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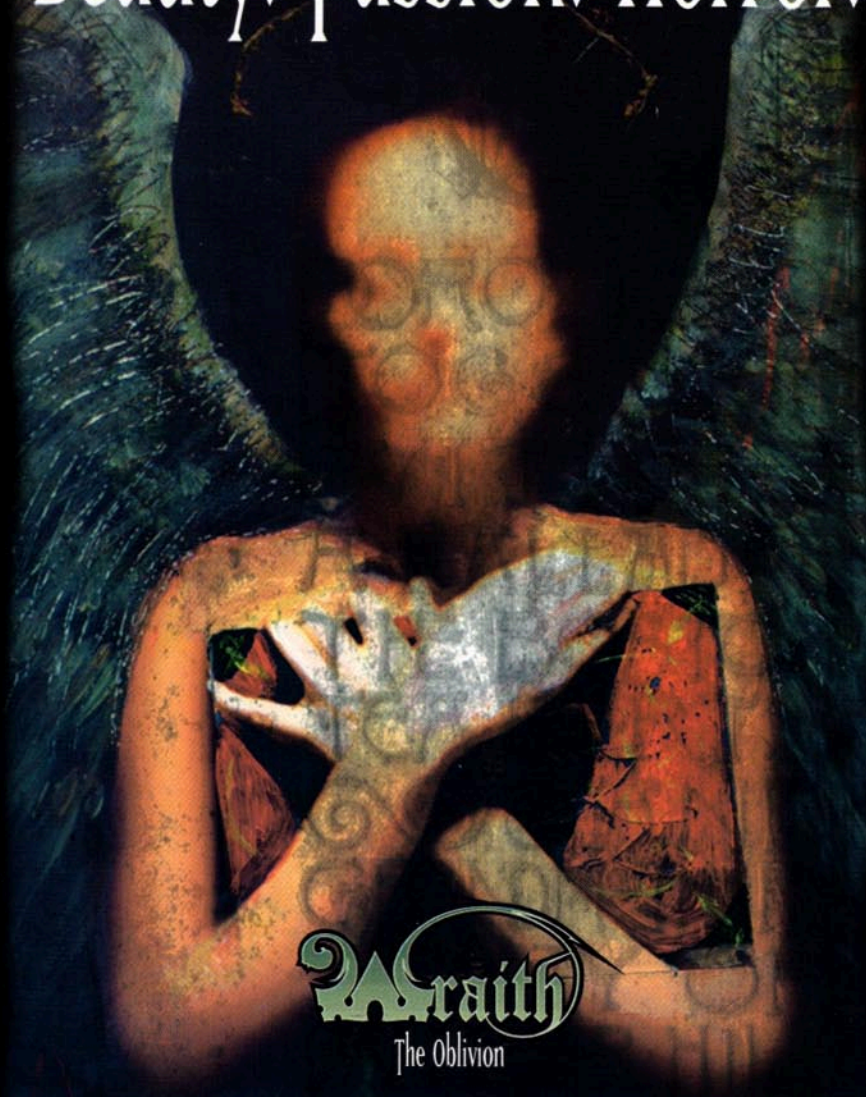
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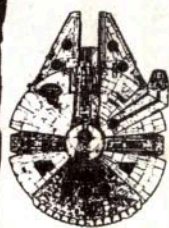
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boardgame.*

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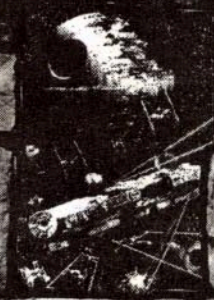
*Fiction from the world of
Feng Shui.*

Strange Vistas

The Edge

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Inside the IFGS, plus news and reviews.



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The famous shot from
Return of the Jedi (courtesy
of Lucasfilm and West End
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our special *Star Wars* issue.
(*Millennium Falcon* not
included.)

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to keep SHADIS truly independent.

Editorial

Holy Wars

The AEG offices have a double- and triple-redundancy feature when it comes to names. Of the nine people who make up the company, we have two Daves, two Matts, and three Johns. Two of the three Johns qualify as extremes along a continuum that some of you may have noticed in the RPG hobby over the last few years: one of them is an Old Guard RPGer, while the other is a New Wave RPGer. Both of them have done countless hours of GMing, each in his own style. Let me give you some examples.

John, the Old Guard gamer, feels that dice are an integral part of the game, and breaks out in hives at the word "diceless." John, the New Wave gamer, considers diceless roleplaying to be the apotheosis of the form, and would rather drop a wolverine into his shorts than let a collection of regular solids overrule his authority.

The New Wave John feels that roleplaying is a lost-and-rediscovered art form, potentially as important and moving as the stage, music, or writing. The Old Guard John feels that a well-played RPG is a satisfying gaming experience, and that's as far as it goes — is there any pizza left, and are the Phillies still playing?

The New Wave John thinks that the GM should be the final arbiter of events in the gaming world. The Old Guard John does too, but he'll roll dice behind a screen and then rule against you.

The New Wave John is convinced that he would be able to convert the Old Guard John to the One True Way if he could just get him into a game. The Old Guard John somehow never quite has free time to game when the New Wave John is running things; he always responds to the invitations with a look like the one an orthodox grandfather gives his mohawked grandkid.

The Old Guard John can run an AD&D melee with seventeen orcs versus a party of eight adventurers and keep everything running smoothly, not ignore anyone, and do so in a way that the survivors have a neat story to tell their gaming buddies. The New Wave John can run a one-on-one saber duel between a PC and an NPC in such a

way that the combatants exchange not only blows, but also observations on each other's breeding, training, and romantic proclivities, and the survivor will have a neat story to tell his gaming buddies.

The New Wave John thinks live-action roleplaying is keen, and dresses up for it. He seems to end up in LARP scenarios in which there's a lot of politics, e.g. *Vampire* and *Castle Falkenstein*. The Old Guard John can't imagine doing LARP, but is somewhat intrigued by the IFGS because you get to whack people with big foam swords (see pp. 92-95).

The Old Guard John loves plot. The New Wave John loves atmosphere.

The New Wave John occasionally threatens to run a diceless AD&D game. The Old Guard John is still waiting for a version of *Amber* with dice in it.

Now, I have a checkered RPG history myself. When I first got into roleplaying, lo these many years ago, I started with *D&D* and moved on to *AD&D*. When I returned to the fold a few years ago, I ended up in a *Mage* campaign. As a player, I've had a good time under both approaches. From a player's-eye view, either system is just fine, thanks.

(Not that this equivocal position is going to stop them, or any gamer, from passionately defending their positions. Furthermore, their positions are the *only correct* positions, and everybody who disagrees is wrong. Sound like your RPG group yet? After all, we're all gamers here, and we love to argue almost as much as we love to roleplay.)

At any rate, I'm almost out of space here. Pity... I was going to enlighten both of them with the revealed wisdom of the ancients — right, the way I GM. Maybe next time.

— D. J. Trindle

NOTE:

Jason Holmgren, the author of *Joe Genero and Fineous Fingers*, has left SHADIS for greener pastures. We wish him luck, and I look forward to seeing Joe and Fin wherever they find a home.

The Hero Support Group

How superhero characters can get by with a little help from their friends

In most superhero games, the campaign world is already laid out for the characters; simply look outside the window, and the gaming environment is stretched out, ready to use. Still, the world outside the window is lacking something every superhero campaign needs: a hero support group.

A hero support group is a series of "campaign world support services," a framework that can help the PCs (and especially the GM) through difficult times in adventures ahead. By anticipating and designing the bare essentials of these support services beforehand, the players and the GM can ensure that the heroes have a number of ways of obtaining help when complications arise. While it will rest with the GM to design most of the services below, players should make sure that their characters are designed so that they can easily access those services, either by purchasing contacts or dependent NPCs who work in the organizations, or by actually having their heroic or civilian ID employed within one of the support structures listed below (as a mechanic, doctor, research scientist, police officer, news reporter, and so on).

With this in mind, here is a presentation of a few of the services every superhero campaign should have.

Maintenance

Damage happens. The GM will need to provide the PCs with options if the characters' base or vehicle is destroyed during play. With simpler vehicles, such as motorcycles and cars, this is rarely a problem; superheroes with these vehicles can either fix them or replace them inexpensively during the course of the adventure. Bases, however, and exotic vehicles can be a problem if they are destroyed, and the GM may be hard pressed to come up with quick alternatives in situations such as these. Usually, providing contingencies for

these situations can be as simple as making sure that the characters have a safehouse set up somewhere in the city to act as a temporary command post, or making sure some of the character's discarded vehicle prototypes are tucked away in storage. When possible, these alternatives should be introduced in gameplay before they are needed in the campaign.

The GM should consider the following questions carefully: If the PCs completely demolish all their auxiliary bases and vehicles, where could they get replacements? Would the government finance their construction in return for a favor? Could a local Research Center help them out in exchange for a chance to study the heroes? Would rival heroes be able to help them out somehow?

Still, the damage may not be so bad that the characters need to abandon their base or vehicle entirely, although they may need to get to a "fixer" to repair their vehicles, bases or powered armor when the adventure draws to a close. As a result, the following member of the hero support group is recommended:

The Fixer: This character can be anything from an auto mechanic to an architect. If one of the PC's devices, vehicles or weapons is malfunctioning, he or she can contact the Fixer and ask him for help. The Fixer understands the care and maintenance of the damaged object and should be reliable, especially if secrecy is an issue.

The following support service is recommended and sometimes goes hand in hand with the Fixer character:

Garage: This is any place where the character's vehicle can be "operated" on; the secrecy of the Garage and the nature of the vehicle (standard car? spacecraft? exotic vehicle?) should be taken into consideration to make sure the "garage" has

**by Chris
Avellone**

**Art by
Brad
McDevitt**

A hero support group is a series of "campaign world support services," a framework that can help the PCs through difficult times in adventures ahead.

the necessary equipment to fix it. This Garage may be part of the Research Center, below.

Science And Research

The Medical Center: Every superhero has a chance to be wounded, poisoned, maimed, infected or altered during the course of a campaign. Not all superhero teams have healing powers or medical skills, and PCs may be lost trying to handle strange cases of mutation or infection. A Medical Center is any place where injured characters can go for treatment and diagnosis. It can be the local hospital, a super corporation that deals with biotechnology, or perhaps a computerized "Auto-Doc" in the character's headquarters that can perform diagnoses and proscribe treatments to the wounded character. The Medical Center can be combined with The Research Center (see below). The Medical Center usually holds the following member of the hero support group:

The Doctor: The doctor or physician usually specializes in paranormal cases, and it is preferable that one be designed before a campaign begins. Doctors should be sympathetic toward the characters in some fashion; they may not agree with the PCs on every issue, but are willing to help them when they are in danger. The Doctor should be able to provide a reasonable diagnosis of a character's condition, and may be able to proscribe treatments. Occasionally, they may serve as a contact and be able to tell characters about events transpiring within the hospital or in the medical community that might concern the characters.

The Information Center: Information is a valuable commodity in any campaign, and there should be some place the characters to research the latest information on a topic. The Information Center is similar to the Research Center, below, but the focus is more on information gathering than technology (although characters may be likely to proceed to a Research Center after they are finished learning what they need to know from the Information Center). An Information Center can be a well-stocked library, a computer that can search the Internet for specific topics, or even a network of contacts. The GM should have some information source the PCs can refer to on almost any subject or area of the work force (the business world, the occult world, the international arena, the campaign city underworld, the medical world) and so on. The Information Center does not have to have the answer to everything; just enough to point the characters in the right direction or to give them a clue to what they should do next.

The Research Center: Technology plays a large role in many superhero campaigns, and the PCs may need to use some cutting edge toys to help them in their adventures. They can find this technology at the Research Center. The "center" can be a chain of laboratories, a technological institute, a local university, or the research divi-



The Hero Support Group

sion of a major corporation. The Research Center can serve several functions in a campaign:

(1) It can act as an adventure seed, providing an influx of new technology that can either help or threaten the heroes. This new technology can also be stolen by villains for use in their dastardly schemes.

(2) The Research Center can examine strange technology the characters come across during their adventures. The staff of the Research Center should act much like "technological doctors" in this respect (see The Doctor, above).

(3) The Research Center can provide the characters with technology to heal them, stop an alien menace, travel through time and space, or improve their abilities. The Research Center can double as a Garage, a Medical Center, an Information Center, and a Technology Supplier, all in one.

The Research Center also holds the following member of the hero support group:

The Scientist: The Research Center should have scientists that specialize in fields that none of the characters have skills in. If the characters run across a problem that requires knowing a particular science, they can go to the Scientist and ask for help rather than floundering in the dark for an answer. If the campaign world has mutants or mutates (those who were not born with their abilities), it is recommended that some of the scientists specialize in mutations and paranormal science.

Note that the Research Center can be occult-oriented as well; the proprietor of the local oddities bookstore down the street may be where the superheroes routinely go to get mystical items analyzed or when they need an interdimensional gate to travel somewhere fast.

The Law

What happens to the criminals when you haul them in? Crime plays a big role in any superhero campaign setting; deciding how these criminals are processed can save the GM a lot of headache in the long run.

The Justice System: The GM should detail some of the characters in the state court system, as the PCs are likely to encounter them repeatedly during the campaign. Popular characters include the district attorney, a defense attorney, at least one judge, and a criminal lawyer who represents the crooks the characters haul in. Someone in the Justice System should be able to act as a source of information for PCs when they need it.

The Prison: The heroes need a place where they can put the villains when they are done foiling their plans. By its nature, the local prison should be the best place to put the villains... but not necessarily reliable. Breakouts should be able

to be performed by inside and outside parties so the villains have an opportunity to return to battle the heroes in a later adventure. As a result, the following points should be taken into account when designing a Prison:

1. The Prison should be a place to imprison villains with relative security.

2. Breakouts should be able to occur, but not frequently. If they happen too often, then characters will no longer have faith in the Prison and find other ways of dealing with their defeated foes.

3. The Prison can serve as a setting for an adventure if the villains break out, if they seize control of the Prison, or if other villains attack the Prison to rescue some of their comrades.

The Prison may include a mental health institution for occasional insane criminals the hero may run across in their adventures. It should be treated with the same guidelines as above. The GM may also wish to create a separate supervillain prison, but a local prison for the campaign city should also be designed for handling the non-powered criminals the heroes encounter during their adventures.

The Law: Heroes are likely to deal with the law as often as they tangle with criminals. The PCs may even wish to know if they can be placed on a deputy program or be sanctioned by the local government to act as crime-fighters (this would present a lot of problems should the supervillains decide to press charges against characters for trespassing, breaking and entering, destroying property and so on). Two questions for the GM to consider includes:

1. How does the law deal with superheroics in their jurisdiction? Do they accept it, cooperate with it, or fight it?

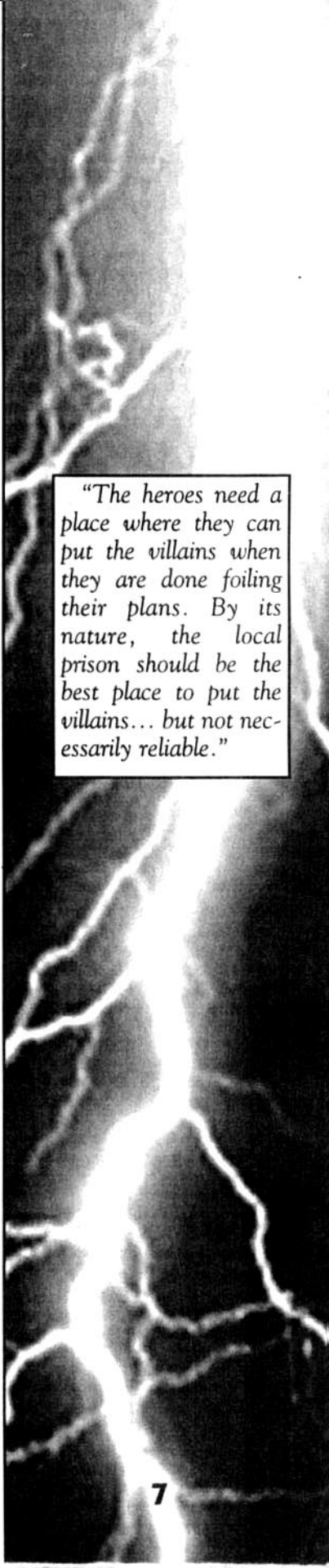
2. What weapons or technology do the police have for dealing with supervillains? (And for superheroes, if they are accused of a crime and need to be brought in?) Do they have a specific antiparanormal task force or SWAT team?

The GM should consider detailing at least three members of the police department that the PCs are likely to encounter during the campaign: these characters can be police detectives, police captains, lieutenants, beat cops, or vice cops.

The Law usually holds the following member of the hero support group:

Law Contact: This is any contact within the police department is useful for information gathering. The police commissioner, a coroner, beat cops, and police who work in the records division can all be important sources of information. The contact should somehow be able to provide information to the characters on cases and autopsies for use in the heroes' own investigations.

Characters also may need to have some con-



"The heroes need a place where they can put the villains when they are done foiling their plans. By its nature, the local prison should be the best place to put the villains... but not necessarily reliable."

tacts in the FBI or even in the international scene, depending on the scope of the campaign. This includes contacts in foreign intelligence agencies, Interpol, officers in foreign countries, and so on. These contacts can usually provide information on terrorist activity, threats in the diplomatic arena, and are a valuable source of information about the espionage world.

The Media

The media culture should include TV station owners, reporters, Hollywood producers, disk jockeys, musicians, publications (based solely on superheros or not), and so on. How the public perceives the heroes varies from campaign to campaign, but the structure of the media rarely does. News programs and newspapers in the campaign city should be detailed early on in the campaign; sometimes the media will be the character's only warning about an imminent threat.

In other cases, the media can be used to foreshadow upcoming adventures, perhaps with reports of activities and breakthroughs at the local Research Center, underworld activity in the city, and so on. Crusading news reporters, slanderous talk show hosts, popular music stars should be fleshed out to give the campaign a realistic feel.

Note that a character who has a newspaper reporter as a information source could effectively learn just about anything from any of the categories listed above and the Underworld below; some reporters can act as an Information Center all their own.

The Underworld

Superheros rarely live in quiet towns, and the local black market and organized crime rackets are likely to figure prominently in the PCs' adventures. The GM often needs to make sure that the following areas are covered in the underworld, as they can provide rationales for how supervillains operate in the campaign city. Some members of the villain support group include:

Crime Doctor: This doctor is the same as the "Doctor" listed in Medicine and Research, above, except the Crime Doctor serves villains in the same capacity. Patching up bullet wounds, reconstructive surgery, and organlegging may all be a part of this doctor's daily routine. A doctor who specializes in paranormal powers or physiology may secretly aid supervillains in order to examine their physiology for an interested corporation or for the doctor's own studies.

Forger: This character can give villains new identities and get them out of town when things look rough. While the Crime Doctor can give a character a new face, the Forger gets the villains the documentation necessary to make the new face stick long enough to get out of town.

Weapons Supplier: This person makes sure that weapons are available on the market for any-



The Hero Support Group

one who needs them. If the local thugs aren't giving the local bullet-proof hero enough trouble, they can get "connected" with the right firearm or laser cannon through the Weapons Supplier. This character sells indiscriminately. For maximum range of possibilities, the Weapons Supplier's "shop" manufactures gadgets and gimmicks for villains on the street as well, making recyclable villains and ego signature gadgets for costumed criminals. A Weapons Supplier can secretly double as the Fixer or Research Center, above.

The Informant: This character doesn't like to talk, but he will if leaned on. He should be the GM's way of leaking information from the underworld to the PCs if they have no investigation oriented skills. The Informant should be well-detailed.

The Fence: Villains go to the Fence when they want to sell their ill-got gains. If the PCs uncover who the Fence is, they may be able to ambush villains or trace their whereabouts through the Fence.

Villain Temporary Service Agencies: If the local normal human crime boss is being hassled by the player characters, where can he turn to? What organization, assassin or hitman can he hire? A Villain Temp Agency can hire villains for missions against the player characters, especially if the villains would never cross paths in their normal careers.

Other Heroes

The Reserve Corps: Is there anyone around who can help the characters out if they get into serious trouble? This may include lone heroes from the area (perhaps vigilantes), rival superhero teams, or old teachers and friends of the characters. They should be roughly detailed for any adventure where the characters might out of their league against villain opposition.

The Reserve Corps should be designed for maximum role-playing: the superhero PCs and the Reserve Corps may chafe each other's style, but they need to unite against a common foe.

The Reserve Corps can also serve as contacts for PCs as well. They may have access to some government and research areas the PCs don't.

With these support services in place, GMs and PCs will find that gameplay proceeds more smoothly, with no bogging down during the adventures as the characters attempt to find a source of information or someone who can help them. Heroes will know when and where to turn to when things become difficult — and while this will not solve all their problems, it will give the campaign itself some added security. 



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Another Shade of Spandex

Running Superheroes in Alternate History Campaigns

Has your superhero campaign gone stale? Is making the world safe for Truth, Justice and Product Tie-ins putting your players to sleep? Does the ultra-serious crimefighter campaign you began now feel like a bad episode of *The Tick*? Horrors! What's an earnest GM to do?

Superhero campaigns can be tricky to run at times. Charging around bashing the same old übervillains rapidly becomes tiring, and the soap-opera dilemmas of secret identities and girlfriends in danger lose their spark after the twelfth time or so. Many campaigns tend to fall into the "Adam West/Tim Burton" dichotomy — with either grim, gothic anti-heroes struggling with the horrors of the night and their own inner demons, or a lot of day-glo silliness involving exaggerated posturing, Boy Scout morality, and sophomoric sexual innuendo about sidekicks in tights. Either way, maintaining interest in the characters and situations over any length of time becomes a serious challenge, and long-term superheroic gamers can easily grow bored with both scenarios.

There is, however, a third option available, one which can freshen and energize a superhero campaign without losing that vital four-color spark: alternate histories. The question of "what if..." has been a staple of the superhero business for years, yet is often underused by role-players. By placing the trappings and elements of superheroics within worlds similar to our own — yet uniquely different in some vital way — those trappings lose their clichéd status. A campaign set within an alternate universe could be the very thing a tired group needs to recharge its batteries.

Such a scenario, of course, is nothing new. The comic book industry has thrived on the concept of the alternate history for years, incorporating countless "what if..." plotlines into their stories. Most of the time, however, they transform ele-

ments unique to their own characters and events. Making them work is a function of fictitious plot developments that require years of fleshing out before they can signify anything. Marvel's recent *Age of Apocalypse* storyline, for example, was based largely on the actions of its own characters and the relations they have to each other; it needed thirty years of X-men comics to function well. Even the most developed role-playing campaigns don't have that level of complexity.

Furthermore, most comic book alternate histories are temporary endeavors at best, existing only as one-shots, limited series or shortened storylines. Usually, alternate universes exist only for the "normal" heroes to visit on occasion, or as single issue stand-alone stories ("What If Superman's Tights Were Green?", and such). *The Age of Apocalypse* was one of the most ambitious, and even it only lasted a few months. Grim news for anyone wishing to base an entire campaign in such a world. Most prudent GMs are loathe to embark upon a project that means tons of extra work for a comparatively short life-span.

Despite all this, there is nothing in the concept to prevent an enjoyable campaign. The key is to design an scenario with lasting power, one that can keep the players' attention and provide for stimulating adventures and character development. How can you do this? Here are several suggestions:

1) Stick With "Real" History

The first question to answer when designing an alternate history campaign is what exactly is different. Perhaps the Roman Empire never fell, but expanded and settled colonies in the New World. Or Napoleon Bonaparte didn't tarry at Moscow, which allowed him to preserve his army and conquer the whole of Europe. Whatever it is, it has

by
Rob Vaux
Art by
Steve Bryant

The question of "what if..." has been a staple of the superhero business for years, yet is often underused by role-players .

transformed our present into a strange new world that your altered superheroes must now occupy.

Unless you feel bold enough about your own campaign to change some element within it (and if you did, it's probably strong enough not to need a change), you should probably alter "normal" historical events, rather than those affecting your characters. i.e., Nazis winning World War II, as opposed to Dr. Wainwright's gamma machine engulfing the evil Sgt. Lutz rather than the heroic Cpt. Squarejaw. "Real history" allows the entire scope of the story to change instead of just a solitary element. Limiting the change to a single character's life — no matter how important that character may be — just doesn't change the parameters of the campaign that much and becomes another variant of the same old theme. Even something like an alien invasion or an oft-thwarted supervillain emerging victorious to rule the world is still a "typical" storyline inflated to more

prominent proportions.

On the other hand, a Nazi victory in WWII or a Confederate victory in the Civil War would have devastating repercussions on the entire world, not just a few people. The nature of the people, politics and government are now completely transformed; alliances have changed, antagonists may now be allies, and the enemies your heroes now face could come from surprisingly unexpected ways. In short, everything is new, different, and fresh, which gives the GM a variety of directions to go in. The trappings of superheroics can't do this — only the concrete facts of "pure" history.

2) Choose One — And Only One — Event to Change

Pick one historical event to adjust — something which interests you and which can be extrapolated to on a world-wide scale ("America Loses the Revolution" works much better than, say, "Eisenhower Only Serves One Term"). Then take this event and think about how the world will change because of that. How will subsequent historical events be different? Which leaders will rise and which will fall? Will subsequent wars, coups and other political changes still take place? And if they do, will the outcomes be different? Everything that happens should happen in relation to the chosen change, and while the world will have transformed in countless different ways, it should all be reduced to a single variation.

The key here is simplicity. One event should be the trigger that sets it all in motion, and the brave new world that emerges (assuming your campaign is still taking place in the late twentieth century) should reflect that event. For example, if the American Indians drove the colonists into the sea in 1613, we should see overt evidence of that in 1995. This has the effect of keeping the universe's overall tone focused and coherent, as well as providing the GM with a strong theme around which to base his adventures.

A good idea in considering what to change is to give an increasing antagonistic bent towards a specific element, be it a person, government or nation. If a given Empire never fell, for example, it's probably fairly dark and oppressive after two thousand years. What better foil for your characters to battle against? History is chock full of evil, both real and potential, and exacerbating that can easily give you a fascinating campaign setting.

Alternately, you can take a more even-handed approach and create a world where some sort of balance of power still exists (for example, the "powder keg" of late 19th century Europe). Players could be agents of one of these powers, pursuing their nation's particular form of justice to the countless adversaries that await. ("Look! It's Kaiserman! Halt, fiendish Prussian baddie, or face the righteous English wrath of Her Majesty's Royal Cybersquad!")



Your concept — whatever it is — doesn't have to be likely or plausible, just as long as it could have conceivably happened during the course of regular history. An in-depth study of the "true" history you're going to change may be desirable, but not entirely necessary. These are comic book stories after all, and there's nothing wrong with playing the minute details fast and loose. What's important is that it has enough depth and continuity to provide for a solid campaign, and will hold up through a lengthy series of adventures. That should be foremost in your mind when selecting an event to tweak.

3) Make Sure There Are Similarities Mixed In With The Differences

Obviously, some things aren't going to change; depending upon what you've transformed, any number of elements within your new universe will be just the same as ours is. When approaching the specifics of the campaign, however, you must take extra care. This may be a different universe, but it still has unexplained radiation accidents, alien orphans from outer space, and genius inventors who wish to use their gifts for the betterment of mankind. In short, there's still a bunch of high-powered freaks running around in tight outfits and beating the holy snot out of each other.

What's changed are the specific circumstances of the freaks' lives, and thus their reasons for doing what they do. With the world transformed, there will be causes to fight for and wrongs to right that no one in the "real" world ever had to consider. If Nazi Germany is running the show now, there's definitely a problem that the heroes will need to address. If the British Empire still controls the American colonies, then Captain Patriot has a substantial task before her. None of these sorts of events may change the core of who the characters are (be they heroes or villains), but there *will* be differences and those differences should be brought out. The fun thing about alternate histories is to see the eerie similarities and parallels sheathed in different trappings; that mix should be present in the specifics of your campaign.



Of course, some players may want to create entirely new superheroes to match the new campaign world. But if you wish to use characters from other super-campaigns, they should obviously be altered by this new universe's changes. Will boy patriot Lightning Lad still be devoted to Truth and Justice? Or will he be the jack-booted lackey of the oppressive foreign government now occupying our soil? Players should ask themselves how their characters would be affected by the changes, and adjust their origins, missions in life, costumes, etc. to fit accordingly. This can be the most enjoyable part of campaign preparations, as the players warp their creations to match their new surroundings.

4) Give Your Villains Some Form of Legitimacy

Most supervillains are maverick types, unattached to any "real" countries, governments or organizations. They want to rule the world all by their lonesome, and don't need some pesky alliance or loyalty entanglement to crimp their style. Besides, when a comic book writer attaches a villain to an existing entity, it tends to piss off members of that entity, whatever it may be. ("Dear sir — we are greatly troubled by the association of your sinister supervillain, 'Cutthroat McKilt,' with the Scottish nation and with people of Scottish ancestry in general...") It's less of a

headache to make the bad guy a loner.

Alternate histories provide an opportunity to give your villains some level of legitimacy, and GMs shouldn't hesitate to capitalize on it. Criminal masterminds are tons of fun, but putting the clout of an Evil Empire behind them can make them even better. Instead of forcing Dr. Ominous to lurk in an isolated island hideaway, he could now be an agent of the Kaiser, performing his fiendish experiments in the service of the Prussian Empire. Or he could be an advisor to Emperor Caesar, guiding the administration of the Empire towards his own fell purposes. Regardless of what has been transformed, attaching your villains to a larger antagonist will give them a power base to become truly formidable adversary. With an increase in resources, an air of authority and a dangerous amount of support, a normally hunted criminal can easily become the equal of any group of players. It also eliminates many of the overused clichés of the genre, such as prison breaks. (When a bad guy escapes from jail over and over again, you figure they'd either get him a more secure cell or just take him out and shoot him. But who's going to lock him up in the first place if he's a government dignitary or a member of the ruling elite?)

Furthermore, if a villain should die, he could easily be replaced by another agent of the entity

he serves, maybe one even more nefarious. This has the effect of shifting the focus from one individual or group who can easily be dispatched to an organization that takes far more to bring it down. Which — again — can provide the support a campaign needs to hold the players' interests for an extended period of time.

With these steps in mind, here are a few brief ideas for alternate history settings, and ways to place you characters within them. I've deliberately left out some of the most obvious ones (Nazi victories in WWII, Confederate victories in the Civil War, a more permanent Roman Empire) which have been dealt with elsewhere in books, movies and old *Star Trek* episodes. I've also listed a reference or two afterwards, worth examining by GMs who wish to set their campaign in such a world:

Give me Liberty...

In 1776, a brief insurrection in the American colonies was ruthlessly suppressed by the might of the British Army. The instigators were all caught and put to death, and all thoughts of independence vanished from colonial minds. Now it's 1995 and the Revolution has begun...

The world here has never undergone a colonial revolt, and the old system of European



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Imperialism is still in place. The first World War was fought to a bloody stalemate, and the eventual peace treaty brought no change to the world's political picture. The British Empire rules most of the United States and Canada in an iron grip, siphoning off their resources and manpower to battle its various rivals (France, Austria-Hungary, and the German Empire). Now, a handful of super-powered colonials have picked up the mantle of the Founding Fathers, and are fighting to free their country from the yoke of its European masters!

Heroes played in this universe will be part of the second American revolution, using their powers and abilities to strike back against the British Redcoats occupying their nation. By day, they are mild-mannered citizens of the empire, working to do their duty for Queen and Country. But by night, they don their brightly colored longjohns and fight for the freedom of oppressed people everywhere! They may be opposed by super-powered British 'heroes,' or by members of their own nation, modern day Benedict Arnolds who see them as threats to safety and security. Alternately, they could play British heroes working to quell the upstart colonials, or do battle against the sinister forces of Kaiser Wilhelm IV.

There are several role-playing games set in 19th century Europe — including *Space:1889* and *Castle Falkenstein* — that can provide ideas for the politics and attitudes that govern this style of setting.

Bloodbath

The Aztec Empire discovered by this universe's Cortez fared somewhat better than its real life counterpart, and ended the Age of Exploration by slaughtering the Spanish to a man. With the secrets they learned from their would-be masters, their empire grew and grew until it encompassed the whole of the New World. Now they turn their eyes across the Great Eastern sea, eager to add to their holdings...

The modern day Aztecs continue to worship their terrible gods with offerings of blood and human sacrifice. But they have also advanced technology, and can utilize resources that match any real life 20th century nation. How will the rest of the world react now that they are no longer content to remain in the Americas?

Heroes here could belong to one of a dozen European countries, sworn to defend their nations against the encroaching Empire. Alternately, they could be members of Native American nations who have been crushed beneath the heel of the Aztecs and forced to flee to Europe. They could even be from the Far East, vowing to join the Westerners in the struggle before the Aztecs can turn their attention to Asia. In any case, the players will be opposed by the sinister priests of the Aztec empire, by the fanatical "heroes" their rule has produced, or — even more terrifying — by the

mysterious godlike forces they worship with bloody sacrifices...

GMs interested in an revived Aztec Empire should check out FASA's *Azteca* supplement for their *Shadowrun* system. It provides numerous ideas on how such a nation would function in a modern society.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

What if Oliver Cromwell had lived to a ripe old age and the Puritanical roots of our country did not die, but flourished and grew? Our modern world would be a Gothic nightmare of dour cathedrals and Church Police, ruled by stern and judgmental clerics devoted to performing God's will. Laughter is a thing of the past here, as are popular entertainment, recreation, and any form of reading save the King James Bible. Most of Western Europe and the United States lies under Puritanical rule, and the "heathenish" peoples of the Third World have suffered greatly at the hands of these fanatics — as have all those who do not bow their heads and submit to the will of Our Lord (and His servants here on Earth, of course).

Heroes in this world may be devoted to removing the harsh yoke of Puritan rule from their world. They may be members of the hated Catholic church, fighting to keep their faith from destruction. They could have family members who were spirited away by the Church Police or they could espouse views which the theocracy finds unacceptable. Or they simply could have come to realize that God's Plan doesn't include routine torture and political oppression, and have vowed to use their preternatural gifts towards ending such practices. They must keep themselves hidden from spying eyes, work to break the people from their religiously-induced shackles and do battle against the Church's chosen champions — who will use all their power to cleanse such heretics as they from the Earth.

DC comics has published a Batman one-shot graphic novel entitled *Holy Terror* that details a world such as this. It's several years old, but may still be available at your local comic book shop.

Regardless of what path you chose to take, there is much a change of universes can do to spice up a superhero story. Alternate histories have always been a part of comic books, and a campaign set entirely within one could be just the thing a burned-out group needs to recharge. Few "normal" superhero stories have been able to resist a side-trip of two into these worlds, and in fact, one of the best superhero tales ever written — Alan Moore's *Watchmen* — was an alternate history. Truth, justice and beefed-up guys in capes shouldn't be limited to one historical permutation. With care and attention, your beloved spandex-clad super-folks can find new life in a strange and different world as memorable as any now in existence. 

Strange Vistas™



'At the Mountains of Madness' by Matt Sturm

Like A Rat

by Greg Stolze

From the world of "Feng Shui" by Daedalus Games

A lot of my colleagues don't like to be on hand when a murder goes off, but I've always been a hands-on manager, especially for a job this important. In my long career as one of the Pledged, I've gotten exactly three Black Spot jobs — hits so urgent that everything else is secondary. They're ultimate priority, spare-no-expense, get the job done right the first time kills, and they can only be ordered from the very top. Only the Lodge has Black Spot privileges.

This one is some guy called Arnaud Delacorte, got into Hong Kong yesterday. Didn't have much advance warning, so this won't be subtle. Bugged his limo and set up the hit around Lily Street. No matter where you're going in Hong Kong, a good driver will take the Lily Street shortcut. How good is this shortcut? For one thing, this will be the first ever hit there since the British occupation.

Here he comes now. Nice simple plan for starters; got Jane Wilkes stationed on the right to blow out his tire, running him into the back of an old Ford Pinto. Ah Pinto, the poor man's cruise missile...

Damn — did Jane miss? No, because the car lurched. Self-repairing tires? Huh. Plan B is Helmut with the sniper rifle and armor piercing shells. Not as much of an "accident" but it is a Black Spot...

Helmut didn't miss, it's just that the armor wasn't pierced. Is this a depleted uranium Cadillac? Screw it, I've got plastique under the manhole cover.... THERE! Burn! Flipping like a milk cap, all right. Heavy armor won't be much fun when you're trying to get out of a burning car, Mr. Arnaud Delacorte... oh, that's him. I recognize him,

even on fire. Staying in the car is a slow roast, but getting out you'll face Jane and Helmut. There they go. Wonder which one hit first? Doesn't really matter, I'll bonus both of...

Oh no.

No.

This is not happening. Arnaud Delacorte is not turning into a burning, dying... dog? Wolf? Jackal?

Arnaud Delacorte is a Lodge member. Was. Until I killed him.

I killed a Lodge member.

I'm a dead man now.

This is not happening. This is not... no, dammit, it is happening. Here comes Jane. She's confused.

"Did you see that? Did you see him turn into an animal?"

"Jane, I need you to ask no questions. Get my car. Now."

"But..."

"NOW!"

Jane goes. It is thirty seconds since I killed a Lodge member. How long until they get me?

Home. They'll go for my home first. Can I get there in time? No. Yes. That's the first thing they'll expect. But I've got money, guns, my computer... got to risk it. If nothing else, to de-attune.

Jane's back.

"Pick up Helmut, then take me home."

Who could have set me up? No one, no one

except another Lodge member, and they wouldn't. Can I explain? Maybe they'll understand I was duped. Sure, they'll take away my money and my power and my Feng Shui site, but I'll live.

No chance. The Jackals or the Wolves or whatever family he was from will want me dead for revenge. The Lions will want me dead because it's proper. The Tigers because it's better to be safe than sorry, the Sharks because it's a good excuse and the Scorpion because, well, just because.

Lucky we're right on the Lily Street shortcut. I don't even hear sirens yet.

Eight minute drive home, can't waste that. I could call someone... but who? They're all Pledged, dammit, I'd just be tipping my hand. Maybe someone who's not too important... like Alice. Yeah.

"Hello?"

"Alice."

"Hi Tommy... what's up?"

"Tangled Lemon Spiral Dormitory, Alice."

"What is your bidding, my master?" God bless deep hypnosis, but what kind of geek brainwasher came up with that line?

"Alice, you must destroy the Top Hat Club, as soon as possible. Now. Get everyone you can, with as many guns as you can. Do it now." I hang up.

Good. Only someone of my rank or higher will know the code words to stop her. The Top Hat club is too well guarded for her and her cronies, but it'll be a distraction — might keep the Lodge from finding out I killed their

brother for another fifteen minutes at least.

Damn. Twenty years in the Order, down the toilet. They'll hunt me down like a mad dog for betraying them... no chance to convince them I'm innocent... yeah, no way around it.

My only hope of survival is to betray them quick enough, and badly enough, that one of their rival factions will protect me. Maybe the Architects, they do business my way... nah. Everything I hear says that they look at the human brain the way a grease monkey teenager looks at a hot rod. An awe inspiring tool, but it won't stop them from popping the hood open to poke around...

The Eaters of the Lotus are probably my best bet, dammit. Wizards from the deep damn past, they give me the creeps but they scare the hell out of the Lodge. Gotta be them. Besides, I turncoated one of them three months ago. All he wanted was his weight in silver — a bargain at twice the price. With a couple Pledged surgeons helping him, he carved some kind of Inscription Against Mind Control on the top of my skull. Selling secrets wouldn't be easy if they could just turn me into one of their little zombie bootblacks...

Of course, they'd just as soon see me deep fried, so I have to offer them something sweet. In fact, I'm going to have to pay heavy just to avoid being killed out of hand. Not a problem: I've got a couple secrets they'd dearly love to know.

Next call to my banker.

"Dooley, take twelve mil from Swiss account 80021634 and put it in National Bank of the Caymans, account J21LM6006."

"Good day to you too, Mr. Gonnorelli."

"No time for pleasantries, Dooley, this is top priority."

"Mr. Gonnorelli, you know I cannot perform such a large transaction simply on the say-so of a voice on a telephone."

He's right; it could easily be a simulation. Still frustrating though.

"Screw you Dooley. You're a dead man." I hang up. I've got better things to do than whack a banker, but he doesn't know that. Let him sweat. Time for a cigar. I should call someone, but it's no use and I'm craving my nic fix. I've got maybe a dozen of these cancer-proof cigars left — damn things cost over a grand each to produce. I can kiss that Pledge perk goodbye too.

My apartment building. Literally — I own the whole high rise. Not for long, of course.

It's nine minutes, twenty seconds since I betrayed the Lodge. They probably won't bother making me a pauper until sundown. They'll want to make me a corpse first.

"Jane, point. Helmut, at my side."

I've got my hand in my pocket on my .32. Not a huge gun like Helmut carries, but I've had it since my days with the Family in Jersey, back when I didn't know nothing about what was really going on. Jersey in the sixties; it's like my golden age. I thought loyalty, whiskey and baseball bats made the world go 'round. What a punk.

"G'day, Mr. Gonnorelli."

"Patrick, come with me. Now."

Pat's the doorman, looks about as dangerous as June Cleaver, but I guess he did stuff in Korea that would curl your hair. He's a little pudgy and over the hill, but I'll take what I can get.

No one in the lobby looks suspicious. They all could be killers. We get in the elevator without incident, and I put in my key for the penthouse apartment.

Now would be a sweet time to do it. One cut cable, no fuss. It's ten minutes, ten seconds. No guns, no police, just a terrible accident for one of Hong Kong's many legitimate businessmen.

The elevator dings. I'm home.

"Jane, call Conrad on the phone over there, and hit the red button marked 'scramble.' Tell him to get here pronto. Helmut, you're with me." Jane jumps to it as I stride towards my study. Good girl, Jane. "Patrick, guns are in the, whatsit, the credenza. Take an uzi and a shotgun and kill anyone who comes out the elevator."

I flick on the computer. "Helmut, you know how to work one of these things?"

"A little."

"Good. It's all in that Windows crap anyhow — got a pre-release of Windows 99, so it actually works. Log on to the 'Innernet' icon when it pops up, and the password is 'cody42', that's C-O-R-D-Y four two, got it?"

"What's 'cody42'?"

"None of your damn business. Now shut up, I gotta meditate."

Giving up my apartment is going to be one of the worst aspects of this whole betrayal thing. Not only is it beautiful and in a swell part of town — it's a Feng Shui site.

I didn't believe it until I felt it. I mean,



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Like A Rat

what? There's some nebulous life energy that controls us all? Sure, right; or maybe someone watched 'Star Wars' a few too many times. But Cordelia explained it to my sorry Jersey gangster ass, very patiently, along with the time war and changing history and ruling the world — the whole mess. Most important was the chi — this whole "wind of life" idea. Some places act like magnifying glasses, some places pull all this force together. You own one of these spots, these Feng Shui spots, and suddenly this chi isn't just flowing through you — you're flowing through it too.

It sounded like crap, until I attuned. Then I could feel it. I could feel the world going through me, and me going through it, and for the first time I wasn't struggling, and for the first time I felt like Earth was somewhere I belonged.

Cordelia put me onto a weak site, 42 East Genesee in Syracuse, New York. My apartment is a strong one, and it's time to cut my cord.

I can't stay here, and once my fellow Pledged are in control of it, I'll be one screwed dude if I'm still attuned. They'll fly in some chi doctors from the mainland to fix this site good, to kill it, choke of the flow of the life.

I'll be locked in it like a grave, like a rat in a trap.

It hurts to let go, but I have to.

I have.

I open my eyes. Helmut must have dipped into my gun collection — he's loaded up for bear. Good boy — though the members of the Bear family in the Lodge don't want to come to Hong Kong, any more than any of the other families do. Lucky for me. Their human agents, dopes like me, are bad enough; I wouldn't last a heartbeat if an enforcer like Senior Ocho or Lord Of The Earthquake got put on my case.

It's been seventeen minutes. They have to know by now.

I get on InInternet. It's a computer system a couple years or ahead of the technology allowed the rest of the world, and only the Lodge and the top Pledged are allowed in. If I really had been planning to betray them, I could have cooked up some horrible mischief in advance and set it loose on InInternet. Instead, I'll just screw up whatever comes along while I look for clues about my punishment.

Uh huh... 'baked goods' in Brazil, no biggie... hidden biotech facility found in Antarctica? Another lost nuke for that, I suspect; and they wonder why the ozone is so screwy. Guiding Hand operatives suspected near the Eiffel Tower? Maybe I ought to help them out; if the Lodge thinks I shafted them for the Hand, they won't suspect me of going to the Lotus. I'll just punch up a fake biochemical agent heading for Vatican City, that'll get the European families feeling antsy... Now let's click on the Hong Kong icon...

Oh no.

They've put a killkid on me. All you vultures, come on down from the tree. Tommy Gonnorelli is today's blue plate special. I only had access to a killkid one time, to monkey-wrench some serious Guiding Hand action. There are only seven in the whole world who survived their upbringing — they tried the process on maybe a thousand. If murder was an Olympic sport, they'd be the gold medal Dream Team. The one I saw didn't even have a name — I just called him "killboy." Tall, scrawny and black, he had no body fat and looked like a damn muscle diagram. We sent him in alone, and to cover up the deaths we had to claim it was a train wreck. Yeah, a train wreck that put seventeen bullets through seventeen skulls. Eight between the eyes, three through temples and six at the tops of their necks. Exactly the same place for each shot, less than half an inch deviation. I'm screwed. That's not even counting the ones killboy did in with his bare hands. I'm a dead man.

No, no I'm not. Is that the sound of a helicopter? Pat is no slouch, Jane's a heavy duty pro, ditto Helmut, and we've got the drop on it. Her. Computer says "killgirl 5" — that number next to it can't be a confirmed body count, can it? Good god, she's Murder Inc.!

That was the elevator. Come on Pat, let her have it...

That wasn't a shotgun blast. That wasn't an uzi. That was a damn pistol shot, and that thud must have been Pat falling. Oh no.

"Boss, what...?"

"Shut the door Helmut!"

He pulls it closed as I hear gunfire and screams, then a second thud. I pull out my .32 and press my ear to the wall. I think I hear Jane whimpering. Then there's that crack — broken neck. Nothing else sounds like it. Poor Jane.

"Mr. Gonnorelli. Surrender and you will not be immediately killed."

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Got a voice like ice. Just dropped two prime agents and she sounds like she's asking the boss for a raise, instead of demanding that I give up my life.

I don't say anything, but I hear the chopper. She hears it too, and opens up on the wall and door.

Good luck, killgirl 5. When the Lodge finds a Feng Shui site, they make sure it's nice and tough. She'll need a rocket launcher to get into my office, and one shouldn't be available to her for another three minutes at least.

Unfortunately, time is on her side. I'm trapped in this office. Every second brings backup for her and cuts off options for me. I have to get out and regain the initiative.

It's gonna take one smooth movement. Breathe in. Rush the door, turn the knob and shove Helmut through it in front of me.

"Boss, what?" His dying words. One shot to his brain, but I have my head low, behind his chest as we go through the door.

Killgirl 5 is small, blonde, muscular, dressed in black lycra. She's in a perfect shooter's pose, absolutely still. I start shooting. She goes from stillness to a blur — seems like there's no start to the movement, but I get a lucky shot. Lucky .32, it's never let me down, and the shells are more high tech no-nos from the Lodge. Igniter bullets. She actually grunts as the shell throws her across the room and explodes, but I don't look, I'm running towards the window.

My leg! They must want me alive if she's shooting my leg. I jump through the window.

Conrad's chopper is out there, lower than I thought, and I'm going towards the blades, then the air vortex slams me down towards the street, but there's a rope ladder... got it! I swing and twist, look up.

Killgirl 5 is on fire, and it looks like I took out her right arm, and she's jumping out the window. She's coming right towards my rope ladder.

Only one chance. Gotta make this shot. Leg hurts, I'm swaying, the chopper is too loud, she's flying right at me, but it's my lucky .32...

The force of the igniter blows her off trajectory. Conrad is reeling me in. She's spinning, falling, really burning, and I doubt even a killkid can survive a hundred story fall. So long, babe... holy crow! She shot the chopper!

It's shaking and spinning, and I'm getting pulled in.

"Conrad!"

"Don't move too much, sir!"

He's a pro, but no way am I not getting buckled in... hello? Is that a paraglider? I never used one, but I saw the briefing video. I look up.

"To the right, sir! No, not too far!"

Conrad is steering the chopper by shifting our weight. That psycho chick must have hit the guidance rotor in back! We're diving towards the street. Looks like most of the Hong Kong cops are down there. I'll take my chances with the paraglider.

"Sir, that's my escape..." Conrad's dying words, probably. I'm not sticking around to find out. I leap out and pop the wings.

"OWWW!"

Never felt such pain in my *armpits* before, damn! Got to keep a hold of the .32 though. Oh and the cops are shooting at me. Are those cop cars Tauruses? Where's the gas tank on one of those... have a little igniter action, Mr. Copper Man.

Jeez. Here I am, shooting at the cops again. You can take the boy out of Jersey, but you can't take Jersey out of the boy. Crunch! Poor

Conrad, but if I can land this damn thing close enough to the crashing chopper, the cops will probably be too scared of shrapnel to close in. Better close my eyes. If I remember right, the fireball from one of those can be pretty blinding...

"AAAAH!" There go my eyebrows, but the cops have stopped shooting. Where's the ground...?

"AIIIEEE!" My leg. Damn, it's useless. I flap to keep balance, and I see a couple of cops staring at me. Their faces are burned, they must have been facing the explosion. They look stunned. I kill them both. Was that Lieutenant Yow?

Off with the wings. Into the car. On with the sirens. On with the radio. Lessee if I can still lie good to the fuzz...

"Gonnorelli was not in the chopper, repeat, not in the chopper!" I say.

"Report?"

What the hell. "This is Lieutenant Yow, commencing hot pursuit of suspect on motorcycle!" I spin the wheel, tromp the gas...

"OWWW!" She would have to shoot me in my gas-pedal leg. Let's try the left... that's awkward, but I usually drive with both feet

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I just wince. I can feel my tears... then he lets me drop. I exhale hard. Then I blink as

Greg Stolze

my gun flies out of my pocket. It opens mid-flight — the bullets landing in a fish tank, the gun looping itself on a light fixture ten feet above the dance floor.

"Why should I believe you?"

"The Lodge set the Lotus up as the hatchet men for the Silver Dragons. It was called 'Operation Killdeer' and your man Jueding Shelun took the fall. Someone called 'Mr. X' was the Lodge mastermind, and that's all I know about that."

"Hm... knowing about Shelun is... interesting."

"I can tell you everything about Hong Kong operations. I can tell you about the technology the Lodge won't let the rest of the world have. I can even tell you the Lodge's greatest secret — and their greatest fear."

His eyes narrow. I've got him interested.

"Tell me, then."

"The Lodge are the descendants of transformed animals. Back in your time juncture, a bunch of doggies and kitties and monkeys meditated themselves into human form — and then they stole the planet from the Four Monarchs and soft-pedalled the magic real hard. Too much magic, and they're back to 'two legs good, four legs bad' again. They hate Hong Kong because magic works here, and they hate you Lotus guys because you work magic."

He snorts. "We long suspected as much."

"Sure you did."

Time for the big gamble. I hope I recognized this guy right from the dossier...

"...Especially after you personally turned a transformed shark back into his native form eight months ago in Minnesota. Isn't that right... Yuan Pei?"

He tries not to let his eyes get wide, but it's clear to me he spent more time reading scrolls and brewing up frog's leg potions than he ever spent bluffing at poker.

"The Shark family has called out blood rights on you... now, wouldn't you like to know what that means? What the families of the Lodge are? How they're aligned? Who runs things, and who follows along?"

"I would indeed, as would my masters."

"They can know everything, if you can get me to them alive."

"You leave that to me..."

Into the basement we go. Something stinks to high heaven.

"Where are we going? I ain't up for a long walk."

"Have no fear, Mr. Goner."

We round a corner. Oh no.

No self-respecting sewer would have stuff like this in it. It looks like we just crawled into someone's large intestine, as decorated by an H. R. Giger tapeworm. Fleshy pods that seem to breathe, but hooked into screens and keyboards. Pipes and guns and doorways that look like they were born, not built — and like they mutated in the womb.

In the floor, an eye opens. Arms like a preying mantis's reach from the walls and gently touch my shoulders.

This is not the work of the Lotus. This is future stuff. This lab belongs to the Architects of the New Flesh.

"But... Yuan? How...?"

"You are not the only one who knows how to betray, Mr. Goner. The Lotus could give me power — at the cost of mutilating my body. The Architects have power as well... the power to restore me."

"Have you ever been in love, Mr. Goner? I doubt it. I never was until I travelled to the future. In the year 2056, I fell in love with a beautiful woman — but more, I fell in love with a society where one's birth, one's station, make no difference. As a 'lesser' noble in my own time I was spurned, humiliated, and eventually castrated by an uncaring and corrupt court. The Lotus gave me a taste of revenge — but the Architects offer something sweeter yet."

"Your manhood back."

"Yes — but in more than the crude way you mean. Certainly they can restore my virility, can enable me to... well, anyhow, that's the least of it. They have also offered me a place of honor in a great world order. They have offered me a cause to believe in."

"What's in it for them? What do they get from you?"

"From me? They get the skills of a 'classic' sorcerer. They get a mole in the Lotus network. Finally, Mr. Goner, they get you — and you are a very ripe plum indeed."

He's gloating, overconfident, I'm screwed — might as well try the oldest, stalest trick in the book. I look glance over his shoulders and widen my eyes just a bit.

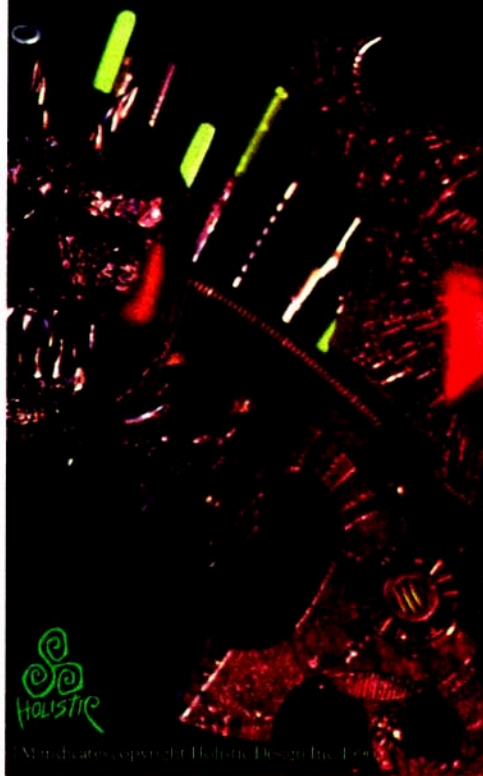
He fell for it? That one was old when he was born! I'm almost too surprised to hit him, but I catch him good with a chunky gold

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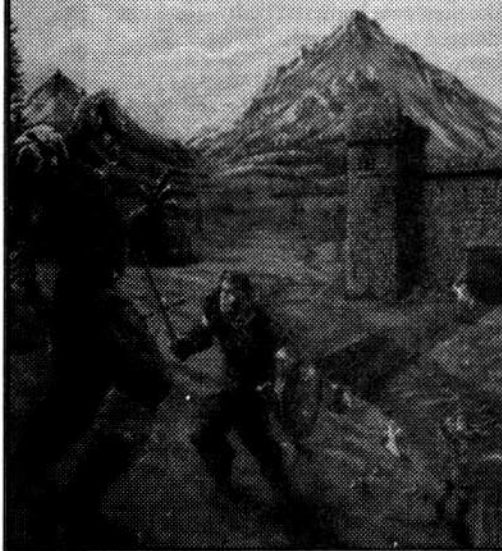
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nugget ring I got in Chicago.

"Yeah! Maybe next time you know better!"

I'm pounding him as hard and fast as I can. I let up now and he'll cook me. He's turned his back, trying to protect his head, but I've cracked this kind of shell before. Trick is, just reach in and dig for the eyes...

"That will be quite enough."

Who said that? Then there's this weird skip and my hands are empty, there's some chick pointing this ugly, hairy gun at me but I can't pay much attention because there's things touching me from the walls. Arms, tentacles, feelers — I can feel them oozing into my clothes, running through my hair, probing at my scalp. Something hard and sharp touches me at each temple, and the last thing I hear is the high, piping laugh of Yuan Pei, the Lotus betrayer. It sounds like the squeaking of a rat.

TacOps Report:

Subject Thomas Gonnorelli

So far we have been able to recover only the last twenty-nine minutes of the subject's recollections. However, these short-term memories are extremely vivid and offer a wealth of knowledge about the so-called "Lodge" as well as glimpses into the mentality of their less paranormal agents.

Some of his thoughts do not square up completely with our perceptions of the situation; it is possible that even a servant of Gonnorelli's rank was habitually lied to by his masters. On the other hand, these small anomalies may have been caused by superficial shifts in the flow of the timestream, perhaps even caused by our own deep history operatives.

Long-term memory calibration has begun, but as you know, the process is an uncertain one at best. So far we've restored the memories of his first successful shoplifting attempt and his first failed sexual experience; anything of permanent value will require a great investment of time.

It is my recommendation that Gonnorelli's corpse be shipped to BHP headquarters in New Des Moines for further examination. In the 1990s juncture, the corpse is an object that must be guarded; once we move it to 2056, it will become a resource ripe for exploitation. 

SHADIS TWENTY-SEVEN

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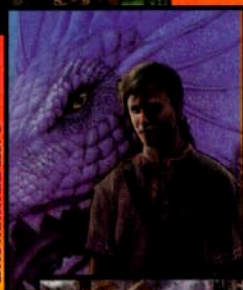
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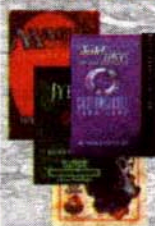
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Crude Oil

Part Two

An Introductory *Call of Cthulhu* One-Night Adventure

Crude Oil is an introductory adventure for Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game. While it has been designed to be easy to run for beginning players and Keepers, it can be easily modified to give more experienced Investigators a run for their money. The scenario is fairly short and can be run in a single session, or dragged out over several sessions if the Keeper so desires. This is Part Two of "Crude Oil." Part One can be located in the last issue of *SHADIS*, but you don't need a copy of it to run Part Two. A brief summary of past events is included to bring you up to speed. Your players will be taking the parts of FBI and CDC agents investigating a rather bizarre mystery. They'll be digging up files from 1927, informing them (somewhat) of the events of the past which may guide them (or mislead them) along the path to an encounter with the horror of the Cthulhu Mythos.

Background

Seventy years ago, Federal agents and detectives from the Burns Detective Agency investigated a murder in New Jerusalem, MA. They discovered an extraterrestrial creature possessing as an oil field worker, trying to free hundreds of its brethren from a magical tomb deep under the earth. Depending on the outcome of the first part of *Crude Oil*, the small town of New Jerusalem either survived or was destroyed by a thousand Formless Spawn. The man who built the oil field, Sean O'Bannon, left town after his daughter was killed by the Formless Spawn (she was torn to shreds), and now his mansion stands empty and abandoned.

Local rumors say that the ghost of Kathy O'Bannon wanders the hallways, looking for her father. Seventy years have passed since the Formless Spawn tried to unlock that subterranean tomb, and now, a mortal man is going to try it so

he may bring back the Formless Spawn's namesake: the Great Old One Tsathoggua.

Adventure Structure

While the first part of *Crude Oil* took place over several days, the events in the second part will take place in just a few hours. While the emphasis is not on investigation, there will be a great deal of deduction involved. There will also be much more action than in Part One, as Investigators will be facing many angry Formless Spawn while they try and save a pack of frat-house flunkies from a fate worse than death. Because of the free-floating nature of the scenario, a Timeline has been provided to allow you to keep track of events going on outside of the Investigators' viewpoints. What the Investigators do after certain events take place will generally not effect the Timeline.

Adventure Overview

Characters for *Crude Oil* can come from several sources. Most players will probably want to create their own, but if not, then the templates provided in Appendix 3 should suffice. Regardless of how they are made, however, the characters in Part Two should be similar in balance to those in Part One, and there should be at least two FBI agents in the group.

The investigators will be assigned to check out a possible new plague breaking out in New England. They will do the majority of their research over the course of a single day before flying to New Jerusalem to check things out.

The Investigators will arrive in New Jerusalem the next day and will either find a small village scraping up a living out of the railroad or a ghost town, devoid of any signs of life (which version they find depends on the outcome of the last episode). They'll be able to question the

How To Use *Crude Oil*

Crude Oil has been designed to be used by beginning Keepers and Players for Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game. However, it can also be used with just about any other modern horror game, and Keepers can easily adjust the scenario to give more experienced players a run for their money. The first part of this scenario took place in 1927, and the events can be found in the Background section.

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inhabitants or search out the remains, but in either case, they'll turn up next to nothing.

However, that night, a bunch of rowdy frat boys turn up for their yearly initiation rites. They've got a bunch of freshmen with them, whom they plan to scare in New Jerusalem's "haunted house." They'll enter and start their ghost story, but when they try to leave, they'll find all the doors locked with brand new padlocks. Then they'll discover that they're going to have all their Power sucked out in a grand ritual to summon Tsathoggua to New Jerusalem. One of them will escape and run screaming through the streets, awakening the Investigators and drawing them to the house where the ritual is taking place. From there on, the story is up to them.

The Briefing

(The introduction below assumes that the players will be running the pre-generated characters in Appendix 3. It should be adjusted to fit the particulars of your party.) On a rainy March morning, the two FBI PCs (who work at the Boston bureau) are summoned to the office of Special Agent Martin Trask. Trask has run the Boston office for eleven years, and is well-liked — and highly respected — by the agents who serve under him.

As the storm hammers away at the huge window behind Trask's desk, he gestures for the PCs to seat themselves at a small conference table. Once they are settled (and have helped themselves to coffee and donuts, which are piled in the middle of the table), Trask will address them.

"I have just been informed that we may have an unusual situation developing in New Jerusalem. For those of you not familiar with it, it's a miserable little burg about 40 miles south of here. I understand there was a profitable oil field there in the '20s, but nowadays it's practically a ghost town.

"Over the last several days, the residents have found four corpses in and around the town. While this might be unremarkable here in Boston, it's damn unnerving in a town with only seventy-some people to begin with. Furthermore, the state the bodies were found in is... curious. It was so odd, in fact, that the local doctor, Allan Miller, placed a call to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta — he suspects there might be an outbreak of anthrax.

"So, Atlanta called me to let me know they are sending a man down. You're to pick him up from the airport, and then all of you will drive to New

Jerusalem. When you get there, get in touch with Dr. Miller so the CDC's agent can take a look at the bodies. While he's doing that, you will be coordinating your efforts with the Boston PD; they're sending a unit down there, too. The PD sure as hell isn't assuming these people died of anthrax, and I'm not either. Let's help them out.

"Oh, make sure you check out a Suburban from the motorpool. In this kind of weather, you're going to need it. The road between Boston and New Jerusalem is a mess, I'm told."

Of course, anthrax isn't the problem; it's the two Formless Spawn that Edmund Tillinghast released from the wreck of Well #3. The Spawn instinctively sought host bodies upon their release, but they are unpracticed in the maintenance of them, so they wrecked them in short order. Special Agent Trask knows none of this, and he's also totally unaware of what really transpired in New Jerusalem in the 1920s. He is telling his agents the truth as he knows it.

If the PCs ask the right questions, Special Agent Trask will tell them the following additional pieces of information:

• Sean O'Bannon used to run the oil-field in New Jerusalem. He was a small-time gangster until he got rich off his legitimate oil business. For some reason, he abruptly left New Jerusalem in February, 1927. He is believed to have moved back to Dublin.

• If asked about previous unusual events in New Jerusalem, Trask will provide the report of Special Agents Reid and Halsey, below. Note that this report has been tampered with; it glosses over the unsettling truths of the original investigation.

Special Agents Halsey and Reid's Report

Actual criminal investigation reports are long and full of dull legalese. There's no need to make your characters slog through a realistic one, but here are some of the highlights of the report Halsey and Reid filed in 1927.

"...the murder of Arthur Whipple at first appeared to be the result of competition for the affections of Kathryn O'Bannon with Scott Ridley, another oil-field worker. However, events took a turn for the worse with the murder of 5-year-old Billy Bowyer, whose body was discovered the morning of February 12, one day after we arrived. The body was found under the derrick of Well #3. There at first appeared to be no connection between the events, but at





approximately midnight on February 13th, we encountered Scott Ridley while staking out Well #3. Upon revealing ourselves and our identity as Federal agents, Ridley attacked us. In an exchange of gunfire, Ridley was accidentally immolated when a waste oil drum he was taking cover behind ignited, presumably due to the muzzle flash of his weapon. The connection between Ridley and the child could not be established, but it seems likely he was the perpetrator in the child's murder, though his motive remains unknown."

Those of you who have played Part One will notice right away that some things don't ring true here. Ridley didn't have a pistol, but rather was possessed by the Spawn. There's no mention of the runes on the wellhead, and the only photographs in the report are of Whipple's and Ridley's corpses. Furthermore, there is no documentation on Ridley's alleged firearm. In brief, most of the report is bogus, glossing over all the otherworldly details of the events that transpired in February 1927. Any agent reading the report will immediately notice these omissions but will be unable to fill them in. If they question their superiors, they receive nothing but frustration. Trask and anyone else in the Bureau they can get a hold of will be truly ignorant of the matter — the cover-up was long before their time. If the PCs continue to stir things up, they might attract some unwanted attention, at the Keeper's discretion.

Despite the fact that the report has been faked, it still has all the information that the first agents

were given in their briefing, as well as the Arthur Whipple autopsy results (see *SHADIS* #26: page 39 sidebar and page 43 proper). Perhaps the person who was responsible for "sanitizing" the original report wasn't familiar enough with the case to delete all the suspicious information. This might lead the PCs to believe, correctly, that the original investigators were not part of the conspiracy.

If an aspiring agent gets lab work done on the report itself, they'll find that the paper and ink used were not commercially available in the 1920's — a fake report apparently was used to replace the original one at a later date. The location of the original report is now a complete mystery, and asking too many questions about it won't be good for any PC's career. The only way they can get to the truth is to track down a surviving relative of one of the original PCs, who might be persuaded to part with a diary or other record of "grandpa's weird case." We'll leave the details up to the Keeper. Just remember that the PCs don't have to know the truth about 1927 to play Part 2, but if you want to turn *Crude Oil* into an *X Files*-style campaign this is one way to do it.

Lost in Time

New Jerusalem is not, by any means, a modern town. There are no cellular phone antennas; all calls have to go over land lines. Likewise, the characters will be unable to rely on pagers, if they have them. There is no cable TV; if you want HBO you need a satellite dish. And of course, the

whole town uses septic tanks instead of sewers. There is running water and electricity, at least.

The Fate of New Jerusalem

Depending on the success or failure of Part One, New Jerusalem with either be a slum or a ghost town. Here are two brief run-downs for the alternate New 'salem's your Investigators will encounter.

The Quiet Town

New Jerusalem has suffered since 1927. After O'Bannon left and the original Investigators stopped the plot of the Formless Spawn, the small town turned to the railway to survive. There's a small switchyard for the local rail service and all the trappings that surround such a place. A modest café/rest area stands next to it, where the railworkers can stay the night and get a hot breakfast in the morning before they take another job back to Boston.

Further down the street, there's a gas station and a small truck stop, with a large parking lot and a restaurant where truckers can stop and sleep, and get a meal if they need to. Across the street from the train station, there's a tiny grocery store run by an elderly couple, who manage to keep their place clean and tidy (in contrast to the rest of the town). Andy Cottonmaker's hotel (see "The Lost Town," below) is on the edge of town, on the road back to Boston. Down by the lake, a small fishing company manages to stay in business selling nearly all their catch to the cafés and the street markets in Boston. The workers there tend to keep to themselves, and ignore the transient population of the railway station and truck stop.

A substantial piece of New Jerusalem's economy has no set location. There's a whole lot of women who are eager to keep truckers and railworkers company for the night; they can be found around loitering around most of the businesses in town (although the elderly couple keeps them away from the grocery store). And high on a hill, casting its shadow over the entire town, is the ruins of the O'Bannon mansion. Of course, the place is haunted by the ghost of the

Irishman's daughter, Kathy.

The total population of New Jerusalem (including the families of those who work in the switchyard, the cannery, the grocery store, the two cafés, and the gas station) count up to only seventy-three people.

The Ghost Town

New Jerusalem has been deserted since 1932. The buildings are in disrepair and the great old mansion of Sean O'Bannon sits high above the ruins of the town. The only residents are squatters who stay for a while and jump the trains as they pass by the empty switchyard. Andy's hotel is the only legitimate business in the entire area. Stories of Kathy's ghost tell of a sickly white figure dressed in dripping wet clothes and empty eyes, calling sweetly and sadly for her father as she bleeds from every pore in her body along the empty corridors of O'Bannon's mansion.

Our Villain

The man responsible for the mess the Investigators are about to get themselves in is Edmond T. Tillingast, known to his friends as "Nightraven." He's twenty-six years old with dyed black hair and pale skin, and he looks about as fragile as an oak leaf in November. His hair has been cut short in the back and left long in the front (so he can hide behind it). He has no life, works at a goth clothing store in the mall and lives in a house his folks rent out. He's been attending Boston Community College for five years now and still hasn't achieved any kind of degree.

A couple of months ago, an anthropology professor was rather careless with an ancient document and Nightraven procured it. (The history of the book is provided in a nearby sidebar.)

Nightraven is a selfish, spoiled little brat who is only interested in furthering his own temporal power. He's a student of the new school of occultism (he's got a set of Native American Tarot cards, lots of rocks that keep his karma right and even an Ouija board somewhere in his closet) which means that he doesn't know



Crude Oil, Part Two

what he's doing. He's read the text and his early tampering has released a pair of Formless Spawn from their crypt (they promptly possessed a pair of transients and have begun murdering people, which is why the characters are here). He figures that if he can sacrifice some lives to the God Beyond the Gate, he can get some real mystical power. He knows the local frat boys meet once a year in the "spook house" in New Jerusalem to scare the pants off their pledges, and he figures that sacrificing jocks is "active Darwinism" and "thinning the herd." Unfortunately, the formula he's using is corrupt and incomplete, and when he uses it, the offense will be felt to the very bowels of the Earth, and the slothful Tsothoggua is actually going to get rather miffed...

Timeline

Here's how the events for the evening are going to unfold:

6:00 P.M. The Investigators arrive in New Jerusalem.

11:00 P.M. The frat boys arrive in New Jerusalem.

11:45 P.M. Nightraven sneaks about the house, putting brand new locks on the doors.

12:00 A.M. Nightraven begins the ritual in the basement.

1:00 A.M. One of the frat boys escapes the house and gets to the general store.

1:45 A.M. The Investigators are awakened by the owner of the general store.

app. 2:00 A.M. The Investigators arrive at the old O'Bannon house.

from app. 2:15 A.M. The Investigators have to find a way to close the gate Nightraven has opened, and the only way to do that is by completing the incomplete ritual that Nightraven has begun.

The Lost Town (6 p.m.)

At around 6 p.m., the Investigators will arrive in New Jerusalem. Use the descriptions provided above to give the Investigators an idea of what the town has become. Despite the fate of the town, there is a general store/gas station/wayside hotel near the road to Boston, run by Andrew J. Cottonmaker (a friendly fellow in his fifties who smiles with a bright smile and has a crimp in his back from working on the railroad). The place used to be owned by his grandfather, Joseph P. Cottonmaker and his father, Phillip A. Cottonmaker, before everything turned to dust. While the Investigators check in (it's a nice little place that Andy keeps very clean, because it's the only real hotel in the area and he takes pride in

his birthright), he'll give them the following speech:

"Town turned to dust about seventy years ago, or so I'm told. All happened twenty years before I was born. My father, that's Joseph, he watched grandpa go nuts when he saw what he saw. Grandpa said the whole night came alive that night. It was like the darkness come to life and moved. A bunch of flatfoots were there, hired by O'Bannon. They were there 'cos two of O'Bannon's boys was fighting over his daughter, a fine lookin' girl from what daddy told me, and one of them went a bit too far. His rival disappeared, and everyone figured he had done the poor guy in. The flatfoots was there to find out who did it — as if nobody knew.

"Anyhow, those boys found something they wasn't supposed to, and there must have been hell to pay. Grandpa — he was at the yard that night and saw the whole thing — he told me that something from the well did it. I don't know

what that means, but I do know that grandpa wasn't very well after that. He always slept with the light on, so there weren't any shadows anywhere in the room, and he kept a piece of this weird slab with him under his bed. Don't know where he got it, but he never slept without it. The night he died was the night that my mom took the slab out from under his bed and grandpa couldn't

find it and his heart kicked out on him that night. Bad time. Real bad time. That piece of rock's the only thing I got left of his — 'sides this store, that is.

"But anyway, you know that the house up there (Andy points up to the old O'Bannon place) it's haunted. O'Bannon's daughter — that pretty thing — she's up there walking around, looking for her father. She wanders the empty hallways, finding anyone who comes into the house and gives them a kiss. It's the kiss of death, they say. Makes your blood boil, and then you die screaming as your eyes and lips turn black as the night. Happened to Fred Tomilson twenty years ago, I tell you. My cousin, he saw it. And that's the truth."

After this little pontification, canny investigators may want to examine the stone slab Andy mentioned (see sidebar). It is an unremarkable piece of rock, like the headstone of a grave. It has been broken and a significant portion is missing, but the beginnings of a line of runes can be seen along one side. These runes have bearing on the conclusion of the adventure (see below) and players would do well to remember it.

The Clayburth Document

-1d3/1d6;
+3 Cthulhu
Mythos; x4
Spells; 2 days; one
Spell: Summon the Gate to
Heaven (see below)



The book Nightraven has is perhaps one of the most dangerous Mythos texts in existence — not because of its accuracy and insight into the Mythos, but because everything in it is wrong. It was written by Johannes Clayburth in 1889. Clayburth was the leader of a Mormon pilgrimage to California. His caravan stopped in the region that is now New Mexico and discovered a stone slab with peculiar markings. Clayburth remembered the tales of Joseph Smith and his finding of tablets with "strange carvings" and began his attempt to translate the carvings. The stone slab belonging to Andy's grandfather is one such tablet (actually a piece of one of the coffins the Formless Spawn are often found in) and the carvings about the stone tell how to open a Gate to the realm of Tsothoggua.

Unfortunately, Clayburth's translation of the symbols on the tablets is corrupt and incomplete, and when the ritual Clayburth suggests is attempted, it will cause an offending energy surge in the Slothful One's lair, thus bringing great irritation to Tsothoggua and his Formless Spawn.

They can wander through the town and question the locals (if there are any left) but they won't come across any real evidence of foul play. Dr. Miller will not be available until the next morning and the four corpses they were sent to investigate will have to wait until then. However, the O'Bannon house will cast shadows across the entire town, and of course, that's where the Investigators will want to look ...

The O'Bannon House

It's all locked up. Padlocks are on the doors and all the windows are boarded up. The only opening into the house is through the storm cellar, which is isolated from the rest of the house. The walls of the cellar are filled with old shelving covered with spider webs and dusty jars of rotten preservatives. An old dog carcass is rotting in the northwest corner, covered in mold, spiderwebs and flies.

The Investigators are undoubtedly going to want to take a look at the house. Go ahead and let them. They'll have to break through the padlocks, but they should have no problem doing that. The inside of the house is deserted. They'll find old dust tarps thrown over the furniture and long, drooping cobwebs filling the halls. A map is provided for the layout of the house. Nightraven is hiding in the secret basement (where O'Bannon kept all his hooch). He'll hear the Investigators moving about upstairs and stay put. He'll watch them through the secret viewpoints (another installation of O'Bannon's) and realize that they are not the frat boys he's waiting for. The Investigators can search all they want, but right around 11 p.m., the frat boys are going to show up for their initiation whether they like it or not.

The Initiation (II P.m.)

Seven brothers of BCC's Delta Tau fraternity arrive with three bound and gagged pledges. The pledges are freshmen who have no clue as to what's going to happen to them. Funny thing is, neither do the frat boys.

The new locks on the doors belong to the frat boys. They'll unlock the front door, bring the lock inside with them and lock themselves in with the pledges. Then, they'll put the pledges in the library (where the Investigators from the first part met with O'Bannon) and take their blindfolds off. Five of them will start telling the pledges about the ghost story that the Investigators heard from Andy while the other two run to the secret passages that O'Bannon used to use to run whiskey out of his house (see the map below). From those secret passages, the two brothers will

pound on the walls and make moaning sounds to scare the pledges. It's all pretty traditional stuff. Until midnight, that is.

Preparations (II:45 P.m.)

At 11:45, Nightraven will sneak out of the secret basement to where it opens up on the beach just below the house. He'll climb the stairs up to the house (which are obscured by false rock and a steep angle), put a new lock on the front door and creep back down the stairs to the secret basement. Then, he'll begin the ritual that will open the Gate to Tsothuggua.

The Ritual Begins (Midnight)

At midnight, Nightraven will begin the Gate spell. He's reading the spell from the Clayburth Document, which is incorrect. The symbols are in the improper order and corrupt. He thinks he's

casting a Summoning Spell, when in fact, he is casting a Gate Spell. This will open a doorway between the house and the deepest stygian pits, allowing Tsothoggua to come through and investigate (if he can get his big slothful butt off his throne, that is), but he'll more than likely send some Formless Spawn to do it for him.



The Formless Spawn

The ritual will suck Power from the pledges and the fratboys, draining them of one point of Power per fifteen minutes. The moment the ritual is begun, they'll feel the Power drain. This will go on for forty-five minutes, and then everything will go wrong. That's when Nightraven messes up the ritual. Suddenly, every living soul in the house will be drained of 1d10 Power (that's just in case some Investigators are hiding out somewhere; if they complain, tell them the story about a cat and his curiosity). A single frat boy (who's in the secret passage) will lose only a single Power point; he'll see what's happening to his buddies (they'll be shriveling up into prunes about this time; see sidebar for details), and smash through a weak spot in the wall, running to Andy's hotel for help.

Dilemma at Andy's Place (app.

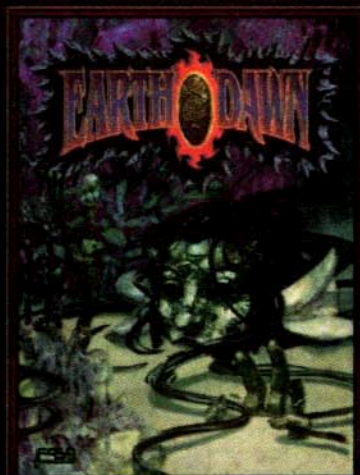
12:30 A.M.)

At approximately 12:30 A.M., Andy will be awakened by the sound of pounding and screaming — the frat boy (Kip Winsler) trying to raise some help for his friends. Investigators staying there have a chance of getting awakened

Losing Power in Crude Oil

In CoC, a character's magic ability is represented by the Power stat. Power (usually abbreviated POW) is also a measure of a person's intangible "life force" and can be sucked away by certain creatures or magic spells. In this case, the opening of a Gate will cause a sudden drain of POW from everyone in the house. The human body cannot stand to lose so much POW all at once, and will begin to shrivel as it does. Eventually, the body becomes a mummified shell of what it once was. It will become grainy, like sandstone and the blood will become a thick ichor; it will seem as if the body's moisture has been sucked away. Despite this gruesome atrophy, a human will not die from it until they lose their last point of POW (or if they lose all their Hit Points from damage — a body can be very fragile when it's been drained of POW.) A grisly sight, indeed.

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by the sound (a Spot Hidden roll with a 20% penalty may be appropriate). Kip will tell Andy about their prank and claim that the ghost is sucking everyone's soul. He swears that he's seen the ghost (he hasn't, but unfortunately, Kip is a little insane at this point) and further maintains that it's wandering through the halls, kissing the frat boys and drinking their souls. His wild-eyed testimony will drive Andy to go up and wake the Investigators (if they're not up already). If any late risers want to hear Kip's testimony, they'll be out of luck. By the time they get downstairs, Kip will be out like a light.

To Face the Ghost (Sometime after Kip's testimony)

The Investigators now have to go into the house and face "the ghost." Andy gets out his old shotgun (his grandfather's 1912 12 gauge Winchester pump action [4D6@10 yards, 2D6@20 yards, 1D8@50 yards]) and demands that he go with. Of course, the Investigators will decline, but he'll insist, starting out the door ahead of them. One way or another, Andy is going to show up at the House: Destiny (the plot) demands it.

When the Investigators show up at the house, it's all alight with eldritch fire. The ritual has successfully sucked out all the Power from the frat boys and is now starting to work on Nightraven. The Investigators will enter the shuddering building and discover that the thunder and screams are coming from below the house. As they move through the hallways, they'll eventually enter into the study, where they'll find the crimson light leaking up through the floorboards. A few shots with a shotgun will blast a hole big enough for them to peer through.

Nightraven is standing in a magic circle. The symbols around the circle are unfamiliar to anyone without Cthulhu Mythos knowledge. His skin is pallid and wrinkled, and his eyes are ablaze with an unearthly red flame. His face is turned up toward the Investigators, and he's screaming like a banshee. His cheeks are shallow, his teeth are gone and his tongue is black and bloated. He screams "Help me! Oh God, please help me!" just as his spine snaps and his last ounce of Power is sucked from him. His body will be torn in half and a black ichor will ooze from both sides of the ragged wound. This sight will cost the Investigators 1/1d6 SAN.

The Gate has been opened, however, and now comes the real trouble. If the Investigators are able to make it down to the secret basement (the 15 foot drop will cause 1d3 damage to anyone who fails a Climb or Jump roll; make a Luck Roll to see if anything's sprained), they'll discover the Gate. Viewing the Gate will cause another 0/d3 SAN loss. Looking into the Gate will bring attention to one's self, causing the release of a Formless Spawn within 10 Turns (roll a d10). Roll each time an Investigator looks into the Gate for the first time.

Tsathoggua isn't too pleased about this intrusion and he wants the Gate closed. If that means coming across the Gate himself, he will do so. But, more on that later ...

Closing the Gate

With the incoming Formless Spawn, the Investigators are going to have to shut down this Gate pretty quick. The only way to do that is by chanting the incantation in reverse and chanting it correctly. Unfortunately, the symbols in the magic circle are incorrect, and in the wrong order. Clayburth was rather creative with his interpretation of the magic runes (see sidebar above). The Clayburth Manuscript is lying on the floor of the secret library, just inches from the circle. It's been smeared with Nightraven ichor, but still legible. The page Nightraven was reading from has been marked and a reading is provided in a nearby sidebar. If the Investigators should read the text, they should make the connection to the slab Clayburth is referring to and the slab that Andy was talking about earlier. If they don't, have one of them make an Idea Roll, or have Andy make the connection (bad Investigators, no cookie).

The Investigators will have to get out of the secret basement (a successful Spot Hidden at a 20% penalty will spot the secret passage out to the beach. If they are actively looking for it, give them an even break). The slab back at Andy's place is also incomplete (the first seven symbols only), but it will have the beginning of the correct sequence. The Investigators are just going to have to put the rest together from there.

The Ritual will involve putting the runes in the circle in the correct order (they're incorrect the way Nightraven drew them) and chant the words written in the text (those are right). Once this is done, the Gate will close and Tsathoggua will be happy. Everyone in the area loses 1d6 Magic Points each time the Ritual is performed incorrectly. Any character that reaches 0 Magic Points will lose 1 POW each time the Ritual is muddled. A character that reaches 0 Magic Points is unconscious. A character who reaches 0 POW is dead. It takes ten minutes to perform the Ritual correctly. Remember, the Investigators are also going to have to deal with angry Formless Spawn. Details on the Spawn can be found in Appendix One.

At the conclusion of a successful Ritual incantation, a total of 10 POW must be sacrificed in order for the Ritual to be completed. This 10 POW can come from any character(s), including Andy. The Ritual implies this sacrifice. When it's completed, all in the area will suddenly become aware that they must sacrifice a small bit of their souls in order to compensate for the insult against Tsathoggua. If the Investigators decline, Andy will give up the ghost to close the Gate.

Each time they fail to close the Gate, roll d100.

The Runes

Both Clayburth and Nightraven have got it all wrong. In order to perform the spell correctly (and, in order to shut down the Gate), the runes must be positioned in a Magic Circle in the proper order. Here are the runes as Nightraven has them:

SATBOTYAT

And here is the *correct* rune usage, found on Cottonmaker's stone slab:

TSATBOTIYA

The players can discover this by way of Andy's old tablet, or by careful examination of Clayburth's book.

After the first failure, there is a 10% that Tsathoggua shows up personally to deal with the Investigators. All future attempts add 10% to the roll (2nd attempt = 20%, 3rd attempt = 30%, and so on). We've provided stats for the Great Old One just in case he decides to show up. He will not be accompanied by any Formless Spawn. He will quickly sit on the Investigators and give them miserable deaths. Those that are driven insane by the experience are brought back to Tsathoggua to serve as mindless slaves for the rest of eternity.

Conclusion

If the Investigators successfully close the Gate, they deserve a hand. Let each of them roll a d10 SAN gain. If they did not allow Andy to participate in the POW sacrifice at the end of the scenario, they deserve another d6.

If the Investigators fail, well, they'll either get killed by Tsathoggua or end up as slaves. No need for Sanity loss here.

This is the end of *Crude Oil*, but it need not be the end of your Investigator's careers. Provided below are a series of Lights, Camera, Action! set-ups to direct your FBI guys in new directions.

Appendix One: Tsathoggua and his Formless Spawn

TSATHOGGUA, Great Old One

STR 50 CON 120 SIZ 30 INT 30
POW 35 DEX 27 Move 24 HP 75
Damage Bonus: +4d6

Weapons: Tentacle 100%, damage Grapple; Characteristics Drain 100%; damage 1 point per characteristic per round.

Armor: Regenerates 30 hit points per round of wounds and punctures, but fire, electricity and other such forces have natural effects.

Spells: He knows 'em all.

Sanity Loss: 0/1d10 to see Tsathoggua.

FORMLESS SPAWN, Lesser Servitor Race

STR 20 CON 11 SIZ 25 INT 13
POW 11 DEX 19 Move 12 HP 19
Damage Bonus: +d6

Weapons: Whip 90%, damage 1d6; Tentacle 60% for Damage Bonus; Bludgeon 20% for Damage Bonus; Bite 30%, damage special.

Armor: Immune to all physical weapons, but fire and chemicals may harm them.

Spells: None

Sanity Loss: 1/d10 to see Formless Spawn

For complete details, see the CoC rulebook: pp. 102-103 for Formless Spawn and pg. 123 for Tsathoggua.

Appendix Two: Lights, Camera, Action!

Hidden Agenda

(note: this LCA could well stir up inter-party rivalry, and so won't be everyone's cup of tea.)

Lights: The characters begin their investigation of the four corpses. One of the PCs with some medical knowledge — or Dr. Miller — spots the CDC agent PC handling the allegedly anthrax-ridden corpses in an unsafe manner; perhaps he is seen working on a corpse without gloves or a mask.

Camera: If pressed on the matter, the CDC man will spin a quick tale about how the infectious power of the organism that causes anthrax declines dramatically after the victim's death. This cover story will be easy to see through for anyone with medical knowledge.

Action: The CDC's man is not from the CDC at all. He's on site because when Dr. Miller called the CDC about the bodies, the right people — the people who know what *really* happened in 1927 — found out. Their immediate goal is learning more about the current Mythos activity in New Jerusalem, and the faux CDC agent is their key to doing so. Their long-term goals could be anything from destroying the menace for good to capturing one or more Formless Spawn (and there are still two out there at the moment). The identity of these powers is up to the Keeper, but we suggest creating a cabal within the FBI or the military.

If the cabal is ultimately working for good, they may recruit the PCs to their cause, which could be a springboard to a campaign. If they are working to further their own power, or to harness the power of the Mythos for America (bad idea) they can become the antagonist for a different sort of exciting campaign. Remember, in *Call of Cthulhu* the PCs are usually working to thwart the human agents of the Mythos, with encounters with otherworldly beings used as terrifying accents.

Ain't it dead yet?

Lights: Instead of being messily killed, Nightraven disappears in a flash of actinic light while performing the ritual. Let the investigators assume that he's dead, or at least summoned to Big T's side for an eternity of torment.

Camera: Nightraven was in fact summoned away, but not for torment. Tsathoggua saw in him some potential. To tap it, he guides a very special Formless Spawn into poor Nightraven's body. The Spawn, though alien and impossible to fathom, is at least as intelligent as a human. It's also adept at taking care of hosts, and Nightraven will be kept painfully alive as long as Tsathoggua's Spawn minion has need of his body.

Action: Helpless, Nightraven will be only able

Choose your weapons!

DEATH BY STARLIGHT

OUT TIME DAYS



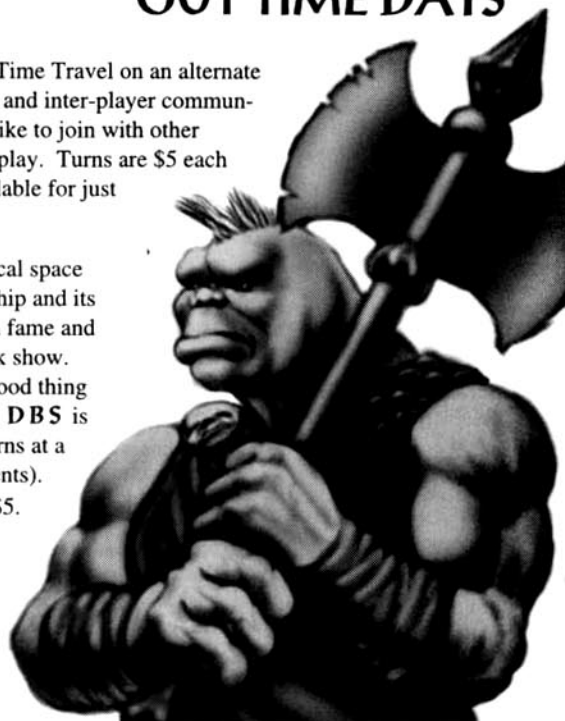
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Bradbury
STR: 17 DEX: 11 INT 14
CON13 APP 10 EDU 20
SIZ 17 SAN 50 POW 10
Idea 70 Know 99 Luck 50
HP: 15 Damage Bonus: +d6

LaRoche
STR: 12 DEX: 15 INT 15
CON13 APP 13 EDU 20
SIZ 13 SAN 75 POW 15
Idea 75 Know 99 Luck 75
HP: 13 Damage Bonus: +d4

Lynch
STR: 9 DEX: 16 INT 17
CON10 APP 16 EDU 22
SIZ 9 SAN 50 POW 15
Idea 85 Know 99 Luck 75
HP: 10 Damage Bonus:
N/A

Seaton
STR: 14 DEX: 12 INT 13
CON13 APP 11 EDU 12
SIZ 14 SAN 50 POW 14
Idea 65 Know 60 Luck 70
HP: 14 Damage Bonus: +d4

Abbot
STR: 13 DEX: 14 INT 18
CON13 APP 16 EDU 15
SIZ 11 SAN 50 POW 17
Idea 90 Know 75 Luck 85
HP: 12 Damage Bonus: +d4

to watch as the Spawn goes about its business, using his body. The Spawn can freely use any of Nightraven's abilities, and it has access to all of his knowledge of 20th century life. It can also use Nightraven's POW as needed. The Spawn's ultimate goals are up to the Keeper, but it's likely Tsathoggua will use it to revive his cult on Earth in some way. The PCs should be able to pick up the trail of the Nightraven-Spawn after they learn of a few Spawn-style killings in a nearby city...

"Pet-oh-tall rain!"

Lights: If one of the Investigators happens to be driven mad (or more conveniently, if any of the jocks lose their marbles), he babbles the same thing over and over again: "Pet-oh!-tall rain!" The Investigators confiscate all the evidence and return to FBI headquarters for analysis.

Camera: One by one, the Investigators begin having unusual dreams about a red moon, howling dogs, and a dark silhouette standing on a lonely hill. They recognize the hill as one they saw in New Jerusalem. They approach the figure, and as they do, it seems as if the scene were running backward. The words "Pet-oh-tall rain" echo endlessly all around them. They reach the man with the eerie red glow (from the bloody moon high above) and when he turns about, the Investigator is shocked awake by the sight, losing 1/2 SAN from the sight.

Action: The high level of madness and chaos that happens in New Jerusalem has a cause. The dreams are being sent by Nyarlathotep, the Crawling Chaos with 1,001 forms. One of his forms (part of his soul) has been trapped in a small box under one of the abandoned buildings. A witch inherited the box about three hundred years ago, and Nyarlathotep has finally located it. He's sending the dreams to the Investigators to retrieve the box, thus releasing his 563rd form. If the Investigators refuse to return to New Jerusalem, perhaps the Crawling Chaos will send less subtle hints to get them there.

Deep Troubles

Lights: As the Investigators wander about the small town, they notice that the inhabitants have a rather sinister appearance, and keep odious personal habits (they all smell like fish). When the adventure wraps up, the Investigators notice that many of the townsfolk are watching them very closely.

Camera: A couple weeks after everything has settled down, the Investigators are surprised by an attempt on their lives. The assassin is unsuccessful, however, his eyes are a strange shade of yellow and he seems to be growing gills.

Action: The town of New Jerusalem has been infested with Deep Ones. They were the ones who were watching to make certain the subterranean tomb of Tsathoggua's minions was undisturbed, and now that mortals have discovered it, they also must be silenced ... forever.

Appendix 3: Characters

Provided below are five characters to use with Crude Oil. If you'd like to get the complete characters (along with nifty character sheets), check out the *Crude Oil Keeper Kit* sidebar above.

Special Agent Phillip Bradbury

Bradbury is a 43 year old black haired, blue eyed Bostonian with a heavy accent and a good healthy dose of skepticism. His broad shoulders and piercing gaze make him very intimidating and he's often tempted to use that to his advantage, even when he doesn't have to. Bradbury spent three years in the Secret Service before coming over to the Bureau and he doesn't like talking about why.

Agent Dayron LaRoche

LaRoche is a tall black man from Louisiana. He saved up all his life to go to Louisiana State, then moved to Washington to join the Bureau. He's only got a couple years under his belt, and this is the first time he's ever worked with Bradbury. He's quiet and reflective, and very, very Baptist.

CDC Agent Nancy Lynch

Nancy is a red haired, blue eyed medical doctor, specializing in exotic diseases. She's just on the edge of pretty, the kind of girl who would be if she wanted to be. Nancy's too busy with her studies to be worried about appearances, however. She dresses in blue jeans and t-shirts and isn't afraid to tell someone how rude it is to sneeze without covering your mouth.

Boston Detective Alex Seaton

Alex grew up in Boston across the street from Special Agent Bradbury. They've known each other all their lives and are close friends. Seaton is a Red Sox fanatic and knows every detail of their long and illustrious history. He's quick on picking up details and when he's not at the stadium, he's on the shooting range practicing.

Boston Detective Elliot Abbot

Elliot doesn't like being a cop. Dreams of making a difference and touching people's lives got shattered by nine-year-old drug dealers, apathetic parents and corrupt politicians. He was born a Catholic and still goes to church every Sunday. He hates profanity and comments on others' use of it regularly. ☹

The Feds begin with the following Skills: **Bargain, Drive Auto, Fast Talk, Firearms, Fist/Punch, Forensics, Grapple, Hide, Law, Persuade, Sneak, Spot Hidden, and Track.**

The CDC Agent begins with the following Skills: **Biology, Chemistry, First Aid, Latin, Medicine, and Pharmacy.**

The two Detectives begin with the following Skills: **Bargain, Fast Talk, Handgun, Persuade, Psychology, Spot Hidden and Fist/Punch.**

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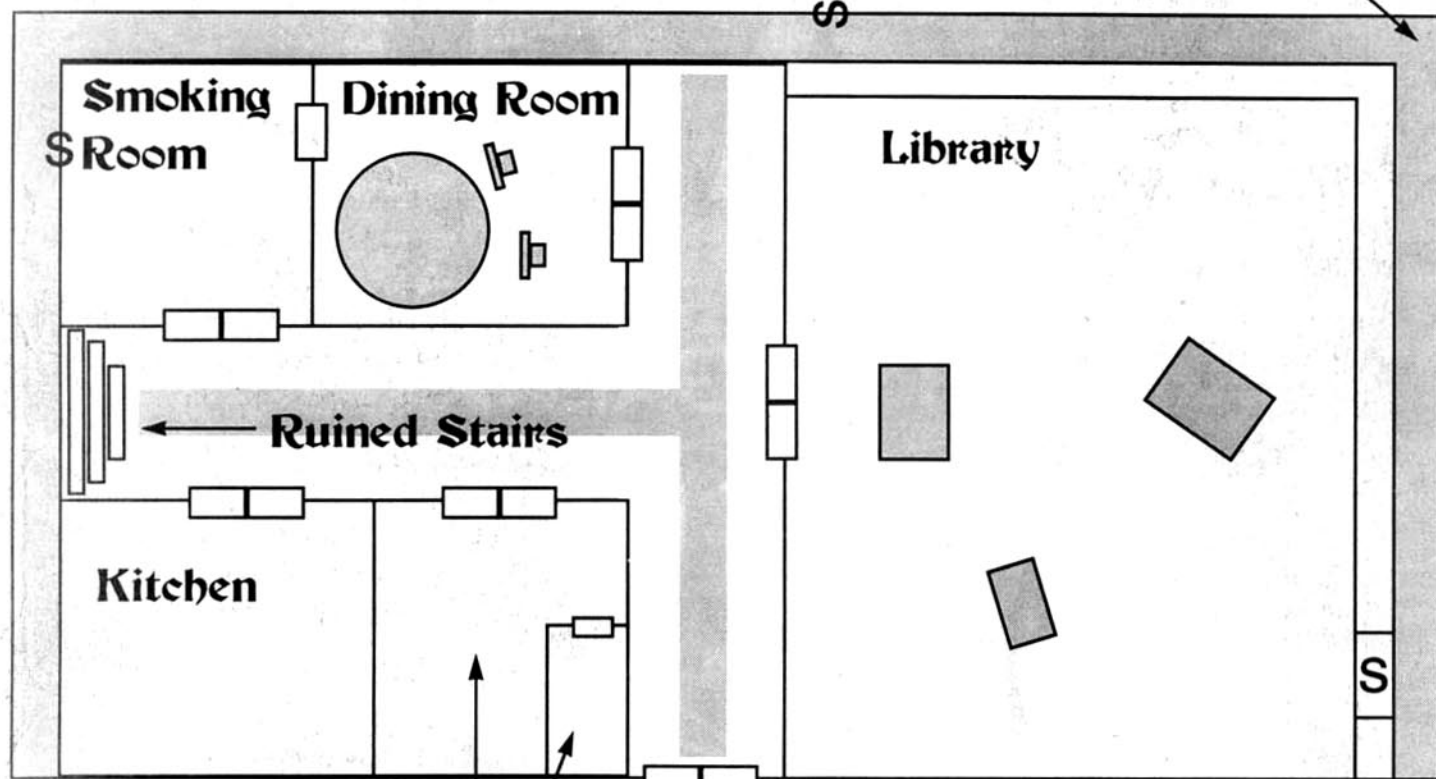


The O'Bannon Mansion

1st Floor

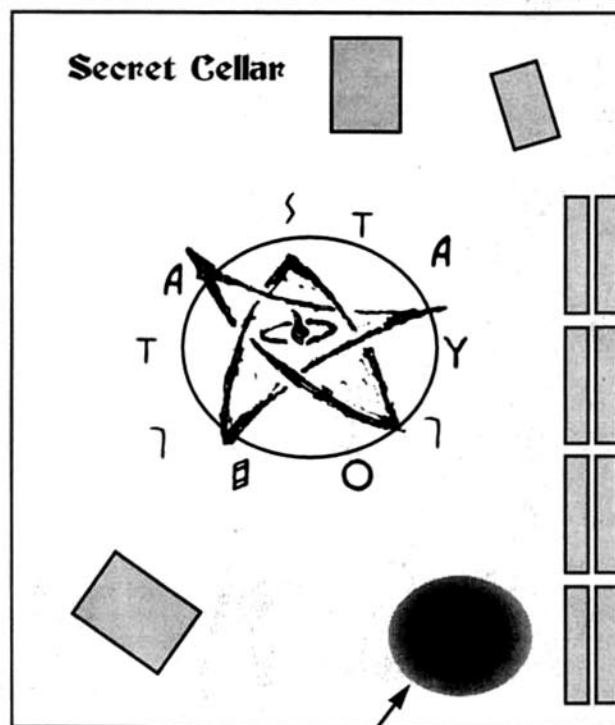
Secret passage
to beach

Secret Stairway
to 2nd Floor and
Secret Cellar



Butler's
Chambers
Coat Closet

The first floor and cellar of the mansion are really the only floors of concern in *Crude Oil*. The stairs to the west are ruined, and foolish Investigators who try to chance a climb should be rewarded with a d4 Hit Point loss if they miss a DEX/Luck check.



Botched Gate

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Star Wars: Corellian Smuggler

A new solitaire board game set in a galaxy far, far away

by Dan Verssen, based on an original concept by John Zinser

Welcome to *Corellian Smuggler*, the game of crime and rebellion in the world of *Star Wars*. *Smuggler* is a solitaire game designed to be played over the course of several evenings; the player takes the role of a free-lance pilot and criminal, sneaking his ill-gotten goods past Imperial blockades and assisting the forces of the Rebel Alliance over a series of six scenarios. As time passes, you will have the opportunity to improve your skills, upgrade your ship, and stick it to the dark forces bent on controlling the universe. All you need to begin are these rules, a pair of six-sided dice, and a pair of scissors for the counter sheet. You will probably want to make a copy of the character creation sheet (p. 55) — perhaps several copies.

Getting Started

Character Creation

To begin *Corellian Smuggler*, you will need to create a character to portray. A starting character begins with 7 character points to allocate to skills and to ship upgrades (see Character Creation Sheet for details). A character gains an additional number of character points with the completion of each scenario. If you choose to begin with any scenario other than the first, generate a character with the following number of character points: 7 at the start, plus 4 points for each scenario to be skipped. For example, if you were to begin with third scenario, you would generate a character with 15 points (7 for the normal starting character, plus 4 for the first scenario, plus 4 for the second scenario).

Skills

Skill Points are used to modify particular die rolls during a given situation. For instance, if your character has a Blaster +1, he adds one to all his rolls involving Blasters. (Pretty straightforward, isn't it?)

Luck Points

Luck Points can be used to adjust rolls after they have been made. Each point of Luck gives you a certain number of Luck circles to spend. Luck is expended as it is used, and each Luck circle expended will retroactively

adjust a die roll by one point in either direction. No more than two Luck circles may be expended to modify a single die roll.

Luck circles may be expended to modify any die roll in the game. Once expended, a Luck circle is gone permanently.

Once you have chosen your skills, feel free to embellish your character any way you see fit — give him or her a name, decide what race he or she belongs to, describe what she wears, etc. Despite the game's title, your character doesn't have to be from Corellia (Corellians are traditionally better at smuggling than everyone else, so they get the honor of having the game named after them). Such details have no effect on the game, but can be fun and give your character a sense of personality.

Characters receive 1000 credits to begin the game with. They do not receive additional credits when they begin in later scenarios, except where specified by the particular scenario to be played. Their ship is assumed to be fully repaired if they begin with any scenario except the first.

Once your character is secured, select a planet to begin the game on and start a scenario.

On-Going Characters

An on-going character is one who moves through more than one scenario. Presumably, such characters begin at Scenario 1 and progress numerically all the way through Scenario 6. However, players may choose to start and end at whichever scenarios they please.

Depending on how well you perform, your character will earn a number of character points as you play through each scenario. These points can be used to increase statistics at the end of the scenario. Your status at the end of each scenario is kept as you begin the next. This includes your ship damage, your credits, Wanted counters in place, your location, your crew members, and whether you are Wounded.

Crew Members

During your time in Starport, you will have

the opportunity to hire Crew Members for your ship. You may, as well, gain a Partner on your Starport Encounter roll. In either case, you've now got someone to help you with all the things you need to do. Crew Members can only be hired in their home system (listed on their counter).

Each Crew Member or Partner you have may be assigned one Activity by you (the Captain) each day while in a Spaceport, on a Wilderness System, or while Dead in Space. All crew members must be assigned their Activity for the Day before any may be resolved. The following rules for specific activities apply:

Piloting

Only one person can Pilot the ship at a time. However, one other person in the Cockpit — the Co-Pilot — may assist in Piloting. To have a crew member assist, add up the Piloting skills of both crew members and apply it to the Piloting die roll.

Gun Turrets

Your ship has two weapon turrets. One person may be in each turret. People in turrets may not be assisted.

A single person may Pilot the ship as well as remotely operating either turret from the Cockpit, so long as the turret is unoccupied. In this situation, treat the person's Piloting and Gunnery skills as each being one less than normal. No one may help a person do this.

Repair

An unlimited number of people may attempt to repair Components on the ship each day. You may also group several people into one die roll in an attempt to gain a single large modifier to one die roll. A successful Repair roll will move a Really Damaged (black) component to Damaged (grey), or a Damaged component to Functional.

All people attempting to Repair the ship must be assigned at the start of the Day. You may, however, resolve one Repair attempt before selecting the Component to be

A Star Wars™ Boardgame

Repaired by the next crew member. Each Self Repair attempt requires the expenditure of credits, listed on the chart. These credits are expended whether the attempt is successful or not. You may choose to expend additional credits before rolling for the Repair attempt in order to increase your die roll. Each time you pay a multiple of credits equal to the required amount, you gain +1 on the attempt. For example: Self-Repairing the Emergency Power Generator requires a die roll of 6 or greater and 150 credits. You could choose to expend 300 credits and succeed on a 5 or greater, 450 credits and succeed on a 4 or greater, etc. Remember to take into account the modifiers for being in a Wilderness System or Dead in Space if these apply to your situation.

Paying for Repairs while in a Spaceport is a second option. Simply pay the indicated number of credits and the Components you select are automatically Repaired (Really Damaged to Damaged, or Damaged to functional). You are, however, limited in the number of Repairs you may get per Day based on the System you are in; see the Components table.

Blaster

All Crew Members are assumed to be present for a given fight. As with Repair, multiple people may group their skill for one good die roll. Droids and pets may not fight. See the Blaster Fights rules for more information.

Encounters

Each Encounter specifies whether to use your character's skills alone, or to combine those of the entire crew.

Cargo and Contraband

Crew Members are free to purchase Cargo and/or Contraband. Each Crew Member may make one roll on the Cargo or Contraband Table, representing their individual efforts to locate those items. Alternately, you may pool two or more Crew Members together to modify a single die roll. For example, if Selnia and Aabatar are both shopping for cargo, they may make two separate rolls at +1 on the table (representing their respective "Charisma +1" stats), or may pool their efforts to make one single roll at +2.

Imperial Entanglements

Imperial Entanglements rolls are modified by the statistics of the entire crew. Only one roll need be made.

Dropping Crew Members

A Crew Member (not a Partner) may be let go while at any Spaceport, or their home System. This is a free action, before paying

Daily Expenses, and does not require a Day. Once a crew member is fired, they will not work for you again for the remainder of the scenario.

Slain Crew Members

A slain crew member is removed from the scenario and will not reappear. If you are playing an on-going character, the crew member does not appear in later scenarios.

A Word About the Wookie

The Wookie Yaawl is an Imperial Fugitive who may be picked up as a Crew Member or Partner on the planet Hoth. Every time you leave a system with Yaawl, you must add a Wanted counter to it, reflecting the Empire's attempts to track him down (no, keeping him in the Cargo Hold the whole time will not prevent this). This will continue for as long as Yaawl remains on your crew.

"I don't have the money with me..."

What happens when you owe credits and you don't have them? Well, it depends on who you owe. There is also the situation where you actually do have the credits but don't feel like parting with them. In any event, you must pay a penalty for your lack of financial savvy. What kind of penalty depends on which Event caused you to go into debt. See the Non-Payment Table for descriptions.

Space Travel

"Flying through hyperspace ain't like dusting crops."

When transporting Cargo, Contraband, or any other item that you have been asked to transport to a specified destination, you must take the route with the fewest number of

intervening Systems possible. If there is more than one shortest route of equal length, you are free to choose.

Travel stops when the Alderaan Belt or The Maw are encountered. The event is resolved (as described below), and the journey continues.

"...And no Imperial entanglements."

When you complete a journey from one system to another, you must make a check for Space Imperial Entanglements. Roll at the Destination System only. Do not roll for Entanglements as you pass through each intervening System.

Smuggling and Wanted Counters

Wanted counters represent the character's popularity with the local authorities, bounty hunters, and any others who may have a reason to want you out of the way. For example, carrying Contraband results in Wanted counters being placed because it is against the law, and the Empire considers you a criminal.

Each time you pick up contraband, you place Wanted counters equal to the Contraband's Wanteds in the System of origin, the destination System, and each System to be traveled through. These counters are placed when the Contraband is accepted or purchased.

Smuggling and Passage must be delivered to its destination system the day after it is procured, or the following penalty is incurred: place additional Wanted counters on both the System of origin and System of destination equal to the Contraband's Wanted value. Jettisoning your Contraband also results in Wanted counters being placed (equal to the Wanted score of the contraband in question).

Non-Payment Table

Event	Penalty for not paying
Cargo Purchase	Cargo may not be purchased
Contraband Purchase	Contraband may not be purchased
Crew Member Daily Wages	Crew Member leaves your employ and is removed for the remainder of the scenario. If you cannot pay the Crew Member while stuck out in space, the Crew Member will continue to perform as normal until a System is reached. You may not choose to withhold pay from a Crew Member while stuck out in space if you have the credits.
Detained Fine	Treat as Arrested, game over
Encounters	Detailed in Encounter rules
Ship Component Damage	Component remains Damaged or Really Damaged. If the Component is required for the game to continue (Sublight, Hyperdrive, etc.) then the game is over
Spaceport Fee	Must leave System at the end of the Day. Place 3 Wanteds in System. If System cannot be vacated for any reason (ship damage, Encounter, etc.), then the game is over.

Corellian Smuggler

This is because the owner and buyer of the merchandise has now taken a dislike to you. Dumping Kessel spice isn't always good for your health...

As a result, the battles with "fighters" and "Stormtroopers" may not always be against the forces of the Empire. They may represent combat against mercenaries and bounty hunters hired by the people you've upset.

On a slightly different subject, legal Cargo must also be delivered the day after it is procured, or it must be Jettisoned. After all, if you don't deliver it, it becomes stolen and creates more problems than it's worth (yes, I suppose you could sell your load of now-stolen Bantha saddles on your own, but just let it go).

The Alderaan Belt

Treat the Alderaan Belt the same as the Asteroid Field Space Encounter, over and above any other Space Encounters. When making a delivery to the Alderaan Belt, resolve the event first, then conduct the delivery. No other activities may be undertaken at Alderaan, and you don't roll for any other Encounters or Spaceport Imperial Entanglements.

The Kessel Run

The Maw is a large grouping of black holes between Kessel and Corellia. In order to make the Run, a ship must plot a course through the gravity wells. The faster a ship travels and the more skilled the pilot, the shorter the course. A fast moving ship with a skilled pilot can "dip" down into the wells to shorten the distance traveled, and thus cut the travel time.

As the ship approaches The Maw, declare the type of Run you would like to attempt: Safe, Intense, or Foolhardy. Then roll the dice to determine the outcome of the Run and check the appropriate table below.

Apply all Piloting modifiers, regardless of which type of Run is selected. Luck may also be applied following the die roll.

Kessel Run Notoriety and Experience

The first time your character completes a Safe Run with a Smooth Trip result, you immediately gain 1 character point (to be allocated or saved) and one Luck circle.

The first time your character completes an Intense Run with a Good Run result, you will be able to add one to all future Contraband Availability die rolls, and you immediately

gain two Luck circles and two character points (to be allocated or saved).

The first time your character completes a Foolhardy Run with a 13 Parsecs! result, you will be able to add one to all future Contraband Availability die rolls, and you immediately gain three Luck circles and three character points (to be allocated or saved).

There is no official place to record this information, but don't worry — you'll remember.

Combat and Damage

Blaster Fights

These rules cover blaster fights with Imperial Stormtroopers.

You and your crew shoot first during each turn of combat. You may choose which of your team is to shoot and in which order every turn. You are free to resolve one attack before who will attack next. To resolve an attack, roll 2 dice and consult the Stormtrooper Target table (see p. 51). Apply the appropriate modifiers listed to the die roll to determine the result of the attack.

Once all of your shots have been resolved, any remaining Stormtroopers shoot back.

Continued on Page 52

The Kessel Run

Safe Run

2d6	Result of Run
3-	Disaster! Even though you were playing it safe, dreadful piloting causes your ship to spiral into a black hole; game over.
4-5	Close Call A miscalculation results in your ship suffering 3 Damages. If your Hyperdrive becomes damaged your ship loses speed and falls into a black hole; game over.
6-8	Rough Ride Your entire Run is marred by near misses and close calls. You complete the Run, but your ship suffers 2 Damages.
9+	Smooth Trip You get the ship through in one piece due to a safe course and some good piloting.

Intense Run

2d6	Result of Run
5-	Miscalculation You exceed the envelope of your ship's capabilities and dissolve in a shower of metal and flame, before whirling into a black hole. Game over.
6-9	Emergency Power You must hook in emergency power in order to correct your course. If your Emergency Power Generator is not functioning, game over. If it is functioning, take 3 Damages now. If your Hyperdrive becomes Damaged, you are in fact pulled back into the hole and the ship is destroyed; game over.
10-12	Over Stressed You made it, but your ship got quite a workout. Take 4 Damages after you clear The Maw.
13+	Good Run There are those who would say you played it too safe in places, but you got through it okay.

Foolhardy Run

2d6	Result of Run
8-	Smack! You never even saw it coming. One millisecond you're smiling with ignorance, and the next millisecond — game over.
9-12	Ahhh! You get about as deep into a hole as you can, and still have any chance of getting out. Your ship takes 3 Damages. If any of the following are, or become non-functional, game over: Hyperdrive, Sublight Drive, Emergency Power Generator, Cockpit, Fore Shield. If you survive, you clear The Maw and your ship takes 3 more Damages.
13-16	Stylin' Your crew watches in horror as you skim the holes. A Run like this gets talked about.
17+	13 Parsecs! Think you could have done better? We'll never know, because in these here parts only one guy does the Run in 12 parsecs, and you ain't him.

Asteroid Field

Roll 2d6 and apply all Piloting and Hull & Shield modifiers. Ship suffers one Damage for each point the modified die roll is less than 10.

Bad Weather:

May not safely leave System for 1d6 Days. If you choose to leave while enduring Bad Weather, resolve a Rough Flight encounter. Once you have resolved the Bad Flight encounter, you may choose to continue exiting the System, or turn back and land again.

Blaster Duel

Time to shoot it out with some low-life scum. Use the following table to determine the outcome. Apply your own Blaster skill to the die roll.

2d6	Result of Duel
4-	You're dead; game over
5-7	You're Wounded, but you get him
8-10	Nice Shooting, go get a drink and claim a 100 credit bounty on the scum
11+	Quick and deadly, they never knew what hit them. In addition to your 100 credits, gain one Character Point toward improving your Blaster skill, in addition to your 100 credits.

Corrupt Bureaucrat

Pay 100 credits in bribes, plus 100 credits per Wanted in the System, or add an additional +3 to the Day's Spaceport Imperial Entanglement die roll.

Cutter

Remove 1d6 of Wanted from the map at no cost, plus one Wanted per 500 credits paid to the Cutter.

Dangerous Creature

The crew is attacked by a dangerous creature. Treat the Creature as a Stormtrooper for combat purposes. Creature will attack until slain, or all Crew Members are slain.

Drunken Spree

Use the following table to determine the result of your drunken spree.

2d6	Result of Drunken Spree
2-3	Lose 500 credits; if you cannot pay, game over
4-5	Find a Sealed Cargo in Hold (lose any already there)
6	Find a load of Contraband "Weapons for Sale" in your secret Hold (lose any already there with no Penalty) and take on the new Contraband's obligation
7	Move ship to a random System
8	Gain 500 credits
9-10	Lose cargo and Contraband on-board (and suffer the penalty)
11-12	Roll for 2 Results, re-roll future "11"

or "12" results

Equipment Failure

Draw one random Damaged (not Really Damaged) counter and apply it to your ship.

Find Cargo

Locate an abandoned load of Cargo. You may deliver it to any non-Wilderness System at any time and get paid 500 credits.

Get Lucky

You gain one luck circle for every 500 credits that you choose to spend.

Ion Storm

All Shields become Damaged if Functional. No effect if already Damaged.

Laying Low

Remove two Wanted counters from the map.

Misjump

Roll on the following table to determine the result of the Misjump.

2d6	Result of Misjump
4-	Ship is lost forever, game over
5-6	Ship ends up in a random System, Hyperdrive is Really Damaged, and ship suffers 3 Damages
7-8	Ship ends up in a mostly random System (roll 2d6 to determine the System, you may adjust die roll by 1), Hyperdrive is Damaged
9-10	Ship ends up in a slightly random System (roll 2d6 to determine the System, you may adjust die roll by 2)
11+	Due to your excellent Piloting skills, there are no ill effects

Apply all Piloting modifiers to Misjump die roll.

Misunderstanding

A random Crew Member in your hire leaves, and will not work with you again for the remainder of the Scenario. Treat as No Encounter if no Crew Member is in your hire. This encounter has no effect on Partners.

Mynocks

Sublight Drive Component becomes Damaged if Functional, or Really Damaged if already Damaged.

Partner

Receive the Crew Member resident to the System (if more than one, choose). Works for no pay (or receive at no Purchase cost). If none available, no effect. A partner remains with you until slain. If your Partner is slain, your next Spaceport encounter is automatically Drunken Spree.

Rebel Base

Freely upgrade one aspect of your ship (Controls, Turrets, Hull & Shields, or Diagnostics).

Rebel Victory

Remove 1d6 of Wanted counters from the map.

Rough Flight

While landing on a planet, or while moving the ship to a new location during your stay, the ship's repulsors fail and you are in danger of crashing. Apply Piloting modifiers and resolve the incident on the following table.

2d6	Result of Rough Flight
3-	Crash, all on board killed, game over
4-5	Draw 3 Really Damaged and 3 Damaged
6-7	Draw 2 Really Damaged and 2 Damaged
8-9	Draw 1 Really Damaged and 1 Damaged
10-11	Draw 1 Damaged
12+	No damage received; good landing, Captain.

Sabaac Game

Choose an amount to bet, 50 credits minimum, then roll on the following table. Treat as No Encounter if you have no credits.

2d6	Result of Gambling Session
3-	Lose bet. Also lose 10 times amount bet
4-5	Lose bet. Also lose 3 times amount bet
6-7	Lose bet
8	Break even, reclaim amount bet
9-10	Reclaim bet, and win an amount equal to bet
11-13	Reclaim bet, and win an amount equal to 3 times bet
14+	Reclaim bet, and win an amount equal to 10 times bet

Add your own Charisma to die roll. If you lose the bet and cannot pay the amount due, Lose ship (Game Over)

Secret Approach

Do not roll for Imperial Entanglements as long as you stay in the new System.

Spare Parts

Repair 1d6 of Damage. One Point improves a Really Damaged Component to Damaged, or a Damaged to Functional.

Stowaway

Stowaway pays you 2,000 credits for the ride, but the Space Imperial Entanglements die roll at destination System is at +2. You may not refuse to accept or Jettison the stowaway. Treat the stowaway as Contraband if Boarded or Detained. The stowaway may be hidden in your Secret Hold even if you are carrying Contraband there.

Valuable Contact

Add 2 to the Day's Cargo or Contraband Availability die rolls.

Daily Sequence of Play

1. Pay Daily Expenses
2. If in a Non-Wilderness System:
 - i) Roll for Spaceport Encounter
 - ii) Select and Resolve a Spaceport Activity for each crew member
 - iii) Roll for Spaceport Imperial Entanglements
- If in a Wilderness System:
 - i) Remove one Wanted counter
 - ii) Roll for a Wilderness Encounter
 - iii) Select and resolve a Wilderness Activity for each crew member
- If Dead in Space:
 - i) Select a Dead in Space Activity
(Do not roll for Space Encounters while Dead in Space)
3. May choose to travel to another System; if so:
 - i) Roll for a Space Encounter
 - ii) Move ship counter to destination System
 - iii) Roll for Space Imperial Entanglements
4. End of the Day
 - i) Advance Day counter

Daily Expenses

Docking Fee:

Dead in Space	0 credits
Wilderness	0 credits
Settled	50 credits
Populated	100 credits
Metropolitan	200 credits

Crew:

See crew member counter



Spaceport Activities

- 1) Do nothing
- 2) Heal see Wounds
- 3) Repair Ship (Self and/or Paid) see Components
- 4) Fulfill Goal see Scenarios
- 5) Load Cargo and/or Contraband see Cargo/Contraband
- 6) Unload Cargo and/or Contraband see Cargo/Contraband
- 7) Hire a crew member see Crew cards

Wilderness Activities

- 1) Do nothing
- 2) Heal see Wounds
- 3) Repair Ship (Self) see Components
- 4) Fulfill Goal see Scenarios
- 5) Load Cargo and/or Contraband see Cargo/Contraband
- 6) Unload Cargo and/or Contraband see Cargo/Contraband

Dead in Space Activities

- 1) Do nothing
- 2) Heal see Wounds
- 3) Repair Ship (Self) see Components

Imperial Entanglements

2d6	Space	Spaceport
6-	None	None
7-10	Boarded, or 2 TIEs	Boarded, or 2 Stormtroopers
11-13	Detained, or 2 Interceptors	Detained, or 4 Stormtroopers
14-15	Detained, or 4 TIEs	Detained, or 6 Stormtroopers
16+	Arrested, or 4 TIEs and 2 Interceptors	Arrested, or 8 Stormtroopers

Modifiers to Entanglement Die Roll

Crew's Charisma (-)
 Ship has legal cargo in Cargo Hold (-1)
 Each Wanted in System (+1)
 Each Carbon Scoring on ship (+1)

You may choose to jettison Contraband before...

Being Boarded: Empire finds Contraband in Secret Hold on a 2d6 die roll of 7 or less, or Contraband in Cargo Hold on 11 or less. You are Arrested if Contraband is found.

Being Detained: Empire finds Contraband in Secret Hold on a 2d6 die roll of 10 or less, or Contraband in Cargo Hold automatically. You are Arrested if Contraband is found. Regardless, you are fined 1d6 x 100 credits and any legal Cargo that you may have is taken.

Being Arrested: Look forward to spending a long time in an Imperial detention cell. Game over.

Encounters (see page 45)

2d6	Spaceport	Wilderness	Space
2	Valuable Contact	Misunderstanding	Asteroid Field
3	Cutter	Partner	Stowaway
4	Spare Parts	Dangerous Creature	Misjump
5	Blaster Duel	Find Cargo	Mynocks
6	Get Lucky	No Encounter	No Encounter
7	No Encounter	Laying Low	No Encounter
8	Corrupt Bureaucrat	No Encounter	No Encounter
9	Sabaac Game	Bad Weather	Equipment Failure
10	Drunken Spree	Equipment Failure	Rebel Victory
11	Misunderstanding	Rough Flight	Ion Storm
12	Partner	Rebel Base	Secret Approach

Corellian Smuggler is a board game, but we hope the ideas and concepts presented here will not stay limited to that format. The six scenarios can easily be converted to the *Star Wars* RPG, giving GMs some quick on-the-fly adventures to run on a moment's notice. We've also tried to bring some of the flavor and atmosphere of the movies' settings to life with the Charts and Encounters. They can serve as a handy guide for a group who makes an unexpected detour onto an abandoned planet, or who find themselves in a strange starport, hiding from the Imperials.

Cargo and Contraband

Cargo

2d6	Cargo Available	Payment
6-	No Cargo available	None
7-8	Bulk Cargo	200 credits/System
9-10	Sealed Cargo	400 credits/System
11-12	Important Cargo	700 credits/System
13+	Priority Cargo	1,100 credits/System

Modifiers to Availability Die Roll

Crew's Charisma (+)
 Metropolitan System (+2)
 Settled System (-2)
 Wilderness System (-4)

Roll 2d6 to determine the Destination System. Re-roll if you roll your current System. Cargo must travel directly to the Destination System at the end of the Day, or the payment is not received.

Contraband

2d6	Contraband Available	Purchase Price	Payment	Wanted
3-	No Contraband available	None	None	None
4-6	Weapons for Sale	200 credits	2d6 x 100 credits	1
7-9	Illegal Technology for Sale	800 credits	2d6 x 400 credits	1
10-12	Smuggling — Weapons	None	1,500 credits/System	1
13-14	Smuggling — Stolen Data	None	2,000 credits/System	2
15-16	Smuggling — Kessel Spice	None	2,500 credits/System	3
17+	Passage — Imperial Fugitive	None	3,000 credits/System	4

Modifiers to Availability Die Roll

Crew's Charisma (+)
 Metropolitan System (+2)
 Crime System (+2)
 Wilderness System (-4)
 Kessel Run Notoriety (+0 to +2)

Roll 2d6 to determine the Destination System for Smuggling and Passage Contraband (Purchased Contraband may be sold anywhere). Re-roll if you roll your current System.

Smuggling and Passage Contraband must travel directly to the Destination System at the end of the Day, or the Payment is not received. Also, place Wanted counters on the Origin and Destination Systems equal to the Contraband's Wanted.

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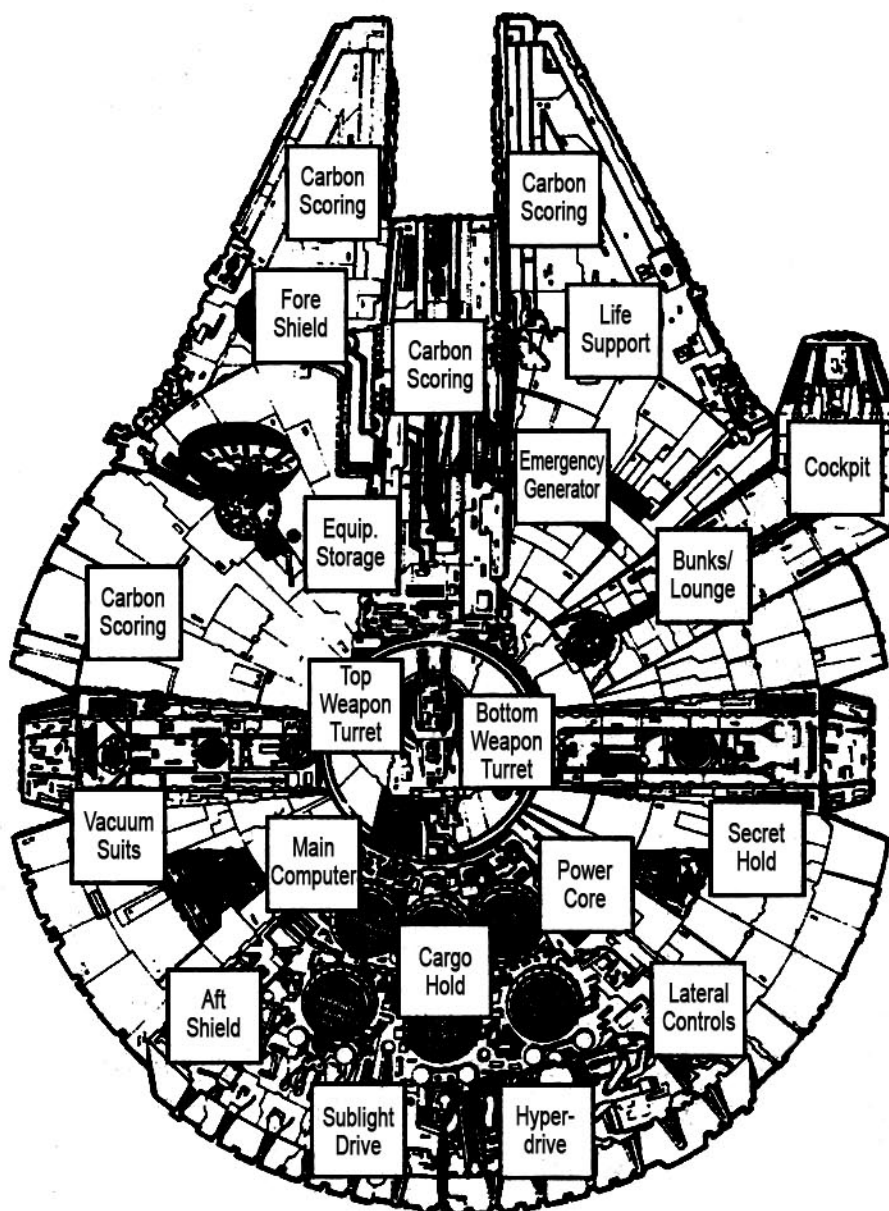


Roll 2d6 for TIE fighter placement every round

2-3 Fore and Above

4-5 Fore and Slot

6 Fore and Below



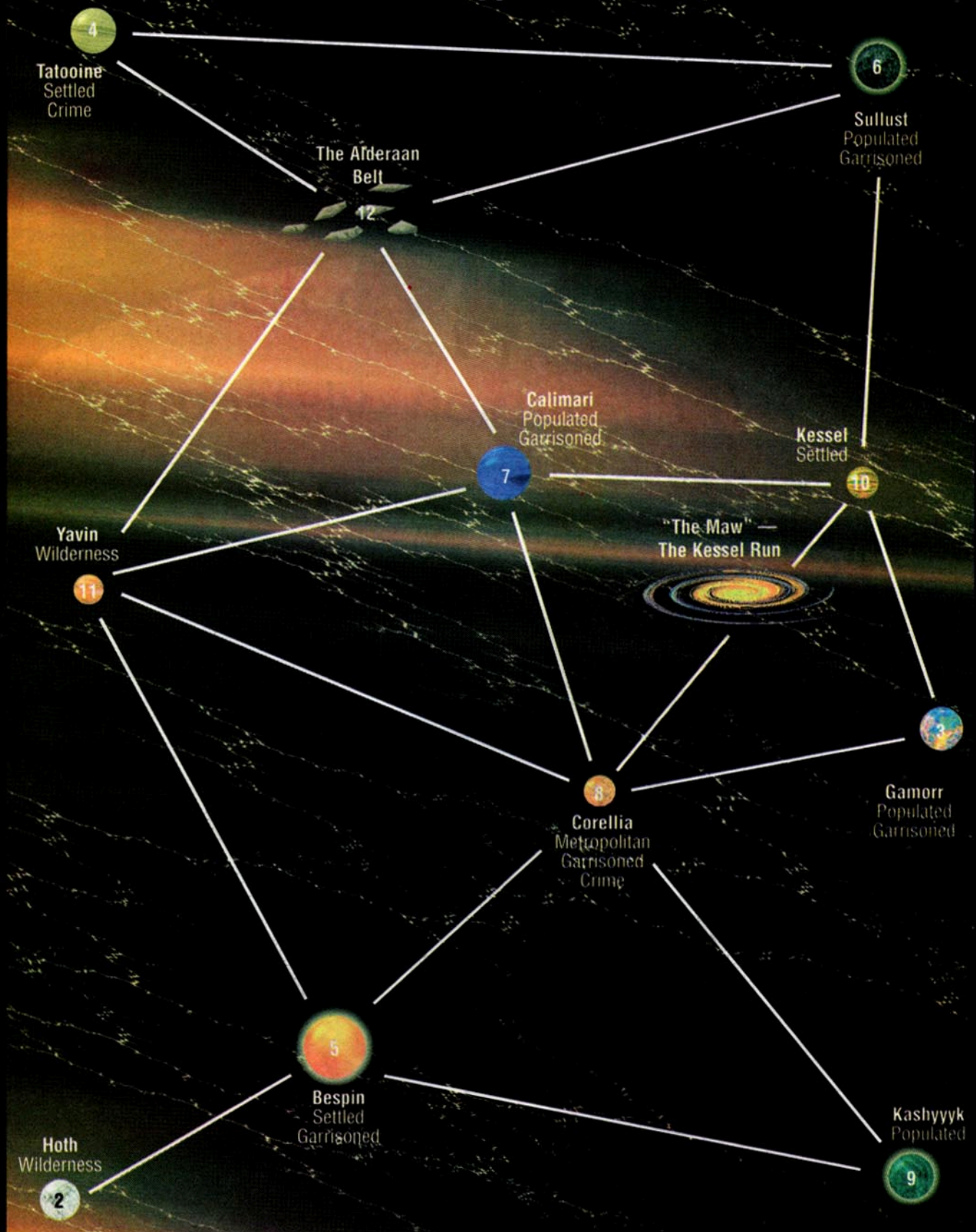
7-8 Aft and Below

9-10 Aft and Slot

11-12 Aft and Above

Straighten the staples and remove these pages. Lay the ship and map flat on the table, and open the magazine to the facing pages of charts.

Coreellian Smuggler Sector Map



Use the numbers for Random System Determination.

This map is not endorsed by Lucasfilm or WEG, and bears little if any resemblance to the actual distribution of planetary systems. Do not attempt to navigate the sector with this map.



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Space Combat

Sequence of Space Combat

- 1) Determine location of enemy fighters and place them on the Ship Sheet
- 2) Assign your own character and any other crew members on-board to Duties (Pilot, Co-Pilot, Top Gunner, Bottom Gunner)
- 3) Conduct attacks against the enemy fighters by your ship
- 4) Conduct attacks from enemy fighters against your ship
- 5) Repeat this sequence until all enemy fighters are destroyed, or until your ship is destroyed

2d6

Ship Shooting at Fighter

6-	Missed
7-8	Missed
9-10	Destroyed
11	Destroyed
12	Destroyed
13+	Destroyed

Modifiers to Ship Attack

Gunnery Skill (+)
Ship's Turrets (+)
In The Slot (+1)
Prepared last turn (+2)
Interceptor (-1)

Fighter Shooting at Ship

Missed
Damaged
Damaged (2)
Really Damaged & Damaged
Really Damaged (2)
Really Damaged (3)

Modifiers to Fighter Attack

Ship's Hull & Shields (-)
Interceptor (+1)
Inoperable Shield facing fighter (+2)
No one Piloting ship (+2)

Top Turret may shoot at fighters which are Above or In The Slot.

Bottom Turret may shoot at fighters which are Below or In The Slot.

Pilot may remotely operate one unoccupied Turret from the Cockpit in order to Pilot and Shoot in the same turn. When doing this, treat both skills as being one less than normal.

Blaster Combat

Sequence of Blaster Combat

- 1) Each crew member shoots. Declare and resolve their attacks one at a time.
- 2) Each Stormtrooper shoots. Stormtroopers shoot at the crew member with the lowest Blaster skill until the crew member is killed. They then turn their attention to the next least skilled crew member, and so on.
- 3) Repeat until all Stormtroopers or crew members are killed.

2d6

Crew Member Shooting

5-	Missed
6	Negated by Armor
7-8	Negated by Armor
9	Dead
10+	Dead

Modifiers to Crew Attack

Blaster skill (+)

Stunned: Next attack at -1

Wounded: All skills at -1 until Healed. Wound penalties are cumulative.

Dead: If your character dies, game over. If one of your crew members dies, they are removed from the game and do not return.

Stormtrooper Shooting

Missed
Missed
Stunned
Wounded
Dead

Modifiers to Stormtrooper Attack

Target's Blaster skill (-)

Wounds

A crew member's die rolls are reduced by one each time they are Wounded. A crew member may be Wounded multiple times.

One Wound may be Healed by selecting the Heal Activity for the Day. The Wound is healed on a die roll of 8 or higher on 2d6. You may add one to the die roll for every 50 credits paid, before the dice are rolled.

Components

Component	Effect when Damaged or (Really Damaged)	Self Repair (2d6)	Spaceport Repair
Aft Shield	Ship Defense reduced vs. Aft attacks	4+ & 50 credits	300 credits
Bunks/Lounge	Increase Docking Fee by 50 credits each Day. Anyone in Bunks/Lounge when it is Damaged (Really Damaged) is Wounded (killed)	3+ & 50 credits	200 credits
Carbon Scoring	Modifies Imperial Entanglements	4+ & 100 credits	300 credits
Cargo Hold	Contents are destroyed and the Cargo Hold may not be used until fully repaired	5+ & 250 credits	1000 credits
Cockpit	Piloting die rolls are at -1 (-2), and the Pilot and Co-Pilot are Wounded (killed)	8+ & 500 credits	2500 credits
Emergency Generator	No effect, unless the Power Core is also inoperable and you are in space, in which case you have no power to repair the ship and you all freeze to death in space, game over	6+ & 150 credits	550 credits
Equipment Storage	Repair die rolls at -1 (-2)	5+ & 50 credits	250 credits
Fore Shield	Ship Defense reduced vs. Fore attacks	4+ & 50 credits	300 credits
Hyperdrive	You are Dead in Space until it is fully repaired	8+ & 500 credits	2500 credits
Lateral Control	Piloting die rolls at -1 (-2)	6+ & 250 credits	600 credits
Life Support	No effect unless the Vacuum Suits are also inoperable and you are in space, in which case everyone dies	4+ & 100 credits	350 credits
Main Computer	All ship related die rolls at -1 (-2)	7+ & 300 credits	950 credits
Power Core	No effect, unless the Emergency Generator is also inoperable and you are in space, in which case you have no power to repair the ship and you all freeze to death in space, game over	6+ & 400 credits	1200 credits
Secret Hold	Contents are destroyed and the Secret Hold may not be used until fully repaired	5+ & 200 credits	1000 credits
Sublight Drive	You are Dead in Space until it is fully repaired. If the damage occurs while in combat the enemy fighters add +1 (+2) to their die rolls	6+ & 100 credits	300 credits
Vacuum Suits	No effect unless Life Support is also inoperable and you are in space, in which case everyone dies		
Weapon Turrets	Attack die rolls for the damaged Turret are at -1 (-2), and the Gunner in the Turret is Wounded (killed)	6+ & 250 credits	800 credits

Modifiers to Self Repair Die Roll

In a Spaceport (+0)
In a Wilderness System (-2)
Dead in Space (-4)
Extra credits equal to required (+1)

Maximum Repairs per Day in a Spaceport

Metropolitan: 6
Populated: 4
Settled: 2

A Really Damaged Component must be repaired to Damaged, before being repaired to functional. Each crew member may attempt one repair per Day. Multiple crew members may combine their Mechanical skill toward a single die roll.

Corellian Smuggler

Continued from Page 44

Stormtroopers attack the crew member with the lowest Blaster skill (thus having the best chance to hit). If you have more than one crew member of the same lowest skill, you choose which one is attacked. Stormtroopers will continue to fire at Stunned or Wounded crew members. Once a crew member has been killed, they move on to the next. Stormtrooper attacks are resolved in the same manner as crew attacks; simply use the Crew Member Target table instead.

This completes one turn of combat. Continue conducting turns until all the members of one side are dead.

"Here they come..."

These rules cover ship battles with Imperial TIE fighters.

Your ship has two weapon turrets, one on the topside of the ship and one on the underside. The top turret can be used to shoot at one enemy fighter each turn which is either above or "in the slot" (alongside your ship). The bottom turret can be used to shoot at one enemy fighter each turn which is below or in the slot. One crew member is required to operate each turret. If you wish, a single crew member (or your character) may Pilot the ship and remotely control one turret from the Cockpit, but while doing this both his Piloting and Gunnery skills are one less than normal.

If a crew member Prepares for one turn, they receive +2 on their next attack die roll. To Prepare, the crew member must be in a Turret and not fire for one turn (they're taking careful aim). They then receive +2 to their attack die roll on the following turn.

At the start of each turn of combat, roll for each enemy fighter's position using the Angle of Attack chart. Once all enemy fighters are placed, assign the duty you want each crew member to perform (Piloting and Co-Piloting in the Cockpit, Gunnery of Top Turret, Gunnery of Bottom Turret). All other crew members are in the Bunks/Lounge. A crew

member may move from one location (Cockpit, Top, or Bottom) to one of the other locations, by spending one turn in the Bunks/Lounge.

Your turrets fire first during each turn of combat. You may select the turret to shoot first and resolve its attack before declaring and resolving the attack for the second turret. To resolve an attack, roll 2 dice and consult the Fighter Target chart, applying all appropriate modifiers.

Once all of your attacks have been resolved, any remaining enemy fighters shoot back. They use the same method of attack, except they use the Ship Target chart.

This completes one turn of combat. Continue conducting turns until either the ship or all enemy fighters are destroyed.

Wounds

A crew member's die rolls are reduced by one each time they are Wounded. A crew member may be Wounded multiple times. One Wound may be Healed by selecting the Heal Activity for the Day. The Wound is Healed on a die roll of 8 or higher on 2d6. You may add one to the die roll for every 50 credits paid, before the dice are rolled.

Scenarios

The following section describes the scenarios available. Any starting adjustments or conditions are noted, as well as the goal of the scenario.

The scenarios are arranged in order of difficulty from 1 to 6, with '1' being the easiest and '6' being the most difficult. You may either play the scenarios in order, and gain experience from each before proceeding to the next, or you may generate a character with the appropriate amount of experience and play any scenario you like.

(1) Repair Ship or "Bring me my hydrospanner!"

Congratulations! You've just won a ship in

a high stakes sabaac game. Unfortunately, the previous owner was a little vague about its condition.

Your ship begins with the following Components **Really Damaged**: Carbon Scoring, Carbon Scoring, Emergency Generator, Bunks/Lounge, Vacuum Suits, Lateral Controls. But there is good news, the following Components are only **Damaged**: Fore Shield, Carbon Scoring, Cockpit, Bottom Weapon Turret, Aft Shield. 1000 credits only goes so far, and in order to get this tub up and running, you're going to have to take a few jobs...

This scenario comes to an end at the end of 20 Days. You may choose to end it early if your ship is fully repaired in order to gain additional character points. The number of character points received for the scenario is based on how quickly your ship gets fully repaired.

Days Required	Character Points
1 to 3	7
4 to 7	6
8 to 11	5
12 to 15	4
16 to 19	3
20	2
Not repaired	1

At the end of this scenario the Rebellion issues orders to all ships to begin Blockade Running operations.

(2) Run the Blockade, or "Why don't you outrun them? I thought you said this thing was fast!"

Rumors of rebellion draw the attention of the Empire to this sector. In order to bring order to the galaxy, the Empire has blockaded Corellia and Calamari with ships from the Imperial Navy. In response, the Rebellion organizes blockade running operations to defy the Empire and inspire support for their cause.

Result of Fighter Attacks

Missed	The attack missed the target and has no effect.
Damaged	Draw one random Component counter and place it on the appropriate area of the ship sheet with the Damaged (grey) side up.
Damaged (2)	As Damaged, but draw two counters.
Damaged and Really Damaged	As Damaged, but draw a second counter and place it on the ship sheet with the Really Damaged (black) side up.
Really Damaged (2)	As Damaged (2), but use the Really Damaged side of the counters.
Really Damaged (3)	As Really Damaged (2), but draw three counters.
Destroyed	The enemy fighter is destroyed and removed from the battle.

A Star Wars™ Boardgame

All Imperial Entanglements in Corellia and Calamari automatically result in Stormtroopers or Fighters. The Empire will not Board, Detain, or Arrest anyone in those Systems; go immediately to combat.

As part of the blockade, the Empire has shut down the Spaceports on both Systems. Your ship must land in uninhabited areas of the planets. Normal Docking Fees still apply, and you still roll on the Starport chart for Encounters (the nearby villages are almost as busy these days). However, you may not Pay for Repairs or Buy Cargo in these Systems. Also, All Self-Repair die rolls in these Systems are at -2.

By using your contacts with Rebel agents stationed throughout the Sector, you may adjust any 5 Cargo and/or Contraband Destination die rolls by 1 or 2 toward '7' (you could, for example, adjust a '5' to a '7', or a '10' to a '9', but not an '8' to a '9').

This scenario ends at the end of 15 Days.

The number of character points received for this scenario is based on the number of Loads of Cargo and/or Contraband you haul into Corellia and Calamari. Arriving with a Load of Cargo and Contraband counts as two Loads.

Loads	Character Points
15+	8
13 or 14	7
11 or 12	6
9 or 10	5
7 or 8	4
5 or 6	3
3 or 4	2
1 or 2	1

At the end of 15 Days of blockade running, orders arrive assigning your ship to carry out covert operations in the sector.

(3) Covert Operations, or "My friends will get the shield down in time!"

To magnify the effect of the blockade running operation, the Rebellion initiates commando raids against Imperial bases in the Sector. Your ship is to be used to transport these commandos to the various bases. Once inserted, the teams will attempt to sabotage key components of the base. You must then extract the team and prepare for the next raid.

You must maintain your free trader cargo and contraband activities in order to provide a cover for your frequent travels. The Rebellion supplies you with 1000 credits to begin the operation, but all other financial

problems are up to you to handle. The Rebellion will also freely repair your Beds/Lounge Component if it is not functional. If it is already functional, they provide you with an additional 100 credits.

You must travel to each System with an Imperial Garrison and spend one Day while in each "Fulfilling Goal". It is during that Day that the commando team will sabotage the Imperial base. Place 3 Wanted in the System at the end of the Day. Also at the start of the next Day, consult the following table to determine the result of the command raid.

2d6	Result of Raid: Base Destroyed?
4-	Disaster — No
5-6	Complete Failure — No
7-10	Failure — No
11-13	Success — Yes
14+	Complete Success — Yes

Result of Attack	Effect on Team
Disaster	Team is lost in Raid and replaced with a new Team. Lose any previous experience.
Complete Failure	No experience is gained, but the team survives.
Failure	Team is now "Proven" and gains a +1 on future Raid die rolls.
Success	Team is now "Experienced" and gains a +2 on all future Raid die rolls.
Complete Success	Team is now "Veteran" and gains a +3 on all future Raid die rolls.

Experience bonuses are not cumulative; apply only the best achieved to date to the team's die roll.

Being the hero that you are, you can't just sit back while the commandos act. Your crew must stay with the ship and may not apply their Blaster skill. You do what you can to help them in their raids, because of this add your personal Blaster skill to their Raid die rolls.

If your Bunks/Lounge Component becomes Damaged while in Space, the command team is incapacitated and withdrawn from duty. You are assigned a new team and any Raid modifier earned by the previous team is lost. If the second team is also incapacitated, the scenario ends.

Treat the team as being Contraband if you are Boarded or Detained. Any normal Contraband that you are carrying at the time must be Jettisoned and the team hides in the Secret Hold.

You may choose to have the team partici-

pate in the fight against Stormtroopers at the start of each turn of combat. If the team participates, the Stormtroopers are automatically eliminated at that time. Additionally, immediately place 3 Wanted counters on that System; the Empire will hear about the presence of a Rebel Commando Team in the area.

The team leaves the ship as soon as the ship lands on any System after the last Garrison has been destroyed.

This scenario has a 15 Day duration.

The number of Bases eliminated determines the character points earned for the scenario.

Bases Eliminated	Character Points
5	6
4	4
3	2
2	1
1	0

The special rules covering the Blockading of Corellia and Calamari are in full effect throughout this scenario. The blockade is lifted at the end of this scenario.

(4) Courier, or "Many Bothans died to bring us this information."

The Empire has stepped up intelligence activities in the sector following the success of the covert operations against their bases. They first broke some of the codes used by the Rebellion, then used the information to round-up and execute several key Rebel agents in the sector. Orders, therefore, must be hand delivered to operatives in the sector until new codes can be established and replacement agents put into the field.

Your ship has been selected as the courier vessel to deliver the new orders to the Rebel operatives in the sector.

At the start of each Day, just after pay Daily Expenses, you are contacted by a Rebel Agent. The Agent delivers to you the coded information which must be delivered, as well as its destination. Determine the destination randomly, re-roll if the indicated System is the one you are currently in.

The coded information will be found if Boarded on a die roll of 8 or less, or during a Detention on a die roll of 11 or less. This information may not be placed in the Secret Hold, it must remain on your person. If it is discovered, you are immediately terminated, game over. The information may not be Jettisoned.

You may haul cargo and contraband as normal during the scenario, as well as performing all the usual Activities.

Corellian Smuggler

Place 1 Wanted counter on the destination System each time you deliver coded information. The information is considered to be successfully delivered after the Check for Space Imperial Entanglements step at the end of the Day. If you do not deliver it at the end of the Day, for any reason, the information is out of date, and the delivery is a failure. Keep in mind that you are not forced to attempt the run. You may decline the delivery due to danger, the need to make ship repairs, etc. But each such refusal still counts as a Day of the scenario.

This scenario has a 15 Day duration.

The number of character points earned is based on the number of successful deliveries made during the scenario.

Successes	Character Points
15	7
14	6
12 to 13	5
10 to 11	4
8 to 9	3
6 to 7	2
4 to 5	1
3 or less	0

(5) Rescue Mission, or "Marching into the Detention Center's not what I had in mind!"

Captain Antilles has once again run out of luck and being captured by the Empire. He is being held somewhere in the sector in a temporary Imperial base. You must travel around the sector collecting information as to the Captain's location, then lead a small Rebel strike force to rescue him.

You may only collect information in non-Wilderness Systems. Once in a System, each crew member may attempt to search during each Day. To do this, the crew member selects "Fulfilling Goal" for their Daily Activity. Roll once on the following table during any Day when at least one crew member attempts to search.

2d6	Result of the Search for a Lead
4-	No information discovered, but the Empire has been alerted to your presence: place 1 Wanted in the System.
5-9	No information discovered
10+	You have discovered the Lead available on the System.

Add the Charisma skill of crew members engaged in the search.

Before rolling, you may choose to attempt bribery and spend 100 credits to add 1 to your

die roll.

Before rolling, you may choose to search more openly, place 2 Wanted on the System and add 2 to your die roll.

Only one Lead may be found in each non-Wilderness System. Re-searching a System will not gain additional Leads. A System may be Searched multiple times until its Lead is discovered.

Roll once on the following table after each new Lead is discovered. Continue searching for Leads in new Systems and checking for the Location of Captain Antilles until you succeed in locating him.

2d6	Location of Captain Antilles
19-	Remains unknown, continue search Systems for Leads
20+	You have discovered the location of the Imperial base and may proceed on to the next phase of the scenario

Leads Found	Search modifier
1	+1
2	+2
3	+3
4	+5
5	+7
6	+10
7	+13
8	+17

If you have not discovered the location of Captain Antilles after successfully searching all the non-Wilderness Systems, you fail the mission.

Now that you have discovered the location of the Imperial base, you group up with three other small Rebel ships and begin the rescue operation. Your ship must first battle your way past 4 TIE fighters on patrol over the base (conduct a normal space battle). The other Rebel Ships are assumed to be fighting other Imperial forces at this time. Once you have defeated the TIEs, the three other ships will continue to battle other Imperial forces while you land and rescue Captain Antilles on the ground.

As you battle your way toward the Captain on the ground, the three other Rebel ships are engaged against Imperial ground and space forces in order to maintain an opening for you to fly the ship through during your escape. Your progress in the ground rescue is measured on a minute-by-minute basis. Conduct one Ground Combat turn (fully resolve any indicated combat) then one Rebel Support turn each minute you are on the ground.

2d6	Ground Combat
3-	Encounter 4 Stormtroopers
4-6	Encounter 2 Stormtroopers
7-10	Running through corridors, gain +1 on future Ground Combat die rolls
11-13	You have located the Detention Level, gain +2 on all future Ground Combat die rolls
14+ (1st time)	You have located Captain Antilles. Defeat 2 Stormtroopers and he is rescued. Reset Ground Combat modifier to zero. You must now exit the base.
14+ (2nd time)	You have exited the base and blasted out into space.

These die rolls may be modified with your own personal Blaster skill.

Accumulate the modifiers gained each time you "Run through corridors" or "Locate the detention level."

2d6	Rebel Support
1-	One Rebel Ship destroyed
2+	No Rebel Ships destroyed

Subtract one from the die roll for each minute you are on the ground.

Once you have rescued the Captain, conduct one last Rebel Support die roll. If the last of the three Rebel Ships is destroyed while you are on the ground, you are captured and it's game over. If the last Rebel Ship is destroyed during the "Blast out into space" turn, then you must defeat 4 TIE fighters before ending the scenario.

The Captain has been seriously injured by the Imperial interrogation and may not perform any actions during the scenario.

This scenario ends at the end of 20 Days or when Captain Antilles has been rescued, whichever occurs first.

Days Required	Character Points
10 or less	6
11 to 12	5
13 to 14	4
15 to 16	3
17 to 18	2
19 to 20	1

(6) Repay Jabba or "Look, I'll pay you triple!"

While smuggling a load of Kessel Spice for Jabba the Hutt, you jettisoned the load as you were about to be boarded. The good news is that you were not arrested and scheduled for summary execution. The bad news is that you

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owe Jabba 25,000 credits. Now, Jabba knows that you'll pay him as soon as you can, but he does have a reputation to protect, so he's put out a contract on you. So you suddenly find yourself in high demand.

You begin this scenario with 2,000 credits. If you are playing an on-going character who has played in previous scenarios, reduce your money to 2,000 credits. For every 1,000 credits that you are forced to lose, you receive 1 Luck circle.

Effects of Jabba: Due to Jabba's contract, add Wanted counters to the following Systems: Tatooine (2), Kessel (3), Calimari (1), Corellia (2), and Bespin (1).

All crew members in your hire from previous scenarios leave you and return to their listed Systems.

Modify the Partner Encounters as follows: If you do not already have a Partner, then treat them as Blaster Duel. If you do already have a Partner, the Partner is killed by one of Jabba's bounty hunters and you immediately suffer the Drunken Spree encounter.

You may hire crew members, but due to your situation they charge you double their normal fee, or cost (you can hire "Eyes" but he won't pay you to carry him around anymore).

To pay back Jabba, you must spend one Day on Tatooine and select the Fulfill Goal Activity. At that time you must transfer 25,000 credits to Jabba.

This scenario ends at the end of 15 Days or when Jabba is paid back, whichever occurs first.

Days Required	Character Points
7 or less	6
8	5
9	4
10 to 11	3
12 to 13	2
14 to 15	1

At the end of the 15th Day, Jabba hires Boba Fett to balance the books, and several hours later, he puts "paid" to your account. Game over. 🎲

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DataPad: Character, Ship, Credit, and Time Records

Beginning Characters receive 7 character points and 1000 credits. If you begin in a later scenario than the first, add 4 character points for each scenario skipped.

Skills and Capabilities must be purchased one bonus at a time. For example, one point must be expended to attain a +1 in the Blaster skill, before two additional points are expended to increase the Blaster skill to +2.

Ship Capabilities may be upgraded between scenarios by expending the indicated number of credits and character points.

Luck gets expended as it is used. Each Luck circle expended will retroactively adjust any die roll by 1. No more than 2 Luck circles may be expended on any one roll. Once used, a Luck circle is gone for good.

Tens of Thousands	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Thousands	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Hundreds	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Tens	50 00									
Days	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

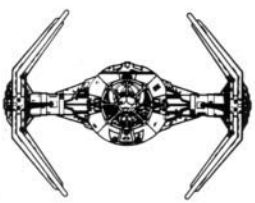
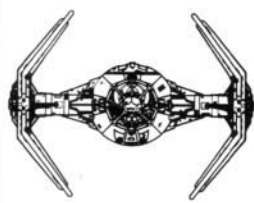
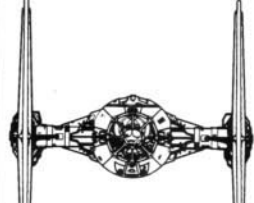
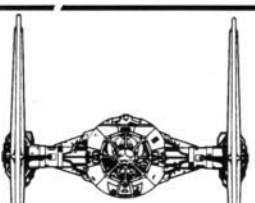
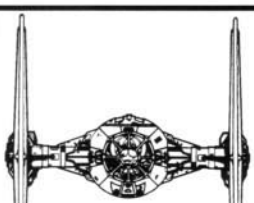
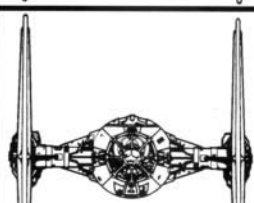
Character Name:

Skills	+1	+2	+3	+4
Piloting	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gunnery	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mechanical	☐	☐	☐	☐
Charisma	☐	☐	☐	☐
Blaster	☐	☐	☐	☐
Luck	☐	☐	☐	☐

Ship Name:

Capabilities	+1	+2	Modifies
Controls	☐	☐	Piloting rolls
Turrets	☐	☐	Gunnery rolls
Hull & Shields	☐	☐	Ship Defense rolls
Diagnostics	☐	☐	Ship Repair rolls

2 Points & 1000 Credits
+4 Points & +3000 Credits

											
Interceptor		Interceptor		TIE							
											
TIE		TIE		TIE							
Bulk Cargo	Sealed Cargo	Important Cargo	Priority Cargo	Origin System	Destination System	 Imperial Fugitive <i>Human</i> Charisma +2 Contraband			 		
Illegal Tech	Weapons	Passage-Imperial Fugitive	Smuggle Weapons	Smuggle Stolen Data	Smuggle Kessel Spice						
1 Day	10 Days	10 Credits	100 Credits	1000 Credits	10,000 Credits						

Aft Shield	Bottom Weapon Turret	Bunks/Lounge	Carbon Scoring	Carbon Scoring	Carbon Scoring	Carbon Scoring	Carbon Scoring	Carbon Scoring	Bunks/Lounge	Bottom Weapon Turret	Aft Shield
Carbon Scoring	Cargo Hold	Cockpit	Emergency Generator	Equip. Storage	Fore Shield	Fore Shield	Equip. Storage	Emergency Generator	Cockpit	Cargo Hold	Carbon Scoring
Hyper-drive	Lateral Controls	Life Support	Main Computer	Power Core	Secret Hold	Secret Hold	Power Core	Main Computer	Life Support	Lateral Controls	Hyper-drive
Sublight Drive	Top Weapon Turret	Vacuum Suits	Cut out this entire block of counters. Fold along the dotted line, and glue the counters back to back.						Vacuum Suits	Top Weapon Turret	Sublight Drive
Stunned	Stunned	Stunned							Wounded	Wounded	Wounded

Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted
Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted	Wanted
Wanted 2	Wanted 2	Wanted 2	Wanted 2	Wanted 2	Wanted 2	Wanted 3	Wanted 3	Wanted 3	Wanted 3	Wanted 4	Wanted 4	Wanted 4	Wanted 5



Yaawl

*Wookiee Fugitive
Hoth*

Gunnery +1
Blaster +2

Wanted

50 Credits/Day



"Eyes"

*Rodinian Creep
Kessel*

Charisma -2

Pays you 50 Credits/Day



R2-X3

*Droid
Corellia*

Mechanical +1

Buy for 500 Credits



Womprat

*Pet
Tatooine*

May be sacrificed to
negate any Wound or
Dead result meant for
character.

Buy for 100 Credits



Selnia

*Human Gambler
Kessel*

Piloting +1
Charisma +1

100 Credits/Day



Bolto

*Rodinian Gunman
Bespin*

Blaster +1

50 Credits/Day



T'Sal

*Jawa Shuttle Jockey
Tatooine*

Piloting +1

50 Credits/Day



Thuugar

*Gamorrean Leg-breaker
Gamorr*

Blaster +2

50 Credits/Day



Rooarwaa

*Wookiee Mercenary
Kashyyyk*

Gunnery +1
Blaster +1
Mechanical +1

200 Credits/Day



Aabatar

*Calamari Smuggler
Calamari*

Gunnery +1
Piloting +1
Charisma +1

200 Credits/Day



Nenasha

*Sullustan Pilot
Sullust*

Piloting +1
Blaster +1

100 Credits/Day



Huutar

*Human Mechanic
Corellia*

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The Unofficial Gamer's Lexicon

Every profession and hobby has its own jargon and slang. Gaming is no exception. What is collected below are all the "unofficial" gaming terms (those not found in game rulebooks) I have encountered during sixteen years of being both player and game master. Some are definitions, while others are observations on strange situations that seem to pop up only in role-playing games. I am sure that many players who have been in the hobby long enough will find much of what follows very familiar indeed, and will probably have a few of their own terms to add.

Anti-Magic: The Gathering Shell: A fairly recent phenomenon, this is the moratorium a GM puts on playing any collectible card game by any player during a normal RPG session.

Athaclena Syndrome: In fantasy and science fiction campaigns, the mysterious attraction PCs have for non-humans (Elves, Vargr, Vulcans, etc.) in romantic encounters. Named after a character in *The Uplift War*, by David Brin.

Baby Face Rule: In fantasy and horror campaigns, any child or seemingly innocent creature found alone in a dungeon will actually be a soul-sucking monster in disguise.

Bad Guy Lighting Rule: The headquarters of a master villain will always be poorly lit.

Bad Karma Rule: Used by some GMs to keep "evil" PCs in line. For every hideously evil action committed by a PC (murder, treason, etc.), the GM imposes an equally bad re-action on the PC (poor luck, powerful new enemies, revenge-crazed clansmen, etc.) at some undisclosed and very inconvenient point in the future.

Bimbo Book: Any published RPG, supplement, or scenario that looks great but whose material is only 10% worth reading.

Boy Wonder: Any NPC who exists for the sole purpose of being captured and subsequently rescued.

Brick: Any PC or NPC who can absorb a lot of punishment in combat.

Card Curmudgeon: Any die-hard role-player who still believes collectible card games are just a fad.

Card War Party: The crowd of eager, anxious Card Warriors that gather at the hobby store whenever there is a shipment of new *Magic: the Gathering* expansion sets.

Card Warrior: Anyone who has given up RPGs to play collectible card games exclusively.

Chainmail Bikini Rule: In most fantasy art and gaming material, a female character's breast size is inversely proportional to the amount of clothing she usually wears. In other words, the more well-endowed she is, the less clothing she will wear.

Chariots of Slime Rule: In any horror game, a typical monster will always be able to outrun a typical PC.

Chuck Monster: Any monster specifically designed to neutralize a particularly annoying and game-wrecking PC. ("Gee, Chuck, your dwarf was swallowed whole by that purple worm, I guess he can't keep singing 'On Top Of Ol' Smokey' at the top of his lungs in that Dragon Lich's lair.") Named after an infamous local player.

Clone Game: Any game whose theme, background, and/or mechanics closely resemble another, much more popular game.

Con Warrior: Any non-professional who attends three or more gaming conventions in a single year.

Construction Sign: Any not-too-subtle hint

Lexicographer:
Paul Lucas

At last, a semi-comprehensive listing of all of those terms you've been using, or hadn't realized you needed! Give copies to your non-gamer friends so they can translate!

given by the GM that the part of the dungeon the party was about to enter isn't mapped out yet.

Continuity Cop: Any player who constantly whines about minor inconsistencies and mistakes made by the GM. ("But you said Lord Farstar was wearing a red cloak. How come he's wearing a blue one now?")

Cthulhu in a Can: 1. Common to many campaigns, any device or artifact that will bring hideous, untold DOOM upon all the world or some such if ever opened, used, or activated. 2. The ultimate throw-and-run-like-hell weapon.

Dark Corner Rule: All taverns in a game campaign always have at least one corner that is dimly lit and empty except for a brooding and/or mysterious figure who is drinking alone.

Dead Parent Syndrome: In most character backgrounds, the player will list the parents of the PC either as dead or as having orphaned the PC shortly after his birth.

Deus ex Machina Device: In science-fiction campaigns, any device that possesses miraculous, god-like powers. (The transporters from *Star Trek*, for example, which can duplicate matter, split beings into good and evil halves, cure diseases, transverse time, and pierce dimensional barriers.)

Dice Junkie: Any player who owns more dice than socks.

Die Hard: Any gamer who avidly plays an outdated or out-of-print game (2300 AD, 1st edition *Gamma World*, etc.)

Dirty Pair Rule: Any PC party, when in a desperate fight, will cause collateral property damage in direct proportion to the amount of firepower they can bring to bear.

Doctor Doom Rule: No really cool villain will ever stay permanently dead.

Dragon Bait: Any NPC on point.

Einstein: Any player who repeatedly points out the scientific inconsistencies in a science fiction game's background or system.

Emergence Phenomenon: Most PCs, no matter what their original background, conception, or quirks, will eventually adopt the core personality of the person playing them.

Empty Room Phenomenon: In a fantasy game dungeon crawl, this is the absolute conviction held by players that a completely empty, mundane room has to hold some hidden secret. ("I know we've been searching for two hours, but there just has to be a secret door here somewhere!")

Evil Brunette Rule: No powerful villainess in the history of gaming has ever been a natural blond.

Evil Corporation Rule: With the exception of Marc hault Oberlindes from *Traveller*, no campaign-world corporation in the history of gaming

has ever had a board member, president, or CEO who was a decent guy.

Evil Grin Rule: Any time the GM smiles broadly without saying anything, it is a solid bet that something very, very awful is about to happen to the party.

Extra: Any NPC who has very minimal interaction with the party (pedestrians the PCs pass on the street, for instance).

Femme Fatale Rule: In most campaigns, it is inevitable that any attractive, recurring female adversary will become infatuated with a male PC.

Flimsy Box Rule: Any box containing a RPG will never outlast the material it contains.

Flying Fists of Death Syndrome: With martial-artist, magicuser, and super-hero PCs, the tendency of such characters to use the fanciest method at their disposal to take out an opponent when something much simpler will suffice. ("Why should I just shoot him when I can give him what-for with my Atomic Cybernetic Fingers of Hideous Evisceration?")

Game Master's Golden Rule: It is the people who play the game, not any particular game's background, characters, style or system, that makes a RPG session enjoyable.

Game Smart, Life Stupid: Anyone who can rattle off the level, area of effect, and range of every spell in the AD&D game but can't find his home state on a map.

Gamer's Best Friend: The photocopier.

Gamer's Golden Rule: If it's stupid but it works, it isn't stupid.

Gamer's Platinum Rule: Be paranoid enough for everybody.

Gamer's Silver Rule: Never join a party with anyone braver than you are.

Gamespeak: Any text of a RPG rulebook that gets bogged down in dense, obscure rule references ("To calculate a Heroic Fighter Dragon's Courage Aptitude requires the Player to take the average of the Strength, Fortitude, and Stupid Attributes, adding the result to 1d20 x the Boasting Skill Level, taking the square root, and cross-referencing that number on the Bravery Action Multiplier Table.")

Garage Game: Any small-press RPG or supplement (i.e., games — sometimes very good ones — that look like they were put together and printed in someone's garage.)

Gloom and Doom Game: Any RPG whose campaign background is unrelentingly depressing.

God's Roommate: In horror RPGs, the characters in a game's background who are so immensely powerful that they could smear the entire party instantly if they ever met (Cthulhu in *Chaosium's Call of Cthulhu* or Caine in *White Wolf's Vampire*:

Locked Room Ecology: In fantasy adventures, the curious phenomenon of monsters in remote dungeons surviving for years in small, locked rooms with no apparent source of food.

The Masquerade, for example).

Groom Go Kaboom Syndrome: No wedding ceremony in any game campaign will ever be routine.

Guest Star: This is a character or close facsimile thereof that the GM "imports" from some other source for use in the game. In fantasy campaigns, Conan, Gandalf, and Robin Hood are the most common guest stars. In science-fiction games, expect to see Aliens, HAL 9000, and Han Solo.

Hack and Slash: A style of play where the main thrust of the adventure is near-constant combat.

Hulk Smash Syndrome: The amount of destructive power available to the PCs is inversely proportional to how often they use their wits to solve problems. In other words, the more power a party has, the less inclined they will be to use their brains.

Illuminated Ignoramus: Any player who thinks playing a pretentious, gloom and doom RPG will somehow make him cooler than other gamers.

Land Shark Syndrome: The extreme paranoia adopted by all parties at one time or another when they expect to be attacked at any time, anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances, no matter how mundane. ("You're no barmaid, but an evil zombie agent of the Lich Lord of long-lost Acheron! Admit it!")

Last NPC Rule: When marching single-file in a dungeon or other darkened area, any NPC bringing up the rear of the party will always mysteriously disappear.

Lead Head: An avid miniature wargamer or collector.

Lead: Any NPC who has a prominent role in an adventure or campaign. Also known as a Focus NPC.

Locked Room Ecology: In fantasy adventures, the curious phenomenon of monsters in remote dungeons surviving for years in small, locked rooms with no apparent source of food.

Lugosi: Any player of White Wolf's *Vampire: the Masquerade* game who dresses like a vampire, walks like the undead, wonders what blood tastes like, or otherwise takes the game way too seriously.

Magic Miser: In a fantasy game, any magic-capable PC who refuses to use his spells except in the most dire circumstances. ("Why should I use my *Fireball* spell? It's only a horde of dragons led by Sauron and Cthulhu.")

Manga Maniac: Any gamer who exclusively uses Japanese comics and animation as inspirations for characters and adventures.

McCoy: Any player who repeatedly states the obvious. ("He's dead, Jim.") Also known as a MOTO (Master Of The Obvious).

Meatball Sub Incident: Any diplomatic encounter the party botches horribly. (Named after an incident in a *Traveller* campaign: during the party's critical meeting with an alien race of hideously violent and xenophobic vegetarians called the K'Kree, in which a PC ate a meatball sub just to annoy them.)

Mech Head: Anyone who plays the *Battletech* game to the exclusion of all others.

MF Squad: Any collection of two or more Monster Fodders (*q.v.*). A common practice is for each such NPC to wear a jersey with the initials "MF" and a number on it (MF #01, MF #02, etc.)

Miss Haversham Syndrome: In a fantasy campaign, this is where the PCs will spend weeks or even months without ever seeming to change their clothes. ("Sure I sleep in this armor. What's your point?")

Modulitis: When using a store-bought adventure, the phenomenon of having the game come to a twenty-minute halt while the GM searches frantically through the module for some important but obscure reference.

Monster Fodder: Any NPC hired by the party for the sole purpose of drawing enemy attacks.

Monty Haul Campaign: Any game campaign where the party is allowed to haul off unbelievable amounts of treasure with no regard to game balance.

Monty Python Syndrome: In a fantasy game campaign, it is inevitable that one player or another will make numerous references to *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* or some other Monty Python work. ("It's only a flesh wound"; "Let's not go to Camelot — 'tis a silly place"; and "No one expects the Spanish Inquisition!") are the most common such outbursts.)

Mundane: Slang for any non-gamer.

Pinch Hitter: Any player who temporarily plays the PC of an absent player.

Pocket Doc: Any NPC hired for the sole purpose of rendering medical attention to the party during an adventure.

Porthos Rule: Any NPC opponent who laughs good-naturedly during a duel, bar or street fight will end up being the party's friend.

Power Gamer: Any player whose main goal in the game is to acquire as much power and treasure as possible for his PC.

Protection from Hygiene, 10' Radius: Closely related to the Miss Haversham Syndrome, this is when the party will apparently go weeks or even months without attending to personal hygiene. For example, no PC, when entering a huge dungeon complex, will ever pack along soap or a toothbrush.

Rescue the Princess: By far the most commonly overused plot in all of gamedom, this is where the PCs are required to rescue someone who was

kidnaped and is being held against his or her will in a hard-to-reach and heavily guarded stronghold.

Retroactive Relationship Device: A plot device used by game designers to get the party into an adventure by introducing, and then immediately killing, an NPC who was a friend or romantic interest of a PC at some time during the past.

Right-Hand Bias Rule: On any dungeon map, the majority of the "good stuff" to be found by PCs will usually be on the right-hand side of the map.

Romantic Foil: Any NPC romantic interest of a PC.

Rubber Suit Syndrome: In science-fiction games, the tendency of GMs and players to portray aliens both physically and psychologically as 20th-century Americans in rubber suits instead of non-humans from strange worlds, divergent evolutionary paths, and unique cultures.

Rules Lawyer: Any player who insists that the game be played precisely according to the published rules with no deviations, and who constantly points out rule inconsistencies to the GM.

Scotty Special: In modern-day and science fiction campaigns, the ability of a mechanically-inclined PC to whip up some ingenious device not anticipated by the GM that solves all of the party's immediate problems.

Signature Style: Every major game company has at least one distinctive creative emphasis that distinguishes it from the competition. (For instance, TSR's polish, White Wolf's gloominess, GDW's ultra-realism, Chaosium's elegance, etc.)

Snooky-Wookums Syndrome: The phenomenon of the PC of the GM's girlfriend always getting the neatest magic items and/or the best role-playing encounters during a game session.

SOP: 1. n. Any Standard Operational Procedure the party establishes to deal with a familiar, recurring situation, like checking for traps at a locked door or scanning a star system. 2. v. The act of using a SOP. ("I'm going to SOP the treasure chest, Bob.")

Spectral Janitor Phenomenon: The corridors and rooms in a dungeon will always be mysteriously clean and free from organic detritus, despite the presence of dozens of unintelligent wandering monsters and no bathrooms.

Spidey Sense Rule: Whenever the DM states that a PC gets a "bad feeling" when the party enters a room or area, it is a good bet that something very, very awful is about to happen.

Spit and Polish Rule: Upon entering any tavern in a RPG adventure, the bartender will always be seen polishing glasses.

Stand-In: Any PC created as a contingency in case the player's primary PC dies.

Starry-Eyed Rule: Every gaming group has at least one member who hopes to be a professional

science-fiction writer, fantasy artist, or game designer.

Stock NPC: A generic or stereotyped NPC (the slinky, seductive villainess or the grim, cynical veteran, for example).

Strange Bedfellows Game: Any RPG that combines two disparate genres; FASA's *Shadowrun* (cyberpunk and fantasy) and GDW's *Space: 1889* (space opera and victorian), for example.

Stupid Wish Syndrome: No PC will ever use a Wish in his possession to its fullest possible potential. (The only character from any source who ever has is, of course, Jafar from Disney's *Aladdin*: "I wish to be the most powerful sorcerer in the world!")

Teenage Girl Rule: Any recurring teenage female NPC in a campaign will eventually develop a crush on a male PC.

Thesaurus Rex: Any character who has an unnecessarily complicated and ultra-colorful name. ("Theodora Beliza Illusia Starkiller Twilightbane of Phantasia Forest the Third.")

Tolkein Effect: The tendency of game designers to capitalize every other word to make a game's background sound grand and lofty. ("The Emperor Star of Whales used the Spiral Staircase of Cormeer to conquer the Hoary High Dragon Lords of Sludge.")

Troubled Crown Rule: Any benevolent monarch the PCs know personally will always have a) an attractive daughter of marriagable age, b) an impetuous son, or c) a scheming advisor.

Twin Peaks Syndrome: 1. The substitution of an unrelated collection of weird, compulsive, or psychotic behaviors in place of real characterization in PCs and NPCs. 2. The proliferation of such NPCs in a game world to the exclusion of all other types of characters.

Villain's Monologue: A hold-over from movies and comic books, the point in an adventure during which the main villain will stupidly reveal all of his plans to the captured or otherwise seemingly-helpless PCs, giving the party time to think of a way out.

Waldorf: Any PC who is allowed to reach ludicrous levels of power in a campaign.

Walk-On: Any NPC who has only minor interactions with the PCs. (e.g. shopowners, barkeepers, bowling partners, etc.)

Wire Head: Any avid cyberpunk gamer.

Wish Fulfillment Syndrome: This is the phenomenon of PCs performing outrageous or incongruent actions in a campaign in order to fulfill the fantasies of the persons playing them. (A paladin and a dwarf forming a rock band, for instance.)

Z-R Rule: Most made-up character names will either have a Z, an R, or both in them. ("Zalon," "Rallod," "Zeron," etc.)

Jonas Clay.

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Volcanic Gas

Lights: The party have been sent to a town (or hired by the local villagers) to investigate a mysterious monster which is killing livestock, wild animals, and — more recently — people. It leaves no marks on its victims and leaves their bodies untouched out in the wood.

Camera: The village has many farms and they surround a large area of woodland. During the last couple of weeks, livestock that had wandered away from the grazing fields into the woodlands have been found dead, with not a mark on them. The villagers have also found dead foxes and rabbits in the area. Two farmers whose cattle had been killed decided to keep an overnight vigil in the area — but they didn't return the next day, and their bodies were found in the same condition as the animals. They looked as if they had been strangled, but there were no marks on their necks. The party can also find out there was a large earth tremor and appalling roar about a month ago; the people are blaming a supernatural creature (probably a dragon) for it and they think it is to blame for the deaths. The villagers are too afraid to go near the woodland and they want the party to kill the monster for them.

Action: The earth tremor and roar was not a monster at all, but rather a small fissure in the earth that has opened up. The fissure is less than a foot wide and looks like a deep crack in a rocky outcrop in the woodland area. It is, however, very deep and every couple of days, usually early in the morning, it spews forth a small cloud of poisonous invisible gas that chokes anything in the immediate vicinity. People or animals caught in the cloud will become sleepy and short of breath and after a couple of minutes eventually fall unconscious and die. Animals don't realize what is happening and the two men were caught by it when they were asleep. It is a heavy gas and stays close to the ground; people can escape it by getting out of its area of effect (for example by holding their breath and running out of the gas cloud, or by going

above it by climbing a tree). The gas dissipates about an hour after its release, leaving dead animals and a puzzling problem. The answer is to avoid the area around the fissure or to seal it up.

Tonia Walden

Good Intentions

Lights: The PCs encounter a slave wagon with guards on a lightly traveled road. The slave wagon has one prisoner, a pathetic old man who pleads for help.

Camera: If the PCs free the old man, he will be very grateful. He begs the PCs to protect him and see him safely to his home village, and will promise them a small reward. He will seem very wimpy and pathetic.

Action: The "poor old man" is a powerful necromancer who was discovered and captured by the villagers. The "slavers" were mercenary guards hired by the village to take the old man to prison, the local lord's dungeon, or whatever. The old man only wants to get back to the village to get revenge, and his spellbook that he had to hide in the local cemetery.

When they arrive at the village, the old man sends the PCs to the tavern so he can visit his poor departed wife in the cemetery. While he is left alone he will get his spellbook and start raising the dead to destroy the village. The players will end up having to defend the town from the army of undead, and from the old man who finally shows his true colors. The villagers will treat the PCs like heroes for saving them, but the players had better hope that nobody finds out how the old man got back to town.

Scott Meredith

The Good Samaritan

Lights: One of the party members is in prison. Every prisoner has his own cell. This is a big city,



Lights, Camera, Action!

well organized, with strong internal security. They are very efficient at capturing crooks (or disaster-prone player characters). In fact, this prison always has 100% occupancy.

Camera: A small creature (gnome, goblin, etc) tries to pay the character's bail, but the guards won't take the money; there's no bail in this town. The gnome leaves, but comes back with more money. The guards won't have anything to do with the ugly, strange brute, who keeps returning with more and more money for the bail. They simply don't trust it. The gnome eventually gives up (at this point, he has a whole cartful of loot) but he returns in the middle of the night, breaks in and tries to kill the player character! If the character survives, the gnome will try to escape, only to return the next night and the next....

Action: A group of these grubby little creatures has discovered that an ancient, very powerful artifact is lying buried beneath a particular cell in the prison. They need to get the character out of the cell (by paying his bail, or killing him) so that the cell will be empty, and they can get one of their own kind arrested and locked in that same cell. Then, they can dig up the artifact without anyone else seeing.

Alex Strang

The Shipment

Lights: Cyber-PCs order some new guns from their friendly neighborhood black market arms dealer.

Camera: When they go to his hidden warehouse to pick up their orders, they find him nervous and apologetic. The truck carrying their orders has been delayed. He makes a show of calling to check its ETA, and phones into the middle of a fire fight. Gathered around his cell phone, the PCs hear the clatter of automatic weapons and a panicked description of the attackers. Then the phone goes dead.

Action: The shipment was worth many thousands of dollars, and the dealer will give the PCs a generous cut if they can get it back. He recognized the hijackers as one of two violent but ill-equipped gangs known to operate nearby, and can give the PCs some clues to start their investigation. Meanwhile, the hijackers use the stolen weapons in a mass attack on their rivals. A major gang war follows. Since PCs and gang leaders have similar tastes in guns, the PCs are likely to end up on the wrong end of their selections. (The rest of the shipment is ammunition and common weapons that will not affect game balance, even if PCs keep them.) The climax might involve a

three-way firefight and a truck full of ammunition....

Fredrich Passow

Things Are Seldom What They Seem

Lights: A young local lord hires the party to kill a monster that is attacking his men. The beast is said to be a large bear with blood red eyes, who rends people and horses limb from limb.

Camera: The party will hear many stories about the beast and will find tracks near supposed attack spots — it is indeed a large creature with huge claws. However, they will notice peculiar differences in the versions of stories about the beast. The lord is indifferent and just wants the nuisance dealt with. In the version of the story his soldiers tell, the beast seems to get and more horrific, but they lack the evidence of any terrible battle wounds. The villagers are tight lipped, hostile and don't want to talk to the party, because they are seen as being the "lord's men". If the party can somehow gain the villagers' trust, they can find out the lord is cruel: he imposes heavy taxes even when crops have been poor, he takes local children as servants and treats them unkindly and his soldiers are little more than thugs — and the villagers can display bruises and broken limbs to prove their stories. There is also a local legend the village wise woman can tell them, about a spirit that used to protect the village in times of need many years ago.

Action: The monster is Paul Lippenstock, one of the villagers who recently moved back to the village with his mother. He is a were-bear, and gained this hereditary type of lycanthropy from his father. His mother used to live in the town but moved away when she met his father. He has good control over his changes and, being a bear, he mainly subsists on a vegetarian diet. He returned to the village with his mother after hearing his grandfather had died; they were horrified to see what the new lord was doing to the people, so they are arranging ambushes of the lord's men to try and stop their brutality. Paul tries not to deliberately kill and maim, he just tries to scare the men and horses away. The lord's men are really a cowardly lot, which is why they exaggerate the details of the battles to make them seem much worse than they were. Hopefully the characters can solve the mystery without killing the bear and may even want to join sides with him.

Tonia Walden





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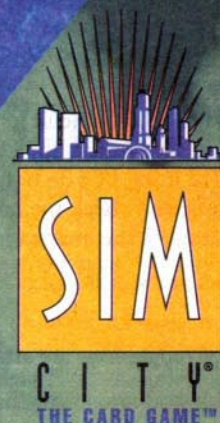
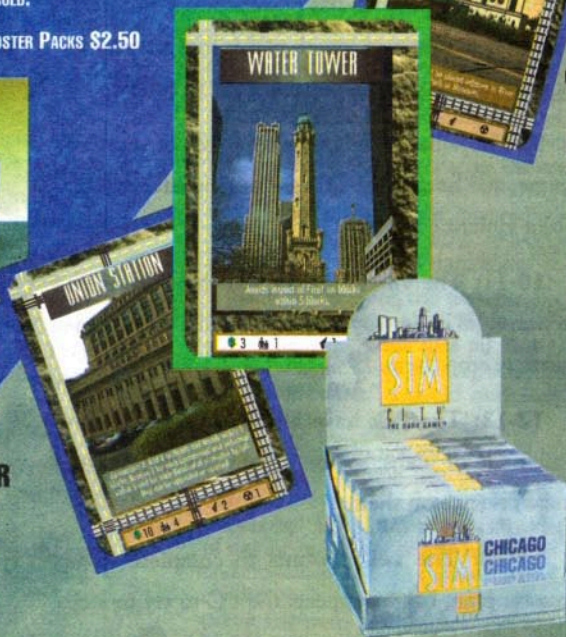
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THE EDGE

NEWS, REVIEWS, AND MORE...

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NAVIGATING THE EDGE



Check it out!



Matt Staroscik was
here.



Pay attention, there
may be a quiz.



John Wick was
here.

THIS AND THAT



As you may have noticed, this month's *Shadis* is chock full of *Star Wars* stuff. We really didn't feel we could present a *Star Wars* issue, however, without talking a little bit about what it all meant to us.

For people of our generation in particular (twenty to thirty or thereabouts), *Star Wars* is more than just a good movie. It's helped us to define who we are, giving us a sense of legitimate wonder in an otherwise ironic and jaded culture. That means a lot of things to a lot of different people, and the full impact of the trilogy can't really be summed up in a space this short, but we thought that one recollection might help put it in perspective, and understand just how important it is to us.

When you're eight years old, Luke Skywalker isn't the whiny, snot-nosed dork that more mature eyes see him as. To an eight-year old, he's The Hero, the defender of all that is Right. He is the distillation of the bright happiness of the universe. He stands stalwart against Bad People, he defends the weak from those who would oppress them. Luke Skywalker is everything you want to be, everything you *hope* you can be. And when you're eight, you spend your life in dead certainty that he will one day defeat the forces of evil.

In *The Empire Strikes Back*, he got even cooler than he was in *Star Wars*. He was training to be a Jedi now, with a little green guy who sounded like Grover and dispensed some of the deepest wisdom a second-grader will ever hear. He showed Luke how to move things with his mind, how to fix problems like the X-wing sinking into a bog, and how to take Darth Vader's head off if he had to. When his friends all got caught by Vader, you *knew* he was going to go after them, to save them from all the Bad Things that that black helmet represented. With Yoda's wisdom, the strength of righteousness and his newfound Jedi skills, he marched off to finally vanquish the Dark Side...

And promptly got his ass kicked.

Vader stood up to Luke and tossed him aside with ridiculous ease. You sat there and watched him get beaten around like a crash test dummy for a full fifteen minutes before Vader clipped his sword arm and brought the pathetic contest to an end.

It got worse. Vader didn't seem content

merely to defeat Luke. He wanted Luke to join him, to leave all that was Good and help him crush everyone beneath him. And the reason he gave was far worse than whatever you could imagine: he claimed that Luke was his son.

You and your friends debated the legitimacy of that for the next three years, but deep down, in the core of your breast, you understood that Vader *wasn't* just playing some cheap trick. There was a connection between the two of them, and the prospect of joining the Dark Side was a very real one. Our Hero seemed helpless in the face of this evil, unable to overcome it, in danger of being utterly damned by it.

Oh sure, he *escaped*. He leapt down that deep shaft away from Vader and was eventually rescued by his friends. But as you watched him there, dangling on that weather vane beneath Cloud City, you knew that that terrible temptation was there. The Dark Side was *not* destined to crumble; sometimes it even beat the good guys, or worse, destroyed everything they represented. Perhaps Luke *should* have died right there, before those awful promises Vader made could come true.

That was the only time I've ever cried at the movies.

Bb Vandy

CONTEST ERRATA
IN ISSUE 26, WE
ERRONEOUSLY
PRINTED THE
DEADLINE OF OUR
"CAN YOU HEAR THE
CALL OF CTHULHU?"
CONTEST AS JULY 1.
THE ACTUAL
DEADLINE IS AUGUST
1, AND WE WILL BE
ANNOUNCING THE
WINNERS IN ISSUE 30.
ENTRIES MUST BE
POSTMARKED BY
AUGUST 1 TO BE
CONSIDERED. WE
APOLOGIZE FOR THE
CONFUSION THIS MAY
HAVE CAUSED.

CONTEST NEWS
WE STILL DON'T HAVE A WINNER FOR THE
DUNGEON CRAWL CONTEST - SO WE'LL
GIVE YOU A HINT: THE BOXING RING IS
QUITE AUTHENTIC.

THE LONGER IT TAKES TO GET A WINNER,
THE BIGGER THE PILE OF PRIZES GETS. IF
YOU ALREADY MAILED IN A RESPONSE,
FEEL FREE TO TRY AGAIN. GOOD LUCK!

ON ANOTHER TOPIC, WE'RE CALLING OFF
THE RAT RACE. OUR DISTRIBUTION IS SUCH
THAT IT'S NOT FAIR TO AWARD A PRIZE TO
THE FIRST READER TO RESPOND TO A
CONTEST. CONGRATS TO ALL THE PAST
WINNERS, AND DON'T WORRY - WE'LL
STILL HAVE CONTESTS FOR YOU...



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anything else?*

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BY LESTER SMITH

WEASEL GAMES #5

WEASELS IN ROLE-PLAYING

A couple of years ago, as my first "public" discussion of weasel gaming, I was invited to talk about weasel gaming with a number of people on the GENie® bulletin board. Given that my focus for this column was to be board games, naturally it struck me as significant that these gamers came to the discussion assuming that I would be writing about weasel *role-players*. Even months later, after several columns were in print — each about board games — attendees of the Weasel Games seminar at GEN CON® game fair steered the conversation to the subject of weasels in role-playing. Now, I've never really been one for caving into peer pressure, but neither do I greatly admire the carp for swimming up rapids to spawn. For the next few months then, at least, let me discuss weasel play in RPGs.

NATURAL SELECTION IN ACTION

When faced with a frustratingly troublesome individual — such as a condescending waiter, or a motorist with a Napoleon complex — my last boss used to say, "Most problems in Nature are self-correcting." That thought has consoled me through a considerable number of trying events over the years, from run-ins with mind-numbingly literal bureaucrats, to conversations with the occasional swell-headed "pro" who seemed to view fans as a lower form of

life suited only for giving him worship. It has gotten me through some tense role-playing sessions with some real weasels, as well, I have to admit.

Most of us have played a role-playing adventure or two with an individual who just didn't seem to get the point that this is a *group* activity. You know the type: a person who apparently believes that everyone else is there for his or her personal enjoyment. And that enjoyment typically consists of causing the most havoc possible, making life a nightmare for the other players in general, and the game master in particular.

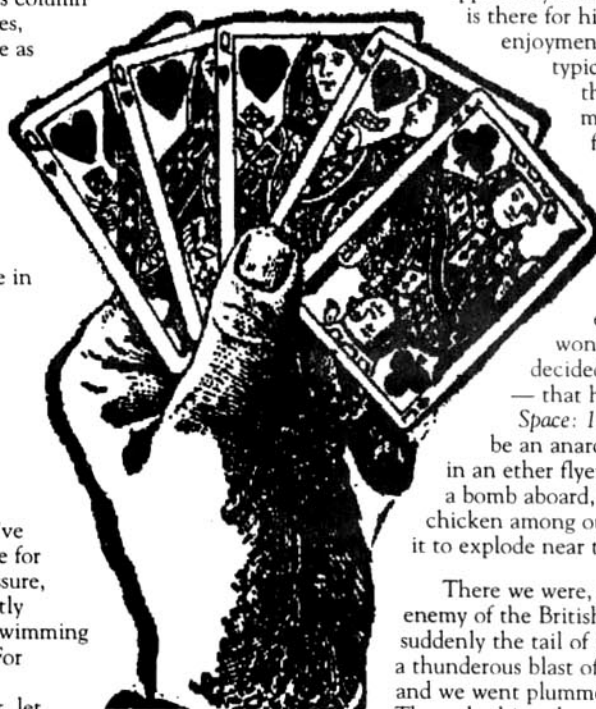
HOISTED ON HIS OWN PETARD

I recall, for example, an otherwise wonderful friend who decided — secretly, of course — that his character in our *Space: 1889* campaign would be an anarchist. On our first flight in an ether flyer, the character carried a bomb aboard, hidden in a roast chicken among our provisions, and left it to explode near the ship's tail.

There we were, in hot pursuit of an enemy of the British Empire, when suddenly the tail of the ship disappeared in a thunderous blast of shrapnel and smoke, and we went plummeting to the ground.

The only thing that made this otherwise frustratingly unexpected event satisfying was that all of us survived the crash, except for the anarchist.

During the course of the adventure, the rest of us had all been puzzled at his frenzied behavior. It began with his sudden attempt to get into the ship's cabin — thwarted by my character, a reformed criminal turned personal servant, who wouldn't let anyone in there with the pilot, his master. A bit later, when we crippled the "villain's ship" (which turned out to



be a decoy), and grappled it, the anarchist "bravely" led the charge onto its deck — only to discover that it was burning too badly to remain in the air, and we would have to cut it loose. There followed a desperate attempt on his part to clamber back up one of the grappling ropes (he was no great shakes as a climber), cut short when he began laughing maniacally and just let go of the rope, plunging to his death. The bomb exploded bare seconds later, beside the doorway where his grappling line had been moored.

In retrospect, we realized that the character's actions had all been designed to get him away from his own bomb. That each attempt was thwarted had a satisfying sense of irony, casting his performance as a comedy of errors. But it was still a self-absorbed manner of playing, and we didn't invite that player to continue with the campaign.

SOME NEVER LEARN

An old issue of the *Different Worlds* magazine had a one-panel cartoon in which a GM tells a group of players something to the effect of, "You've been crawling across the desert for days now. Your food is gone. Your water is gone. You've long since abandoned your armor and weapons. Suddenly, a score of lizard men in mail leap up from under the sand and level pikes at you, shouting 'Surrender or Die!' What do you do?" And one of the players cries, "I kick sand in their faces!" while the others gape at him in stunned disbelief.

I knew such a fellow. Near the beginning of one campaign, while we all still had fledgling characters, his PC spit on the boot of a mounted captain leading a dozen mounted guards, all because the captain was curt in asking us what we were doing on the King's road. After the guards horse-whipped the PC into unconsciousness, the rest of our characters all apologized to the captain profusely — hoping not to be damned by association — and promised to teach their friend some manners. But as the campaign went on, he continued to offend nearly every NPC we met, and antagonized the rest of us as well. Finally, unable

to stand it any longer, one of us challenged him to a duel and — despite all mathematical probability — was killed. Two more PCs quickly followed suit, in both challenge and death, with the unruly player gloating at his luck.

Disgusted, the GM had the character banished to the wastelands and ended the campaign, never to run another. Of course, the rest of us made a point of not inviting the player to any of our later campaigns.

WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

The worst case of this sort of weaseling I've ever hear of involves a group of players who, when the D&D® game first came out, would roll up new characters, adventure through a dungeon, return to the surface, then fight to the death over who got to take all the treasure. The next week, all those whose characters had died would roll up new ones to go along with the "experienced" PC, battle through a dungeon, return to the surface, and again fight to the death for all the treasure — making sure to gang up on last week's survivor first, to do away with his experience advantage. The end result was that the group adventured week after week, with no one ever getting beyond second level of experience.

Wow. What fun.

Obviously, these are all examples of how *not* to weasel in RPGs. But I believe there are ways to weasel that can actually enhance role-playing sessions. That's the topic for the next few months' columns.

**WE'RE PLEASED TO
ANNOUNCE THAT MR.
WEASEL HIMSELF WILL BE
ASSISTING IN TRAVELLER'S
REBIRTH! FOR MORE
INFORMATION, CHECK OUT
THE INDUSTRY NEWS ON
PAGE 70 (JUST AROUND THE
CORNER)!**

GAMING INDUSTRY NEWS & PRODUCT ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE SHADIS STAFF

FINDING THE ULTIMATE UNKNOWN

"Slick" is not a word that springs to mind upon reading *The Ultimate Unknown*, a relatively new quarterly sci-fi & horror zine. While it doesn't tickle the eye, it stimulates the brain with one hundred pages of fiction, poetry, zine reviews, columns, and convention reports. Subscriptions are \$14, and single issues are \$4. Send checks to Combs Publishing, PO Box 219, Steamwood IL 60107-0219.

A NEW NEW HOME FOR EVERWAY

Looks like Pagan Publishing isn't going to be picking up *Everway*. Newcomer Rubicon will be taking the reins of the Jonathan Tweet game. Mr. Tweet will join the Rubicon Games' Board of Directors, allowing him an active role in the development of the game. *Magic: The Gathering* artist Amy Weber, Rubicon Games' new Art Director, will guide the visual presentation of all future *Everway* products. (Right. Now that it's got another home, when do we start seeing all those great support materials!?)

MAGIC GETS A QUICK START

Wizards of the Coast has announced a distinctly different line of *Magic: The Gathering* playing card decks this summer. In July, the game manufacturer will introduce the MTG Quick Start set, one that's ideal for teaching new people how to play the game.

DEADLANDS COMES TO LIFE

Deadlands, a new role-playing game by Pinnacle Entertainment Group is making a whole lot of noise. With a nifty Brom poster/cover and a whole lot of very interesting perspective on the Western genre, everyone here is curious to get a peek at it. *Deadlands* promises to be the role-playing game of "the weird west," crossing the border between horror and the western. For a very scholarly opinion why the western has not done well in RPG's, be sure to check out Rob Vaux's *Into the Sunset* in issue #20.5.

KINDRED: THE CANCELLED

Unfortunately, *Kindred: The Embraced* has been removed from Fox's schedule. While gamers can make endless arguments about the show's level of quality and its faithfulness to the original material (*Vampire: The Masquerade*) it was the first role-playing game to make a prime time slot. Rumor has it the first episode had the highest ratings of any Spelling series ever, but Fox still decided to dump it. But fans of the show should take heart! Remember what happened after the demise of *Star Trek*, *Cagney & Lacey* and *Forever Knight*. All of those shows were resurrected after tons of fan mail demanded their return. If you feel so inclined, get your pens and stamps ready and start writing.

THE RE-BIRTH OF TRAVELLER!

Imperium Games has announced that it will be releasing Marc Miller's *Traveller* at Gen-Con 96. Under the watchful eyes of *Traveller*'s creator, Marc Miller, this new edition brings together a truly stellar design team. Lester W. Smith (the "W" stands for "weasel") will be developing the system, TSR's *Dark Sun* designer Tim Brown will be working on alien and xeno-culture, Greg Porter (of *Macho Women With Guns* fame) will be working on vehicles and equipment, Don Perrin (who designed *Star of the Guardians* and *Wing Commander* CCGs) will be designing ship layout and construction, Larry Elmore (if you don't know ...) will be doing interior art and Chris Foss (the fellow who designed the starships for *Alien*) will be doing art as well. Ken (*Mutazoid*, *Wizards*) Whitman will be responsible for the business side of things. Sounds like quite a team.

WHITE WOLF TAKES ITS FANS TO ARCADIA

Arcadia: The Wyld Hunt is scheduled to be released sometime this year and promises to be a very different CCG, indeed. Players will take the role of a character travelling through the land of the Tuatha de Dannon (that's Færie Folk, folks). There will be no Starter Decks — just Character Packs and Story Packs — and designer Mike Tinney promises that you can play the game for just \$5 (one of each of those above mentioned packs, it would seem). White Wolf veterans Mark Rein•Hagen and Joshua Gabriel Timbrook were also on the design team.

A NEW HOPE IS COMING

Decipher Games has announced the publications of its first expansion set for the *Star Wars* CCG. A *New Hope* is scheduled to his stores on July 1st, and contains 162 cards, all focusing on the characters and events in the first film. Fans of the game will finally get a chance to include such perennial favorites as Chewbacca and the Death Star in their decks.

OOPS!
We printed the wrong address for Archon Gaming (publishers of *Noir*) in Shadis #25. The correct address is 6 Headwater Cove, Barrington, IL 60010. Their phone number is (847) 381-2245.

We also omitted the address for Pagan Publishing in our spread last issue. You can reach them at 4542 18th Ave NE #4, Seattle WA 98105-4232. (paganpub@aol.com)

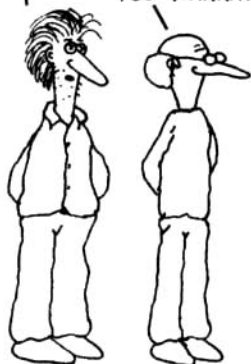
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WEIRD PETE'S BASEMENT SPECIAL

WEIRD PETE was holding out on KODT fans everywhere! KODT #1 has been sold out for months, but stingy ol' Pete was hoarding 25 copies in the basement of his gameshop. Fortunately, Pete lost his shirt by over-purchasing cases of SPELLJACKED™ cards and needs to pay the rent.

The first 25 respondents to this offer will receive 1st print-run issues of KODT #1, #2 and #3!! As a bonus, you can request to have your issues signed by the artist. Only \$15.00!

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Product: KODT-2001



IN THE TRENCHES

LESSON FIVE:

"I CAN'T GET NO SPECULATION"

BY BRYAN WINTER
(DOOMTROOP @ AOL.COM)

BEGINNING THIS ISSUE, WE'LL BE RUNNING IN THE TRENCHES AND PLAYS WELL WITH OTHERS ON ALTERNATE MONTHS.

IN THE TRENCHES IS A MONTHLY ARTICLE DEDICATED TO THE GAME RETAILER. EACH COLUMN WILL PROVIDE READERS WITH METHODS TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, STORE APPEARANCE, SALES TECHNIQUES, AND PROFITS! BRYAN WINTER IS THE DESIGNER OF THE DOOMTROOPER AND KULT CARD GAMES, AMONG OTHER PRODUCTS, AND HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN GAMING FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS. HIS OPINIONS ABOUT RETAILING AND THE CURRENT GAME MARKET ARE HIS ALONE, AND NOT THOSE OF SHADIS MAGAZINE OR ITS PROPRIETORS.

Remember when you were a kid and some wise guy abused your trust by teaching you a new card game called 52-Card Pickup? And after the fun was over, do you remember picking up those 52 cards and knowing that you would never fall for that trick again? Well, you may be falling for it right now.

Between my years as a retailer and a designer, I worked for a major comic, game and trading card distributor. There was a word that shifted among us Product Managers: speculation. It was born in the Trading Card division, then it moved to Comics, and then it moved to Games. And everywhere that word travelled, it made our heart heavy and left a mound of unpaid accounts and closed stores in its wake.

The meaning of speculation is simple: pure, unadulterated greed. The "collectability" of a game has become as important than the game itself. It's the nature of the beast, and there is nothing wrong with it. What is wrong, however, is that manufacturers, distributors, retailers and even consumers are falling for the old 52-Card Pickup all over again.

Instead of sitting back and enjoying the money-making potential of normal sales techniques, stores are only concerned with getting rich off of these products, and they are throwing all business sense out the window. I've seen speculation destroy the trading card industry. Then I watched speculation kill the comic industry. And now I sit and stare as history repeats itself for a third time. It's time to realize that you *will not* get rich off CCGs, but if you start making smart business decisions, you can make a hell of a profit.

But this is not happening. I see games that sell enormous numbers when compared to the other games in the store, but because their sales numbers are not on par with those of *Magic* or *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*, they are branded as "losers". If you compare your sales of a "loser" to your sales of a standard AD&D module, you may find that you have a tremendous winner on your hands!

It is time for CCG manufacturers, distributors and retailers to start treating these products as *games* and stop treating them as *commodities*. There is a lot of stuff out there.

Here are a few things you can do to stop speculation from driving you out of business. Let your competitor make the mistakes; you'll still solvent when he has gone under.

1) Don't bet the farm. This is so simple yet so difficult. We all know that when the *X-Files* CCG ships, it will sell like hotcakes. You are all going to want to fill your shelves with this product. Don't. Take pre-orders, and buy a little over those orders. If the game is popular, then it will stay around. If it isn't, you'll have boxes sitting on your shelves.

2) Don't plan for allocation. If you need 10 boxes of the new *X-Files* CCG, and you think you're going to get allocated, don't order 20 boxes. Just order what you need. If you get allocated, then you will probably be able to get more later.

3) There is no Sure Thing. Just because a company has a lot of consumer awareness and advertising dollars doesn't mean they can make a good game. Never assume great artwork will guarantee you a great game. You cannot be sure until you actually get a chance to play the game.

4) Advocate quality. If a game is good, let your customers know about it! Sure, some just want complete sets of the latest licensed game, but most of them want something fun to *play*. They can't afford to weed out the garbage, but they sure will be happy to give you their money if you help them along.

5) Discourage speculation in your customers. This one is really important. *Nobody* is going to get rich from a set of game cards, not even *Magic* cards. The secondary market is so transparent I can see five states through it. Price lists are worth less than the paper on which they are printed. It's time for it to go away before it drives your customers and you out of business. Remember, this has already happened with trading cards and comics!

6) There will never be another *Magic*. Accept it, because it is just not going to happen. Not even WOTC will be able to top themselves. And before you start listening to a company or magazine tell you "this game could be the next *Magic*," remember all those RPGs that promised "this game could be the next AD&D."



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DRAGONLANCE: THE FIFTH AGE

ROLEPLAYING WITH TSR'S NEW "SAGA" SYSTEM

- PUBLISHED BY TSR, INC.
- WRITTEN BY WILLIAM W. CONNORS
- 128P RULEBOOK, 96P WORLDBOOK, 48P ADVENTURE, COLOR MAP, 82 FATE CARDS, 18 CHARACTER CARDS
- \$25.00
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCK

SCHEDULED FOR
SEPTEMBER
RELEASE, THE
"SAGA" RULES
SYSTEM IS
TOTALLY UNLIKE
ANY TSR
PRODUCT YOU'VE
EVER SEEN.
SHADIS HAS THE
INSIDE STORY.

OK, I know what you're thinking — because I was thinking it too. "An RPG run with cards. From TSR. Ooh. Pinch me." I'll admit I was less than enthusiastic upon receiving my preview copy of the upcoming *Dragonlance: The Fifth Age* RPG. But, not being one to make snap judgements, I decided to give the "SAGA" rules system a chance. Let me tell you, I am glad I did. *D:T5A* has a lot going for it.

The game mechanics are dirt simple, and revolve around the 82-card Fate Deck as well as the GM's creativity. Each card has a portrait of a character from the *Dragonlance* world, one or more of their personality traits, a suit, descriptive text, and a value from 1 to 10. Cards also have color codes and an "aura," which is something like a "good, neutral, evil" rating. Even though the cards have *Dragonlance* characters on them, any fantasy fan should feel right at home with them.

Now that you've got a handle on the deck, let's look at creating a character. Each player is given 12 cards, and they must decide how to allocate their values among their character's stats. Besides Strength, Endurance, Agility, and the other physical and mental stats you'd expect to find, you also have to assign values to your Wealth & Social Status, Quests (starting level), Nature, and Demeanor. Nature and Demeanor are personality stats, and as such aren't numeric; you use the traits that appear on each Fate Card to assign these values.

Personally, I didn't like being confined to choosing my character's personality in this way. I'd rather be dealt 10 cards and choose my Nature and Demeanor on my own. Fortunately that kind of free thinking is encouraged in the SAGA System. The rules are constantly helping you to find new, imaginative ways of using the cards, which is a nice change from the lockstep of AD&D.

Each of the nine suits in the deck corresponds to one of the physical or mental character stats, except for the suit of Dragons, which is something like a suit of jokers. The trick to character creation is to spend Dragon cards on things where suit doesn't matter, like Wealth & Social Status or Quests. You also want to try and match card suits to stat suits as closely as possible. For example, the suit that corresponds to Strength is Swords; it's best if you can assign a

Swords card to your character's Strength stat. If you can't, try to at least use a card whose suit relates to another physical stat, like Helms or Arrows. Using a mental stat suit like Orbs to buy Strength will limit your character's abilities. Based on how closely the suits match, each stat gets a "code" of A, B, C, D, or X, in addition to the card's numerical value. High codes indicate ability to use a larger variety of weapons, armor, spells, and whatnot. I hope you're sitting comfortably, because it gets weirder.

There are no character classes. There are also no skills. Everything you do is based on your character's stats. For example, if you have a high Reason code, you can use sorcery; you don't have to forsake your armor and sword for it, either. Your character's level is equal to the number of adventures ("Quests") they have completed. The more Quests you have under your belt, the more cards you can keep in your hand, which brings us to the next topic — task resolution.

When a character tries to do something, like pick a lock, the Narrator secretly determines a difficulty rating for the task. The player then bids a card from their hand. If the sum of the card bid and the relevant stat (Dexterity for picking a lock) meets or exceeds the Narrator's target number, the task succeeds. If the total isn't high enough you fail, and if you fail after having bid a Dragon card you can have an unpleasant mishap. In any case, you immediately draw a card to replace the one you bid.

To make things more interesting, if the player bids a card of the same suit as the action's relevant stat (such as Swords for a Strength action, like bashing in a door), they get to draw the top card off the deck and add that to the total. Also, some actions are "opposed," which means that the opponent's relevant defense stat is added to the base difficulty. Combat is conducted as a series of opposed actions of different sorts. (If players try to spend cards on silly actions to "load" their hand for a future combat, the Narrator is encouraged to make them draw off the top of the deck until they knock it off.)

You might be wondering how this could possibly be less like AD&D. I've got two words for you — "spell points." Say goodbye to traditional magic-users, clerics, spell lists and memorization, and say hello to improvised spells. The improvisation rules are well-done, being neither too strict nor too ambiguous. This is one of the best parts of the game.

As you can see, the SAGA System is a huge departure from TSR's usual fare. It's worth a look even if you aren't familiar with the *Dragonlance* novels, so don't shy away on that count. My only real complaint is that there isn't any kind of skill system; I don't think adding a simple one would have bogged down the game's graceful mechanics. That aside, this is a top-notch, innovative product, and I hope it catches on.

REVIEW

REALITY CHECK

It's time to set the record straight on more than a few things, which is why we're running *Reality Check*. The first topic we'll put our sights on is the wide, wide world of guns. We can't cover everything in one page but we'll try to give you the basics and then give you some ideas on what it all means to your games.

HOW THEY WORK

All modern firearms operates on the same basic principle. A cylindrical case (usually brass) holds a quantity of gunpowder. A bullet is crammed into the top of the case, where it makes a tight seal. The other end of the case has a small hole, where a primer is inserted. This assembly of powder, case, bullet, and primer — called a cartridge, not a bullet — is what is loaded into the firing chamber of a weapon. (We'll talk about caseless ammo and energy weapons some other time, I promise.)

The user pulls the trigger, which causes a firing pin to sharply strike the primer. The primer is a tiny metal button filled with a shock-sensitive explosive,

another cartridge into firing position. Revolvers are unique in that the "magazine" (the cylinder) is also the firing chamber.

LET'S KILL OFF SOME MYTHS

Movies and TV shows are rife with things that simply Don't Happen, or Don't Happen Often. Let's look at some.

1. **Guns go off when you drop them.** Well, OK, it can happen. It is in fact quite possible with shotguns, old bolt-action rifles, revolvers, and older semiauto pistols — if there's a round chambered. However, most modern semiauto pistols, like S&Ws, Glocks, HKs, and SIG-Sauers don't have this problem. Due to how they're constructed, unless you've pulled the trigger, they simply can't discharge. These kind of weapons are called "drop-safe." If you're playing a sci-fi game, it's safe to assume that virtually all firearms (except revolvers) are drop-safe.

2. **Your gun is gonna jam.** Again, it can

REALITY CHECK

like mercury fulminate. When the firing pin hits it, it causes a tiny explosion, and the gasses are vented up into the case, where the gunpowder is. The gunpowder ignites, and because it's confined, another explosion results. The gases from the burning gunpowder expand rapidly and the bullet is forced out of the barrel at a very high speed.

Once the bullet is on its merry way, things start to get complicated. If the recoil or gases from firing are used to work a mechanism that kicks out the empty case and loads another one, you've got a *semiautomatic* weapon. It'll fire each time you pull the trigger. When it's out of ammo, you put in a fresh magazine. A *fully automatic* weapon will not only load a new cartridge for you, it'll fire it too if you keep the trigger down. Most states will not let you own a fully-automatic weapon. Weapons that can switch from semiauto to fully auto are called select-fire. Some even have a 2 or 3-round burst option.

Simpler firearms will require the user to work a pump or lever to pop out the spent cartridge and chamber a fresh one — you've seen Arnie in *Terminator 2* do this. Most shotguns work this way, though there are semi- and fully-automatic ones. Someone with a good semi-auto shotgun can empty the magazine before the first empty shell has hit the ground!

Pistols work the same way. Some are semi-automatic, with 10-30 round detachable magazines, like Bruce Willis' Beretta 9mm in the *Die Hard* movies. (There are fully-automatic versions of some pistols, too.) Others are revolvers, which hold about 5-9 shots (depending on the caliber). Each time you squeeze the trigger, the cylinder rotates to bring

happen. But as the years march on, guns get more reliable. If your players have cheap guns, let 'em jam according to the rules. But if they buy name-brand weapons, jams should be *extremely* rare unless the weapon is dirty, damaged, or firing questionable ammo. Incidentally, bad technique, like holding your gun sideways or not keeping your wrist stiff, can also cause jams in semiauto pistols.

In the old days, jams were a lot more common. The *Call of Cthulhu* 1920s rules have it about right. But cut 'em some slack nowadays.

3. **Firing while underwater is a really good idea.** It's a really *bad* idea. Water is almost incompressible. When all that water tries to get out of the way of a bullet coming down the barrel, you get problems. The barrel can get a bulge and it might even explode. Best case: damaged gun. Worst case: damaged or dead user.

4. **This Honda will provide excellent cover.** Wrong. The thin sheet metal and plastic car panels are made of today offer scant protection. They'll help soak up small-caliber pistol fire, but if anyone's lobbing shotgun slugs or assault rifle rounds your way you better get behind the engine.

5. **Gunshot wounds fling you across the room.** Another Hollywood-ism, this. You can get spun around or knocked down from a hit, but you won't get launched through the air.

6. **Bulletproof vests.** Inexpensive Kevlar vests are only good at stopping handgun and light rifle rounds, and the impact will take you down gasping. Anything beyond a .44 mag. will punch through cheap armor.... You have been warned.

 Reality Check is a new, irregularly appearing column dedicated to giving you what you need to make your games more realistic. We'll try to dispel myths, and give you the lowdown on everything from armor-piercing rounds, to castle construction, to superluminal travel... because someone has to set the record straight. If there's a topic you'd like us to cover, drop us a line at shadis2@aol.com or send us some snail mail. This month, our resident shootist (Matt Staroscik) takes a long hard look at heaters.

HAVARD

THIS MONTH, OUR SUBSCRIPTION OFFER FEATURES THE *STAR WARS RPG*. SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1987, IT HAS GONE THROUGH TWO EDITIONS AND SPAWNED AN EVER-GROWING NUMBER OF SOURCEBOOKS – ABOUT WHAT YOU'D EXPECT FROM A GAME BASED ON THE GOD-KING OF PRODUCT MERCHANDIZING. WE STUCK THE JOB OF REVIEWING IT TO OUR ASSISTANT EDITOR, ROB VAUX.

In an essay entitled *Luke Skywalker is a Nerd and Darth Vader Sucks Runny Eggs*, Harlan Ellison had the guts to admit he was less than thrilled with the *Star Wars* phenomenon. Recounting stories of Lucas-fixated vandals, friends who never left the theaters and hordes of mindless sci-fi drones chanting "May the Force Be With You" *ad nauseum*, Ellison dared to voice contempt for a film that the entire country was worshipping like a pagan god. While he eventually reversed gears with the release of *The Empire Strikes Back*, the shocking precedent he set remains unchanged; the man ripped apart George Lucas's masterpiece and wasn't a bit sorry about it.

That essay has more than tangential bearing here. For while twenty years have passed since that galaxy far, far away first appeared on the silver screen, the fervor over it has never really abated. *Star Wars* has touched everyone on the planet some way, somehow, and now stands as one of the definitive shared experiences of our time. So when it came time for *The Edge* to publish a review of West End's *Star Wars: The RPG* — a now-classic system that countless gamers are familiar with — Ellison's essay serves as a bulwark to keep us all from diving lemming-like into fawning adulation.

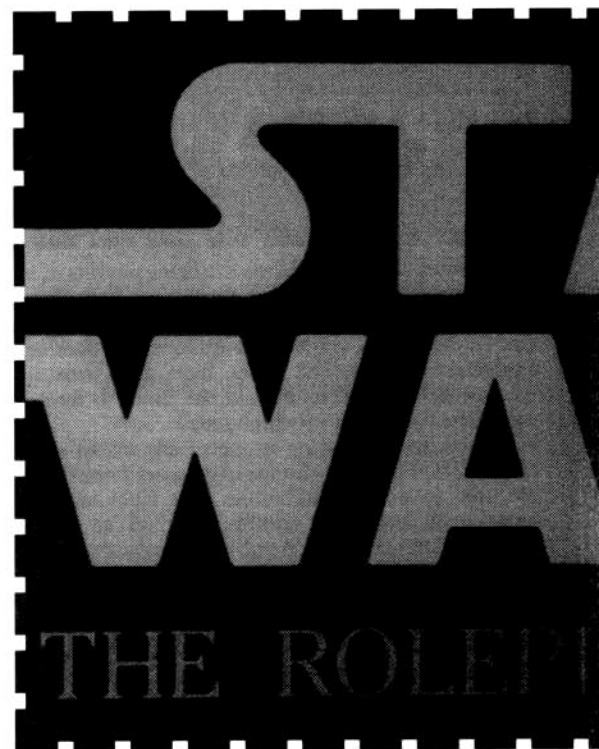
After all, how can one possibly review the cultural touchstone of our time? What can one say about it that hasn't already been said? How can one express a valid opinion without either toadying up to the Lucas juggernaut, or risking the wrath of countless millions who love the films like their own children?

Luckily, *Star Wars* the RPG isn't *Star Wars* the film series. It's merely a licensed product, one of thousands that have come out in the last twenty years. One can feasibly express contempt for it without being dragged into the street and flayed alive. Nevertheless, it still has the awesome mystique of its namesake behind it, and one invariably hesitates before condemning anything

that might have connections to The Films. But with Ellison's precedent in mind, and the fact that the role-playing game is *not* the movies close at hand, we can hopefully bring ourselves to look at SW:TRPG with some kind of emotional detachment. Here then, is an objective, fact-finding analysis of West End's flagship product...

This game rocks.

West End has taken Lucas's beloved creation and done justice to it in both word and spirit. They've created a fast-paced, easy to play RPG that emphasizes character development and player fun, while keeping intact the subtle, mythical reverberations that make the story so powerful. They caught the films' lightning and put



it in a box for us to buy, and we can thank God that they did it all with style.

Players portray members of the Rebel Alliance, fighting desperately against the evil Galactic Empire. From that basic description, a staggering variety of character options can arise: you can be a hardened smuggler, a broken-down Jedi, any one of a hundred alien races, or even a droid. The only stipulation is that you must be a Rebel; from there, the sky's the limit. West End has done a terrific job of bringing the diversity of the *Star Wars* universe to life, and more

importantly, making it available to the players. That weird looking thing in the corner of the Creature Cantina? You can play him. The bizarre ship parked next to the *Millennium Falcon*? You can have that. Anything that doesn't get covered in the basic rulebook is handled in one of a slew of sourcebooks, guidebooks and supplements; there isn't a single facet of the *Star Wars* universe they haven't covered. Races, technology and background story material from the beginning of the rebellion to the victorious New Republic are provided in rich detail, allowing players plenty of material for their favorite aliens or techno-toys.

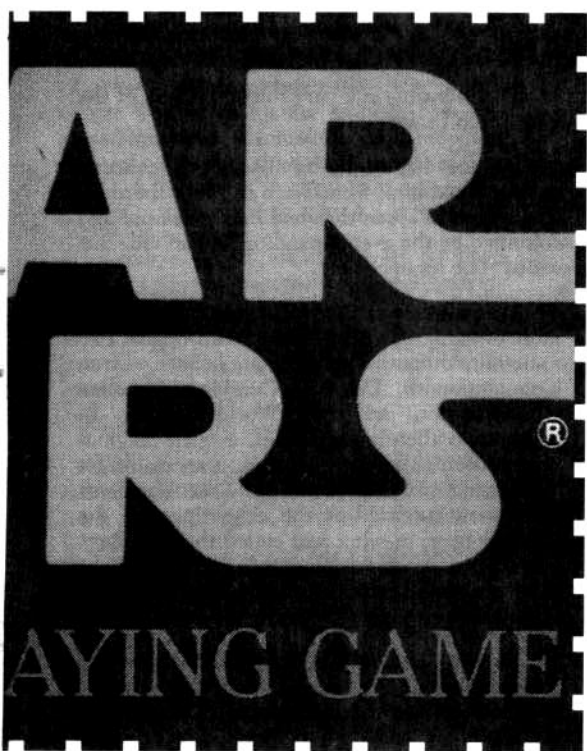
The system is a bit clunky, but has some major pluses. Success rolls are based on attribute dice, rolled against a difficulty number. The better you are at something, the more dice you get to roll,

effective score for a given roll. Everyone starts the game with Force points, although only specific, "Force sensitive" characters (i.e. Jedi) can have more than five. Those particular characters can eventually do the kinds of things with the Force that you see in the movies — lifting ships out of bogs, using your lightsaber in breathtakingly cool ways, carrying little green guys on your back for hours on end, etc. But like the movies, you can't misuse the Force without a price. You gain "Dark Force" points by doing evil things with the Force; too many Dark Force points and you become an agent of evil — which is, of course, majorly uncool.

Ironically, the biggest drawback to the *Star Wars* system is that it remains constantly in the shadow of its parent material. Players can't really portray Han, Luke or any of the rest of the characters from the films, yet anyone else they roll up runs the risk of playing second fiddle ("Yeah, stealing those access codes was pretty important, I guess. But not as important as blowing up the Death Star; we never get to do that..."). A glut of supplemental sourcebooks focusing on Luke & Co. in their various stages of development emphasizes this considerably, and unless players are careful, they'll develop a serious inferiority complex within the space of a few sessions.

However, clever GMs can circumvent the problem by emphasizing the interconnectedness of the Rebellion and how the player's missions tie into that. That prototype TIE fighter the characters destroy might have eventually blown the *Millennium Falcon* from out of the sky. That Admiral they kidnap might have shown up to turn the tide at the Battle of Endor. Everything the characters do is a step that ensures the Empire is just a little weaker than it might have been, and a good *Star Wars* GM can make sure the players understand that. West End has helped by publishing a bunch of *other* supplements that shy away from the derring-do of the film's principal characters. The *Dark Stryder* campaign, for example, focuses on a group of characters who have little or nothing to do with Lucas's principals. The looming presence of the films is always there, but with a little effort, it can be circumvented.

Star Wars is currently undergoing a big marketing push in anticipation of its re-release next year. Which makes it the perfect time to discover or re-discover this gem of a game. Fast, fun and crammed full of Lucas-essence, *Star Wars: the RPG* is something that even the most jaded player can enjoy. It's almost a pity it wasn't around earlier — then maybe Harlan wouldn't have bitched so much.



and so on. Combat is resolved through a few quick rolls of the dice, and vehicle checks run much the same way. That speed is one of the strongest parts of the game, allowing the fast-paced action of the movies to translate easily into a role-playing setting. It also prevents the game from getting bogged down in mechanics, bringing the focus back to characters and storytelling — which, after all, is what *Star Wars* is all about.

And oh yes, lest we forget, there is the Force. Characters are permitted a certain amount of "Force points" which allow you to double your

REVIEW

THIS MONTH, KEN TAKES A LOOK AT AN "EVOLUTION OF A MILIEU," THAT MEANS HE'S GOING TO TELL US ALL ABOUT THE BIRTH, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORLD OF BATTLETECH.

BY KEN CARPENTER

CASTING CALL:

Everyone in our hobby has seen gaming milieus originate from movies, books, or even ancient legends. It's commonplace to see a hit movie in the fall and be buying its role-playing counterpart the next spring or summer. It's much more rare, however, to see a successful series of books, popular role-playing game, or an highly acclaimed animated series based on a miniatures game. In fact, it's only happened once that I'm aware of.

BattleTech began as a relatively simple miniatures game inspired by some very successful anime (then called japanimation). The system was simple enough, and the genre popular enough, to attract a whole new breed of miniatures gamer – players who didn't want to study Napoleonic history or know the names of the officers involved in Pickett's Charge in order to get involved.

As a new miniatures game, it had the advantage of using huge, powerful BattleMechs – 6+ meter tall monsters of metal powered by fusion reactors and armed like a battalion of 20th century tanks. Now, in what other game could you play with high-tech, futuristic weapons of war such as these?

BattleTech's simple mechanics revolved entirely around a two 6-sided die system. Players didn't need dozens of charts and a myriad of dice in differing geomorphic shapes. A couple of dice and a terrain map pretty much got you going, since the game even included cardboard counters to represent 'mechs.

Because a system using 2d6 produces random numbers along a bell curve, small modifiers for attacker and target movement, as well as terrain, have a big impact on targeting numbers. Essentially, the system is a very simple yet elegant set of mechanics that requires few tables while providing a realistic (using the term loosely) feel. The randomness is there, but by playing the law of averages there are less arbitrary occurrences than in most miniatures games.

But that still doesn't explain how this miniatures game developed into a full blown

milieu, complete with books and video games! So what made BattleTech different? The background. While the initial setting was simplistic and seemed two-dimensional, FASA corporation locked the game onto a time-line and recruited authors to generate fiction. In no time at all the milieu began to expand and increase in depth.

The following is a very rough synopsis of the BattleTech background:

By the beginning of the 28th century, mankind had leapt from Terra and into the stars. The region of space that had been explored and colonized by the ever-expanding human race was called 'The Inner Sphere.'

Through centuries of bickering and struggles, most of mankind had polarized into one of five societies/cultures: The Federated Suns, Lyran Commonwealth, Draconis Combine, Capellan Confederation, and Free Worlds League. In addition to these great houses, a quasi-religious organization called ComStar was responsible for all high-speed communications. Other fragments of humanity existed at the very fringes of the Inner Sphere, in what was called the Periphery, but they were too young and impotent to be involved in the political machinations and maneuvering going on between the great houses.

Despite the centuries of enmity between the five houses, one man was able to unite them in purpose to create what was called the Star League, uniting all of mankind for the first time in its history. The Star League brought with it prosperity and peace the likes of which mankind had never known. Unfortunately, the Star League lasted less than a century before a violent death at the hands of a treacherous power-monger.

The armies of the Star League destroyed the armies of the usurper and his rebellion was crushed, but the damage had been done. The First Lord of the Star League and his entire bloodline had been killed. Without a rallying point, the leader of each of the five houses laid claim to the Star League throne – and each was willing to go to war to pursue that claim.

FUTURE WARS IS AN UNSANCTIONED BATTLETECH FANZINE. WE RECENTLY RECEIVED ISSUE #37, AND FOUND 54 PAGES OF NEW 'MECH DESIGNS AND QUALITY ARTICLES ON ALL BT TOPICS. SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE \$24 FOR 6 ISSUES. SEND YOUR CHECK TO HERB BARENTS, 17187 WILDEMERE, DETROIT, MI 48221. THE SINGLE ISSUE PRICE IS \$4.50. ALL BT NUTS SHOULD CHECK IT OUT.

"ALL 'BOUT BT*"

BY KEN CARPENTER

Rather than become embroiled in a civil war that could easily mean the end of mankind, General Kerensky, leader of the Star League army, marshalled his forces and left the Inner Sphere for unknown space.

Over the next three centuries, mankind, led by the five houses, fought three Succession Wars. Each Succession War pushed human technology further back, destroying precious factories, research centers, and killing the great minds of the time. By the year 3025, hundreds of years worth of technological advancement had been lost.

Mankind was able to cling to some critical technology, such as jump ships and battlemechs. The jump ships, with their FTL (faster than light) drives, allowed interstellar travel to continue. The battlemechs allowed warfare to continue.

That's where the time-line began when the game was released. As the game grew in popularity, each of the great houses were better defined in their own sourcebooks, and BattleTech novels began to pour out. The books introduced gamers and SF fans to the first of many now-renowned units, such as the Grey Death Legion and the Northwind Highlanders. In fact, BattleTech novels have been the driving force behind most of the advances in the game, such as advanced Inner Sphere and Clan technologies.

Books by Mike Stackpole, one of FASA's most prolific writers, have wrought incredible changes in the BattleTech universe, such as the Fourth Succession War in which the Lyran Commonwealth joined with the Federated Suns, through a diplomatic marriage, to form the Federated Commonwealth. The F-C then turned its attention to the Capellan Confederation and Draconis Combine, taking hundreds of worlds from each during the war.

The end of the Fourth Succession War heralded great changes in the political make up of the Inner Sphere: leaders grew old and began to look to their heirs for the future, borders shifted, and new political entities came into being, many having broken away from oppressive masters to

form independent states.

As the time-line marched on, the Inner Sphere came under attack by a new enemy (called the Clans) from outside known space. By the time the Inner Sphere could respond, the enemy had gobbled up a large chunk of Inner Sphere space, including pieces of the Federated Commonwealth's Lyran space and the Draconis Combine.

With the Inner Sphere unable to stop the Clan juggernaut, ComStar revealed itself to be more than it had seemed. Though the leaders of the Inner Sphere had known ComStar to possess military forces in some small numbers, ComStar actually possessed many times more than they suspected.

ComStar won a fifteen year truce from the clans by defeating them in a series of battles on the world of Tukayyid, but that was hardly the end of troubles for the Inner Sphere. The Federated Commonwealth is being torn apart by political maneuvering, the Draconis Combine has a new Coordinator but is still reeling from the damage sustained during the Clan invasion, and the ruler of the Free Worlds League may marry his daughter and only heir to the ruler of the Capellan Confederation, who is plotting against virtually everyone.

With his latest book, **Malicious Intent**, Michael Stackpole twists the reader's mind with shocking revelations of intrigue and tons of action. Even if you aren't a fan of BattleTech, any SF fan will enjoy the BattleTech series of books.

Look around a hobby store now and you will see dozens of products for the miniatures game, from extra map sets to scenario books, to Ral Partha miniatures. However, you will also see loads of role-playing adventure books, computer software, Sega and Nintendo games, comic books, and other assorted products. It's staggering.

We won't even get into the highly acclaimed animated series, really bad toys by Tyco, talk about a major motion picture, virtual reality centers featuring BattleTech simulators, or the impending WotC deckmaster card game based on BattleTech.

* "That's
Battletech,
son!"

STORIES

BY KEN CARPENTER

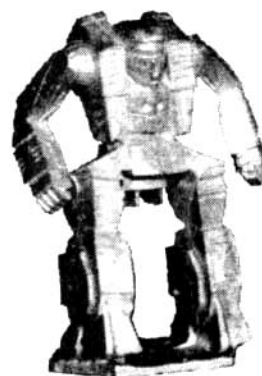
CASTING CALL

AS TECHNOLOGY MARCHES ON, INNER SPHERE 'MECHS BECOME MORE AND MORE DEADLY. UNFORTUNATELY, SO DO THE CLAN MECHS...

BUT THE INNER SPHERE IS CATCHING UP. HERE ARE SOME GREAT RAL PARTHA 'MECHS FROM THE LATEST TECHNICAL READOUTS!

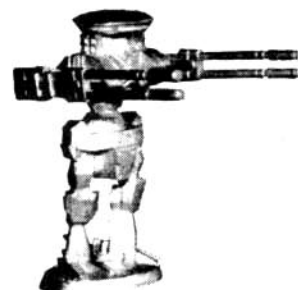
20-656 APOLLO \$5.75
SCULPTOR: ROBERT KYDE

WITH 2 LRM-155 AND 4 TONS OF AMMO, THE APOLLO CAN REALLY KEEP UP THE PRESSURE FROM LONG RANGE. ROBERT IS A RELATIVELY NEW SCULPTOR BUT HIS WORK IS WONDERFUL.



20-791 RIFLEMAN IIC \$6.25
SCULPTOR: JEFF WILHELM

AN INNER SPHERE REFIT, THE CLANS KNEW WHAT THEY WERE DOING WHEN THEY SLAPPED ON 4 (COUNT 'EM - FOUR) LARGE PULSE LASERS AND ENOUGH HEAT SINKS TO FIRE THEM ALL. ADD 105 METER JUMP CAPABILITY TO THAT AND YOU'VE GOT ONE SCARY SECOND LINE 'MECH!



20-661 VIXEN \$4.95
SCULPTOR: CHRIS ATKINS

HEAVILY ARMED FOR ITS SIZE, THE VIXEN CAN TOSS 24 POINTS IN LARGE AND MEDIUM LASERS AT YOU. THOUGH LIGHTLY ARMORED, WITH A RUNNING SPEED OF 14 THE VIXEN IS ANYTHING BUT AN EASY TARGET.



CASTING CALL

BY KEN CARPENTER



20-665 SLUNDER \$8.25
SCULPTOR: CHRIS ATKINS

WITH THREE CONFIGURATIONS TO CHOOSE FROM, THE 90 TON SLUNDER CAN BE FITTED FOR SHORT RANGE, LONG RANGE, OR AS A COMMAND CENTER FOR TWO LANCES OF SLAVE UNITS.



20-666 GRIZZLY \$6.25
SCULPTOR: JEFF WILHELM

WITH RESPECTABLE FIREPOWER AND FORMIDABLE ARMOR, THE GRIZZLY'S BIG SURPRISE COMES WHEN IT JUMPS ALL OF ITS 70 TONS OVER YOUR HEAD AND FIRES A GAUSS RIFLE INTO YOUR BACK. CAN YOU SAY 'ENGINE CRIT'?

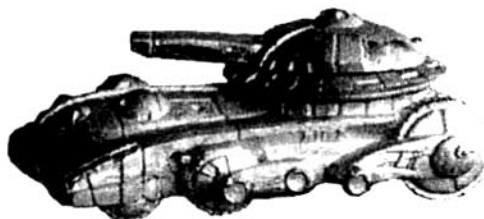
20-660 KODIAK \$7.50
SCULPTOR: JEFF WILHELM

IF YOU LET THIS 100 TON BEHEMOTH GET NEAR YOU, YOU DESERVE THE 130 POINTS OF DAMAGE THE KODIAK CAN UNLEASH IN A SINGLE TURN - THOUGH HEAT PROBLEMS MAY PERSUADE IT TO GO EASY ON YOU.



20-667 TOKUGAWA HEAVY TANK (2 EACH) \$7.25
SCULPTOR: JEFF WILHELM

WITH MODERATE FIREPOWER, GOOD ARMOR, AND TONS OF AMMO, THE TOKUGAWA CAN STAY IN THE FIGHT FOR A LONG TIME.



MINIATURES

ONCE UPON A TIME

- A STORYTELLING GAME
- PUBLISHED BY ATLAS GAMES
- CREATED BY RICHARD LAMBERT, ANDREW RILSTONE AND JAMES WALLIS
- 2ND EDITION ART BY FLORENCE MAGNIN AND SOPHIE MOUNIER
- \$35.95
- REVIEWED BY JIM PINTO

"Once upon a time, there was a game..."

No, that won't do.

"Long ago, in a distant land, there was a king that loved to play -"

Argh! Too corny.

Okay here we go.

"A long time ago, in a galaxy -"

No, no, no! That's been done. Besides, we don't want a lawsuit.

Okay, last try.

"Once upon a time there was a really great game that these guys made because they thought the game was fun to play and they didn't expect to make a million dollars selling it and I think you should play it because it is fun and you will never tire of all of the variations that the game has to offer and with new art and some new clear rules the second edition is even better and everyone knows that I would never lie to you about a game because I like to play good games too and I wouldn't want to steer you in the wrong direction and besides it's a card game and it can't be all that bad. Right?"

Whew...

Once Upon a Time is a card game. Actually, if you love any kind of storytelling, either role-playing or otherwise, there is no other card game to play. Both the first and second editions of this game are superb. Atlas Games devised one of the greatest card game ideas ever. Once Upon a Time is designed to allow players to create a coherent (eh?) and fun fairy tale. Each player takes on the role of a narrator or story-teller and you each have your own objective. The deck of cards comes with characters, items, events, places, and aspects, each attributing something to the story. A character card, for instance, may say 'mother' or 'father' or 'king', but that is merely a guideline; a King can be a father and a leader of mushrooms may be defined as a King, if his followers deem it so.

The rules (in the second edition) are straightforward and liberal. Something like, "If the players determine that a card play is silly, than the player must draw two cards and pass to the left." This sort of rule rarely shows up in any

kind of game, let alone a card game, but in *Once Upon a Time* the players are the final arbitrators of what is "okay." And what evening with your friends would be complete if you weren't able to interrupt one another? Well, in *Once Upon a Time*, not only do the rules tell you how to do it, but they recommend strategies for when and how you should do it. And if someone is taking too long telling their story, you can call 'em on it. Nothing bonds us together better than that.

In *Once Upon a Time*, the rulebook walks you through the different aspects of play, and shows you how cards can be used. Just a few simple guidelines to remember. Only one card per sentence. Only if the item or character is serving a purpose in the story may the card be played. Keep it fun... and interesting.

How do you win you ask? Well, I'll tell you. In *Once Upon a Time*, each player has a "Happily Ever After" card that they must play in order to finish their story. In order to play your "Happily Ever After" card, it must be the last card in your hand. However, between playing your last card and playing your "Happily Ever After" card, there can be no sentences, story, additions, pauses or anything else. A word or two may be interjected in order to complete the thought, but that is it. If you can do that, you win the game.

By the way, as soon as the other players find out what kind of story you are trying to finish, I guarantee they will screw it up for you. So try to be a little stealthy about your choices.

I can't recommend this game any higher. It's definitely a keeper.



ONCE UPON A

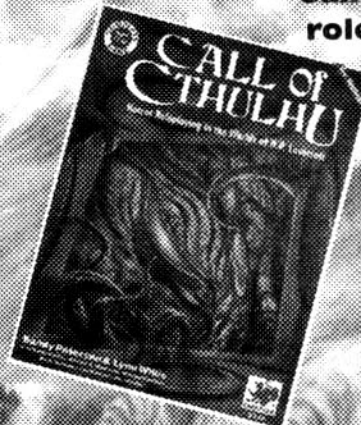
TIME IS A GAME FOR FAERIE
TALE FANATICS EVERYWHERE



MYTHOSTM

by Chaosium Inc.

Chaosium's Cthulhu Cycle fiction presents many of the the original stories of the Cthulhu Mythos on which the *Mythos* cardgame is based, as well as many new stories by modern authors.



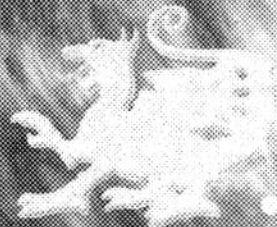
Call of Cthulhu is Chaosium's award winning roleplaying game, based on the works of H.P. Lovecraft, in which ordinary people are confronted by the terrifying beings and forces of the Cthulhu Mythos.

For a free catalog of Chaosium's books and games, call us at 510-547-7681.

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Gibson



FENG SHUI WAS SUCH A BIG RELEASE, WE SICKED OUR MAIN-STAY REVIEWER KEVIN JONES ON IT. BUT TO GIVE IT A BIT OF A TWIST, WE ALSO SLIPPED A COPY TO NEWCOMER JAMES MACDUFF. BOY, DID THEY HAVE A LOT TO SAY.

With all of role-playing's focus on genre, with all of role-playing's focus on action, it seems odd that a role-playing game based on the *action* genre hasn't come along until now. Or, for that matter, that it took a card game to finally get it through. *Feng Shui*, based on Daedalus Games' popular *Shadowfist* CCG, takes the situations and clichés from all those cop-buddy, mystic kung-fu, chunks of violent mayhem movies and gives them a concept whereby they can come to bone-snapping life.

That out of the way, it's probably safe to say that the setting is a bit off the beaten track. Basically, there are a wide variety of conspiratory forces — some mystical, some cybernetic, some just plain sneaky — who are vying for world domination. Plotting their schemes across time and space, they battle each other for control of feng shui sites — areas designed to focus and intensify the life forces that gives the universe its power. The only thing standing in their way is the players... who can portray a wide variety of characters taken from the annals of every action movie ever made. Kung-Fu Fighters, One Man Armies, Loner Cops... they're all here, just waiting for your players to jump on board. They're tough, they're nasty, and they have what it takes to take down hundreds of faceless extras at the drop of a hat. What better group to save the world?

The generation system is fairly straightforward: players choose from a variety of basic templates (ex: The Maverick Cop), and are then encouraged to flesh out and develop them by selecting skills, schticks (keen things your character can do), and weapons unique to their person. Players must also choose melodramatic hooks — little facts about their characters that'll let the GM create adventures down the line ("Got an ex-girlfriend involved in the drug trade? Well, she's been captured by this rival gang, and suddenly Internal Affairs is all over you about it..."). Such development is not encouraged to go too far, however, since the source material for *Feng Shui* was often two-dimensional and shallow.

Skill checks and combat are resolved quickly and easily, using a pair of dice to augment a basic skill — one die adds to your skill, the other subtracts from it, and sixes are rerolled. Add to that various schticks like Both Guns Blazing and Carnival of Carnage and you've got a system that runs quickly and effectively — but not very

realistically. These are action characters, after all, and all those nit-picky little details that drive physics majors nuts are alive and well in here. Players don't need to reload. Any NPC without a name has an average life span of about two seconds. Shotguns cause more damage if the player makes a "cu-CHIK!" sound before firing. All of it makes for a lot of fun during play, and players can have a real blast trying to one-up each other with cheesy clichés... but those searching for fastidious accuracy and stark naturalism had better look elsewhere.



That, however, is one of the strengths of the game. Most RPGs based heavily around combat strive for some kind of realism in their system. Even *Warhammer 40K* has viable explanations for why some of their stuff does the horrifying stuff that it does. *Feng Shui* comes from a different cut of cloth. The designers knew that their system was ludicrous, and that's exactly what they wanted. It's goofy, it's preposterous, it makes no sense in terms of the real world, and it makes you *love* every minute of it.

Feng Shui is not a great game for people who want intricate complexities and deep-set character development in their campaigns. It is a great game for those who don't mind playing fast and loose with the rules, for those who aren't concerned about being deadly serious, and for those who just like to blow away faceless thugs by the truckload. Taken in moderation, such a game can be a lot of fun, and a refreshing break for older, more serious campaigns. After all, that's what action films are for, aren't they?

JAMES MACDUFF

It was like synchronicity. Just a couple of months ago, a guy in the AEG office let me borrow a copy of *The Killer*, a film directed by a fellow named John Woo. I had never heard of Mr. Woo before, but the guy was pretty enthusiastic about the young director's skills, so I decided to give it a try.

Wow.

Watching *The Killer* was like a spiritual awakening. It was an action film unlike any other I'd ever seen. It had tense drama, an intriguing

(actions) and gives bonuses if they do! It even encourages the GM not to penalize extra actions if the other players whisper "Cool ..." after another player gets finished describing his stunt for the turn. As far as duplicating the fantastic flare that action heroes take on the screen, the game is peerless.

However, *Feng Shui* is not the western action film RPG — it is the Hong Kong action film RPG, and that means magic and mysticism. There's demons and sorcery and cross-time conspiracies trying to acquire the sources of life energy on earth (the "feng shui sites" that players of *Shadowfist* will be all too familiar with). Just like the combat system, the magic system is quick and easy to use. The system also includes "kung fu paths" that martial artists can follow that really capture the feel of those old '70s kung fu films my uncle and cousin used to watch when I was younger. Paths your martial artist can follow include: The Path of Shadow's Companion, The Path of the Sharpened Scales, The Path of the Tightening Coils and (my personal favorite) The Path of the Empty Bottle, along with about ten others.

While the Fighting and Magic rules fit perfectly within the genre, I felt a little put off by the inclusion of the factions from the

future. In fact, if I run a *Feng Shui* game, I'll probably just ignore them. There's a beautiful section in the back of the book that details the source material of the game (including sections on John Woo, Jackie Chan and Tsui Hark [I'm still looking forward to watching these]), there are only three entries that involve films whose plot takes place in the future. While groups like The Dragons, the Eaters of the Lotus and the Four Monarchs fit the genre like a glove, the Jammers and Architects of Flesh are just a bit too out there for my tastes. I was also rather surprised that *Big Trouble in Little China* wasn't included in the list. Granted, John Carpenter and Kurt Russell have about as much in common with John Woo as Eric Lustbader has in common with Akira Kurosawa, but *Big Trouble* is a wonderful homage to the films *Feng Shui* is trying to emulate.

It's got a great cover, great color and a fun, simple system. If you're one who loves flying fists and blazing guns check out *Feng Shui*. It's a big investment (\$30!), but it's worth just about every penny.

KEVIN JONES



FENG SHUI WAS DESIGNED BY THE SAME GUY WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR A WHOLE LOT OF THE REALLY STRANGE OVER THE EDGE SOURCE MATERIAL. ROBIN D. LAWS IS THE FELLOW WHO CREATED THE CUT-UPS PROJECT EXPANSION FOR ON THE EDGE (THE CCG BASED ON THE ABOVE MENTIONED RPG) WHICH INCLUDED CARDS THAT ALLOWED YOU TO BRING CARDS FROM OTHER CCG'S INTO PLAY AND OTHERS THAT COULD NOT BE USED UNLESS YOU DEFACED THEM WITH A BLACK INDELIBLE MARKER. TO PUT IT IN KINDER WORDS: MR. LAWS HAS A VERY UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON REALITY, A HIGHLY COMMENDABLE VIRTUE IN OUR RATHER "CORRECT" DAY AND AGE.

EDGE
S



main character and lots and lots and lots of guns. Wait a minute, I don't think I emphasized that enough: There are more guns in that movie than all the Westerns that Sergio Leone ever directed put together. It was fast, furious and a whole lot of fun. All that being said, let's talk a minute about *Feng Shui*.

Feng Shui is a role-playing game designed to simulate all that action and adventure you see on the silver screen when you watch action-adventure movies (go figure). I've been looking forward to this one for a long time. I've said it in a previous review: I'm a big fan of those *Die Hard* films. Well, when it comes to guns a'firin' and fists a'flyin', *Feng Shui* does a fine job. In fact, Characters can actually *dodge* with their Guns skill! The game makes a differentiation between Nameless Characters and Named Characters, making Named Characters stand up to insurmountable damage, while Nameless Characters get thwacked like chaffs of wheat. If you're a Named Character, no nameless mook is going to touch you. You can sit and reload forever while the mooks unload entire clips your way. Then, you can calmly take both pistols in your highly trained fists and blow all of them away in a single turn. The game system encourages players to vividly and dramatically explain their "stunts"

Lost



TWILIGHT: 2000 (Rob Vaux)

Okay, admittedly there was a lot to be happy about when the Cold War came to an end. But the passing of this wonderful game wasn't one of them. Produced in the days of Ronald Reagan and the Evil Empire, GDW's *Twilight: 2000* produces a chillingly plausible scenario for World War III. NATO and the Soviet Union clash over the attempted reunification of Germany, and all Hell follows in their wake. The nuclear exchange of 1997 brings civilization to a grinding halt, and three years later, the world enters a new Dark Age. Players portray a squad of U.S. soldiers stranded behind enemy lines, forced to survive among the warlords, bandits, loyal army units and refugees of southern Poland. A series of sequential modules moves the action through the chaos of Europe back home to America, where military and civilian governments struggle for control of the nation alongside an eerily accurate White Supremacist movement...

The system for *Twilight: 2000* was praised upon its release for its realism and military accuracy. Character creation followed a straightforward format of die rolling, the combat system was fast paced without sacrificing too much detail, and a wealth of information on weapons, vehicles and military tactics was included. A second edition streamlined the system a great deal, using a "life path" PC generator and a greater variety of background options, as well as simplifying combat a great deal.

Unfortunately, the fall of the Evil Empire swept all things Cold War-ish under the rug, and this game went with it. Although GDW tried valiantly to roll with the historical punches (the second edition contains updates to the background), it was ultimately forced to concede the cause as lost. And it's too bad, really. There isn't much out there that can make people long for the Cold War again, but for those of you nostalgic for the days when imminent nuclear annihilation lay constantly above our heads, *Twilight: 2000* provides an excursion you won't want to miss.

SPACE: 1889 (Rob Vaux)

R. Talsorian's recent *Castle Falkenstein* line, with its steampunk fantasy and Victorian highbrow, quickly draws attention to a very similar game that appeared a few years back. *Space: 1889* takes players into the science fiction worlds of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, where spaceships fly the luminiferous ether to Mars or Venus, the British Empire expands across several worlds, and mad scientists and alien beings rub shoulders with dragoons and royal families. Players take the role of soldiers and adventurers in this brave new world, thwarting the plans of the Kaiser's agents or the canal lords of Mars while searching for fame, money, and all that other stuff that makes role-playing worthwhile.

Space: 1889 ultimately suffered under a clunky system, which remained complicated and unwieldy despite an obvious attempt to keep it simple. Several rather wretched adventure supplements — in which character was held hostage to over-plotting and players were rendered completely helpless at least once a scenario — didn't help things any. Balancing that, however, was a keen understanding of the time period in which the game was set; brief but informative passages clue players in to the political intricacies of 1889, its class system, its codes of conduct and the way alien worlds and new technology have affected all of it. The other worlds in the solar system were also unique and original, and functioned well together in a context that makes perfect sense (at least in terms of Victorian pseudo-science). And as any player of *Castle Falkenstein* will tell you, there is nothing more refreshing in today's ordnance-heavy role-playing environment than a little polish and gentility. Tired of seeing who has the biggest guns? Ever wish that space aliens lived a little closer to home? Want a science fiction setting that understands where the whole thing began? *Space: 1889* can deliver all that, and much more.

THERE ARE JUST SO MANY GREAT GAMES OUT THERE, AND SO MANY GAMERS WHO DON'T REMEMBER THEM, OR JUST NEVER GOT A CHANCE TO PLAY THEM. "LOST TREASURES" IS A SEMI-REGULAR FEATURE THAT WILL HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THOSE GAMES THAT YOU CAN ADD TO YOUR OWN PRIVATE GAMER LIBRARY FOR JUST A FEW PENNIES. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS BE WILLING TO TAKE A PEEK THROUGH THE FLEA MARKET AT YOUR LOCAL GAMING CONVENTION.

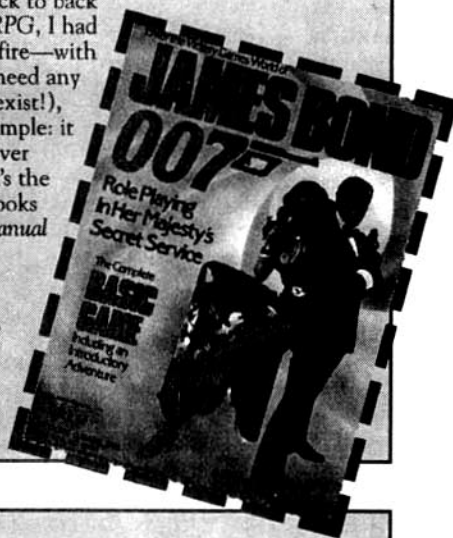


Treasures

THE JAMES BOND ROLE-PLAYING GAME

A lot of people ask me why I run games without dice. Well, it all started with the *James Bond Role-Playing Game*. You see, I was dating this girl when I was living back in St. Paul who was also a gamer and a *Mission Impossible*/*Avengers* fan (they used to run them back to back on Channel 11 on Saturday afternoon). So, when I saw the JBRPG, I had to pick it up. We spent many a long, cold evening in front of a fire—with me as the GM and her as the Agent. Sheila and me, we didn't need any dice. So when gamer couples came into the store (yes, they do exist!), I'd always refer them to the *James Bond* RPG. The system was simple: it was great for beginners and those of us who prefer storytelling over statistics. Of course, as the engineers in the office remind me, it's the guys who know statistics that make it easy to play. The sourcebooks were also a lot of fun (although not always accurate). The *Q Manual* was packed with gadgets and submarine cars, wristwatches with laser cutters and iron teeth.

So if you sit around on Saturday afternoons watching old reruns of *Mission: Impossible*, *The Avengers*, *Secret Agent* and *The Saint*, then you must go out to your local con and start digging through those used game boxes. I picked up mine for \$5.

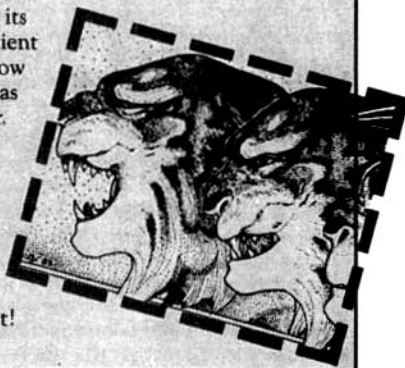


RINGWORLD RPG

This old Chaosium RPG was based on the award-winning *Ringworld* novel by renowned sci-fi author Larry Niven. This game is a must-have for any Niven fan, including such hard-to-find things as the *Hyperspace Approximations* (just how close can you safely get to a neutron star in hyperspace?), hyperdrive statistics, and diagrams of all the General Products hulls. If you know what I'm talking about, you know you want this stuff. If you *don't* have any idea what I'm talking about, let me suggest you go find some of Niven's books. I'd start with the short story collections *Crashlander* and *Tales of Known Space*, and then hit what is arguably his best novel — *Ringworld*.

The old Chaosium RPG focuses strongly on the *Ringworld* and its inhabitants, but you're given enough information on the other sentient races in *Known Space* to play them too. This is the only place I know of where you can get game stats for Kzin and Puppeteers — as well as equipment like the infamous variable knife and Slaver disintegrator. There's enough information in the game to let a Niven-savvy GM run an entire *Known Space* campaign; it's truly a pity that these books are out of print.

The only problem I had with the game was that they included some decidedly non-Niven technologies in the equipment section. Pneumo-rifle? Where did *that* come from? Still, such flaws are easily enough overlooked when there are pages of information on the *Ringworld* and all of humanity's colonies. I'm dying for a reprint!



REVIEWS

MAGE: 2ND EDITION

- PUBLISHED BY WHITE WOLF
- WRITTEN BY PHIL BRUCATO & STEWART WIECK
- \$28.00
- REVIEWED BY KEVIN JONES

I didn't like *Mage* when it first came out. I felt betrayed. If you take a look at my library, you may be able to discern the reason why. I have a whole shelf dedicated to the Order of Hermes, those lovable mages from *Ars Magica*, and when I opened that first edition of *Vampire* and saw that they planned to do a series of games, one of which was called *Mage*, I waited with bated breath for a game of modern magic involving my favorite 11th century mystical order.

Of course, that's not what I got. At first glance, I was appalled. *Ars Magica* was about power and its tempting siren song. Mages in *Ars Magica* were always on the teetering edge of corruption, constantly hearing the diabolical whispers of Hades and its minions. In *Mage*, sorcerers do battle with ... the power of Reason? What's all that about? I took it as a personal affront. I've always been a student of reason, and those boys down at White Wolf were telling me that I was evil because of it? What's up with that?

I dropped the book on my shelf and never picked it up again.

A couple of years later, I met two guys who had been playing in a *Mage* campaign for nearly two years. They loved the game and its uncompromising magic system that allowed them to turn vampires into lawn chairs and werewolves into soap bubbles. They couldn't praise the game highly enough. The clincher for me was this: one was an engineer and the other was a physicist.

So, when *Mage 2nd Edition* was released, I saw the cool cover, glanced over the haunting black and white images inside and listened to the two "Magers" talk about the revisions to the magic system that clarified all the kooky stuff that was going on in first edition, so I decided to check it out.

Well, I've still got complaints, but they ain't many. The printing of the book is beautiful. The images are stark and complement the style of the book well. Many of the factions that were

confusing and sketchy in the first book are clarified. As the designer of the first edition says at the end of the book: "*Mage First Edition* was not clean. It was not clear. The systems were not perfect... it was impossible to step far enough away from the project to see if it read clearly...." Well, it didn't, but *2nd Edition* fixed all of that.

I should also mention that *Mage* has the most open ended and imaginative magic system from any role-playing game. It forces the players to be creative. You see, in the world of *Mage*, Magi must hide their magick from reality (which is a slightly cognitive entity unto itself), so they use what is called "Coincidental Magick." Instead of throwing fire balls and lightning bolts and flying through the sky, Mages have to be a bit more clever, lest Reality sends "Paradox Demons" their way to enforce it's strict laws. A mage is probably the luckiest fella you're going to meet. Nothing ever bad happens to him. He catches all the streetlights (2 Correspondence), always has a few extra bucks in his pocket (3 Matter) and when he gets caught in a drive-by shooting (remember, we live right next to LA out here in the Shadis offices), the bullets just seem to slide right off of him (3 Life). Sure, having a power line fall on a guy isn't as sexy as lightning bolts from the heavens, but the guys is just as dead, isn't he? Figuring out such "real" ways to create the effect you want is part of the fun of the game.

While it certainly isn't "light-hearted", *Mage* is, perhaps, the most optimistic of the World of

Darkness

games. Mages seek Enlightenment (true knowledge of the nature of reality) and seek to bring humanity to "the Ascension" when every man, woman and child will realize that all of life's hindrances are illusions, tricks of the light, just smoke and mirrors. If you're familiar with the works of Richard Bach (*Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and *Illusions*) or Robert Pirsig (*Lila and Zen* and *the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*), then you'll be in familiar territory.

Now, myself, if I ever ran a *Mage* campaign, I'd probably just stick to what I know and employ the Order of Hermes. I'm not hip to the Euthanatos (mages who kill folks who aren't Enlightened enough), the Verbena (a questionable take on the whole Wicca movement), the Cult of Ecstasy (I don't want to talk about it) or the Akashic Brotherhood (these are mystics and not mages, guys). But I will look forward to turning those pesky bloodsuckers into lawn chairs - which is a 3 Matter, 4 Life, 3 Forces, 5 Prime and 3 Spirit effect, I'm told, and yes, Mr. Buffett, that does include a frosty Margarita on the side.



HOL

- BY DANIEL THRON, TODD SHAUGHNESSY, AND CHRIS ELLIOTT
- DIRT MERCHANT GAMES
- REVIEWED BY CULLEN BUNN

Hol, *Human Occupied Landfill*, from *Dirty Merchant Games* is crude, mean-spirited, and offensive — and those are some of its good points! The designers of *Hol* went out of their way to create a truly twisted, humorous, surreal, and just plain strange role-playing system which pokes fun at everything from traditional science fiction to other games to Patterson, New Jersey. This is science fiction role-playing, it claims on the back of the book, for gamers who have had a really bad day.

Hol is a tiny planet in the farthest reaches of the Confederation of Worlds (C.O.W. for short) which is not only used as an intergalactic waste dump, but as a handy place to get rid of all the psychotics who might otherwise terrorize civilized folk. The player characters are, of course, these stark-raving lunatics.

The characters are as bizarre as the world they populate. Examples of character templates in the rule book include Captain Wacky, a jester with a love of razor sharp weapons, Frank, the were-guy; and the King, for whom tabloid papers have been searching for years. (The character background for the King reads, "Whaddya want? It's Elvis.") Vital statistics break down into the attributes of Greymatta, Meat, Mouth, Feets, and Nuts. Some of the skills available to round out a character include *Repair Toasters*, *Pummeling Something With The Assistance of a Large Cannon-Shaped Object*, *That Psycho Bruce Lee Sh***, *Operating Vehicles Smaller Than Something Really Big*, and (my personal favorite) *Make Sharp Things Go Through Soft Things That Bleed & Scream*.

Game mechanics are boiled down to rolling a couple of six sided dice, adding any modifiers, and consulting the appropriate chart. Basically, the higher you roll, the better. Low rolls are bad. And the roll of snake eyes is a complete failure. Only a few pages are dedicated to game mechanics, mainly because rules are not really that important to playing *Hol*.

Hol is presented completely in a handwritten format, with lots of drawings and lots of notes (not to mention jokes and insults) scrawled in the margins. You can tell when the writers switch off by the changes in handwriting. In any other game, this would be considered a layout disaster, but in a weird way, it works quite well for *Hol* (although it may take a little getting used to).

Hol is a blast to read and many of the jokes

are laugh-out-loud funny. It is not, however, the kind of game I would get together with a bunch of friends and play. But I can see how some groups (if they are crazed and bloodthirsty and looking for a game that allows them to blow off a little steam without worrying about complex rules) would get a kick out of playing it, however. In short, *Hol* is not a game for everybody, but if you want to read something funny, and are not easily offended, you might want to check it out. It might even be the game your group has been looking for.



EVERYONE IN THE AEG OFFICE IS PRETTY CONVINCED THAT *HOL* IS NOT A ROLE-PLAYING GAME. IT DOES, HOWEVER, HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF FUN THUMBING ITS NOSE AT OTHER ROLE-PLAYING GAMES. JUST RECENTLY, *HOL* WAS PURCHASED BY WHITE WOLF FOR THEIR BLACK DOG GAME FACTORY DIVISION. A SUPPLEMENT FOR *HOL*, CALLED *BUTTERY HOLSOMENESS*, IS JUST AS MUCH OF A RIOT AS ITS PREDECESSOR.



A HOL LOT OF FUN
(BUT NOT FOR EVERYONE)
FROM DIRT MERCHANT GAMES



BE SURE TO BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR "A HOL LOT OF TROUBLE", THE MOST BIZZARRE CROSS-OVER YOU'LL EVER SEE IN THE PAGES OF SHADIS MAGAZINE! COMING SOON!

NEWS

CALIFORNIA FREE STATE

- A SOURCEBOOK FOR SHADOWRUN
- PUBLISHED BY FASA CORPORATION
- \$18.00
- REVIEWED BY JAMES MACDUFF

California Free State is the West Coast sourcebook for FASA's ultra-popular *Shadowrun* RPG. "But wait, isn't Seattle on the West Coast?" you say. Yes it is, and any player of the game will tell you how important that city is. But isn't all of the West Coast. In fact, it's only a relatively tiny part of it. *California Free State* provides information on the rest — that big chunk of real estate between Aztlan and Tir Tairngire. As you may expect, *Shadowrun*'s Cali isn't the sun 'n surf paradise of *Baywatch* and Beach Boys songs. It isn't even the smog-ridden hellhole of *Colors* and *Falling Down*. It's far, far worse than any of that.

As any Californian can attest, the state has a wide diversity of climates, territories and people. San Francisco is vastly different from L.A. and the Redwood forests of Eureka have little in common with the deserts of Palm Springs. *California Free State* has taken that diversity into account and intensified it, detailing a fragmented, hotly contested area which morphs into something entirely new every few miles. After the break-up of the United States in 2034, California issued several secession threats. The UCAS responded by kicking them out in 2036, and all hell broke loose. Now, twenty years later, the Golden State is a patchwork of free townships, corporate holdings, environmental disaster areas and a central government in Sacramento trying desperately to exhibit some sort of control.

In the North, the eco-terrorist elves of Tir Tairngire have designs on the independent townships dotting the state's remaining Redwood forests. Further south, the pro-human government in Sacramento still controls the breadbasket of the Central Valley, but remains beholden to the huge agricorps whose vested interest in the region is quite apparent. San Francisco was "liberated" by Imperial Japan in 2036, and is currently occupied as a *de facto* colony. Disgruntled metahumans and angry natives fight an ongoing guerrilla war from the uncontrolled East Bay.

The Big Sur coastline of Cali is a mess of pseudo-toxic waste-dumps, horrifically radioactive sea monsters, and bands of pirates. Los Angeles is sharply divided between the super-rich and desperately poor, as movie moguls and sim-stars live luxuriously secure from the intense squalor of the rest of the city. San Diego has long since become part of Aztlan to the south, and the Mojave desert is an expansive wasteland of powerful magics and *Road Warrior*-like nomads.

Like many *Shadowrun* supplements, *California Free State* presents its information as a futuristic on-line chat session: one particular decker will describe a given area, while numerous fellow shadowrunners chip in with their ideas, witticisms, and opinions. In terms of atmosphere, this format works very well, allowing players to quickly get a feel for the environment without getting bogged down in rules. A bare minimum of stats at the end of the book balances against over 150 pages of background, setting descriptions and flavor text. The writers have a good feel for the contrasts and diversity that the real-life California holds, and have exacerbated those characteristics admirably for their dark future setting. While the book suffers a bit in trying to convey too much information (there are six distinct sections of the entire state), enough attention is given to each area to launch a fairly solid campaign from any of them. And the sheer variety of California ensure that campaigns losing steam will be able to switch gears and keep going with a minimum of fuss.

As befits many sourcebooks, the area and the background take precedence over hard core adventure ideas. Such an emphasis requires that a GM planning to set a campaign in Cali do a little more work than might be expected. *California Free State* seems intended as an overview to provide GMs with an idea of where to go, but nothing more explicit. Someone expecting to thumb through it once and be ready to rock and roll is going to be disappointed. A working familiarity of *Shadowrun* is essential, as well as a willingness to create adventures from some very generalized background material.

That, however, is a minor quibble. While newbies may want to shy away, veteran players will have lots here to enjoy. As diverse as the state it portrays, *California Free State* has more than enough goodies to keep experienced shadowrunners sunning and surfing for quite awhile.



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FASA
CORPORATION

ORGANIZATION

The IFGS is a national organization. A central committee is responsible for maintaining the rules, as well as keeping track of sanctioned chapters. Each chapter has its own internal structure, and exists as a self-sufficient entity. My experiences were all with the West Los Angeles and Orange County chapters; I have no doubt that other chapters will have some different customs, but all chapters will play by the same set of rules.

By the way, the official web page can be found at <http://http.rap.ucar.edu/staff/brandon/ifgs/ifgs.html>.

INTERNATIONAL FANTASY

MATT STAROSCIK GOES INSIDE THE



INTERNATIONAL FANTASY GAMING SOCIETY

The International Fantasy Gaming Society is perhaps the largest live-action roleplaying group in the United States. You may have heard of them but chances are you don't know much about them — live-action roleplaying ("LARP") remains a mystery to many traditional tabletop gamers. I didn't know much about it myself until I ran into the West Los Angeles chapter of the IFGS at OrcCon 96. After talking to them for about half an hour I decided to try a game...

Right away, I learned that IFGS members are about the most dedicated roleplayers you'll ever meet. The whole organization exists so people can get into costume, get into character, and have a great time pretending to be someone else doing remarkable things. While there is combat, and plenty of it in some games, *roleplaying* remains at the core of it all. Here, you can't get away with telling the GM, "I bribe the guard." The guard is right there in front of you and you get to talk to him yourself. If you try anything funny, watch out — you might get the business end of that halberd coming your way. There's a lock on the chest, you say? Get out your thief's tools and pick it! Zombies approaching? Pull out your holy symbol and watch them cower before you.

If you're reading Shadis, chances are the setting of a typical IFGS scenario will be familiar to you. There are all the stock fantasy character classes — rangers, fighters, clerics, mages, monks, thieves, and knights — and they all work about as you'd expect them to. Clerics can turn undead, mages can cast sleep spells, rangers can track, and knights have to obey a code of honor. There is a strong traditional FRP feel to all of it.

Your character's abilities are defined by your class, level, possessions, and your own personal skill at swordplay (more on that later). There are no non-human races in the IFGS rules, and characters do not have stats for strength, intelligence, or anything else. This is not to say that characters are all clones of each other; far from it. You are encouraged to customize your character's appearance and history. If you want to play an elf, well, you're an elf — you just don't get any extra abilities because of it. Still, it's to your

advantage to create a history for your character, because you never know when the GM might incorporate part of it into the game. For example, my first character was a cleric by the name of Father Duncan Riley. Riley spent his youth on the high seas, crewing merchant ships. When my GM for "The Piper on the Hill" scenario learned about that, she gave me the ranger class's knot-tying ability, because it fit my background. If you can, find out who your GM will be ahead of time and give them a copy of your character's history. They might be able to work some of it into the game. Good roleplaying is rewarded!

Part of getting into character is costuming. Most IFGSers dress in costume when they play, and some of the costumes are quite elaborate. If, like most people, you don't happen to have access to a medieval wardrobe, don't fret. Most people build their costume a piece at a time, and people occasionally play in street clothes. What you say and do is a lot more important than how you look.

HOW GAMES ARE RUN

First, some of the more experienced people in the chapter will write the game, or borrow a game written by another chapter. They'll then take care of finding volunteers to play NPCs and fill logistic functions. They also take care of securing space to run the game. (Most games are held in public parks.) Props a-plenty are also rounded up, some of which are quite elaborate. (The second game I played was set in a tavern on a foggy moor, and the chapter rented a fog machine to create the right atmosphere. It was a nice touch.)

A rating system is used to let players know what they might be getting into. Games are given a 1-10 score in Combat, Mental, Physical, and Risk. The higher the score, the tougher the demands in that category are. To give you an idea of what to expect, a Physical rating of 6 equates to about a six-hour game, wherein you'll walk all over a huge public park. A Fighting rating of 6 means that about 60% of your encounters will require combat. A Mental rating of 6 means you'll have to do some basic investigative work and perhaps puzzle out a riddle. The Risk score is a little different, because it's a measure of the

THANKS TO EVERYONE

IN THE WEST LOS ANGELES & ORANGE COUNTY CHAPTERS OF THE IFGS, ESPECIALLY CHRIS VREM, NIKKI HANSEN, JEFF WILLIAMS, & MIKE GEIFMAN. THANKS ALSO TO JANICE MOORE, IFGS CLERK.

chance for permanent changes to your character — good or bad.

Once the organization is complete and the game date is set, a draft is held. The purpose of the draft is to let Loremasters (who are essentially team captains, chosen by the game designer) choose the members of their party. Players also pony up their game fees (which are from \$5 to \$20) at the draft. Many drafts are held with the "novice rule" in effect — this means that all the novices present must be chosen before the more experienced characters get a chance. After the draft, there might be a short team meeting, so you can meet the rest of your party and discuss strategy. This is a good chance for new players to ask all their questions and have some fun practicing combat.

In the most common kind of game, the players move around a park from encounter to encounter. The course of play can be arranged so that different teams can start with about one hour of separation. That way, 4-6 teams of about six players each can be run through a game over a weekend. Other games are not as linear and will run with more players and fewer groups. Games can be anywhere from 2-6 hours, though occasionally a chapter will run a game that lasts for an entire weekend.

While you can do most things in IFGS without refereeing, occasionally you'll need access to information only the GM has, or the GM will need to hit you with surprises. For this reason, and to monitor safety, each team on the course is accompanied by a GM. If you cast an information-gathering spell, for example, you surreptitiously ask the GM what you found. If the party triggers a trap, the GM tells them what happens. Here's an example... In the last game I was in, our thief, who was scouting out the path ahead of the party, triggered a trap. The player hit a near-invisible tripwire; when her foot pulled it, it threw a switch somewhere and something started beeping. We all thought, "Uh oh..." as the GM intoned, "A log falls on you, Nyx. Take twelve points of damage, and you're pinned underneath it." (Just so you know, the tripwire was made out of thin fishing line. There was really no chance it could have tripped any of us as it would too easily break. The IFGS is very safety conscious.)

Of course, there was no real falling log. To really enjoy an IFGS game, you need to have the ability to suspend your disbelief — totally. You'll be asked to witness some very strange things and act as if everything is quite normal. In one encounter, my party encountered a pair of arguing

fire giants. They were portrayed by a couple of other chapter members dressed in jeans and t-shirts. They weren't twelve feet tall, and they weren't breathing fire — but you have to look past all that and try to see what they're *supposed* to be. Now, imagine some park visitors on mountain bikes cruising by, checking out the scene. It starts getting surreal real quick, and it can take some time before you're comfortable with it all. It is worth the effort, though.

Suspension of disbelief is also important when it comes to "physical representations," or physreps as they are often called. Physreps are objects with significance in the game. A perfect example is armor. If you happen to own a leather armor vest, go ahead and wear it. It'll have a clear meaning to other players — one point of armor — and it looks keen with the rest of your costume. If, like most people, you don't own any medieval armor, you use a physrep to show other players what you're wearing. The generally accepted physrep for leather armor is a small patch of brown material or leather pinned to your costume. Some physreps, like bows and magic potions, are life-sized. Depending on the game you might get to keep some of the physreps you find. That's part of what your game fee goes for.

Perhaps IFGS's greatest difference from tabletop gaming is in game continuity. There are no long-running campaigns in IFGS gaming, at least in the chapters I play with. You get to keep the treasure you find in the game, of course, and you gain experience, but most of the story elements of each game are deliberately kept separate. The reason for this is simple — if six teams each play in the same game one weekend, it's inevitable that events won't play out the same way for everyone. "You killed the Overlord? No, I don't think so... we spared his pathetic life!" Six teams will usually play a scenario six different ways.

COMBAT

Combat in the IFGS is designed to run in real-time, and not surprisingly the rules are quite simple. It works basically like this: you engage an opponent with your handcrafted Nerf-like sword and attempt to smack them, while avoiding getting smacked yourself. If you hit, you call out your damage. Your opponent mentally subtracts the damage you do from their hit points. If they are wearing armor, they can subtract its value from the damage you called, but any hit still does one point of damage regardless of what kind of armor is being worn. When you're out of hit points, you're out of the combat.

BAR GAMES

"Bar games" are plotless get-togethers where people hang out in character. They are a chance to take it easy, practice fighting, and conduct business with other characters you didn't get to see in recent games. They usually take place in an imaginary tavern—hence the name. Koool-Aid or similar beverages are often provided.

WEAPONS

An IFGS melee weapon is made of strips of closed-cell foam around a bamboo or fiberglass core. This foam-and-bamboo sandwich is held together with contact cement and covered with a stretchy fabric sock. It's light enough to be safe, but strong enough to take the abuse of combat. It costs about \$20 to make a pair of swords. Any chapter will be able to give you detailed instructions on how to make proper weapons, and most of them will have loaners for new players.



PICKING LOCKS

You don't pick a real lock in an IFGS game, but an abstract representation of one. A twisted wire strand represents the lock, and you have to move a metal loop carefully over it. If you touch the loop to the wire, you complete an electrical circuit and a buzzer goes off—notifying the GM that you failed. The more twisty the wire, the harder the lock is to pick. Well-prepared thief characters carry an assortment of picks and related tools with them.

SPELLS & FLAGS

Spells with obvious effects, like magical shields, need to be represented with flags. A flag needs to be about 8 inches long, and held in such a way that everyone can see it. There are several colors of flag, each with a general meaning; for example, red means, "If you attack me, you're gonna get hurt." Red flags are used for the cleric's "Physical Protection," and the mage's "Electrify" spells, among others.

That's the basics, but there are a few more things to remember. First of all, your hit points are a function of your class and level only. You have locational hit points, so you have to keep track of what you have left in each limb. If a limb gets reduced to zero hit points you have to stop using it. That means you drop your sword if it's an arm, or hobble around if it's a leg. If both legs go you should kneel on the ground and hope no one decides to put you out of your misery. You also need to keep in mind how many points of damage it takes to knock you unconscious, in addition to how many it takes to kill you. Also, all characters should try to wear a different color, so they can be easily informed of ranged attacks or spells directed against them.

Each character class does a set amount of damage with a hand-to-hand attack. This base damage figure increases as your character gains levels. The weapon type doesn't matter; a short sword does the same damage as a long sword, which does the same damage as a staff, and so on. Some character classes cannot use certain types of weapons. For example, a cleric can't use a longsword. This might not seem like much of a disadvantage at first, since the damage doesn't differ from one blade to another, but it is. Longer weapons give you a definite advantage in melee. Also, keep in mind that practice makes perfect in IFGS combat. The more you play, the better you'll get, and that's an advantage that follows you from character to character.

Like melee weapons, ranged weapons also have a set damage, and again this figure changes as your level increases. It doesn't matter if you are carrying the physical representation for a bow, a sling, or a kender's hoopak — they all do the same damage. It's also important to note that you don't use a physical projectile to simulate missile combat. Characters that use ranged weapons have a certain percent chance to miss, hit, or inflict a critical hit with every shot. To perform a ranged attack, you draw a colored marble from a pouch or pick a colored toothpick from a pocket. You then declare the results of your attack loudly enough so your target can hear. Your hit percentages are, again, a function of your class and level, as is your reload time. However, if you are an archer yourself, you can be tested by someone in your IFGS chapter; your scores on a standardized target can be used to determine your miss/hit/crit percentages in the game.

While projectiles are not used to simulate bows, slings, or other missile weapons, bean bags are used frequently for other types of ranged attacks. A white beanbag represents a vial of holy water. A grey beanbag represents a throwing dagger. A black beanbag is a flask of oil, and a black beanbag with a red string around it is flaming oil. A purple beanbag is used for a monk's "physical attack." As in AD&D, a monk in IFGS can inflict terrible damage with a punch, but since

punching is forbidden in IFGS combat a beanbag takes the fist's place. Most beanbag attacks need to hit the target character directly, but some, like flaming oil, have an area effect.

Many character classes have special abilities that can be used in combat. For example, a fighter can evoke "battle fever," which gives them more hit points. To use it in combat, the player should yell, "Battle fever!" so that their opponent can hear it. The player then immediately gains the extra hit points. (It's good form to try and get a crazed gleam in your eye at this point.) Thieves can, of course, backstab. To do this they have to sneak up behind an enemy, strike their back with a weapon, and declare, "Backstab!" as well as how many points of damage they do. Of course, the amount of damage a backstab does increases with your level, as does the damage inflicted by a knight's "avenging blow" or a monk's "physical attack." Some special abilities and spells are level-dependent, and you have to state your character's level when you use them. If the target is of higher level, they can ignore you.

Many games, especially games with novice players, are played with the "PC Rule of Fairness" in effect. This is a catch-all rule designed to make people "play nice." It simply means that if you are the victim of a sociopathic player character who slits your throat while you're unconscious and takes all your loot, the GM can — and will — undo the deed. I have never seen a game yet where the Rule had to be invoked.

MAGIC IN THE IFGS

The rules for magic are as simple as the rules for combat. Spellcasting characters have a certain number of spell points to draw on, dependent on their class and level. They can use any spell in the rules for their class as long as the spell's level isn't higher than their own level. Each spell takes a certain number of spell points to cast, and some have a variable cost. You can only put a number of points equal to your level (or less) into a variable-cost spell. For example, a cleric's Heal spell heals 2 points of damage for each spell point used. If I were a 4th level cleric, I could choose to heal 2, 4, 6, or 8 points with it. Some spells are level-dependent, so characters of a higher level than the caster are not affected. When using one of these spells, the caster must state their level.

The actual act of casting a spell in the game is simple. The caster must stand still and recite a brief incantation — six seconds for low-level spells and twelve seconds for high-level spells. Once the incantation is complete, the caster names the spell and its effects loudly enough for the target to hear. If necessary he also states his own level and the target's color or colors. The incantation can be anything you want, as long as it's long enough.

Most people will make up some easy-to-remember incantations before the game and recycle them, but I have seen some armchair poets improvise good incantations on the spot. For example, if a 5th level mage were casting "Crashtime," the IFGS Sleep-equivalent, he might say, "Sands of time, sands of sleep, claim mine enemies and swaddle them in inky blackness. Crashtime, level five—blue, yellow, green!" Unless the characters played by Blue, Yellow, or Green are sixth level, they'll have to fall to the ground and pretend to snooze for five minutes.

AN "INNOCUOUS LITTLE BARGAME"

One of the first games I played was called "An Innocuous Little Bar Game." Well, this game wasn't so innocuous... It started out with the characters gathering in an inn at night. We were all travellers, and had congregated in the conveniently-placed inn due to the thick fog outside. About 30 people sat around and shot the breeze (in character, of course!) for about half an hour. Things began to get really interesting when there was a scream from the back of the bar; a barmaid, who had been in the storeroom, had been found dead of some kind of animal attack. It looked like some manner of creature had forced its way into the storeroom, killed her, and escaped. A few more people bit the dust when they went out into the thick fog to investigate; those who survived were driven back indoors by magical fear. A little later those who were killed outside came back to (un)life and we had a merry little melee in the bar, trying to slay the zombies. Well, we barricaded the door after that!

Eventually we got enough clues (from grilling the reluctant barkeep) to realize that there was a magic chalice on the premises which we could use to banish the nasty demon who was out haunting the fog. To do this, we had to travel to a nearby crypt and perform a banishing ritual... What followed was the most intense part of the game. We were walking up a path in the park, heading towards the crypt. Periodically zombies would wander out of the gloom and we'd have to fight them off. This was creepy enough, but the GMs were circulating among us, playing the part of the demon talking in our heads — he did not want to be banished.

One of the GMs came up to me and started whispering in my ear. "Turn back! If you come any further I'll rip your heart out and suck the marrow from your bones... you will all perish. Your god cannot save you now, Father! Turn back!" Others received similar threats, or even promises of wealth and power... for the tiny price of slaying their companions. Now, there was no danger from any of this in game terms, but it made for some incredible atmosphere. There was some amazing roleplaying going on around me; some IFGSers are great actors.

Eventually we got to the crypt, had a big battle with a bunch of zombies, banished the demon, and (almost) everyone lived happily ever after. Some PCs ended up dead, but everyone had a great time anyway. Keep in mind that this happened at about 10PM, with a fog machine, and was spread out over a few hundred yards of a public park. The "tavern" and "crypt" were jury-rigged out of poles and plastic tarps. The effects were not exactly Industrial Lights and Magic quality, but they did the job.

SAFETY

Safety is of primary concern in an IFGS game. You cannot hit someone in the head, neck or groin, and you can't punch anyone or try to push them down. To inflict damage, all you need to do is hit your opponent with your foam weapon hard enough that they can feel the contact. If someone breaks these rules, a GM will take them aside and deal with them. Such behavior is not tolerated. However, IFGS weapons are light enough that should you accidentally get whacked upside the head (and it can happen accidentally) you won't get hurt. Because of this, and the friendly atmosphere, people of all ages join the IFGS — one West Los Angeles chapter member started when she was thirteen!

GETTING STARTED

If you feel like it's time to take your roleplaying to the next level, the IFGS may be just what you've been looking for. The games are fun and safe, and the members are all great about teaching novices the ropes. You also get away from the kitchen table, bags of Doritos, and fluorescent lights and into the great outdoors. Gaming and exercise don't have to be mutually exclusive anymore!

If you're interested in giving the IFGS a try, contact the chapter closest to you. They'll be more than happy to help you get started. If there are no novice-class games coming up, ask about being an NPC, which are always needed. Give it a shot, and I'll see you on course!

DROP US A LINE!

If you're involved in another LARP group, contact us and let us know what you're all about. We'd like to offer more coverage of live-action roleplaying, so we'd love to hear from you.

IFGS, P.O. Box 3577, Boulder, CO 80307-3577
(303) 443-1012 (IFGS@aol.com) Rulebooks can be mail ordered for \$15.

Chapter Listing — Below are listed the PR contacts for each chapter the head office has listed. This is the most recent information the head office could provide; your mileage may vary. (Presidents are listed where no PR official has been indicated.)

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SEE YOU THEN!



By ALLEN SMITHEE
AND THE FREAK FORCE

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PLEASE, STEP INTO
MY OFFICE...

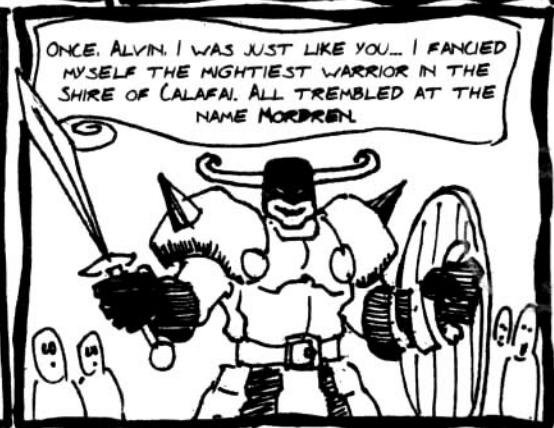


DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU'VE
BEEN BROUGHT HERE?

UM, YES, AND I'LL NEVER TELL
YOU WHERE THE AMULET IS HIDDEN.
THE GUILD WOULD DO WORSE
TO ME THAN YOU EVER COULD.

I DOUBT THAT.

WHO ARE YOU? AN
AGENT OF THE QUEEN?



ONCE, ALVIN, I WAS JUST LIKE YOU... I FANCIED
MYSELF THE MIGHTIEST WARRIOR IN THE
SHIRE OF CALAFAL. ALL TREMBLED AT THE
NAME MORDREN.



MORDREN THE MALIGNANT?
CONQUEROR OF PORTRERO?!

THE SAME.



ONE DAY, AT THE PEAK OF MY MADNESS, A MYST-
ERIOUS STRANGER CAME TO ME. HE HELPED ME TO
SEE THE FOLLY OF MY WAYS. I OWE HIM MY LIFE.



NOW, I TRAVEL TO
RENAISSANCE FAIRES, GAME
CONVENTIONS AND SCHOOLS,
HELPING THOSE WHO CAN-
NOT HELP THEMSELVES.



MY METHODS MAY SEEM HARSH BUT
I ALWAYS GET RESULTS.

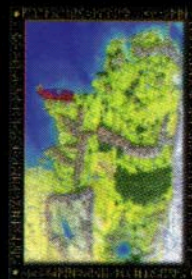


YOU'RE MAD! MERCIFUL
BHASK PROTECT ME!



LET THE HEALING BEGIN.

TO BE CONTINUED...



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—The Lord of the Rings

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he's good

watch this



What could you do with this card?



wish



really great card



what's he got?

nothing, ha!

MAGIC

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