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Best Card Game, 1995

Middle-earth: The Wizards

Iron Crown Enterprises

Author: Coleman Charlton



M.C.B.

middle  earth
THE WIZARDS



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SHADIS™

Issue #28
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Lost Worlds

by Al Leonardi
Page 6

Two complete Lost Worlds characters are embedded in this SHADIS. Play right from the magazine!

Strange Vistas

Starlight

by Rob Vaux
Page 56

Fiction from the world of Legend of the Five Rings.



The Edge

Page 73 et. seq.

News and reviews, plus LARP and more weasels.

About the Cover

This month's cover, by Matt Wilson, has the two *Lost Worlds* characters included in this issue locked in deadly combat. For the full story, see page 6.

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Faux pearls of wisdom.

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Declaration of Independence

The staff of SHADIS is determined
to keep this publication independent
and bringing our readers the best
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available.

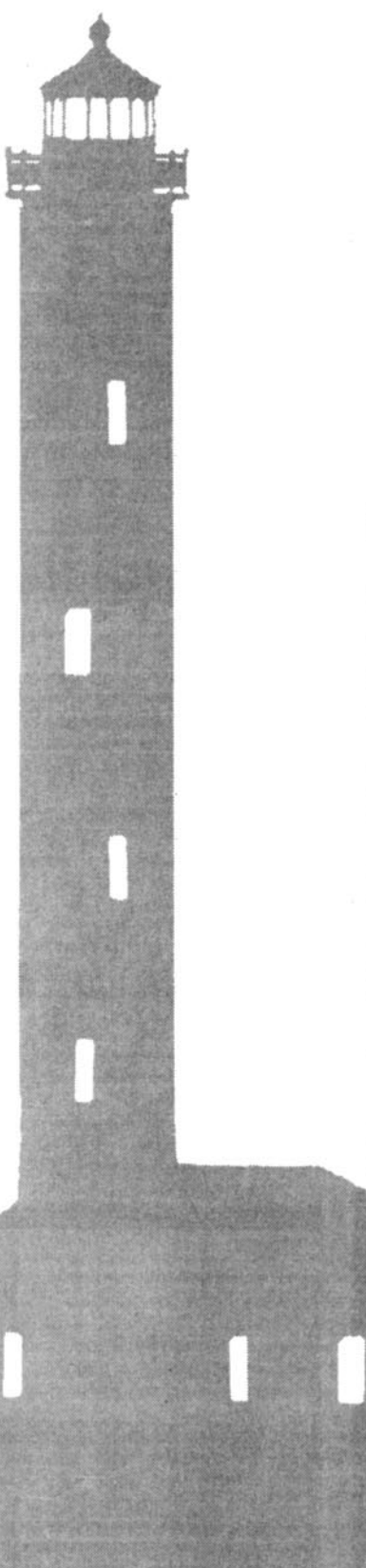
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of fifteen pages for both issues. (That
works out to 15 pages per 672
published pages of SHADIS.)

This policy actually penalizes AEG
for being associated with SHADIS
rather than having an unfair advantage
over other companies. We hope this
policy demonstrates our determination
to keep SHADIS truly independent. □

Editorial

Thanking the Academy



I hadn't planned to write this editorial for this issue. After all, we're giving this SHADIS away in job lots at GenCon, and I'd expected to spend my allotted page greeting the folks who hadn't seen us before, or for a while.

But curiously enough, the ones who have been reading us lately voted us the Origins Award for Best Professional Gaming Magazine of 1995. I now have an attractive black marbled plaque on my office wall commemorating the fact. Its only fault is that my name is the only one on the plaque.

Any professional product is a team effort. In this case, if we were to fit all the possible names on the award, the plaque would provide shelter for a family of four. Some of those names include:

Jolly Blackburn, who not only started up SHADIS by himself, but taught me the editorial ropes; and John Zinser and Dave Seay, who saw the potential of Jolly's tiny one-man fanzine and took it pro with him, and who have believed in it since. These three started it all, and the gaming community is richer for it.

Matt Staroscik and Matt Wilson, who rethought the design of the magazine. Although those first proof pages were quite a shock when they came off our battered old laser printer, I now find SHADIS easier and more interesting to read. From the mail I get, it would appear I'm not alone. These guys make SHADIS a pleasure to look at.

John Wick and Rob Vaux, who epitomize the hiring policy at AEG: "Show up and work for months for little or no pay. Once you've made yourself indispensable at your job, congratulations: it's yours." John writes constantly; Rob writes in the few minutes he can escape from editing. Without them, SHADIS wouldn't be nearly as interesting as it is.

Dave Williams, whose diploma inexplicably doesn't read "Card Game Design and Analysis." Were it not for Dave, SHADIS's card game coverage would have been only very good throughout the Great Card Boom of 1993-95. Instead, we had up-to-date coverage, the first lists on the newsstand in many cases, and even a *Magic*: the

Gathering boardgame (Dave designed it) and a wall-to-wall CCG issue (Dave edited it) back to back. Even though these days *Legend of the Five Rings* occupies almost all of his time, Dave deserves a lot of credit for the success of the magazine.

Wayne Wallace and The Redoubtable Intern Jen both get a nod, even though they are no longer with us, because of their contributions during their respective tenures. Wayne is a sharp-shooting copyeditor, while Jen hails from the artistic side of things. Both helped make the magazine better.

John Zinser, Sr. is still working in the office for no pay, even though he owns a chunk of the company. (He takes the hiring policy very seriously indeed, it appears.) His demesne is shipping, customer service, and making sure that everybody in the office is operating at 105% capacity.

Our contributors — columnists, writers, artists, and cartoonists — are, of course, the reason for our success. There are literally scores of names on this list, and you know what those names are. Without these folks, SHADIS is history. The best part about being editor is that you get to see all the neat stuff before everybody else — and then you get to print it up and say "Check this out!"

I'd also like to snag some space to thank the support net, without whom I'd have gone postal and slain dozens at the truck stop: Corin Andrade, Darren Holt, and Rich McHugh, gaming (almost) every Wednesday; Elisa Mason, via email; the folks (Hi Mom and Dad — it's a real job, honest!); and Walter Grube, who first introduced me to RPGs way back when, and to whom I owe not only my current career arc but also a year's worth of mail.

Finally, there are all the fans: everybody who voted, of course, but more importantly everybody who reads SHADIS. We're all grateful for the award, and that you considered us worthy of recognition; in return, we're going to do our best to blow you away this year. Here's our opening salvo: Issue #28. Enjoy!

—D.J. Trindle

Back In The Flesh



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Lost Worlds Combat



Portions of this SHADIS represent a pair of fantasy characters in *Lost Worlds'* series of graphic combat book games and is playable with all other books that carry the *Lost Worlds* logo. Each book is unique and has its own special qualities. Collect them all and discover their magic.

This month, through a special arrangement, there are two complete *Lost Worlds* booklets in the pages of SHADIS. Left-hand pages have the character sheet and panels for **Mattha, the Huntress of Denglade**, while right-hand pages contain the sheet and panels for **Veltigg, the Forest Shade**. These characters are playable with all other books that carry the *Lost Worlds* logo, but more importantly, you and a friend can play against each other with only a copy of SHADIS apiece!

Components

Booklet: Each character has thirty-two frames, each containing two panels. Mattha's frames are on the left-hand edge of the magazine, and Veltigg's are on the right-hand edge. On each frame are two unrelated panels; a larger odd-numbered picture panel, and a smaller even-numbered matrix panel. The panels are numbered consecutively from 1 to 64. The panel numbers are unrelated to the page numbers of the magazine.

Character Sheet: A player picks his combat maneuvers from this card, which is on pages 7 & 8. Remove pages 7 & 8 for play.

Fantasy Cards: There exist supplementary cards which come with other *Lost Worlds* books, but neither Mattha nor Veltigg comes with them. They are mentioned here in case you play against a friend with a card-endowed booklet.

How To Play

Each player must have a book and a Character Sheet to play. Since there are two *Lost Worlds* books and Character Sheets in this issue of SHADIS, you can play a game with nothing more than two copies of the magazine. Choose a character to play. Do the following steps simultaneously with your opponent.

0) Remove the character sheet. (pp. 7-8.)

1) Swap books with your opponent.

2) Keep your Character Sheet.

Example: You are playing Mattha, and your opponent is playing Veltigg. You tear out page 8, which has your maneuvers, and look at the right-hand pages of the magazine, with frames showing your opponent in front of you.

3) Open his book to picture frame #57.

You see your opponent at X-Range preparing an attack, and below him are instructions for his next move.

4) Read the instructions to your opponent.

On the first turn you will direct each other to "Do only X-Range next turn."

5) Choose a maneuver from your Character Sheet.

On the first turn you were directed to do X-Range, so only pick from that box!

6) Remember the frame number next to your move.

7) Turn to that frame.

8) Tell your opponent the frame number you have just turned to.

It is always an even number and designates a matrix at the bottom of the frame.

9) In this matrix, find the number your opponent gave you in step 5. Turn to the number listed beside it.

This is always a picture showing your opponent's maneuver, or you scoring on him.

10) You score a hit if "SCORE" appears in the picture.

11) Add the number beneath "SCORE" to the damage modifier (MOD) found on the Character Sheet by your maneuver.

12) If the result is greater than zero, tell your opponent to subtract that many points of damage from his character's Body Points.

A character's Body Points are located at the left of the Character Sheet.

13) If your opponent's Body Points total is now zero or less, he is unconscious and you have won the game. If his Body Points total is -5 or less, he has died. Otherwise, go

to step 14.

14) Read the instructions below the picture to your opponent. (i.e. Tell opponent: "Do...")

15) Return to step 5 and choose your next maneuver.

Keep in mind your opponent's instructions.

IMPORTANT !!

Do X-Range only when instructed.

Height

Before starting each battle, compare your opponent's height to your own character's height. The taller character adds +1 to his Orange and Red modifiers. Mattha and Veltigg both have a height of 4, so neither gets a bonus if they are opposing each other.

Multi-Player Rules

One player may fight several others (that is, 1 on 2, or 1 on 3, etc.). Remember that all players must have their opponent's book, so when fighting 3 opponents you need to hand out 3 books of your character, while holding their 3 books and adopt the following rules.

1) When given multiple restrictions do the most restrictive.

2) Do the same move in each book.

3) When opponents are at both Ranges, select a Close Range move and use the "X" column for the opponents at X-Range.

Attacks

Some characters are tough guys and can take on multiple opponents. 'Attacks' refers to how many opponents you can score on in one turn. If you score on more opponents in one turn than your number of attacks, then select which opponents you choose to hit.

Created by Alfred Leonardi

Character creation by Matt Wilson

Playtesters: Wayne Badges, William Fortin, Mary Leonardi, Alan Pienkowski

Developed by Dennis Greci

Artwork by Kevin Daily © 1996

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Veltigg

The Forest Shade

Primary Weapon
Great Ax

Other Weapons
Wolf Pack

BODY 8
HEIGHT 4
ATTACK 1
TACTIC 0



page = page you turn to
X = X-Range
Conversion
MOD = Score modifier
S = Touch & Cursing
ignore "Score & MOD"

Maneuver

	Maneuver	page	X	MOD
Down Swing	Bash	36	50	5
	Smash	24	50	4
	Strong Swing	28	64	3
Side Swings	Swing High	10	64	2
	Swing Low	2	64	2
Thrusts	Thrust High	32	54	-2
	Thrust Low	14	54	-2
Fakes	Fake High	42	64	1
	Fake Low	12	64	1
Wolves Attack	Leap & Snap	44	56	0
	Bark & Bite	48	56	-1
Wraith Attacks	Charge & Nip	6	56	0
	Touch	38	58	S
Special	Curse	22	60	S
	Kick	34	56	1
Ax Blocks	Wild Swing	40	64	4
	Dislodge Weapon	30	64	-1
Jump	Retrieve Weapon	46	52	-6
	Block High	26	56	-1
X-Range	Block Low	4	56	-1
	Jump Up	18	52	-6
	Dodge	8	52	-4
	Duck	20	52	-5
	Jump Back	16	52	-4
	Charge	50		4
	Swing	64		-1
	Touch	58		S
	Thrust	54		-3
	Curse	60		S
	Block	56		-3
	Dodge	52		-6
	Escape	62		-6

Veltigg

PHYSICAL ABILITY: Far stronger than foul appearance.
AX: Effective hacking weapon, especially Down Swings and Orange.
DRAINING TOUCH: The special ability of the wraiths and shades.
CURSE: Able to cause future happenings. May be supplemented by Curse Cards.

Down Swing

BASH (36) and SMASH (24): Powerful, quick, overhead swings. Vulnerable to low attacks.

Side Swing

STRONG (28): A powerful side swing. A miss could spin you around. High risk of being hit.
HIGH (10, 64): High, fast slashing side swing. Vulnerable to low attacks.
LOW (2): Low, very fast slashing side swing. Vulnerable to high attacks.

Thrust

HIGH (32, 60) High, fast piercing thrust. Vulnerable to low attacks.
LOW (14): Low, fast piercing thrust. Vulnerable to high attacks.

Fakes

HIGH (42): Starts high, scores low. Effective when prohibited from doing blue (low).
LOW (12): Starts low, scores high. Effective when prohibited from doing red (high).

Wolves Attack

LEAP, BARK, & CHARGE (44, 48, 6): The wolves come to your assistance, attacking and shielding.

Wraith Attacks

TOUCH (38, 58): Allows Veltigg to drain Body Points from opponent and add them to his Body Points.
CURSE (22, 60): A hypnotic suggestion requiring opponent to do Blue or Yellow when directed.

Special

KICK (34): Effective method to knock opponent down. Vulnerable to many attacks.
WILD SWING (40): Desperate, unarmed swing. Vulnerable.
DISLodge WEAPON (30): Disarms opponent. Effective against thrusts and fakes.
RETRIEVE WEAPON (46): Try to pick up a dislodged weapon. Use caution!

Ax Blocks

HIGH, LOW (26, 4): Aggressively using ax to block incoming attacks. Can score on opponent.

Jump

JUMP UP (18): Avoids low attacks, but vulnerable to high attacks.
DODGE (8, 52): Effective against thrusts and downswings. Vulnerable to side swings.
DUCK (20): Effective against high attacks. Vulnerable to low and downswings.
AWAY (16, 62): Move to extended range, or get an attack bonus. Vulnerable to thrusts.

X-Range

CHARGE (50): Aggressively close to short range. Vulnerable but effective.
EXTENDED RANGE MANEUVERS: Similar to their close range counterparts.

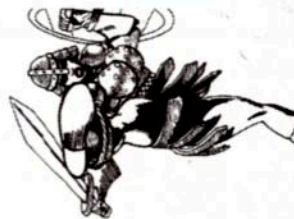
Mattha

Huntress of
Denglade

Primary Weapon
Sword

Other Weapons
Two-handed spear

BODY 12
HEIGHT 4
ATTACK 1
TACTIC 7



page = page you turn to
X = X-Range Conversion
MOD = Score modifier
S = Touch & Cursing
ignore "Score & MOD"

	Maneuver	page	X	MOD
Down				
Swing	Sword Smash	24	50	3
Sword	Strong Swing	28	64	2
Side	Swing High	10	64	1
Swings	Swing Low	2	64	1
Sword	Thrust High	32	54	0
Thrusts	Thrust Low	14	54	0
Sword	Fake High	42	64	0
Fakes	Fake Low	12	64	0
Sword	Down Swing	44	56	-1
&	Side Swing	48	56	-2
Shield	Thrust	6	56	2
Spear	Slash Spear	38	58	1
Attacks	Thrust Spear	22	60	2
	Kick	34	56	1
Special	Sword Wild Swing	40	64	3
	Dislodge Weapon	30	64	-2
	Retrieve Weapon	46	52	-6
Shield	Block High	26	56	1
Blocks	Block Low	4	56	1
	Jump Up	18	52	-6
Jump	Dodge	8	52	-4
	Duck	20	52	-5
	Jump Back	16	52	-4
	Charge With Sword	50		3
	Swing Sword	64		-5
	Slash Spear	58		1
X-Range	Thrust Sword	54		-3
	Thrust Spear	60		2
	Block	56		-1
	Dodge	52		-6
	Escape	62		-6

Mattha

PHYSICAL ABILITY: Lithe, lean, and mean.

SWORD: A good short range slashing and parrying weapon.

Spear: A good thrusting weapon, effective at X-Range.

Shield: Effective for blocking attacks and for bashing foes.

Down Swing Sword

SMASH (24): Powerful, quick, overhead swings. Vulnerable to low attacks.

Sword Side Swing

STRONG (28): A powerful side swing. A miss could spin you around. High risk of being hit.

HIGH (10, 64): High, fast slashing side swing. Vulnerable to low attacks.

LOW (2): Low, very fast slashing side swing. Vulnerable to high attacks.

Sword Thrust

HIGH (32) High, fast piercing thrust. Vulnerable to low attacks.

LOW (14, 54): Low, fast piercing thrust. Vulnerable to high attacks.

Sword Fakes

HIGH (42): Starts high, scores low. Effective when prohibited from doing blue (low).

LOW (12): Starts low, scores high. Effective when prohibited from doing red (high).

Sword and Shield

PROTECTED ATTACKS (44, 48, 6): Not as effective as other sword attacks but less vulnerable.

Spear Attacks

SLASH (38, 58): A cross-body attack more swing than thrust.

THRUST (22, 60): Best spear maneuver. Usually stops jumping away.

Special

KICK (34): Effective method to knock opponent down. Vulnerable to many attacks.

WILD SWING (40): Desperate, unaimed swing. Vulnerable.

DISLodge WEAPON (30): Disarms opponent. Effective against thrusts and fakes.

RETRIEVE WEAPON (46): Try to pick up a dislodged weapon. Use caution!

Shield Blocks

HIGH, LOW (26, 4): Aggressively using shield to block incoming attacks. Can score on opponent.

Jump

JUMP UP (18): Avoids low attacks, but vulnerable to high attacks.

DODGE (8, 52): Effective against thrusts and downswings. Vulnerable to side swings.

DUCK (20): Effective against high attacks. Vulnerable to low and downswings.

AWAY (16, 62): Move to extended range, or get an attack bonus. Vulnerable to thrusts.

X-Range

CHARGE (50): Aggressively close to short range. Vulnerable but effective. EXTENDED RANGE MANEUVERS: Similar to their close range counterparts.

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New and Improved

Going Beyond Your Game's Given Technology

by Paul Lucas • Art by Kevin Daily

Draco Starkiller, mercenary extraordinaire, sat in his friend's warehouse laboratory and eyed the odd-looking contraption in his hands with a great deal of suspicion. He gave its inventor a similar look.

"I still don't get it, Wingnut. What's it do again?"

The goggle-eyed, primly-dressed man sighed heavily, something he seemed to do a lot whenever Draco was nearby.

"Like I explained twice before, Draco, it's a Gluon Disassociator. It projects a field that suppresses the strong nuclear force that holds atomic nuclei together."

Draco stared at him blankly.

Wingnut sighed again. "Anything you shoot it at goes boom."

When the inventor at last saw the light dawn in Draco's eyes, he continued. "It works pretty well under laboratory conditions, but it has yet to be field-tested. Since you seem to — ahem — get into combat situations a lot, I thought you might want to try it out for me."

"Hmph. Guess so." Draco hefted the strange, heavy rifle in his hands and idly pointed it at an empty table. "So you just aim and shoot it like any other gun?" His finger began to squeeze the trigger.

Wingnut leaped out of his chair, grabbing wildly for the Gluon Disassociator. "No!" he screamed, "don't do that without —!"

Draco never heard Wingnut, because the building around them shattered with a deafening roar. He had one last thought just as the walls exploded and hideous, painful darkness engulfed him.

"Cool!"

Fusion guns. Galaxy-spanning starships. Intelligent computers. Huge, death-dealing robots.

Big deal.

There comes a time in every science-fiction campaign when the standard technology in the game becomes mundane, when the neat devices that once so enthralled your players become just so many can openers.

To remedy this, referees may want to introduce something new and different that will keep the sense of technological wonder in the campaign alive. But what should it be? How should one go about introducing it into the campaign? What ramifications will such new technology have on the ongoing game?

Basic Principles

Before we address any specifics of new tech, several factors that must be taken into consideration first.

Repercussions: First and foremost, you must realize that any innovations you introduce will have long-range effects on your game world. In most cases these will be minor (a new class of laser rifle may just displace older models, for instance), but in others the effects can be radical to both society and game balance (cheap and readily-available teleportation could cause the crime rate to rocket out of control). Always think through the long-term effects of new tech.

Plausibility: In order to maintain the verisimilitude of the game's technology, the referee should determine early on exactly what is and is not possible in his game universe.

In other words, the referee should set up general parameters for each major field of science and stick to them when introducing new tech. These limits will vary from referee to referee, depending on his plans for the campaign, and from game to game, depending on its style. Hard science games,

Jumping Away

1



Tell opponent: "Add +1 if you score next turn."

2 45	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 41	36 13
6 13	22 11	38 49
8 53	24 41	40 45
10 19	26 47	42 19
12 13	28 41	44 17
14 45	30 45	46 27
16 57	32 53	48 13

2

Swinging High

3



Tell opponent: "Do no Thrusts or Red attacks next turn."

2 5	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 19	36 15
6 19	22 19	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 3	26 63	42 19
12 41	28 3	44 17
14 9	30 15	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 19

4

1 Jumping Away



Tell opponent: "Add +2 if you score next turn."

2	45	18	37	34	41
4	63	20	41	36	00
6	47	22	11	38	49
8	53	24	41	40	45
10	19	26	47	42	45
12	13	28	41	44	17
14	45	30	45	46	27
16	57	32	13	48	13

2

3 Swinging Sword High



Tell opponent: "Do no Red or Spear attacks next turn."

2	5	18	37	34	41
4	63	20	19	36	00
6	17	22	19	38	49
8	33	24	15	40	5
10	3	26	63	42	19
12	41	28	3	44	17
14	9	30	15	46	43
16	57	32	9	48	19

4

like *Traveller* and *Albedo*, should stick to real-world science or widely-accepted theories. Soft science games like *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* have more leeway, but even these must adhere to their established conventions, *Death Stars* shouldn't be tooling around the Federation, nor should Luke and Han be beaming down to Tatooine anytime soon.

Compatibility: The referee should also take into account the style of his science-fiction campaign, so that the innovations introduced won't spoil the flavor of the game. Anti-gravity might logically follow the technological progression of the *Battletech* universe, but *Traveller*-style grav tanks would quickly make battlemechs, the focus of the game, obsolete. The force fields from *Star Trek* may be cool, but they have no place in an ultra-gritty, hard-science setting like *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*.

Acceptance: The disposition of your campaign's societies will determine what sort of innovations will be easier to introduce than others. In the *Traveller* universe, for example, AI robots are very rare and greatly mistrusted, and any new advances in robotics will meet with open hostility by the populace. Thus any new research into this field will be greatly stifled. In *Star Wars*, however, AI robots (Droids) are all over the place, and new lines of robots are openly sought after. Robotics in this universe will be a very fertile field for new technology.

Proportion: Don't go innovation happy. Keep the pace of technological progress to a level that both you and your players can easily assimilate. Introduce new technology only when the old innovations start to lose their luster, or when some new device makes for an interesting plot point or adventure hook.

Innovation Types

There are four general types of new tech you can introduce into a game campaign: refinements, fillers, breakthroughs, and artifacts.

Refinements: A refinement is a minor improvement to already existing equipment. Usually a refinement will involve making one general class of equipment (scanners, rifles, vacc suits, etc.) cheaper, lighter, smaller, easier to use, more powerful, more efficient, or a combination of such. A new laser pistol may have a hundred more meters of effective range than older models or holographic projectors may go from clunky cabinet-sized units to pocket portables.

Refinements will have only a minor impact on your game world. They will rarely affect society as a whole, but may greatly affect small portions of it (holographic crystals, for example, may replace optical disks as the primary data storage medium, causing disk manufacturers to go out of business). Refinements should be as common as they are in the real world, with new models coming out every

year or so. The referee should plan out refinements in each field several years ahead of time, in order to anticipate what affect they will have on the campaign. For example, in one year, an advance in light focusing allows laser rifles to propagate a more intense beam, resulting in greater penetration for that weapon class. However, this new element makes the weapon bulkier, heavier, and increases the price by 50%. In the next year, aggressive miniaturization reduces the price and bulk of the new rifles back to standard. The year after, the focusing element becomes modular, and can be added onto old models for a slight fee. During the fourth year, the advancement becomes small enough to be added to laser pistols.

Fillers: Because of limited space, most science fiction games tend to focus on only certain fields of technology while breezing over or completely ignoring others. The technical fields that receive the most attention in RPGs include weapons, cybernetics, vehicles, space travel, sensors, computers, exploration equipment and robotics. This leaves only sparse room for such fields as medicine, genetics, chemistry, forensics, materials science, aquatic equipment, construction tools, rescue equipment and entertainment. Filler technology is when the referee expands on these neglected fields on his own, "filling in" what he feels is missing on the game's equipment list.

Creating filler technology often requires a lot of forethought on the part of the referee, but can generally be handled in two ways: transferring technology from listed equipment to new fields, and extrapolating from clues in the game's background about these fields.

An example of the former technique involves translating the proliferation of laser weapons technology in the *Traveller* rules to mean that things like laser scalpels, laser torches, and laser cigarette lighters are also common. In *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*, robots are rarely mentioned, but how hard could it be to extrapolate robot parts from the game's truckload of cybernetics and computer equipment? An independently powered cyberhand, for example, with the fingers reconfigured and sensors attached would make a nifty chassis for a small recon robot.

Another example: a brief mention in the old *MegaTraveller* rules of a plastic knife that could be melted into a blob and later reformed with just a few sharp raps led to the introduction of a materials science "filler" in my *Traveller* campaign, morph plastic. Morph plastic is a material that can be deformed and, with an electric catalyst, change back to its original form. Contracting rings of morph plastic can fell trees, while expanding coils of morph plastic can pry apart barriers, and so on. The possibilities are endless.

Further examples of filler technology are listed below.

Technological Advancement

Medicine:

— Spray-on bandages that can cover any size wound.

— Sleep-inducing electronic headbands that eliminate the need for chemical anesthetics.

— Drugs that temporarily induce total recall.

Genetics:

— Guard dogs engineered to be as smart as chimpanzees.

— Artificial microorganisms that can "age" wine and other spirits in days, not years. Used to accelerate the production of alcohol fuels.

Chemistry:

— Anti-polymer compounds that can dissolve most plastics.

— Spray-on, foaming plastique explosives.

Forensics:

— Devices that can "read" voice prints from the minute ripples left in wall paint from sounds within a closed room.

— Portable DNA analyzers.

Materials Science:

— Thermal superconductors. Can be used as an anti-laser armor sheath, as the material will evenly distribute the heat energy of a laser over its entire surface area.

Breakthroughs: Breakthroughs are the most important and far-ranging innovations you can bring into a campaign. By their very nature, breakthroughs will always have a major, significant impact on your campaign. This is why breakthroughs are introduced only very rarely, if at all, in an ongoing campaign.

Breakthroughs are major leaps forward in knowledge, often taking wildly tangential directions from established science. They are the initial inventions that spawn entire new fields of technology. Fire, the wheel, gunpowder, nuclear weapons, and computers are all breakthroughs that have had a profound effect on human civilization. You must realize that, after the any breakthrough is introduced, nothing in your campaign will ever be quite the same again.

The mere existence of this new technology will profoundly affect your PCs' lives.

The most common breakthroughs in science fiction games include faster than light (FTL) drives, FTL communication, fusion power, cybernetics, anti-gravity, force fields and artificial intelligence. Depending on the game you play, your campaign will already have some of these breakthroughs already in place as part of the game's background. *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.* has only one (cybernetics), *2300 AD* has three (cybernetics, FTL drives and fusion power) and *Star Trek* has them all. The designers of your game have probably included or excluded these breakthroughs for the good reasons of game balance and style. Therefore, introducing breakthroughs in these fields is not recommended unless you want to change the course of your campaign to a radical new direction.

Weapons technology is also a dangerous field to introduce breakthroughs. Radically new weapons will usually be so overwhelming that they will completely dominate all combat in the game. Imagine battlemechs armed with *Star Trek*-style phasers or Reformation Coalition starships armed with *2300 AD* FTL missiles.

All that said, breakthroughs can provide wonderful opportunities to jump-start a stalled campaign. Charted Space might be just the same old engine exhaust to your PCs, but what if someone discovered a way to create a stargate to the center of the galaxy? Your PCs may puke if they fight one more battle in the Inner Sphere, but what if genetic engineering found a way to produce giant monsters that could give mechs a good run for their money?

Other breakthrough examples are listed below.



Swinging Low

5



Tell opponent: "Do no Thrust or Blue next turn."

2 53	18 13	34 41
4 63	20 29	36 19
6 17	22 19	38 19
8 33	24 13	40 5
10 3	26 63	42 53
12 3	28 45	44 17
14 45	30 5	46 13
16 53	32 45	48 17

6

Dazed

7



SCORE 6

Tell opponent: "Do only Green next turn."

2 5	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 29	36 15
6 17	22 21	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 3	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 3	44 17
14 21	30 3	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 17

8

5 Swinging Sword Low



Tell opponent: "Do no Blue or Spear attacks next turn."

2	5	18	19	34	19
4	63	20	29	36	00
6	45	22	19	38	49
8	33	24	15	40	5
10	3	26	63	42	5
12	3	28	45	44	45
14	45	30	5	46	19
16	19	32	45	48	17

6

7 Dazed



SCORE 5

Tell opponent: "Do only Green or Yellow next turn."

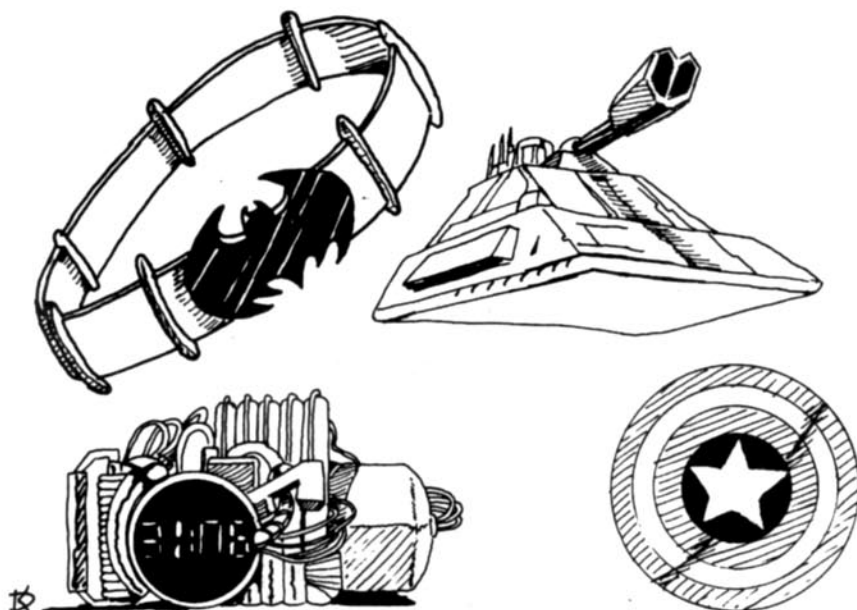
2	5	18	37	34	41
4	63	20	29	36	00
6	17	22	21	38	49
8	33	24	15	40	5
10	3	26	63	42	5
12	3	28	3	44	17
14	21	30	3	46	43
16	57	32	9	48	17

8

—Gravity Pulse Munitions. In universes that allow artificial gravity (*Traveller*, *Star Trek*), it should be possible to "pulse" specially-designed grav generators to produce brief, super-intense gravity fields (30 Gs or more) that would do incredible structural and bodily damage. As gravity penetrates even force fields, there would be no practical defense except stasis fields (see below).

—Stasis Fields. These create a field that essentially "bottles" its contents outside of time, freezing anything within in the moment the field was created. Nothing, save for a singularity or the heart of a star, can penetrate the field until it naturally decays. The field may last for seconds, millions of years, or may outlast the heat-death of the universe.

—Unbelievium. This has a number of different aliases: Monadium, Duralloy, Scrith, Adamantium. Basically, it is a high-indestructible material that cannot be destroyed, melted, deformed, or even scratched except from a



hideous amount of punishment (several megatons of nuclear explosives) or very special circumstances (contact with anti-matter).

—Uplift. This is the genetic engineering of non-sentient species, like dogs and chimpanzees, into intelligent, technologically capable races. The technical, social and theological ramifications of such a capability are mind staggering, and will profoundly affect the societies that are capable of it.

Artifacts: Artifacts are pieces of equipment created by sources far advanced and usually far removed from your campaign's main civilizations. Usually they are products of long-vanished or equally out-of-touch alien races, like the Ancients in *Traveller*. Sometimes, they may be products of one-of-a-kind scientific accidents, like Captain America's shield in *Marvel Super Heroes*.

Artifacts are always very rare, non-reproducible, and greatly coveted. The party should only encounter a handful at most over the course of a campaign. Because they are created by science far removed from that of man, the normal restrictions that apply to the game's other technology can be ignored when creating artifacts. Feel free to have what they do appear to be miraculous and magical.

Each artifact should have its own unique character. One artifact's powers and look should not overlap another's, except perhaps to show that they came from the same exotic source (they may

fit only three-fingered hands, for example). They should require much experimentation and examination before their true function is discovered.

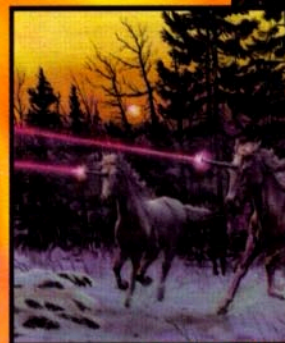
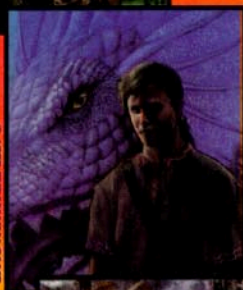
All artifacts should have limits built into them, to avoid destroying game balance. That disintegrator you had the party find in those ruins will quickly wear out its welcome if it has unlimited charges.

Some artifact examples:

- **Unbelievium Staff.** This is a two-meter long

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Designed by Susan Van Camp, Developed by Mark Harmon, Art directed and Graphics by Mark Poole

9 Thrusting Sword



Tell opponent: "Do no Side Swings or Spear attacks next turn."

2	31	18	53	34	25
4	19	20	23	36	00
6	47	22	11	38	19
8	53	24	45	40	53
10	45	26	47	42	19
12	19	28	53	44	45
14	53	30	3	46	43
16	57	32	31	48	45

10

11 Thrusting Spear



Tell opponent: "Do no Sword or Shield attacks next turn."

2	5	18	19	34	25
4	63	20	19	36	00
6	17	22	11	38	49
8	19	24	45	40	5
10	19	26	63	42	45
12	45	28	19	44	15
14	9	30	3	46	29
16	57	32	45	48	45

12

quarterstaff that is mundane in every way except that it is indestructible.

• **Impossible Circlet.** A small, finger-sized ring whose circumference is exactly equal to three times its diameter, no matter how it is measured. The holder of the ring may shunt objects within 100 meters into a small pocket dimension for storage. Up to 1000 kg at a time may be so stored, and it needs to recharge for 1D6 hours after each use. Looking through the center of the ring has strange effects on a human's mind, and may require a sanity check or such to keep that person from going temporarily insane. Anything pushed through the center of the ring disappears forever, including fingers.

• **Holopen.** This thin, 10-cm metal stick will leave trails of glowing light in the air that lasts 2D6 hours. Messages can be written anywhere: on a wall, on a watery surface, or floating in the middle of a hallway.

Sources For Ideas

New tech ideas can come from a variety of sources.

Other Games: Other games already have well-thought out and extensive item lists which can usually be converted into your game system with just a little number crunching. For example, in *Traveller*, the Imperium was mentioned to have genetics technology advanced enough to create Uplifted races, but seemed to have used the capability for little else. Looking to 2300 AD, however, one can find numerous genetically engineered inventions (Pentapod products) that can easily be transferred into a *Traveller* campaign as filler technology.

Movies and Television: Visual media can be a great idea source. Films and TV shows have the advantage of showing the viewers the devices in actual use, as well as addressing their capabilities and visual appearance. Think of the tricorders and communicators from *Star Trek*, or the power loader and the motion detectors from *Aliens*.

Fiction: Another fertile source for ideas, though most stories and novels tend to focus on breakthroughs because of their dramatic effects and gloss over more mundane equipment.

Stasis fields, mentioned earlier, come from two sources: *Ringworld*, by Larry Niven and *Marooned in Realtime*, by Vernor Vinge.

Comic Books: A very over-looked source, comic books are rife with examples of off-beat equipment. For example, the glue-gun used by the Marvel Super Heroes villain the Trapster can be the basis for a liquid concrete sprayer. Also, comics also have a lot of great gimmickry that can be used as artifacts. Remember the Ultimate Nullifier from Marvel's *Fantastic Four*?

The Real World: The very best source for

refinement and filler ideas. Peruse magazines such as *Discover*, *Scientific American*, and *Popular Mechanics*, and TV shows like *Nova* and *Beyond 2000* to see the most recent developments in science and technology. Often what you'll find there will be more bizarre than anything listed in any RPG. Morph Plastic, mentioned earlier, has a real-life analog (which I learned about from an old *Omni* article): Nitinol, a titanium-something "morph alloy" developed back in the 1960's. It can be deformed and hold one form when it's room temperature, then transform back into its original shape when its temperature drops below freezing.

Using Innovations

To introduce most refinements and fillers, all the referee usually has to do is announce the availability of the new tech at a pre-arranged point in the campaign. From then on, it is assumed that the innovation will be readily available to the PCs from the appropriate source (department store, medical supplier, etc.). However, sometimes the PCs might be able to learn of a refinement before it becomes publicly available and get in on the ground floor, so to speak. Their contacts in a corporation might sneak them out prototype designs, or they could work for a special operations force that has access to such devices years before they go public. Adventures can be centered around corporate espionage to get the competition's designs for a profitable new refinement, or the PCs could be hired to field-test new equipment.

Artifacts should always be the major feature in the scenario they are introduced in, as an obstacle to overcome, a treasure to find, or a prize to be won. A perilous race between the party and the bad guys to reach the Ancient site rumored to contain the most powerful weapon in the galaxy is the example of such an adventure. Once the artifact is in the PCs' possession, every thief, terrorist and rabid collector will besiege them to get the weapon for themselves.

Breakthroughs, because of their far-reaching repercussions, deserve an entire mini-campaign when introduced. The PCs may stumble across an escaped chimpanzee uplift and are hunted by government agents for months for taking the creature in. The party may struggle for a long time before they either rescue the other neo-chimps and/or expose the government for its illegal experiments. Of course, the true complications won't come until afterward, when the rescued neo-chimps try to integrate themselves into human society.

Closing Thoughts

With a little moderation and forethought, innovations can be a great way for breathing fresh life into stagnant game campaigns. They can keep your game world dynamic and surprising for both yourself and your players. **CS**



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Getting Right Into the Action

GM and player guidelines for creating characters for conventions

by Mark Jason Durall • Art by Kevin Daily

You've driven across numerous state lines, subsisting on convenience store burritos, Pop Tarts, and Mountain Dew, to get to BigCon. Once there, through some miracle of misscheduling, the organizers manage to put you into one of the games you actually requested. Luck is on your side as you find the table amongst the sprawling mass of similar groups, braving the curtained labyrinth to find your game group. You arrive in time, and settle down, pulling out favorite dice and your copy of the rulebook. Three hours and forty-five minutes to play this scenario to the bitter end. With a herald of trumpets, the Gamemaster arrives, bulky backpack nearly dwarfing him. He draws out the rulebook, and then, you twinge as he pulls out a sheaf of blank character sheets. You look at your watch. Character creation can take an expert an hour in this game, and you see some of your fellow players don't even have rulebooks with them.

As if rubbing it in, you hear a dozen other games roaring by, already immersed in adventure as you begin to roll dice. You find that familiar refrain bubbling to your lips...

"Best three out of four, right?"

Creating characters ahead of time for a role-playing convention game session should be a matter of common sense, though few Gamemasters seem to bother, thinking that they'll just do it on the spot. For campaigns at home, with time as an ally, and among friends who know what the campaign will be like in advance, this is fine. In campaigns, Gamemasters should advocate letting players think about their characters for weeks before things begin. Ideally, the characters should be drawn into the campaign by elements in their backgrounds, their interests, and their weaknesses. These kind of campaigns are usually the most rewarding.

Trouble is, not so many characters created on the spot at a gaming convention are original, interesting, or have any thought put into them other than to kick butt for the next three hours (That's right, three hours now! Time is running, running, running...). They tend to be one-note characters, without much depth or reason even to be involved. Sometimes, the adventure itself requires characters to have skills or abilities that weren't brought up in the character generation process, which means that the characters can accomplish zip.

Have you ever been in a group of characters who, upon the final confrontation, realize that none of you had thought to take Ancient Ugaritic as a language skill, and thus are unable to translate the magic scroll of Ilthyrian Death Crawfish Banishment, watching helplessly as the horrendous mutant crustaceans stomp all over downtown Chicago, sky sizzling behind them?

In the history of role-playing game conventions, has anyone ever slugged a Gamemaster who forgot that one of the characters had the supernatural ability to detect ambushes which would have warned all of you of the ambush which destroyed half your group? Or slugged the player whose character had this ability when they remember about it an hour after the battle?

How many times have you seen a struggling Gamemaster try to incorporate a soldier of fortune, a stand-up comedian, a jaded alcoholic private eye, an IRA terrorist, a computer hacker, a death-rocker, a priest, and a bounty hunter into a murder investigation amongst bums in New Orleans?

Have you winced to see a player new to a game who has no idea what to do for a character half an hour into the character creation time? Ever wish that convention organizers, while sorting sched-

Thrusting

9



Tell opponent: "Do no Side Swings next turn."

2 53	18 53	34 25
4 63	20 23	36 31
6 19	22 11	38 19
8 53	24 45	40 7
10 45	26 47	42 31
12 19	28 53	44 17
14 7	30 3	46 43
16 57	32 53	48 17

10

Cursing

11



Tell opponent: "No restrictions, and if on a score page, you may direct me once in the future to 'Do Yellow or Blue' in place of another restriction."

2 31	18 13	34 25
4 63	20 19	36 19
6 17	22 11	38 19
8 31	24 45	40 53
10 19	26 63	42 45
12 45	28 31	44 17
14 9	30 3	46 29
16 57	32 45	48 17

12

13 Leg Wound



SCORE 1

Tell opponent: "Do only Green or Yellow next turn."

2 45	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 7	36 00
6 45	22 53	38 49
8 23	24 13	40 45
10 31	26 13	42 45
12 3	28 41	44 13
14 13	30 5	46 53
16 19	32 13	48 45

14

15 Swinging Down



Tell opponent: "Do no Blue or Spear attacks next turn."

2 57	18 61	34 41
4 57	20 61	36 00
6 17	22 11	38 51
8 61	24 15	40 23
10 57	26 57	42 57
12 57	28 21	44 57
14 9	30 57	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 57

16

ules and reservations for games, would enforce the "Novice/Intermediate/Expert" classification of player experience with brute force and superior firepower?

Ever wonder why all player character groups seem to have an inordinate number of people with high weapon skills and the wherewithal to use them indiscriminately, or if the Gamemaster limits them, how many seem to have the maximum allowable skill with firearms?

Ever just get up and leave when the Gamemaster hands out those character sheet blanks for a game as character-creation-intensive as *Kult*, or *Nephilim*, or any of the *World of Darkness* games? *Traveller*? *Shadowrun*? *RuneQuest*? *Ars Magica*?

Even a good *Toon* character takes about ten or fifteen minutes to create out of thin air, especially if the rulebook is being shared by more than one or two people.

Or even worse.... How many times have you been having a great time, only to have the Gamemaster suddenly speed things up to a ridiculous pace due to time constraints? Or suddenly end the thing unsatisfyingly because he's got a game of his own to get to? Or, even worse, adding insult to injury, when the Gamemaster calls things short and then has the audacity to tell you what would have happened, as if that fills some perverse desire for "closure?"

An important note to any game designers hoping to exhibit, sell, and demonstrate their games at conventions: forcing large numbers of people to go through a complex character creation process in a system no one has had time to even read once, or owns a copy of, for a two hour game session is an exercise in futility. Having sample characters ready, perhaps even ones featured in rulebook examples, speeds things up immensely and might even help sales. Let them have the character sheets as a freebie, and they might reciprocate by buying a copy of the game. Heck, for that matter, if you're not planning on selling the adventure to another source, why not give players a copy of the adventure they just went through? So many new games are coming out without initial adventures, and source material is often a long way away, that these kinds of efforts can create loyal followings for the cost of a few photocopies.

Gamemasters aren't the only culprits. Players should even try to help out, or prepare beforehand. If you, as a player, know you are going to be in a specific game, then maybe creating a quick character beforehand would be a good idea. If you know that the adventure is going to be set in, for example, *Wild West America*, then spend a half hour before the con, or in the car over, writing up a basic cowboy character who can be plugged into an adventure. Give him some background that shouldn't conflict with the Gamemaster's plans, a name, and a list of some sample gear. If those

blank character sheets come out, then show the Gamemaster your character and get the jump on everyone else. Maybe you and another player who did the same can begin the adventure, bringing the other characters in when they're created.

So, ten guidelines for Gamemasters and players for campaign characters:

1. Always bring pregenerated characters for a game that is not open to pre-existing characters. Even if it is a game where players use their own characters, bring a few pregenerated characters who would be suitable for the scenario, or allow some NPCs to be turned into player characters.

2. Bring a few extra pregenerated characters, and maybe even a few that are only mostly done for players who insist on customizing them. Leaving things like name, appearance, gender, and other surface characteristics open are all acceptable means of giving players some input without slowing things down.

3. Overlap characteristics enough so that even if all the pre-generated characters are used, they will have the resources, abilities, and skills to accomplish the goal of the scenario. This also means that they should have abilities which will enable them to survive if someone is killed, incapacitated, or just isn't able to do the job they set out to. Sometimes, the character necessary just isn't in the right place at the right time. Rather than crush them flat for that, give other people the skills necessary ahead of time so you don't have to improvise lamely. This allows everyone to think that there is still a chance of failure.

4. Pgenerated characters should have the advantages of being customized for the scenario, already familiar to the Gamemaster, and with strong, easy to role-play personalities. It takes no work at all to create characters rounded enough so that people can get into character fairly easy, rather than having to breathe life from a vacuum created by exhaustion, caffeine frenzy, and fatigue from carrying a backpack full of books around all day.

5. Offer a wide variety of character types to please everyone, making sure each has some business being in the scenario. Even with a little bit of preparation, the above-mentioned motley crew of characters can be dragged into the same scenario. Well, make that a lot of preparation, but it could be done.

6. If you have the ability, clip a picture from somewhere or draw it yourself to give the character an appearance. Maybe even make photocopies of character sheets and give players the copies, for keepsakes and in cases where you are running the same game more than once. A picture or sketch of a character says a lot more than a description would. If you must provide a description, say something like "She looks like a younger, black-haired Susan Sarandon with glasses." Using a

Characters at Cons

famous person as a guideline is a trick that suggests character quickly and painlessly.

7. Try to offer some variety in race, age and gender in the pregenerated characters if those are specified. Though it might seem as if role-playing conventions are inhabited solely by overweight, bespectacled, bearded men, someone else might show up. It's also a matter of simple common sense and good manners to use some small measure of taste in creating these characters. Why not an elderly, ethnic Chinese private eye? How about a black errant knight, converted to Christianity from Islam? Instead of your standard horror-movie staple Catholic priest, how about a rabbi?

8. If you are offering some variety, don't always assume that females want to play female characters, males want to play male characters, or even the reverse. These are tricky times; why not let people choose the gender of the character they want to play rather than having it shoved down their throat?

For that matter, why bother to specify gender or race on the character sheets until it becomes necessary? Unless the character's background story specifically calls for their gender, it's usually not important to decide this before playing.

9. As a player, bring at least one new character created for the con, and maybe bring yours from your own campaign if you play that game at home. Use the description of the event in the conven-

tion catalog to come up with a character, or at least write down a half-dozen or so ideas for characters. Use the standard rules. Try not to come up with any weird permutations of rules or things which the Gamemaster might not want to use. If you've got more than one character, offer one to another player to speed things up if character creation becomes necessary. And remember, even if your beloved character gets iced at the convention, it doesn't really have to have happened in your campaign back home, just as booty and experience earned onsite should be jettisoned. There are some exceptions to this rule, such as *Amber Diceless Role-Playing*, which routinely sucks up characters from alternate versions of the same universe and throws them into play together. But that's an exception.

One Gamemaster trick for modern-day RPGs which could serve well here concerns names. Before setting off for the convention, just jot down a list of about twenty names picked at random from the phone book: both men and women. Customize them, mix and match, and so on to have some good instant character names. Gamemasters can use lists like these to come up with instant monikers for NPCs created when characters want to talk to someone you didn't expect them to contact. A really useful booklet is *The Everyone Every-where List*, from Magic & Tactics Unlimited, a cheap and inexhaustible source of authentic names from dozens of ethnic groups and languages. There are also computer



Leg Wound 13



SCORE 2

Tell opponent: "Do no Red or Orange next turn."

2 45	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 7	36 13
6 17	22 19	38 49
8 23	24 13	40 45
10 31	26 13	42 45
12 3	28 41	44 13
14 19	30 5	46 53
16 13	32 41	48 17

14

Swinging Down 15



Tell opponent: "Do no Blue next turn."

2 57	18 61	34 41
4 57	20 61	36 19
6 17	22 11	38 51
8 61	24 19	40 21
10 57	26 57	42 57
12 57	28 21	44 57
14 9	30 57	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 57

16

17 Sword & Shield Attacking



Tell opponent: "No restrictions next turn."

2 5	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 29	36 00
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 23
10 3	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 3	44 17
14 9	30 5	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 17

18

19 Knocked Off Balance



SCORE -1

Tell opponent: "Do only Green or Yellow next turn."

2 5	18 37	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 00
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 23	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 21	44 15
14 9	30 3	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 17

20



Dr

programs with the same abilities, and any baby naming book could serve the same function with Western names.

10. Above all, relax, have fun, and roll with the punches. If a player turns up with a character that they really, really, really want to play, let them. If it's a pain, then there are plenty of ways to put power-hungry, or trigger-happy players in their places. If a player shows up with a character with the proverbial "18/00" Strength (or the equivalent), then let them use it, but adjust the head baddie's henchman up to Strength 19 or 20, or put a Ring of Weakness in someone's hands. Why not do both, and let the character be pounded on like the proverbial 98-pound weakling for a change?

Finally, one unspoken rule for Gamemasters which can be freely ignored if it conflicts with your style of play is this one:

11. Let them win. People come to conventions for fun. They usually don't get a second shot at the scenario with different characters, the way your home gaming group might. They've come a long way, in some cases across the world, to have a good time in your game. Ending the game with them failing, however hard they tried, is usually not the best way to leave a good impression, unless the game itself is one where failing in a mission is part of the fun (*Paranoia* or *Toon*, for example). Whatever the outcome, give the players the feeling that they did something to affect things for the better, or directly changed the world positive-

ly.

Still, make them feel like they've earned their victory, through foreshadowing a means of success, or by making someone unbelievably lucky at the moment of crisis, or by a reversal of fortune with the villain suddenly inconvenienced or showing some weakness. Before the game, create a few ways that they might succeed if things get really bad, and drop hints for each of them in the game's early stages, such as a random comment or an minor action which turns out to have incredible potential. If the players don't need these "helps," don't use them. Nothing is more annoying than having your butt pulled out of the fire in the last few moments via some form of deus ex machina, but a one-in-a-million shot from a character with described as "Lucky" in a description might be all that is needed.

To use a weird analogy, gamers come to conventions for the same people eat in buffet restaurants. A lot of different types of food, all of it ready, and all of it just waiting for you. You want something exactly to your specifications, then you stay home or go to a different restaurant. What you want at a con is a lot of choices, fast fun and furious all, and you want gaming in quantity. Quality doesn't hurt, either.

But most of all, you want it NOW!

G

FOUR-FOOTED FELONS

FAMILIARS FOR SCOUNDRELS

The genre of fantasy gives free rein to the imagination. If a GM allows magic in his world, then the possibilities for adventure are vast. Wouldn't the same practices used by the apprentices of wizards and enchantresses be picked up by a more unethical, if not larcenous crowd? Given the temptations that even a little magic can send a person, wouldn't there be petty mages who seek to use their abilities to purloin the riches they believe are so well-deserved?

It is not the purpose of this article to hint at all the ways a bit of magic and a deft hand can achieve greatness in the field of thievery. Rather, this piece discusses how one of the more common conventions in fantasy games, the animal familiar, can enable a person to earn more than their fair share of coin. By granting a familiar, those who tread lightly through the shadows will have a most worthwhile companion.

Consider the traditional roles that the familiar plays: cohort, guard, messenger, scout. The thief by nature is a solitary soul. Even though he may belong to a guild or band, he is truly alone at heart. Who can he trust with his secrets and ill-gotten gains? Who will watch his back at night or while out on a mission? Another thief? The idea brings only a sick grin. But a familiar — a faithful animal bonded not only with the soul of the thief but also his heart — is a companion who will never betray. On nights when there is no one else about to safely gloat to about that last grand heist, the familiar will listen and rejoice with the master. During lonely hours when it seems the world has a bounty on that little cutpurse's head, her cat will sympathize with her emotions and give solace.

While mages may stereotypically need a guardian, since most tend to be physically weak or

unskilled at melee, a rogue can also be dependent upon his familiar to watch his back. There are many beggars in the streets of a city. It would be ridiculous to imagine that all are well protected against petty theft or the cruelties of the city watch and young drunkards. But a mangy dog that curls its lip and snarls may keep that poor slumbering soul safe another night. Even that new buccaneer that has yet to prove himself on the high seas needs a warden. His crewmates might have some fun while he sleeps, if not for that godawful parrot who squawks out a warning just before a dagger falls.

A thief also needs the services of a good messenger. Does that fence across town have need of the silver candlesticks that the burglar has found in the estate? Without a familiar to speed the request, he risks carrying excess baggage without truly knowing if he can get any fair coin. What do the beggars across the city have to say, or the rumormongers at the wells, or the bar maids? That dog that begs for scraps may just keep its ears open for someone else. What happens when the thief is caught and tossed into the dungeon? He can rely upon his rat companion to send word to the guild that in return for bribing the guards, his hidden cache of loot will be revealed to them.

Then there is the role of scout or spy. This is especially crucial to those brigands and outlaws who ply their trade along the highways and wilderness. Is there a fat carriage bearing wealthy travelers ahead? Has the forest been emptied of game? Do the king's men stalk the woods in search of rogues? That squirrel the other brigands laughed at may well save one particular scoundrel's hide. In the city, a familiar can offer much as a scout. That cat peering into a window

IMAGES AREN'T
THE ONLY ONES
WHO COULD
USE SOME
QUADRUPEDAL
HELP. HERE ARE
FAMILIARS FOR
THOSE WHO
SKULK.

BY STEVE
BERMAN

ARTWORK BY
BOB HOBBS



at night can tell if the house is occupied. Any strange scents in the estate? That acute nose will find poison or hidden guards before the thief does by happenstance. At the crucial meetings of the smithy's guild, the rat hiding in the corner will bring back news of the new shipment of dwarven steel. Above all else, the familiar can act as an alarm, alerting the thief much faster than a human of the presence of the city watch or some stray eye.

Before going further, we should address how a rogue acquires a familiar. The easiest way is to possess some magical ability. This can range from a suddenly tapped latent talent to a practiced multi- or dual-classed profession. Then all that is necessary is the casting of a summoning spell.

But to those who don't have the knack, there are other ways that can justify the binding of a familiar. Perhaps the thief worships a deity that may reward the character with an animal companion. Or the guild may be in the habit of hiring the services of a mage, who during play may grant a familiar to one of its members in return for some mysterious service.

Finally — and this is my favorite way — perhaps a rogue and a unique animal just cross paths along the way to adventure and soon develop a friendship. The bond between them grows until it has become quite magical. Rather than be the typical master-servant relationship that most familiars undergo, they are two close companions who

share similar interests and care for each other's well-being.

So what sort of animal will come to the thief (or the mage seeking a larcenous career)? Rather than rolling on some table, the DM should choose a native animal from the local environment, one which the rogue may naturally encounter. It would no do to have an alley cat helping the career of a corsair, nor would a raccoon like the rather quiet life of a urban fence. Below are a listing of vocations and suggestions for the sort of familiar that would make a good companion; by no means is this list complete.

BRIGANDS AND OUTLAWS

These rogues rarely step foot inside a city, and then only to sell their loot and buy supplies and luxury items. There are many different sorts of these scoundrels, ranging from desert raiders to highwaymen. The GM should first consider the terrain before choosing the appropriate animal.

Hawk: This raptor is an excellent choice for a cruel, martial sort of outlaw. It lends a sense of physical threat to a thief's image. Those who would set themselves up as brigand lords would be wise to bear a hawk upon a leather gauntlet.

Raccoon: This animal is sometimes known as the bandit of the forest. Indeed, it even wears a black mask. The raccoon has a curious and mischievous nature, a good companion to those outlaws of a less evil bent.

Weasel: For thieves who are the epitome of sneaky, the weasel can offer a vicious streak amid their sly ways. In ancient times, though, the weasel was considered extremely wise; perhaps its wisdom was simply a knack for never getting caught.

BURGLARS AND CUTPURSES

These thieves stalk the city, whether it be the insides of houses and buildings or amid the alleyways. Again the local terrain should be taken into consideration, since a community near a swamp would have a different host of animals than one in a desert.

Bat: This is a rare but useful familiar. On quiet leathery wings, the bat can fly about the city, acting as a swift and silent messenger. Simple folk are sure to find its appearance almost infernal, thus an asset in frightening away unwanted folk from a site about to be burgled.

Cat: An obvious companion for any thief, but especially for a 'cat burglar.' Perhaps more than any other familiar, a feline can range in emotions from crafty to noble. Thus, a GM can use one to complement or provide a foil to any character's personality.

BEGGARS AND SWINDLERS

These are the not your average thieves, but folk that use pity or chicanery to earn their coin. A beggar's familiar must be hardy enough to survive the rigors of such a poor life, while a swindler will tend to attract a more mischievous animal. Either profession may be rural or urban based.

Dog: A pariah dog is the natural companion to a beggar. The animal provokes a note of sympathy from passers-by, as well as giving protection and friendship to the rogue. In the real world, dogs are often paired with the destitute; the animal being the only one loyal to any master suffering hard times.

Rat: Here is a companion that will act as a scavenger of foodstuffs, scraps of clothing, trinkets and most importantly information. The rat is often overlooked but can be privy to a dizzying number of secrets — revealing all to aid its master.

Squirrel: Known for their chattering and quick movements, a squirrel offers the wandering swindler both an ear to every scheme and a companion interested in hoarding possessions.

Though this animal is usually only encountered in wilderness and rural settings, it could easily adapt itself to the environs of its human confidant.

SMUGGLERS AND FENCES

These men both deal in the traffic of wanted goods, though smugglers tend to see more 'action' than sedentary fences. To be successful in either

Skill	Animal(s)
Alertness	Cat, dog, hawk
Ancient History	Owl, tortoise
Animal Training	Any, but will be confined to that animal type
Appraise Goods	Cat, owl
Begging	Dog
Boating	Otter, rat, toad
Catwalking	Cat, squirrel
Eavesdropping	Rat, raven, squirrel
Etiquette	Cat
Fast-Talking	Squirrel
Fishing	Otter, raccoon
Fortune Telling	Black cat
Gem Cutting	Toad (old tales say the toad has a gem in its skull)
Heraldry	Hawk
Herbalism	Any strictly herbivorous animal
Hunting	Any strictly carnivorous animal
Intimidation	Black cat, owl, weasel
Juggling	Raccoon
Leaping	Rabbit, toad
Local History	Mouse, raven
Mimicry	Magpie, raven
Mining	Any burrowing animal
Night vision	Bat, cat, owl
Play Instrument	Cat, songbird, toad
Ransacking	Raccoon, rat, weasel
Reading/Writing	Owl, rat
Set Snares	Fox, rabbit
Singing	Cat, songbird, toad
Survival	Dog
Swimming	Otter, rat, toad
Tracking	Dog
Trailing	Dog
Tumbling	Squirrel

"Perhaps a rogue and a unique animal just cross paths along the way to adventure and soon develop a friendship. The bond between them grows until it has become quite magical. Rather than be the typical master-servant relationship that most familiars undergo, they are two close companions who share similar interests and care for each other's well-being."

endeavor requires keen wits, and a familiar should also express this trait.

Owl: The classic wizard's familiar can also be portrayed as the companion to a fence. The knowledge of the owl in tabulating records, falsifying documents, and appraising goods is considerable. He lends a spooky air to the fence or smuggler, an aura of intimidation that will be an edge when dealing with clients.

Raven: The raven is well known as a collector of shiny objects. The talent here is in the caching of possessions, as well as offering the possibility of a messenger than can actually speak a few words of the common tongue.

Toad: While not one of the more attractive familiars, the toad should not to be overlooked. Steadfast yet silent, the toad bespeaks a solemnity of hidden wisdom. The toad will know the best routes along waterways for boats and skiffs to travel, can explore coves for his master, and find safe water and food in a swamp.

In addition to all the benefits mentioned above, there is one more use that familiars can provide. By association with the animal, a rogue soon learns to refine certain skills that it exemplifies. This amounts to a small gain in attempted rolls. To gain a 5% bonus on the roll, one must have been in the company of the familiar for a number

of months equal to at least three months. After a year, that bonus rises to 10%.

Should the familiar and its master part company for any reason, the bonus is slowly lost as the finer points of the skill fade from memory. The chart on page 25 shows which animals may provide what gains (by no means is this complete, and an imaginative GM or player can certainly provide more instances).

Please note that in this article familiars are presented with more intelligence and perception than normal. In my defense, I can only say that as a mage or rogue grows in confidence and ability, so to should their faithful companion, until the two can practically converse by whispering in each others' ears. There is a bond that runs far deeper than most share; a dependence and caring for the well-being of each other.

Given that, it is not hard to project of bit of personality into a familiar. That cat can be a bit surly at times, especially when robbing the houses of the smelly lower class. The squirrel may constantly yearn to see the crowded marketplaces of the city. And the dog may decide that he should have a direct say in his master's traveling confederates. Remember that fantasy knows only the boundaries of the imagination. **6**



HEAVY GEAR

Gaia's Vengeance

Written by Jeff Mackintosh • Art by Ghislain Barbe

Introduction

Welcome to the *Heavy Gear* universe, set in the far future where humanity is thinly spread across the great void. Interstellar travel is possible, but altogether unpleasant, time-consuming and very costly. Colonized planets are isolated for centuries. Imagine a distant world where great empires have been established. A world where humanoid vehicles protect the soldiers within. Welcome to Terra Nova, the savage, sun-scorched world that humanity's hardest pioneers call home.

Heavy Gear is the newest science fiction universe by Dream Pod 9. It is also the name of the first game set in that universe. The first few *Heavy Gear* game books recount the recent events on Terra Nova, one of the first planets outside the Sol system to be colonized by Man. The year is 6132. Technology has advanced by leaps and bounds, but unpleasant historical circumstances have limited its expansion. Colonists often found out — the hard way — that high tech equipment tends to break down over time, so they preferred to use a mix of high and low tech.

As our story opens, Terra Nova has just defeated an invasion force from Earth, intent on reclaiming their "lost" colony. The invaders fled, but nobody can offer an explanation as to why they chose to reappear after such a long silence. After forming a short-lived alliance to fight off the Earth forces, the military forces of the North and the South (political alliances similar to the East and West coalitions of the Cold War days) are restless again. Raiding and frontier wars plague the planet. Something's going on... but nobody seems to know what. Are you bold enough to find out?

This adventure is Episode One of two linked adventures. Each adventure is designed to be run separately, but the plots of both are tightly intertwined. Furthermore, these adventures will not paint any established group as the bad guys. This is done so that the adventure can be used with characters from any region of Terra Nova. For simplicity, we will refer to the characters as though they were from the Northern Guard. Gamemasters should use the Northern references only as a guide and feel free to make any change they deem necessary to fit their own campaign.

The players can choose any Gears they wish in this adventure. GMs are free to create any other handouts that they believe will add to the feel of the game: maps, mission briefings, NPC data files, intelligence reports, etc.

Sequence 1: Drop Zone

Outline

The characters are called in by their superior officer and briefed for a mission. Immediately after their briefing, the characters are loaded into an air transport and flown to the drop site.

Game Notes

The characters' superior officer will tell them that Cynthia James, the personal secretary of Brigadier Gibbons and the daughter of Colonel James, was kidnapped by a band of rovers five days ago. Earlier today, the rovers, who have identified themselves as Gaia's Vengeance, announced that they were holding the girl for a ransom of 10 million marks. Should their demands not be met in two days, they will kill Cynthia and kidnap another daughter of the military brass until they get what they want.

Since Cynthia is the daughter of a highly respected field commander and, as Brigadier Gibbons' personal secretary, is privy to some sensitive material, the military has decided to act swiftly. Colonel James has taken the initiative and ordered a squad of Gears — the characters — to rescue her immediately. Normally, the military would frown on James being involved in this operation, but an exception seems to have been made....

Satellite surveillance has discovered the rover camp and identified Gears in the vicinity. Due to

Wolves Attacking 17



SCORE -2

Tell opponent: "No restrictions next turn. If my score is greater than zero, take no damage and do no Wolves Attack for the rest of the game."

2 5	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 29	36 15
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 21
10 3	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 3	44 17
14 9	30 5	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 17

18

Knocked Off Balance 19



SCORE 2

Tell opponent: "Do only Green or Yellow next turn."

2 5	18 37	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 15
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 21	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 21	44 17
14 9	30 3	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 17

20

21 Turned Around



SCORE -1

Tell opponent: "Do only Yellow or Shield attacks next turn."

2 19	18 37	34 25
4 63	20 53	36 00
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 23	24 15	40 45
10 31	26 63	42 45
12 19	28 3	44 13
14 9	30 5	46 43
16 31	32 31	48 45

22

23 Behind You



Tell opponent: "No restrictions next turn and you may change weapons."

2 53	18 7	34 53
4 47	20 7	36 00
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 19	40 21
10 45	26 47	42 5
12 45	28 3	44 17
14 9	30 3	46 41
16 1	32 45	48 17

24

cloudy weather, they are unable to confirm the exact number or make of the Gears present. With this knowledge, James has decided to use a Gear team rather than a commando squad for fear of the squad being out-gunned and jeopardizing his daughter's life. The camp is located about 170 km into the Westridge Trench, west of the Great White Desert and about 300 km north of Prince Gable. There is a clearing 43 km northwest of the camp that is suitable for use as a drop zone. From there, the characters are to make their way to the camp, rescue Cynthia and, should the opportunity present itself, apprehend or cripple Gaia's Vengeance. After their briefing, the characters are rushed to their transport and begin the flight to the drop site.

En route to the drop site, a member of the flight crew informs the characters that a severe storm has made a safe drop nearly impossible. They will adjust their flight path to a backup drop zone roughly 100 km east of the camp, in the savanna of the Great White Desert, knowing that the storm will not hit there until the characters are safely on the ground.

Objective

The characters must be informed of their mission and plan the rescue. With the sudden change in drop site, they will be forced to adjust their plans quickly.

Potential Complications

The characters encounter a pack of Desert Wolves, rovers that operate in the Westridge Trench region. They will primarily be driving desert vehicles, but they also have a few small, older Gears. If attacked, they will act only in self-defense and will open communications with the characters to ask why they are attacking. Once the Wolves have cleared up the confusion, they will point the characters in the direction they were already heading, but they will reveal that they do not know the exact location of Gaia's Vengeance. If the characters continue to attack, the rovers will attempt to retreat. If they cannot retreat, they will fight viciously and exact their vengeance in true rover fashion.

Sequence 2: The Best Laid Plans...

Outline

The characters are now approaching the desert camp of Gaia's Vengeance and must proceed with their plans to rescue Cynthia.

Game Notes

Cynthia's kidnapping is a hoax. Cynthia and her father, Colonel James, are Earth sympathizers and have been working to build a secret army to aid Earth when it returns in force. Over the past several years, Cynthia and her father have been "losing" shipments of military supplies throughout the Great White and Western Deserts to be

picked up by the members of the "rover gang." These shipments have been transported to several secret hideouts to await Earth's return.

Cynthia concocted the plan to blackmail several million marks out of the military, which they could then use to purchase more armament from the neutral military manufacturer, Paxton Arms. James felt that the plan could succeed, but knew that the military would take action before turning over such a large sum of money. He knew the military's first reaction would be to send in a commando team to "rescue" his daughter, but this was unacceptable. A commando team would successfully penetrate the rover camp and quite possibly discover the truth, which would make the entire plan pointless. Therefore, James acted first by ordering a team of Gears in, citing the presence of rover Gears and the possibility that a commando team would be out-gunned. Compared to a commando team, he knew a Gear team could easily be ambushed at the drop site — if one just happened to know where it was going to land. After the team of Gears was ambushed and destroyed, James believed the military would have little choice but to concede to the demands of the rovers, thereby funding his private army.

The one factor that was not taken into consideration was the weather. Due to the emergency change in plans, the characters have been dropped on the opposite side of the camp and will therefore avoid the ambush.

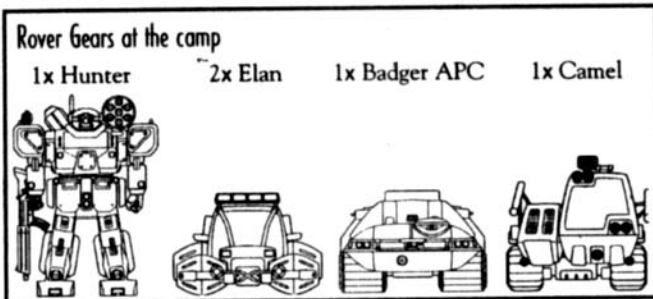
The camp is relatively empty since most of the rovers are about 6 clicks away preparing to ambush the characters. All that remains are a few guards and a Hunter Gear. Once the characters are discovered in the camp, the Hunter pilot will send out an emergency message to the ambush site before turning his weapons on them. The characters will meet brief resistance before the rovers realize they are out-gunned and flee into the surrounding terrain. If the characters pursue them, the rovers will make use of the rough terrain to hide themselves. The Hunter will have much more difficulty losing the characters should they give chase and will fight to the death if escape is impossible. If the characters use ECM to block the communications of the Hunter, any rover escaping into the surrounding area (and at least one will) will communicate with the main force and reveal that the characters are there.

When the characters chase off the rovers, they will have roughly 10 minutes to look through the camp before the main force returns. In the camp, the characters will find no immediate sign of Cynthia. They will not find any captives nor any sign that someone has been held there. Also, if players are very thorough in their search (Notice roll vs. Threshold 7), they might discover a map of the region. Marked on the map is the route the characters were originally going to use to approach the camp, before their unexpected change in plans. Marked on the route, about 6

Gaia's Vengeance

klicks away, is an "X."

Equipment



Characters

1 Hunter Pilot PER +1, all combat skills at level 2

10 rovers (treat as 1 standard Northern infantry squad)

Objective

The objective is quite simple: neutralize the rovers in the camp. Once the characters succeed, they may have enough time to discover a few things about the rovers before the ambush force returns. They will likely have to wait until after the conflict with the ambushing force to sort out any details.

Potential Complications

During the confrontation, one of the characters recognizes one of the rovers, an old friend from Basic Training that he has not seen for about 2 cycles. If any attempt is made to communicate with the individual, he will fight more ferociously than before with the specific intent of killing his old friend. Another alternative is to have the rovers who escaped decide to counter attack when the characters leave their Gears to search the camp, forcing the characters into a dangerous and difficult fight outside of their Gears.

Sequence 3: Endgame

Outline

The rovers who were prepared to ambush the characters return to camp after receiving the message that the characters are there.

Game Notes

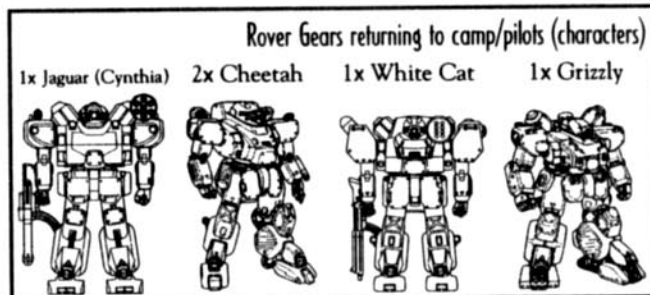
The first sign that the rovers have arrived will be the comm and sensor systems going wild due to the blanket of white noise ECM being thrown up by the rovers' White Cat. The second sign will be the two Cheetahs racing into the encampment and unleashing their Pepperbox missiles at the characters' Gears.

If the characters are prepared for trouble, they may not be taken by surprise and might be able to ambush the rovers themselves. Regardless, the rovers will do everything they can to eliminate them so that they can not report back to base. The White Cat will continue to use ECM to hamper the characters and will target any character Gear capable of ECM. The Cheetahs will use their speed and maneuverability to get in tight and fire at point blank range. The Grizzly will stay as far back as possible and bring its awesome firepower to bear against any fire support Heavy Gears on the team. Cynthia, in her Jaguar, will stay back, firing her medium

autocannon at any Gear foolish enough to get in her line of fire. The rovers will not back down as long as Cynthia is alive since she will inspire them to fight on. Should she fall before the others are dealt with, the remaining rovers will actually step up their attacks to avenge her death.

After the battle, the most important thing the characters will find is Cynthia in the enemy Jaguar, killed by a fatal head wound. Also, the characters will notice that all the equipment in the camp is standard issue Northern Guard materiel and that most of the rovers are obviously not military personnel (non-military standard haircuts being the most obvious clue.). They will also discover Cynthia's journal, which was missing when the characters searched the camp before. The last entry in the journal, dated today, simply reads, "The plan is proceeding as expected." When the characters read the rest of the journal they will be able to piece together most of Cynthia and Colonel James' failed blackmail attempt. Nothing will be said about why they did this (there is no mention of their aiding Earth).

Equipment



Characters

Cynthia James AGI/PER +2, all combat skills 3

2 Cheetah Pilots AGI/PER +2, all combat skills 2

1 White Cat Pilot AGI +1/PER +2, all combat skills 2, Electronic Warfare 3, Communications 2

1 Grizzly Pilot PER +1, all combat skills 2

Turned Around 21



SCORE 2

Tell opponent: "Do only Yellow next turn."

2 19	18 37	34 25
4 63	20 19	36 15
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 23	24 15	40 45
10 3	26 63	42 45
12 13	28 3	44 17
14 9	30 5	46 43
16 31	32 31	48 17

22

Behind You 23



Tell opponent: "No restrictions next turn."

2 7	18 7	34 53
4 19	20 7	36 15
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 19	40 21
10 45	26 47	42 5
12 45	28 3	44 17
14 9	30 3	46 41
16 1	32 45	48 17

24

25

Kicking



Tell opponent: "Do no Thrusts or Yellow next turn."

2	5	18	41	34	25
4	63	20	19	36	00
6	47	22	11	38	49
8	33	24	15	40	5
10	3	26	63	42	19
12	41	28	5	44	19
14	9	30	3	46	43
16	57	32	9	48	19

26

27 Weapon Dislodged



SCORE 0

Tell opponent: "Do no Orange. Don't use this weapon until it has been retrieved, and you may change weapons."

2	19	18	37	34	25
4	47	20	23	36	00
6	45	22	11	38	19
8	53	24	31	40	31
10	3	26	53	42	5
12	53	28	19	44	17
14	9	30	31	46	29
16	23	32	9	48	17

28

30

Cynthia James

On 1 Winter TN 1905, possibly the coldest day of that miserable cycle, Cynthia, daughter of Captain Mikhail James, was born. Natasha, her mother, died of complications during childbirth, leaving Mikhail to raise their daughter alone. Cynthia grew up as a military brat, playing with toy guns while other children her age played with more mundane toys. By the age of 8 cycles, Cynthia had already fired her first gun on a hunting trip with her father. With Earth's occupation of Terra Nova in TN 1913, Mikhail — a very opportunistic man — saw a chance to turn a bad situation around. James became an mole for the Earth forces in their attempted conquest, hoping to gain a better life when they succeeded. Four cycles later, when the Earth forces left, Mikhail knew that they would return, better prepared the next time. He also knew that he had to hide the fact that he had aided Earth during the occupation, by any means necessary. Those that James did not trust and those that would not join his private army were hunted down as "threats to the state." He was so effective in this facade that the military promoted him twice for his outstanding efforts and tactical genius in hunting down and dealing with these "dangerous elements."

All along, Cynthia has stood by her father, hunting wild springers and enemies alike. She is second-in-command of Gaia's Vengeance and is loved by the members of the band. Where most of the men follow Mikhail out of respect, they follow Cynthia out of love. She is their inspirational leader. With her promotion to Brigadier Gibbons' personal secretary, Cynthia has been able to "lose" shipments of military equipment that her father's men have hoarded away, awaiting Earth's return. Cynthia plans on being right beside her father the day it happens.

Objective

Defeat the rovers. Find out that Cynthia faked her own kidnapping.

Potential Complications

As the characters pound the rovers, the rover foot soldiers who were chased off return to attack from behind, aiding their companions.

Debriefing

If the players are not going to play the second part of this adventure (next issue), the scenario ends and the officers debrief the characters as soon as they return to base:

The PC's superior officer will tell them that the military police will be taking over the investigation and that each of them will be questioned about what they saw. He will say nothing more, but they will learn later, through the rumor mill,

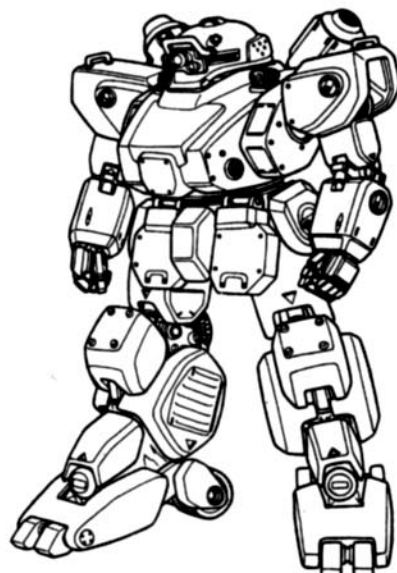
that Colonel James has gone AWOL and has disappeared in the Badlands on a hijacked troop transport with a group of mercenaries.

Naturally, the characters will have a few questions, most of which will not be answered by their superiors ("It's on a need-to-know basis only, and you don't need to know," "You don't need to concern yourself with this any more," "It's being handled by competent authorities"), though they might learn the truth later through the rumor mill.

- Why did Cynthia and James attempt to blackmail the military, besides the money?
- How did a band of rovers get their hands on such a large stash of military equipment?
- Why did Cynthia and James work with this group of rovers and how deep did their ties to them go?
- Where did James disappear to?
- What is he planning?

Whether you choose to answer these questions or work them into your campaign is your choice. James could easily become a recurring villain or could fade into distant memory. It's all up to you.

If, however, you plan on playing the second part of this adventure, the remaining answers to these questions will be found there. Debrief the characters on site while they wait for a transport aircraft to re-supply them before setting out on the second part of "Gaia's Vengeance." 🐉



SHADIS TWENTY-EIGHT



AN ADVENTURE FOR THE UPCOMING DEADLANDS RPG. BY SHANE LACY HENSLEY

ART BY RON SPENCER AND JAY NEAL

Our twisted tale of the Weird West begins in, of all places, the City of Lost Angels, California. The Cult of Lost Angels, under the leadership of Hezekiah Grimme, is constantly trying to thwart the influx of settlers and technology to the region. Such things upset their secret cannibalistic rituals, you see.

The railroads are the cult's worst nightmares. They bring more tin horns and lawmen to California than a fellow can shake a gnawed leg-bone at. So the cult sends its followers out to sabotage any company that gets close to linking their lines into a transcontinental railroad.

The latest object of their peculiar affections is the Union Pacific. The UP signed a treaty with the Sioux Nations last year ('75) and ran a line right through South Dakota and the treaty city of Deadwood. The Sioux's only restrictions were that UP could not make any stops other than Deadwood and they could not lay their tracks through the sacred "Paha Sapa" or Black Hills.

UP eagerly agreed. Who wanted to build a rail line over steep hills anyway? Even better, the protection of the fierce Sioux warbands meant rival railroad gangs couldn't sabotage their line. This made the "Dakota Stretch" a crucial link in completing UP's transcontinental railroad.

The Cult of Lost Angels isn't pleased with this platonic arrangement, so Grimme sent two of his Outer Circle members to start trouble between the railroad and the Sioux. The cultists hope to start a war that will ruin the entire Dakota Stretch and raise their status with Brother Grimme.

THE SCHEME

To do this, Brothers Emmanuel Strong and Jacob Wyse spent some time in Deadwood to study the situation and then devised a simple but cunning plan. They sabotaged a bridge between

Deadwood and the Black Hills and lay in wait for a repair crew to come fix it. Then they jumped the crew, pushed their flat car into the river, and took the captives up into the Black Hills.

The cultists made camp the first night in an old trapper's cabin near a swamp formed by the bowl of several peaks. They planned on killing their captives the next morning and planting false evidence to suggest the rail crew was actually a survey team looking to lay a line through the Black Hills. This would anger the Sioux, while UP would assume the Indians murdered their repairmen.

CHANCE ENCOUNTER

But that night, something went terribly amiss. An ancient creature known to the Sioux as the "Horse Eater" lived in the swamp beside the cultist's camp. The cultists watched in reverent fascination as its slimy touch burned the flesh of the captured rail crew's horse. It devoured the liquefied animal in minutes, killed one of the crewman who tried to rush by it and escaped. Brothers Strong and Wyse threw the second captive into the stolen wagon and fled into the night.

The next day, Strong and Wyse returned to the swamp. Strangely, the horse had been devoured but the body of the dead rail worker was left untouched. Brother Strong instantly realized how he could turn misfortune into opportunity. They had spotted a Sioux village nearby with a large herd of horses. If he could get the swamp creature to attack the Sioux's horses, then set it up so that the Sioux found the body of the repair man and the fake survey maps, the Indians would believe that not only had Union Pacific secretly surveyed the Black Hills for a new rail line, their careless treachery had also awakened a monster.

The trouble was leading the creature to the

Kicking

25



Tell opponent: "Do no Blue or Yellow next turn."

2 5	18 41	34 25
4 63	20 19	36 19
6 19	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 3	26 63	42 19
12 41	28 5	44 19
14 9	30 3	46 43
16 57	32 9	48 19

26

Weapon Dislodged 27



SCORE 0

Tell opponent: "Do no weapon attacks until weapon has been retrieved."

2 7	18 37	34 25
4 47	20 23	36 31
6 19	22 11	38 27
8 53	24 31	40 41
10 3	26 53	42 5
12 53	28 53	44 17
14 9	30 31	46 29
16 23	32 9	48 17

28

29

Ducking



Tell opponent: "Do no Orange next turn, but add +1 to any Blue that scores, and you may change weapons."

2 27	18 37	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 00
6 17	22 19	38 19
8 33	24 15	40 27
10 3	26 63	42 27
12 3	28 3	44 15
14 9	30 27	46 27
16 57	32 27	48 17

30

31

Arm Wound



SCORE 1

Tell opponent: "Do no Red or Orange next turn."

2 5	18 13	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 00
6 45	22 31	38 49
8 33	24 45	40 5
10 3	26 63	42 5
12 45	28 31	44 45
14 19	30 5	46 43
16 19	32 19	48 17

32

32

Sioux village. This meant stealing a few of their horses to make a "trail" from the swamp to the village. Strong pulled this off easily enough, and within three days, the Horse Eater attacked the Sioux village.

NEVER SMILES

One of the Sioux, a champion named Never Smiles, fought the Horse Eater and was burnt by its acidic touch. Never Smiles could not defeat the monster and fled for his life, but the touch of its slug-like flesh gave him an idea how he might defeat it: salt.

Never Smiles hoped shotguns loaded with rock salt would kill the Horse Eater. Unfortunately, he had neither shotguns nor enough salt to kill a monster the size of the Horse Eater. So Never Smiles sent money and an order to a trader he knew in Deadwood. Besides the shotguns, shells, and salt, he ordered several other items to help conceal the contraband (the Federal government does not allow the sale of weapons to tribes of the Sioux Nations).

Never Smiles also knew a friend in Deadwood who owed him a favor, and sent word for him to escort the wagon-load of supplies to his village at the northern base of the Black Hills.

While the impatient Never Smiles was waiting for his salt and shotguns, he decided to venture into the hills and find the thing's lair. The creature attacked only at night, so Never Smiles figured he would be safe if he searched the Black Hills only in the daytime. He hadn't counted on the Brothers Strong and Wyse.

The cultists caught Never Smiles poking around the swamp and got the drop on him with their rifles. Then they beat him up and dragged him up to a ruined cabin along the Horse Eater's nightly path.

CHAPTER ONE:
DEADWOOD

One of the posse is the unfortunate fellow who owes Never Smiles a favor. The Marshal (that's you, partner) needs to pick a character that will feel honor-bound to pay back the favor and keep this adventure going. Another Indian makes a good choice, as does a cowpoke with Hindrances like loyal, honest, or heroic. Good guys make such easy pickings.

Never Smiles has sent word that it's time to repay his favor. He's arranged for a wagon-load of supplies to be picked up from an Indian trader named Dean. He needs his friend and his companions to escort the wagon to his village some six miles away at the foot of the Black Hills.

The trip starts in Deadwood on Saturday, March 6th, 1876, sometime before noon. It's cold and wet in South Dakota this time of year, so the

group should be well-outfitted with coats, blankets, and rain-slickers.

Never Smiles' supplies are already paid for. Trader Dean has everything packed in a rickety buckboard ready to go. Dean chucked the list of what's supposed to be in the wagon, so the posse will have to trust the trader that what's inside is what Never Smiles paid for.

INSIDE THE WAGON

The supplies are concealed by a tight canvas tarp tied over the wagon. The posse shouldn't get an inventory unless they actually untie the tarp and poke around. If they do, they'll find the following:

- 4 barrels of flour
- 16 20-pound bags of rock salt
- 107 surplus US Army blankets with shotguns wrapped in the bottom-most blankets
- A barrel of 50 shotgun shells covered by a layer of nails
- 1 keg of whiskey marked "sugar"

A character who makes a Foolproof (3) knowledge roll knows the Sioux Nations have announced that anyone caught bringing whiskey into their territory would be dealt with under the law of the tribe that catches them. This means death in most tribes. Never Smiles hopes the whiskey will burn the creature if the salt doesn't work.

Dean's rickety wagon can make 40 miles a day, so it should only take the posse about 5 hours to get to the village.

BOUNTY

Give the posse 1 bounty point for agreeing to repay Never Smiles's favor. Add 1 for each of the 3 contraband items they discover in the wagon.

CHAPTER TWO:
PORTENTS

As the posse journeys south, they'll come across Elk Creek. The Union Pacific crosses the bridge here before heading southeast around the Black Hills — or at least it would, if a three-yard section of track in the middle of the bridge weren't missing its ties.

Anyone looking for tracks will have a difficult time because of the cultist's efforts to conceal their presence. Still, on an Incredible (11) trackin' roll, wagon tracks leading from the north can be found. The wagon was heavily loaded until it stopped a few yards from the bridge. At that point there are strange drag marks leading into the deeper water beneath the bridge. The tracks then get much lighter as they lead to a shallow ford twenty yards to the east. The wagon came out the other side but disappeared a few yards from shore.

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A GAME OF STEAMPUNK, MAGIC, AND HORROR IN THE WILD WEST

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The Horse Eater

The creek below the bridge is just over 4 feet deep. Should anyone plumb its depths, they'll see what made the strange drag marks — enough wooden ties to repair those missing from the center of the bridge.

This is where the repair crew's wagon full of replacement ties was jumped by Brothers Strong and Wyse. The cultists then dumped the railroad ties into the river and took the captives and their wagon into the hills.

BOUNTY

The posse gets 1 bounty point for poking around the mess and gathering clues. Add two more if they find the rail ties hidden in the creek.

CHAPTER THREE: ANGRY CLOUDS

The posse will be noticed as they approach Never Smiles' village. Braves on horseback will ride near and ask them their business. The characters are expected, so there shouldn't be much difficulty in dealing with the warriors. The Sioux village is but one of many Lakota settlements. Twenty men, twenty-eight women, and eight children currently occupy the various lodges. All stare curiously at the posse as they ride into the center of their home.

When the group stops, an old, haggard Indian approaches. This is Angry Clouds, the tribe's Shaman. After brief formalities, Angry Clouds will speak:

"Welcome to our home. The one you seek is not here. Never Smiles has gone to Paha Sapa to fight the evil. But he cannot succeed without this wagon. You must take it to him."

Paha Sapa are, of course, the Black Hills. Should the party refuse to travel there, Angry Clouds will remind the character who owed Never Smiles of his obligation. A few angry young braves might also encourage the posse to take the wagon on to Never Smiles.

When the party does finally agree, Angry Clouds will tell them what he knows of Never Smiles' fate:

"The evil came several nights ago. Every night one pony was taken. Never Smiles and several other braves vowed they would catch the thief and hid among the ponies on the sixth night. The evil came and killed most of them before taking another pony. This time the evil ate the pony and left its bones. Never Smiles was hurt badly but he said he knew how to defeat the evil. The next morning he sent two notes to Deadwood. He said he would slay the creature when it returned that night with the supplies you were to bring. He wanted to spend the day trying to find the creature's lair. Never Smiles promised he would be gone only a few hours; then he would return and

tell us of his plan. That was early this morning. Now it is almost night and he has not returned. You must find him tonight — before the Horse Eater rises again."

Angry Clouds is insistent that the posse go looking for Never Smiles immediately. His fresh tracks require only a Fair (5) trackin' roll to follow.

BOUNTY

Add 1 to posse's bounty once they've picked up Never Smiles' trail.

CHAPTER FOUR: LACY O'MALLEY

BLACK HILLS: FEAR LEVEL 2

Never Smiles' trail leads the group up and down a trail for just under half an hour. The trail is usually 3-4 yards wide, so they should have little difficulty getting their wagon through the hills.

After a half hour of travel, the posse will see a burnt wagon in a pass between two steep cliffs fifty yards ahead. Standing before it are two men and their horses. One man wears an all-white suit and hat. The other is hidden beneath the canvas sack of a tripod camera.

When the group draws near enough, the camera flashes on the macabre scene and a dark-haired Italian man emerges from beneath the canvas. He is a studio photographer dragged from Deadwood by the other man, a blonde-haired Irishman named Lacy O'Malley. O'Malley is a well-known newshound for the Tombstone Epitaph, and anyone who reads the rag likely knows his name as well as his reputation.

Lacy greets the posse cautiously when they first approach. He was in Deadwood when he got a tip that a Union Pacific rail crew had gone missing. His investigations brought him here. If asked, Lacy tells the posse that Union Pacific is not allowed into the sacred Black Hills. In his opinion, these men trespassed and were killed by nearby Sioux. As far as he can figure, UP is looking to break their treaty with the Sioux by running a line through the Black Hills. He figures UP staged the break themselves as an excuse to send their "repair crew" out into the Nations. From there the crew could sneak on into the hills to survey a pass.

In truth, Brother Strong staged this scene to blame the murder of the repair crew on the Sioux. He was forced to burn the body to hide the horrible scars caused by the repairman's death at the hands of the Horse Eater.

LACY O'MALLEY

Lacy is tenacious to the point of annoying. Both the Pinkertons and the Texas Rangers despise him for constantly revealing abominations to the public.

Ducking

29



Tell opponent: "Do no Orange next turn, but add +2 to any Blue that scores."

2	27	18	37	34	25
4	63	20	29	36	15
6	17	22	27	38	19
8	33	24	15	40	27
10	3	26	63	42	27
12	3	28	3	44	17
14	9	30	27	46	27
16	57	32	27	48	17

30

Arm Wound

31



SCORE 3

Tell opponent: "Do no Red or Orange next turn."

2	19	18	13	34	25
4	63	20	29	36	19
6	17	22	31	38	49
8	33	24	45	40	19
10	3	26	63	42	19
12	45	28	31	44	17
14	31	30	5	46	43
16	31	32	31	48	17

32

33 Dodging



Tell opponent: "Add +2 if you Score next turn and you may change weapons."

2 5	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 29	36 00
6 17	22 41	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 19
10 19	26 41	42 5
12 3	28 41	44 17
14 9	30 41	46 27
16 1	32 41	48 41

34

35 X-Range Body Wound



SCORE 3

Tell opponent: "Do only Brown next turn."

2 5	18 53	34 53
4 63	20 53	36 00
6 47	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 3	26 47	42 5
12 3	28 53	44 47
14 9	30 27	46 53
16 1	32 9	48 47

36

Corporeal: D:3d6, N:2d8, Q:1d6, S:2d6, V:1d6

Climbin' 1, dodge 2, filchin' 2, horse ridin' 1, lockpickin' 2, shootin' pistols 2, sneak 4, swimmin' 1

Mental: C:3d6, K:1d6, M:1d4, Sm:1d8, Sp:2d4

Academia: occult 3, area knowledge: Tombstone 2, arts: photography 2, bluff 2, guts 2, language: French 2, overawe 1, persuasion 3, professional: journalism 3, ridicule 2, scroungin' 1, scrutinize 5, search 4, streetwise 2

Junk: Lacy carries a steno pad, pen, and a .38 caliber revolver.

EXAMINING THE SCENE

In the seat of the wagon is a charred body with several arrows sticking out of it. Everyone present should make guts checks, but the Marshal should modify the difficulty based on each character's previous experiences. The blackened sideboards of the wagon read "Union Pacific Railroad." Lying in and about it are survey tools and hand-drawn maps of the area showing a new rail line cutting directly through this pass.

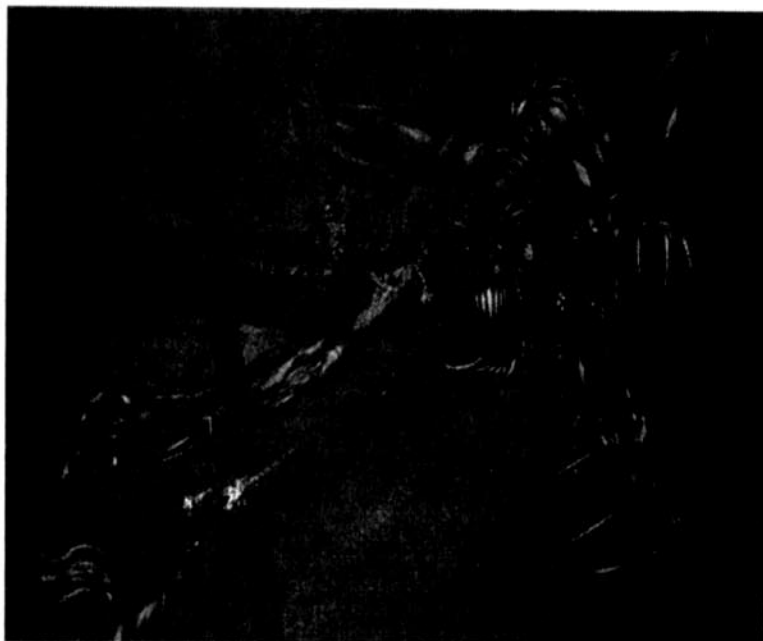
There is one important clue that can later help reveal Strong's scheme. The hand-drawn survey maps were made by brother Wyse, not an experienced engineer. If a character has science: engineerin' or experience working on a railroad, have him or her make a roll. On an Onerous (7) success for the former or an Incredible (11) success for the latter, the examiner will realize the maps are completely useless.

BABBLINGS OF A MADMAN

Just as the group finishes investigating the scene, Lacy says that there were supposed to be two members of the repair crew. As if on cue, the surviving repairman comes running out of the woods. The man grabs onto the nearest character and starts ranting.

"Eyes... evil... claws like Bowie knives... slimy skin like an eel. Bullets bounced right off it. Charlie — It got Charlie! I want to go home!"

Charlie is the man lying dead in the burnt wagon. The repairman will point at him as he says his name. If the posse asks him about the wagon or the "attack," he'll simply shake his head and say "No!" That's the best the posse will get out of this fellow. The things he's seen in the last two days have driven him completely over the edge.



Assuming the party has told Lacy about the missing Never Smiles, he'll decide to tag along. His photographer will eagerly volunteer to take the mad repairman back to Deadwood.

BOUNTY

The posse gets 2 bounty points for poking around the mess and gathering clues. Add 1 more if someone notices the poor quality of the survey maps.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE RESCUE

THE BOG AND OVERLOOK: FEAR LEVEL 3

Never Smile's tracks lead to a deep bowl between several high hills. The bowl holds a large swamp full of scraggly trees, tall weeds, and thick muck. Never Smiles' tracks lead around the swamp several times before they disappear.

As the group tries to pick up the trail, they will come upon the bones of a pony a short ways up the northern slope of the bowl that forms the swamp. A Fair (5) search roll also reveals a ruined blood-stained rope hanging from a nearby tree. This was one of the ponies the cultists used to draw the Horse Eater to the top of the hill where it could see the Sioux village below. The Horse Eater typically follows this path up the hill and climbs down the front of the cliff to attack the Sioux's herd. Every 100 yards up the wide path of the hill is another horse carcass. Each one looks slightly fresher than the last.

The Horse Eater

THE OVERLOOK

At the top of the hill is a ruined trapper's cabin. The group should reach this spot shortly after dark. Tied to a post inside the ruin is Never Smiles. The cultists beat him senseless and left him here in the path of the Horse Eater to see if it would attack humans that weren't actually provoking it. It will, of course.

As the posse moves in to free Never Smiles, they'll hear a strange slurping sound from the base of the hill, then an eerie thudding. The Horse Eater has risen from the swamp below and is climbing up the hill toward the cabin. When it reaches the top of the hill, it will attack ferociously. If reduced to below its last 10 hits, the Horse Eater will retreat to its swamp where it will disappear in the mire.

If the posse hasn't already figured it out, Never Smiles will tell them that their only hope is the shotguns and salt in the wagon. Some of the group will have to distract and delay the Horse Eater while the others dig out the shotguns and shells and stuff the barrels full of salt. Loading the shotguns with rock salt takes 1 extra round of reload time.

THE HORSE EATER

The Horse Eater has slimy blue flesh like that of a slug or an eel. Its teeth and nails are the size of Bowie knives. It doesn't walk so much as bounds, making it very difficult to move through the thick forests of the Black Hills (half move), which is why it usually keeps to the large paths when it emerges from its home in the swamp.

Corporeal: D:3d10, N:4d10, Q:2d12, S:1d20, V:1d20

Climbin' 5, fightin': brawlin' 5, sneak 2, swimmin' 5

Mental: C:2d10, K:1d4, M:3d8, Sm:1d6, Sp:1d6

Overawe 4, search 4

Special Abilities:

Acid Touch: The Horse Eater's hands emit a powerful acid. Besides the damage from the creature's inherent Strength, anyone touched by it suffers hideous wounds that can only be healed by magical or mystical means.

Invulnerability: The Horse Eater is a creature of legend. Bullets, arrows, and normal weapons cannot hurt it. Its slug-like skin makes it extremely vulnerable to salt, however. Handfuls of salt do 1d4 points per hit. Salt shot does a base 2d8 damage per hit.

Weakness: The creature feeds on horse meat. If it is confronted by a mounted target, it will attempt to focus its attentions on the more dangerous riders first. If the thing fails a Foolproof (3) Smarts roll, however, it will attempt to put down a horse so that it can feed on it afterwards.

BOUNTY

The posse gets 3 bounty points if they defeat the Horse Eater. Add 1 more as long as Never Smiles survives the fight.

CHAPTER SIX: THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

Once the Horse Eater is slain or chased back into the swamp, Never Smiles will tell the group that two white men have a camp nearby. It was they who jumped him when he was investigating the bog. They beat him with rifles then dragged him to the old cabin and tied him up. He has no idea why the men did it.

An Onerous (7) trackin' roll will pick up a trail leading back to the cultist's camp. There the posse will find a tent, camping supplies, and the remains of a small fire, but no inhabitants. As soon as the party starts poking around, Brothers Strong and Wyse will emerge from the woods, their horses tied a short distance away. They were watching Never Smiles when the Horse Eater struck and have actually followed the victorious posse back to their own campsite.

Brother Strong's story is that they are two pilgrims come to bring religion to the heathens. They attacked Never Smiles because he pointed a rifle at them. They subdued him and took his rifle (it's sitting in the camp), but being peaceful men, they merely bound the warrior at the nearby cabin where he could eventually work his way free. A few minutes ago they heard the sounds of battle and went to help, but they got lost. Now they've returned only to find strangers poking around their belongings.

This doesn't explain the work done on Never Smiles' face, but is otherwise difficult to disprove.

While Strong tells his story, have any characters who aren't taking an active part in the interrogation make a search roll. On a Hard (9) roll or better, they'll see a few clues that contradict Brother Strong's lies. First, piled among their gear is a crowbar. This was used to pry up the railroad ties at Elk Creek. Second, a makeshift desk made of crates inside Wyse's tent has several large pieces of paper atop it. If anyone can get close enough, they'll see these are poorly drawn half-completed survey maps. These were Wyse's first attempts to forge the maps. The final clue is a blue cap lying on Brother Strong's bed. Embroidered on the top of the cap are the words Union Pacific.

BROTHERS STRONG AND WYSE

Strong is older and more forceful. Wyse is nervous and not quite sure of himself yet. Both are brainwashed minions of Grimme's sinister cult.

Corporeal: D:2d6, N:3d6, Q:2d6, S:2d6, V:1d6

Climbin' 1, dodge 2, fightin': brawlin' 2, horse ridin' 2, shootin': pistols 3, shootin': rifles 3, sneak 1

Mental: C:3d6, K:1d6, M:1d4, Sm:1d8, Sp:2d4

Dodging 33



Tell opponent: "Add +2 to any Down or Side Swing that scores next turn."

2 5	18 37	34 19
4 63	20 29	36 19
6 17	22 41	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 41
10 19	26 41	42 5
12 3	28 41	44 17
14 9	30 41	46 27
16 1	32 41	48 41

34

X-Range Body Wound 35



SCORE 6

Tell opponent: "Do only Brown next turn."

2 5	18 53	34 53
4 63	20 53	36 19
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 53
10 3	26 47	42 5
12 3	28 53	44 17
14 9	30 27	46 53
16 1	32 9	48 17

36

37 Jumping Up



Tell opponent: "Do no Blue and add +2 if you Score next turn."

2 5	18 19	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 00
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 19	24 45	40 5
10 45	26 47	42 5
12 45	28 3	44 45
14 19	30 3	46 43
16 57	32 45	48 45

38

39 Charging



Tell opponent: "Do no Green, Yellow, or Spear attacks next turn."

2 45	18 23	34 25
4 47	20 53	36 00
6 31	22 13	38 49
8 33	24 23	40 19
10 3	26 13	42 45
12 41	28 3	44 19
14 45	30 5	46 43
16 23	32 9	48 47

40

Academia: occult 3, bluff 1, faith 4, guts 2, medicine: general 1, overawe 2, persuasion 2, scrutinize 2, search 3, survival: plains 1

Junk: Both cultists carry .45 caliber revolvers, Winchester '73 rifles, and a knife

THE TRUTH

If the posse doesn't point out Strong's inconsistencies, the cultists won't do anything rash. If they do point out the major evidence against them, Strong will grimace and pull several gnawed bones from his vest pocket. Wyse does the same and the two back up into cover with their weapons drawn. In two rounds the bones grow into Bloody Ones and the fight begins.

The trick here is to expose the cultists' ruse to Lacy O'Malley. He'll publish his story when the encounter is over regardless of the outcome. If he still believes Union Pacific is violating its treaty with the Sioux and their trespassing roused the Horse Eater, his story will do irreparable harm to the UP-Sioux Nations alliance. Worse, it will raise the fear level of the entire Black Hills to 3.

If the posse proves the truth, that Strong and Wyse were behind the whole scam, his story will have a different effect. The fear level of the Black Hills will not decline, but the inspiring story of the posse's fight will drop the fear level of this area to 2.

BOUNTY

Give the heroes 1 bounty point if the cultists get away with their scheme. Add 3 more if the group forces Strong's hand and defeats him.

BOOT HILL**THE HORSE EATER**

Attack: Claws 12 / 5d10 / 1d20+1d8

Bite 12 / 5d10 / 1d20+1d8

Defense: Dodge 4, Brawling 5

Size: 10

Speed: 12

Hits: 50

Terror: 11

Coup: A Harrowed character who absorbs the Horse-Eater's spirit gains 1 point of natural armor. The character will ever-after have a peculiar taste for horseflesh, however, and every round spent in contact with a handful or more of salt causes 1d4 Wind.

Special Abilities:

Invulnerability to normal weapons
Vulnerable to salt

NEVER SMILES

Defense: Dodge 1, Knife 1

Speed: 6

BROTHERS STRONG AND WYSE

Attack: Rifle 2 / 3d6 / 3d8

Pistol 4 / 3d6 / 3d6

Knife 4 / 1d6 / 2d6

Defense: Dodge 1, Knife 1

Speed: 6

Brother Strong's Hits: 30

Brother Wyse's Hits: 30

BLOODY ONES

Attack: Claws 12 / 4d8 / 1d8+1d6

Bite 12 / 4d8 / 1d8 + 1d6

Defense: Brawling 4, Speed: 12

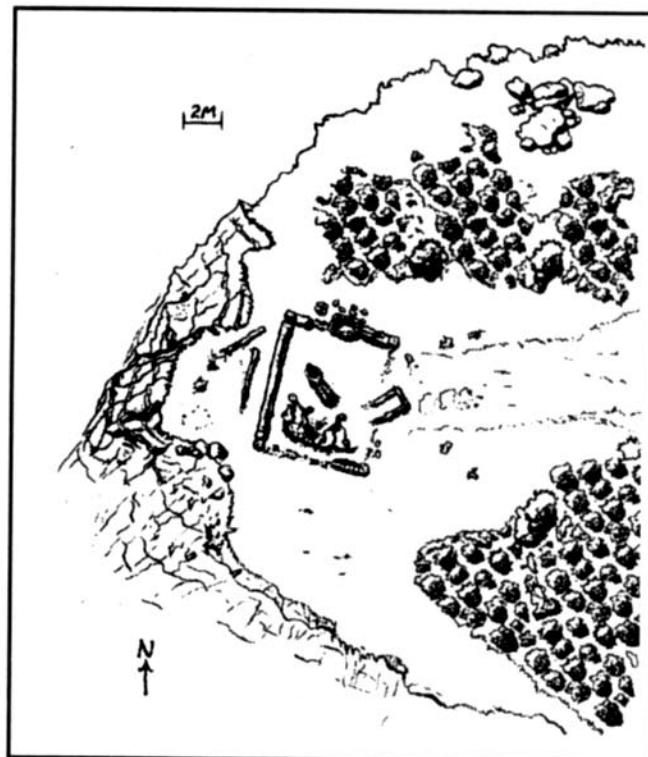
Creature 1's Hits: 30

Creature 2's Hits: 30

Terror: 9

Coup: None

Special Abilities: Piercing weapons and bullets do half damage. ☹



THE TRAPPER'S CABIN AND SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT



Pandemonium Unchained

by Andrew Greenberg • Art by John Bridges

Adventure without limit fills the universe of the Fading Suns, and the main rulebook can only give the briefest taste of the possibilities. "Pandemonium Unchained" follows the exploits of Tibitha Blewe, a penitent priest disenchanting with the Universal Church. She desperately needs someone who can help her, and the characters can jump into the following drama at any point. It details what happens to Tibitha while on Pandemonium, as well as what might happen if the characters decide to intervene.

Pandemonium, as described in the *Fading Suns* rulebook, is a planet in the throes of massive natural disasters. The great terraforming machines which regulated so much of its actions have gone haywire, forcing the planet to find other ways to vent its heat and move its many tectonic plates. This means that only the capital, the Hub, remains safe, and anyone outside the Hub is in constant danger.

The Universal Church has established a great cathedral in the badlands outside the Hub, however, as a sign that the Pancreator's might will protect its followers from harm. Tibitha recently arrived on Pandemonium to help with the cathedral's construction, but was not expecting what she found. The rest of this drama is for the gamemaster's eyes only, and the players should (but probably won't) stop reading now. Heck, we're all gamemasters at heart.

Getting the Characters Involved

While the characters can become part of this drama at any part, probably the easiest way is to start them off in the famous Pandemonium Bazaar. Many of Pandemonium's citizens, desperate to get

off planet, have sold all their possessions for a pittance, and wealthy bargain hunters flock to the Bazaar to take advantage of their misery. As the characters fight their way through the bustling streets, any with psychic abilities will feel something tug them toward Badaboo's Curios and Sundries. Arriving there, they will feel strangely attracted to a studded leather band. If none of the characters have psychic abilities, then one of them (whoever has the highest Tech rating) notices the band as they pass the shop.

Badaboo just put the band on display, having bought it from Tibitha Blewe late last night. He met her while visiting Beggar's Alley on the edges of the Hub while seeking some cheap evening companionship. Tibitha rejected his initial offers of money before offering to sell him the band. He had no way of detecting its psychic resonance, but immediately noticed that it was of definite Second Republic origin. He paid her one firebird for it, and now offers to sell it for 15.

Badaboo likes bargaining almost as much as he likes profit, and he will gladly lower the price to 10 firebirds (or whatever the characters can afford) with only the slightest prompting. As he bargains, he will talk willingly about acquiring the band, rubbing his protruding belly and stroking his bushy beard all the while. The only part he leaves out is his real reason for being out last night. Whatever he says should hint to the characters that Tibitha might have access to more artifacts, which should interest the characters no end.

Of course, the gamemaster can also appeal to the characters' more noble aspects. One or more of them might know Tibitha, who would have left word for them to meet her in Beggar's Alley. They might be investigating the cathedral and hear that

Jumping Up 37



Tell opponent: "Do no Blue next turn, but add +2 if to any Orange that scores."

2	19	18	19	34	25
4	63	20	29	36	15
6	17	22	11	38	49
8	19	24	45	40	5
10	45	26	47	42	19
12	45	28	3	44	17
14	53	30	5	46	43
16	57	32	45	48	17

38

Charging 39



Tell opponent: "Do no Green or Yellow next turn."

2	45	18	23	34	25
4	47	20	53	36	13
6	53	22	53	38	49
8	33	24	23	40	13
10	3	26	13	42	45
12	41	28	3	44	19
14	45	30	5	46	43
16	23	32	9	48	19

40

41 Knocked Down



SCORE -1

Tell opponent: "Do only Jumps next turn, and you may change weapons."

2 45	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 19	36 00
6 17	22 41	38 49
8 13	24 19	40 19
10 19	26 63	42 45
12 45	28 13	44 17
14 45	30 5	46 27
16 57	32 9	48 45

42

43 Retrieving Weapon



Tell opponent: "You may use your weapon again. No restrictions next turn."

2 5	18 53	34 41
4 47	20 7	36 00
6 45	22 11	38 19
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 45	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 53	44 45
14 9	30 31	46 27
16 57	32 45	48 45

44

one of the priests ran away. They might even be working for the Church, trying to track down the source of a recent influx of possibly heretical Second Republic artifacts. However the gamemaster gets them involved, the characters should end up resolving to visit Beggar's Alley.

Beggar's Alley

It's hard to believe that the people living in Beggar's Alley are not the most pitiful ones on the planet, but they aren't. That dubious distinction goes to the poor souls who live outside the Hub, their daily lives wracked with uncertainty and fear. Still, those in Beggar's Alley are probably the most wretched in the Hub, as the characters will discover when they get there. While the Decados claim only 500,000 people have crammed into the city, probably twice that many live without documentation or official residence.

As soon as the characters show up in Beggar's Alley (really a phrase used to describe a maze of streets which once made up a warehouse district, all gently covered by the smoke and ashes from nearby

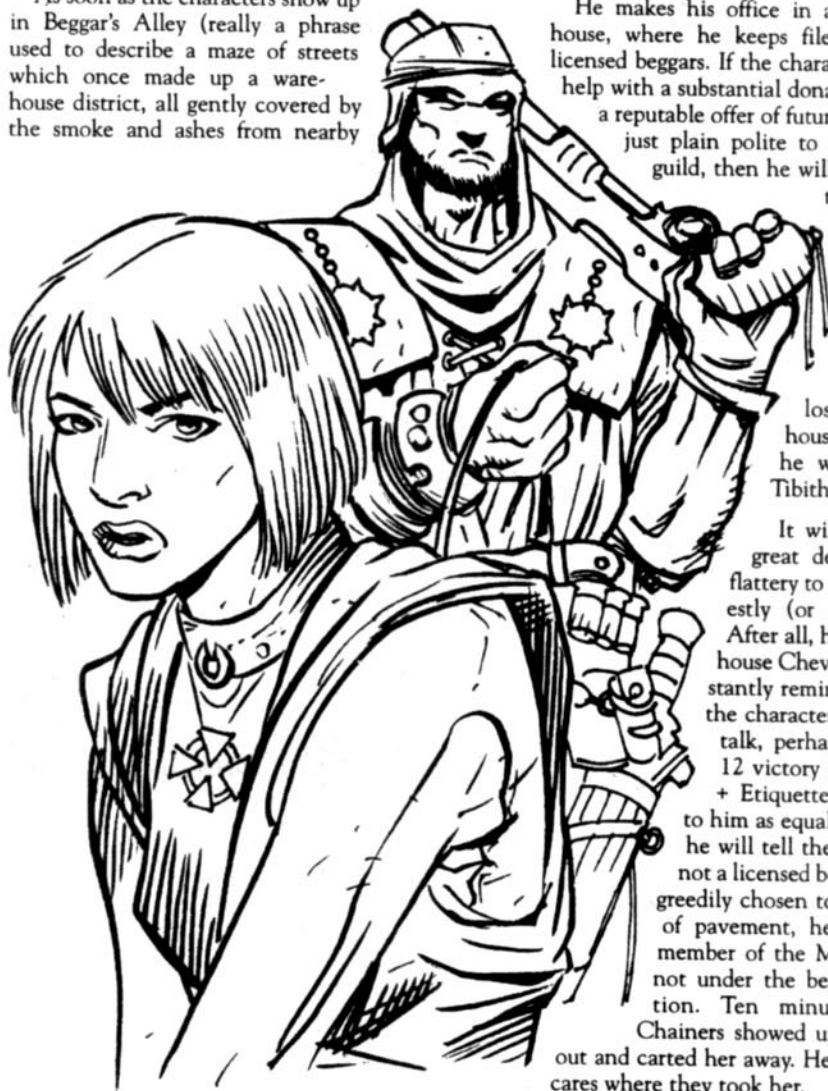
factories), pleas for money bombard them from all side. "Please sir, just a quarterbird for a victim of Arasot's syndrome," begs a one-legged woman with giant growths on her face." "Ma'am, have some pity for my poor child," beseeches a man, holding up some shriveled abomination which might in fact be a baby.

Most of the beggars are legitimate, but characters who are guild members should quickly realize that they have been organized into their own guild. If they don't make this distinction, then questioning the beggars about Tibitha will not get them far. If they cause enough fuss, then a number of the beggars will shrug off their disabilities and insist (with force, if necessary) that the characters visit Cahyle, beggar king and League-sanctioned president of Pandemonium's mendicant's guild. The characters will need his assistance to make any headway with their inquiry.

He makes his office in an abandoned warehouse, where he keeps files on all the Hub's licensed beggars. If the characters can line up his help with a substantial donation (25+ firebirds), a reputable offer of future aid, or if they were just plain polite to the members of his guild, then he will have his people try to track down

Tibitha. They will return within an hour, bringing with them Don Maurice Alienar, who claims to be the last noble of the lost Chevalier noble house. A licensed beggar, he was seen talking to Tibitha last night.

It will take characters a great deal of cajoling and flattery to get him to talk honestly (or even make sense). After all, he is the last scion of house Chevalier, as he will constantly remind the characters. If the characters finally get him to talk, perhaps by accumulating 12 victory points on Extrovert + Etiquette roles or appealing to him as equals if they are nobles, he will tell them that Tibitha was not a licensed beggar. Since she had greedily chosen to sleep on his piece of pavement, he had told a local member of the Muster that she was not under the beggar guild's protection. Ten minutes later, several Chainers showed up, knocked Tibitha out and carted her away. He neither knows nor cares where they took her.



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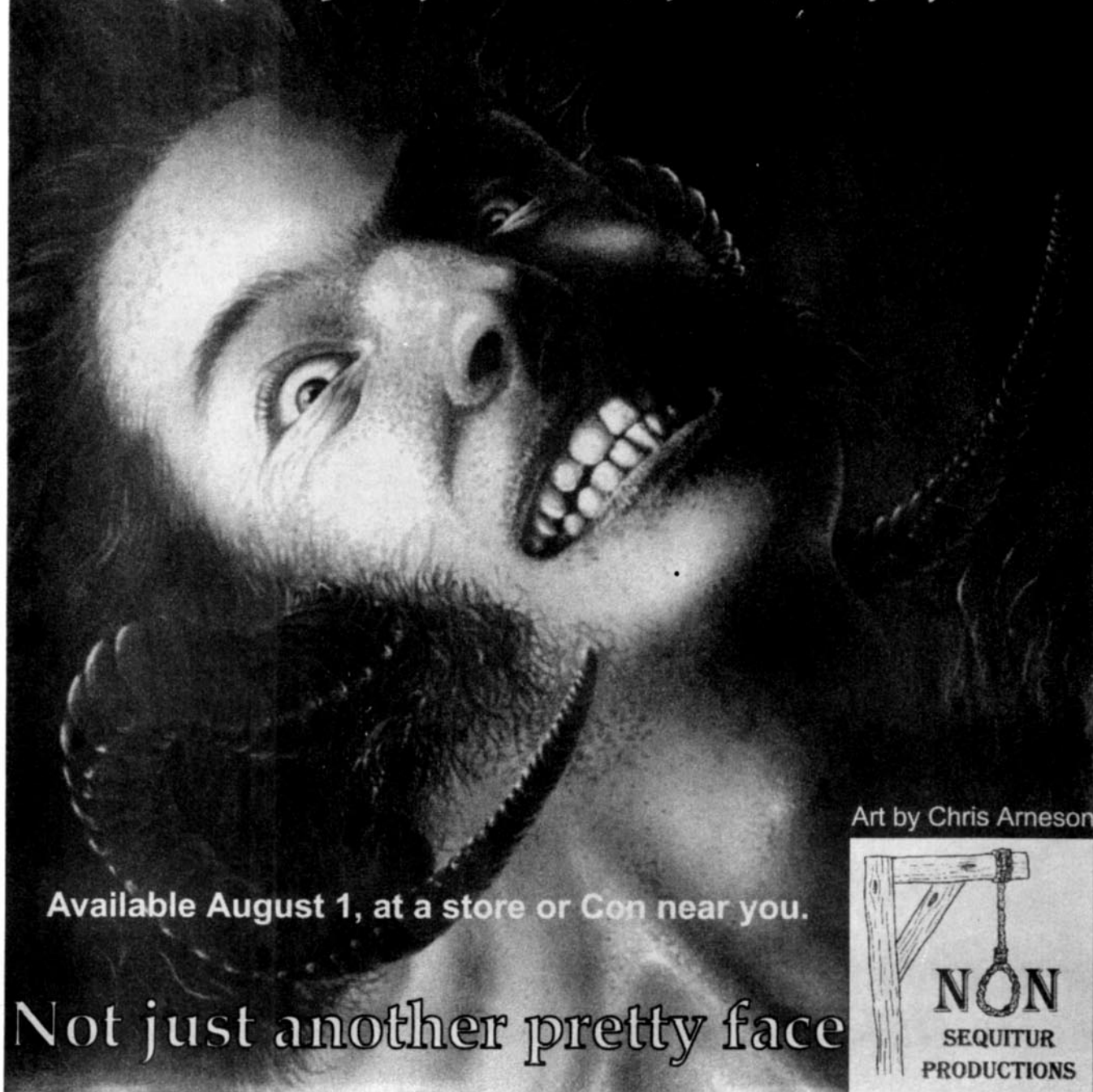


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The realms are at the brink of chaos and war.
Out of this decaying peace a new hope is born.

Some with the power of Gods now walk the realms.
But out of the many, only a few may ascend.
Only the greatest will become part of the story.



Art by Chris Arneson

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Not just another pretty face



Pandemonium Unchained

If the characters have become friends with Cahyle, he will tell them that he has heard of a slaver warehouse in the Badlands just outside the Hub. He cannot tell them exactly where it is, but this should get them started.

Pandemonium in Chains

The players can find out where the Muster warehouse is in a number of ways. If they have guild ties, they can pursue these. If they are nobles, they can ask other nobles where they buy help for the mansion. They can offer to sell one of their own characters to the Muster and then follow him. In any case, they will have to be careful. The Church has labeled slavery a grave sin, and anyone suspected of trafficking in slaves may well have to face the Inquisition.

Still, the characters should eventually find out where the Muster keeps its slaves. Much of what lies outside the Hub has been destroyed by either natural or man-made disasters, but some buildings still stand. The Muster has converted one of these (a former slaughterhouse which processed tons of meat each month) into pens for its slaves. Special landers visit the planet once a month, making official landings at the spaceport, paying the required bribes, and then flying to the warehouse at night to pick up and drop off cargo before returning to space.

The Muster took Tibitha to these slave pens, where she now waits, chained to 15 other slaves. Most of them are unfortunates from the badlands who the Chainers caught as they made their way to the Hub. The pens house a total of 90 slaves right now, and the next lander is not due for two weeks.

When characters arrive at the slave pens, they should not have too much difficulty arranging a meeting with Manager Jessup Lukesta, the jovial head of slaver operations on Pandemonium. If they want to buy a slave, he will be more than happy to arrange the sale, offering the characters wine, food and other pleasures. He will take them to the slave pens, where his attitude immediately changes. His friendly demeanor disappears, and he begins beating the slaves to get them out of his way as he leads the characters to Tibitha. He will remain friendly and deferential to the characters, but brutal to the slaves. He will show Tibitha to the characters, but will not let them speak to her.

Then he will lead them back to his office and once more become the soul of gentility. The only problem with the sale, he tells the characters, is that the Muster never sells a slave on the same planet she was captured. No matter how much the characters offer, he refuses to break this rule. The only way to make him change his mind is to bring pressure to bear or guarantee that they will immediately take her off planet. Attacking him should

not work too well — the slave pens are guarded by a dozen high quality Muster mercenaries, and others come here regularly with their prizes.

On the other hand, threatening Church or noble intervention will turn his blood cold. Players may think of other threats to earn his compliance, but eventually they should get him to agree to a sale (at least 20 firebirds, though he will try to start the bidding at 50). This is when Canon Ague Menophlox bursts in.

Canon Ague Menophlox

This drama is not just about freeing Tibitha from slavery. Other forces also want to get their hands on the penitent priest. Foremost among them are the leaders of the Cathedral. They want Tibitha back. Maybe they are afraid that she will reveal too much, or else they fear for her soul, but in any case they have sent out Canon Ague, one of their most trusted followers. A talented hunter who often stalks the badlands to bring back fresh meat for the Cathedral, he tracked Tibitha through the wilds and into the city. He will track her to the Muster shortly after the characters do. Once there he may start a bidding war for her, but he is backed by the full authority of the Church. The characters cannot outbid him. The trouble is, he does not have the cash on him and Manager Lukesta wants money up front.

Ague will convince Lukesta to delay the auction for an hour while he hurries to get more money. By now the character should realize that they cannot raise more money than he can. Their best bet is to prevent him from coming back within that hour. Lukesta is such a stickler for rules that he will sell Tibitha to the characters if Ague is even one minute late.

Characters can ambush Ague in the badlands, hold him up in the city, keep him from meeting with Church officials to get cash or try anything else their devious minds can think of. Whatever they do to him, they should not kill him, as this is certain to upset the Church.

Tibitha's Story

Tibitha grew up on Madoc, surrounded by some of the finest technology in the Known Worlds, but found the Pancreator at the end of the Emperor Wars. She has devoted herself to the Church, and after several years spent in seclusion, was assigned to the Pandemonium cathedral. The entire structure is being built and maintained by penitent priests, and Tibitha found herself working in the building's upper reaches. Other, more senior priests worked in its depths, and Tibitha began to hear strange stories of what they were doing there.

A week ago, while trying to find some missing tools, Tibitha went down to the lower store rooms.

Knocked Down 41



SCORE 0

Tell opponent: "Do only Jumps next turn."

2 45	18 37	34 41
4 63	20 19	36 19
6 17	22 19	38 49
8 13	24 19	40 53
10 19	26 63	42 45
12 45	28 13	44 17
14 45	30 5	46 27
16 57	32 9	48 17

42

Retrieving Weapon 43



Tell opponent: "You may use your weapon again. No restrictions next turn."

2 5	18 19	34 19
4 63	20 31	36 15
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 45	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 19	44 17
14 9	30 19	46 27
16 57	32 45	48 17

44

45 Parrying



SCORE -5

Tell opponent: "Do no Spear attacks next turn."

2 5	18 37	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 00
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 3	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 3	44 15
14 9	30 5	46 43
16 1	32 9	48 3

46

47 Shield Cracked



SCORE 0

Tell opponent: "Do no Orange next turn, and if receiving 6 damage points or more do no Shield attacks for the rest of the game."

2 5	18 19	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 00
6 45	22 19	38 49
8 19	24 15	40 5
10 45	26 47	42 45
12 45	28 19	44 45
14 45	30 19	46 19
16 57	32 9	48 45

48

One door, usually kept locked, was ajar, and Tibitha looked here. Here she found mounds of heretical technology — Second Republic artifacts whose very existence would put their possessor's soul at risk. Horrified, she concluded that something must be very wrong in the Cathedral. For proof she took the nearest item at hand, a psychic tracking collar, and stealthily made her way toward the hub.

She has been unable to contact any Church leaders not connected to the Cathedral, however, and needed money to get a message off planet. She finally sold the band and had the money, but then the Muster got her. In exchange for being rescued, she will give the characters her undying gratitude, information on where the high tech goodies are stashed, and a request that they help her tell other Church leaders what is happening. How much other Church leaders might care is up to the gamemaster.

Other Complications

Gamemasters should feel free to add whatever other bits of nastiness they want to this drama. Both Graaf, Pandemonium's crime lord, and Count Enis Sham, Pandemonium's noble lord, would be interested in exact proof of what the Cathedral is up to and may have their own people on the case. The League would most assuredly want access to this stuff, plus it might be a way to embarrass the Church. Whatever, the case, it should give characters the opportunity for plenty of future dramas.

Characters

Gamemasters should use the Traits of the Hazat soldiers in the Precious Cargo drama in the main rulebook for combatants like the Muster slavers, though he might want to give some of them stunners instead of more lethal weapons. The traits for the Scraver investigators work for most of the other characters. Canon Ague's traits follow.

Rank/Class: Canon

Quote: "The Bishop isn't going to like this."

Description: A tall, slender man with a long mustache and dark, sunken eyes. He wears plain brown clothing and talks simply and succinctly.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 8, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 5

Spirit: Extrovert 2, Introvert 4, Passion 2, Calm 5, Faith 5, Ego 2, Human 4, Alien 1

Natural skills: Charm 5, Dodge 7, Fight 6,

Impress 6, Melee 6, Observe 8, Shoot 8, Sneak 7, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Beast Lore 5, Etiquette 2, Inquiry 6, Remedy 4, Ride 5, Search 5, Social (Debate) 3, Stoic Body 4, Stoic Mind 3, Streetwise 3, Survival 8, Tracking 7

Wyrd: 5

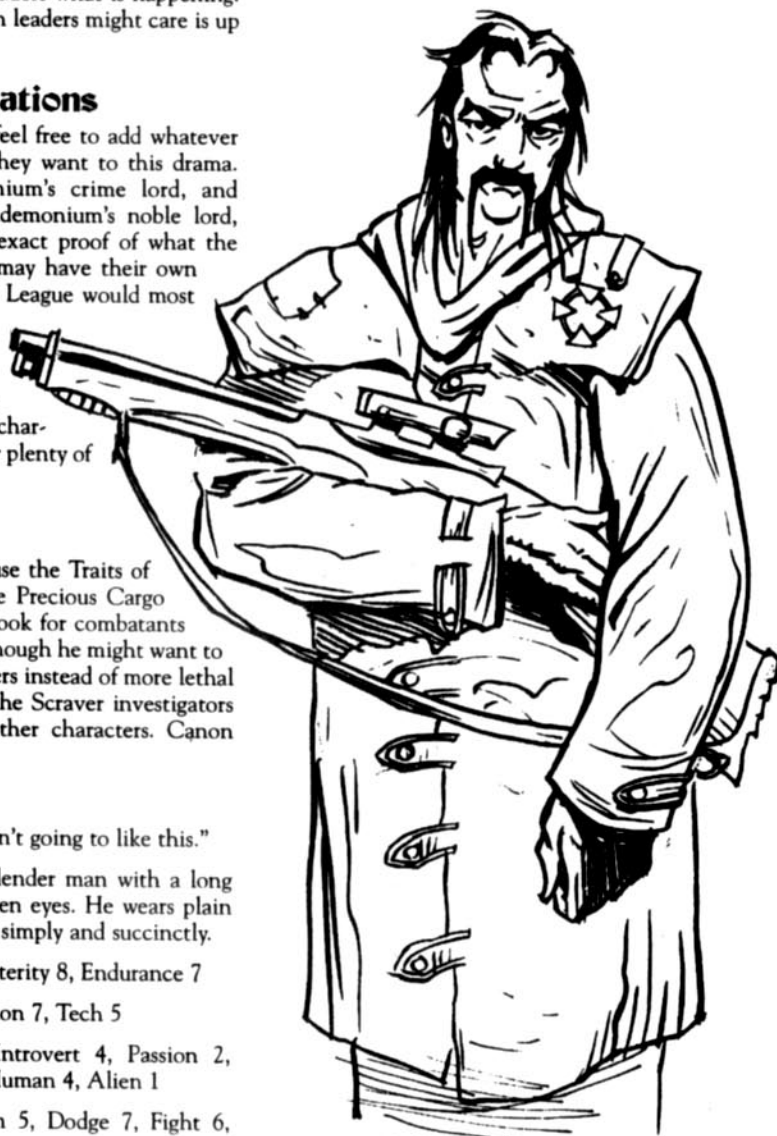
Weapon: Assault rifle, rapier

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash

Armor: Standard shield, leather jerkin

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/ 0/0/0/0/0/0



Slaver's Chains

an adventure for *Star Wars: The Role-playing Game*

by James Macduff • Artwork courtesy of West End Games

Slaver's Chains is an adventure for the *Star Wars* RPG. It is designed for a mixed group of beginning and experienced PCs, allowing new characters to smoothly enter a preexisting campaign. However, with a little adjustment, it can be made to fit just about any campaign, and inexperienced characters are hardly necessary to run the adventure.

The players' stalwart band of rebels must gather vital information on a nefarious band of outlaw slavers. Executing a dangerous boarding of the slavers' ship while in hyperspace, they inadvertently cause an engine malfunction, sending the vessel careening towards an occupied planet. They must avoid crash-landing, salvage the information they need, and escape, all while being pursued by both the angry slavers and the local Imperials.

New PCs will take the role of slaves on the *Tarnta's Fang*, a slaver ship destined for the outlaw's headquarters. They will have a chance to cast off their chains and perhaps join the Alliance once the rebels board. Older characters can portray the rebel commando team, poised to strike at the slaver's operations. Players can use any characters they wish; if pressed for ideas, there are ready-made templates located at the end of the adventure.

Slaver's Chains has been designed to allow a certain amount of leeway in terms of how it progresses. Parts of the adventure have been deliberately left vague for GMs to fill in with their own details. The information below should be used as a guide, not a strict fiat.

The Situation

For the last five years or so, a large band of slavers has been operating out of the Elrood sector. They use the rather innocuous name "Consolidations Unlimited," but both their business associates and their victims know how terrible their profession really is. With an elaborate system of informants and an intimate knowledge of shipping schedules and travel lanes, they have launched devastating attacks on settlements and personnel transports in the region, taking the strongest and fiercest as captives. They have an uncanny ability to know when and where to attack, siting only the targets that produce the greatest amounts of "quality product." As is often the case, the Empire has turned a blind eye to these pirates, considering the elimination of "undesirables" under their chains to be a boon.

The Rebel Alliance has recently learned of this nefarious band and vowed to put an end to their activities. Besides the humanitarian concerns and the desire to eliminate a thoroughly

odious business, the destruction of Consolidations Unlimited would curry favor for the Rebellion within the sector. Furthermore, it would subtly demonstrate the Empire's incompetence to both legitimate and illegitimate interests. To this end, they have sent a small group of commandos — the player characters — to locate their base of operations and transmit the coordinates back to headquarters. Once the Alliance knows where the slavers are, they can launch a full strike against them, destroying their power base — and hopeful-



Parrying

45



SCORE -4

Tell opponent: "No restrictions next turn."

2 5	18 37	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 15
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 33	24 15	40 5
10 3	26 63	42 5
12 3	28 3	44 17
14 9	30 5	46 43
16 1	32 9	48 17

46

Ax Cracked

47



SCORE -1

Tell opponent: "Do no Orange next turn, and if receiving 6 damage points or more then subtract 4 from all ax attacks for the rest of the game."

2 5	18 19	34 25
4 63	20 29	36 15
6 17	22 11	38 49
8 19	24 15	40 19
10 45	26 47	42 45
12 45	28 19	44 17
14 45	30 19	46 19
16 57	32 9	48 17

48

49 Slashing Spear



Tell opponent: "Do no Sword or Shield attacks next turn."

50 45	58 41
52 23	60 11
54 9	62 19
56 17	64 53

50

51 X-Range, Slashing Spear



Tell opponent: "Do only X-Range Spear attacks or Brown next turn."

50 21	58 49
52 61	60 11
54 9	62 55
56 57	64 57

52

ly freeing hundreds of slaves who would be more than happy to join the rebellion.

The Slavers

Consolidations Unlimited was founded by an opportunistic smuggler by the name of Tarnta Bane. Taking advantage of the recent chaos caused by the rebellion, Tarnta has gathered a small army of equally ruthless scum and promptly begun carving out his own little criminal empire. The slavers have utilized a fiendishly simple *modus operandi* — they kidnap friends or relatives of star-port controllers, customs officials, militia captains, and anyone else with information they need, then blackmail them into providing regular data for the organization. In some cases, they simply plant a transponder program in the proper computer system, allowing the slavers access to particular pieces of information. In others, a more permanent relationship is required and the victim's loved one is held captive for months or years on end. In any case, this web of reluctant informants has provided Tarnta and his band with everything they need to strike quickly, take what they need, and vanish before any kind of help arrives.

Consolidations Unlimited operates out of Vicerv 3, a small planetoid hidden deep within a nearly-destroyed system. A nearby gas giant provides Vicerv with a barren, but survivable atmosphere, and the increasing profits of the operation have allowed a veritable fortress to be constructed beneath the surface. Comfortable living quarters and all manner of amusements are available for Tarnta's men, as well as a docking platform for attack ships, a well-stocked arsenal, and an entire floor of slave pens designed to hold their product. No one but the slavers and their captives is ever brought here; buys are conducted at a neutral site and everyone within the operation is totally loyal to Tarnta.

Raids are typically carried out through the use of several huge frigates refitted for slave trading and

numerous smaller vessels of one kind or another. They occasionally attack under-defended settlements, but usually choose personnel transports carrying large numbers of passengers. They typically force the ship out of hyperspace, board it, and move directly towards their pre-specified targets (Wookies and other such creatures are highly prized, as are beautiful women and underground species such as Ugnaughts). After securing their victims, they disable the ship if possible and retreat before any serious opposition organizes. This process continues again and again, over a period of weeks, until the holds are full.

Once captured, potential slaves are tagged with restraint collars, herded together into pens and shipped to Vicerv. From there, they are cleaned up, holo-taped for sales pitches, and if necessary, broken into accepting their new lifestyle. The slave drivers of C.U. are very talented, and ensure that there is no permanent damage to their product during this process.

Thus far, no one has been able to get a mark on Consolidations Unlimited. They strike fast, move quickly, and vanish before anyone knows what's going on. That, however, is about to change.



The Mission

As stated earlier, Imperial authorities have been reluctant to do anything about Consolidations Unlimited. As long as Tarnta and company do not inordinately disrupt Imperial shipping or harass "decent" Imperial citizens, the local magistrate will happily ignore their depredations. Several weeks ago, however, one of C.U.'s blackmailed informants had had enough. He discreetly contacted the Alliance and asked for their help. The rebels agreed.

The biggest difficulty the Alliance faces in dealing with Consolidations Unlimited is getting a decent bead on them. Lacking the resources to patrol the sector and unwilling to tangle directly with the

An Adventure for Star Wars

local Imperials, the rebels need to know exactly where C.U. is based before launching their strike. Through their informant, they have been able to plant a single mole (one of the PCs) onboard a transport slated for attack. A combination beacon/microphone has been planted beneath the mole's skin that will permit a small group of commandos (the other players) to both monitor his situation and follow the slaver's ship.

The official plan runs as follows: the mole will allow himself to be taken by the slavers. Once onboard, he will assess the situation and attempt to engineer a revolt amongst the other slaves. Whether the revolt succeeds is not the issue; it is merely designed to distract the slavers from the other rebels. At the proper moment, the rebel commandos will board the ship, locate the bridge, record the coordinates to Vicerv from the navicomputer and depart. If they're lucky, the slave revolt will be successful, and they can pilot the now-captured ship back to headquarters. If not, they must depart and leave the rescue operation for later (the mole will have to suffer until the strike force arrives).

The Morrt

The Morrt is an experimental vessel that the Rebellion has loaned to the players in order to board the slaver ship. It is a three-man craft designed to latch onto another vessel while in hyperspace, bore a hole in the hull and allow a commando unit access to the "host ship."

Essentially just a big engine with a cockpit attached, the Morrt combines the hyperspace capacity of long-range fighters with the hull penetration of classic Corellian boarding skiffs. It is designed to ride behind the host ship in hyperspace, gliding along in the wake of the hyperdrive engines. When the time is right, it accelerates alongside of the host, latches to the side and uses the edge of the cockpit to drill a hole in the hull. With the addition of mass and weight, the hyperdrive will be forced to deal with a new set of figures. Safety routines will click into place and the ship should drop out of hyperspace just as the Morrt's crew begins to board. This has the twin benefits of halting the host's movement, and allowing it to be attacked by larger ships in the area.

That's the theory, anyway. The players are expected to see how well it works when they board the slavers' ship.

Stats for the Morrt

Type: experimental boarding ship

Scale: Starfighter

Length: 15 meters

Skill: Starfighter piloting 4D (at least)

Crew: 1 plus 2 passengers

Cargo Capacity: 50 kilograms

Consumables: 1 week

Hyperdrive multiplier: x2

Hyperdrive back-up: none

Navicomputer: Yes

Maneuverability: 4D

Space: 10

Atmosphere: like a turkey dropped from a B-52

Hull: 4D

Shields: None

Sensors:

Passive: 20/0D

Scan: 40/1D

Search: 65/1D+1

Focus: 3/5D

Weapons: none

The Morrt's hull is designed to reduce the engine signal, making it very difficult for enemy sensors to detect. It can approach stealthily, leap into hyperspace alongside its host, and glide along smoothly until boarding operations commence.

Plotline

Capture

Play begins with the capture of the Rebel mole. He (she) has been planted aboard the *Shining Comet*, a lower class personnel transport en route from Lanthrym to Bodrin. The character has been provided with a universal lockpick — planted within his jawbone — and a two way transponder radio/microphone, imbedded in the skull behind his right ear. With it, he can communicate with the rest of the commando squad (lurking nearby in the Morrt) and allow them to track him through deep space.

The *Comet* is a dingy, clanky, unkempt hole of a freighter, designed to pack as many people on as possible. The mole will be assigned a bunk in a communal living quarters, with four other passengers in the same room. Recreational facilities are at an absolute minimum on the ship, although the viewing deck provides a spectacular view of the surrounding stars. Those not on the viewing deck generally stick to their quarters.

GMs should feel free to role-play any encounters on the *Comet* they see fit. The crew is for the most part sullen and uncommunicative, concerned more with doing their job than making chit-chat with others. Most of the passengers are poor migrant laborers, leaving Lanthrym for greener pastures. They tend to be reserved, yet optimistic sorts, hopeful about their prospects for the future. A smattering of criminals and ne'er-do-wells may have found themselves on board as well, and one may try to take the mole for a ride (GM's discretion).

At the proper moment, the *Comet* should suddenly shudder, as if struck, and the engines will grind to a halt. The slaver's flagship, *Tarnta's Fang* has disabled the engines, and its crew of cutthroats is in the midst of boarding the vessel.

Strength Draining Touch 49



Tell opponent: "No restrictions, and if on a score page, go to page 19 and drain +3 of my Body Points. See Character Sheet."

50 45	58 41
52 23	60 11
54 9	62 31
56 17	64 53

50

X-Range Strength Draining Touch 51



Tell opponent: "Do X-Range next turn, and if on a score page, go to page 35 and drain 3 of my Body Points. See Character Sheet."

50 21	58 49
52 61	60 11
54 9	62 55
56 57	64 57

52

53 Body Wound



SCORE 3

Tell opponent: "Do only Green or Yellow next turn."

50 31	58 35
52 33	60 11
54 45	62 35
56 17	64 3

54

55 X-Range Escaping



Tell opponent: "Do only X-Range next turn, or you may choose to escape; if you escape, the game is over and I win."

50 39	58 51
52 61	60 59
54 9	62 55
56 17	64 3

56

Having no defenses and little incentive to prevent the takeover, the crew will stand by as slavers stride down the corridors, blasters in hand. Those few passengers who fight back are ruthlessly gunned down. Allow the player to conduct any action he wants, but unarmed as he is, he shouldn't prove much of a match for the hardworking employees of Consolidations Unlimited. Treat any slavers encountered as Imperial Army Troops from the SWRPG rulebook.

The player's passivity (or fighting spirit, whichever he most exudes) will be rewarded by a brief visit from Tarnta Bane himself. He will stride into the character's quarters, flanked by a pair of guards.

Tarnta Bane:

Dexterity 4D+1: blaster 6D+2, dodge 5D, melee combat 6D, melee parry 6D, running 5d+2

Knowledge 3D: business (slaving) 7D, intimidation 6D +2, planetary systems 4D, streetwise 7D, survival 4D

Mechanical 3D: astrogation 4D, space transports 5D, starship piloting 6D, starship gunnery 4D+1

Perception 4D: bargain 6D+2, command 7D, con 7D, hide 5D, search 5D+2, sneak 5D+1

Strength 2D+1: brawling 4D, climbing/jumping 3D, stamina 4D

Technical 2D+2: first aid 3D, starship repair 3D

Tarnta is a seeming anomaly among the slaving community: a jovial, boisterous man who genuinely likes people. The ethical connotations of his job just haven't hit him, and he doesn't let the abject misery of others get in the way of his good time. He enjoys seeing his men made happy and puts his other business associates at ease with his boyish charm and easy smile. Even the slaves are given friendly treatment; he treats his profession like some kind of grand game in which his victims are the losers ("better luck next time, big guy!"). His jocular should not be confused with frivo-

lousness, however, and he will kill those who cross him with the same passion and glee he exudes over the rest of his life.

Tarnta dresses in no-nonsense clothing designed for close combat fighting. He carries twin blasters stuffed into his belt like a pirate and a wrist communicator on his right hand. His black hair is tied back in a pony-tail and his eyes flash with a deep-set love of his job.

"So, this is the prize we've heard about," he booms at the mole in a good-natured voice. "Let's hope you're all you're cracked up to be, my pretty pet." Allow the player to engage in any witty repartee he wishes at this point. When the conversation has run its course (or as soon as the character does something threatening), Tarnta's guards step forward, subdue him with stunsticks (6D stun damage) if necessary, and latch a restraining collar around his neck.

As always, the slavers will waste little time procuring their other victims. Within twenty-five minutes, they will have found who they needed, stunned and collared them, and returned to the *Tarnta's Fang*, which is preparing to go to light-speed.

Meanwhile, the commandos on board the *Morrt* will be able to make their move as soon as the slavers launch their attack. The pilot must maneuver the *Morrt* into the general vicinity of the *Tarnta's Fang*, then wait for the slaver ship to fire up its hyperspace engines. The pilot must make a Moderate starfighter piloting roll to avoid being spotted by the slavers; give a bonus for particularly clever ways of getting close (if the character keeps the *Comet* between them and the slaver ship, for example).

Revolt/Boarding

The mole will be dragged the *Tarnta's Fang*, and led down to the slave holds along with seven other captives. He will be stunned and shackled to a wall, left there to suffer until the slavers return to Vicerv.



In contrast to the *Shining Comet*, the *Fang* is a clean, efficient, well-run vessel. (For statistical purposes, treat the *Fang* as a modified Corellian frigate as per the rulebook pg. 119. It fires twelve turbolaser cannons instead of the usual six, and has a crew capacity of 50. Up to two-hundred slaves can be held in the storage areas, which have been converted to pens. In all other aspects, it matches the listed stats of a Corellian frigate.)



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Body Wound 53



SCORE 6

Tell opponent: "Do only Green or Yellow next turn."

50 31	58 35
52 33	60 11
54 45	62 35
56 17	64 3

54

Escaping 55



Tell opponent: "No restrictions next turn, or you may choose to escape; if you escape, the game is over and I win."

50 39	58 51
52 61	60 59
54 9	62 55
56 17	64 3

56

Tarnta expects his men to keep their quarters clean, and to conduct themselves as professionally as possible — the fun of raids should never translate over to sloppiness. The atmosphere of the Fang reflects this philosophy. The walls and floors glow with a soft white light, the corridors are free of debris, and dirt and dust are never given a chance to coalesce.

The slave pens, however, are another story. Dark, poorly lit and crowded, a few hours in them is enough to turn most captives into gibbering wrecks. Slaves are swiftly taken down to the dual holding floors, where they are chained to the wall and forced to crowd in with hundred of others. Food is distributed in buckets and no provisions

are made for the captives' hygiene (Tarnta finds such conditions a useful way to break the slaves' will — they are cleaned up and made healthy before being presented to buyers). Pens are divided into upper and lower sections, with a central catwalk dividing the floor down the middle. The shackles prevent any of the slaves from reaching the catwalk.

The slave pens are overseen by Nuubsal the Hutt, a frustrated, pathetic member of his odious species.

Nuubsal the Hutt

Dexterity 2D+2

Knowledge 2D: intimidation 6D, value 3D

57 X-Range Blocking and Attacking



Tell opponent: "Do only X-Range next turn and you may change weapons."

50 39	58 49
52 33	60 11
54 35	62 55
56 35	64 57

58

59 X-Range Thrusting Spear



Tell opponent: "Do only X-Range Spear attacks or Brown next turn."

50 53	58 49
52 33	60 11
54 13	62 35
56 57	64 57

60

Mechanical 2D

Perception 3D: bargain 4D, con 4D, persuasion 4D

Strength 4D: stamina 7D

Technical 1D+1

Nuubsal's clan was on the losing end of an extended intra-Hutt conflict, and its survivors have been scattered throughout the galaxy. Nuubsal tried his hand at the covert, manipulative form of crime that his race excels at, but never quite got the hang of it. He's been reduced to actual physical labor, acting as the slave driver for Tarnta's band. Needless to say, this has made him bitter, caustic and hateful to every being he meets. Since he can't challenge Tarnta or any of his other associates for a position of real importance, he takes out his frustrations on the slaves. He can be found waddling up and down the catwalk, shocking passive captives with a stun stick and following it up with some witty comment. He enjoys pitting the slaves against each other, forcing them to fight over food, supplies and preferential treatment (i.e., not getting stunned into unconsciousness). This is the closest the miserable Hutt can get to the vaunted manipulation his race is famous for.

Nuubsal always has a contingent of four guards with him, in case of serious difficulties (treat as Imperial Army Troops — they are armed with an assortment of blasters).

Once things have settled down a bit and the ship is under way, the mole will be free to interact with Nuubsal or with any of his fellow prisoners. There are approximately one hundred slaves here, having been captured on a series of raids stretching back several months. Many of them are frightened and demoralized, but a few have nurtured a healthy hate for their captors. None of them is so far gone that they wouldn't revolt against their captors if the opportunity presents itself.

This is the point where new characters can enter the game. PC slaves should be chained up near the mole and allowed to quietly interact with him. If no characters are playing slaves, substitute Jarson and Ch'thoqua from the Appendix. In any case, however, a few minutes talk and a presentable means of unlocking the chains (i.e. the lockpick) should be enough to get them on their feet. Depending on how the character handles it, word could spread quickly throughout the entire cell, alerting all of the slaves of a means to freedom. Or it could be just the players breaking their chains and lurching wildly up at Nuubsal. It is up to individual players and GMs to decide exactly how to play the slave revolt.

Any talking above a whisper is likely to attract the attention of Nuubsal, who will apply his stunstick with vicious glee to any transgressors. If talk of escape is widespread, he will be stunning a great many captives, which may be the spark that sets everybody off.

Meanwhile, the other stalwart commandos should be following developments in the slave hold via the transponder. The *Morrt* will have gone into hyperspace quite easily, and should now be waiting quietly behind the *Tarnta's Fang* (Easy piloting rolls to avoid alerting the slavers to their presence). They should be able to make suggestions to the mole concerning the particulars of the slave pen and revolt, but anything they say or do must be channeled through him.

Once they feel the time is right, they can put the *Morrt* into action. It will require a Difficult piloting roll to maneuver the ship out of the *Fang's* wake without colliding with the engines (Force points should be encouraged here). From there, they need to match speeds with the *Fang*, pick a good spot to attach, and engage the ships boarding program. A series of claws will appear from housings lodged around the cockpit. A sharp burst from the engines will shoot the *Morrt* towards the *Fang's* hull, where the claws dig in and begin to superheat the surrounding metal. Within seconds, a seal is made, the hull is broken through, and the entire front end of the cockpit opens forward like a flower petal, giving the crew access to the ship (exactly where depends on where the pilot decided to board and the GM's whim — a nice corridor somewhere is probably best). As they prepare to board, however, the ship should lurch terribly, and an horrible shudder will cause the surrounding metal to buckle. Have everyone make a Moderate dodge roll in order to stay on their feet. Those who fail take 1D damage.

Landing

Some of the calculations regarding the *Morrt's* ability to bring a ship out of hyperspace were a wee bit flawed, and the *Fang's* hyperdrive has gone belly-up from the stress caused by the connection. The good news at this point is that the *Morrt* has indeed opened a hole in the *Fang*, and the Rebels are now free to charge through the corridors at their leisure. The bad news is that the connection has done irreparable damage to the hyperdrive, the lurch back into realspace has caused a nasty explosion, and the ship is now spiraling hopelessly out of control. If they haven't already, the shuddering ship causes the slaves to finally make a bolt for freedom, overpowering their guards and forcing their way towards the upper decks.

The characters' orders are to find the bridge and download the coordinates to Vacerv from the navicomputer. In light of the *Fang's* malfunctioning, however, they may want to change their plans. The engineering section is currently leaking flaming debris into space, so attempts to gain control of the ship from there are going to be a bit touchy. If they somehow get through the boiling plasma and avoid getting sucked out into space, they will find the controls here completely useless. Some players may want to go down to assist the slave revolt, others may want to hunt down the slavers before they can escape (the *Fang* is

An Adventure for Star Wars

equipped with emergency lifeboats). A few may even want to find the escape pods or go back to the *Morrt* and get the heck out of Dodge.

In any case, the entire crew has been alerted, and with the slave revolt underway, is expecting trouble. The commandos should have a firefight or two on their hands before they get to where they want to go. Rebellious slaves will soon be wandering the halls as well, and might not be particular about who they shoot at. Sympathetic slaves may want to join the rebels in a burst for freedom, and in any case, there should be at least one opportunity to hook up with the mole. Everyone should also make routine dodge checks of varying difficulty to avoid taking light damage as the ship continues to pitch and yaw.

The only place to regain control of the vessel is the bridge. The *Fang's* officers have been running around like headless chickens trying desperately to correct what is rapidly becoming an overwhelming problem. When (if) the players enter, there will be five slavers scattered about the bridge, all operating various controls. They will open fire if the players make hostile acts (again, treat as Imperial Army Troops), but are otherwise too busy trying to keep the *Fang* from exploding to notice anything else. Tarnta Bane is not among them (he's trying to quell the revolt).

Luckily, the *Fang* came out of hyperspace near an inhabited system. Darstell 4 is a fairly pleasant little planet located along a minor-league shipping lane. Its primary continental mass consists mainly of softly rolling hills, and the many settlements dotting its surface have achieved a harmonious balance with the surrounding ecosystem. The local Imperials are able to keep order with a minimum of strong-arming, and the quiet flux of trav-

elers along the trade route does little to ruffle the native's feathers. Things on Darstell are by and large fairly peaceful.

That, however, is about to change. Unless exploding in a ball of amazing Lucasfilm™ special effects somehow appeals to your players, the best hope is to land the *Fang* somewhere on the planet. It will take three Difficult starship piloting rolls to maneuver the burning *Fang* into Darstell's atmosphere and engage the landing cycle. The slaver's current pilot has a skill of 3D+2, but is unwilling to hand the conn over to anyone else — he may take some persuading if more competent characters want to take control.

Clever players will doubtless want to access the navicomputer and fulfill their mission. Once again, they will need to persuade the slaver there to abandon his post. It takes a Moderate astroga-tion roll to call up the *Fang's* flight plans and download them onto a storage disk. Once the slaver realizes what the player is trying to do, he will do whatever it takes to stop him.

Any number of things could happen during this time to further disrupt player activities. An enraged mob of slaves could break in and attack everyone. Tarnta Bane could return and decide to kill the players on general principles. The possibilities are limited only by how nasty the GM feels.

The Crash

Hopefully, the characters will be able to guide the *Tarnta's Fang* towards Darstell and engage the landing cycle, thus preventing the hideous death of all on board. Unfortunately, the ship has picked the worst possible place on the planet to crash — the Governor's palace in the heart of the capital



X-Range Blocking and Attacking 57



Tell opponent: "Do only X-Range next turn."

50 39	58 49
52 33	60 11
54 35	62 55
56 35	64 57

58

X-Range Cursing 59



Tell opponent: "Do X-Range next turn, and if on a score page, you may direct me once in the future to 'Do Yellow or Blue' in place of another restriction."

50 31	58 49
52 33	60 11
54 13	62 35
56 57	64 57

60

61 X-Range Dodging



Tell opponent: "Do only X-Range next turn and add +2 if you score. You may change weapons."

50 39	58 51
52 61	60 59
54 57	62 55
56 57	64 57

62

63 Blocking With Shield



Tell opponent: "Do no Orange next turn."

50 7	58 51
52 35	60 35
54 9	62 55
56 17	64 3

64

city of Symt. Burning like a meteor, it streaks right down on top of building's central tower, landing *Morr*-side down in front of Governor Bellows and his tea. The building will crack and large chunks will come tumbling all over everything. Everyone on board will suffer 2D damage for every unsuccessful starship piloting roll made during the landing. (Oh yeah, and the *Morr* will be destroyed beyond repair — the Alliance can bill them.)

Governor Bellows is not one to take the destruction of his living quarters lying down, and orders his troops to take down anyone they find in the wreckage. As survivors stagger from the *Fang* they will be fired upon or subdued, slavers, slaves and rebels alike. At least twenty Imperial stormtroopers survived the crash and will promptly begin poking through the wreckage, looking for other survivors to kill. Furthermore, a large percentage of the slavers are alive and kicking, and now now want some payback. The characters will have to deal with twofold threats of cranky slavers inside the *Fang* and cranky stormtroopers outside.

Fortunately, they have a large number of ram-paging ex-slaves on their side (sort of), who are fleeing the ship and won't be easily deterred by people shooting at them. In all the chaos and confusion, a determined band should be able to effect an escape. As long as they don't draw inordinate attention to themselves, they should be able to slip out of the palace and into the city beyond. A large crowd has gathered to watch the destruction and carnage, making escape that much easier. Exact details, again, are up to the GM.

Symt is a fairly high-technology city of approximately one million beings. It contains a modest underworld element and a fair amount of crime, although its small size keeps things from getting tremendously out of hand. Streetwise characters should be able to blend in without a considerable amount of difficulty. Once the fireworks settle down, however, the players will have a new problem on their hands. Governor Bellows has ordered a quarantine of the entire system until the "miscreants" who crashed their ship on him can be apprehended. He lacks the ships to physically prevent anyone from leaving, but anyone who does so will find themselves wanted by the Imperial authorities wherever they go. Stormtroopers will begin methodically searching for slavers and slaves alike, throwing anyone they catch into the stockade.

The players will have to dodge the troop patrols and find a way off the planet before they end up back in chains. Exactly how the players manage to leave is up to the GM. Stealing a ship is a possibility, and there are enough unsavory smugglers about who would be willing to break quarantine and take them off-planet if the price is right. Whatever the players come up with, make sure enough pressure is there to keep them on the move. Darstell is not the place to be right now, and leaving is in everyone's best interests.

Furthermore, Tarnta Bane managed to escape the wreckage at the palace and is extremely upset. With his operation in shambles, he will become obsessed with hunting down the characters and making them pay. He could cause quite a few problems to their escape attempts, and eventually force a showdown before they can leave. Or he can go on even further to become a recurring villain for the players. Catching them has become a new game for Tarnta, and he wants to make sure he wins this one...

Players should be awarded between five and ten Character Points for the adventure, depending on how well they performed and how much fun everyone had.

Appendix: Ready To Play Characters

The Slaves

Jarson Andekers: Jarson is the sort of cocky, brash, shuttle pilot that infests every starport in the galaxy. He was taken captive because of his mechanical skills and because he was able to convince Tarnta not to kill him outright. Unfortunately, his skills don't work with Nuubsal, and he has quickly found himself at the top of the Hutt's List of People to Harm. He therefore tries very hard to avoid attracting attention, and is content to wait and bide his time for an escape attempt.

Dexterity 3D+1; blaster 4D+1

Knowledge 2D; language 3D

Mechanical 3D; space transports 4D

Perception 4D; con 5D, forge 5D, persuade 6D

Strength 2D

Technical 3D+2

Ch'thoqua: Ch'thoqua was a Tusken Raider whose tribe was wiped out by Imperials on Tatooine. After performing the traditional mourning rituals, he left the Jundland Wastes for the first time and traveled to Anchorhead, where he caught a shuttle off-world. His intention was to link up with the Alliance and exact some revenge, but he was unused to the cloak and dagger tactics such contact required. He was spotted by an Imperial bureaucrat who pointed him out to Consolidations Unlimited, and quickly found himself in slaver's chains.

Dexterity 3D; melee 4D

Knowledge 3D; intimidation 4D, survival 4D

Mechanical 2D

Perception 4D; hide 5D, sneak 5D

Strength 4D; brawling 6D

Technical 2D

The pair have been in chains for just a few weeks, and have come to trust each other a great deal. Ch'thoqua has even begun thinking of



Jarson as a new, "surrogate tribe," and will go to great lengths to protect him. Both of them are very anxious to escape. A serious opportunity to put the harm on their captors would be even more welcome than a shot at freedom.

The Mole

Cermack Rustill: Cermack's high-gravity planet produced a large number of Endomorphs, and was thus singled out by the Empire as a source of slave labor. His family was pressed into servitude while he was off planet, and he joined the Alliance as soon as he got the news. He hopes to find and rescue them someday, and sees the Rebellion as the best chance of doing that.

Cermack is a quiet, thoughtful man whose intelligence belies his huge size. He will be cautious in his instigation of the revolt, as he has no wish to die before finding his family.

Dexterity 2D: blaster 3D

Knowledge 3D+2: languages 5D+2, streetwise 4D+2

Mechanical 2D+1

Perception 3D: con 5D, hide 4D

Strength 4D

Technical 3D

The Commandos

Selnia Trigg: Selnia was a page for Senator Bail Organa and one of the earliest members of the Rebel Alliance. The destruction of her home planet of Alderaan has left her withdrawn and distant, and she now goes about her duties with an almost clinical detachment. J'rek de Mahdavi has opened her up a bit, but she feels that any display of emotion will betray the devastation of her world. She follows orders well and demonstrates considerable field initiative during her missions.

She is somewhat upset at receiving this assignment, preferring assaults on Imperials rather than a "PR tangle" with comparatively minor criminals.

Dexterity 3D: blaster 3D+2, dodge 3D+1

Knowledge 4D: bureaucracy 5D

Mechanical 2D+1: astrogation 3D+1, capital ship piloting 4D+1

Perception 4D: command 6D

Strength 2D

Technical 2D+2

Ne Thruska: "One cannot be betrayed if one has no 'people'." That's the guiding philosophy of Ne Thruska, a Bothan pilot of unparalleled skill. Trained early on as a spy, Ne has developed a sense of paranoia that rivals most in the Alliance. He prefers missions alone, and dislikes trusting his back to anyone. As such, he usually serves as a scout pilot and rarely comes into contact with any rebels save Selnia, his C.O. He was chosen to test the *Morrt* mainly for his talents, but also to teach him a little about the merits of trust.

Dexterity 3D+1: vehicle blasters 4D+1

Knowledge 2D: planetary systems 3D

Mechanical 4D: astrogation 5D, capital ship piloting 6D, starfighter piloting 6D

Perception 2D+1

Strength 2D+1

Technical 4D

J'rek de Mahdavi: J'rek de Mahdavi is a student of the Force, a pseudo-Jedi who is just beginning to understand his capabilities. He's a good soldier who understands the concept of mercy, and was sent on this raid to help quell any misunderstandings that may develop with the revolting slaves. J'rek is a very sensitive young man who feels the pain of his comrades acutely. He's tried to bring Selnia and Ne out of their shells, but so far has achieved only limited success. His greatest ambition is to one day leave the fighting behind him, and study the mysteries of the Force in peace and seclusion.

Dexterity 3D: melee combat 5D, melee parry 4D

Knowledge 3D: alien languages 4D

Mechanical 2D

Perception 3D: command 4D+2

Strength 2D: stamina 3D+1

Technical 2D

Force Points: 1

Special Abilities: control 1D, sense 1D, alter 1D. Seven Force powers of the player's choosing. 6

X-Range Dodging 61



Tell opponent: "Do only X-Range next turn and add +2 if you score."

50 39	58 51
52 61	60 59
54 57	62 55
56 57	64 57

62

Blocking With Ax 63



Tell opponent: "Do no Red or Orange next turn."

50 7	58 51
52 35	60 35
54 9	62 55
56 17	64 3

64

Strangelands



Starlight

by Rob Vaux

From the world of *Legend of the Five Rings* by Five Rings Publishing

The stars shone down on the battlefield in glittering spirals, adding to the moon that lit the earth as bright as day. The sparks of a thousand campfires mirrored their glow, scattered across the Lion camp in equally intricate patterns. Lao-Tse stood at the edge of them and sighed quietly, an enigmatic smile on his face. So far from the golden hills of his homeland, the stars were the only thing he truly loved about this place.

He stretched beneath his armor and stifled a yawn, cradling his naginata closer to himself. Guard duty was the most reviled shift a soldier could perform, and with an army as splendid as this before him, it seemed almost a waste of time. Who would dare attack the forces of the Lion now? What could an enemy hope to gain from it? Better to rest and prepare for the battle tomorrow than stand on watch for an assault that would never come. Not even the Crab was foolish enough to strike in the dark.

Looking up from the camp, Lao-Tse turned his attention to the sky above, his thoughts wandering. When the war is over and his Lord claimed the Emerald Throne, what would he do? Return home, of course, to serve the new Emperor at his ancestral palace. But what then? He remembered the Geishas he had visited the night before he left, remembered the charms they had plied on his willing body. Were any of them still there? Would one of them perhaps make a fit wife? He smiled at the thought. A pretty wife to hold him and care for him when his duties ended. A wife to stand by him while he defended the honor of the Lion Clan. How many women

would jump at the chance? How many women would be honored to stand by his side? They were innumerable, he answered, in response to his own question. As many women as there were stars in the sky...

He was still studying those stars when the knife reached around him and sunk into his throat.



The general's tents were a buzz of activity, with pages and servants scurrying to fulfill their master's wishes. There would be no sleep for the Lion's leaders tonight; Hida Kisada was too wily a foe to take lightly, and the coming battle would test their mettle to the limit.

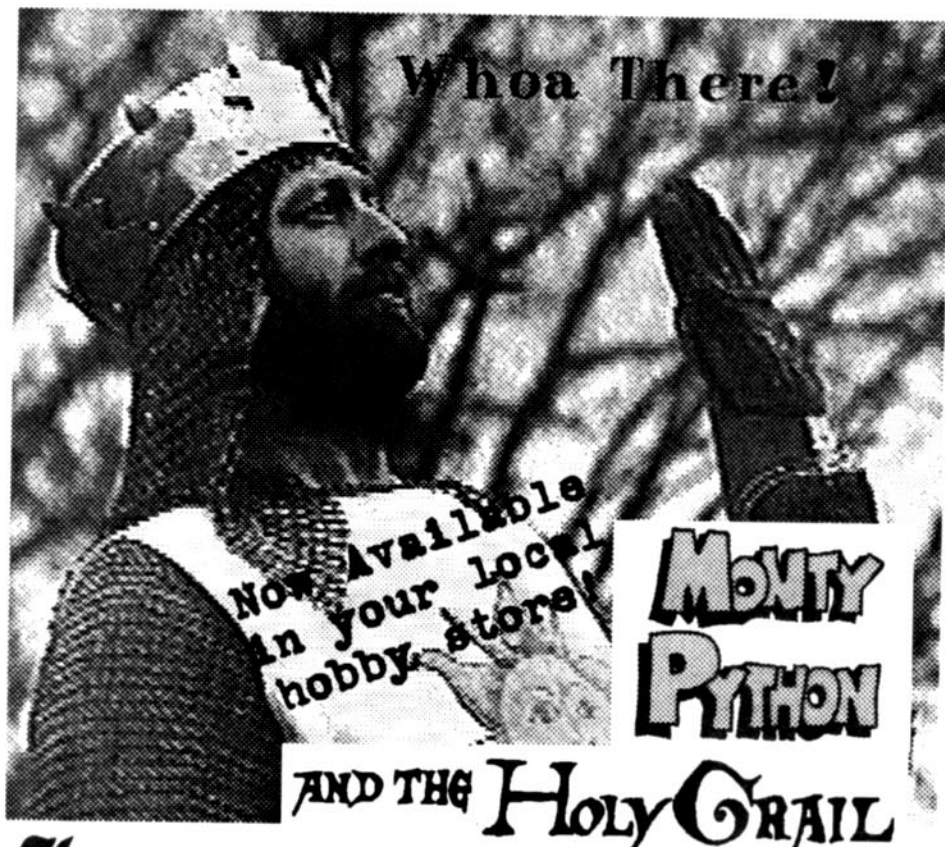
In the center tent, the leaders of the clan stood around a scale map of the field. The golden sigil of the king of beasts marked the tokens of their own forces, while the Crab's troops were signified by a pair of chitinous claws. The enemy was spread out on a ridge to the north, ready to ride down and sweep over them like a wave. Each lord and samurai present had an idea on how to circumvent Hida's forces, and all felt the need to share it with their peers. Tactical movements and strategies passed back and forth between the circle, animated assertions and testy arguments following in their wake. Not a man at the table was silent.

Slightly behind the heated debate stood Matsu Tsuko, the recently chosen Champion of Clan Lion. Tall and imposing, she could view the tactical display quite easily over the

smaller generals. Her youthful face was still and unmoving, focusing completely on the conversation. The leather of her armor creaked silently as she shifted from foot to foot, her dark hair brushed back behind the Lion's ceremonial helmet. Though only twenty-one, she had already distinguished herself in the arts of weaponry and tactics, and the older men around her were already deferring to her instincts. She followed the darting arguments with focused interest, waiting until they died down before voicing an opinion.

As she listened, she absentmindedly stroked her leather-sheathed shoulder. Beneath the armor, the golden tattoo of the Lion's crest began to itch slightly. The mark had been given to her when she was still a child, just before she began her training. She remembered the pride she had felt when the old man stitched it into her, the pride that had overridden the tears of pain. Its presence meant she had been selected for something far greater than she could possibly have imagined. She was to be a warrior of the Lion, a defender of the noblest clan in Rokugan, and a protector of the Emperor himself. It was an honor few could dream of, and almost none could attain. But she had been invested with it and would happily die in the defense of its cause. The mark they gave her was irrefutable proof of that status.

The tattoo was there for her as she began her long years of training; it reminded her of what she was fighting for when she was tired and exhausted. It helped her strive farther and faster than her peers, to reach the fullest of her potential at an astoundingly early age.



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The crest had watched when she slew her first warrior, had shined with satisfaction at her victory. She was only thirteen when she first drew blood in combat and her battles since then had only grown fiercer. The Lion had been with her all the while, guiding her progress towards whatever destiny the fates had in store for her.

Its itch was a familiar comfort here on the eve of the battle.

Finally, the jabbering of the generals slowed, the debates around the table quieted. A dozen faces turned towards her, ready now to hear the words of their champion. She smiled calmly, and gestured at the table.

"The Hida family is well named," she asserted. "Scuttling and chittering, they make a great show of power when threatened. But we will see how fierce they are when they no longer have their holes to crawl back to. Flank them to the east and we cut off their supply routes. Allow our forces in the valley to fade back, drawing them further and further from their perch. When they over-extend themselves, we will order a counterattack. And they will be ours."

Her eyes swept the assemblage, as thoughtful nods and pleased grins met her words. The eldest general, a leathery old man whose armor was riddled with countless ribbons and medals, cleared his throat.

"It shall be done, honored champion. Our forces have the strength and the will to carry out such a plan, and come the dawn, Hida Kisada will be counting the cost. With the blessings of Osano Wo, the banner of the Lion will emerge triumphant."

A low murmur of assent followed his proclamation, the lords and samurai nodding their approval. Tsuko smiled and leaned back against a tent pole as renewed debate rose around the table. The marshaling of forces and tactical particularities were now the focus, their arguments geared towards the how and wherefore instead of the what. It was good.

Their discussion was interrupted by the appearance of a young boy, dressed in messenger's garb, at the entrance to the tent. He was sweating and out of breath, having apparently run here at top speed. The conversation died down as the generals turned to regard the child.

"Murder!" he panted. "Murder most foul. O noble lords, an assassin has struck our right flank and treacherously executed two of our number."

Instantly, Tsuko was standing. Whirling on her toes, she turned to face the messenger, towering above his tiny form. "Where?"

"The eastern edge of the camp, mistress. A guard was slaughtered while standing at his post, the local commander taken as well. The symbol of the Crab was left with both bodies."

"Assassins," Tsuko whispered, her voice like a razor. "Is there no depths to which Kisada will sink?" The other leaders clustered forward, the upcoming battle momentarily forgotten.

"What is being done to apprehend the killer?" the elder general inquired of the boy.

"The honored Matsu Yojo is organizing a search party, and all the local commanders under him have been alerted."

"And the killer?"

"No sign, although the bodies have not yet been examined."

"This commander who was killed... what is his station?" Tsuko inquired

"The leader of a single cadre, my lady," the boy replied dutifully. "His second in command has assumed his responsibilities."

"I see. A regrettable loss, but not one which will greatly affect the upcoming battle..." Tsuko appeared thoughtful for a minute, then regarded the boy again.

"Tell Yojo to have his commanders stand down. Tell him that the situation has been dealt with and further repercussions are unlikely. Have him warn the men on watch to attend to their duties and take extra care lest more assassins come slinking out of the shadows."

She turned to face the assembly.

"This is a bad omen. Unless the killer is apprehended, he will spread fear and doubt through our ranks. Without sleep, our troops will not perform well on the morrow, and our plan may suffer for it."

"Could this be the beginning of an attack?" one of the younger samurai queried.

"On a night as bright as this? We would have noticed any significant troop movements hours ago. No, this is but a single man or small group of men, sent to dull our edge before the battle."

She turned back to the men. "You honored gentlemen continue with your preparations. I shall remove this thorn in our side myself."

The lords started.

"My lady, is that wise?" The eldest asked.

"Your expertise is sorely needed here, and a skirmish in the dark may lead to a broken leg or worse. Surely, we can dispatch someone else to deal with this interloper."

The mask of her face broke in a darkened frown as her mark began to itch again.

"Am I not the new champion? Is not mine the right? The day I cower behind the lines while the enemy strikes at us is that day the Shadowlands claim my soul! I have faith in your tactical skills, honored gentlemen. Have faith in my ability to deal with a few crawling worms. Continue as you have. I will find this Crab assassin, this coward who skulks in the dark like a dog, and I will teach him what it means to cross the Lion. We will carry his head before us in battle as a warning to his scuttling masters."

She touched the hilt of her katana and looked down at the boy.

"Take me to the bodies, child. We shall see who holds their cost dearer this night."



The corpse of Lao-Tse lay as it was found,

his head tilted upward at the glittering sky. His armor was stained with his own blood, his naginata lying useless as his side. A deep hole in the center of his throat gave grisly account of the cause of death, its pulpy core staring up like a third eye. His bewildered expression was almost comical, like some bumbling sensei who had found enlightenment while voiding his bowels. Tsuko knelt and stared into that face for almost five minutes, her unblinking calm standing in sharp defiance of its madness.

"It's an end, you fool," she said to herself, "a perfectly normal end to one who watches the stars and not his duty. No need to look confused by it."

The small crowd of soldiers in the area had orders to stay back, lest their clumsiness destroy some bit of evidence. Tsuko had approached the body with an equal amount of care, and now turned her attentions away from the deceased and towards some sign of his killer. For a tracker such as her, one wasn't hard to find. The footprints were planted firmly in the dirt, bathed in the brilliant moonlight. Their imprint was small but deep in the surrounding earth. He walked on the

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Starlight

balls of his feet, she noted quietly. Silent and noiseless to all save the gods. The prints led directly into the commander's tent, then back out again, along the edge of the camps towards the no man's land of the battlefield and eventually the camp of the Crab army. No fool, this one. He had not dallied excessively here, content merely to wreak his havoc and return the way he had come.

Fortunately, there was quite a bit of distance to be covered before he reached the safety of the Crab's camp. He had struck on the eastern edge of the army, a good league and a half from the front line and a considerable ways from nearer and therefore more attractive targets. Why exactly, Tsuko was not certain. Possibly to send the Lion commanders a false impression of troop movements. Possibly just over-confidence and a need to "strike with impunity." Either way it did not matter. The killer would keep to the edge of the camp lest he be discovered, and would need to move with caution in the brightness of the night. She did not. Turning towards the footprints that trickled away like a glowing string, she smiled thinly to herself and strode off in pursuit. The soles of her boots left spaces twice as wide between them.

The stars wheeled and spun in their pat-

terned dance as she followed the course, her step neither wavering nor slowing. As the trail continued, she found herself able to read the footprints much more clearly. They seemed to grow as time went on, to become larger and more pronounced. Sloprier. The tracks led through bushes and around clumps of trees, always positioned so as to obscure their owner from the camp. Yet it still appeared odd that one so careful about his approach should be so careless in covering his retreat. Tsuko was challenged twice by sentries as she made her way along, which was comforting, but also deepened the mystery. Was this killer so good that he could just sprint by them without notice?

Finally, the tents of the Lion began to thin, becoming wider and less clustered. The glow of the campfires lessened, no longer strong enough to compete with the blazing sky. Her army fell away behind her, leaving the No Man's Land of the battlefield spread wide. The earth and grass were untouched here, stretching straight and level as far as the eye could see. In two days time, they would be crushed by bodies, the blood of countless men staining their roots. Beyond them, several leagues away, lay the armies of the Crab, their own campfires just another set of stars from

this distance.

Tsuko paused and surveyed the plain, crouching low like her predatory namesake. Not a thing moved between her and the Crab, not a bird, not a mouse, not a worm. It was as if the ground itself sensed what was coming, and was holding its breath in anticipation. Only the footprints stained its canvas, an interloping Crab scuttling across the battlefield. She scanned back and forth with piercing eyes, looking for some sign of the man who made them. The moonlight lit her face with an ivory glow beneath the mane of her helmet.

From the corner of her vision, something stirred. A dark form, crouched low against the ground, began moving slowly and methodically across the plain.

"Still wary, little crab?" she whispered to herself. "Why the caution now? You are almost free of the Lion's jaws..."

With a single fluid motion, she leapt to her feet and sprinted after the form. The wind whistled through her ears and she felt her heart sing as she sped towards her prey. The man did not even turn at her approach; he leapt forward and began running madly towards the enemy camp. Tsuko cursed and drew her katana, intending to cut the cur down like a row of wheat. He was a small man, she noticed, barely high enough to reach her shoulder. She sprinted after him, covering three steps for each of his.

In a flash, she was upon him, the hilt of her blade striking between the shoulders. He went sprawling to the ground, a long knife falling from his hands.

"I am not some foolish guard to be caught unawares, killer." Tsuko hissed. "Turn and face me before I put you in your grave."

She reached down and grasped the smock of his black shirt, flipping him over on his back. She could feel the fabric rip beneath her fingers as her quarry launched a vicious kick at her midsection. It careened harmlessly off her armor and she laughed.

"It will take more than that to..."

Suddenly, she paused, her instincts sensing something just beneath the wind. She released the killer from her grip and spun around in a flash, seconds before the whistling blade sped past her head. She lashed out reflexively, then ducked and rolled free of her quarry. Springing to her feet, she whirled to face this new threat.

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the Hida family stood before her, their faces invisible beneath the painted sneers of leather masks. Weapons flashed in the silver light, their murderous intentions all too apparent. Behind the pair, the Crab assassin slowly clambered to his feet.

"HAI!!!" Without pause, Tsuko charged into the fray, denying her opponents the opportunity to think. She parried the first thrust with deceptive ease, pushing herself past the soldier and back towards the killer.

The second Crab sprang towards her, a tetsubo club gripped in both hands. Without turning around, she reversed her free hand, feeling her elbow connect with the man's throat. A vicious kick brought the assassin to his knees again, knocking the wind out of him. That taken care of, she spun around a second time, ready to face her opponents on her own terms.

The first soldier rushed at her again, his katana spinning in his hand. She lifted her own sword to block the blow, feeling sparks as the steel connected and slid down to her hilt. They locked eyes and she smiled serenely, feeling the first hint of fear in her opponent's soul.

His expression stiffened behind his mask, and she felt the wind behind her grow thick. In an instant, he had given the game away.

She pivoted slightly and pulled her katana away from him while the second soldier came hurtling up behind her. She dodged beneath his blow as the tetsubo crashed into the first soldier's arm with a resounding snap. Using the momentum of her turn, she brought her katana down into his midsection. It snapped through metal and leather alike, cutting deeply into his unprotected belly. The blade bit deeply and she felt a satisfying tug as it pulled away, dragging bits of dripping gore from its unfortunate victim.

Tsuko stepped sideways and wiggled free as the second soldier lurched into his companion. Before the first man could react, she had turned again and with surgical precision, brought her scarlet blade down upon his throat. With her free hand, she produced her wakizashi and planted it firmly between the second soldier's shoulders. Releasing the hilt, she stepped away from their entangled forms and readied her katana for another blow.

It never came. The men fell away from her in a fumbling heap, their air of menace all but gone. The second soldier jerked spasmodically in a death rattle, as his hands tried feebly to hold in his intestines. The tip of Tsuko's wak-

izashi poked out from his armored chest, the strength of her blow driving it completely through him. The first soldier struggled to free himself of his companion, then staggered to his knees, his broken arm flopping like a rag doll.

"The battle comes with the dawn, little crawlers, not before." Tsuko spoke with a voice taut as wire. "Did you think you could strike at us with impunity, then scuttle back to your dank little holes without retribution?"

The soldier could only gobble a reply as blood spat out of the broken cracks of his mask. He made one final effort to bring his sword around upon her, then fell backwards again, his form stilled. His katana stood straight up, wedged between his arm and his companion's shuddering corpse. It stabbed the night sky like a nail, spattered with blackened drops of its owner's blood.

Tsuko waited as their thrashing slowly subsided, then retrieved her wakizashi from the corpse. Quickly surveying the area, she allowed herself to relax slightly. No other Crabs would follow these. A pair of shallow trenches were visible a short ways off, dug just deep enough to hide a human form. They must have been waiting there for the assassin to return, she thought. Her attentions turned back to the killer. Her blow had knocked the wind out of him, but he was staggering slowly to his feet. With easy grace, she bounded over to him, spinning him around to look upon his face for the first time...

And all the questions were suddenly answered.

"Lion dog! Release me!"

The youthful face glared back at her with vicious hatred, its skin unblemished with the perfection of a child. A long shock of hair, once tied back behind her head, blew across her face in untended snarls. She couldn't have been twelve years old. So this was the assassin Kisada had sent to sow destruction in their ranks. A girl. A skilled, silent, invisible girl. A girl without the experience or the patience to avoid leaving a trail behind her.

Tsuko could see a dark splotch along the skin of her shoulder, visible beneath the torn cloth of her sleeve. With a grunt, she ripped the rest away, revealing the bare skin of her side to the glow of the stars. Unobserved, the splotch now took fixed form, explaining away the hate that welled up in the girl's eyes.

It was the blue tattoo of a jointed crab. The symbol of the Hida family.

Tsuko's eyes softened at the site, and she



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felt the skin beneath her shoulder itch. The murderous intentions she harbored mere moments before smoldered and died within her breast.

"So the honored Hida Kisada sends a child to perform his killing for him. Who are you that would attack us so?" she asked quietly, her grip never wavering for an instant.

"Only a loyal servant of the True Emperor, performing the orders of my general as given to me!"

"Kisada's daughter? His niece? A cousin of the family? Or just some peasant girl seduced by dreams of glory?"

"It matters not, Lion filth! Where I have come, many will follow, and on the morrow we will soak the ground with your heart's blood!" She continued to struggle beneath Tsuko's hold.

"No doubt as bravely and fiercely as you have, little crawler," she whispered, trying hard to quell the emotions building within her. "Is this the way the Crab trains its youth? To skulk in the dark like grubs?"

"All means are honorable if victory is the result. My knife has tasted a Lion's throat tonight. Tomorrow, my fellows will do the same with yours."

"Is that so? Did your general tell you that when he sent you off? Or just your wetnurse?"

The comment brought another round of kicks and curses from the girl, but Tsuko's grip never yielded. She hoisted the flailing assassin up beneath her arm, and began moving back to the Lion camp, all thoughts of murder forgotten. Battling children was not the way of the Lion, she told herself. Best take her back, and decide what to do with her after the battle tomorrow.

"Come, girl, back to the warmth of my fire. Perhaps I will allow you to view our army in action when we destroy your general."

"Cur! You have no idea what you face tomorrow! We are the Crab! We are legion! And when battle comes, you will know how terrible your enemies truly are."

Tsuko's eye clenched shut at the fervor of the remark.

"Your belief in your cause is... touching, child," she replied at last. "Perhaps... perhaps when the battle has ended I will teach you its value more fully."

The child sneered from beneath her arm.

"You do not understand. None of the Lion has ever understood. Tactics is nothing.

Planning is nothing. We have faith in our cause and our cause is just. We have powers and allies that you could not imagine in your worst nightmares. When the battle commences, we will wash over your toy soldiers like a wave. Then you will know the terrible strength of the Crab!"

With a flash, she twisted around and sunk her teeth into Tsuko's wrist. The champion cried out — more in surprise than in pain — and loosened her hold for an instant. The girl scampered free, landing on her feet and scuttling back towards the battlefield with a speed that belied her size. She turned toward her captor as she ran and laughed.

"Watch and mark, Lion dog! Watch the power of a Crab's faith!"

"WAIT!"

Tsuko cursed under her breath and turned in pursuit, confident that she could run the child down. The girl flew on, heedless of her captor's rapid approach behind her. She sprinted straight to the deceased soldier, whose body lay broken and bent like his spindly namesake. His katana struck upward from his twisted hand, braced and pointed to the sky by his shattered body. The girl launched herself towards it, springing upward in a great leap as she impaled her form on its unbending shaft. She did not scream as the blade pierced her chest, did not twitch as she sunk down upon it to the hilt. The only sound was the swish of Tsuko's boots as the champion rapidly closed the distance between them.

The girl was fading when she reached the bodies, crimson dripping from her nose and mouth. She turned and looked at the Lion, a hideous smile breaking across her blood-caked lips.

"I... am... but... one of many..." the girl hissed weakly. "One... of a legion... and when we come... we will bury you beneath us..."

Tsuko stood there in silence, watching the child's body shudder and still with unblinking eyes. She looked at it with a calm that belied the unease she felt, the disturbance that rose from the depths of her soul. The girl's words echoed in her ears as she slowly turned her face up towards the Crab camp, dotted ominously on the ridge beyond them. Far above, the timeless stars matched her gaze. 

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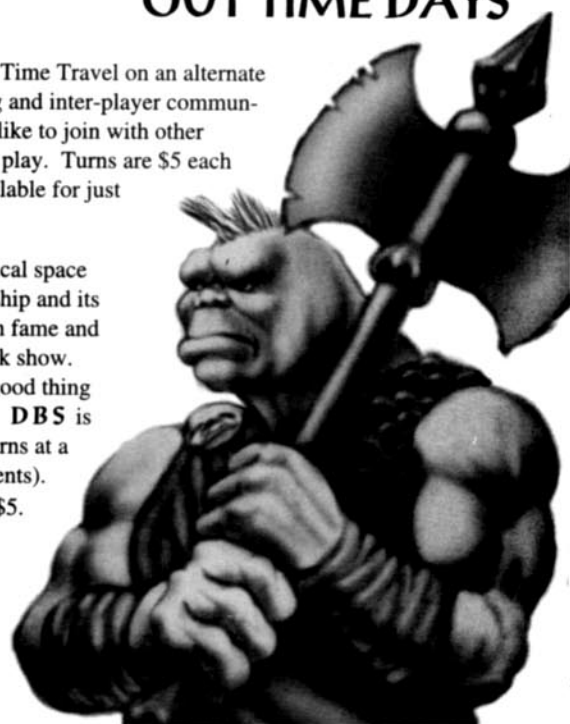
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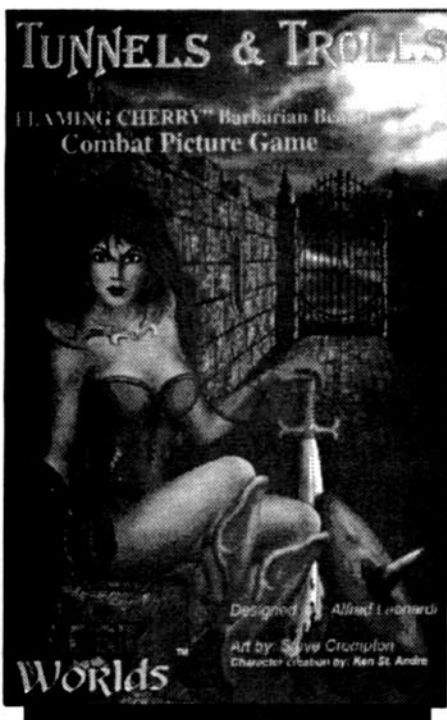
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The Sinking Chest

Lights: The party is traveling in a dungeon.

Camera: The party comes upon a large chest, surrounded by rubble. They will also see a gaping hole in the ceiling, above the chest, unless they are on the very first level of the dungeon, in which case there will be no hole. The hole will seem to be the bottom of a very dark, vertical tunnel. If a character tries to climb up this tunnel, the earth will be very unstable, and he will easily fall back down.

The chest seems old, very beaten and definitely locked. If the party succeeds in unlocking the chest, they will see a group of tiny people inside! These "little people" will shout as loud as they can "Close the lid! Close the lid!"

It will be difficult to hear their tiny voices, but as soon as someone leans close to listen, the entire party will become miniaturized and trapped in the chest with the other tiny adventurers. The lid will close and lock itself, then the chest will smash its way through the floor to the next level below!

Action: There is a strange monster who lives at the very bottom level of the dungeon. He set the chest on the uppermost level as a trap, and now awaits his treasureful of prisoners. The chest swallows adventurers, and sinks ever lower, one level at a time. When it reaches its master, it will spit out the prisoners, but it will keep their gold. (It likes gold.)

Alex Strang

The Interview

Lights: An email message promising a high paying job summons the PCs to the local Splatterball arena. It tells them to go to a certain section and wait to be contacted.

Camera: It's amateur night at the Splatterball arena and the crowd is small but rowdy. The PCs find a mismatched group of shifty-eyed mercenar-

ies — people just like themselves — already in "their" section. The two groups will probably interact. Before anyone is seriously injured, a nameless suit arrives. It seems his secretary made a mistake and contacted two groups for the same job. (Yeah, right.) But he has an idea. Since they just happen to be at the Splatterball arena, and it just happens to be amateur night, why don't they play a quick challenge match to see who gets the job?

Action: Splatterball is "capture the flag", played in a maze of paint-stained office cubicles on the floor of a small sports arena. The "flags" are one meter balls of gold plated plastic, which start the game on pedestals at each end of the arena. To win, a team must move the other team's ball to their own pedestal. Each team gets nonlethal versions of their favorite guns, and 100 paint pellets. A computer video system judges hits. After three hits, a player is "dead" and out of the game. Players are free to make unarmed attacks, but anyone who breaks bones or causes any other serious injury is out of the game.

Fredrich Passow

We'll Make Great Pets

Lights: This adventure can be used in a module where dimension hopping or weird stuff is not uncommon. The party is recruited by an old man to retrieve an important artifact — he says he is one of the few remaining members of his tribe who still believes in the old ways and he needs this artifact to convince the young people of his tribe to believe in the ways of his ancestors.

Camera: The old man will give the party directions to recover the artifact and they will be surprised to find that it is only in the next town and is supposed to be buried next to an old tree. If they ask the old man why he just can't go and get it, he will explain he is too old for such a dangerous journey — this should probably confuse the players. If they agree, just as they are about leave, they suddenly feel incredibly tired, as if they have been



Lights, Camera, Action!

drugged, and they fall into a deep sleep.

Action: The old man is an Indian shaman and he hasn't really explained that the artifact is actually on a spiritual plane — a parallel world to this one, a world where there are no humans. All humans are represented by their "totemic" animal and a quick drive to the next town suddenly becomes a long journey through dangerous woods. The players wake up and find themselves transformed into small animals such as chipmunks or foxes (gamemasters discretion: pick something that you think fits the character's personality — the character who is always running around and chatting could become a squirrel; the vain character becomes a cat; the vicious, sneaky type becomes a weasel). They then have to complete the adventure in this form and should be encouraged to get into the mindset of the animal and think of different ways to overcome obstacles now they don't have opposable thumbs. The artifact probably has different forms — in the animal world it could be a tree branch, but in the human world it appears as a beautiful carved staff.

Tonia Walden

The Gift

Lights: The party discovers a group of their traditional enemy (orcs, goblins, lawyers, etc.) sneaking through a heavily wooded area carrying a good-sized chest.

Camera: The baddies will run if able to, and will fight to the death to protect the chest. After defeating the baddies and opening the chest, the PC's will discover a beautiful silver cup with lots of gems and runes, and handles shaped like dragons. They will undoubtedly be quite proud of their treasure.

Action: The cup has a couple neat magical powers, GM's choice. It was also the yearly offering from the baddie tribe to a really nasty monster (e.g. a dragon). The big nasty will know about his gift, and be expecting it. He will be highly upset with the PCs for stealing his present and will stop at nothing to get it back (perhaps wrecking their hometown and kidnapping a PC's family member). The baddie tribe will send out assassins to retrieve the cup and return it to the big nasty to avoid reprisals against them by him.

Scott Meredith

The Old Humanoid in the Inn

Lights: The PCs are visiting an orc-ravaged land. The locals know the lair is nearby, but no one knows where.

Camera: As the PCs relax after a good meal, the door opens and a stranger shuffles in. He is only four feet tall, and wears a floor-length robe, a deep cowl, and very long sleeves. The cowl scans the room and fixes on the PCs. He shuffles over and gives a traditional speech: His people have been enslaved by orcs. Will the PCs please rescue them? They have no money, but he can lead the PCs to the lair, where the orcs' treasure will be theirs for the looting. (Yes, he really says "looting".) The adventurers have heard it all before, but never in the squeaking, snarling voice of an old goblin.

Action: The stranger is The Venerable One Ear. (*Venerable* is the title of any goblin who survives into double digits.) His tribe has, in fact, been enslaved by orcs. He escaped through pure luck, and the orcish habit of fighting, drinking, and sleeping on duty. He knows the way back to the lair, and how to pass the sentries, traps, and barriers that defend it. Although he is telling the truth, and does not plan any sort of double-cross, he is still an evil little goblin. But he is an evil little goblin who wants his tribe back. He will faithfully lead the PCs past the traps and barriers, then try to run away before the first battle. He does not care who wins, as long as some of his tribe escape in the confusion.

Fredrich Passow

The Model

Lights: The PCs have a reputation for helping people in trouble, especially people in trouble with major corporations.

Camera: A famous fashion model just survived an assassination attempt. She thinks the hit team was sent by her own corp, and wants to hire the PCs as bodyguards. The PCs have heard rumors of attacks on other models and entertainers, but so far all the victims seem to have survived.

Action: A few months ago, a lab owned by the corp in question developed a process for making near perfect computer models of real people. Performers had always been a bit of a pain, so the corp brought many of them to the lab, "to shoot ads for a new personal computer", and recorded them. When the copies passed public inspection, the corp sent hit teams to quietly kill the originals. The PCs can fend off a few attacks, but the only long-term solution is to break into the lab and destroy the recordings.

Fredrich Passow



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The Good,

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Ootoyo Izumo

Occupation: Noble Woman

Skills: Politics, Etiquette, Koto (stringed musical instrument)

Motivation: To ensure the continuation of the house of Izumo

Weaknesses: Unable to exert power directly

Lady Ootoyo is the wife of Lord Izumo, the Daimyo (feudal lord) of Kishu Han. The province of Kishu contain many prosperous towns and peasant communities who support Izumo. He in turn must pay taxes to the Shogunate.

Only a few people know that recently Lord Izumo was struck by an assassin's arrow and has become critically ill with a brain fever. Ootoyo and some of the Lord's closest advisers realize that Izumo may never recover; they suspect the arrow was coated with poison. She wishes to keep this a secret, since her only son is still an infant and she fears what may happen if the Shogunate discovered that Lord Izumo is no longer capable of leading the house.

Ootoyo and the Izumo's advisers have acted secretly to make it appear as if Izumo was not seriously ill. But he now never leave his gardens except in the confines of a *palanquin* (an enclosed litter which is carried by retainers). Ootoyo does not know how long she can keep this deception up, but her organizational skills and strong will have since made her the power behind the Izumo household. ❸



Kosuke Haga

Occupation: Samurai

Skills: Swordsmanship (Katana and Wakizashi)

Motivation: To learn about the world

Weaknesses: Trusting, Compassionate

Kosuke is the youngest son of Lord Haga, a prominent Daimyo. He is intelligent and contemplative and as a result is not very talkative, preferring to think situations through before jumping to conclusions. Although born a privileged nobleman, Kosuke wished to see more of the country and was granted permission by his father to study at the Shogunate's school in the far-off city of Edo (the capital of old Japan, now the site of Tokyo). Kosuke deliberately allowed himself to become sidetracked on his journey to the school, visiting townships and local temples, and learning something of the martial arts from various teachers. This gave him an appreciation of the peasants' life and he has respect for their simple, hard existence (an unusual attitude for a noble).

After studying at the Shogunate's school for two years, he decided to return to his family. While travelling home, he met a young woman called Okan and fell in love with her. He is currently staying in her home town and is trying to convince her to come home with him so they can be married. She seems unwilling to travel with him; Kosuke cannot understand her stubbornness and is going to insist that she accompany him soon. ❸



Miyoshi Nomura

Occupation: Zen Buddhist priest

Skills: Meditation, Zen Wisdom

Motivation: To reach enlightenment and help others

Weaknesses: Overly persistent

Miyoshi is a Buddhist who wears the saffron orange robes of a beggar monk. He wanders from town to town, begging alms from others, visiting temples, and living a life of peaceful contemplation. He is about forty, although his shaved head and boyish grin make him appear younger. He likes trying to help people, often by pointing out their inability to change and the troubles it causes them. He can't resist meddling in other people's affairs and this has occasionally caused problems with those who don't appreciate interference from a lowly beggar monk. Miyoshi's sense of humor, quick wit, and simple wisdom have made him many friends, however.

Certain important officials favor him, and he has been a guest of the Izumo family on more than one occasion: he can seek aid from these unexpected quarters if he needs to. People have a tendency to overlook him, since lowly monks are not expected to have any influence in the echelons of power. This makes him a good source of information, since he is often able to eavesdrop on conversations among disreputable types. In so doing, he has been able to discover and warn people about impending bandit attacks and once uncovered a spy acting against the Izumo family. ❸

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The Bad,

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Hiraga Tamao

Occupation: Kabuki Actor

Skills: Acting, Disguise

Motivation: Fame and his career

Weaknesses: Single-minded, overambitious

Hiraga was trained as a Kabuki actor from a very young age and has traveled extensively with different troupes performing the popular Kabuki plays. He is an exceptional young actor, but he lacks the discipline and control that experience provides. He is not, however, content to simply wait until his contributions are recognized; he wants to rise in prestige by insinuating himself among high ranking Lords and officials. He is very manipulative and has flattered and cajoled his way into a highly regarded troupe under the instruction of Sakata Tojiuro, a recognized master of Kabuki.

Hiraga's ambition has been noticed by the Anesaki Ninja, who realize that an ally in the theatre could be useful. They have arranged to advance Hiraga's career through the influence of their master Lord Haga, who has the troupe perform before important audiences. In return, they gain access to officials' homes disguised as part of the troupe's retainers. Hiraga does not realize that by cooperating with the Anesaki he will never be free of their influence. They will continue to ask for greater and more dangerous favors which he will be unable to refuse, lest they expose him as a spy against the Shogunate. ☪



Kikuma Hanji

Occupation: Ronin/Assassin

Skills: Swordsmanship, Brawling, Stealth

Motivation: Money

Weaknesses: Carousing, Secret criminal

Kikuma is a swordsman who wanders the land looking for work as a temporary retainer — he is a *Watarikachi* or mercenary. The *Watarikachi* are low-ranking samurai hired by less-powerful Daimyo who can't afford to permanently keep hundreds of retainers. They hire *Watarikachi* only when they need extra soldiers to guard their *Han* (province and lands), or to bolster their numbers in military processions. Kikuma's alliances change according to his employment and he feels no particular duty to any one lord. Nor does he follow the strict code of conduct (known as *bushido* or "the way of the warrior") that other samurai do. His skill with a sword is formidable, but he kills with a mixture of brute strength and speed rather than any developed style of swordsmanship.

When he cannot find work with a Daimyo's troops, he carries out assassinations to make money and spends his idle hours in the red light districts. If his involvement in such activities were ever discovered, he would be executed. Families who have lost sons to Kikuma's sword would pay handsomely for information about the assassin's identity and location. ☪



Yoshi Anesaki

Occupation: Kunoichi (Female Ninja)

Skills: Spy, Tanto (knife), Stealth, Poisons

Motivation: To serve her clan/Lord Haga

Weaknesses: Quick temper

Yoshi is a Ninja, one of the silent killers and spies of the noble families. The Anesaki clan belongs to part of the spy network that serves the Daimyo Lord Haga, and has a long history of training their sons and daughters in the skills of ninjutsu. Yoshi is an expert in killing by stealth and deception, especially with poisons ingested in food or drink.

Yoshi has been ordered to secure a position within the household of Lord Seizan, spy on the family, and determine if they have any weaknesses that could be exploited. The lands of Lord Seizan lie next to those of Lord Haga, and if Seizan could be revealed as a traitor against the Shogunate (the military dictatorship of Japan), they will order his house to be disbanded. Seizan would then have to commit *seppuku* (ritual suicide), and his lands could be claimed by Haga as part of a reward for revealing such treachery. Yoshi has been sent to evaluate whether planting evidence against the house of Seizan will be effective. ☪

And The Ugly

Artwork and Characters by Tonia Walden © 1996



Okan

Type: Fox Woman (Kitsune)
Skills: Shapeshifter, Charm, Cause Trance
Motivation: To entrance a human husband
Weaknesses: Bound to her home

In Japan, foxes are believed to be spirits capable of bewitching people. Their powers can cloud the human mind and a person may find himself wandering aimlessly through the fields after being led astray by a fox's spell. More malicious fox spirits may even lead a person into a dangerous situation. Foxes are also capable of assuming human form and then entrancing a helpless human to fall in love with them.

Okan is a fox maiden who noticed Kosuke Haga as he was traveling through the countryside. She immediately took a liking to him and when she saw bandits waiting to attack him on a lonely road, she confused their minds and helped him fight them off. She followed him, transformed herself into a beautiful woman, and told him she lived in the village of Miya. Okan regularly meets with Kosuke, who is staying in Miya. Although her magic has prevented him from asking awkward questions about her family and home life, she knows she must soon tell him the truth (since he must eventually leave to visit his family). Okan truly does love Kosuke and will not use her magic to force him to stay. She fears she will lose him if she tells him the truth, but if she doesn't and travels with him she fears she may weaken and die, since her spirit is bonded to the countryside around Miya. If Kosuke has faith in her and loves her for what she truly is, it may be enough to let her leave her home for a while, but she knows she must eventually return. ☾



"Danjo"

Type: Vampiric Cat
Skills: Cause sleep, move silently, attack with claws
Motivation: To feed on blood
Weaknesses: Needs to feed to survive, can only appear at night

"Danjo" has the appearance of a young peasant boy of about eight years old, but its true form is of a monstrous cat. The cat is a night spirit that must feed on human blood; if it kills its victim and buries the body, it can then assume the likeness of that person. The cat has recently killed the real Danjo, a farmer's son whom the peasants believe has run away.

The cat has appeared to Danjo's mother at night, making the other family members fall into a deep sleep so it can feed from her. She thinks it is Danjo appearing to her in a dream, but she has grown listless and weak from loss of blood and will die unless the cat is stopped.

The cat also uses its Danjo form to waylay travellers (who take pity on the small boy crying on the roadside at dusk). If they let him into their camp, they will soon fall into a deep dreamless sleep. The cat will then feed on them, and they will awaken tired and dizzy in the morning. If attacked, the cat will resume its true form and attempt to escape: hissing, spitting and attacking people with its sharp claws.

If a body of one of the cat's victims is found and blessed, the cat cannot assume that person's form any more. If all its victims are so blessed, it will have to revert to its cat form and will be banished from the area. ☾



Jabo

Type: Oni
Skills: Wakizashi (Sword), Shapeshifter, Invisibility
Motivation: Wealth, Human comforts
Weaknesses: Sake

There are two types of Oni — the horseheaded Oni of the spirit plane who search out sinners and carry them back to hell, and the Oni of earth who are hairy and deformed supernatural beings. The Oni of earth can change their shape, appearing as human beings or even inanimate objects in order to trick people. They can also vanish from sight, visible only to the very virtuous, such as holy men or the pure of heart. An Oni's body must be exorcised after it is slain; otherwise, the Oni will not be truly killed and will return in a few weeks.

Jabo is an Oni of earth, typically ugly in appearance, with three eyes, horns, and clawed hands. He is not particularly evil, just rather self-centered and not too bright. He is fascinated by the world of humans and wishes to live in comfort and luxury as they do. His preoccupation leads him to travel extensively, ambushing other travelers in order to obtain human finery and money. He doesn't usually kill to get what he wants; rather, he appears in one of his numerous human disguises and then uses threats or trickery to get his victims to give him their possessions. However, if a fight ensues, he goes into a blind rage and can be very dangerous. His great weakness is sake, which he has developed quite a taste for. If he gets too drunk, he cannot maintain his human disguise and will revert to his true appearance. ☾

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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



A good writer is not necessarily a good book critic. No more so than a good drunk is automatically a good bartender.

— Jim Bishop

A good critic ... describes his adventures among masterpieces.

— Anatole France

This is a tirade.

It all started when John Zinser came back from Origins with stories of people complaining that our reviews were "too complimentary." We never panned anybody. Of course, my wisecrack answer would have been "I suppose we'll start with your latest release, right?" But it is a valid complaint, especially if you don't understand our review policy.

It's true that if you read SHADIS, there isn't a single bad review in the lot. That's because we think it's better to show off the good things the people of the industry are doing rather than make value judgments about the products we didn't like. In short, if we don't have anything good to say, we'll keep our mouths shut. We know how much work people put into a role-playing product. A lot of those people have families to support. A lot of those people are gambling with their lives to live out the dream of making a living in the role-playing industry. Why should you, me, or anyone else condemn someone else's realized dream? It's unkind, unfair and just plain mean. If anything in this world is true, it's that it's easy to complain and a pain in the ass to create.

It's also pretty hard to have an attitude that allows you to recognize when other people do something great. We have quite a team here at AEG, and each of us is pretty good at what we do. I learn a lot from my co-workers, all of whom are skilled artisans in their own right. By just watching them work, I learn that sometimes you have to let your ego down a bit to recognize someone else's talent and appreciate it for what it is. That's hard for a lot of people to do; heck, it was hard for me to do; but like I said, I've learned a lot from doing it.

I guess the real reason I'm writing this is because I'm more guilty of the crime than anyone else in the office. I hold a lot of things close to my heart, and when I see someone presenting something I adore with even an ounce of less respect than I think it deserves, I go off the deep end. It's not a pretty sight. You know, I could have used this space to complain about a lot of things in the gaming industry that get my goat (the

disrespect card gamers get, the demise of GDW, the slow fade of strategy games, the Sci-Fi Channel), but maybe I'll just take a deep breath ... let it go ... and shut the hell up.

CONTEST WINNERS!

IT'S TIME TO ANNOUNCE SOME WINNERS IN THE CONTESTS WE'VE BEEN RUNNING. IF YOU'VE WON, YOU PROBABLY KNOW BY NOW, BUT FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO WERE CURIOUS, HERE'S WHO WALKED AWAY WITH OUR SECRET STASH OF GOODIES.

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5. THE INFERNAL TOWER OF SUNSHINE AND
LOLLIPOPS
4. "DRIVE THEM INTO THE SEA" MONGOLIAN
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3. WIZARDS OF THE COAST AND BRINKS
RELEASE THE OFFICIAL MAGIC: THE
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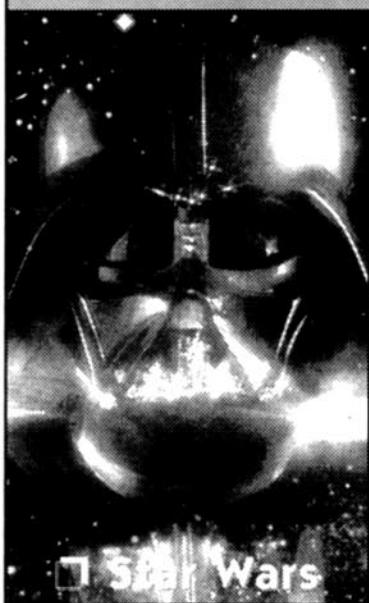


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BY LESTER SMITH

WEASEL GAMES #6

ORIGINALLY APPEARING IN *POLYHEDRON* MAGAZINE, "WEASEL GAMES" HAS NOW FOUND ITS WAY TO THE PAGES OF *SHADIS*. THIS IS THE SECOND OF THREE INSTALLMENTS TO DEAL WITH WEASELS IN ROLE-PLAYING. LESTER SMITH IS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE DESIGNER OF TSR'S MONUMENTAL HIT, *DRAGON DICE*.

MORE OF "WEASELS IN ROLE-PLAYING"

In last month's column, I turned from my usual discussion of weasel play in board games and the like to consider the issue of weasely role-playing. I mentioned that the "me first," "dog-eat-dog," "winner-take-all" attitude necessary for winning at competitive board games just doesn't travel well to role-playing — at least in group sessions. And I gave a few good examples of the destructive results I have seen over the years.

But used in moderation, and given the right group of players, a little bit of weasel in a player character or two (or even in some of the players themselves) can actually enhance a role-playing campaign, allowing the development of stories that wouldn't have happened otherwise. This month's installment begins a discussion of that idea, to be continued next month.

THE ALL-TOO-COMMON THIEF

Countless role-playing groups have at one time or another faced the predicament of dealing with a

thief PC who has stolen an item from a companion. (It is often spurred, at least in part, by the thief's desire to get even with the fighter characters who boast, "Stand aside, little one, and let a real man face this monster.") Typically, when the theft is discovered, hard feelings arise: the player of the victim feels hurt and angry at this betrayal of confidence, yet the player of the thief argues that the action was simply a case of acting in character.

The solution, I think, lies in getting past the disjointedness of that conflict — in role-playing the situation at character level rather than arguing it at player level. The player of the victim has every right to feel distressed, and certainly the character should. But the thief character would hardly seek to justify his actions as keeping with his nature, as his player is doing. Rather, he would either be taking to his heels, leaving the adventure party forever; or he would be apologizing profusely, offering to make amends and promising never to do such a thing again — in hopes of salvaging his relation with the group. In either case, there should be no hard feelings remaining between players. If the thief leaves, his player loses further opportunity to play that character (at least in this group), a not inconsequential loss. And if he apologizes, it is a wonderful opportunity for character development and



WARNING

the making of inter-character ties.

THE EXAMPLE OF LITERATURE

It shouldn't be surprising that this sort of thief-versus-party friction arises fairly often in role-playing groups. After all, role-playing springs naturally from fantasy fiction — as a matter of fact, RPGs typically explain themselves as an opportunity to play the sort of action found in novels, but with the ability to affect the course of the story, rather than passively “going along for the ride” — and fantasy fiction is rife with this sort of conflict among major characters.

Consider the example of Bilbo versus Thorin Oakenshield in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. While visiting Smaug's lair for the second time, Bilbo finds the Arkenstone and decides — without consulting the Dwarves, who consider it their most sacred artifact — that it shall serve as his share of the treasure rescued from the dragon. When Thorin finds out what Bilbo has done, he threatens to kill him, and a great deal of the drama in the latter part of the novel involves the resulting schism between the two.

Nor are Leiber's prototypical thieves Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser strangers to this sort of conflict, having fallen out various times in their careers, only to resolve their differences and draw all the more closely together.

Tasselhoff Burrfoot from the *Dragonlance* series serves as another example for player characters to follow: “lifting” items from friend and foe alike, only to reveal his possession at a dramatic moment — with the lame excuse that he was only holding it in safe-keeping for the original owner, who “dropped” it.

AN EXAMPLE FROM ROLE-PLAYING

While playing *The Fantasy Trip* RPG some years ago, I designed a small but clever thief character and a friend designed a large but rather thick-headed fighter. The GM introduced the two to each other by having the fighter set upon by alley-bashers in the thief's home town, knowing that the thief hated robbery by force. Seeing the fighter outnumbered, the thief joined the fight, striking the thugs by surprise out of the darkness. With the odds thus changed, the thugs were defeated, though the fighter was seriously injured

in the battle. The thief helped him to an inn and called a physicker, grandiosely paying for all the expense, but secretly lifting the fighter's purse by way of recompense, convinced that the dullard would not notice until he was long gone.

Unfortunately, my friend got lucky with a roll vs. the fighter's IQ, so his character noticed the theft even as my thief was cutting the purse strings. Suddenly, I was faced with the ticklish situation of having to deal with an offended friend at one level and an angry fighter on another. Rather than argue at player level, I asked to continue role-playing the situation.

It seemed to me, that with the fighter's iron grip on his wrist, my thief would be both humbled and impressed. Apparently, this stranger wasn't as dumb as he seemed. It was time for some hasty apologies, and some begging for forgiveness (i.e. mercy), coupled with offers to make reparations and then some. In the end, my character paid for the room and all medical expenses during the fighter's convalescence, and of

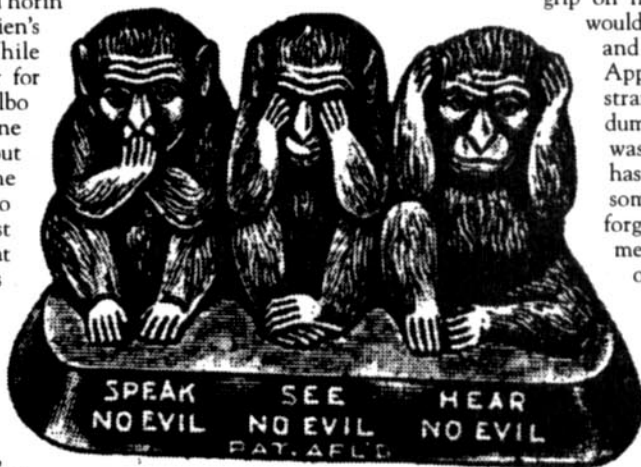
course, a new purse.

More importantly, he gained a real respect for the fighter, and the two became fast friends from that day forth. A bond had been forged that would not have been as dramatic if the two characters had begun play as companions.

Of course, that happy resolution depended just as much on my friend's willingness to forgive as mine to back-pedal. He was able to view this as a role-playing situation, rather than a personal betrayal, and to act out his character's reaction to mine's rather panicked change of attitude. After all, the fighter also owed something to the thief for the aid in the fight, and for help in getting a room and medical attention, so obviously there were qualities to the thief that were worth admiring.

AN INVITATION

If you find the subject of weasel games interesting, drop me a line and say so. I would love to learn what you think is the most useful weasel tactic, or read about a particularly apt example of weasel play from your own experience.



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thousand
years old.

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hurt him.

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stop him.

No one but you.

HUNTERS IN THE NIGHT

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MARC MILLER'S TRAVELLER

RISING FROM THE ASHES OF GDW, THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS SCI-FI RPG SEES YET ANOTHER INCARNATION.

- PUBLISHED BY IMPERIUM GAMES, INC.
- RRP/\$30 (HARDCOVER) \$25 (SOFTCOVER)
- BY MARC MILLER, LESTER SMITH, TONY LEE, GREG PORTER, KEN WHITMAN, DON PERRIN, AND MATT MACHTAN. ILLUSTRATIONS BY LARRY ELMORE AND CHRIS FOSS.
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

Game Designer's Workshop may be gone, but *Traveller* lives on. Imperium Games will soon be releasing *Marc Miller's Traveller*, the latest in the legendary line of RPGs. For those of you not familiar with *Traveller*, it was the first SF RPG ever published. The first three books in the series were released in 1977, and before long there were some 60 additional sourcebooks detailing the Third Imperium — without a doubt, *Traveller* is one of the most exhaustively detailed game worlds ever published. The game was revised in '87 with the release of *MegaTraveller*, and again in '92 with *Traveller: The New Era*. Each release pushed the timeline of the game universe forward. (Incidentally, *Traveller: 2300* is not part of the true *Traveller* timeline. Rather, it takes place in the same timeline as *Twilight: 2000*.)

Imperium Games had several goals in mind for the new *Traveller*. First, they wished to return to the simpler rules of the "classic" *Traveller* of nearly 20 years ago. (Optional rules are included for those desiring more complexity.) Secondly, they wanted to facilitate games that take place in any *Traveller* era, from 300,000BC to 5,000AD. Lastly, they wanted to reconcile the volumes of "future history" that were presented in previous *Traveller* materials.

Did they succeed? Well, the rules are indeed less complicated than, for example, *Traveller: The New Era*. Even new roleplayers shouldn't have trouble with them. It's harder to judge the other two goals, though, because the new core rulebook doesn't spend a lot of time covering *Traveller* history. Instead, it focuses on the time of Emperor Cleon, and humanity's recovery from the Long Night, a 1,000-year period of social and technological collapse. This is a fine time to be adventuring, indeed, and it's a great place to start the *Traveller* relaunch — but we'll all have to wait for future expansions to cover other periods of time in detail.

Marc Miller's Traveller is quite complete, as core rulebooks go. Character creation isn't as quick as in other modern systems, but it also provides characters with more depth. The skill system is sharp, and is complemented by good coverage of commerce, equipment, ground

combat, star travel, spacecraft construction and combat, psionics, and world generation. There are also two short scenarios included.

I really have only two complaints about *Marc Miller's Traveller*. First of all, it could use some lengthy examples of more complicated topics like ground combat. Secondly, I wish it had some more background information on the game world; as it is, it's more suited to GMs who like to be given a toolbox to "roll their own" scenarios. Fortunately, Imperium Games is planning on one release a month for the next fourteen months, so there will be plenty of resources available.

In the end, I don't think it'll win any White Wolfers over but, *Marc Miller's Traveller* is a worthy addition to the *Traveller* line and to any SF gamer's library.



So far, Imperium Games have announced the following releases for *Marc Miller's Traveller*. Each is priced at \$20.00.

September 1996 — *Starships*

October 1996 — *Central Supply Catalog*

November 1996 — *Aliens Archives*

December 1996 — *Milieu 0: The Third Imperium & First Survey*

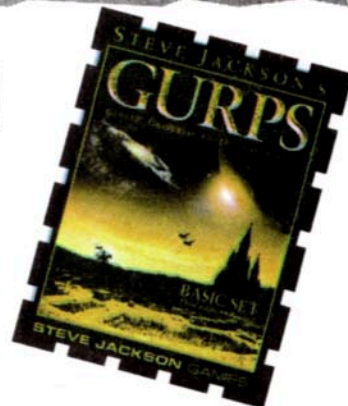
The *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society* magazine will also be put back into print to offer more support for *Traveller*.

Truly hard-core Travellers can register as a Citizen of the Imperium; fifteen Terran dollars gets you dogtags, a newsletter and more. Write to Imperium Games at P. O. Box 481, Lake Geneva, WI 53147. Their phone number is (414) 275-3984. You can also find their excellent web site at www.imperiumgames.com.

If you're lucky enough to be reading this SHADIS at GenCon '96, stop by the Imperium Games booth (#539) and ask them about the five official *Traveller* games being run at the con this year.

"Have you seen GURPS lately?"

 by John Wick



Remember when GURPS first came out? Remember those little ads in *Dragon* showing a little Steve Jackson and a big barbarian guy saying "What kind of name is GURPS!?" Remember that? I sure do. I remember picking up first edition GURPS and not being overly thrilled. I'm a sucker for easy systems, but this one was just skin and bones. No flavor at all. I passed it up and went back to reading my *Call of Cthulhu* books.

A couple of years passed and second and third edition came out. I was too busy trying to keep the Gaunt Man from becoming the Torg to take notice. Then, a friend of mine invited me to play in a fantasy game using the GURPS rules. I was intrigued because my friend was a fine GM and I had always wanted to play in one of his games. I showed up on Thursday night with a pizza and a twelve pack of Coke and we all started filling out characters.

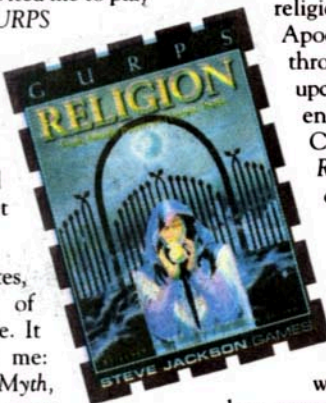
As I was scratching down notes, I noticed the large stack of sourcebooks on my buddy's table. It was the titles that intrigued me: *Imperial Rome*, *Greece*, *Celtic Myth*, *Arabian Nights*, *Religion*, and, of course, *Illuminati*. My friend noticed my attentions and smiled. "You know, GURPS writes the best sourcebooks in gaming." I shrugged and picked up *GURPS: Celtic Myth*. I was – quite literally – taken aback. I'm a relentless fanatic when it comes to representing my grandfather's culture with sincerity and respect (he was one damn proud Irishman), and I had never seen such a careful presentation of the Celtic people in a gaming product. The authors both held Masters degrees in the subject and provided a four page bibliography at the end of the book. The very next day I went to my local gaming store and picked up five GURPS supplements.



You see, a lot of "reference" materials in the gaming industry have the attitude "If I don't know the answer, I can make it up. This is a fantasy game after all." I guess I have a rather "science fiction" author attitude toward the fantasy genre. In science fiction, authors don't make stuff up if they don't know how things really work; they do extensive research. That's the attitude GURPS supplements have as well. Here are some GURPS sourcebooks that reflect that attitude best.

RELIGION

My bookshelf is filled with books on religion. I've read the Qabalah and the Apocrypha, I'm currently trying to get through the Koran (for research on an upcoming *Rifts* article) and I've got an entire section dedicated to Joseph Campbell. I have to say that *GURPS: Religion* is the most useful book a GM can own. It presents the ideas of what Joyce called "the monomyth" with clarity and organization in a format that GMs can use in any campaign. It starts with creation myths, showing their common symbols and meanings and organizes them in a way that allows the GM to pick the myth he wants to fit the mood of the campaign. Then it discusses mythic deities, showing the difference between Greek and Norse gods, why they were created the way they were and how a GM can design his own to (again) give his campaign the feel he wants. Then it talks about clerics, prayer, epiphany and tradition, discussing the meanings of their symbols. It may sound like a lot, but the authors present the information in a friendly and organized manner that makes the book a fun, educational read. A must for any GM who wants to start building their own world.



GREECE

Being a Philosophy major, I was very interested in this one. The birth of the individual can be attributed to Greece. The birth of democracy, the concept of the author

(playwright), and the father of modern thought (good ol' Socrates) all come from Greece, and it is a place I am very familiar with. Once again, the authors impressed me greatly. The beauty of the culture is presented with great care by an author who knows and loves Athens as deeply as anyone.

PLACES OF MYSTERY

Let me just list off the table of contents:

"Atlantis (Plato's Story, Modern Theories, Lost Lands of Legend The Bermuda Triangle), Stone Circles (Neolithic Europe, Ley Lines, Geomancy), The Pyramids (Temples of Thebes, Pyramid Mysticism, The Surviving Pyramids), Desert Cities (The Silk Road, Samarkand, Petra, Timbuktu and the Sahara), The Far East (The Forbidden City, Shangri-La, Lamaseries, Angkor, The Taj Mahal), The Near East (Mohenjo-Daro, Jericho, Babylon, Baghdad, Alamut), Darkest Africa (Nubia, Great Zimbabwe, King Solomon's Mines), The Mediterranean (Troy, Mycenae, Knossos, Pompeii), The British Isles (Loch Ness, Hadrian's Wall, Camelot, The Tower of London), and the list goes on and on. It includes almost fifty pages of maps and endless amounts of trivia about everything you've ever wanted to know about these places — including an enlightening look at the Society of Assassins.

VOODOO: THE SHADOW WAR

C.J. Carella's Voodoo is one of the most enjoyable reads I've had this year, even though the title is somewhat distracting. While Voodoo does play a major role in the dark world that Carella has created, there is so much more going on. Fans of White Wolf's World of Darkness are cheating themselves out of an incredible sourcebook of material if they pass on this one. The world of Voodoo is rich with magic, conspiracy, terror and raw heroism. The world is dominated by magical groups called Lodges (Hermetic wizards) while the players take the roles of normal humans, Voodoo masters and shape-changing spirits who try to wrest control from the Lodge slavers. Once again, the research done on the religions of Haiti and Hermetic magic makes for a great read.

CELTIC MYTH

Here's the one that started it for me. I grew up with a grandpa who was proud to be Irish and he smart enough to instill that pride in me when I

was young and impressionable. I grew up learning more about Celtic myth than any sane person should know. While other RPGs read *Sandman* for their research into the Færielands, *Celtic Myth* delves into The Mabinogian, The Red and Green Book of Færie and three more pages of resource material to present the Celts and their kind in a colorful, entertaining light. *Celtic Myth* includes information on willful weapons (where Stormbringer comes from), the Tuatha de Dannon, the Shidh (yes, there's a difference) and Druidic magic.

GOBLINS

This is one that has to be seen to be believed. It's Edward's England and Goblins rule the streets. Most of the book is in full color and it reads like *Mr. Toad's Wild Ride*. A whole bunch of fun and a must for *Castle Falkenstein* players.

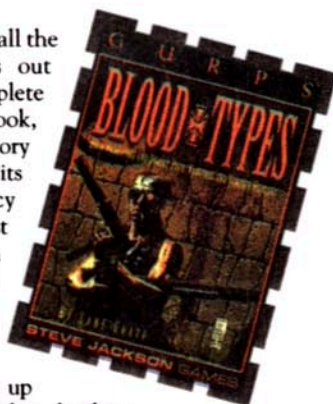
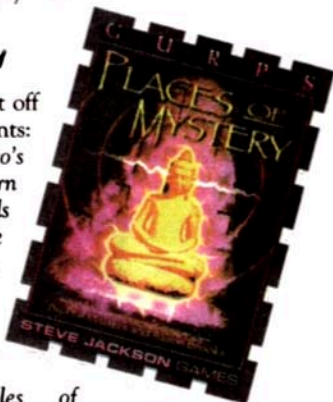
ILLUMINATI

Okay, let's get something straight. I don't watch the skies for UFOs and I don't believe in Area 51 and I don't believe in smoky chambers with twelve men who guide the destiny of mankind. But it's sure fun to pretend now isn't it? *GURPS: Illuminati* was written by the late Nigel Findley and is one damn fun read. I take my conspiracy theory pretty seriously, and while the tone of *Illuminati* is a bit light for my tastes, its still the pre-eminent sourcebook for adding a little paranoia to just about any GM's favorite game. The bibliography is worth the price of admission alone.

BLOOD TYPES

This one's for all the Anne Rice fans out there. It's a complete vampire sourcebook, detailing the history of the beast from its folklore legacy through to its first appearance in literature to its transformations by the Romantic poets all the way up to the tragically hip leather-clad bad boys they've become. Not always a pretty journey, but certainly one worth taking.

There are more, of course. There's *Riverworld*, *Conan*, *Supers*, and even more coming down the road. I'm particularly looking forward to seeing *Alternate Earths*. If you haven't seen *GURPS* lately, you're truly missing out on some of the most finely researched volumes in the gaming industry.



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 - Dark Stryder Campaign .. \$24
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EPIPHANY - THE LEGENDS OF HYPERBOREA BY GREG PORTER (\$9.95/48P)

Epiphany is a new diceless RPG set in the legendary land of Hyperborea (which includes the kingdoms of Atlantis, Lemuria, and Mu). The game mechanics are very simple. Task resolution is unusual, being conducted with a finger game. Conceptually it's somewhat similar to rock-scissors-paper, but you have the ability to allocate your points (which are derived from your attributes and abilities) between a "defense" and "offense" hand. The magic system is also unconventional, incorporating a random element — you draw from a pool of cards or tokens to determine what spell or elemental power source you can play that round.

Epiphany includes a sample adventure and advice on how to launch a campaign, as well as a world map and a blank character sheet.

SLAG - COMBAT ON THE HIGH FRONTIER BY GREG PORTER (\$7.95/28P)

Slag is a "beer and pretzels" space combat game. The designer's note claims that they intended it to be fast, fun, and affordable, and it looks like they've hit the mark. Combat is conducted on a hex map, and there are very few charts to wrestle with.

Ships are easy to design, and can be equipped with everything from ablative armor to nuclear dampers. Simple schematics are used to show the layout of a ship's hull and systems, and track damage to them. 35 example ships are included to get you started.

NEW FROM GREY GHOST GAMES

Grey Ghost Press P. O. Box 838 Randolph MA 02368-0838

GATECRASHER 2ND EDITION (\$18.95/208P)

Gatecrasher is an eclectic mix of sci-fi and fantasy, set in the year 2371. Magic has come back to the world, and as it says in the introduction, physics is under martial law. *Gatecrasher* is based on the FUDGE rules system, which has developed quite a following.

SMALL PRESS GAMES

SYNERGY

BY S. ISAAC DEALY (\$21.00/143P)

DarkSIDE Press 15775 Hillcrest Road #508
Dallas, TX 75248-4199

Synergy is a blend of high-tech and fantasy with a money-back guarantee. Even though it has a 1993 copyright, we just found it recently; you'll probably have to contact the publisher directly if you want to check it out.

LORDS OF FANTASY

BY MICHAEL HALSE (\$7 - NONE GIVEN/159P)

World Builder Publications P. O. Box 7196

Bonney Lake WA 98390-0932

Elves, dwarves, and centaurs make up a solid traditional fantasy foundation, but additional races such as avians and felines give *Lords of Fantasy* some more character. The rules use a roll-and-add mechanic for task resolution, and spell lists are provided. There's also a section detailing various locations and NPCs to use in your games.

THE LEGEND OF YORE

BY BRENNAN TAYLOR (\$26.99/236P)

Galileo Games, Inc. 3630 Capitol Drive Ft.

Collins CO 80526

The Legend of Yore is another traditional-feeling fantasy RPG. It's a skill-based system, but you're given plenty of archetypes to work with. The magic system uses spell lists, but in a nice touch the spells priests use are limited according to who their patron is. All in all, one of the better independent fantasy RPGs I've seen.

OF GODS AND MEN

BY JEFFREY KONKOL (\$25.00/320P)

Non-Sequitur Productions 1513 N. 69th St.

Wauwatosa WI 53213 (414) 297-9803

Unlike most fantasy games, there are no non-human races in *Of Gods and Men*; PCs come from different human tribes, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. The rulebook is full of nice touches like lists of plant properties for herbalism, an alchemy system, and a magical rune system. Like most games these days, it's skill-based. This is also one of the better indie fantasy RPG out today.

CROSSROADS - MODERN MYTHIC ROLEPLAYING

BY JASON & TINA ADREW (\$7 - NONE GIVEN/125P)

Xanadu Games P. O. Box 28065 Spokane, WA 99228-8065

An eternal, secret war is taking place between the forces of corruption and those determined to save humanity. Sentinels, Defilers, and Guides are the Eternals involved in the conflict. Lots of White Wolf-style character archetypes are provided to get you going.

REVIEWS

Lost

**JUSTICE INC.** (John Wick)

I have my Uncle Tom to thank for this one, even if it is an indirect thanks. You see, my uncle was one of the first adults I knew who went out and bought a VCR, and boy, he taped everything. Whenever we went over to visit, he had something new on tape. It was a blast going over to his house and watching all those old movies. It was on his couch that I learned to love Laurel and Hardy, the Marx Brothers and Alfred Hitchcock. But that's also where I first saw three of my favorite heroes: Flash Gordon, Zorro and the Shadow. When I got older, I found more pulp fiction heroes to fall in love with. I found Buck Rogers, Doc Savage, Phillip Marlowe, Tarzan and Conan. It was through Conan (and his creator, Robert E. Howard) that I met Cthulhu and Company and the Gentleman of Providence, H. P. Lovecraft. I've always loved pulp fiction and that's why I've always loved *Justice Inc.* When I first saw it, I knew it had to be mine. It's pulp fiction role-playing at its best. The cover says it all: "Horror, Romance, Crime Fighting, Adventure, Science Fiction, Mystery and Spicy Stories!"

Based on the legendary Hero System, *Justice Inc.* was versatile enough to allow you to create any kind of hero from the pulps. It included rules for psychic powers, weird science gadgets and dark avengers who have the power to cloud men's minds. It even came with a 1920's & 30's Sourcebook, filled with information on the two decades. Over half the book was dedicated to creating the proper atmosphere for the genre you wanted to play. *Justice Inc.* has long been out of print and is pretty hard to find. That's because it's one fine game. If you want both books, you'll probably have to go looking for the boxed set. If you've already got a Hero System book, you can probably get by with just the Campaign Book. Its a great game that uses a much-overlooked genre in our industry: the world of the gumshoe, of the dark avenger and the super-brilliant adventurer walking rain drowned streets looking to do battle with the forces of evil and corruption. I can just hear the maniacal laughter ringing out of the shadowy alleys now.

There is an excellent web page devoted to 2300AD at <http://www.ktb.net/~jayadan/2300ad.htm>

 2300 AD (Matt Staroscik)

2300 AD is, in my humble opinion, the most well-conceived SF game ever written. Set in the same game world as *Twilight: 2000*, it chronicles the struggle of mankind to reach the stars. It presents a detailed "future history," setting the stage for the international rivalries that form much of the backdrop of the game. You're not a member of some fictional "Federation" in 2300 AD — you're an American, or Chinese, or French, or a citizen of any other Earthly nation or one of their colonies. You're even given an *real* star map, which gives you the lowdown on the stars within about 50 light years of our own sun, Sol. I have had that map on my wall for an *awefully* long time.

The game focuses heavily on humanity; the basic rules didn't even allow for playing one of the scant (though very well-done) alien races. I'd balk at that in most SF settings, but it's totally appropriate in 2300 AD, where humanity's drive to explore and expand is the focus. Sure, there's the obligatory hostile, mysterious alien race, but they need not become the driving force of a campaign unless you want them to. Space is *big*, after all.

One of the best things about the game is how they handle technology. All of the weapons and starships have a realistic feel, and the uses they project for biotechnology especially are fantastic.

If I had to compare 2300 AD to something you're probably familiar with, it'd be the movie *Aliens*, or possibly the late *Space: Above and Beyond*. They all share the same atmosphere of gritty realism, and that's what I, at least, am after in SF.

Treasures

BI: IN SEARCH OF THE UNKNOWN (Rob Vaux)

From the misty days of role-playing past comes this *Dungeons and Dragons* classic, reaching its icy claw from the grave of obselecence to emerge as a bona fide piece of RPG history. Unmatched by competitors, unfettered by time, *In Search of the Unknown* offers a nigh-unheard of challenge in this day and age — the chance to run around a dungeon and kill things.

Okay, stop screaming. It's not as scary as it looks. Yes, it's old. Yes, it has no plot. It's basically just two levels of rooms and corridors waiting to be explored. Monster and treasure stats are left blank for GMs to fill with whatever they want. And that's pretty much about it. But for old grizzled role-playing veterans, it's a piece of nostalgia that today's character heavy storytelling just can't match. This is a dungeon crawl. This is the *great-granddaddy* of dungeon crawls. And as such, little things like story and character will happily step aside for some huge dice-rolling monster slugfests. Or, if you prefer, there are a plethora of puzzles and traps for players to get around. When it comes to old-time D&D, *In Search of the Unknown* stands ready for whatever your troupe is in the mood for.

And perhaps because of that, it leaves an impression on the reader that later dungeon crawls lack. The module encourages creativity, of a sort, by leaving the monsters and treasures open to the GM's discretion. He or she can then tailor the module to fit any theme or specification in mind; while a first level party may encounter a tribe of kobolds, stronger parties can deal with an evil wizard's headquarters. *In Search of the Unknown* can easily accommodate both. In-depth drama it's not, but for a pivotal piece of role-playing history with a lot more flexibility than may be apparent, it has no peers.

TOON (John Wick)

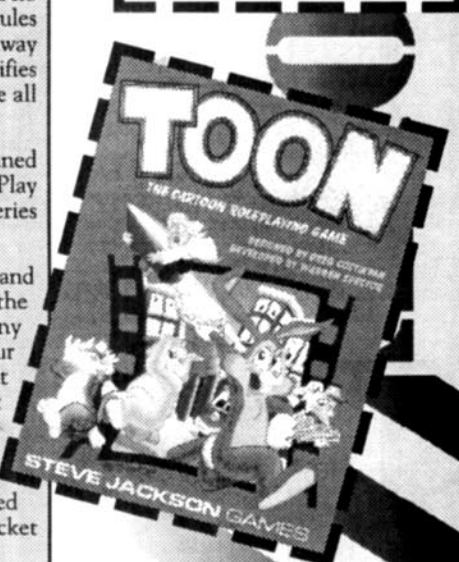
Okay, you wanna blame diceless role-playing on Amber, go ahead, but I remember a time and an RPG that never needed no dice, and it came along long before Amber. It didn't need no stinkin' dice, it didn't need no stinkin' rules, it didn't even need no stinkin' character sheet! All the rules you needed you could hold on a 3x5 note card and the point of the game was to throw that card away and make up your own rules anyway! The game is called *Toon*, and while I'm not really sure if it qualifies as a "lost treasure," it was a game that broke a whole lot of rules a long time ago. And it did it before all this new fangled "new wave" gaming stuff was even a glimmer in a game developer's eye.

The point of the game? Make up your own cartoon characters and have a riot. Nobody ever planned to play *Toon*. It just kinda sorta always happened at the right time. The *D&D* game going sour? Play *Toon*! Building up a Class 3000 car doesn't sound like too much fun? Play *Toon*! Solving the mysteries of the Elder Gods just a big yawn ... You get the picture.

Toon is simple. It used d6's and every character had only four stats: Muscle, Zip, Smarts and Chutzpah. The GM (called "The Animator") would come up with some crackbrained plot and the players would throw their maniacal little monsters into the soup. You could do all those wacky zany things the toons on TV were doing, all you had to do was justify it in the Animator's eyes. If your stunt made the Animator go blank, congratulations! You've "bonked" the Animator and your stunt goes off without a hitch. Otherwise, you've got to roll and use your Attributes and then things got real sticky. Yeah, it wasn't fair, and yeah, it wasn't balanced, but we are talking about a cartoon for Pete's sake! And if you don't wanna have fun role-playing, go play one of those "dark" games. *Toon* was for folks who take their fun seriously, and we sure did back then. I kind of miss it now. Don't you miss it! You can find *Toon* in the dollar bin and sometimes you can find the latest edition (pictured here) on game store shelves. Just remember, the rules ain't important, it's what you've got in your Pocket that counts!



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.



ロードス島戦記

Record of Lodoss War

Western Fantasy Roleplaying — Japanese Style

Record of Lodoss War is a 14-episode Japanese animation series distributed by Central Park Media. There are 6 tapes, priced at \$29.95 or \$19.95 each for the subtitled and dubbed versions, respectively. The boxed set (including a ROLW phone card) is \$129.95 or \$99.95 (subbed/dubbed). To order, call Mangamania at (800) 626-4427.

Other ROLW merchandise is available, such as the Japanese-language RPG, CDs and posters, but it's hard to find. A good starting point is Books Nippan. You can reach the head office at (310) 604-9701; ask them where the store closest to you is.

by Matt Staroscik

Record of Lodoss War — The Anime

Picture this — a war among the gods, one thousand years ago. Thousands of dragons and lesser gods fought in the mother of all battles, and in the process the very lay of the land was altered. When the dust settled, only Marfa, Goddess of Creation, and Kardis, Goddess of Destruction, still lived. The world's largest continent, Alecroft, had been shattered, and a new island lay to its south. It came to be known as Lodoss, which means "accursed land."

Today, Lodoss is populated by humans, elves, and dwarves, and it has its share of dungeons, dragons, enchanted forests, clerics, knights, wizards, and kingdoms large and small. All of Lodoss is in great peril, though, as the monstrous armies of the nation of Marmo head for its shores, bent on conquest.

Sound familiar? It just might. *Record of Lodoss War* was created by Japanese roleplayers who wanted to capture the feeling of gaming — Western fantasy gaming, no less — in anime. They did a great job, too, which isn't surprising considering that the series is actually based on a game. ROLW carries with it a lot of the feel of AD&D, Dragonlance, and Tolkien's Middle-Earth — samurai need not apply.

From the beginning, you can see the series' foundation in gaming; the main characters form what any fantasy roleplayer would agree is a well-balanced party. There's Etoh, a human cleric; Ghim, a dwarven warrior; Woodchuck, a human thief; Parn, a human knight; Deedlit, an elven

warrior/mage; and Slayn, a human mage. Eventually the heroes team up with Shiris, a human warrior, and her partner Orson — a berserker.

Together, these adventurers will be the architects of Lodoss' salvation. Their task is nothing less than the defense of their homeland against the inhuman armies fielded by the nation of Marmo (which bears more than a little resemblance to Mordor). Before the heroes find rest, they will battle dragons, explore ancient dwarven dungeons, and see the deaths of king and peasant alike.

OK, so the series isn't breaking any new ground. The scenarios, character classes and races are all familiar. For example, elves and dwarves don't get along. Clerics can heal people. Evil armies are seeking magical artifacts, and dragons are raining fire on cities. You've seen it all before — but you've never seen it quite like this. The series is full of scenes that made me say, "Yeah. That's how it should happen!" Watching ROLW actually inspired me to get back to work on my own fantasy campaign, which had been languishing in my file cabinet for some months.

I'd recommend ROLW without hesitation to any fantasy fan, even people who profess a dislike for anime. It will be especially alluring to those with a background in fantasy roleplaying — and you might even find it improves your game some.

Record of Lodoss War — The RPG

I recently acquired the *Record of Lodoss War* RPG (volume 1) from Books Nippan. In all honesty, if you don't read some Japanese, you

Win a complete set of Record of Lodoss War!

Stop by the SHADIS booth at GenCon and enter our drawing to win a free subtitled boxed set of *Record of Lodoss War*. Two runners-up will also receive a subtitled copy of the first volume of the series. (Thanks to Jeff Zitomer at Central Park Media for providing ROLW review copies and contest prizes!)

won't get much out of it. I should also warn you that this isn't a big, glossy color art book. It is in fact rather light on illustrations, and those it does have are black and white sketches. If you're looking for a ROLW art book, keep hunting. They've been out of print for some time, I understand.

Fortunately, I have picked up enough Japanese to muddle my way through the RPG. I though I'd let SHADIS readers in on what the state-of-the-art in Japanese RPGs is like.

The game is class-based, with warriors, priests, scouts, knights, shamen, sorcerers, and wizards available. Each is only allowed to use certain weapons, of course, and combat-oriented classes have more hit points. Spellcasting characters receive spell points to use when casting spells from the lists provided. Hit points and damage work similarly to AD&D. The available races are human, elf, half-elf, and dwarf. The book also includes sample adventures and advice on setting up a campaign, as well as the mandatory equipment, monster, and spell lists.

While it all looked nice, I didn't see anything that made me want to abandon my English-language systems. In fact, much of the ROLW RPG is obviously derived from AD&D and its ilk. You may as well stick with the original. I do quite like the Lodoss setting, though, and I'm planning on adapting it to TSR's new "Saga" rules system, which fits it well. Perhaps we'll be able to bring you more on that in a future issue.

The Characters

The adventurers in *Record of Lodoss War* are a diverse group, brought together by fate. Their destiny is to follow in the footsteps of a previous band of heroes, who were Lodoss' salvation in an age long past.



As the series progresses, Parn changes from a clumsy lad into a courageous, if headstrong knight. His adventuring career began when one day he fought off several goblins who were attacking a woman from his village. He was in over his head until Etoh appeared and joined the fray. Together, they drove off the goblin scouts, but unfortunately the goblins later launched a full-scale attack on their village. Afterwards the villagers accused Parn of stirring up trouble, and he was kicked out under the pretext of being "elected" as the town's representative abroad. His mission — to find out the cause of the increased goblin activity in the area. Parn is the main character in *Record of Lodoss War*.

Etoh and Parn originally came from the same village. Etoh returned for a visit after spending four years studying to be a priest of Falis. As he returned to the village, he came across Parn in combat with several goblins. After their surprising reunion (and Parn's exile from the village) Etoh decided to accompany Parn on his quest. He's handy with his ornate mace, but prefers to be a healer rather than a warrior.



Soft-spoken and serious, Slayn is a sorcerer of tremendous power. Throughout the series, he accomplishes feats ranging from simple sleep spells to erecting a magical shield to protect the party from dragonfire. His oddly-shaped staff seems to be some sort of spell focus, as he frequently uses it while casting. He also possesses a keen magical intuition, and instinctively knows when strong sorcery is used nearby. Slayn has been close friends with Ghim the dwarf for years.



Ghim is a stout dwarven warrior. His personal quest is discovering what has happened to the woman he loves, Leylia. Leylia, a priestess of Falis, nursed him back to health after a serious mining accident, but was subsequently kidnapped by someone with mysterious motives. Ghim has resolved to find her, and Slayn decided to accompany him rather than let him undertake such a task alone. Ghim and Slayn happen to pass through Parn and Etoh's village during the goblin attack, and two groups join up.



In direct contrast to the gruff dwarf, Deedlit the elf is compassionate and light-hearted — though she's not above trading insults with Ghim. She possesses a good mix of nature magic and combat skills, and has characteristic elven stealth, agility and intuition. Throughout the story, she and Parn become closer and closer.



Wood (as he usually goes by) is the prototypical rogue. The other characters actually rescue him from prison when the city they're in is attacked by Marmo forces. Wood's defining characteristics are his dexterity, his love of gold, and his propensity to look for a good time. He is also a smart-aleck, and is the first to complain when things aren't going well.



REVIEWS

MARKED FOR DEATH

• PUBLISHED BY DAEDALLUS GAMES

• WRITTEN BY BRUCE A. BAUGH, CHRIS PRAMAS, GREG STOLZE, JOHN TYNES AND ALLEN VARNEY

• \$2.95

• REVIEWED BY JAMES MACDUFF

Daedalus Games has wasted no time in pushing its newest product onward. *Marked for Death* is the first expansion to its *Feng Shui* line, released a scant month after the basic rulebook hit the shelves. To call it a campaign sourcebook is a bit misleading; strictly speaking, it's simply a series of five *Feng Shui* adventures, designed for fast play and easy digestibility. But to treat it as just an adventure book is to miss one of its principle strengths. *Marked for Death* does what many reach for, but only few accomplish: it provides an honest-to-God springboard for a full blown campaign.

The adventures themselves are fairly straightforward. The first two, "Brinks!" and "Blood for the Master," are essentially extended gunfights, the first taking place in a bank, the second in a pizza parlor-turned-demonic-temple. The next, "Pai Lai," is a bit more subtle, as the characters come between a Jammer and the feng shui site he wants to destroy. "The Shape of Guilt" gives us Shakespearean tragedy through the eyes of bad Netherworld TV, and finally, "Shaolin Heartbreak" presents the perils of a time-travelling monk and the exotic modern day rock star who *just happens* to look just like her.

In and of themselves, these adventures are all engaging, if a little clichéd. If one read them separate of each other, one probably wouldn't think them anything more than standard by-the-book material. But looking at them together, they become much stronger, both as overt role-playing sessions and as more subtle foundations to longer campaigns.

The scenarios are strongly mixed between standard "action movie" fare and more specific references to the arcane milieu of *Shadowfist*. For example, while both "Brinks!" and "Blood for the Master" make references to the Buro, their scenarios could be part of any action RPG. "The Shape of Guilt," on the other hand, couldn't be run as anything but *Feng Shui*. This mix allows for a surprising amount of texture and variation. Each adventure has its own unique style (they had five different authors), which allows GMs to easily select whatever scenario he or she's in the mood for.

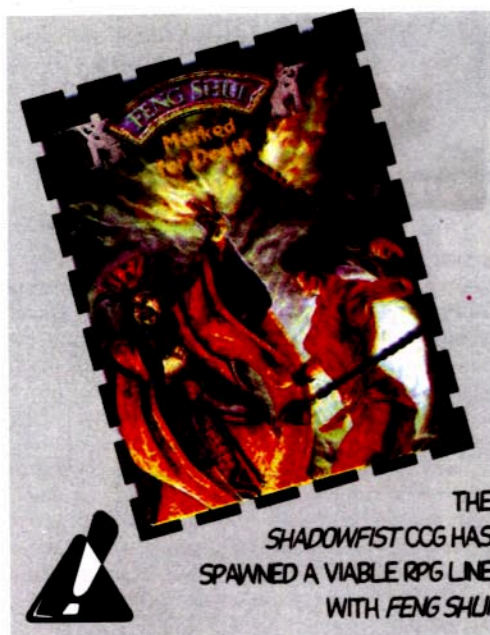
What really makes the book work so well, though, are the hooks and extensions beyond the simple "Point A to Point B" adventure stuff. All

NOW DOWN DOZENS OF MOOKS!

five scenarios discuss NPCs, settings, and ideas for further adventures at length, providing a blueprint for an on-going *Feng Shui* campaign. Many of the NPCs are endearing and well-fleshed out, as are the Hong Kong boroughs and Netherworld caverns which they inhabit. Two of my personal favorites are "Blood for the Master's" Rikki Ko, the harried and obnoxious owner of a cult-infested pizza parlor, and IKTV, the rerun-obsessed television station in "The Shape of Guilt." *Marked for Death* is full of characters and settings like these, with a style all their own. They're specific enough to give inexperienced GMs a solid footing in the *Feng Shui* world, but open enough to keep veteran referees from feeling too restricted.

The result is a simple and painless introduction to the *Feng Shui* world, one which sucks you in, then opens the full possibilities of the world before you. An adventure can be run with little preparation over the course of a single evening, but once you finish, you suddenly find a plethora of directions to progress in. Before you know it, you've got a complex, well-paced campaign on your hands, all with only a few reasonable projections from the material presented here.

As a *Feng Shui* product, *Marked for Death* isn't intended to be entirely serious, and the text has a very lightweight feel to it: the authors have no compunctions about elbowing their readers in the ribs and letting them know just how goofy it all can be. But the attention to detail and the understanding of role-playing structure gives that feather-lightness some steel, and makes *Marked for Death* more than just a follow-up fluff piece. This fledgling line is off to a very strong start.



THE
SHADOWFIST COG HAS
SPAWNED A VIABLE RPG LINE
WITH FENG SHUI

LOST WORLDS

• PUBLISHED BY CHESSEX MANUFACTURING

• DESIGNED BY ALFRED
LEONARDI, DOUG SCHULER
AND ADAMO LEONI

• \$5.95 PER BOOK

• REVIEWED BY JANE ST.
CLAIRE

My first exposure to *Lost Worlds* was in grade school, just after I learned how to play *D&D*. My friend Victor Zamecki taught me how to play during lunch while we were munching on soggy hamburgers and cold fries. I was instantly enamored and started collecting all of them as fast as I could.

The way it works is simple. You and a partner each pick out a book. Each book is a character. You keep the card in the book and trade books with your partner. The book has images of "you" so it represents what your opponent is seeing. Once you've traded, it's a duel to the finish between two fighters with different maneuvers and styles. Your card tells you the maneuvers you can perform and how many Hit Points you have. You start off at "Extended Range" and can maneuver forward to get closer, or keep at a distance (whether your fighter uses a long or short ranged weapon will determine this). The game works much like an actual fencing match. You've got to carefully consider you're opponent's abilities (and your own) in order to get the best effects from your choices.

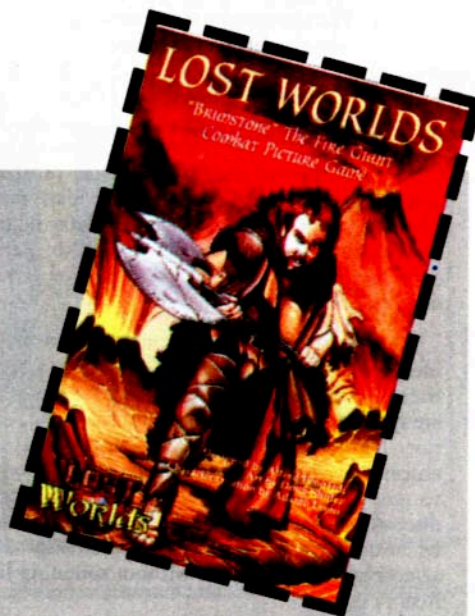
Once you decide on a maneuver, you look on a small chart and read that number to your opponent. He does the same. Then, you both turn to the appropriate pages in your books and the images tell you the effect of your maneuver, the effect of your opponent's choice, what position you're in and what maneuvers you can and can't do in that position. It can get rather tricky sometimes if you're not paying attention, and your opponent can literally sneak up on you and give you a good whack from behind.

I think that's what attracted me most to the game. It wasn't exactly role-playing, but it allowed me to take a look at the different fighters and decide which one suited my style of play best. I always liked the quick, nimble elf duelists myself

while Vic liked the lumbering ogre-types. Sure, he did a lot of damage when he hit, but I always hit more often. It was nice the way the books were always balanced like that.

Lost Worlds books disappeared for a while (a long while), but they're back with a vengeance, complete with cover and interior art by Doug Schuler (renowned *Magic: The Gathering*, *On The Edge* and *Legend of the Five Rings* artist). New books also include "Item Cards." These little ditties give a spark of individuality to your fighter. Each book comes with different items (kind of collectible), but any fighter can use them. Some books also come with "Spell Cards" allowing your sorcerers to create more fiery and dramatic effects. It's just icing on the cake.

It looks like a lot of "old school" games are making a come-back. *Lost Worlds* is definitely one of them, and I'm one "new wave" gamer that's glad to see some great "old school" games getting a fresh breath of life.



JUST A FEW OF THE
MANY BOOKS FOR
LOST WORLDS.



REVIEWS

THE BOOK OF STORYTELLER SECRETS

• PUBLISHED BY WHITE WOLF GAMES

• WRITTEN BY WADE RACINE, MATT BURKE AND J.D. WIKER

• \$5.00

• REVIEWED BY ROB VALIX

With their new role-playing line, *Vampire: the Dark Ages*, White Wolf has saddled itself with a bit of a dilemma. They must present their World of Darkness line in a new and invigorating light, but they mustn't lose sight of the source material they've run before. *The Book of Storyteller's Secrets*, the first real supplement to the basic book, demonstrates both the way they have solved that dilemma, and the problems it continues to present.

The Book of Storyteller's Secrets is an odd, quirky little manual designed to help Storytellers with a *Vampire: The Dark Ages* chronicle. A fairly slender volume at 96 pages, it attempts to cover a lot of ground in a very short time, jumping from one topic to the next quite quickly. As such, it's a very hit and miss affair; the stuff that hits, though, really hits dead on.

The opening section details Europe circa 1197, and is one of the strongest portions of the book. A pocket field guide to the world of *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, it briefly discusses every country on the continent. Historical background and contemporary leaders are dealt with concisely and informatively, letting those unfamiliar with the time period quickly grasp the nuances of. A "Local Cainites" addendum to each country fills the reader in on the undead side of things, describing dominant clans and power players from England to the Black Sea. Each country takes up about three paragraphs; enough to get an overview, but not enough to get bogged down in descriptions.

Also useful is a section devoted to the lifestyles of the Middle Ages and ways to convey them during a role-playing session. As the writers are quick to point out, *Vampire: The Dark Ages* is not *Dungeons and Dragons* and treating a chronicle as high fantasy with fangs is a good way to get into trouble. The lifestyles sections discusses clothing, foodstuffs, and class differences in much the same way, presenting useful atmospheric information without sounding like a history report.

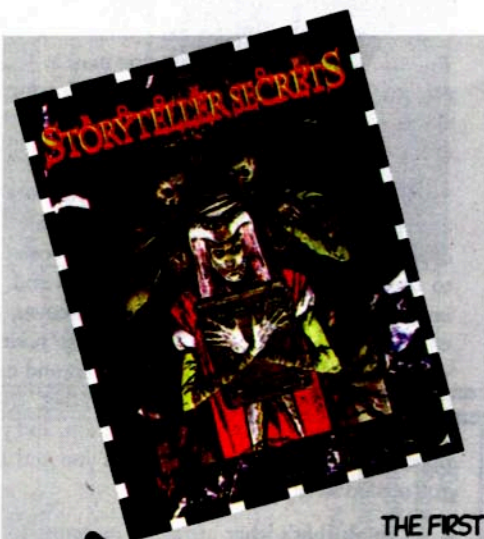
But the text fares less well in other areas — not exactly bad, just problematic. The "Storytelling for the Dark Ages" section, for example, demonstrates the difficult balance beam this series walks. It seems to serve simply as a pep-talk/instruction book for novice GMs, giving

them advice on how and what to do in order to run a successful campaign. It's useful stuff, but White Wolf has run similar material countless times before. Do you reprint something like that, knowing that new storytellers will want coaching? Or do you omit it, and spare veteran players a warmed-over rehash of previous products? The decision to fill ten pages with such information is questionable, and for older players can be quite frustrating.

Other sections, as well, have a similar "recycled" feel, and the filler seems to take away space for the better and more developed material. The entire text moves very quickly from subject to subject, giving it a rushed feelings at points.

Despite that, though, there are bursts of brilliance throughout the work, and even the weaker sections have their moments. You like magic items? How do two dozen severed heads predicting the future grab you? Tid-bits like that add spice and color to the text, turning what could otherwise be dull fluff-pieces into engaging and legitimate contributions to the World of Darkness. When combined with the stronger sections, they raise the product's overall quality considerably.

Vampire: The Dark Ages must inevitably depend a bit on its twentieth century predecessor, and *The Book of Storyteller's Secrets* reflects that dependence. Good but not great, it demonstrates the challenge of the *Dark Ages* line and the difficulties that line must inevitably overcome. White Wolf has taken a great chance by revamping its flagship product the way it has, and for all its flaws, *The Book of Storyteller's Secrets* is an admirable start along that rocky road.



THE FIRST
SUPPLEMENT TO WHITE
WOLF'S DARK AGES VAMPIRE
CAMPAIGN

REALITY CHECK

The image one gets of a typical fantasy RPG magic-user is that of a thin, sickly fellow throwing lightning from his eyes and fireballs from his fingers. Role-playing developed out of miniatures combat rules. The magic-user from these games was the equivalent of an "artillery piece." He was slow to move and vulnerable to attack, but had the offensive power of a Sherman tank. When "roll-playing" turned into "role-playing" with the birth of *Dungeons & Dragons*, the magic-user kept his image. While that sickly Engine of Destruction creates a beautiful and dramatic image, it bears little, if any, resemblance to the wizards of history and literature.

THE ARCHETYPES

There are two characters from literature that can be attributed with being the main source of inspiration for the FRP mage: Gandalf and Merlin. However, these two characters only bear a cosmetic resemblance to the FRP magic-user.

heads in high regard. That's about it, everything else is just an educated guess.

Merlin pulls off some fine tricks. He's able to disguise Uther Pendragon to trick Ygraine and he's able to move Arthur's army through days of travel in a single night. But he pays a high cost for such tricks. Merlin must sleep after he performs magic, sometimes for months on end. Most FRP magic-users can call up effects like that once or twice a day with the only cost being a few magic points or a couple hours re-memorizing the spell.

But once again, Merlin is armed with knowledge. Since he's based on the druids of old, he understands the way that life moves: in cycles. Because he knows the cycles of the past, he can recognize the cycles of the future. That is his strength, his "power." He knows what will come because he knows what has gone.

 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 "culture nazi" (John Wick) takes a look at magic and magic-users in role-playing games.

REALITY CHECK

The FRP mage is often seen without weapons, without armor and without any knowledge of "martial arts" (that is, strategy, tactics, and the like). However, Gandalf wears armor, wields the mighty and ancient sword Glamdring and rides out in front of the Riders of Rohan right alongside King Theoden. In fact, he actually gives battle advice to the King when they encounter Sauron's terrible armies. Now think for a moment. When does Gandalf actually use magic? He calls down a rain of fire on some goblins in *The Hobbit* but we can attribute that to his Elven ring of fire, not to any innate magical ability the Gray Wanderer might have. When Elrond Half-Elven sends a mighty wave down on some of the Ringwraiths to protect Aragorn and the Hobbits, Gandalf adds a little splash of color to the wave by putting horses in the foam. Cute, but hardly impressive. Other than minor illusions and cantrips, Gandalf really doesn't do anything magical in the entire saga. No, Gandalf's power does not reside in magical ability, his true power lies in his knowledge.

Gandalf knows a lot about Middle-Earth. He immediately recognizes Theoden's palantir. He knows all about the prophecy that spells the doom for the Witch King, and he knows exactly what must be done with Bilbo's little magic ring. It is his *knowledge* that makes him powerful, not blinding spells of thunder and lightning.

So, how about Merlin? That meddling magician who guides Arthur's destiny is *probably* based on old Celtic legends of the druids. Unfortunately, we know precisely two things for certain about druids: 1) They did actually exist and 2) They held trees and severed

MAGIC SYSTEMS THAT WORK

Listed below are some RPGs that have different views on magic and magic-users from the standard spell slinging artillery piece.

Ars Magica

Perhaps one of the most critically acclaimed RPGs in the industry, *Ars Magica* took a close look at the mage of the Middle Ages and developed a system of magic that is both easy and fun to use.

Pendragon

In the original editions of *Pendragon*, the entire magic system was on a single page. Players were not allowed to play wizards because knights had all the fun. But in the latest edition, there's a whole chapter on playing Wizards, including their strange powers and sleeping habits.

Mage

Perhaps the most radical magic system in the genre, *Mage* takes the idealist metaphysical argument ("Perception equals reality") to an extreme.

GURPS Voodoo

To use the word "innovative" with GURPS Voodoo would be a disservice. C.J. Carella has taken every modern magic system and incorporated it into a world of magical conspiracy, treachery and duty.

Nephilim

Nephilim takes modern magical theory and brings it full force into the gaming industry. A good bit of Hermetic horror.

JOHN WICK GOES BEHIND

Mind's Eye Theatre™

LIVE ACTION VAMPIRE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Just to make sure that I don't give you the wrong impression:

I don't dye my hair black, wear white face paint, black out my eyes, wear red contact lenses and I really do not like the novels of Anne Rice. I do wear a lot of black, but that's because all of my clothes always match and black never goes out of style. My favorite RPGs include Traveller, Space: 1889, Call of Cthulhu and I've even participated in a Champions game recently. I own an Ork army for Warhammer: 40K and I love Torg. I've been playing RPGs for nearly fifteen years. I love RPGs, all kinds of RPGs. In other words, I'm a normal, healthy gamer.

Just last month, when we were at Orc-Con (the local LA convention), I had an opportunity to play in a live action Vampire game run by a local group who call themselves "Sneezing Lizards" (don't ask; I didn't). I stood in line for registration and when I reached the front, I discovered they had a "Cast List" for the evening's story. One by one, the players in the line were filling up the list. I found that a single spot in the Tremere Clan was open and I jumped at the chance. I went into a small room where the other Tremere had gathered along with our group's "Narrator" (a kind of mini-GM who settles mechanics questions and conflicts). The character sheet let me know all about my character, but left me enough space to "fill in the blanks." The Narrator let us in on the plot for the evening and the parts we would play in it. He also let us in on our own little sub-plot and clarified any rules questions we might have had. The Narrator was patient, concise and friendly.

While we prepared for the evening's activities, I had a few private questions for the Narrator. He

told me, "Numbers are numbers. The character is up to you. Feel free and have fun." I smiled. I had been a little leery of playing live action Vampire, but the folks I met set me at ease. This was going to be a blast.

THE GAME

Live action Vampire works much the same way that its table top counterpart does. You've got vampire Clans (family groups) trying to gain political advantage against opposing and rival Clans while keeping their nature a secret from humanity. The setting has remained the same, its just the rules that are a little different. They're trimmed down a bit with dice getting replaced by a game of Hand Over Fist (Rock, Paper, Scissors). There are 3 groups of Attributes - Physical, Social, Mental - and instead of numbers, each player has a list of adjectives to describe his character. A typical character sheet might look something like this:

PHYSICAL (3): Strong, Enduring, Brawny

SOCIAL (5): Alluring, Charming, Dignified, Genial, Intimidating

MENTAL (7): Alert, Intuitive, Knowledgeable, Perceptive, Shrewd, Vigilant, Wily

When characters come into conflict, they have to perform "Challenges." A Challenge involves both characters "bidding" Traits against each other. In short, it's kind of like a game of chicken. If a character loses a Challenge, they lose the Trait they've bet, and can't use it for the rest of the evening's entertainment. So, lets say that I'm trying



LARP

to hit your character and your character is trying to dodge. We both bid a Physical Trait and we play Hand Over Fist. If you win, I miss and lose my Physical Trait. If I win, you get hit and you also lose your Trait. There's more to it (like Wounds, Willpower and Blood Points), but that's the core of the rules. It's pretty fast, simple and easy to remember.

That's just about all I learned about the game from reading the rulebook. Much of the rulebook is unclear on a lot of points (a very important rule called "Free Escape" got left out of both the first and second editions and was included in a non-essential supplement), and didn't really give a GM any help when it came time to actually run one of these events. I was very glad to find out that Sneezing Lizards have run a great many of these things, and have learned from past mistakes.

Since we were out in the open at the Con (outside), we had to follow the normal rules of the Masquerade. No-one who wasn't playing the game should know that we were playing the game. I found the experienced players in my group were more than willing to help me out with my first conflicts (to my surprise, so were the folks I was contesting with!) and there was very little use of rules. Most of the evening consisted of social interaction.

The story was simple: It was the 13th Century (we were playing a Dark Ages game). All of us were neonates arriving for a party in celebration of our "coming of age." There were about twenty of us, a few from each Clan, and when we arrived, we found that our Elders were nowhere to be found. There was a slight mystical aura in the air, and a hint of foul play. Our group and a few others suspected a test of some kind, but other groups began to panic. This simple set up began a series of political maneuverings that would nearly bring the "Final Death" to every vampire in the place. And just in case we didn't get the hint, there was an army of crusaders just a few miles down the road coming this way. Apparently some peasants told them there were vampires in the castle, and those bloodthirsty knights were just aching to take out some holy fury on our undead hides. We were screwed.

The night swiftly turned into a "who is going to take command of the situation" power play. Our group agreed right off that we really didn't care who was in charge of the situation, we just wanted to get the hell out of there. Unfortunately, we soon discovered there was also a small army of werewolves outside. Apparently, somebody had let them know about the party as well. The whole evening seemed to be conspiring against us and time was running out fast. We'd have to work

together to get out and with all the bickering and conspiring going on, it didn't look like we'd be celebrating our victory the next night. It all ended with a bloody battle between the Brujah and the Ventrue (no surprise there), an alliance with the werewolves (it was us and the Gangrel), and a whole lot of others getting whacked by the fires of the holy crusade. It was a whole lot of fun and afterward, we all gathered together in a single room and told our stories, Clan by Clan. That was the best part. We all got to pose and posture a little and cast a little blame around the room for our failures, but everybody laughed and took victory and defeat with good spirits.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

I look back on the experience now and understand why I had such a good time. Yes, I'm a Vampire player/GM, but that had very little to do with it. The main reason I had such a good time was because of the people I was playing with.

There were a lot of good role-players there, not only the Narrators, but my fellow players as well. We were all willing to work together to create a good story. The

Lizards folks took a lot of time to organize the evening, providing everyone with enough character and background,

but also providing enough leeway to give the character a style of our own. They

were all looking out for everybody, making sure that every player was having a good time. If someone looked

frustrated, they were approached by a player or a Narrator and asked

if there was anything they could do to help. It was a very good environment

for role-playing.

I honestly didn't know what to expect going into it, so I have to be honest when I say that I shouldn't be surprised that I was surprised. A lot of gamers (myself included) may expect to go into a LARP having to contend with a gaggle of "wannabe-actors" all posing and preening and wishing they were Tom Cruise. Well, that wasn't what I found.

Now I can only talk from my point of view from the game that I attended, but I have to say that I had a blast at Orc-Con. I'm looking forward to the next one, mainly because I won't need to go out and dye my hair black, buy a pound of Bryl Creem and study Anne Rice novels all night to have a good time. All I have to do is bring me my own humble role-playing skills.

And I can leave my dice box at home.



LARP

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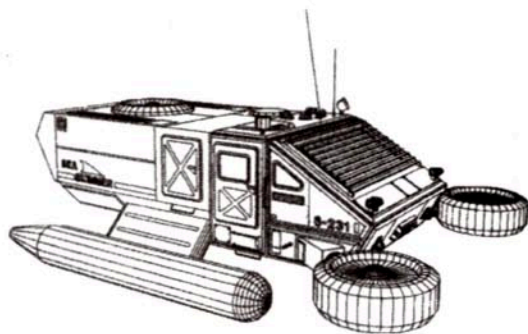


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Blue Planet

DUE FOR RELEASE IN JANUARY '97, BLUE PLANET IS A SCI-FI RPG SET ON THE DISTANT COLONY WORLD POSEIDON. WHILE THE FIRST COLONY SHIPS SENT TO POSEIDON ARRIVED IN 2065, PROBLEMS BACK ON EARTH PREVENTED THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FOLLOW-UP FLEET, AND THE 5,000 ORIGINAL COLONISTS WERE LEFT TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES. DESPITE THE NEGLECT, THEY THRIVED ON POSEIDON'S WATERY SURFACE. WHEN EARTH RE-ESTABLISHED CONTACT WITH POSEIDON IN 2199, IT FOUND OVER 80,000 HUMAN NATIVES WHO CALLED POSEIDON HOME. BEFORE LONG, TRAVELLERS AND MERCHANDISE BEGAN TO FLOW BETWEEN THE TWO NEWLY-ACQUAINTED WORLDS.

SOON THEREAFTER CORPORATE SCIENTISTS DISCOVERED THAT HIDDEN BENEATH POSEIDON'S SEA LAY A SUBSTANCE THAT HELD THE KEY TO HUMAN IMMORTALITY. WHEN WORD LEAKED OUT, MILLIONS LEFT EARTH TO SEEK THEIR FORTUNE. NOW, POSEIDON IS A PLANET OF COMPANY BOOM TOWNS AND CORPORATE MINING FACILITIES, NATIVE SETTLEMENTS AND ORBITING FACTORIES. LIFE IS HARD, FAST, AND AMPHIBIOUS. FRONTIER LAW PREVAILS. SEA FLOOR INSTALLATIONS ARE GUARDED BY SQUADRONS OF FIGHTER SUBS, AND CORPORATE TAKEOVERS OFTEN INVOLVE MARINE ASSAULT TEAMS. NEW COLONISTS CONSTANTLY FLOOD IN, HOPING FOR A BETTER LIFE, AS RUTHLESS OPPORTUNISTS SCAVENGE WHAT THEY CAN. AND, LOST IN THE BACKGROUND, SCIENTISTS PREACH CAUTION, CLAIMING THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG, SOMETHING STRANGE GOING ON BELOW THE WATER'S SURFACE...



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7. VISIT DRAGON DICE DEMO AND STUFF DICE IN YOUR PANTS. WHEN QUESTIONED, EXPLAIN TO THEM THAT IT'S OKAY BECAUSE THEY'RE ONLY GOBLINS.

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5. CIRCLE THE WHITE WOLF BOOTH STEALTHILY WHILE DISPLAYING THE LIVE ACTION VAMPIRE SIGN FOR "OBFUSCATE."

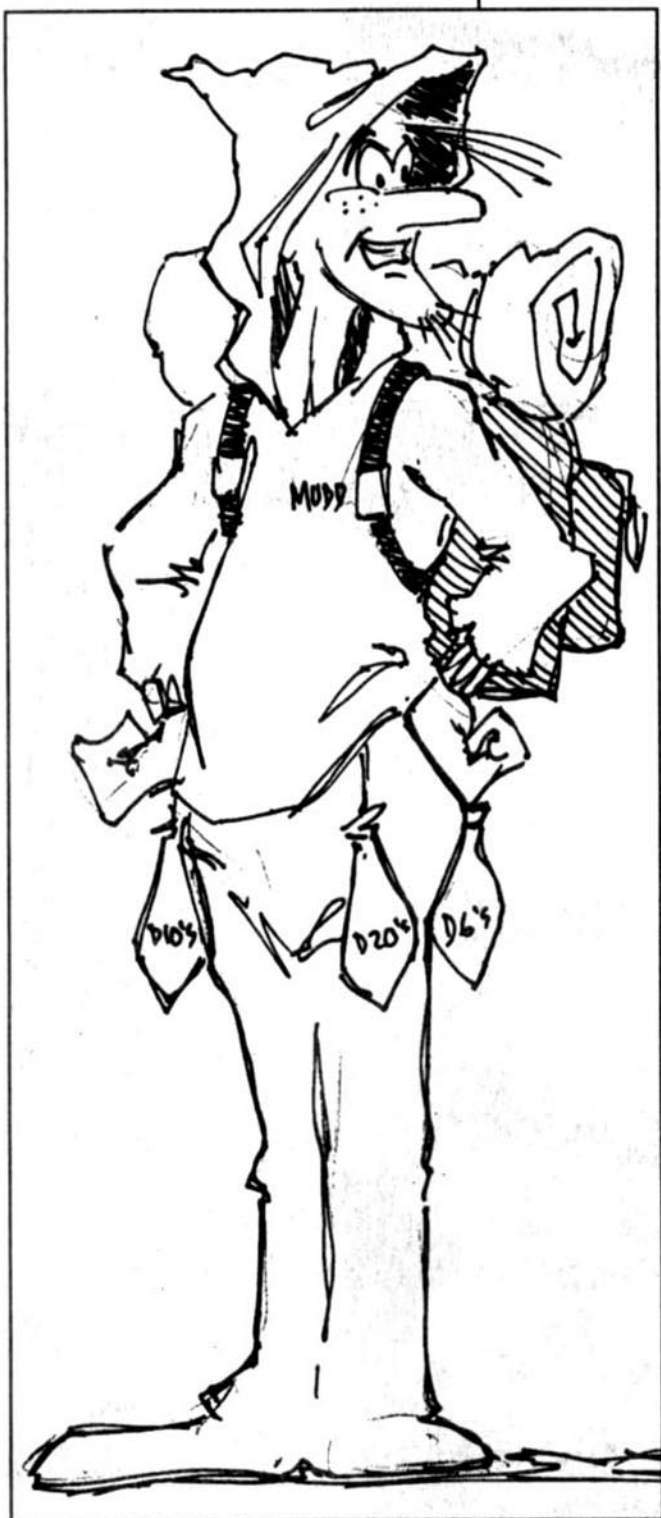
4. DRESS LIKE A TRIBBLE. IT'LL DRIVE THE KLINGONS CRAZY.

3. INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO STEVE JACKSON, THEN DEMAND TO KNOW WHAT HE'S DONE WITH THE REAL STEVE.

2. BRING ONLY ONE SET OF CLOTHES. IT CUTS DOWN ON YOUR ENCUMBRANCE.

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