius of a world (Archimedes, Aristotle, Da Vinci and so on) left in their will a newly constructed game made out of metal with various alloys. Mercury conductors runs through the board and tiny metal balls are to be moved in flumes across it.

The universal genius named it *The Game of Worlds* and with some good will the different parts of the board represents the continents that exist in this world. The game is not very hard to play and a lot of it is about learning what consequences there is to putting certain balls in motion, and so on. This universal genius implies, in his or her cryptical writings, that the game is the key to all of the world's knowledge, but nobody has ever understood the meaning of it. A progressive ruler decides to solve, once and for all, the puzzle of the game and recruits the players. They are given large resources to solve the puzzle, both when it comes to money and scientific advisors. They are sent on a long journey through different countries, cities and cultures where miscellaneous clues lead them on. Finally they find that the mechanics of the game changes depending on where they play it. Balls and mercury behave differently in different parts of the world, and the players conclude that there must be something universal, geographical that affects the game. Pursuing this, the players are led deep into dangerous, notorious, tricky waters in which centre there is a hidden civilization (Atlantis or suchlike). And this location coincides with the magnetic pole. When the players use the game to locate where to search, they also find the knowledge hidden in the deep.

FICTIVE GAMES – AN OVERVIEW TO INSPIRE

The subculture we are in is loaded with examples of just the sort of fictive games this article centres around. We come across them in the books we read, the movies we watch and from time to time they even show up in the games we play. Here follows a few short examples that can easily be found if one is looking for more inspiration:

Fantasy

Thud and *Cripple Mr Onion* are just two of many fictive games appearing in Terry Pratchett's books. The last time I counted he had introduced more than twenty in his *Discworld*-series. *Dragon Poker* appears in Robert Asprins *Myth Adventure*-series. Very amusing, complicated, and totally unplayable in reality.

Science fiction

Sabacc is a card game appearing pretty frequently in the *Star Wars*-universe, both in the movies and in miscellaneous books. The ownership of the Millennium Falcon has more than once been determined by

playing this game. *Full Colours* is a card game played several times in the remake of *Battlestar Galactica*. *Kadis-Kot* is an *Othello* like board game appearing from time to time in *Star Trek*. *Plum* is a *poker* like card game appearing in an episode of the dearly departed *Firefly*. Here the crew plays by betting all the boring chores aboard the ship. The goal is of course to get rid of them all. The excerpt below is an excellent illustration of how som thrown in nonsense terminology may do the trick:

From *Firefly: Shindig*

Dealer: Ante up gentlemen.

Book: Dishes.

Dealer: Dishes.

Jayne: Garbage.

Dealer: So I'll card... plum.

Dealer: Plums are tall.

Book: I'll take two.

Dealer: No tall-card claim.

Jayne: I'll take three.

Dealer: Three.

Dealer: Dealer forced to claim the tall.

Jayne: I fold.

Dealer: Me too. Tall cards around my neck like a weight.

Miscellaneous fiction

The Glass Bead Game by Herman Hesse, is a completely fictional piece revolving around the fictive game with the same name. The novel also widens the concept of what a game can be in a foreign world. Very inspiring.

Azad is a fictive game from Ian M Banks novel *The Player of Games* (which is completely devoted to the fictive game). This novel also provides good ideas for scenarios, for someone who wants to give their fictive games a bigger meaning in the campaign.

Games

Kejsare from Swedish *Mutant: Undergångens Arvtagare*. A card game with rules that remain a mystery. It is played by zone travelers and other random people and seems, like *poker*, to demand that you always keep a straight face.

Three Dragon Ante is a fictive and actual card-game for *D&D*. The game is meant to exist as a fictive game inside their fantasy universe and has also been published, giving you the chance to actually play it. The game was reviewed in *Fenix 4, 2006*.

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TEXT **KENNETH HITE**

ILLUSTRATION **LUKAS THELIN**

JUST ADD RUM

EVERYTHING YOU NEED FOR PIRATES

“Now and then we had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates.”

– Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*

What is a game setting without pirates? A sad and empty thing. But almost as bad is a game setting with pirates that make no sense. Pirates in Neverland can survive merely by chasing Lost Boys and pestering Indians, but in most settings pirates need more than just a parrot and a cutlass. For a given historical setting, you can usually find pirates somewhere if you look hard enough. (Hint: Try the South China Sea.) For an alternate history or a future history, you should pay attention to some pirate fundamentals, especially if you plan to change your pirates up or center the game on them. Whether they pilot pursuit fighters (as in *Crimson Skies*), navigate heavily mortgaged Type S scout ships (as in *Traveller*), or ensorcel magical skullships (as in *Spelljammer*), your pirates should still fit the setting. From the antediluvian Black Coast to ancient Crete to modern Somalia to the far future of the Saturnian system, there are certain conditions – certain ingredients – you need in order for pirates to sprout, in our world or yours. Fortunately, building pirates that make sense will also help you add flavor and excitement to the rest of your world. Makes sense – they’re pirates, after all.

GEOGRAPHY

There can be no pirates without loot. There has to be something out there worth the stealing, a game worth the candle, whether gold doubloons or fat cattle, spices or iridium. In some cases, the loot is simply the other ships’ passengers and crew, as slaves or hostages: this was true for the Cilician pirates of Julius Caesar’s day (he got mad because the ransom they suggested was far too low) and it’s true for most Somali hijackers today (who wait for the insurance companies to pay out for seamen they kidnap). The loot should be better – more valuable, more prestigious, more varied – than the day-to-day income the pirate could reasonably earn elsewhere. In other words, the reward should outweigh the risk. (Somali pirates earn something like 150 times the prevailing wage in Somalia.) The loot should be concentrated – not necessarily physically (modern pirates in Burma steal whole tankers full of palm oil) but geographically. There should be rich ports – mine heads, colonial capitals, frontier entrepôts – where that loot gets assembled into cargoes, and from where it gets shipped. Wealthy ports appear in almost every setting, from high fantasy to gritty dark-future cyberpunk to star-spanning space opera.

Adding or emphasizing rich ports with an eye to adding pirates merely means thinking a bit about the specific flavors of riches in your setting, which can be as close as the random treasure type tables. What does a “rich port” that produces dragon scales look like? Where might it be located? What does producing robots mean for that moon or asteroid colony? Powerful or ambitious pirate bands might try to sack these ports rather than wait for the cargoes to ship out: such attacks can turn to disaster (like Henry Morgan’s 1668 raid on Maracaibo almost did thanks to an alert Spanish garrison), achieve modest success (like the Viking raids on Byzantium in 860 and 907), or loot the port to the bare walls (like the Hosokawa pirate clan’s sack of Ningbo in China in 1523).

But let’s assume the rich ports can assemble their cargoes of loot in relative peace, and load them onto ships. Or onto land-crawlers, or trains, or big rigs, or zeppelins, or space freighters: in this context, “ship” just means “cargo-carrying vehicle to be attacked by pirates.” The logic of economics means that the cargo goes from its point of production or assembly (our “rich port”) to its point of use, often the center of that empire or world economy: Elamite lapis went to Babylon, Syrian



incense went to Rome, Indian pepper went to Baghdad, Mexican gold went to Spain. When the pirates didn't get it, that is. (Yes, indeed, pirates preyed on all those trade routes.) Sometimes goods travel between imperial centers: Tocharian brigands ("land pirates") stole silk from caravans between China and Rome; Somali and Indonesian pirates hijack cargoes of Japanese cars going to Germany, and vice versa.

Where do the pirates attack? If the cargo can travel anywhere on the wide ocean before arriving at its destination, piracy becomes much, much harder. This is the first major obstacle when adding space pirates to a science-fiction setting: space is big. The second obstacle is even worse: hyperspace doesn't have geometry. Which is to say, when you're in hyperspace, you're nowhere. If you can just wink your cargo into hyperdrive and wink out again on your customer's front doorstep, you're pretty much pirate-proof. It's almost as bad for the pirates (and hence, for the GM who wants pirates) if a zeppelin can take any route in the sky, or a galleon sail any direction from Mexico to Manila.

In general, pirates want two things from shipping lanes: they should be predictable, and they should be geographically compressed. In the first place, it makes a pirate's job much easier if he can lie in wait for his target to show up at a specific location instead of hunting it all across the ocean. Railroad schedules, and the near-impossibility of changing course, make trains the ideal target for pirates by this criterion. (This delightful type of land-piracy was not restricted to the Old West – Josef Pilsudski, future dictator of Poland, robbed a train carrying Poland's tax payment to the Russian czars in 1908.) The pilgrimage season, and the monsoons, played a similar role for 12th-century Templar pirates in the Red Sea and for Anglo-American pirates like Every and Tew in the Indian Ocean in the 1690s: the pirates would wait for the winds to turn, and descend on the ships carrying rich Muslims on the way to or from the hajj. The annual sailing date of the Spanish treasure fleet from Havana to Seville was a closely guarded military secret for just that reason.

A suitable piratical hunting ground should not only be predictable, but easily covered by a single ship, or by a small squadron. Lots of cargo ships should pass through a relatively narrow space, giving pirates plenty of prey. Here, technology dictates what "narrow" means: in the ancient Mediterranean, when most ships hugged the coast, any sea could swarm with pirates, since almost all trade necessarily passed within a few dozen miles of shore. In medieval times, Mediterranean piracy retreated to more restricted zones: the Adriatic and Aegean, the passages between

Sicily and Africa, the Balearic Islands. Better sailing ships opened out the hunt again after the 15th century. The Barbary pirates' depredations covered the whole western Mediterranean, and raided as far as Argentina, Cornwall, and Iceland. The pirates of the Caribbean laid in wait in the passages between Cuba and Hispaniola, in the Windward and Leeward Passages, and in the narrow seas of the Bahamas. Pirate junks from Japan, Taiwan, and (later) Indonesia prowled much of the South and East China Seas until the mid-19th century. Radar and satellites mean that a few modern pirates in Somalia can threaten ships as far away as Mumbai and Sri Lanka. But even with such detection capabilities, modern pirates prefer cramped and crowded seas: the Gulf of Aden, Cape Guardafui, the Strait of Malacca. All of these waters have been pirate magnets for over a millennium: geography doesn't change.

What does this constraint mean in game terms? Whatever you design it to mean. Predictability comes from something you control, elsewhere in the setting: Perhaps ships can only sail from Darkport during the krakens' hibernation period, or the wormholes between planets only open for a few days out of the year. If there are specific "jump lines" between stars, you're halfway to a crowded trade route – now add in a super-Jovian at a jump-line nexus where starships can refuel, but the gravity well prevents easy hyperjumping back out. If nearby asteroids produce mother lodes of platinum or osmium, your jump-line nexus becomes a science-fictional Strait of Malacca. If pirates in a fantasy world have access to detection magics, they can potentially operate over hundreds of miles of ocean, just like modern-day Somali marauders. If an ion sloop can cross a hundred thousand miles in a few dozen minutes, the space between a planet and its moon – or even within the moon system of a gas giant like Saturn – is as cramped as the Dardanelles or Singapore Straits.

So we've got where the cargo leaves from, and where the cargo has to go. What's left is where the pirates are. Geographically speaking, pirates need two things: access to their target, and concealment, the latter not only from their prey but also from anyone who goes chasing pirates. A coastline with plentiful harbors fulfills both needs. If many different harbors can threaten a trade route, pirates have lots of tactical options: even if the target ship is expecting pirates, it can't maintain alertness everywhere and can still be taken by surprise by a pirate ship concealed in a narrow inlet or cove. If pursuit comes, lots of harbors nearby give the fleeing pirates plenty of options for hideouts: camouflaged amongst coasting traffic, covered in

overhanging vegetation, or even dismantled and hull down behind a hill. If pirates raid in shallow-draft ships, they have the option of more harbors still, from river estuaries to shelving bays. If their pursuers use heavier craft, such shallow harbors become safe refuges, unless the navy or the law dismounts marines in pursuit. But such pursuit carries its own problems, especially if the pirates' shallow harbor is surrounded by swamps, like Jean Lafitte's Barataria.

Look at the map of the Caribbean: thousands of islands, any of which can beach a pirate sloop or schooner. Barrier islands line the coast of Frisia and Pomerania, protecting the Vitalienbrüder captains who swooped down on Hanseatic ships at the turn of the 15th century. The coasts of Sumatra, Borneo, and Malaya offer dozens of harbors suitable for whole fleets of Malay pirate praus; the shores of Crete and the Greek isles supported so many pirates that no Mycenaean town could be located within ten miles of the ocean. River pirates (on the Mississippi in the 1810s and 1820s; on the Danube in the 10th century; on the Mekong today) use sandbars, rapids, promontories, and caves. Gullies and canyons play a similar role in Western train-robber getaways; mountains or jungles might mask predatory air pirate landing strips. In a fantasy game, dragon-riding raiders can launch from any volcanic island; dark elves can flit in and out of the boles of mighty trees anywhere in the forest. Pirates lurked in the Asteroid Belt in Golden Age science fiction thrillers; space pirates more familiar with orbital mechanics hide out in moon-and-ring systems like those of Jupiter or Saturn.

POLITICS

So much for geography, then. We've got our rich ports, our narrow trade routes, our sneaky harbors: can't rightly have piracy without them. But if geography were everything, there would still be pirates in the Caribbean right now. No, piracy also depends on politics. Or rather, on the absence of politics. Piracy can't flourish where law enforcement, or at least a capable and responsive military presence, can be relied on to show up and protect cargo traffic. Thus, a pirate zone requires that local jurisdiction (or at least local sea-power) be tenuous, confused, contradictory, or just plain absent. The Spanish Main had (in theory) clear jurisdiction: the Pope had granted the whole Western Hemisphere (except Brazil) to Spain. But Spain couldn't afford to build and crew enough ships to enforce its claims in the Caribbean, much less patrol the sea lanes to stop piracy. (The whole Caribbean only had about 50,000 Spanish colonists even as late as 1650, protected by

fewer than 20 galleons.) In practice, Spain couldn't even enforce Madrid's ban on trade with the Caribbean: smuggling (which is to say, illegal shipping) was necessary for the Spanish colonies to function almost from the beginning. To cap it all off, neither France nor England (or Spain's rebellious subjects the Dutch) recognized Spain's claim. Rather, their diplomats refused to address Spain's claim: peace treaties in Europe had no effect in the Caribbean. "No Peace beyond the Line" was the watchword, and pirates poured into Tortuga, Jamaica, and dozens of other islands even as British, French, and Dutch captains formally seized bases and plantations in the Caribbean for their nations.

We see the same effect in modern Somalia: a nation ungovernable and ungoverned for twenty years breeds warlords – and at sea, pirates. Piracy in the Straits of Malacca depends on bureaucratic delays and snarls: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore all claim stretches of water and coastline in those seas (which the U.S. and other maritime nations claim are international waters), making unified law enforcement difficult when a new jurisdiction is only a few minutes' sail away. If the geography is already favorable, piracy blooms in any seapower vacuum. Ming dynasty China abdicated control over its coasts by banning sea-borne trade and scrapping its navy; the result was smugglers (Japanese at first, but increasingly Chinese) who inevitably became pirates. Piracy blossomed in the Mediterranean as Rome smashed the eastern kingdoms and then fell into civil war; once the Portuguese (and later, the Dutch and British) broke the power of the Ottoman navies in the Arabian Sea, pirates appeared in those rich trading waters. When (usually under wartime pressures) the Dutch and British East India Companies skimmed on their own patrols, pirates sailed into those same waters from Malaya and the Caribbean.

The other primary political criterion for piracy is a safe haven ashore; somewhere pirates can sell their loot, repair their ships, recruit more men, and quaff flagons of rum or the local equivalent without getting arrested. This might simply be a handy stopping point on the ungovernable coastline, as with Eyl in Somalia, or the island of Delos in the classical Aegean. Some safe havens are "pirate republics" like Tortuga off Haiti, or the city of Sallee in Morocco, or the Zaporozhian Sich that sheltered both sea-pirates and land-pirates on an island in the Dnepr River deep in the Ukrainian steppes. Other safe havens are cities where local officials look the other way or even protect the pirates from other law enforcement. This might be because the pirates double as the local defense force (as with Port Royal in Jamaica), because the

YARR! 'TIS A CHECKLIST!

"You're pirates. Hang the code, and hang the rules. They're more like guidelines anyway."

– Elizabeth Swann, *Pirates of the Caribbean*

This list boils down the piratical preconditions in this essay to a few simple concepts. The more of these elements your setting has, the more plentiful – and plausible – your pirates can be.

- Rich ports where cargoes are assembled
- Compressed and predictable shipping lanes
- Plentiful harbors to lurk or hide in
- Confused or unenforced local jurisdiction or power vacuum
- Safe havens ashore
- Surplus of combat-trained sailors
- Cheap ships, easily and cheaply refueled and repaired
- Offense trumps defense in ship combat
- Offensive weapons cripple or immobilize ships, not destroy them
- Ships fastest mode of communication
- Higher manpower gives advantage in close ship combat
- Boarding is possible, even likely
- Weapon range roughly equals detection and identification range

pirates mostly attack shipping belonging to town's enemies (as with Newport in Rhode Island), because the pirates pay off local officials (as in Hainan province in modern China), or a combination of those reasons. State-sponsored pirates, such as the "sea dogs" and "privateers" who raided the Spanish Main for England, or the Barbary pirates who took Christian slaves for North African pashas, can find safe haven in their country's home ports. Finally, a whole country might be a safe haven, if piracy, warfare, and trade are interchangeable concepts – as with the Vikings, the ancient Illyrians, or the Persian Gulf emirates in the 17th century.

These two factors are easy to add to a created world, or to a created bunch of worlds in an SF campaign setting. Almost any fantasy setting worth the name has a bunch of barbarians or rowdy city-states along one or the other edge of the map. Dwarven merchants might repair human galleys if the humans raid orcish towns and elven ships. In some settings, a single wizard might support whole fleets of pirates, becoming a fantasy version of Henry Morgan or Cheng-I-Sao. Adding

"neutral zones" and starship shortages to an SF setting is, if anything, even easier. In some settings, it's practically the default: even the Federation got space pirates (Orion and otherwise) by the 24th century.

Although it's not required, think about placing your pirate haven chronologically as well as geopolitically. Periods of prolonged or regular low-level naval war, or the time just after a major naval war, are good times for pirates. Naval wars produce lots of trained and blooded sailors, some of whom are happy to desert for better treatment and much better pay in the pirate fleet. After the war, their appetite for pirate pay gets, if anything, even greater: even rebounding civilian shipping can't absorb all the sailors a navy generates. The same is true for other sorts of pirates: Jesse James recruited his land-pirate train-robber gangs from demobilized Civil War veteran raiders, for example. A steampunk zeppelin war produces squadrons' worth of aggressive pilots for air piracy; atomjacks and laser-loaders returned from the war against Sirius find their skills very welcome in the pirate havens of Enceladus or Callisto. ►



TECHNOLOGY

The notion of extra sailors leads us toward the question of ships. Remember, “ships” is just our generic term, used here for “vehicles pirates ride in.” The same guidelines apply to ion-drive spacecraft, post-apocalyptic combat SUVs, hunter-killer turboprops, and Zodiac speedboats loaded down with machine guns. Pirate ships must be relatively cheap, and relatively easy to repair and refuel without a lot of infrastructure. Expensive ships suddenly tilt the “risk versus reward” equation the other way: getting a million-dollar yacht shot up to earn a \$50,000 ransom makes less sense than risking a ramshackle fishing boat to the same end. Expenses are relative: a million-credit space schooner can make a sensible pirate ship if you’re hunting warp freighters hauling a billion credits worth of trillithium.

If, after you’ve gotten your pirate ship shot up, you have to bring it into a civilized port to fix it, and fill out a bunch of forms, and pay huge insurance premiums – well, you may have missed the point of being a pirate in the first place. Piracy flourished when the world’s most technically advanced ships could still be repaired – or even built from scratch! – by anyone with time and a hammer, while careened on a deserted beach. One solution for space pirates is salvaged, repurposed, and recycled hulls and engines. This has its own parallels in the piratical habit of using captured ships as flagships: modern Somali pirates use hijacked yachts as “mother ships” for their fleets of motorboats and fishing

yawls, while Blackbeard’s 40-gun *Queen Anne’s Revenge* began as a captured French slave ship. Internal combustion engines so completely dominate global transportation now that the knowledge and technology to repair ships is almost as common as it was in Blackbeard’s day. Refueling is another matter: Gasoline, diesel, or fuel oil is more expensive than wood or coal, but it’s incredibly easy to store and to pump. And in their various forms, hydrocarbons are (for now) much more easily found than a mizzenmast. That said, sailing ships needed no fuel, and (masts aside) what naval stores they did require came cheap and plentiful from any harbor. (One could, in extremis, cut down a tree and turn a mast, although stepping it required more skill than most pirates possessed.) Post-apocalyptic pirates (land or sea) probably run their (doubtless salvaged) craft on alcohol, more reliably available than gasoline. Space pirates can scoop reaction mass or methane from gas giants; if star travel requires antimatter or quantum singularities, pirates probably become single-system foes.

The most crucial other expendable is weaponry. Caribbean pirates, for the most part, stole their cannon from other ships, or (very occasionally) bought them from European foundries. But once acquired, muzzle-loading cannon seldom wore out, assuming they were powdered and laid correctly. For modern pirates, squad weapons are dirt cheap in Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa and everywhere else superpowers fought proxy wars for decades. Artillery is harder to come by in the modern era, but hardly impossible. Classical pirates needed no more weapons than bows or spears; ship artillery was reserved for naval vessels. Artillery is also questionable pirate gear both in classical times and now, because of its tendency to destroy a ship instead of capture it. (It takes far too long to destroy a strong wooden ship with solid shot, so for about 400 years you could have cannons on a pirate ship without endangering your investment. Plus, in the Age of Sail you could always aim high and shoot up the masts and rigging.) The bottom line is this: regardless of how actual warfare progresses, pirate ships need an offensive advantage over their targets’ defenses, but not a cataclysmic one.

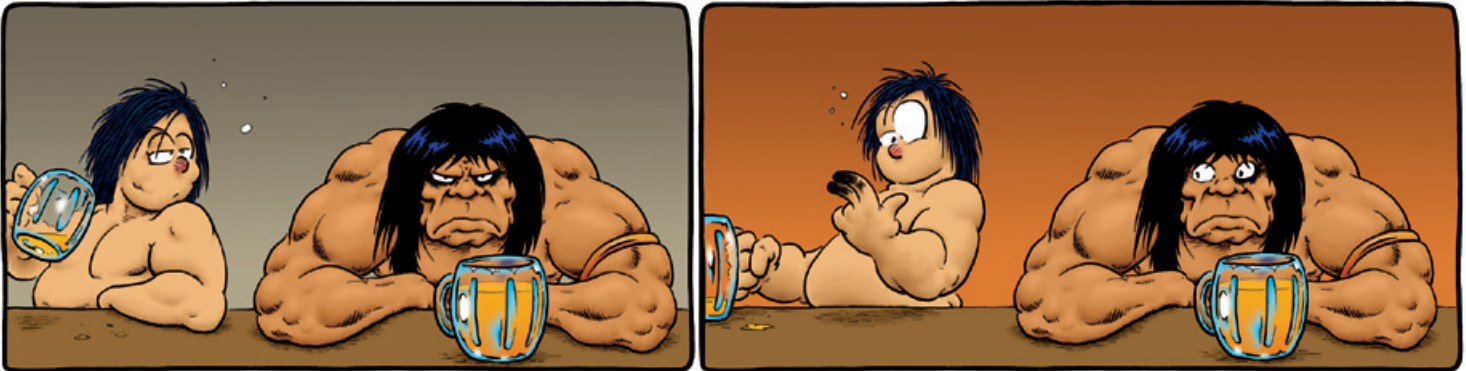
Economic incentives help drive things the pirates’ way. Assuming there’s loot to be had, pirates can usually recruit more attackers than any ship has as defenders, or even crew. Merchants would rather spend money on cargo instead of crewmen, to say nothing of useless marines to defend a ship the owner probably isn’t even on. (The exception to that rule being the rapid response of railroad companies to land piracy in the 1860s and

1870s: heavily-armed “Pinkerton men” rode shotgun, literally, on trains after 1875.) The same economics drive maritime architecture: ships carrying armor or weapons are heavier, and thus more expensive to operate, than undefended craft. On top of that, money spent on armor and weapons can’t be spent on more cargo. Merchant ships, therefore, mount very little in the way of defenses, leaving them vulnerable even to small, fragile craft carrying nothing but small arms and boarders. There are a few exceptions to this rule: state-owned Spanish galleons combined military and commercial duties, and Dutch East Indiamen were built tough and carried plenty of weapons – mostly because their captains (who often owned shares in their ships) were eager to turn pirate in the Spice Islands themselves! But bold and determined pirates, given luck and weather, could even take an Indiaman or (less often) a galleon.

In settings where you’re creating the technology (or magic) used on the high seas (or space lanes), you can stack the deck a little more. Ideally, ships should be the fastest modes of communication: radio has probably done more to diminish global piracy than anything else. (In the old West, the telegraph did about the same to train-robbing and land piracy in general.) Ideally, combats should occur at close range, or in circumstances where pirates’ greater manpower gives them an advantage. Unless you’ve got an unstoppable tractor beam in your pocket like the space pirate Julian Forward in Larry Niven’s *“The Borderland of Sol”*, piracy depends on being able to board your target. Transporters or teleport spells can really bring pirates into their own in SF or fantasy settings, especially if a few photon torpedoes or fireballs can batter down the shields or wards. Ideally, weapon ranges should also roughly equal detection ranges: pirates do better if their prey hasn’t got time to flee. The geography can help out, as the pirate vessels lurk behind a headland or a nebula. If pirates can blend in with normal coasting traffic, that helps: no *detect pirate spells*, no universal IFF transponders. Seeing the ship isn’t enough if you can’t tell a pirate when you see one: modern tankers can see ships half a world away if they want, but only when the AK-47s come out fifty yards away can they identify a threat.

Ideal conditions aside, it doesn’t wreck the story too badly if the fat merchant sees the black sails on the horizon and flees for his life, assuming your game’s chase mechanics can handle it. If you’ve got narrow seas, a wild borderland or a pirate republic off the prow, and someone lined up to fence your loot, you might even give the merchant a head start. Enough of one to take a swig or two of rum, anyway.

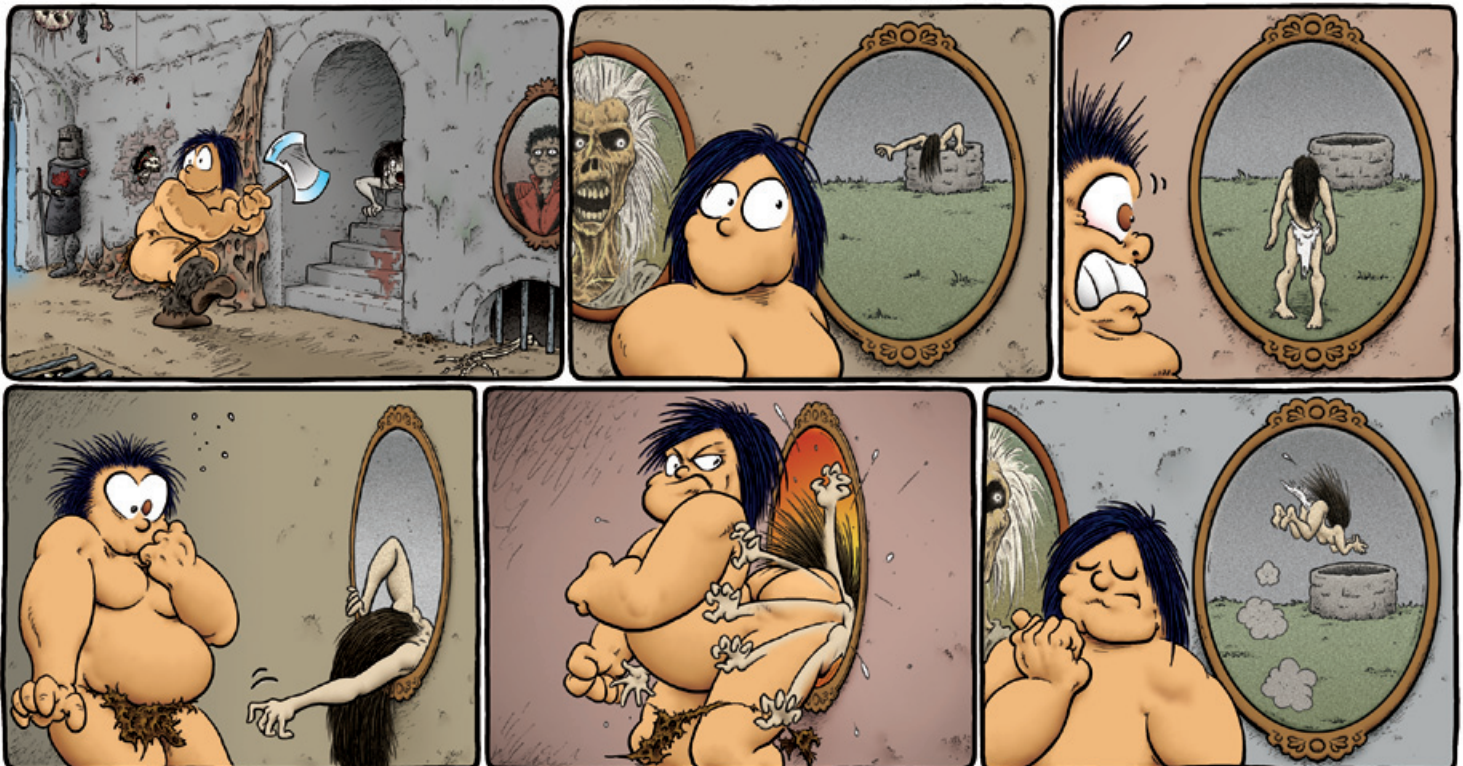
BERNARD THE BARBARIAN IN YOUR EYE



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN AND THE PEA



BERNARD THE BARBARIAN ON THE SEVENTH DAY



BETTER ANGELS

A COMEDY CARD GAME FOR 3+ PLAYERS

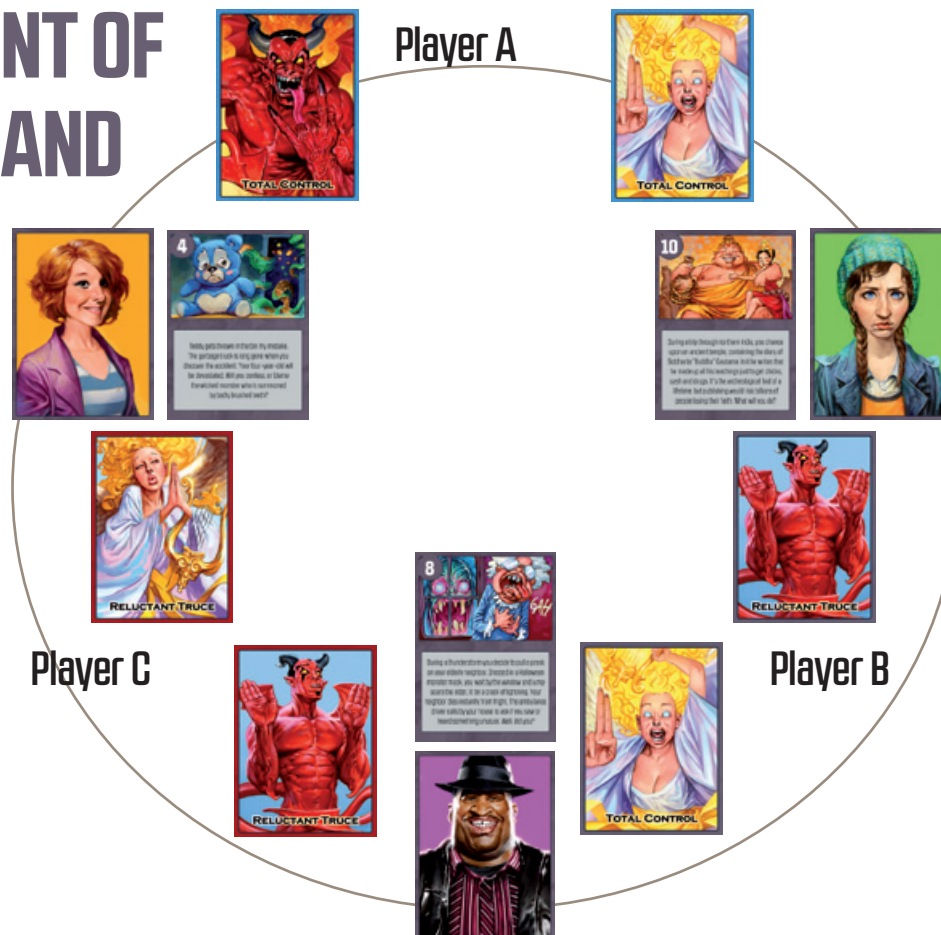
TEXT **CHRISTOFFER KRÄMER**
BILD **LUKAS THELIN**

We've all seen it before: the classic image with a person who has a little devil on one shoulder and a little angel on the other. There they sit and constantly struggle to lead or mislead their person. Often, they also have internal meta-discussions that the person — helplessly caught in the middle of their tug-of-war — is completely oblivious to.

Better Angels is a simple game with this theme that builds on the classic “prisoner’s dilemma”. It is easy to explain, quick to play, and is excellent as a warm-up game before starting something heavier like *Once Upon a Time* or *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, or even *Elementary, My Dear...* from *Fenix #4, 2009* (which is also published in *Best of Fenix Volume 3*).

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION **FENIX 2/2013**

PLACEMENT OF PLAYERS AND CARDS



PREMISE

The players play angels and devils that sit on people's shoulders and try to influence their small and large moral decisions in life. Of course both angels and devils want to have as much effect as possible in order to turn in a nice ripe soul when the person finally dies, but they have, during all their years of exerting their influence, made an interesting discovery: if both the angel and the devil do their utmost in every single decision to convince the person to follow their advice, the result in the long run is just watered-down decisions and ultimate failure. It is as if the spiritual battle causes so much confusion that the end result is moral ambiguity. A person who is constantly torn this way and that in decision after decision does not achieve much in life, and the pale, pathetic soul that results from this ambiguity gives very little to either God or Satan. No, the challenge is to let the person make their own decisions for the most part, and then, at just the right moment, exert sufficient influence for the life-changing decisions. If they play their cards right, they can salvage a real heavyweight soul when death comes calling. The problem is knowing when to be satisfied with a reluctant truce and when to go for total control.

CONTENTS

- **8 Angel Cards** (2/ player – 1 **Total Control** and 1 **Reluctant Truce**)
- **8 Devil Cards** (2/ player – 1 **Total Control** and 1 **Reluctant Truce**)
- **4 Person Cards**
- **19 Moral Decision Cards** with points ranging from 2-12
- **4 Moment of Triumph Cards**

PREPARATIONS

- The players sit in a circle. All players have another player to both their left and their right
- Each player gets 2 **Angel Cards** and 2 **Devil Cards**.
- Each player gets a **Moment of Triumph Card** – if you play with this special rule
- A **Person Card** is placed between each player. Each player is an angel to the person on their right and a devil to the person on their left. This way, all players are both angels and devils
- The **Moral Decision Cards** are shuffled and dealt out so that 5 (or however many you decide) cards are placed face down under each **Person Card**. If there are any cards left over, these should be put aside without revealing which ones they are.

ONE ROUND

One round consists of four different phases:

The Moral Phase

Begin the round by turning over the top **Moral Decision Card** for each person. The different moral dilemmas are read aloud so each player knows which decision the round covers, and the number of points at stake.

The Diplomacy Phase

For a minute or so, the angels and devils are permitted to talk “over the head” of their person, and discuss the moral dilemma and whether they should attempt to influence the person or not. During this phase, it is also possible to discuss the angels’ or devils’ perception of the problem.

The Choice Phase

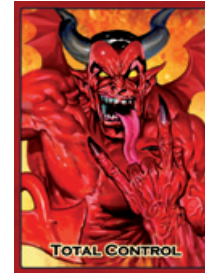
When diplomacy is over, each player decides in secret whether their angel will play **Total Control** or **Reluctant Truce**, and then also choose which card their devil will play. The players then place the cards they have chosen face down to their right and left respectively. ▶

RESULTS TABLE

Player A



Player B



The Person can ponder uninterrupted. The person keeps the *Moral Decision Card* and places it face up on the bottom of their pile.

Player A convinces the person to agree. Player A gets the *Moral Decision Card*.

Player B convinces the person to agree. Player B gets the *Moral Decision Card*.

The person gets confused from all the attempts to sway their decision. **No one** gets the *Moral Decision Card*, which is placed in the discard pile.

The Result Phase

When all players have made their choices and placed their cards, all players turn the cards over simultaneously and reveal their choice. The results are calculated according to the table above.

END OF GAME AND SCORING

When all *Moral Decision Cards* are turned face up and all decisions have been made, it is time to calculate the score.

Points are counted separately for each *Person* whose soul is in the balance (as marked by separate *Person Cards* on the table) and the players then add the points they have received from their two *Persons*.

The scoring system is simple. Players count the total number of points of the *Moral Decision Cards* that they managed to win from each *Person*. These points are multiplied by the number of *Moral Decision Cards* the *Person* managed to win.

The winner is the player who has the most points. If two or more players get the same amount of points, they are all declared moral victors.

Example

Player A has, as an *Angel*, only managed to win one *Moral Decision Card* from their *Person*. This card is worth **6 points**. **Player B**, as a *Devil*, has won two cards from the same person, for a total of **10 points**. The *Person* has won 2 cards and no card has been discarded. **Player A** gets **12 points** (6x2) and **Player B** gets **20 points** (10x2).

As a *Devil*, **Player A** has had better success. Two cards won, for a total of **18 points**, against **Player C** (as an *Angel*) who has only won one card with a value of **4 points**. Unfortunately, the *Person* did not win a single card, as all remaining cards were discarded. Consequently, **Player A** gets **0 points** (18x0) and **Player C** gets **0 points** (4x0).

In the last duel, **Player B** (as an *Angel*) won a card with a value of **4 points** and **Player C** (as a *Devil*) won a card with a value of **12 point**. The *Person* won the remaining three cards and none were discarded. **Player B** therefore gets **12 points** (4x3) and **Player C** gets **36 points** (12x3).

The final scoring is as follows:

Player A: 12 points (12+0)
Player B: 32 points (20+12)
Player C: 36 points (0+36)
Player C is the final winner.

MOMENT OF TRIUMPH

If you decide to play this version of *Better Angels*, each player has access to a *Moment of Triumph Card*. The card can be played once during the game, and can be played either as *Angel* or *Demon*. The *Moment of Triumph Card* doubles the points generated from a *Moral Decision Card*, no matter who wins it!

The *Moment of Triumph Card* must, however, be played after the players have already made their choices. The *Moment of Triumph Card* has no function if the *Person* wins the *Moral Decision Card*, or if the card is discarded.

CONCLUSION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Better Angels is easy to modify. If you want more players, simply make more *People Cards* (or use tokens) and think up a few more *Moral Decision Cards*. It is also easy to modify both points and multiplications. So be creative and moralise like crazy. Enjoy!

A huge thanks to Mattias Bjärnemalm and Maria Bergius Krämer for testing, suggesting improvements and lots of good and evil laughs.

2



You are forced to pass a "Silent But Deadly" fart in the beginning of a "*Lord of the Rings Extended Trilogy*" marathon. It's a real stinker and the tiny theatre is crowded with victims. Confess your crime or deliver an accusatory stare at your neighbor?

2



It's New Year's Eve, and someone forgot to buy the champagne. Every parking spot is taken – except the disabled parking spot right in front of the store entrance. Time to bring out the dark glasses and white cane?

2



Your beloved old mother has given you a wedding gift – a horrendously ugly vase. Isn't that exactly the kind of thing which "accidentally" gets smashed by careless movers?

4



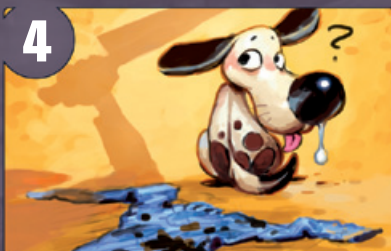
When mixing the punch, you accidentally use the cough syrup instead of the Pernod liqueur. The party goes unusually smoothly, largely because the guests seem particularly... relaxed. You discover the error after the fact. Will you tell the guests what happened?

4



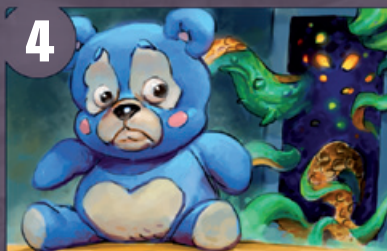
Your daughter is too tired after the horse polo session, and won't do her math homework. You do it yourself, just because you like calculating percentages. Your daughter receives a prize for "Most Excellent Homework"; the runner-up is a boy called Doug the Dufus. Will you tell the teacher what happened?

4



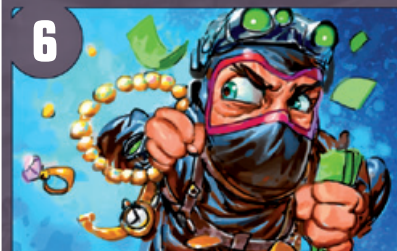
You accidentally use a sweater to wipe down your greasy motor tools – the favorite sweater belonging to the love of your life. You spot Fido running around, playing with some dirty rag. You see a chance to shift the blame. Will you?

4



Teddy gets thrown in the bin my mistake. The garbage truck is long gone when you discover the accident. Your four-year-old will be devastated. Will you confess, or blame the wicked monster who is summoned by badly brushed teeth?

6



You suffer a burglary in your hotel room during a wild vacation. That rude hotel janitor, Hosé, gets fired. On the last day of the holiday you discover the extra bag where you thoughtfully hid all of the 'stolen' stuff while drunk. Will you apologize and try to exonerate Hosé?

6



You are so hung over you feel like you were run over by a garbage truck. Wobbling home from the convenience store you see two hoodlums beating and mugging an old lady with a walker. They leave her lying and make off with the loot. Will you pursue them or pretend you saw nothing and just head for the couch?

6



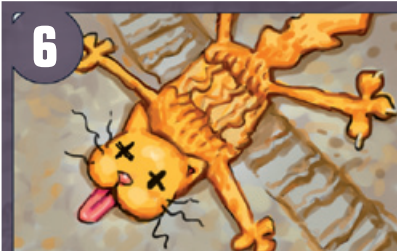
The kid next door somberly but proudly tell you that his father was a fireman who died while courageously rescuing several colleagues, a family of four and a litter of kittens. You know for a fact that his father left his mother for another woman when the boy was barely born. Will you set him straight or let him live with the blatant lie?

6



During your third shift in a row you misread the surgery prep notes and accidentally remove the healthy uterus of a woman with an easily correctible malady of the ovaries. You could tell the truth and lose your license, or say that you saved her from a life threatening tumor and be a hero. Which will it be?

6



Morris the Cat, much beloved by your neighbors, is unfortunately flattened under your wheels. Will you tell the truth or 'reasonably assume' that that Smith kid – who just recently got his license – might probably have something to do with the tragedy?

8



Your colleague is back after extended medical leave due to a bad episode of an eating disorder. Frustratingly, this colleague seems ahead of you to be promoted. A few well placed comments in the lunch room might possibly trigger that eating disorder again, eliminating the competition. Will you do it?

8



A wealthy philanthropist erroneously places \$1,000,000 in your account. The money was meant for an orphanage in Calcutta that specializes in children with cognitive disability. With a few simple keystrokes, you can eliminate every trace of where the money came from, and claim them for yourself. Shouldn't you? That philanthropist can probably afford it, and isn't it his fault to begin with?

8



During a thunderstorm you decide to pull a prank on your elderly neighbor. Dressed in a Halloween monster mask, you wait by the window and jump-scare the elder, lit by a crack of lightning. Your neighbor dies instantly from fright. The ambulance driver calls by your house to ask if you saw or heard something unusual. Well, did you?

8



You are an administrator at an immigrant reception center, and are romantically involved with one of the refugees applying for asylum. The relationship takes a turn for the worse, and your lover threatens to tell your spouse about the affair. A simple stamp on a paper would remove the problem from the country forever within the day. Will you do it?





Through a large scale currency investment scheme, you have destabilized the currency of Sylduria. One final transaction will secure an enormous profit, but only by completely wrecking the financial credibility of the democratic system in the country. Antidemocratic extremists are poised to take power instantly. But is any of that your problem, really?



During a trip through northern India, you chance upon an ancient temple, containing the diary of Siddhartha "Buddha" Gautama. In it he writes that he made up all his teachings just to get chicks, cash and drugs. It's the archeological find of a lifetime, but publishing would risk billions of people losing their faith. What will you do?



A friend of yours persuaded you to take part in an armed robbery in another country. Two clerks accidentally see you without your mask. You will get caught. Robbery gets you 30 years in jail, with hellish living conditions. Murder carries the death sentence. Do you kill the witnesses?



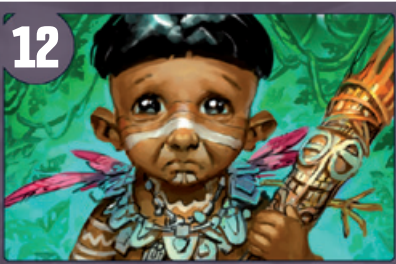
You forgot to return your loaned scroll from the Library of Alexandria. They are demanding an extortionate penalty fee for being late. But on the other hand, aren't old parchments incredibly flammable? Wouldn't it be too bad if someone had an accident with a torch?



Since you became the Prime Minister, you've never had to consider a proposal as weird as this. A consortium of giant corporations are offering to clear the entire national debt, and the only thing they want in return is the public execution of one seemingly innocent citizen - Jack Smith, an ordinary carpenter from a small town.



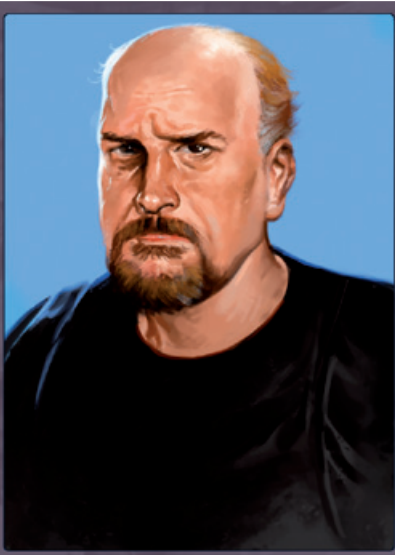
You are a middle-aged inventor who has created an extremely effective diet pill. It will make you stinking rich, and fast. It only has one side effect - widespread use will result in the death of 70% of all fish in the world within 30 years. Only you know this. Will you launch the product?



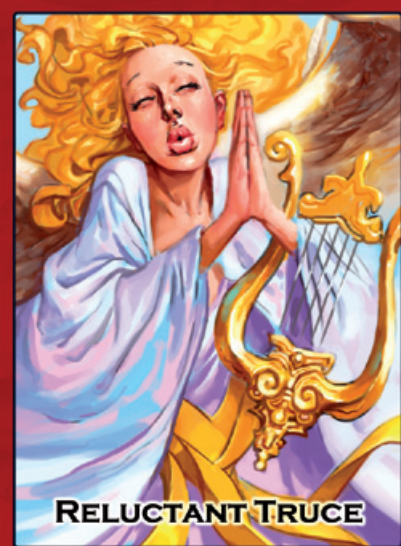
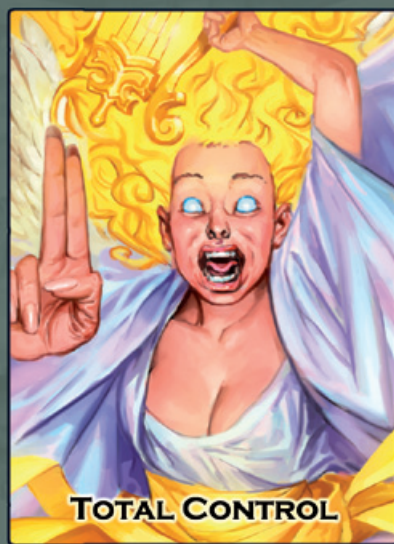
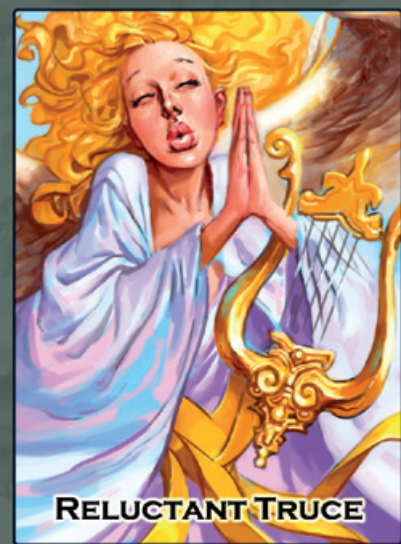
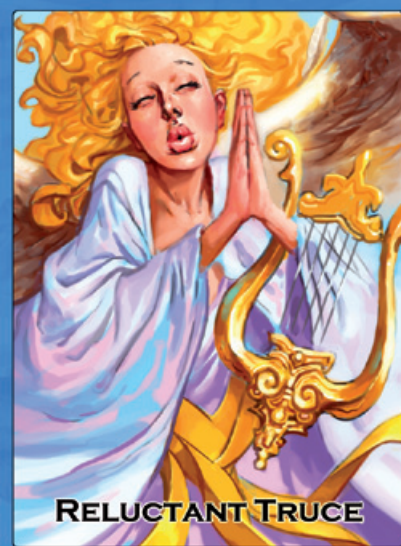
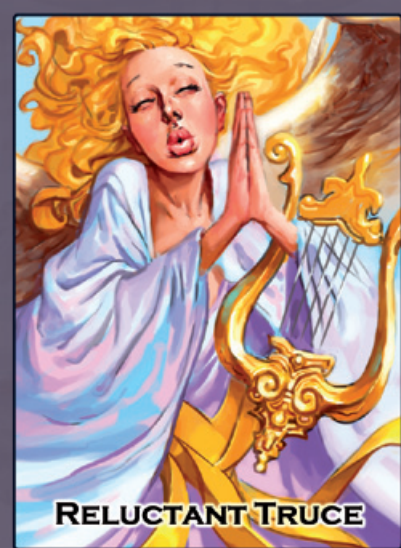
Your friend the Dictator has given you the task of generating boatloads of cash, while clearing the land for new settlements. The fastest way would be to exterminate the natives and pillage their riches. Will you do this?



You alone are the first human to set foot on Mars. The Martians offer you a long life of extreme luxury and comfort. In exchange they want to scan your brain in order to determine the most effective method of eradicating Humanity. You have enough power left in your ray gun to evaporate your entire head. What will it be?









BEST OF FENIX – VOLUME 2

Best of Fenix includes some of the best gaming material from the Swedish gaming magazine *Fenix* – translated to English. In *Best of Fenix* you will find inspiring material written directly for *Fenix*' readers by renown international game designers such as Kenneth Hite and Pete Nash, but also some of the best from the Swedish arena. To top it off, we got our own comic strip *Bernard the Barbarian*, created by Åke Rosenius and at least one stand alone game in every issue. This horror volume should hopefully send chills down your spine. Kenneth Hite's game *The Last Flight of KG 200* is possibly our most appreciated material in *Fenix* ever.



ARTICLES IN THIS VOLUME

- The Lion in Fimbulwinter
- Smiles of a Summer Night – A Horror Adventure
- The House that Jack Built
- The Last Flight of KG200
A Horror Storytelling Game
- Golem
- 51 Mythis Dooms
- The Tree of Life Eternal
Scenario to RuneQuest 6
- More Than Zombies – on Voodoo in role play
- Lovecraftian Horror
- The many Faces of Horror – to RuneQuest
- The Demons of Memory
- Celestial Storm – A Crusade for Fallen Gods
- Fictive Games in Fictive Worlds
- Just Add Rum – Everything You Need for Pirates
- Better Angels
A Comedy Card Game for 3+ Players
- Bernard the Barbarian



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